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The Word Satellite, Its Origin From Etruscan And Its Translation Into Greek

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Abstract: In this paper, we are proposing a discussion of the word Satellite, its origin from Etruscan, its use in astronomy, and how it is translated into Greek.
Keywords: History of Science, Physical Terminology.

It is well-known that several scientific terms had been borrowed or even created from Greek words. Let us consider just one example, the "chlorophyll" for instance, which is the green-coloured pigment in plants: this term is coming from French "chlorophyle", coined in 1818 by chemists Pierre-Joseph Pelletier and Joseph B. Caventou, using the Greek words "khloros", that is "pale green" and "phyllon", which means "leaf" [1,2]. The word chlorophyll is therefore indicating a substance of green color that we find in leaves.
Of course, these new scientific words, created from Greek words, have been immediately transferred in the modern Greek language. However, what happens when the scientific words are coming from Latin? A translation is made: for instance, in physics, the "momentum" becomes "ormi"; the force from Latin "fortis", strong, is "dynami", and the velocity "tachytita". However, the instruments to measure force and velocity are dynamometer, "dynamometro" and tachymeter, "tachymetrou".
Here, let us discuss a more intriguing case, that of the word "satellite". Let us see its origin, its used in physics and its translation in Greek. The word "satellite" has the meaning of "follower or attendant of a superior person". This term came in English from Middle French satellite, from the Latin satellitem (nominative satelles) "attendant, companion, courtier, accomplice, assistant". However, it seems that the Latin word came from the Etruscan "zatlath", where "zatl" is the "axe", and the suffix -ath is a morpheme that indicates "who is doing" [3,4]. The meaning is therefore "he, who wields the axe", the Latin "lictor", the bodyguard to magistrates. According to Livy, lictors were introduced by Rome's first king Romulus, who appointed 12 lictors to attend him [5,6]. About the number of lictors, Livy is favouring that is was borrowed from the Etruscan kings, who had one lictor appointed from each of their 12 states. For "zatlath", let us here propose also a translation as "he, who is bringing the axe".



A denarius, head of Libertas and, on the reverse, a consul flanked by two lictors [6], preceded by an accensus, a soldier of light infantry. The consul was Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic and traditionally one of the first consuls in 509 BC.

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According to [1], the meaning "planet that revolves about a larger one" is first attested in 1660s, in reference to the moons of Jupiter, from Latin satellites, which was used in this sense in 1610s by German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) [7]. Galileo, who had discovered them, called them Sidera Medicaea, the Medicean Stars, in honour of the Medici family. The other names of these satellites were "Circulatores Jovis", or "Jovis Comites", by Johannes Hevelius, but "satellites" in French books by Jacques Ozanam [8-10].
As in the dictionary "The new world of words", 1706 [11], being the satellites the Life-Guards or officers attending upon a Prince, the term "satellite" was taken by astronomers "for those planets which are continually, as it were, waiting upon or rolled about other Planets". Then, "the Moon may be called the Satellite of the Earth, and the rest of the planets the Satellites of the Sun; but the Word is chiefly used for those newly discovered small Planets that make their Revolution about Saturn and Jupiter" [11]. Then, after the Copernican revolution, after the discovery of the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn, a Latin term, originated from Etruscan, assumed a main role in astronomy and physics, and recently in astronautics, to indicate the artificial satellites. Let us stress that "satellite" is a Latin word.
The Greek is rendering the concept of body-guard bringing a weapon with the term "doryforos", that is, "he, who is bringing the spear", because "dory" is the spear. Greek is using doryforos for astronomy too. Then, the Moon, is the "fysiko doryforo tis Gis", the natural satellite of the Earth. Δορυφόρος is also used for a satellite for communications [12]. Not surprisingly, Greek is using its how term [13]. However, this term corresponds to the Latin "hastatus" [14], that is a soldier who fought as spearman, not a "satellite", that was the bodyguard having an axe, that is a "lictor".

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