

My eye alone

On two recent Greek-English Dictionaries

When working on Greek texts, I assume, everyone has his or her favourite tools to turn to. I, for instance, when stuck with understanding the logical chain of argumentation, be it a deductive argument, a looser but still argumentative dialogue in a philosophical text or a heated debate in a tragedy, often look up Denniston's *Greek Particles*,¹ one of the most astounding achievements of modern philology. Denniston's 600+ pages densely packed with thousands of illustrations and references supply an inexhaustible treasury on how a dozen or so particles (δέ, γάρ and their like), and their combinations, structure Greek texts. Another gem I often consult is Goodwin's *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb*.² From time to time I want to check something in one of our reference grammars (e.g. in Smyth,³ or Kühner - Blass - Gerth⁴): either something I should know but have forgotten or I think I know but need to back up, or in order to double-check it for students, or to find parallels for strange and abstruse grammatical phenomena and see how these grammars understand and analyze them. I also like to check etymologies: my preference goes to Chantraine⁵ (as it lets the internal semantic development be seen) and his *Morphologie historique du grec*.⁶

However, the most important tools in our linguistic arsenal are the dictionaries, and a good dictionary can, partially or fully, replace all other tools. Most of the time I would simply use LSJ – Liddell & Scott, Jones⁷ –, the basic reference dictionary of Ancient Greek, as – I imagine – most other researchers do. Either in its monumental

¹ J. D. Denniston: *The Greek Particles*. 2nd edition. Hackett Publishing, 1996 (1950).

² W. W. Goodwin: *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb*. Rewritten and enlarged. London, 1889.

³ H. W. Smyth: *Greek Grammar*. Harvard University Press, 1956.

⁴ R. Kühner - Fr. Blass - B. Gerth: *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*. I-II. Hannover: Hachnsche Buchhandlung, 1998.

⁵ P. Chantraine: *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots*. Paris, 1968.

⁶ P. Chantraine: *Morphologie historique du grec*. Paris, Éditions Klincksieck, 1991 (1961).

⁷ Henry George Liddell - Robert Scott - Henry Stuart Jones: *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976. (1940, 9th edition, with a Supplement of 1968.)

and bulky print or in its easy-to-use online version(s), LSJ has been the essential and irreplaceable tool to serve. Occasionally, for old-fashioned, just-for-fun reading purposes, I supplement it with its little brother, the Intermediate Liddell and Scott,⁸ or with Bailly,⁹ or specialized one-author lexica, or if I need to find Hungarian synonyms, with its smaller Hungarian counterpart¹⁰ but LSJ has always been the lender of last resort, so to speak.

Recent years have seen two new exciting and long awaited additions to this arsenal of dictionaries: *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* published earlier this year (2021),¹¹ and Franco Montanari's *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (GE), published a few years ago (in 2015).¹² Given that the last comprehensive revision, the 9th edition of the LSJ appeared in 1940, and the first edition of the LSJ itself, published in 1843, was based on Passow's *Dictionary*, which itself can be retraced ultimately to Henri Estienne's *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* of the 16th century – a story succinctly recapped by Franco Montanari and Gregory Nagy in *Montanari GE*¹³ –, the timely nature of these undertakings is beyond question. Both undertakings offer a fresh start – of sorts. A clean „from scratch” approach would be not only impractical, but downright impracticable and undesirable. As Nagy puts it: „With the hindsight of four years of work on the present Greek-English dictionary (i.e., the *Montanari GE*), we are convinced that such cross-fertilization is at the very core of lexicography and even of classical philology.”¹⁴ Perhaps somewhat enigmatically, this seems to say that lexicography is inherently a collective enterprise rooted in its own history: you build on what has been achieved by your predecessors.

Yet, even if you allow to be “cross-fertilized” and build upon the work of your ancestors, it is one thing to revise an existing dictionary and another to develop a new one. Both these dictionaries were newly developed and both offer – as emphasized in the Preface to *Montanari GE*, p. vi¹⁵ – to advance the lexicography of Ancient Greek. Three factors are at play here: “the language to be interpreted and translated, namely,

⁸ H. G. Liddell - R. Scott: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1899.

⁹ A. Bailly: *Dictionnaire grec-français*. 26^e édition par L. Séchan L. et P. Chantraine. Paris, 1963.

¹⁰ Alajos Györkössy - István Kapitánffy - Imre Tegye: *Ógörög-magyar szótár*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990.

¹¹ J. Diggle, ed.: *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* I-II. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021. I will refer to it as the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*.

¹² Franco Montanari: *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2015. (*The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* is the English translation of Franco Montanari's *Vocabolario della Lingua Greca*. 2nd edition: 2004, 3rd edition: 2013.) I will refer to it as the *Montanari GE*.

¹³ In the two Prefaces, pp. v–vii.

¹⁴ p. vii.

¹⁵ See also the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon's* Preface, pp. vii–viii.

Ancient Greek; the modern language that provides the translation and the glosses, i.e., the language spoken by the users of a bilingual dictionary; the graphic layout.”¹⁶ Let’s take these three factors one by one.

The least problematic is probably the second one, hence it is the easiest to tackle: the modern language that provides the translation and the glosses, i.e., the language spoken by the users of a bilingual dictionary. A common complaint against our old LSJ (and against the intermediate LS) has long been the antiquated English it uses. True: these dictionaries reflect the language and – probably more importantly – the linguistic norms of the late 19th century, that of late Victorian Britain. In contrast, our two new dictionaries use contemporary English and follow *our* linguistic norms: vulgarities, obscenities are allowed, and explanations and meanings are mostly given in contemporary English. This is an easy and transparent contrast, which piques the curiosity of the media: no wonder the headline of a *Guardian* article runs:¹⁷ “English dictionary of ancient Greek ‘spares no blushes’ with fresh look at crudity,” while the lede is “Words Victorian-era Greek lexicon translated as ‘to wench’ or ‘do one’s need’ have been given much earthier new readings at Cambridge for modern students of classics.” Seen purely from a linguistic perspective, this is not extremely significant. In a way, it is only natural that every age uses *her* language and *her* norms. It is, I admit, inconvenient when you not only have to work out the Greek, but preliminarily have to decipher the veiled meanings of crude terms (unless your sole aim is to read Aristophanes – then it is cumbersome): still, it is the least of those gigantic and gargantuan problems you have to overcome when studying Greek. Antiquated language, in general, is another – both a lesser and a greater – difficulty. Lesser, for you will at least understand it (or, as a non-native speaker, improve your English), greater, for unknowingly you might be led into slight misunderstandings. So, yes, why not use contemporary language: but, as I said, purely linguistically this is not *so* exciting. Pedagogically, sociologically and socially – much more so. The study of classical antiquity has long been associated with the Ivy League, with Oxbridge and the École Normale: in a more emancipated and less elitist world (or in a world which wants to *be seen* more emancipated and less elitist), both pragmatic reasons and fundamental valuations oblige us to use current, contemporary English. Both dictionaries do so and the pedagogical merits are immense: students, from now on, do not need to struggle with weird and only half-comprehensible, half-double Dutch English. Even if there are occasional blunders and lapses. The *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, for instance, keeps defining ἄτη as infatuation, perhaps in a subconscious, bowing

¹⁶ p. vi.

¹⁷ Thursday 27 May 2021, [theguardian.com/books/2021/may/27/first-english-dictionary-of-ancient-greek-since-victorian-era-spares-no-blushes-lexicon-classics](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/may/27/first-english-dictionary-of-ancient-greek-since-victorian-era-spares-no-blushes-lexicon-classics)

gesture before a venerable tradition or perhaps being at a loss about the real – hard to define – content. But overall, the language is modern.

The two other factors, “the language to be interpreted and translated, namely, Ancient Greek” and “graphic layout” are, at one level, more intimately connected than one would think. Connecting them we may flesh out what the major novelty of the two dictionaries is. As I said, the two factors are intimately connected, and the hidden link between them is the structure and organization of the material. Montanari, in his preface, does not mention this as a separate element (perhaps out of deference to his predecessors?), although he could have, but the editors of the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* do dwell upon its importance. Graphic layout, on its own, seems to be simple enough: the material ought to be laid out and arranged in such a way on the page as to help the user to retrieve the desired information as easily as possible. Modern lexicography has progressed enormously in this respect (compare for instance the print version of Stuart & Jones’ *Latin Dictionary* and the new *Oxford Latin Dictionary*), but other considerations (such as how much material you want to cram into how many pages and volumes) must also be factored in.

And this is where the two dictionaries go separate ways: the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*’s professed aim is to supersede the *Intermediate Greek Lexicon* (Liddel-Scott) published in 1889 and thus, it „aims primarily to meet the needs of modern students.” Its coverage is selective, not extending beyond the major literary texts standardly read in schools and universities, nor beyond the second century AD. Its two quite bulky volumes and 1500+ pages offer enough room for a spacious and uncluttered layout, almost pleasing to the eye (but definitely not taking such a heavy toll on them as its predecessors). The price paid for this is the 1500+ pages and two volumes – the *Intermediate LS* crammed more or less the same amount of information into its less than 1000 pages of a single big-pocket volume. The value of this spacious layout, allowing to find meanings easily, is hard to exaggerate.¹⁸

Brill’s *Montanari GE* also offers massive advances in graphic layout, but its real strengths lie elsewhere. In contrast with the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, it offers a comprehensive coverage of Greek literacy in all its forms up to the VIth century AD, and sporadically even beyond, up to the XIIth century. It takes into consideration the diverse scholarly results of the last hundred years: new documents, new attestations, new editions, new interpretations. This is important, but again, without downgrading its import (most apparent and useful for some specialized areas), the major advances come on other fronts. First, the decision to cover late Greek material will be greeted with a sigh of relief by many. The last few decades have seen scholarly interest

¹⁸ This, coupled with its admirably unfailing analytical structure (for this, see below), explains why, in my opinion, not only intermediate but also advanced “students” (i.e., scholars: you remain a student of Greek for life) will be able to profit from it.

shift considerably towards the study of later periods. Religious studies, especially, which focus on late Antiquity and on the earlier Byzantine period thrive, and every addition to an often meagre arsenal of tools will be appreciated. There is, just to give one example, a passage in Psellos' *Sermon on the Crucifixion* using the term διόπτρα which has baffled me.¹⁹ *Montanari GE* (s.v.) helps: a speculum or dilator is meant. The final verdict on how much more extensive *Montanari GE*'s coverage is than LSJ's and how it will help out the students of later periods will only be given by regular users over time, but the prospects are definitely promising.

The other major, and to me the most exciting, improvement of *Montanari GE* – unacknowledged in the editors' prefaces – is the clever and elegant structure, and concise and prudent arrangement of the material. To understand it, let us make a brief detour. The lexicographer of a modern language dictionary has recourse to a quasi-unlimited storehouse of information and the elusive but very much real instinct and insight of the native speaker whence he or she can draw a fairly precise semantic map of the lemmata. In return, the language they cover changes over time which makes the dictionary obsolete in a few short decades. The exact opposite is true for dictionaries of ancient languages: the material the dictionary is based on changes very little (only as new discoveries come to light) but is limited to a more or less haphazard sampling over a long stretch of time. In the case of *Montanari GE*, this stretch of time is over 2000 (!) years. You construct the semantic “map” of a lemma in an ancient language dictionary as if you had to draw a geographical map of a country from a few arbitrarily random measurements – taken not synchronously, but over an extended period of time, and only of land objects above a certain elevation. In this analogy, the few arbitrarily random measurements stand for our linguistic data (for example all of the occurrences of the verb “ὑπολαμβάνω”), which are haphazardly sampled over this 2000 year period and come mostly from fine (“elevated”) literary texts. The semantic map is, by and large, based on literary language in a diachronic setting. There are many ways to arrange this material, to connect the dots – this is why the enhancement of lexicography is “an intuitive procedure, not an exact science.”²⁰

Comparing one fairly simple but exciting entry will demonstrate the importance of the editing hand in organizing the material. Let us return to ἄτη. It is a central concept in the archaic and early classical Greek religious world view, perhaps *the* centerpiece of that inherited conglomerate²¹ which exploded as ideas of personal responsibility slowly infiltrated and permeated the mental landscape of 4th century Greece.

¹⁹ Paul Gautier: “Un discours inédit de Michel Psellos sur la crucifixion.” *Revue des études byzantines* 49 (1991), 5–66, section 49.

²⁰ Nagy in *Montanari GE*, vii.

²¹ These are the words of E. R. Dodds in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) in “Chapter VII: Plato, the Irrational Soul, and the Inherited Conglomerate.”

It is *as much* the “infatuation” i.e., a delusive, blind folly of divine origin which impels the Homeric hero to act rashly and unrighteously, *as* the calamity inflicted upon the hero by some divine agency, *as* the consequent rash and reckless action, which will fall back on the perpetrator *as* his guilt and will bring harm and ruin him. For us these are four distinct moments of a story unfolding in time displaying aspectual differences. Folly and recklessness are mental states, an act of recklessness belongs to the domain of action, guilt and ruin are moral-evaluative terms, and *Atē* personified is some divine causal agency. We might, and often do, connect these moments and aspectual differences but distinguish them without making them totally independent from one another. For a native speaker of Ancient Greek, these moments and aspectual differences must have been much more intimately connected in a unified conceptual scheme. This is the theory: but a lexicographer must somehow, for practical reasons, distinguish these moments and aspectual differences as different but interrelated “meanings” as she or he draws up the semantic map of the entry and either implicitly or explicitly tries to arrange these meanings in an intelligible, articulated and helpful order. Here are the two entries for ἄτη:

<p>1 delusion, infatuation (inflicted on a person’s mind by a god, esp. Zeus) Hom. Archil. Lyr. Trag. Ar. PL. delusional thoughts Il. Hes. S.fr.</p> <p>2 reckless behaviour (sts. assoc.w. delusion), recklessness, folly Il. Sol. Pi. Trag. PL. reckless acts Il. Pi. S.</p> <p>3 ruin, calamity, harm Od. Hes. Eleg. Lyr. Hdt. Trag. +; affliction (inherited fr. one’s ancestors) E.; anguish (fr. a wound or disease) S. PL. disasters Hes. Trag.; (wkr.sens.) troubles Thgn.</p> <p>4 cause of ruin, bane (ref. to a person, the Trojan Horse) S. E. Call.</p> <p>Ἄτη, -ης, Ate (personif. Ruin, daughter of Zeus or Eris, instigator of delusion and destruction) Il. +</p>	<p>A. out of one’s senses, blindness (<i>of the mind</i>), madness, as divine punishment IL. 1.412, <i>al.</i> OD. 4.26 <i>etc.</i> <i>extens.</i> ruin, scourge, misfortune, sent from the gods IL. 24.480 HDT. 1.32.6 AESCHL. <i>Pers.</i> 653, <i>al. etc.</i>; (<i>sc.</i> Τάνταλος) κόρη δ’ ἔλεν ἄταν ὑπέροπλον Tantalos brought overwhelming ruin upon himself through his excesses PIND. <i>O.</i> 1.57 <i>of pers.</i> AESCHL. <i>Ag.</i> 1230 SOPH. <i>Ant.</i> 533</p> <p>B. flaw, error IL. 6.356 <i>pl.</i> deceptions IL. 10.391 <i>personif.</i> Ἄτη, ἡ Ate IL. 19.91, <i>al. etc.</i></p>
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The first is the entry from the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, the second is from Brill’s *Montanari GE*s.²² My aim is not so much to pass a verdict as to display the different approaches. What will be clear at first sight is that the approach of the *Cambridge Lexicon* is much more analytical, while Montanari prefers to stress the

²² For simplicity’s sake, I omitted the morphological information. Nor did I reproduce in all its wealth the typography used as a marker to distinguish the different items within the entries (author, title, explanation, definition, etc).

unity of the concept, while remaining economical.²³ But at further inspection there is something thoroughly odd in how the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* conceives of being analytical. With a few exceptions, largely constrained to some prepositions, particles and the verb “to be,” even longer entries lack a more solid hierarchical classificatory structure. Entries are simple linear enumerations of the different meanings (“sense sections”) without hierarchical ordering. These “sense sections” are not arranged into higher groups of meanings, although, to be frank, in case of longer entries the introductory summary indirectly hints at such an ordering. This is baffling. It is hard to say if it is a dogmatic decision to let the material speak for itself, if the editors shrank from imposing a semantic order on the material lest it should prove deficient, or if it is really the most reasonable semantic arrangement as the different meanings are simply too disparate to subsume under higher headings. Some will probably say that a more solid hierarchical classification, even at the risk of being imperfect, might have served better the needs of students. I think time will be needed to decide on this question.

The above illustration allows us to observe another major difference, implicitly alluded to already. The editors of the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, as explained in their preface, decided against giving precise references to specific passages, mainly to save room for additional material, and perhaps following the pattern set by Liddel-Scott’s *Intermediate Greek Lexicon*.²⁴ For an intermediate lexicon, this might be a reasonable course to take. However, considering the arbitrary randomness and literary origin of our “database,” we should not forget that a fair number of occurrences will always defy easy assignment on our semantic map, and will be interpretation-dependent. I still remember how I struggled to fit such an interpretive translation devised for some arcane Aeschylus-passage onto Pindar or Plato I had difficulties to understand, and saw my students struggle in the same way. In short, I find it deceptive not to assign references to – at least some of – those meanings and explanations, which translate single, specific passages – strictly on a case-by-case basis. A case in point is the enigmatic ψιλὸν ὄμμα (“bare, naked eye”) in the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles (l. 866). The expression is used by Oedipus in his dispute with Creon after Creon seizes Antigone by force. It is certain that ὄμμα, “eye” refers to Antigone. But the force of the adjective – ψιλόν – is debated. The editors of the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* distinguish 14 different meanings of ψιλός, out of which one – the eighth meaning – is devoted to this passage alone and explains it as “8 (of the eye of a blind man,

²³ The lexicography of *Atē* presents a specific difficulty inasmuch as over and above the distinct meanings there is a unifying conceptual scheme which is fundamentally different from ours and which is impossible to translate. Any dictionary can only hope, at best, to arrange the material in such a way as to suggest this scheme. I find Bailly’s entry exceptionally successful in this particular instance.

²⁴ This has been the common practice of Greek and Latin intermediate learners’ dictionaries, out of, I suppose, pedagogical considerations.

fig. ref. to his daughter acting as his guide) **defenceless** S.(dub.)” The entry registers that the given meaning occurs somewhere in Sophocles, that the interpretation is dubious – but the long explanation makes sense only if you do not need it: if you are reading that particular passage and have come here seeking help to understand it. In that case you will not need the summary outline of the situation but would be well serviced with the precise reference. Which would be more economical, in any case, if you wanted to save room. Montanari’s solution is simpler, more economical and straightforward: under the heading “**5. A. pure, simple, mere**” you will find, among others, “ψιλὸν ὄμμα my eye alone SOPH. O.C. 866.”²⁵

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²⁵ The source of the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*’s interpretation is Jebb’s commentary (R. C. Jebb: *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments. With Critical Notes, Commentary, and Translation in English Prose. Part II. The Oedipus Coloneus*. Cambridge, 1885), 143, and a longer note in the appendix, 282–283. The original Italian of Montanari is “il mio unico occhio.”