

Philodemus, Parthenius, and Virgil, *Georgics* 1.436–7

*Revised from a paper given to the Virgil Society on 21 May 2022**

At the end of Virgil's treatment of weather signs given by the moon in *Georgics* 1 (427–37), we are presented with the image of sailors paying vows to sea deities on their safe return to shore (436–7):

votaque servati solvent in litore nautae
Glauco et Panopeae et Inoo Melicertae.

...and the sailors, kept safe, will pay their vows on the shore to Glaucus and Panopea and Ino's son Melicertes.

Lines 436–7 represent a striking departure from the technical meteorological exposition by Aratus upon which this section was based (*Phaen.* 778–818).¹ According to Gellius (*NA* 13.27.1–2), 1.437 is modelled on a verse by Parthenius of Nicaea (fr. 36 Lightfoot):²

Γλαύκῳ καὶ Νηρηΐ καὶ εἰναλίῳ Μελικέρτῃ

To Glaukos and Nereus and sea-dwelling Melikertes.

* I am grateful to Luke Houghton for his helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ See Thomas (1988) and Mynors (1990) for Virgil's detailed adaptation of Aratus' weather signs in *Geo.* 1.427–37.

² See Lightfoot (1999) 194–6, who connects this line with Parthenius' *Propemptikon*; cf. also Macrobius, *Sat.* 5.18, although the latter alters Parthenius' line-ending to Ἰνώῳ Μελικέρτῃ in imitation of Virgil's *Inoo Melicertae* (cf. Thomas [1988] *ad* 1.437). *Geo.* 1.437 is the only securely attested Virgilian adaptation of Parthenius. However, another poem by Parthenius (the *Delos*), which mentioned "Grynean Apollo" (Γρύνειος Ἀπόλλων), has been conjectured to lie behind Virgil's references to the Grynean Grove (*Grynei nemoris*) in *Ecl.* 6.72 and Grynean Apollo (*Gryneus Apollo*) in *Aen.* 4.345; see now Clausen (1964) 192 and Lightfoot (1999) 149–51.

Virgil has made two alterations to Parthenius' line – a change that Gellius considers “graceful” – substituting the nymph Panopea for her father, Nereus, and replacing Melicertes' epithet εἰναλίω (“sea-dwelling”) with the Greek matronymic, *Inoo* (“Ino's son”).³

The significance of Virgil's imitation of Parthenius, and of the sailors' prayer in 1.436–7 for his larger discussion of moon-signs, has not yet been investigated in detail, no doubt partly owing to the loss of the surrounding poetic context of Parthenius' line.⁴ However, some progress might be achieved if we take into account a likely further allusion in lines 436–7 – to my knowledge not previously recognised in the scholarship – to an epigram by Parthenius' first-century BCE contemporary, the Epicurean philosopher and poet Philodemus of Gadara, consisting of a prayer to various sea deities:

votaque **servati** solvent **in litore** nautae
Glauco et Panopeae et Inoo Melicertae.

Geo. 1.436–7

Ἴνούς ὦ Μελικέρτα σύ τε γλαυκή μεδέουσα
 Λευκοθέη πόντου δαῖμον ἀλεξίκακε
 Νηρήδων τε χοροὶ καὶ Κύματα καὶ σύ, Πόσειδον,
 καὶ θρήϊξ Ἄνέμων πρηῤῥτατε Ζέφυρε,
 Ἴλαοὶ με φέροιτε διὰ πλατὺ κῦμα φυγόντα
 σῶον ἐπὶ γλυκερὴν ἦῶνα Πειραέως.

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Philodemus, *AP* 6.349 (= 19 Gow-Page = 34 Sider)

Melikertes son of Ino, Leukothea the blue-green ruler of the open sea and
 divine averter of troubles,
 choruses of Nereids, Waves, and you Poseidon, and Thracian Zephyros
 the gentlest of the Winds,

³ Gellius elsewhere includes Parthenius among the poets of whose verses Virgil “carefully ... omits some things and renders others” (*Scite ergo et considerate Vergilius, cum aut Homeri aut Hesiodi aut Apollonii aut Parthenii aut Callimachi aut Theocriti aut quorundam aliorum locos effingeret, partem reliquit, alia expressit, NA* 9.9.3).

⁴ Discussions of *Geo.* 1.436–7 have for the most part focused on the allusive technique involved in Virgil's imitation of Parthenius rather than on the content of the vignette and its broader contextual significance: see, e.g., Thomas (1988) *ad* 1.437; Farrell (1991) 65; Morgan (1999) 22–3.

graciously may you bear me safely across a calm sea in my flight to the sweet shore of Peiraeus.⁵

The Virgilian phrase *servati ... in litore* (“kept safe ... on the shore”, 1.436) evokes Philodemus’ σῶρον ἐπὶ ... ἡρόνα (“safely to the ... shore”, 6).⁶ The names of Virgil’s sea divinities, moreover, all find direct or close counterparts in the epigram. Thus, *Inoo Melicertae* at the end of 1.437 clearly echoes the opening invocation, Ἴνοῦς ὦ Μελικέρτα (1), while Glaucus picks up the etymologically related adjective γλαυκῆ (1) that Philodemus attributed to the goddess Λευκοθέη (“Leukothea”, 2 = the deified Ino). Virgil’s Nereid Panopea might also gesture towards Philodemus’ Νηρηίδων ... χοροὶ (“choruses of Nereids”, 3) and his poem’s repeated evocation of the names of Nereids.⁷

The correspondences outlined above strongly suggest that *Geo.* 1.436–7 results from the conflation of Philodemean and Parthenian models.⁸ In order to assess the significance of this double allusion, and of Virgil’s choice of proper names in 1.437 in particular, it will first be helpful to examine the opening lines of this section of *Georgics* 1, which treat the weather signs given by the new moon (1.427–31):

luna revertentis cum primum colligit ignis,
si nigrum obscuro comprehenderit aëra cornu,
maximus agricolis pelagoque parabitur imber;

⁵ See Sider (1997) 187 for the text and translation (here lightly adapted). For discussion of *AP* 6.349, see Hopkinson (1988) 271; Gigante (1995) 49–52; Obbink (1995) 208–9; Sider (1997) 187–190. Gigante (1995) 49–52 argues that the epigram must have been composed before Philodemus’ conversion to Epicureanism – specifically, on the eve of his voyage from Gadara to Athens to study under the Epicurean Zeno of Sidon – since an Epicurean would have known that the gods cannot be moved by prayer. However, prayers to the gods are in fact perfectly consistent with Epicureanism, as indicated by Philodemus himself in the treatise *On Piety* (cf. Asmis [1990] 2372 n. 11; Obbink [1995] 208–9). The narrating persona of Philodemus’ epigrams also cannot be relied upon as a straightforward source of autobiographical information; see Sider (1997) 187–8 for some salutary remarks on this point in connection with *AP* 6.349. On the compatibility of Philodemus’ poetic activity with his own and Epicurus’ views on the composition and enjoyment of poetry, see Asmis (1995) and Sider (1997) 28–32.

⁶ Though a conventional feature of such prayers, Virgil’s *ventis ... carebunt* (1.435) may also hint at Philodemus’ gentle wind of Zephyros (θρήϊξ Ἄνέμων πρηῦτατε Ζέφυρε, 4).

⁷ Cf. Sider (1997) *ad AP* 6.349.6: “Several of the words of this poem recall the names of Nereids, as given by Hes. *Th.* 240 ff., along with their power to calm the sea: γλαυκῆ ≈ Γλαύκη (243), Γλαυκονόμη (256); πόντου ≈ Ποντοπόρεια (256); ἡρόνα ≈ Ἡρόνη (255); σῶρον ≈ Σαώ (243); and κύμα ≈ several names beginning with Κυμο-, esp. 252 ff.”. Kyriakidis (2000) 270–1 has persuasively argued that Virgil draws on the same epigram for the catalogue of sea deities at *Aen.* 5.822–6, which features Glaucus, Panopea, and *Inous Palaemon* (Palaemon = the deified Melicertes), his adjective *Inous* an exact transliteration of Philodemus’ matronymic Ἴνοῦς; cf. also Νηρηίδων τε χοροὶ (“choruses of Nereids”, 3) with *Glauci chorus* (“Glaucus’ chorus”, *Aen.* 5.823). See below on Virgil’s Panopea as a possible punning allusion to the full moon.

⁸ See Thomas (1986) 193–8 on Virgil’s use of the technique of “conflation” or “multiple reference” in the *Georgics*.

at si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem, 430
 ventus erit: vento semper rubet aurea *Phoebe*.

As soon as the moon gathers her returning fires, if she encloses black mist within her dim horns, a tremendous shower will be waiting ready for farmers and for the sea; but if she suffuses her face with a virginal blush, there will be wind: at wind golden Phoebe always blushes.

The reference to moonlight (*luna revertentis cum primum colligit ignis*, 1.427), the adjective *aurea* qualifying *Phoebe* (1.431), and Virgil's subsequent description of the full moon as *pura* (*pura neque obtusis per caelum cornibus ibit*: "she goes through the sky clear, with horns undimmed", 1.433) together strongly hint at the etymological association between the name of the goddess *Phoebe* (deferred for emphasis to the end of line 431) and the Greek adjective φοῖβη ("bright, pure, radiant") – one finds a similar play on *Phoebus*/φοῖβος in *Aen.* 8.720 (*ipse sedens niveo candentis limine Phoebi*: "He himself, sitting on the snowy-white threshold of radiant Phoebus").⁹ This sequence of etymological wordplay connecting *Phoebe* with the light of the moon may be supplemented by a subtle bilingual gloss on the word *luna* at the beginning of line 427: the image of the moon gathering light (1.427) and the reference to obscuring "black" (*nigrum*) mist in the immediately following line 428 – another detail notably absent from the Aratean original – might in turn point up *e contrario* the connection between *luna* and the adjective λευκός ("white, bright, clear").¹⁰ Virgil's etymologising play on the name *Phoebe* may in fact form part of a broader pattern of onomastic play in

⁹ See O'Hara (2017) 216 on *Aen.* 8.720. As Michalopoulos (2001) 145–6 observes, "the Greek origin of *Phoebus/Phoebe* was widely known and ... poets expected the learned members of their audience to appreciate the plays built on it". For Virgil's widespread use of etymologising wordplay, see especially Paschalis (1997; focusing on Virgil's etymologising of names in the *Aeneid*) and O'Hara (2017).

¹⁰ Cf. Paschalis (1997) 4: "By far the most common form of etymological association from the time of Homer is the one in which the name is 'glossed' by a word or phrase of synonymous or opposite sense". For the relationship between *luna* and λευκός, see Ernout and Meillet (2001) s.v. *luna*. A play on *luna* and *niger/λευκός* would be consistent with the broader literary game of reversal identified in this passage by Ted Somerville (2010), who notes the reversed order of Aratus' weather signs in *Geo.* 1.427–35, itself incorporating Virgil's MA–VE–PU signature acrostic (1.429–33; discussed further below); on Somerville's reading ([2010] 208), the adjective *nigrum* (428) refers to its opposite on the same principle of reversal, gesturing in the process towards Homer's (unintentional) ΔΕΥΚΗ acrostic at *Iliad* 24.1–5. Virgil's didactic predecessor Lucretius indeed seems to have regularly engaged in bilingual etymological wordplay on λευκός/*luna* and its Latin cognates. Snyder (1980) 83 observes that Lucretian phrases such as *lunaque ... lumina lustrans* (*DRN* 5.575) may "reflect knowledge of the relationship between the various words referring to light, such as *luna*, *luceo*, *lumen*, and *lustrum*, all of which are derived from a common root, -leuk" (cf. Kronenberg [2019] 283); the connection between these words is acknowledged by several ancient commentators (e.g., *luna a lucendo nominata*, Cicero, *De nat. deor.* 2.68; see further Maltby [1991] s.v. *luna*). Like Lucretius, Virgil may play on the connection between *luna* and λευκός by repeatedly juxtaposing *luna* with *luceo*, *lumen*, or *lux* in the *Aeneid* (3.645, 4.80–1, 6.270, 6.725, 7.8–9, 8.22–3); cf. O'Hara (2017) 152.

subtly invoke the connection between *luna* and *λευκός*.¹⁴ There is perhaps even sufficient encouragement here to interpret the name *Panoepa*, not present in the Philodemean or Parthenian models, as a straightforward play on the words *παν-* and *ὄψ* (i.e., “full face, full aspect”).¹⁵

Since the poem from which Parthenius’ verse originated is no longer extant, the full implication of Virgil’s combined reference to Philodemus and Parthenius cannot be firmly established. However, a clue to the poet’s intent may lie in the distinctly Hellenistic allusive background to this section of *Georgics* 1. As we have already seen, Virgil closely modelled lines 427–37 on Aratus’ corresponding treatment of moon-signs in the *Phaenomena* (albeit with several conspicuous deviations). The MA–VE–PU acrostic (1.429–33) itself appears to respond to the famous ΛΕΠΤΗ acrostic – simultaneously proclaiming and illustrating the Hellenistic aesthetic ideal of *λεπτότης* (“refinement, subtlety”) – found in the same Aratean passage (*Phaen.* 783–7).¹⁶ Peter Bing has further proposed that Virgil’s signature acrostic in fact results from the conflation of *two* Aratean word games, namely the ΛΕΠΤΗ acrostic and Aratus’ own hidden signature in *Phaen.* 2, where the adjective *ἄρρητον* (“unmentioned”) forms a clever pun on *Ἄρητος*;¹⁷ in conflating the acrostic form and the play on the name, he suggests, Virgil may in turn respond to the epigrams in praise of Aratus by two other prominent Hellenistic poets, Callimachus (*AP* 9.507 = 56 Gow-Page = 27 Pf.) and Leonidas of Tarentum (*AP* 9.25 = 101 Gow-Page), each alluding to both Aratus’ ΛΕΠΤΗ and his name-play.¹⁸ The influence of Hellenistic poetry can also be detected in the numerous instances of etymological wordplay in these lines. As James O’Hara has demonstrated in detail, Virgil’s learned etymologising was heavily informed by the practice of Alexandrian scholar-poets such as Callimachus, Apollonius, and Aratus.¹⁹

It may therefore be no coincidence that Philodemus and Parthenius – men with whom Virgil may indeed have been personally acquainted – were both also respected authors of

¹⁴ Kronenberg (2018) 5 also highlights the possible reference to *Leucothea/λευκός* (without taking into account Philodemus’ epigram), but interprets it as a further allusion to Homer’s ΛΕΥΚΗ acrostic (see n. 10 above).

¹⁵ Note the reference to the moon’s blushing face in line 430 (*si virgineum suffuderit ore ruborem*). The etymological play on *Panoepa* may be complemented by a TOTaE telestic at the end of lines 433–6 – briefly remarked upon by Danielewicz (2013) 295 n. 32 – corresponding to the ΠΑΣΑ acrostic in Aratus’ discussion of moon-signs (*Phaen.* 803–6) and signposted by the adjective *totus* at the start of 1.434. In addition, Haslam (1992) 203–4 has identified a possible name-play involving Aratus’ epithet *Soleus* (referring to his hometown of Soli) in the lines immediately following Virgil’s list of sea divinities: *Sol quoque et exoriens et cum se condet in undas | signa dabit; solem certissima signa sequentur* (“The sun [*sol/Soleus*] will also give signs, both as it rises and as it sets into the waves; most certain signs will follow the sun [*sol/Soleus*], 1.438–9).

¹⁶ Aratus’ acrostic was (re)discovered by Jean-Marie Jacques in 1960. See Hanses (2014) 609 n. 2 for a useful overview of the extensive bibliography.

¹⁷ See Levitan (1979) 68 n. 18; Kidd (1981) 355; Hopkinson (1988) 139; Bing (1990) 282–4.

¹⁸ See Bing (1990) 282–5; on the contemporary recognition of Aratus’ pun and acrostic, see further Cameron (1995) 322. Thomas (1988 *ad* 1.437) conjectures that *Panoepa* and *Inoo* in *Geo.* 1.437 also allude to Callimachus.

¹⁹ See O’Hara (2017) 21–42 and *passim*.

refined Greek verse in the Hellenistic fashion.²⁰ Cicero attests to the wit and sophistication of Philodemus' poems (*poema ... facit ita festivum, ita concinnum, ita elegans, nihil ut fieri possit argutius*: "He is the author of poetry so delightful, so well put together, so elegant, that there could be nothing more clever", *In Pisonem* 70), as well as to their popularity (*a multis et lecta et audita*: "[poems] read and listened to by many", *ibid.* 71),²¹ while Parthenius was an influential figure both as a scholar and as a poet in Roman literary circles in the first century BCE.²² In light of this, Virgil's careful imitation of Philodemus and Parthenius in *Geo.* 1.436–7 might be viewed as an elegant poetic tribute to these two notable recent exponents of the Hellenistic style.

At the same time, we might consider the possible Epicurean resonance of Virgil's Philodemian source. As several scholars have pointed out, the "sweet" shore of Peiraeus (γλυκερὴν ἡδὺνα Πειραέως, 6) sought by Philodemus' narrator could be taken to allude to the anticipated pleasures of philosophy at the Epicurean school in Athens.²³ In the context of a prayer for safety at sea, the 'Epicurean' shore of Peiraeus here may also suggest the metaphorical safe harbour of philosophy, a motif that figures prominently in the surviving Epicurean literature (e.g., Lucretius' *suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis | e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem*: "Sweet it is to watch from land another's great toil on the mighty sea as the winds whip up the surface", *DRN* 2.1–2), including elsewhere in the

²⁰ For the evidence connecting Virgil with Philodemus and the Epicurean school on the Bay of Naples, see especially Gigante and Capasso (1989); Sider (1995) 42–4; Sider (1997) 19–21; Gigante (2004) 85–6. According to Macrobius, Parthenius was Virgil's *grammaticus in Graecis* (*Sat.* 5.17.18), the designation suggesting that "Parthenius acted as Virgil's consultant in matters of Greek mythology, poetry, (geographical) nomenclature" (Klooster [2012] 313), a notion supported by Parthenius' dedication of a compilation of love stories (the *Erotika Pathemata*) to the elegist Cornelius Gallus; for further discussion of Macrobius' comment, see Dyer (1996) and Francese (1999). The word *παρθένιος* interestingly appears (at col. v.19) in a later first-century CE list of epigram *incipits* (*P.Oxy.* 3724), many of which may belong to Philodemus. Sider ([1997] 217–18) proposes that *παρθένιος* – if taken as a proper name, rather than as a noun or adjective – here refers to Παρθένιος of Nicaea, "and hence someone known (if only by name) to Phil.", or else to Virgil's reported nickname 'Parthenias' (see n. 12 above).

²¹ See Sider (1995) and (1997) 24–8 on Philodemus as a Hellenistic poet. For the reception of Philodemus' epigrams in Roman poetry of the late Republican and Augustan period, see the bibliography in Sider (1997) 239–42 and the subsequent discussions by Armstrong (2004) 4–5; Cairns (2011); Höschele (2011) 26–31; Booth (2011); Newlands (2016).

²² Parthenius has been credited by some scholars as the catalyst for the so-called "neoteric" movement: see, e.g., Rostagni (1932–3); Alfonsi (1945) 56–72; Clausen (1964). For a more cautious assessment of Parthenius' influence on the development of Roman poetry, see Crowther (1976); Hinds (1998) 76–83; Lightfoot (1999) 54–76.

²³ See Gigante (1995) 49–52; Kyriakidis (2002) 281; Longo Auricchio (2004) 41. A striking parallel for Philodemus' poem can be found in Propertius 3.21, where the speaker plans a voyage from Rome to Athens to study (among other possible pursuits) Epicurean philosophy: he will pray to sea deities for safe passage (18), and, after reaching the port of Peiraeus (*inde ubi Piraei capient me litora portus*: "then, when the shores of the harbour of Peiraeus receive me", 23), will seek solace for his *amor* in the schools of Plato or Epicurus (*hortis, docte Epicure, tuis*: "in your gardens, learned Epicurus", 26). See Sider (1997) 188 for the suggestion that Propertius is drawing directly on Philodemus' epigram.

works of Philodemus himself.²⁴ In a self-referential passage containing a signature acrostic and a possible pun on *Vergilius*, and given Virgil's confirmed association with the Epicurean community in Naples,²⁵ might the echo of Philodemus in *Geo.* 1.436–7 in turn constitute a subtle allusion to the poet's own arrival at the harbour of Epicureanism? If Virgil is to be seen as one of the sailors (*nautae*) who have been “kept safe” (*servati*, 1.436), this may indicate that he has safely reached his Epicurean destination, successfully achieving the philosophical goal of *ataraxia* by avoiding the storms that disturb the souls of the unenlightened.²⁶

A suggestive parallel is found in the *sphragis* to Book 4 of the *Georgics* (4.559–66), which contains an autobiographical portrait of Virgil as a young man in Naples (referred to by its original name Parthenope). Here the poet – now explicitly identified as *Vergilius* (4.563) – is said to enjoy “the studies of inglorious ease” (*studiis ... ignobilis otii*, 4.564) in language that strongly evokes the katabatic pleasures of Epicureanism.²⁷ The *sphragis* itself contains several tantalising reminiscences of Philodemus' epigrams, including his prayer for a safe voyage: as Stratis Kyriakidis has observed, the epithet *dulcis* (“sweet”) attributed to Naples/Parthenope (*Geo.* 4.563) corresponds to the adjective *γλυκερός* that Philodemus applied to the shore of Peiraeus (*AP* 6.349.6), hinting at the Epicurean pleasures of the Athenian Garden.²⁸ Intriguingly, the *incipits* (*P.Oxy.* 3724 col. iv 14, 15) of two poems that may also belong to Philodemus start with the name Parthenope, likewise found at the beginning of the verse in *Geo.* 4.564.²⁹ Virgil's review of his earlier life and poetic career in these lines (cf. *lusi ... audax ... iuventa*: “I who played ... in the boldness of youth”, 4.565) can be related to another Philodemean epigram (*AP* 5.112 = 18 Gow-Page = 5 Sider) in which the speaker renounces youthful dalliance (*καὶ παίζειν ὅτε καιρός, ἐπαίξαμεν. ἦνικα καὶ νῦν | οὐκετι, λωϊτέρης φροντίδος ἀψόμεθα*: “And when it was right to play we played; and since it is right no longer, we shall lay hold of loftier thoughts”, 5–6), the verb *ἐπαίξαμεν* (“we played”) alluding – like

²⁴ See Longo Auricchio (2004) on Philodemus' use of the metaphor in his treatise *On Rhetoric*.

²⁵ See n. 20 above.

²⁶ The harbour of philosophy also makes an appearance in *Catalepton* 5 (in all likelihood apocryphal) from the *Appendix Vergiliana*, where the speaker announces *nos ad beatos vela mittimus portus* (“we are spreading our sails for the blessed harbours”, 8), referring to the Epicurean school of Philodemus' associate Siro. Here, he anticipates, *vitam ... ab omni vindicabimus cura* (“we shall free our life from every care”, 10). For discussion, see Longo Auricchio (2004) 40–1 and Peirano (2012) 111–16; for the association of Siro and Philodemus, see Cicero, *De finibus* 2.119.

²⁷ By contrast, the distinctly un-Epicurean figure of Octavian “thunders in war” (*fulminat ... bello*, 4.561) by the Euphrates. For the Epicurean background to the *sphragis*, see, e.g., Kyriakidis (2002) 284–5; Gale (2003) 326–7; Freer (2019) 80–2.

²⁸ Kyriakidis (2002) 281.

²⁹ See Sider (1995) 43–4 and (1997) 18–19 and 212–14, who tentatively suggests that Virgil is alluding to these epigrams, which perhaps also described the “pleasurable ambience” of the Epicurean Garden in Naples (quotation from Sider [1995] 44).

Virgil's *lusi* – to his previous poetic activity.³⁰ Although the evidence for Virgil's engagement with Philodemus in the *sphragis* is by no means conclusive, the several points of contact with his discussion of moon-signs in Book 1 – which contained another apparent authorial signature and a Philodemean echo that may also gesture towards the poet's life in the Epicurean Garden of Naples – may suggest that Virgil repeatedly returned to Philodemus' epigrams as an important poetic resource for his autobiographical self-representation in the *Georgics*.

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³⁰ Text and translation by Sider (1997) 78. For the reminiscence of Philodemus' *AP* 5.112, see Fowler (1989) 84 n. 37 and Kyriakidis (2002) 282, the latter observing that Virgil's *sphragis* presents "the completion of the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* in a similar fashion; a part of his poetic life has been fulfilled with these two works". The verb *παίζω* ("play"), it should be noted, also strongly suggests the composition of poetry in Philodemus, *AP* 9.412.7 (= 20.7 Gow-Page = 29.7 Sider).

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