



A foreword to an essay by Charles de Lamberterie

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Classical Inquiries

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A foreword to an essay by Charles de Lamberterie

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Presented here is a preliminary draft of a foreword to an English-language version of an essay by Charles de Lamberterie.

[\[Essay continues here...\]](#)



Charles de Lamberterie and Douglas Frame.

The original French-language version of “The Greek Adjective ἄσμενος: Its Etymology and History,” an essay written by Charles de Lamberterie, appeared in a volume published in 2014 by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris. That volume is a collection of essays written by students, colleagues, and friends of Jacqueline de Romilly to celebrate that grand scholar’s contributions to the study of ancient Greek literature and of Hellenic Civilization writ large. And now there is a new occasion for celebration. This time, the happy event is the online publication of an English-language version, translated by Ioanna Papadopoulou, of the essay by Charles de Lamberterie about the ancient Greek word ἄσμενος.

The honor of publishing this essay in English goes to the online journal Classical Inquiries, edited by Keith Stone, which is a publication emanating from Harvard University’s Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, DC. The URL is <https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/the-greek-adjective-ἄσμενος-its-etymology-and-history>, which takes the reader to Classical Inquiries 2017.11.17. Correspondingly, the URL for my brief foreword here to that essay in Classical Inquiries 2017.11.17 is <https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/on-an-essay-by-charles-de-lamberterie>.

As the current Director of the Center, I am proud that Charles de Lamberterie has graced our online publications series Classical Inquiries by giving us an “Anglo-Saxon” version of his “ἄσμενος,” and my pride here is doubled, since the argumentation by my dear colleague and friend Charles in his essay highlights earlier research done on the same Greek word ἄσμενος by another dear colleague and friend of mine, Douglas Frame, who is Associate Director Emeritus at the Center for Hellenic Studies.

I share with you in the next paragraph, my dear Charles, with Doug’s wholehearted concurrence, an expression of praise for your academic and intellectual legacy on the happy occasion of this online publication of your exemplary essay:

As the work of Charles de Lamberterie on the ancient Greek word ἄσμενος shows with piercing clarity, the author is ambidextrous in two otherwise distinct fields, classical philology and Indo-European linguistics. His ambidexterity is reflected in the concept of “histoire des mots,” which figures prominently in the subtitle of his essay on ἄσμενος—just as it figures in the subtitles of two works that he much admires, the Greek etymological dictionary of Pierre Chantraine (1968–1980) and the Latin etymological dictionary of Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet (1959).

What remains for me here is to highlight also the importance of the earlier work done by Douglas Frame on the same Greek word ἄσμενος—especially as we see that word attested in the formulaic system of Homeric

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poetry. I have in mind here two books of his: *Frame* 1978 and 2009, as listed in the Bibliography below. My use of the term “formulaic system” in the context of my reference here to the work of Frame is inspired by the even earlier work of Antoine Meillet and Milman Parry.

Both Meillet and Parry are relevant to the intellectual genealogy of Douglas Frame—as also to my own. In order to explain, I must briefly recount the history of a project that was founded by Doug and myself, together with a third colleague Leonard Muellner. The name of this project is *A Homer Commentary in Progress*, the founding authors and editors of which are Doug, Lenny, and myself. As the project evolved, we three coopted seven other editors: Casey Dué, Mary Ebbott, David Elmer, Olga Levaniouk, Richard Martin, Corinne Pache, John B. Petropoulos. Besides the ten editors, there are currently two associate editors: Anita Nikkanen and Keith Stone. And there are two assistant editors: Daniel Cline and Angelia Hanhardt.

In a post for *Classical Inquiries* [2017.11.12](#) I wrote a draft for what is meant as a brief introduction to *A Homer Commentary in Progress*, and here I repeat those parts of the draft that are most relevant to the separate but confluent works of Charles de Lamberterie and Douglas Frame concerning the Greek word ἄσμενος.

A Homer commentary in progress, hereafter abbreviated as AHCIP, is the first and only Homer commentary that is based squarely on the cumulative research of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, who together created a new way of thinking about Homeric poetry. The lifelong research of Parry and Lord, as summarized in Lord’s magisterial synthesis, *The Singer of Tales* (1960), proved that Homeric poetry is a system generated from oral traditions, and that the building blocks of this system are formulas on the level of form and themes on the level of meaning (Lord 1960:4). The comments in AHCIP are designed to analyze and explain this system of formulas and themes—this formulaic system.

For a convenient introduction, I cite Parry 1930 and 1932; also, the second edition of *Singer of Tales*, edited by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, 2000, with a new Introduction by the two editors. A third edition, to be published simultaneously in print and online, is planned for 2018, and the new editor is David Elmer.

Within the framework of AHCIP, the three founding authors and their fellow editors apply to the formulaic system of Homeric poetry a special methodology of linguistics that stems at least in part from the research of Antoine Meillet. An application of this methodology, as exemplified by Meillet 1925, had been pioneered by Parry himself, who was a student of Meillet during his years as a doctoral student at the Sorbonne. The intellectual legacy of Meillet is continued to this day at the Sorbonne by researchers like Charles de Lamberterie, who has been a steadfast supporter of AHCIP. There is more about the influence of Meillet on Parry in an influential article by de Lamberterie (1997).

Albert Lord, who followed closely the methods of Milman Parry in his analysis of formulaic systems, makes a most revealing observation on the basis of his own systematic analysis of a sample poem stemming from the South Slavic oral traditions. “There is nothing in the poem,” Lord says about this poem (1960:47), “that is not formulaic.” Lord’s teacher Parry made a comparable observation (1928a:10–11=1971:8–9), referring to a still earlier observation by Meillet (1923:61) concerning the all-pervasive formulaic system of Homeric poetry. This idea, that everything in an oral composition is formulaic, applies to our own project. In our commentary, we aim to deliver a “proof of concept” by analyzing both synchronically and diachronically the evidence of all the Homeric poems—the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the Homeric Hymns. The comments in AHCIP on these texts of Homeric poetry are meant to prove that they all originated from a formulaic system of oral poetry.

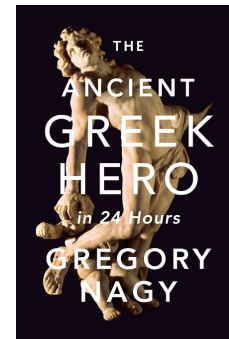
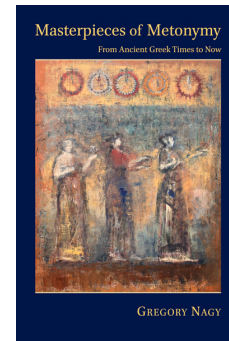
The linguistic approach of AHCIP in analyzing the formulaic system of Homeric poetry provides an empirical foundation for the discoveries and discovery procedures that are assembled and organized in AHCIP. Such an approach does not ignore, however, the beauty of the verbal art that went into the making of Homeric poetry. The three founding authors of this Homer commentary follow the example of Roman Jakobson (in the 1960s, all three attended his classes as well as Lord’s), whose research in both linguistics and literature showed that there is another side to the grammar of poetry: it is the poetry of grammar, as reflected in the title of one of his books, Jakobson 1980. The formulaic system of Homeric poetry is not a machine but a special language for expressing the sublime beauty and pleasure of hearing the ‘glories’ or *klea* of heroes and gods.

For an introduction to the kinds of comments that will appear in AHCIP, I refer here to the sampling assembled in Nagy 2016–2017, the URN for which is indicated in the Bibliography.

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