

“Digging” in Seneca’s *Natural Questions*

1. Natural Questions 3, preface 1: Let the Digging Begin

Non praeterit me, Lucili uirorum optime, quam magnarum rerum fundamenta ponam senex, qui mundum circumire constitui et causas secretaque eius **eruer**e atque aliis noscenda prodere.

(1) The magnitude of the project whose foundations I, an old man, am laying does not pass me by, Lucilius, best of men. I have decided to travel around the universe, dig out its causes and hidden features, and publish these for others to know.

2. Original Ordering of the Books of the *Natural Questions*

Original Book Number	Topic	Canonical Book Number
1	Terrestrial Waters	3
2	The Nile	4a
3	...Clouds, Hail, Rain, Snow	4b
4	Wind	5
5	Earthquakes	6
6	Comets	7
7	Celestial Fires	1
8	Lightning	2

3. Errol Morris interviews Jamie McIntyre, NYTimes.com, March 25, 2014: The Persistence of the Metaphor of Digging

(http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/25/the-certainty-of-donald-rumsfeld-part-1/?_php=true&_type=blogs&src=me&ref=general&_r=0)

JAMIE McINTYRE: Pentagon reporters don’t really expect to get much information from briefings. The real reporting at the Pentagon is based on sources and relationships that you have with people — digging out the things that the Pentagon doesn’t want to say.

4. *Natural Questions* 7.30.2: The Other Metaphorical Use of *eruo*

Nec miremur tam tarde erui quae tam alte iacent.

We should not be shocked that things which lie so deeply are so slowly dug out.

5. *Natural Questions* 5.15: The Dark Side of Digging

(1) At this point let me relate a tale. Asclepiodotus is the authority that quite a few men were sent down into an old, long abandoned mine to find out what richness it possessed, what was its condition, and whether ancient greed had left anything behind for later men. They descended with a lot of light, enough to last for many days. Then, after they had been tired out by a long journey, they saw huge rivers and vast basins of unmoving water, equal to ours and not even compressed by the earth hanging over, but with unobstructed extent; they saw this not without fright. (2) I read this with sheer delight. I learned that indeed our age does not suffer from new vices but already long established ones. Nor in our day has avarice for the first time peeked into the veins of the earth and rocks to seek things poorly hidden in the shadows. Those ancestors of ours – whom we extoll with praises and to whom we complain that we are unequal – drawn by hope, chopped into mountains and stood above their gain and below their ruin. (3) Before Philip of Macedonia was king there were those who would follow money all the way into the deepest recesses of the earth and though they were men with upright and free spirits, they lowered themselves into those caves into which no difference between nights and days reached. What hope was so great as to cause them to leave behind the light? What necessity bent man, upright facing the stars, buried him, and sunk him into the depths of earth's inner recesses, so that he would dig up gold, sought with no lesser danger than possessed?

(4) Because of this he made burrows, and around his muddy and uncertain plunder he crept, forgetful of the days, forgetful of his better nature, away from which he turned himself. . . . They dared to descend to that place where they experienced a new placement of things, structures with lands hanging overhead and directionless winds through blind place and grim springs of water flowing for the benefit of no one and another and everlasting night. Then when they have done these things, they fear the shades of the underworld!

(1) Nunc mihi permittite narrare fabulam. Asclepiodotus auctor est demissos complures a Philippo in metallum antiquum olim destitutum, ut explorarent quae ubertas eius esset, quis status, an aliquid futuris reliquisset vetus avaritia; **descendisse** illos cum multo lumine et multos duraturo dies, deinde longa via fatigatos vidisse flumina ingentia et conceptus aquarum inertium vastos, pares nostris nec compressos quidem terra supereminente sed liberae laxitatis, non sine horrore visos. (2) Cum magna hoc legi voluptate. Intellexi enim saeculum nostrum non novis vitiis sed iam inde antiquitus traditis laborare, nec nostra aetate primum avaritiam venas terrarum lapidumque rimatam in tenebris male abstrusa quaesisse: illi maiores nostri, quos celebramus laudibus, quibus dissimiles esse nos querimur, spe ducti montes ceciderunt et supra lucrum sub **ruina** steterunt. (3) Ante Philippum Macedonum regem fuere qui pecuniam in altissimis usque latebris sequerentur et **recto spiritu liberoque** in illos se **demitterent** specus in quos nullum perveniret noctium dierumque discrimen. **A tergo lucem relinquere** quae tanta spes fuit? Quae necessitas hominem ad sidera **erectum incuravit** et **defodit** et in fundum

telluris intimae mersit, ut **erueret** aurum non minore periculo quaerendum quam possidendum?

(4) Propter hoc cuniculos egit et circa praedam lutulentam incertamque **reptavit oblitus rerum positionem**, terrarum pendentium habitus ventosque per caecum inanes experirentur et aquarum nulli fluentium horridos fontes, et alteram perpetuamque noctem; deinde, cum ista fecerunt, inferos metuunt!

6. Natural Questions 7.1.1: Ignorant Man and Upright Man

Nemo usque eo tardus et hebes et demissus in terram est ut ad divina non erigatur ac tota mente consurgat, utique ubi novum aliquod e caelo miraculum fulsit.

No one is so slow, dull-witted, and bent toward the ground that he does not straighten up and rise up with his entire mind at divine things, or at any rate when some new marvel gleams from the sky.

7. *Natural Questions* 1, preface 11: Understanding the Scale of Human Activity

Punctum est istud in quo navigates, in quo bellatis, in quo regna disponitis, minima etiam cum illis utrimque oceanus occurrit

It is a mere pinprick on which you sail, on which you wage war, on which you arrange kingdoms, the smallest things even when the ocean meets on either side of them

8. *Natural Questions* 3, preface 10-11: Seneca's Goal for Upright Man

quid praecipuum in rebus humanis est?...animo omne vidisse et, qua maior nulla victoria est, vitia domuisse innumerabiles sunt qui populos, qui urbes habuereunt in potestate, paucissimi qui se. quid est praecipuum? Erigere animum supra minas et promissa fortunae...

What is the most important thing in human affairs? ...to see everything with one's mind and to conquer vices, a victory greater than all others. Countless are those who have held peoples in their power, who have held cities in their power, very few who held power over themselves. What is most important? To elevate one's mind above the threats and promises of fortune...

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