Greek Lessons 12 and 13

In Greek Lessons 12 and 13 we'll continue our review of various idiomatic sources which have produced words and terms in English: first those which come from non-Christian religions, and then sea-terms, that is, terms which derive from naval and nautical sources. Those goals we'll address in this video presentation, and in the accompanying audio presentation, we'll look at the Greek suffixes and bases you are assigned to memorize in these lessons. When you're done with this video, please don't forget to listen to that audio presentation.

Christianity has proven such a force in our culture that it's possible to put words from religious sources into two relatively same-sized groups: Christian and non-Christian. In the last lesson we glanced briefly at terms and phrases the textbook cites which have entered English through Christian sources. Now let's look at their pagan counterparts, beginning with the word "fate." "Fate" comes from the Latin word *fatum* meaning literally "the thing spoken," that is, what has been said, the implication being "by the gods," and if so, it's destined to happen, it's inevitable, it's fate. Since this theological term existed in Latin long before the advent of Christianity, it qualifies as a word from a non-Christian religious source.

Here's another example of the same, but from a different part of the world, Zoroastrianism, which is a belief system founded long ago in the Middle East. There priests were called *magi*. You know the term from the Bible and the *magi* who visited Jesus at his birth. These *magi* performed rituals which looked mysterious to the ancient Greeks who borrowed the name but gave it a new, non-religious sense, hence our word "magic."

Going back to the Roman world, we get the verb "to immolate," meaning "to sacrifice, usually in some sort of ritual fashion." It comes from a Latin base we didn't study in the first half of the class, MOL- ("crush, grind" as in what you do to grain). MOL- is cognate with our word "mill" like windmill, so to immolate something was, literally, to throw grain (MOL-) on it (*im-*). That's the way classical Romans purified a victim before they sacrificed it. They tossed grain on it. It's not really clear how that custom evolved. From there, the word took on the sense "murder," usually in some ritualistic manner, and is often applied to creepy mass-murders.

From our Anglo-Saxon heritage comes "bless," which you'd think was Christian in origin, but no! It comes from pre-Christian pagan ceremonies in which not grain but blood was poured over something to sanctify it, hence bless in its modern sense "consecrate." "Bless" is, in fact, cognate with "blood," and although there is a related root in Proto-Germanic, there are no cognates for "blood" or "bless" in other Indo-European languages, so where "bless" came from originally is unclear, which isn't saying much. If you go back far enough, that's true for all words.

Here's a fascinating etymology. "Paradise" is related to a word of ancient Persian extraction, *firdaus* meaning "a lavish garden." It's Indo-European ─ Persian is an Indo-European language ─ originally a compound of the same prefix which became *peri-* in Greek ("around") and the base which produced the -dig root ("knead") seen in *loafdig*, the ancestor of our word "lady." In this case, the base took on a sense of "build," so the word meant originally "something with walls 'built around' it," a reference to the magnificent parks around the houses of Persian aristocrats. When the ancient historian Xenophon encountered and recorded this word, he

imported it in to his native Greek tongue as *paradeisos*, and there it remained for centuries, until Christianity began to develop. Needing a word for the Garden of Eden, some term which did not have pagan connotations ─ all the usual words for heaven and blissful existence were already being used in the polytheistic religions from which the Christians were trying to separate themselves ─ the author of the Book of Luke, following the lead of earlier Jewish writers, began to refer to idyllic places like Eden or heaven as "paradise." That Eden is described as an enclosed garden, no doubt, helped the word make the move into Christian terminology. So, while paradise is not strictly a word from a non-Christian religion, I include it here because it comes from a non-Christian source and eventually became a religious term. But I admit that I'm sort of bending the rules here. The truth is, I just wanted to talk about the etymology of this fascinating word!

A much simpler history lies behind the word "amen," a Hebrew word originally meaning "certainly, in truth," which was later imported into western Christian vocabulary through its many occurrences in the Bible where it often concludes prayers.

I've used the word "pagan," meaning "non-Christian," several times above. Let's stop and look at that term for a moment. "Pagan" comes from the Latin word *paganus* ("a person from the country, a bumpkin"). Before it entered the religious sphere, the Romans used "pagan" to describe people who lived outside of major city centers and resisted joining the Roman army, giving the word the sense "non-combatant, draft-dodger, slacker." Early Christian fathers who often expressed their mission to spread their beliefs in military terms, adopted the word to describe those who did not sign up to fight on the side of Christ, a large number of whom lived in the country. Christianity in the first millennium had much more success in the city than the hinterlands where traditional religion remained strong even long after Rome's disintegration. Thus, "pagan" ultimately became synonymous with "heathen," that is, non-Christian. Again, while this word is non-Christian in origin, it does not necessarily derive from a pagan religious source. But as with "paradise," the etymology is too delicious to let it pass without mention.

The heathen of all heathens is, of course, Satan, who you might think is linguistically Christian, but he's not. Like "amen," "Satan" comes from a Hebrew word, *satan* meaning "opposer, one who plots or argues against another." One of the earliest uses of the word *satan* is found in the Book of Job where a character called the *satan* has the job of posing difficult questions to God, like why people love Him. Historians trace the origin of the later, much more devilish Satan to the Hebrews' subsequent exposure to Near Eastern religions which included in their pantheons a god of darkness. A good example is found in Zoroastrianism, where a Satan figure, representing darkness and evil, is said to be locked in eternal combat with the forces of good and light. It's notable that there is increasing attention paid to Satan in those Hebrew texts which were composed after the Babylonian captivity of the sixth century BCE. Babylon was a center of dualistic, night-versus-day religions in which Satan-like demons are common. Later, interpreting *satan* as "slanderer," the ancient Greeks translated the term into *diabolos* which means essentially the same in Greek. From that we get "diabolical" and in a more compressed form "devil."

Finally, here are two more words, "profane" and "fanatic," also deriving from pagan Roman tradition and a Latin word *fanum* ("shrine, temple"). A "fanatic," for instance, originally referred

to a person who was religiously inspired or enthused. Later, its sense strengthened to mean "highly enthusiastic," and after that it was clipped to "fan." In some ways its opposite, "profane" started out meaning "(set out) in front of (*pro-*) a temple (FAN-)," where all things inappropriate to the dignity of the holy quarter had to be sequestered. From there the word gained its current sense "not holy, impure."

Besides these terms, Mr. Ayers cites a dozen or so more in his textbook, beginning with "abominate" and running through "taboo." Please learn them all, both what they mean and that they are religious terms which come from the non-Christian idiomatic source group.

In Lesson 13, your textbook explores words which derive from naval and nautical sources. Ayers calls them "sea-terms." People today might be surprised to see this category since so few of us, as compared to our ancestors, spend much time traveling on the ocean. But prior to the advent of air travel, voyages by boat were very common, and anything that takes up so much time and attention will by necessity import new terms and phrases, such as "come down on." If you come down on something, you attack it vigorously. The "down" in this expression derives from "down wind," a reference to the advantage one ship has in attacking another if it has the wind behind it propelling it forward with speed. After this term was exported from its original nautical context, "to come down on" came to mean "to censure or ridicule something harshly."

The expression "son of a gun" also began life as a naval term. According to one source, it was a positive term with the sense "thoroughbred," originally referring to a male child who was born to a British sailor and his wife when they were at sea. In the heyday of the British Empire its sailing ships covered the globe and deployments could last for years. Those long absences from home caused all sorts of problems, and so the custom arose of sending the sailors' wives with them to sea. The natural result was that many children were born abroad. Since a sailor in those days was called "a gun," his male offspring came to be known as "a son of a gun." The rhyming nature of the term, no doubt, added to its popularity and aided in its spread throughout the broader English-speaking community.

The expression "cut and run" also comes from nautical terminology. It refers to a tactic for making a quick get-away by cutting either the cable holding the anchor of a ship or the rope that reefs the sails. Disabling either releases the vessel and allows for a hasty escape. From this nautical sense developed the current use of "cut and run," meaning "depart in haste," often by "cutting" losses and leaving some things of value behind.

Another sea-term is "by and large." Sailing ships can propel themselves through the water two different ways: "by the wind" which is with the sails close-hauled, that is, pulled in tight, or "large" which is a corruption of the French word *largue* meaning "slacked off," that is, loose. A ship that can do both is said to sail "by and large," giving it a broader range of activity. From its "this way or that way" connotation, the expression later leaked into popular lingo in the sense "mostly, more or less."

"Hand over fist," another sea-term, refers to a rapid nautical maneuver executed by pulling on ropes quickly to raise or lower sails. Once this expression arrived on land, it came to mean "fast and easily," as in "make money 'hand over fist'."

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And one final sea-term "with flying colors" derives from the custom that a warship which was victorious in battle signaled that it had won by raising colored flags ─ the "colors" here refer to those flags ─ and from that evolved the sense "triumphantly." But I have to ask: if a winner sails off with flying colors, what does a loser have? Sinking colors?

Mr. Ayers includes several more sea-terms in Lesson 13, words like "aloof, rummage, junk" and expressions like "tide over, make headway." If you don't already know them, please learn the meaning of all these sea-terms, as well as their idiomatic source.

And that's it for the video presentation for Greek Lessons 12 and 13. Next you should listen to the audio presentation on the suffixes and bases in these lessons. You'll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site.

Happy etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This is the audio presentation covering the assignments in Greek Lessons 12 and 13. Please open your textbook to page 223 where Mr. Ayers introduces yet another set of Greek suffixes, beginning with -*logy* ("the science of," "a systematic study of"). To those meanings please add "the system of" and "a list of." You already know the root underlying this suffix, the base LOG- ("speech, word, proportion, reasoning" along with a bunch of other meanings). That gives you two options when you encounter -*logy*: to read it as a suffix, or as the base LOG- with the suffix -*y*. The former (the suffix option) is simpler and more accurate since it tailors the use of this root toward the way in which -*logy* usually affects the meaning of a word, so I'd advise you to use the suffix option but, as you know, I won't take off points as long as you follow the rules for etymologizing. Note, however, that the actual etymology assumes that LOG- is a base because it often calls for the combining -o- seen between Greek bases. Thus, in order to read this form as a suffix when that happens, we need to add a variant -*ology*. Please do that!

For the same reason, the next suffix -*nomy* ("the science of," "the system of laws governing") will require the same accommodation. Please add the variant -*onomy*. You'll need that form to etymologize a word like "astronomy" ("the science of the stars"). And, yes, there is a Greek base NOM- meaning "law, science," but you don't need to know it in this class. I probably should add it, but I know you'd revolt if I put one more extra thing to memorize on your plate, so I'm not going to push my luck.

Comparing these two suffixes, -*ology* and -*onomy*, reveals a strong tendency to associate -*ology* with sciences (geology, biology, psychology) and -*onomy* with arts, as in gastronomy ("the art of cooking") versus gastrology ("the science of the stomach"). That tendency, however, falters with astronomy, where the -*onomy* form represents the science and the -*ology* form (astrology) is the art. That's because astrology (the mystical interpretation of the movements of heavenly bodies as signs of things to come) has been such a popular activity since antiquity and the word astrology has been so closely associated with it for so long that it has proven impossible to separate the word astrology from the magical practice of prediction, which means that scientists who study

stars have had to settle for astronomy, and the general tendency that *-ology* refers to a science is reversed in this one word pair.

Skipping over *-cracy* about which I have nothing to add, note that Mr. Ayers gives "one who advocates or practices rule by" as the definition of the last suffix here *-crat*. Doesn't that bend, if not break, the rule that definitions should get to the point? How about something a little less verbose? "One who rules by"?

On to the bases in Lesson 12! To the first one AUT- ("self") add the senses "by itself, on its own." And please note that AUT- is a base, not a prefix. It can form the core of a word, e.g. automaton. I'm guessing you already knew this base because we English-speakers use it so much we really see it as our own, and thus we attach it freely to other word roots. That habit has produced a host of hybrids: autoimmune, autopilot, automobile. I give up! English is just a giant hybridized mess. I'm going in my office and closing the door. Call me when the English language decides to clean up its act. I won't hold my breath.

Further down this list you'll see the base HELI- ("sun"). Note that Greek gives us another base that's close to but different from HELI-: HELIC- meaning "curl, coil." From that we get the word "helix," as in "double helix." Ayers does not include HELIC- in this textbook so you don't have to learn it, but you will encounter this base in your reading, so it's not a bad idea to know it. By the way, helium is so called because the element was first discovered when scientists were analyzing the solar spectrum. So, helium is the sun-element.

Be careful not to confuse the next base IDE-, which both means "idea" and gives us that word, with the base you learned in the last lesson IDI- ("one's own, private"). They look alike, but they're not related.

To MANC-/MANT- add the sense "to prophesy." "To divine by means of"? Seriously, Mr. Ayers, that's a terrible definition! How many people do you think know what "divining" means? Like a divining rod which uses magic to find underground water or buried metal ore? Forget that definition. MANC-/MANT- means "prophesy," or sometimes "priest" because priests tend to prophesy. Hey, here's something else I'll bet not many of you know: the etymology of the word "praying mantis"? You know what I mean, that cool-looking insect that holds its front legs up in a position which make it look like it's praying. So even though it's a predator, it's not a preying mantis. It's praying, like prayer. But that's not my point. The point is, it's a mantis, a Greek word for "priest, prophesier." The scientific name of this creature says it all: *mantis religiosa*. Sounds like a spell in Harry Potter. Now get down on your knees and thank your teacher, because now you'll never forget how to spell "praying mantis."

One of my favorite derivatives of the next base MICR- ("small") is "microbe." It's a combination of the base MICR- ─ and please remember that it's a base, not a prefix! ─ and another Greek base BI- ("life"), cf. microbial. So microbe really should be "microbie," but that just sounds silly. Dignified scientists cannot go around saying "Microbies are everywhere!" Besides that, the Greek roots lend themselves better to the meaning "short-lived," which, I suppose, is also true of microbies but that's not the point. The point is, they're little.

Besides "small," MICR- can also mean "a millionth part of." Just for the record, the Latin base MILL- ("thousand") is used to denote "a thousandth part of," and on the other side of MICR-, NAN- connotes "a billionth part of."

Remember when we studied the base NE- ("new") and said it could also refer to the "most recent" period of some age, like the Neolithic ("the new Stone Age")? Well, the opposite of NE- is the eighth base on this list, PALE- ("old"). It can also be used in reference to periods of time like the "most ancient" period of the Stone Age, the Paleolithic, literally "the old stone age."

Next to the next base PSEUD-, put a note that this is a base, not a prefix, and can stand alone in a word like the adjective pseudo meaning "sham, counterfeit."

Finally, the base TROP- ("turn") at the bottom of this list looks like another Greek base TROPH- which we encountered in Lesson 4. TROPH- means "grow." Don't confuse these two!

That's it for Lesson 12. Now let's look at the suffixes and bases in Lesson 13, beginning on page 228. Here you'll find some complicated suffixes used in specific, often technical or scientific senses. All of these suffixes really come from bases and so can be etymologized that way but I advise against it since these forms have come to be seen as specialized suffixes with particular, usually technical senses which can not only affect the meaning of a base but also change its function, that is, turn it into a noun, adjective or verb. Thus, while the suffixes *-arch* and *-archy* come from the base ARCH- ("chief, head"), they almost always betoken "rule" or "ruler."

Also note that the suffix *-maniac* is technically an adjective but functions almost always as a noun. What do you call that sort of word (an adjective functioning as a noun)? That's right! A substantive. Make your life easy and just treat *-maniac* as a noun-forming suffix.

Finally, as to the last suffix on this list *-phobia* (at the top of the next page), I would put the "abnormal" part of the definition ("an abnormal fear or hatred of") in parentheses. What's "abnormal" about arachnophobia? Spiders are creepy.

Now let's talk about the bases in this lesson.

The first one ACR- ("highest, the extremities") is cognate with its Latin homonym which means "sharp, bitter." The top of something is often pointed, so the Romans used ACR- in the sense "sharp," while the Greeks adopted the connotation "top." Those are just two different ways of seeing the same thing. Note also that to the Greeks the "top" could also mean the "first part" of something, as in "acronym" which refers to the first letter or letters of a word.

To the next base EGO- add the sense "self," and to the following base HIER- ("sacred") add the senses "priest, saint."

The next base HYDR- ("water") has some interesting cognates, such as English water, wet, otter and whiskey. When this base entered Russian, it turned into vodka, which is to some, I suppose, the stuff of life.

MEGA-/MEGAL-, the next base, meaning "large, a million," also carries the sense "a million times," making it the opposite of MICR-. The term "megadeath," a hideous hybrid for a hideous concept, refers to casualties as counted in the millions, usually in reference to a proposed nuclear attack.

OLIG- means "few" often with the sense "chosen few," that is, those who are select and special, and typically also rich.

Both PATR- and PATRI- come from the Greek base for "father," but PATRI- more often refers to a family or clan, hence Ayers' definition. But like its Latin twin, it can also betoken "fatherland."

To SOPH- ("wise") add the sense "the knowledge of." So, what's a "sophomore"? Oh, you haven't learned the base MOR- in Greek? Well, you know it if you know the word "moron," meaning "fool." So a sophomore is … "a wise fool," in other words, someone who's been to school for a year and comes back thinking he knows everything. Hence, the adjective "sophomoric" meaning "pretentious and ill-informed."

The definition of TELE-, too, needs some adumbration (look it up!). Its sense "afar" also means "from afar." Telephones carry voices both to someone who is "afar" and back to someone else "from afar."

The next base XEN- ("stranger, foreigner") is cognate with English "guest/host." So, what is xenogamy, one of the example words Ayers provides? Well, what does the GAM- base mean? That's right: "marry." Now, think plants. When plants "marry strangers," what are they doing? Cross-fertilizing, of course!

And finally, the last base on this list, ZO- ("animal") clearly can assume a variant form ZOO-, as in zoo.

And that's it! We're done with Greek Lessons 12 and 13.

Happy Etymologizing!