

2. SYNTAX AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM: ASPECT IN AESCHYLUS' *PERSAE*

1. Introduction¹

The advances in our knowledge of Ancient Greek grammar may offer new perspectives in fixing the texts, in choosing certain variants among several possibilities, and in explaining the existence of certain textual alternatives.

In recent years, much work has been done in the field of the verb category Aspect.² After much controversy, leaving apart some secondary considerations, the basic schema that nowadays is widely accepted for Greek Aspect is what is presented in (1).³

- (1) The system of the category Aspect in Ancient Greek:
Present: imperfective (the event in its development)
Aorist: perfective (the event up to its end)

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²A brief state of the art can be found in J. de la Villa, "Aspectos del aspecto en griego", in P. Quetglas-B. Usandizaga (eds.), *Ciència, didàctica y funció social dels estudis clàssics*, Barcelona 2004, 97-124.

³See, among others, W.F. Bakker, *The Greek imperative. An investigation into the aspectual differences between the present and aorist imperative in Greek prayer from Homer up to the present day*, Amsterdam 1966; H. Hettrich, *Kontext und Aspekt in der altgriechischen Prosa Herodots*, Göttingen 1976; D. Armstrong, "The Ancient Greek Aorist as the Aspect of Countable Action", *Syntax and Semantics* 14, 1981, 1-12; C.J. Ruijgh, "L'emploi 'inceptif' du thème du présent du verb grec", *Mnemosyne* 38, 1985, 1-61.

Perfect: finished event (perfective) + unfinished result (imperfective)

Some well known examples, where two different aspectual forms of the same verb are in contrast, can serve as illustration of this schema:

- (2a) βούλει οὖν ἐπειδὴ τιμᾶς τὸ χαρίζεσθαι, σμικρόν τι μοι χαρίσασθαι. (Pl. *Gorg.* 462 d)
Then, since you value gratification, be so good as to gratify me in a small matter?
- (2b) χρῆ δ' ὅταν μὲν τιθῆσθε τοὺς νόμους, ὅποιοί τινές εἰσιν σκοπεῖν, ἐπειδὴν δὲ θῆσθε, φυλάττειν καὶ χρῆσθαι. (D. 21.34)
When you are framing your laws, you must scrutinize their purport; but when you have passed them, you must uphold them and put them in force.

In these two examples one can see how, when reference is made either to a general disposition —the maintained attitude towards the gratification of others— or to an actual and, therefore, not yet finished activity—the moment when laws are being framed—the present stem is chosen. In contrast, when the event is taken as completed—to gratify someone in something concrete and limited; the moment when laws are fully approved and in use—the aorist stem is preferred.

On the basis of this schema, we have examined all the passages of Aeschylus' *Persae* where two or more variants affecting grammatical Aspect are offered in the manuscript tradition. Our aim is to compare how the choice of the different aspectual possibilities affects the comprehension of the text.⁴

⁴ Similar studies have already been done for Herodotus (P. Stork, "Aspectual variant readings in Herodotus", in A. Rijksbaron *et alii* (eds.), *In the footsteps of Raphael Kühner*, Amsterdam 1988, 265-89) and for Sophocles (J. de la Villa, "Variantes textuales presente/aoristo en el *Edipo Rey* de Sófocles", in L. Macía *et alii*, eds., *Quid ultra faciam? Trabajos de griego, latín e indoeuropeo en conmemoración de los 25 años de*

2. Aspectual variant readings in *Persae*

Taking as the basis for our research the edition of West⁵, we have found up to a total of eighteen passages where there are variant readings affecting Aspect. They affect verses 171, 173, 217, 220, 278, 360, 390, 451, 479, 510, 516, 520, 622, 702, 794, 802, 857, and 962.

2.1. Not considered

In this paper we will not consider the following cases:

a) Where one of the variants does not have aspectual meaning (future): vv. 173, 360, 702. We give an example.

- (3) (ἀνήρ ... Ἑλλην ... ἔλεξε ... ὡς ...)
Ἑλληνες οὐ μένοιεν, ἀλλὰ σέλμασιν
ναῶν ἐπανθορόντες ἄλλος ἄλλοσε
δρασμῶ κρυφαίῳ βίσιτον ἐκσωσοίατο.
(A. *Pers.* 355–60)
(A *Hellene ... told ... that*) the Hellenes would not
hold their station, but springing upon the rowing
benches of their ships, would seek, some here, some
there, to preserve their lives by stealthy flight.

ἐκσωσαίατο Ω (-τον H^aD) : corr. Monk³

b) Where there is lexical variation in addition to aspectual variation, and, therefore, other phenomena, apart from Aspect, can determine the variations in the transmitted text: vv. 217, 451, 622, 857. I offer an example.

- (4) [...] θεοὺς δὲ προστροπαῖς ἰκνουμένη,
εἶ τι φλαῦρον εἶδες, αἰτοῦ τῶνδ' ἀποτροπήν τελεῖν.

la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid 1994, 93-102; J. de la Villa, "Variantes aspectuales en el texto del *Filoctetes* de Sófocles", in F.R. Adrados-A. Martínez Díez, eds., *Actas del IX Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos*, Madrid 1997, 265-75).

⁵ Aeschylus. *Tragoediae*, edidit Martin L. West, Stuttgart 1990. Sigla of the codices and editions are also taken from this edition.

(A. Pers. 216-7).

*If it be aught inauspicious that thou hast seen,
visit the gods with supplication and entreat them
to turn aside the evil thereof.*

λαβεῖν ελ (non Φ): βαλεῖν K^p: om. D

There is a difference between the present τελεῖν and aorist λαβεῖν and βαλεῖν. In principle, as Bakker (1966) and Ruijgh (1985) have demonstrated for contexts where orders or prohibitions are expressed, the present would suggest that the supplication to the gods should be made to avoid permanently the kind of evil mentioned in the text. On the other hand, the aorist would indicate that the prayer could be made only for the concrete moment or the concrete evil which is mentioned. In principle, both possibilities are suitable. Nevertheless, as far as the verb τελέω has by itself the meaning of ‘accomplish’, ‘execute’, it expresses lexically something similar to what is introduced by means of the perfective content of the aorist in the other two variants. The combination of lexical and grammatical variants obscures the possibility of choice among the textual alternatives.

2.2. Non-problematic passages

In another nine cases, although the textual variants correspond to different aspectual forms of the same verb, there doesn't seem to be any problem with the choice. Modern editors usually agree in the reading for all the passages. These instances can be divided in three different groups:

a) The preferred variant is also more convincing in aspectual terms: vv. 171, 794, 802, 973.

b) Both possibilities, present and aorist, are equally suitable in the context, and, therefore, the choice should be made on the basis of other factors: vv. 390, 510, 520.

c) Instances where, for metrical reasons, the best aspectual reading is impossible: 479, 962.

I will discuss some examples of each type.

a) The preferred variant is also a better one on the basis of its aspectual content.

- (5) πρὸς ταδ', ὡς οὕτως ἐχόντων τῶνδε, σύμβουλοι λόγους
τοῦδέ μοι γένεσθε Πέρσαι, γηραλέα πιστώματα.

(A. *Pers.* 169-70)

Wherefore, since things stand in such case, lend me your counsel in this concern, ye Persians, my aged trusty servants.

γένεσθε fere MIH^{ss}A^{ss}W: γίν- cett.

In this passage, the counsel that Xerxes is asking from his addressees is concentrated in a particular problem, limited to a very concrete question. For this, aorist is the required stem. The present would have meant that he is asking for permanent help on this question from his councilors, which is not the case.

The rest of passages just mentioned are of the same kind.

b) Both possibilities are equally acceptable in aspectual terms:

I will discuss two examples.

- (6) ὅσοι δὲ λοιποὶ κάτυχον σωτηρίας
Θρήκην παράσαντες μόγις πολλῶ πόνῳ
ἤκουσιν ἐκφυγόντες, οὐ πολλοὶ τινες
ἐφ' ἐτιοῦχον γαῖαν·

(A. *Pers.* 508-11)

All who survived and got to safety, when they had made their way through Thrace, as best they could, with grievous hardships, escaped and reached –and few they were indeed– the land of hearth and home.

ἐκφεύγοντες AD

In this instance, the present stem ἐκφεύγοντες, as is the case for every predicative present participle⁶, would imply that the event referred to by the participle is still in its development when the event of the main sentence takes place. In this context, the verses of Aeschylus would express that the persons who appear as the subject of the sentence were still running away when they reached their homeland, which seems, literally, to be the case. Nevertheless, the aorist also seems to be acceptable. Actually, in contrast with the present participle, the predicative aorist participle implies that the event it refers to is already finished when the event of the main sentence takes place. The use of the aorist ἐκφυγόντες in this passage, therefore, would strongly indicate that the flight mentioned by the text has finished once they have arrived at home. So, although in literal descriptive terms the present seems more suitable, the aorist is more expressive. In consequence, both possibilities seem to be acceptable as concerns the content of the passage.

Let's look at another example.

- (7) ὦ δυσπρόνητε δαῖμον ὡς ἄγαν βαρὺς
 ποδοῖν ἐνήλω παντὶ Περσικῷ γένει.
 (A. Pers. 516)
*O unearthly power, source of our cruel distress,
 with what crushing weight hast thou sprung upon
 the whole Persian race!*

ἐνήλω Q2 : ἐνήλου MIγκλ : ἐνήλλου βδε.

ἐνήλου: variant preferred by all modern editors, except for West.

The form ἐνήλω is the second person singular of the alpha-thematic aorist of ἐνάλλομαι; ἐνήλου is the second person singular of the thematic aorist of the same verb; finally, ἐνήλλου is the imperfect of the same verb. I will not enter into the discussion about the choice between the two possible aorist forms ἐνήλω / ἐνήλου; I will only discuss the opposition imperfect ἐνήλλου / aorist ἐνήλω-ἐνήλου.

⁶ See, for instance, de la Villa, "Aspectos del aspecto", 108-10.

In this particular context, the two verses we are discussing belong to a lamentation of the choripheus that follows a long speech by a messenger, where he has told all the afflictions that the Persians have experienced on their way back to Asia after the defeat at Salamis. Imperfect ἐνήλλου would indicate the long and apparently unfinished series of sorrows. We could paraphrase this sentence as “How many sorrows are constantly being sent to the Persians!”.

On the other hand, the aorist ἐνήλω / ἐνήλου could receive two different interpretations: either it has the literal, expected perfective meaning of the aorist stem: “How many misfortunes have come over the Persians during their retreat!”, or, even better, the aorist has a general, almost gnomic, sense, where the continuous misfortunes of the Persians appear as an unavoidable *phatum*: “You, deity, have always sent misfortunes over the Persians!” As one can see, both the present and the aorist, at least in what affects the content of the passage, are perfectly suitable.

c) Instances where, for metrical reasons, one aspectual variant is impossible.

- (8) σὺ δ' εἰπέ, ναῶν αἱ πεφεύγασιν μόρον,
 ποῦ τάσδ' ἔλειπες; οἶσθα σημεῖνα τόρω; (A. *Pers.* 478-9)
But the ships that escaped destruction –tell me of them. Where didst thou leave them? Know'st thou to make clear report?

ἔλειπες MKτ: ἔλιπες *cett.*

For obvious reasons, all the editors take the imperfect, which is the only possibility that preserves the long fourth syllable of the verse. Nevertheless, Queen Atossa, who speaks, asks the messenger where he left the boats. It is, clearly, a past, concrete, completely finished situation and, therefore, the aorist would have been, on a syntactic and semantic basis, the best variant. That explains why so many manuscripts offer the aorist as its reading. But, how do we explain, then, the presence of the imperfect in what we consider to be the original text? The best solution, in my view,

is to consider this case an example of a continuative use of the imperfect⁷. Imperfect would serve to focus on the continuation of the consequences of an already completed action. There are many similar examples in Ancient Greek texts. A similar, and very typical, case is what usually happens with the use of the verb νικάω which normally appears in the present stem in spite of the completeness of the victory in sentences such as (11).⁸

- (9) Ἀθηναίους [...] πρὸς Κορινθίους μάχη ἐγένετο καὶ ἐνίκων Κορίνθιοι (Th. 1.105.1).
A fight between the Athenians and the Corinthians took place and the Corinthians won.

As a conclusion for this section, we can accept that in many passages both imperfect and aorist would be acceptable possibilities on a syntactic basis. Therefore, other considerations, and, in particular, metrical reasons, should be taken into consideration when choosing among the several variants offered by the manuscripts.

2.3. Passages that should be revisited

Among the eighteen passages where there is an aspectual variant in the manuscript tradition of *Persae*, only in two, namely vv. 220, 278, the unanimous choice of the editors doesn't seem to be the best in aspectual terms.

- (10) <αἰτοῦ>
 τὰ ἀγαθ' ἐκτελεῖ γενέσθαι σοὶ τε καὶ τέκνοις σέθεν
 καὶ πόλει φίλοις τε πᾶσι. Δεύτερον δὲ χρῆ χάσας
 Γῆ τε καὶ φθίτοις χέασθαι πρηνέως δ' αἰτοῦ τάδε,
 σὸν πόσιν Δαρεῖον, ὄνπερ φῆς ἰδεῖν κατ' εὐφρόνην,
 ἐσθλά σοι πέμπειν τέκνω τε γῆς ἔνερθεν εἰς φάος.
 τᾶμπαλιν δὲ τῶνδε γαῖα κάτοχα μαυροῦσθαι σκότῳ.

⁷ See, for example, A. Rijksbaron, *Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek*, Amsterdam 2002³, 18-9.

⁸ On the particular uses of the verb νικάω see Armstrong, "Ancient Greek Aorist", A. Striano-J. de la Villa, "L'aspect dans les inscriptions laconiennes", *Actes du colloque international sur l'aspect dans les dialectes grecs*, Saint-Étienne, forthcoming.

(A. Pers. 218-23)

<entreat the gods> that all good things may be fulfilled for thyself and thy children, for the realm and all thou holdest dear. Next, it is meet to offer libation unto Earth and the departed; and in propitiatory wise beseech thy spouse Darius, whom thou declarest thou hast seen in the night, to send into the light of day from beneath the earth blessings for thee and for thy son; and that the reverse of this may be held in durance beneath the earth and fade away in gloom.

χέεσθαι $H^1+O^2?D$

In this passage all the modern editors prefer the aorist. Apart from other philological considerations, the aorist could also be supported by the presence of another aorist in the previous sentence: <αἰτοῦ> τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἔκτελῆ γενέσθαι σοί ... Nevertheless, in the following sentence, there is a present infinitive that could also be a good support for the variant χέεσθαι : πρευμένως δ' αἰτοῦ τάδε, σὸν πόσιν Δαρεῖον, ... ἐσθλά σοι πέμπειν τέκνω τε. Therefore, in contextual terms, both present and aorist infinitives would be acceptable. However, as we will see, present is a better option because of the type of instructions formulated and because of the general structure of the passage.

In fact, the whole passage is presented as the combination of two moves,⁹ clearly separated by the adverb δεύτερον. This adverb, besides its proper use as a sequencer of actions ('you should do this first, that other thing second'), can also be seen as a form of discourse organizer ('you should do this; second, <I think that> you should do that other thing'). In the first move, there is only one sentence; in the second, two sentences are connected by δέ after πρευμένως.

Apart from that, if we accept the restitution of αἰτοῦ that is, a present imperative, at the beginning of the passage, as in verse 220, the entire text presents an interesting balance between

⁹ On the concept of 'move' as a discourse unit, see, for example, C. Kroon, *Discourse Particles in Latin*, Amsterdam 1995, 24-30, 64-7.

concrete and general instructions, where, inside a wider frame of general instructions, both concrete and more general targets are proposed.

The first sentence (the first move) includes a general instruction (αἰτοῦ, ‘start to ask for and continue to do it’¹⁰) to obtain something concrete: τὰ ἀγαθ’ ἐκτελεῖ γενέσθαι σοι. On the contrary, the second part of the second move (πρευμένως δ’ αἰτοῦ τάδε, σὸν πόσιν Δαρεῖον, ... ἐσθλά σοι πέμπειν τέκνω τε) expresses a general instruction (αἰτοῦ) to obtain a continued situation (πέμπειν).

In between, there is the sentence χρή χάος Γῆ τε καὶ φθίτοις χέασθαι / χέεσθαι. In this case, the frame is also general: χρή which can be paraphrased as ‘There exists a necessity for’. The question is, then, to determine whether the accomplishments that should be reached can be better conceived as a concrete and temporally limited fact, or as a maintained attitude or situation.

In my view, in principle, both possibilities would be acceptable in this context: χέασθαι ‘to make a libation’ / χέεσθαι ‘to make libations’. In the first case, it would be in accordance with the instruction of the first move; in the second, with that of the second move. Nevertheless, we must notice that χρή χέασθαι / χέεσθαι is structurally included in the second move, that is, it appears after δεύτερον, which is the edge between the two moves, and this could only be explained, in my view, if it corresponded to the same type of instruction of the second move— that is, general instructions to obtain general targets. In consequence, the present variant, that is χέεσθαι, fits in better for this purpose.

As a result, I think that the passage could be paraphrased as follows, where I have stressed the sequence of instructions and actions: ‘<start and continue to entreat the gods> that all good things *may be fulfilled* for thyself and thy children, *Next*, it is meet to start and to continue offering libations unto Earth and the departed; and in propitiatory wise start and continue beseeching thy spouse Darius, whom thou declarest thou hast

¹⁰This is the type of content attributed to the present imperative, see Bakker, *The Greek Imperative*; Rijksbaron, *Syntax and Semantics*, 44-7.

seen in the night, to *permanently send* into the light of day from beneath the earth blessings for thee and for thy son ...'.

A second passage where we could revisit the usually accepted variant of the text is the following:

- (11) οὐδὲ γὰρ ἤρκει τόξα, πᾶς δ' ἀπώλλυτο
λεῶς δαμασθεῖς ναίοισιν ἐμβολαῖς.
(A. *Pers.* 278-9)

Aye, for our bows stood us in no stead, and the whole host has perished, overwhelmed when ship charged on ship.

ἀπώλετο O

These verses occur in dialogue between a messenger and the choripheus where the messenger announces the destruction of the Persian fleet at Salamis. Before this sentence, there have only been two other direct references to the terrible defeat: στρατὸς γὰρ πᾶς ὄλωλε βαρβάρων (v. 255) 'the whole army of the barbarians is now destroyed', and πλήθους νεκρῶν δυσπότημος ἐφθαρμένων Σαλαμῖνος ἀκταὶ πᾶς τε πρόσχωρος τόπου (vv. 272-3), 'The shores of Salamis and all the neighboring coasts are full of the bodies of men who perished by a miserable fate'.

The first reference, which is also the first time the battle at Salamis and its consequences are mentioned, uses the perfect ὄλωλε to refer to a past event ('the army was defeated') and to its present resultant state ('and remains so'). This corresponds to the unanimously accepted grammatical meaning of the perfect stem. The second instance refers to the present result—at the moment of the narration—of the battle, that is, in a sense it develops the second part of the precedent perfect, where the actual situation is described.

Within this context, we have to revisit the imperfect ἀπώλλυτο 'was dying' of verse 278. The main support for this imperfect is the preceding ἤρκει 'it was (not) sufficient' of the previous sentence. Actually, in defense of this parallelism, it can be argued that both notions, the inutility of the bows and the final destruction of the fleet, are equally in the past at the moment of the narration. In that sense, the imperfect ἀπώλλυτο is a

lectio faciliior. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that they are very different events, and that, as with every sequence of events or actions in a narration, should be analysed in connection with each other. In that sense, the aorist ἀπώλετο seems to be a better choice for two reasons.

First, as has been clearly demonstrated in several studies¹¹, the events described by means of an imperfect are situations not yet finished when the next event referred to in the narration occurs. On the contrary, the aorist refers to events already finished when the next one in the narration happens. So, the imperfect acts as a kind of background for other events. On this general theoretical frame, it clearly appears that the imperfect ἦρκει can be easily justified because it expresses a circumstance still valid and actual when the defeat of the fleet happened. On the other hand, at least in temporal or narrative terms, there is no easy justification for the imperfect ἀπώλλυτο; it refers to a totally accomplished fact at the moment of the narration and the short narration carried out until this point ends in it: ‘the fleet was destroyed’. Therefore, aorist should be preferred.

Second, apart from general principles referring to the sequence of events, in this particular narration the aorist form ἀπώλετο also seems to fit in better. As we have already commented, the beginning of the narration of the battle at Salamis and its consequences are expressed by means of a perfect stem, ὄλωλε (v. 255). The second reference to the event is a mention of a present situation, πλήθουσι νεκρῶν ... ἄκταί (vv. 272-3), which can be seen as a development of the actual results of the defeat implied by a part of the meaning of the perfect (the state resulting from an accomplished event). In this context, the sentence with the aorist ἀπώλετο, introduced as the third reference to the battle, could be seen as the development of the other part of the opening perfect ὄλωλε, which insists on the already accomplished destruction of the fleet and offers some further details.

¹¹ See, for instance, Hettrich, *Kontext und Aspekt*; A. Rijksbaron, “The discourse function of the imperfect”, in A. Rijksbaron *et alii* (eds.), *In the footsteps of Raphael Kühner*, Amsterdam 1988, 265-89.

In conclusion, a periphrasis of the sequence would be as follows: 'the army is destroyed; the coasts are full of corpses; the army *was destroyed* when bows were not sufficient to avoid the defeat and ship charged on ship'.

3. Conclusions

In this paper we have tried to show how the advance of our knowledge of the syntactic structure of Ancient Greek can be useful in revisiting certain passages of the texts where alternative readings are offered by the manuscript tradition. More concretely, we have discussed certain passages where a detailed study of the alternatives between present and aorist verbal forms can offer new arguments toward understanding the existence of the variants themselves and, in a limited number of cases, allows us to propose different solutions to those usually chosen by editors. This is the case with Aeschylus' *Persae* vv. 221 and 278.

Appendix: Editions used for this paper:

- Aeschylus. Persae*, with introduction and notes by A. Sigdwick, Oxford, Clarendon, 1903.
- Aeschylus tragoediae*, edidit U. de Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Berlin, Weidmann, 1932.
- Aischylos. *Die Perser*. Griechisch und Deutsche übertragen von G. Lange, München, Heimeran, 1941.
- Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoediae*, recensuit Gilbertus Murray, Oxford, Clarendon, 1955².
- The Persae of Aeschylus*. Edited with introduction, critical notes, and commentary by H.D. Broadhead, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960.
- Aischylos' Perser*. Herausgegeben-Kommentar P. Groenenboom, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960.
- Eschyle. *Les perses*. Texte, traduction, commentaire de L. Roussel, Montpellier, PUF, 1960.
- Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoedias*, edidit Denys Page, Oxford, Clarendon, 1972.

Aeschylus. *Suppliant maidens, Persians, Prometheus, Seven against Thebes*. Translated by H.W. Smyth, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, Harvard U.P., 1973².

Eschyle. I. Texte établi et traduit par Paul Mazon, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1976¹¹.

Aeschylus. *Tragoediae*, edidit Martin L. West, Stuttgart, B.G. Teubner, 1990.

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