



Systems Failure in Greek Lexicography, or “Don’t Use This Dictionary”

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After helping prince’s rise, Trump and Kushner benefit from Saudi funds

An investment fund overseen by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman backs ventures that benefit the former president and his senior adviser, raising questions of conflict.

By Michael Kranish

MORE COVERAGE

♦ Trump campaign paid researchers to prove 2020 fraud but kept findings secret



(Jabin Botaford/The Post)

The Boeing 737 Max Crashes

Lion Air 610 (19 October 2018)

Ethiopian Airlines 302 (10 March 2019)

The Mechanical Cause: MCAS

(Manuevering Characteristics
Augmentation System)

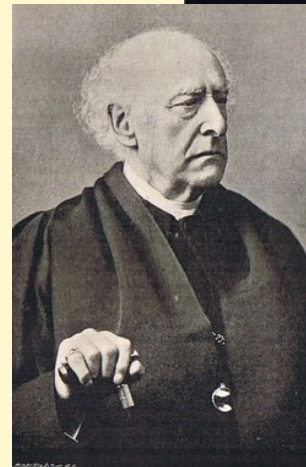
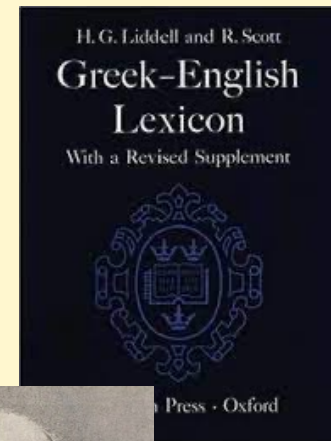
vs.

The Systematic Causes: design flaws
driven by corporate financialization and
loss of engineering focus; outsourcing;
capture of regulatory administration;
approval on that basis by less well-
funded agencies



Section I: Liddell–Scott–Jones and its problems

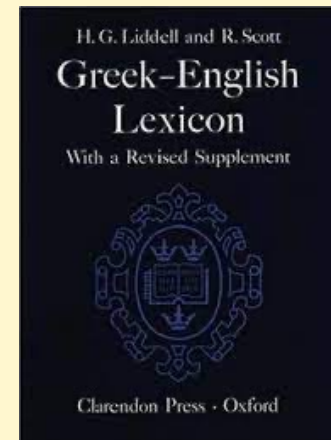
- In the mid-1830s: Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott are commissioned by OUP to produce a Greek lexicon based on Franz Passow's 1830 Greek-German *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache*
- Eight editions follow, yielding a complex, sometimes self-contradictory, multi-layered text
- In 1903, OUP considers a Greek equivalent of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* project, but the project is deemed too expensive
- Instead, Henry Stuart-Jones produces the ninth edition in 1925–1940, with Roderick McKenzie adding etymological information
- A 1968 *Supplement* by E. A. Barber, and a 1996 *Revised Supplement* by Peter Glare and Anne Thompson
- Seemingly no thought of a tenth edition



Henry George Liddell
(1811–1898)

Difficulties with LSJ

- Unsystematic presentation of entries
- Omission of words (via accident, or not known at the time)
- Fragment numbers outdated, and standard editions have often changed
- A sense of “Greek” aimed at an early 20th-century Oxford audience
- And larger questions about English as target-language in a multi-lingual world



Alice Liddell
(1852–1934)

Section II: On the use and construction of lexica

- Lexica as basic research tools, with significant expectations, in particular for *extremely high standards of scholarly rigor*
- Lexica are simultaneously *subjective enterprises*, based on arbitrary if generally well-motivated judgments, the implications and significance of which remain mostly invisible to the casual user: range of coverage generally; selection of specific passages to cite; the fundamental problem of how to “translate” a word and organize an entry that works in both languages
- Definition structures to be understood as *creative acts of intellectual architecture*, and are not natural products of the translated vocabulary



Section III: A new LSJ and why we are unlikely to get one

What would such a project entail, and how could it be accomplished?

- Incorporation of the material in the LSJ *Supplements* and similar recent lexicographic work
- Addition of new inscriptional and papyrological material
- Up-to-date etymologies, along with consistent reference to Mycenaean
- Revised parameters for coverage?
- Most important: *rethinking the individual entries themselves*, by re-collecting and re-sorting the ancient evidence for individual words via TLG, and thinking afresh about how to squeeze them into contemporary English
- A fundamental obligation to accuracy

This suggests several decades of concerted work and a large number of readers and fact-checkers. Compare the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*

But there is always another way ...

James Diggle with the CGL



Section IV: An alternative approach ... *the Boeing way*

When the Boeing Corporation was faced with the need to replace the 737, its executive officers looked at the financial numbers and made a fateful decision to avoid the difficult, expensive engineering work that producing a 21st-century product would have required. Instead, they took an old plane, whose deficiencies were already apparent; made a number of clumsy, superficial updates to it, pushing important technical aspects of the work onto outside contractors; and marketed it again as the 737 Max. *Mutatis mutandis*, similar decisions seem to lie behind the origins of Franco Montanari's *Vocabulario Greco-Italiano*, the third edition of which appeared in 2013 and provided the basis for the 2015 *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, produced by Gregory Nagy and the Center for Hellenic Studies.



LSJ s.v. ἄγριος *living in the fields, wild, savage*

I. 1. *of animals, opp. τιθασός ἥμερος, wild ... even of flies ... of men, living in a wild state*

2. *of trees, opp. ἥμερος, wild ... of the wild vine ... cf. ... μέλι [honey]*

3. *of countries, wild, uncultivated ...*

II. *mostly of men, beasts, etc.:*

1. *in moral sense, savage, fierce ...*

2. *of temper, wild, fierce ... cruel ... τὸ ἄ. savageness ... ἐς τὸ -ώτερον to harsher measures*

3. *of things, circumstances, etc., cruel, harsh ... wild, stormy ... violent*

III. ἄγρίως

Montanari/Nagy s.v. ἄγριος

A. *of the fields, wild, savage ... of animals, opp. τιθασός, ἥμερος ... of men in a wild state ... of trees and fruits ... μέλι ... uncultivated, of lands ... of a hairstyle” (Ach.Tat. 3.12.1)*

B. *fig. savage, violent, cruel ... of persons ... of temper ... of things ... substantive τὸ ἄ. savageness*

C. Adverb



8 of 13 references in A already in LSJ s.v. I; 13 of 16 references in B already in s.v. II, all but one in the same order; first of three references in C already in LSJ s.v. III, and the obvious opportunity to improve the entry missed.

LSJ s.v. ἀλέξω (epic vocabulary, relatively rare outside of Homer)

1. *ward off, turn aside*” (concerned primarily with the various cases and combinations of cases the verb takes, and divided into separate sections for active and middle)
2. *recompense, requite*” (citing only X. An. 1.9.11)

Montanari/Nagy s.v. ἀλέξω

1. *“ward off, repel, protect, defend”*;
2. A. (mid.) *“ward off or drive away from oneself, defend oneself from”*,
B. *“repay”*.

- 15 of 19 passages cited already in LSJ, including X. An. 1.9.11 as the sole reference in s.v. 2.B

- Od. 10.288 ὃ κέν τοι κρατὸς ἀλάλησιν κακὸν ἥμαρ translated “that keeps the evil day from your head”; the Greek means “which would keep ...”.

- Il. 1.590 ἤδη γάρ με καὶ ἄλλοτ’ ἀλεξέμεναι μεμαῶτα described — in this sense following LSJ s.v. 1, which has the passage in the same position in the note — as an absolute use of the verb and glossed “to defend”. But English does not use the word absolutely this way (contrast LSJ’s “lend aid”), and σε (referring to Hera) is to be supplied in any case.

- S. OT 171 ὧ τις ἀλέξεται translated “(sword) with which male name might defend himself”; but the antecedent of ὧ is φροντίδος ἔγχος (metaphorical), and the words mean literally “a spear of thought with which a man will defend himself”.





- In general, the *Brill Dictionary* consistently does little more than take over and abbreviate material already in LSJ⁹: in twelve words beginning with *alpha*, 269 of the 321 references to primary texts (84%) were drawn from the older lexicon, and many of the additions were eccentric and unhelpful, mishandled in one way or another, or unrevealing.
- The variety of texts or periods covered has not been significantly expanded in the *Brill Dictionary*
- The process of abbreviation has often been carried out in a way that distorts the impression created by the range of material cited, by omitting initial attestations of words, narrowing the range of authors and genres cited, and the like.
- Definitions of words, and the way they are organized, are routinely dependent on LSJ⁹, and even when the *Dictionary* reorganizes the material, it does so on the basis of no clear principle or set of principles.

Put another way, the *Dictionary* fails to enter into a coherent discussion of how ancient Greek should be mapped onto English and organized in a way that is helpful for users of the modern language.

S.v. λαγχάνω

- *Od.* 5.311 κ' ἔλαχον κτερέων describes an unreal situation (hence the presence of the modal particle) and thus means not “I shall have obtained funeral honors”, as in the *Dictionary*, but “I would have obtained funeral honors”.
- *D.* 30.34 ἤδη τούτῳ ταυτησὶ τῆς δίκης εἰληγμένης means not “once this man had already been brought to trial”, but “when the present suit” — the one being tried at the moment — “had already been accepted (sc. by the relevant magistrate) against this man”.
- At *D.* 23.76 τούτοις ἐνταῦθα λαγχάνεται, the reference is to suits brought before the Prytaneion court against inanimate objects responsible for a human being's death; the text thus means not “the charges are brought against these men”, but “he” — the person pursuing the matter — “institutes proceedings against these objects”.



S.v. λαμβάνω

- S. *Ph.* 675 σε ξυμπαραστάτην λαβεῖν is translated “to take you as a savior”; it actually means “to take you as an ally”, and this is not appropriately described as an example of the verb used “with two accusatives”, since σε is in apposition to ξυμπαραστάτην.
- Expressions such as ὁρμὴν λαμβάνω, πεῖραν λαμβάνω, and ἀρχὴν λαμβάνω, meanwhile, are examples not of “abstract objects” (thus the *Dictionary*), but of internal accusatives.
- A. *Pers.* 366 κνέφας δὲ τέμενος αἰθέρος λάβη means not “(when) darkness had overtaken the sacred precinct of the ether”, but “(when) darkness overtakes the precinct”.
- Ar. *Nu.* 1123 λαμβάνων οὔτ’ οἶνον οὔτ’ ἄλλ’ οὐδὲν ἐκ τοῦ χωρίου means not “not obtaining wine or any other product from the region”, but “not obtaining wine or any other product from his farm”.
- Ar. *Pax* 1253 λάβοιμ’ ἂν αὖτ’ ... ἑκατὸν τῆς δραχμῆς means not “I could have a hundred of them for a drachma”, but “I would buy them at a hundred per drachma”.
- Th. 4.69.2 αἱ οἰκίαι ... ἐπάλξεις λαμβάνουσαι (“the houses, which had battlements added to them”) is obscurely described as an example of “subject of thing”; this seems to mean that the subject of the verb in the sense “receive, have, accept, admit” need not always be a person, but this is uncontroversial and the note merely confuses matters.
- X. *Cyr.* 1.4.3 (ὅσοι νέοι ὄντες) μέγεθος ἔλαβον is glossed “(the kids) have grown”; the Greek means “those who were still young but reached adult stature physically”.
- The text at E. *Ba.* 1312 reads not δίκην ... ἀξίαν ἐλάμβανεν but δίκην ... ἀξίαν ἐλάμβανες, and the sense is not “he was punished as he deserved” but “you extracted a just punishment (for any slight)”.



S.v. λανθάνω

- Th. 4.32.1 λαθόντες τὴν ἀπόβασιν (described as “with acc. of relation” and translated “their landing having been unobserved”) and E. *IA* 516 λάθοιμι τοῦτ’ ἄν (described as “with neuter pronoun” and translated “I might go unobserved in this”) are treated as different constructions. Both are simply accusatives of respect: “unobserved in regard to their disembarking” and “unobserved in regard to this”, respectively.
- Hp. *Aer.* 2 οὐκ ἂν αὐτὸν λανθάνοι means not “he will not be unaware”, but “he would not be unaware”.
- Ar. *Eq.* 465 οὔκουν μ’ ... οἷα πράττεις λανθάνει means not “what you are doing does not escape me”, but “the sort of things you are doing does not escape me”.

S.v. λάσκω

The *Dictionary* discriminates between (C) “of men, *cry out, yell, shout*”, including “with internal accusative”, as at A. *Ag.* 596 ὀλολυγμὸν ... / ἔλασκον; and (D) “with acc. *say, announce, proclaim*”, as at A. *Ag.* 1426 περίφρονα δ’ ἔλακες, or “with double accusative”, as at E. *Andr.* 671 τοιαῦτα λάσκεις τοὺς ἀναγκαίους φίλους;.

But ὀλολυγμὸν, περίφρονα and τοιαῦτα are all internal accusatives, and the sense of the verb is more or less identical in all three cases.



- **λαγωφόνος** is lemmatized as an adjective, but glossed as a noun (“*hare-killer*” rather than “hare-killing”). So too **λαθροδάκνος** (glossed “*one who bites in secret*” rather than “secretly biting”), **λαθροκακοῦργος** (glossed “*hidden malefactor*” rather than “one who does evil secretly”), and **λαθροφάγος** (glossed “*one who eats or is gluttonous secretly*” rather than “secretly gluttonous”). **λαθροφονευτής** is rightly treated as a noun, but is glossed as an adjective (“*secretly murderous*”).
- S.v. **Λαιμοκύκλωψ**, the individual in question is not “the sender of the Letters of Alkiphron”, but the supposed author of epistle 3.15 only.
- S.v. **λαοξοϊκός**, Hsch. ο 1350 uses the word to mean not “*of carved stone*” but “having to do with stone-cutting”: (ὄρυξ· λαοξοϊκὸν σκεῦος, “pick: a stone-cutting implement”).
- S.v. **λαός**, the Athenian public announcement formula ἀκούετε λεῶ is taken to mean “to the people: listen!”, as if λεῶ were a dative singular rather than a nominative plural of the Attic declension serving as a vocative (“People — listen!”).
- S.v. **Λαρισοποιός**: not “*Larissa-makers*” but “makers of citizens of Larissa”.
- S.v. **Λατογένεια** (“born of Leto”) is lemmatized as a noun: Λατογένεια -ας, ἡ. It is actually an adjective of a type used for goddesses in place of a combined masculine/feminine form in -γενής -ες (e.g. ἀφρογένεια, ἡριγένεια, Τριτογένεια).
- S.v. **λατυπικός**: glossed “*sharp, for cutting*”. But the word is < λαῶς + τύπτω and means “having to do with stone-cutting”; cf. Aristoxen. fr. 51 (Socrates practiced πατρῶα τέχνη ... τῇ λατυπικῇ, “his paternal stone-cutting trade”, sculpture). At Hsch. ε 7191, the word is not used “of a knife” but of a σμίλη (“chisel”).



S.v. λαχανισμός

- *Hippiatr.* 130.171 is from a section that discusses how to get one's horse to eat greens in the winter, by stewing them and adding oil, salt and cumin. This is thus not a matter of "*pasturing*", and ἐὰν ... λαχανίσαι θέλης ζῶον means not "if you want an animal *to pick vegetables*" but "if you want an animal to consume greens".
- At Th. 3.111.1, λαχανισμός is an activity parallel to looking for firewood that can be used as a excuse for leaving a city; thus not "*gathering, picking of vegetables*" (as if work in a garden were in question), but "gathering greens".

These are not merely occasional errors. The English translations in the *Brill Dictionary* are deeply and routinely flawed; uses of the accusative are consistently confused; and tenses and moods of verbs are mishandled. In addition, many translations seem to have have been produced without reference to the original texts from which the passages are taken.

All this suggests a combination of inadequate philological expertise with haste and a lack of careful, competent overall supervision. Some of these problems appear to be confined to the English-language version of the *Dictionary*. Others must be traced to the Nagy *Dictionary's* source, the Montanari *Vocabulario*.



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(Jabin Botsford/The Post)

Section V: How have we got here, and what is to be done?



REGULATORY
CAPTURE

The problem is not precisely that economic interest is entwined in such matters, but that economic interest, uncoupled from other, intellectually more substantial and technically more complicated concerns, can drive bad decisions, particularly when outside controls are absent via *regulatory capture*.

“For a number of years now, scholars at ease in Italian have benefitted enormously from the riches, layout, concision, and accuracy of Professor Montanari’s Vocabulario della Lingua Greca, with its added advantage of the inclusion of names. Hence classicists in general will welcome the English version of this very valuable resource.” ***** **, *University of Michigan*

Some final points:

1. These views will be unpopular in certain quarters and may result in personal and professional attacks of the usual sort. But the evidence is there*.
2. Systematically correcting the entire Nagy/Montanari *Dictionary* on even a basic level would likely require five to seven years of full-time work by a dedicated senior Hellenist. More likely, superficial improvements will be made and the volume will be sold again to every library in the world in a second edition, generating more profits for the press and more royalties. In that case, this will still be a profoundly flawed product.

The bottom line: *Don't use this dictionary.*

*

“Philological Notes on the Letter *Lambda* in a New Greek–English Dictionary”, forthcoming in *Hyperboreus*

“Philological Notes on the Letter *Psi* in a New Greek–English Dictionary”, forthcoming in *Rheinisches Museum*

“Philological Notes on the Letter *Rho* in a New Greek–English Dictionary”, forthcoming in *Mnemosyne* (prepublished in 2021)

“Philological Notes on the Letter *Gamma* in a New Greek–English Dictionary”, *Museum Helveticum* 79 (2022) 301–21

“Philological Notes on the Letter *Zeta* in a New Greek–English Dictionary”, *Glotta* 98 (



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