



**HAL**  
open science

**Nestor and his Twin, in Interdisciplinary Uses of Homer:  
In Dialogue with Douglas Frame, Ioanna Papadopoulou  
ed., Washington, Center for Hellenic Studies, 2021  
(online): <https://chs.harvard.edu/read/interdisciplinary-uses-of-homer-in-dialogue-with-douglas-frame/>**

Françoise Letoublon

► **To cite this version:**

Françoise Letoublon. Nestor and his Twin, in Interdisciplinary Uses of Homer: In Dialogue with Douglas Frame, Ioanna Papadopoulou ed., Washington, Center for Hellenic Studies, 2021 (online): <https://chs.harvard.edu/read/interdisciplinary-uses-of-homer-in-dialogue-with-douglas-frame/>. Ioanna Papadopoulou. Interdisciplinary Uses of Homer: In Dialogue with Douglas Frame, Ioanna Papadopoulou ed., Washington, Center for Hellenic Studies, 2021 (online): <https://chs.harvard.edu/read/interdisciplinary-uses-of-homer-in-dialogue-with-douglas-frame/>, 2021. hal-04653421

**HAL Id: hal-04653421**

**<https://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-04653421v1>**

Submitted on 18 Jul 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Nestor and his Twin\*

Françoise Létoublon

As its title suggests, Douglas Frame's *Hippota Nestor* is of course about Nestor, but the book covers a much larger scope that includes composition, performance, and the dissemination of Homeric poetry. Through a thorough analysis of Nestor as a character, many other subjects come into play, some of which have gone unnoticed even by experienced scholars.

The book's structure is complex for reasons amply justified by the author. The text itself is divided into five well-balanced parts: *Nestor's Indo-European Background*, *Nestor's Homeric Role*, *Athens*, *Ionia*, and *Pylos*.

Due to the breadth of topics covered, substantial content can also be found in the endnotes after each part, as well as in the extensive footnotes in each chapter. This dual set of notes is very helpful for readers that have further interest in any specific aspect of a given chapter. That is to say that nothing goes undocumented in this book. For all these reasons—the thorough research surrounding Nestor as a character, and the scale and complexity of its construction—this work is mainly intended for an audience of well-informed researchers in the field.

Some Hellenists might feel surprised that the book begins with a comparative analysis, which, once again, the author's decidedly comparative perspective justifies. In chapter 1, Frame explicates the problem that gave birth to the book, the discrepancy as to the number and names of Neleus' sons in the tradition. Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, are about Greek Nestor and his Vedic equivalent. The problem arises from

---

\* This paper is a revision of my review of *Hippota Nestor* (published online at <https://homerica.msh-alpes.fr/agora/>) adapted for the purposes of this volume. Thanks go to Stephen Rojcewicz for correcting my English, to Ioanna Papadopoulou for including it in the edition, and to Douglas Frame for his patience answering my questions.

the fact that the Greek Nestor, Neleus' son, combines the characteristic features of the Vedic twins, the *Aśvinā* or *Nāsatyā*, who are—like Nestor—horsemen<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, Frame searches in Greek texts for traces of Nestor's lost or hidden twin. He finds him in the person of Periklymenos, among the twelve Neleids whose names are given in Hesiod's fr. 33a 8-15. It is the narrative that Nestor conveys to Patroclus in *Iliad* 11 that contains, according to Frame, the key to his interpretation: seeing the Achaeans' distress in battle, the old man recalls the glorious episode of his youth in which, after a raid against the Eleans, he won his title *Hippota*, "horseman" or "rider," even though he was fighting on foot. The Homeric formula associating the epithet *Hippota* with the proper name *Nestor* corresponds thus to the Vedic formula *Aśvinā Nāsatyā*.

There is a clear connection between *Hippota Nestor* and a previous book published by Frame (*The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic*, Newhaven, 1978), where he links *νόος*, *νοῦς* with *νόστος* and its etymological family, thus with the myth of return which lies at the center of the *Odyssey*.

The second part is entirely devoted to Nestor's role in Homer, with a very careful and accurate analysis of all the episodes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* where Nestor is mentioned, appropriately beginning with *Iliad* 11 in chapter 4, then dealing with Book 23 in chapter 5, *Odyssey* 3 and *Iliad* 8 in chapter 6, *Odyssey* 11 and the Phaeacians in chapter 7. Frame's sequence of presentation and analysis follows its own logical order rather than the chronology of the epic narration. Thus the succession of two episodes in the narrative of *Iliad* 11—a livestock raid and fighting—corresponds well to the twin myth structure featuring one brother focused on livestock and the other on war. This polarized structure is also found in Greek mythology in the Dioscuri myth.<sup>2</sup> Particularly

---

<sup>1</sup> Skr. *Aśvin-* and Greek *hippo-* stem from the same I.-E. word *\*ekwo-* while *Nāsatyā* derives from *\*nes-* as does *Nestor* (p.15) but both sets of words were formed differently in these languages.

<sup>2</sup> See the first part (1.56) on Castor and Polydeuces as horsemen saviors, 1.58 sq. on the distinction between Polydeuces, immortal son of Zeus, and Castor, mortal son of Tyndareus.

interesting is the analysis of the relationship between Nestor and Patroclus: Nestor helps Machaon, while Patroclus assists Eurypylos, both injured by the arrows of Paris (2.11, p. 121). The detailed analysis leads us to see in Achilles a parallel to Nestor's missing brother in the old warrior's own narrative: just as the death of his missing brother Periklymenos places Pylos at the mercy of the Eleians,<sup>3</sup> Achilles being absent from the war puts the Achaeans in great danger. In chapter 4, the parallel between young Nestor and Patroclus is further illustrated by the fact that Patroclus acquires the formulaic epithets ἵππεῦ and ἵπποκέλευθε when he enters the battle wearing Achilles' arms.

In *Iliad* 23 Nestor offers advice to his son Antilochos, who is about to take part in the chariot race during the funeral games in honor of Patroclus. According to Frame, this long speech to Antilochos is meant to evoke an old episode from his father's youth, so he begins his analysis from the end, with the speech that Nestor gives while receiving an honorary award from Achilles. Nestor recounts his defeat in a chariot race during the funeral games held in honor of king Amarynkeus: while he won all the other prizes, the chariot race went to the Epeian twins (identified through the dual form, *Aktorione*). Comparison with the narrative of *Iliad* 11 leads Frame to his central hypothesis: *Iliad* 23 alludes to the missed occasion to access the status of *hippota*. The victory in the chariot race went to the Epeian twins, because Nestor had not yet learned how to take the place of his own twin brother (2.19, p. 131). Frame pays great attention to the narration in *Iliad* 23 around the various competitors: Diomedes wins thanks to Athena's help (two against one), whereas Eumelos leads his team alone (2.32, p. 145);<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> It seems to me necessary to correct "at the mercy of the Epeians" (p. 125) to "Eleians." The typo mistake might arise from a confusion between the Eleians, enemies of the Pylians, and the Epeians of the following chapter, Nestor's competitors at Bouprasion. But see p. 48: "[The Pylians] prey to their hostile neighbors to the north, the Epeians, who are identified in the story with the historical Eleians." For the author, the names are interchangeable (*per litteras*).

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Frame later remarks (2.54, p. 171, n. 69), that Achilles awards Eumelos a prize despite his

the race both associates and opposes Antilochos and Menelaos (2.35-42). At the end of his instructions to his son, Nestor draws Antilochos' attention to the *sêma*, that is, the final turning post he has to round, using the phrase οὐδέ σε λήσει, echoed later as οὐδέ σε λήθω when Nestor receives his honorary award. Frame interprets this repetition as a mark of irony; it can be read as a reference to the danger of the tactic recommended to Nestor's son, which is the reason as well for Nestor's own failure in the Bouprasion race, where he crashed at the finish line (2.42-49, p. 156-166). Thus, Nestor's discourse to Antilochos about *mêtis* is in fact old Nestor's ironic introspection (p. 169, in particular, n. 63). Chapter 5 closes with the relationship between the chariot race and the *nostoi*, already noted by Whitman.<sup>5</sup>

The following chapter specifies the key role of Nestor in the *nostoi*: the relationship between *Iliad* 8 and *Odyssey* 3 is analyzed as revolving around this role, which justifies the etymology of Nestor's name, both the "one who returns" and the "savior." Diomedes and Odysseus are the protagonists in the two cases, their actions mirrored in reverse: Diomedes saves Nestor in *Iliad* 8, and the reverse happens in the story narrated in *Odyssey* 3. More important, though, and more complex is the relationship between Nestor and Odysseus. It includes a negative aspect: Odysseus does not save Nestor in *Iliad* 8, nor does Nestor ensure Odysseus' return in *Odyssey* 3 (particularly 2.74-75, p. 199). The analogy between Nestor and Diomedes lies in the fact that both are horsemen and warriors, and for Frame, the episode of *Iliad* 8 constitutes a revival of the twin myth. The second mention of Nestor in the *Odyssey*, in the *Nekuia*, is the subject of chapter 7, "*Odyssey* 11 and the Phaeacians." This long chapter—102 pages—brilliantly elucidates the problems posed by the Catalogue of Heroines, whom Odysseus meets in

---

failure, connecting this with the mention in the *Epitome* of the *Library* that Eumelos won the chariot race at the funeral games of Achilles himself.

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*, Cambridge MA, 1958.

Hades. A very detailed analysis of the structure of the Catalogue demonstrates that Nestor stays at its center through his mother Chloris and Neleus' mother Tyro. The Catalogue, interrupted at verses 330-332 of Book 11 by Odysseus himself, indicates the deeper reason of the recitation of the mythical genealogy focused on Nestor, with the repetition of the formula in 11.330, πομπή δὲ θεοῖσ' ὑμῖν τε μελήσει, echoed again in 11. 352-3, πομπή δ' ἀνδρεσσι μελήσει πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί. Another revealing repetition is *Odyssey* 3.410 and 6.11, about Neleus and Nausithoos, respectively: ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἤδη κηρὶ δαμείς Ἄϊδόσδε βεβήκει. It provides the important key that Nestor, son of Neleus, and Alkinoos, son of Nausithoos, are similarly "homebringers" (p. 244); both of them have a name stemming from the Indo-European root \*nes-.<sup>6</sup> If the Catalogue is actually centered on Nestor, the aim of the narrative by Odysseus in Book 11 is to persuade Alkinoos to undertake the role of savior that Nestor did not play for him. From this perspective, Book 3 gives the point of view of Nestor on his parting from Odysseus during the return from Troy, whereas Odysseus provides Alkinoos with a personal, if elliptical and diverted version: according to Frame this constitutes the answer to a question that Alkinoos asked his anonymous guest at *Odyssey* 8.581-586 (2.129, p. 273): what companion, dear as a brother, did Odysseus lose in Troy?

Why has all this not been understood prior to Frame's demonstration? The reason, according to the author, is that the Catalogue we read in *Odyssey* 11 has suffered various interpolations which hide the old structure by adding episodes and heroines who were not part of the original version. Frame does not make the assumption of interpolations lightly, as is well demonstrated by his interpretation of the episode of Tyro, Neleus' mother, the first heroine Odysseus meets in the Underworld (2. §135, p. 277 sq.). *Odyssey* 11.238-240 narrates that she was in love with the river Enipeus; verses

---

<sup>6</sup> Of course, their linguistic structure is different: Nestor is a name of agent directly derived from \*nes-, while Alki-noos is a compound name in which the second term is the word *noos*. The specific meaning of the compound is not clear.

241-242 state that Poseidon took the form of Enipeus, while in the two following verses a wave as big as a mountain conceals their union. With the help of other sources, Frame shows that the text remains consistent even without the intrusion of Poseidon, which is due to the interpolation. Furthermore, he detects several other interpolations in this context and shows the ideological implications of these additions, always with the same deep insight: the ancient version gave Neleus a local origin, whereas the addition actually makes him a panhellenic hero (2. §141, p. 288). Among other additions to the ancient text, several are of Athenian origin. The ancient structure (clearly presented in a four-page table, including text and translation, p. 306-309) illuminates the construction and the parallels:

Tyro (11 verses)	Antiope (6)	Alcmene (3)
Epikaste (2)	Chloris (10 verses)	Leda (7)
Maira, Clymene and Eriphyle (2)	Iphimedeia (4)	

The interpolation, however, has sought to preserve the structure (Catalogue B, same presentation, p. 314-317). In its old form the Catalogue is characterized as *Ionian*, which is for Frame a synonym for *Homeric*. Here Frame faces an open question, already stated by ancient commentators: *Odyssey* 11 explicitly states that Chloris and Neleus had three sons, Nestor, Chromios, and Periklymenos, while in *Iliad* 11 Nestor mentions the twelve sons of Neleus without giving their mother(s)' names. The solution is announced on the last page of the chapter, and it relates to the hypothesis of the intentional silence about Nestor's twin brother.

The third part of the book, appropriately entitled "Athens," begins in an intriguing way with "Arete and Nausicaa," the subject of chapter 8. The key here is the goddess Athena, whom we find again at the center of the following chapter, titled "the City Goddess of Athens." The main focus here is the city in the Geometric period, whose remains are actually very scarce. Frame's hypothesis is that Athena, disguised as a

young Phaiakian maiden who is leaving for "Erechtheus' palace" in Athens at the very moment that Odysseus will enter Alkinoos' palace, reveals the fact that Arete's hidden identity is Athena Polias, spouse of Alkinoos and Erechtheus, respectively. That the name of Arete derives from the root of *\*araomai*, to pray (3.11, p. 351), and that Odysseus addresses himself to her as a suppliant corroborate this hypothesis (3.12, p. 352). Thus, the Nausicaa-Arete pair is, according to Frame, the incarnation of the double identity of Athena as virgin warrior and mother goddess. Athena in Athens is no longer a mother goddess after the Homeric period. In chapter 9, Frame makes a point to show clearly the difference between the goddess protector of the city of Athens in the Homeric period and the one interpolated in the Catalogue of Ships—probably by Solon himself—according to the author, who believes that this is the period (around 600 BC) where the Athenian representation of Athena shifts. This transformation includes Erechtheus and the myth of the birth of Erichthonios: in the ancient version of the myth, Erechtheus was probably simultaneously the son and the consort of Athena Polias. According to Frame this evolution reflects Solon's intention to make of Athens a military force. From this perspective, the Homeric Catalogue of Ships is part of an ingenious propaganda attempt.

The fourth part, titled "Ionia," brings us back to the heart of important Homeric questions, which the author views through the roles of Neleus, Nestor, the twin myth, and Neleus' twelve sons (explicitly mentioned in the foundational episode of the fight against the Eleians in *Iliad* 11). The analysis seeks to prove that, rather than each of the brothers being the hero of one of the Panionian cities, it is the group of the Neleids as a whole that symbolizes the Panionian League. This narrative, as well as the idea of Panionism, was promoted by Miletus, where the leading family, who presided over the feasts of the Panionia, was specifically named the *Neleids*. It is in this context that the Homeric poems were developed in the 8th century alongside the Panionian League.



The fifth part, about Pylos, focuses as well on open Homeric questions, with chapter 12 on *Iliad* 11 and the location of the Homeric Pylos, and chapter 13 on the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* and the text of *Iliad* 11. After reading parts 4 and 5, we understand better why the number of the sons of Neleus can lead to important insights about the birth of the poems and their historical context.

So far, I have focused on the content and methods of Frame's book. Nothing is missing in it. If I may suggest a broadening of the questions presented, it seems to me that the issue of the status of twins in Antiquity is captivating because they manifest both identity and difference: twins are at the same time similar and different. Ancient myths seem to inventory the possibilities opened by these surprising similarities.

Two books in French may contribute to such a broadening of perspective: Charles Malamoud's studies of Yama, the Vedic god of death, whose name means "twin" precisely.<sup>7</sup> His twin sister Yamī appears in the *Vedas*: one of the differences between the twins may be gender. They are born from Savarṇyū and Vīvasvant, the Sun, and the Aśvin have the same parents in equine form. Yama is also associated with horses through several features. The twinship that defines Yama is reflected in the constant duality in the myths and rituals related to Yama.

The second book pertinent to the subject is an extensive study of twins (male and female) in Greek and Roman Antiquity.<sup>8</sup> The author, Véronique Dasen, cleverly inserts mythical twins into a broader ancient context, including scientific theories of conception and medical knowledge going back to the Hippocratic school. Leto's wandering before the birth of Apollo and Artemis and her difficulty finding a place to give birth may give an idea of the fears related to the delivery of twins. Twins were often thought to be the

---

<sup>7</sup> Charles Malamoud, *Le Jumeau solaire*, Paris, 2002 (La librairie du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, Éditions du Seuil).

<sup>8</sup> Véronique Dasen, *Jumeaux, jumelles dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine*, Zürich, 2005 (Akanthus).

result of adultery, and were rejected by society.<sup>9</sup> Dasen convincingly highlights several features of twins: while Herakles and Iphikles symbolize difference without sharing, Castor and Polydeuces symbolize difference and sharing; Amphion and Zethos (the first is also a son of Zeus, the second is born from a mortal) symbolize compromise, together punishing Dirke, raising the walls of Thebes, and ruling, although their temperaments are opposite: Zethos carrying stone blocks with his bare hands, Amphion placing them by the magic of his music. However, twins most often present an example of turmoil: rivalry, violence, murder ... Lykophron, for example, reports that Krisos and Panopeus were already struggling in their mother's womb. Pelias and Neleus, Acrisios and Proetos, Atreus and Thyestes, Eteokles and Polyneikes, and, of course, Romulus and Remus push the competition for power to its peak. Among the twins' skills: they can be distinguished horsemen, athletes, seamen; they foster abundance, fertility, and wealth.

A relevant contemporary memoir addressing the sense of loss caused by the death of a twin is Jérôme Garcin's *Olivier* (Paris, Gallimard, 2011). In addition to describing the pain of losing his twin, Olivier, at age six, Garcin indicates assimilation of some of his twin's personality traits, so that "je" and "tu" eventually merge into "nous" ("we").

Returning to *Hippota Nestor*, the characteristic polarization of the twins is emphasized by the case of the Dioskouroi, one devoted to livestock, the other to fighting. As Nestor combines both aspects of his twin and himself, since his twin brother died long ago, it seems impossible to analyze further the relationship with his missing brother, be it competitive or close. Nestor may have kept silent on any struggle with his twin, even on the possibility of being responsible for his death.

---

<sup>9</sup> See particularly the analysis of the scenes represented on the columns of the temple of Cyzicus, now destroyed but described in the *Palatine Anthology* (pp. 101-103). Most of the pictures show actions by twins in saving their mother, among them Neleus and Pelias in reference to their mother Tyro, whom her father Salmoneus kept chained.