Greek Lessons 15 and 16

In this video presentation we'll continue our survey of words and phrases which come from idiomatic sources by examining military terms and terms which come from the arts. In the audio presentation accompanying this video, we'll look at one more Greek suffix and a few more bases you should memorize. And as always I'll add a few notes about some of these word elements. When we're done here, please don't forget to listen to that audio presentation.

War, of course, is a sad fact of human history, and thus military terms have left their share of words and phrases in English, more than enough to warrant their own branch on the idiomatic source tree. The following is just a small sample. Don't forget that you're required to know both the meaning of these terms and that they are part of the military idiomatic source group.

First up, "fifth column," a term for "enemy sympathizers within a city under siege who work as spies and saboteurs for the fall of the city." This term came into wide use during the Spanish Civil of 1936-1939 when the general Emilio Mola who was attacking the city of Madrid with four infantry columns claimed he had a fifth column of collaborators inside the city who were working to bring it down.

Another word of military extraction is "alert," from the Italian phrase *all'erta* meaning "to the tower (*erta*)," a call-to-arms for the defense of a city.

Yet another word drawn from a military context is "curfew" which goes back to a French phrase *couvre feu* ("to cover the fire"). During medieval times, ringing a bell at a certain hour of night signaled that it was time to cover or extinguish fires, presumably to keep them from spreading and burning down buildings. From there, "curfew" came to mean "a regulation that people, usually civilians, must be home by a set hour" and is often imposed on a population by a military regime. The parents of teenagers also enforce curfews not infrequently ─ "Be home by ten or I'll take away your phone!" ─ which can be seen as another form of militaristic control.

Similarly, the word "foment" from Latin *fomentum* originally meant a warm bath or application, usually intended to promote healing. From there it easily took on the sense "to promote growth, to foster." Later, in a deft metaphorical leap, it came to have a military sense, "to stimulate rebellion," which is its principal use today.

"Subjugate," another military term, is a word with deep Roman roots. You know both of its elements: the prefix *sub*- ("under") and the base JUG- ("yoke, join"), a reference to animals like oxen which are yoked beneath a plow. The Romans used this image to represent enslavement in a ritual where war captives were forced to bow their heads as they walked under a spear held horizontally a few feet off the ground. This walk betokened the beginning of their "subjugation." Curiously, the word "conjugal" meaning "pertaining to marriage" comes from the same root. Hmmmm.

Another word with military connotations is "tattoo": "a drum signal alerting soldiers that it's time for them to return to their barracks." It's originally a Dutch word *taptoe*, meaning "to close

the taps," that is, "shut down the barrels in a bar." The other sense of tattoo ("skin markings") is a homonym which comes from an unrelated Polynesian term.

A salvo is "a simultaneous discharge of guns from ship to ship, often used as a form of greeting." Because those vessels are frequently battleships, we're going to put salvo in the military terms category, though it would qualify equally well as a sea-term. Quite appropriately, salvo comes from the Italian word *salva*, meaning "hello." Note that, like tattoo, salvo has a homonym meaning "saving grace, reservation, out-clause," which later took on the sense "excuse, quibbling evasion." This homonym salvo, which is not of military origin, derives from the Medieval Latin phrase *salvo jure* ("with the right reserved").

Besides these terms please learn the words with military connotations or connections which Mr. Ayers cites in this lesson. You'll find them on pages 236-238.

Now let's turn to Greek Lesson 16 and idiomatic words which come from the arts. To those Mr. Ayers lists there, I'm going to add a few I think you should be aware of, beginning with "chiaroscuro" ("the use of light-dark contrast in painting") which comes from an Italian word meaning "light-dark" (*chiaro* + *oscuro*). This striking type of painting is beautifully exemplified in Renaissance artworks like da Vinci's painting of Saint Anne.

Another word which entered English through the arts is "dilettante," meaning "an untalented person who affects to be an artist." It comes from Italian *dilettare* ("to delight in") and originally referred to an admirer of the arts, but later came to denote anyone who dabbles in painting or music or the like but has no real skill, an excellent example of degeneration and a close kin of the word "amateur" which we've already studied.

Conversely, "connoisseur" means "an expert in the arts," that is, someone who's knowledgeable about art. This word, clearly a loan word to judge from its spelling, derives from the French verb *connôitre* ("to understand"). The difference between connoisseur and dilettante says a great deal about our cultural assumptions. We deem connoisseurs who purportedly "understand" the arts worthy of great respect, but poor dilettantes who merely "delight in" them earn only our scorn. So, knowing beats enjoying? Very left-brained!

The arts, of course, include music, so let's start at the beginning, a very good place to start: do-re-mi (fa-so-la-ti-do). I hope you know that Rodgers and Hammerstein didn't invent do-re-mi. It's a medieval way of representing the music scale, taken from a hymn which runs like this:

UT queant laxis REsonare fibris
MIra gestorum FAmuli tuorum
SOlve polluti LAbii reatum
SAncte IOhannes

In the seventeenth century, DO replaced the UT at the beginning because it's easier to annunciate DO in song. DO is probably a corruption of IOhannes which represented the same note at the end of the hymn. Later, SA was changed to TE (SAncTE), so that each note started with a different consonant, and soon thereafter TE became TI, which is easier to sing.

Another art-based word is “pastiche,” meaning “a miscellaneous collection of pieces of art, a potpourri.” “Pastiche” comes from an Italian word *pasticcio*, “a pie made of various ingredients.” That word in turn goes back to an old Greek word *pastê* (“barley broth”) which gave rise to a number of words, not just pastiche but pasta and pastry. The general thought threading through all these words is one of mixture, be it food ingredients or types of artwork.

One of the more fascinating words which has evolved out of the arts is “gargoyle” (“a grotesque statue, most often used as a waterspout on churches”). It comes from the French verb *gargouiller* (“to gargle”). When rain water runs out of gargoyles, they do indeed appear to be gargling, which makes gargle and gargoyle doublets!

Please add these terms from the arts to those Mr. Ayers discusses in Greek Lesson 16, all of which have rich and complex histories worth learning. In particular, take note of the following: miniature (from a word for “red ink”), grotesque (from grotto, an Italian word for cave), antic (from ancient) and maudlin (from Mary Magdalene). As the oldest attested human tradition, the arts have made a colossal impact on our language, and that attests to their importance in not just vocabulary but every aspect of our lives. To wit, the Latin proverb: *ars longa, vita brevis* (“Art lasts, life doesn’t!”).

And that’s it for the video presentation of Greek Lessons 15 and 16. Next you should listen to the audio presentation on the forms to memorize 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 15 and 16. Please open your textbook to page 238 where you’ll find the last Greek suffix you’re required to memorize in this course: -*ize* (“to make, to do something with, to subject to”). Let’s add the sense “to become” and also epitom*ize* that down to just “to” (verb suffix). [What do you mean “What does ‘epitomize’ mean?” Come on! Etymologize it! The prefix *epi*- “to” (or it can just be intensive) + the base TOM- “cut” + the suffix -*ize* (“to”), so it means “to cut down intensively.” You could have figured that out for yourself!] Back to -*ize*, it’s the only Greek verb suffix you need to learn. There are two other things you should note about it, however. First, the British often spell this suffix -*ise*. Second, the number of hybrids which incorporate this suffix, including anything that ends -*ization* (e.g. randomization), is truly depressing, a clear indication of how much we’ve treat -*ize* like it’s our own property and not something we borrowed from Greek, like Western civilization.

The bases in this lesson are few and remarkably straightforward. The first one GON- (“angle, angled figure”) comes from the ancient Greek word for “corner.” Be careful not to confuse this base with its identical twin, the other Greek base GON- which means “reproduce, originate.” That one we studied in Greek Lesson 7. Usually it’s obvious whether a word requires the sense “corner” (polygon, “a geometric figure with many corners”) or “produce” (theogony, “the birth of the gods”).

The next base LAB-/LEP-/LEM- comes from a very widely used verb in ancient Greek which means “take, seize.” It’s seen in English derivatives like syllable (literally, “[sounds] taken together”) and epilepsy (“a sudden seizure”), also dilemma (“a situation in which there are two choices or two paths to take”).

That’s all I have to say about Lesson 15, so let’s move onto the assignments for the next lesson which starts on page 242. Here Mr. Ayers gives you the Greek number bases, beginning with HEMI- (“half”), which is not to be confused with another, totally different Greek base HEM- (“blood”).

To the following base MON- (“one, single”) add the senses “only, alone.” A monoplane has only one wing alone.

Moving down, to the next base PROT- (“first, original, primitive”) add the sense “primary.” The protagonist of a story is the primary, the central character.

Now, glance down the rest of this list. Recognize any of these Greek bases? If you squint a little, they look a lot like their Latin counterparts. For instance, TRI- (“three”) is the same in both languages, as are OCT(A)- (“eight”) and DEC- (“ten”). Moreover, if you replace QU- with T-, TETR(A)- (“four”) starts to resemble closely its Latin counterpart QUADR(U)-, and Latin QUINT- (“five”) all but turns into Greek PENT-. This qu/p interchange is part of a larger pattern of linguistic evolution in Latin and Greek. And there’s another such pattern here, too. Compare Greek HEMI- (“half”) and Latin SEMI- meaning the same thing. Now look at HEX- and SEX-, both meaning “six,” and HEPT- and SEPT- (“seven”). At one point in the history of ancient Greek, an initial s- turned into h-. Think SOL-, the Latin base for “sun,” and HELI-, its Greek counterpart. Even Latin CENT- (“hundred”) and its Greek equivalent HECT- resemble each other a little. They are, in fact, related distantly. My point is, if you look at these Greek number bases carefully and recall their Latin counterparts, there’s remarkably little you have to memorize here. The linguistic patterns indeed make some of the Greek forms almost predictable.

Well, except for the Greek base KILO- (“one thousand”), which you should note has another form CHILI-. Despite the fact that they rhyme (nearly), Greek KILO- and MILL-, the Latin base for “thousand,” are not related, or if they are, only very distantly. English “thousand” is clearly not cognate with either. That such a high number-base has no common ancestor in Proto-Indo-European suggests our Indo-European forebears didn’t (or couldn’t) count very high, most likely because they didn’t need to. If they were nomads, as the evidence suggests, they probably didn’t own or run into a thousand of anything. So then why have a word you never use? That left the daughter languages on their own to concoct a word for “thousand.” The English word “thousand” comes a base that means “swell, swelling,” the implication being that a thousand is a “swollen” one hundred. That same swell-base also gives us the word “tumor” (a swelling) and “thigh” (the swollen or thick part of the leg). The origin of neither the Greek base KILO- nor Latin MILL- is clear.

Finally, in the paragraph below these bases Mr. Ayers notes that the Greek base for “one” is HEN- and for “nine” is ENNEA-. These are seen often enough in English that they’re worth

learning, as is the pair of suffixes he mentions here too. The first -*ploid* is equivalent to our suffix -*fold*, as in “twofold,” which in Greek would be “diploid.” Please learn this suffix, along the other he cites in this paragraph, the number-group suffix -*ad*, which means “a group numbering (some number).” A triad, for instance, is a group of three. What would be the word for a group of nine? An ennead! And a group of a thousand? A chiliad! And what about a group of one? No, not a henad, but a monad, MON- in the sense of “lonely.” After all, one is the loneliest number. So learn these bases, little monast, and then you can go back to partying with your friends.

That’s it for this audio presentation.

Happy Etymologizing!