

**TENSE, ASPECT AND RELATED TEXTUAL CRITICISM  
IN HERODOTOS, *HISTORIAI* 1.186.**

**TEMPO, ASPETO E CRÍTICA TEXTUAL  
NAS *HISTORIAI* 1.186. DE HERÓDOTO**

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**Abstract**

In this article I discuss the use of tense and aspect in Herodotos *Historiai* 1,186 and, related to that, the instances where both a form from the present-stem and the aorist-stem are attested. I first provide a brief overview and discussion of tense and aspect in Greek and Herodotos, briefly summarising scholarship before Hettrich 1976 and discussing in somewhat more detail Hettrich 1976, the reactions to that work (Ruijgh 1979 (and 1971), Rijksbaron 1979) and Stork (1982). As the literature on aspect (in Greek and on aspect in general) is very large, my discussion will inevitably have to leave out many studies and issues, and I can only treat the issue of the *fortwirkende Handlung* and the *observer's perspective*, and even those only very superficially. The issue of tense, aspect, *Aktionsart* and their overlap cannot be discussed here. In a second step I proceed to the actual passage and discuss all the forms of the present and aorist stem (finite and non-finite forms). As is known, the transmission of Herodotos' text often poses problems and, in

several instances, forms from both stems are transmitted (in two cases in 1.186, the manuscripts agree but conjectures were made). In order to decide on which variant to adopt, a detailed analysis of all the forms in the passage is offered using the distinction perfective / completed – imperfective / ongoing as guiding principle (time and space constraints prevented me from quoting the variants printed in all editions and commentaries, limiting myself to 15 in total).<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Herodotos, tense-aspect, textual criticism, aorist- and present-stem

### Resumo

Neste artigo discuto o uso do tempo e do aspeto nas *Historiai* 1.186 de Heródoto, bem como as ocorrências em que se atestam as raízes do presente e do aoristo. Primeiro, forneço uma breve panorâmica e a respetiva problematização do uso do tempo e do aspeto quer na língua helénica, quer na pena de Heródoto. Equacionando a questão, antes e depois do aparecimento do contributo de Hettrich, em 1976, apresento os reptos suscitados por esse trabalho, junto de Ruijgh (1979 e 1971), Rijksbaron (1979) e Stork (1982).

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Dada a abundância de bibliografia existente sobre o aspeto (no que respeita tanto à língua grega, como ao tema em geral), serão deixados inevitavelmente de parte muitos estudos e vários problemas. Proponho-me tratar nestas linhas apenas do problema da *fortwirkende Handlung* e da *perspetiva do observador*, embora de forma perfunctória. O problema do tempo, do aspeto, a *Aktionsart* não podem ser discutidos nesta reflexão.

Num segundo momento, detenho-me no passo textual de Heródoto referido e discuto todas as ocorrências da raiz do presente e do aoristo (formas finitas e infinitas). Como é sabido, a transmissão textual de Heródoto coloca frequentemente desafios e, muitas vezes, ambas as raízes são transmitidas (em dois casos, no trecho 1,186 os manuscritos apresentam lições concordantes mas são feitas conjeturas). Para decidir que variante adotar, é fornecida uma análise detalhada de todas as formas ocorridas no trecho em causa usando como princípio orientador a distinção entre perfeito/concluído – imperfeito/contínuo (restrições de tempo e espaço impediram-me de citar as variantes registadas em todas as edições e comentários, limitando-me apenas a 15).

**Palavras-chave:** Heródoto, tempo-aspeto, crítica textual, raiz do aoristo e do presente

## 1. Problemstellung

As is known, the transmission of Herodotos' text is notoriously problematic and the quality of the editions differs significantly. In many instances the forms of the present- and aorist-stem differ only in one or two letters and as a result often both variants can be found in the manuscripts. In order to adequately decide on what variant to choose, an in-depth analysis of tense and aspect is necessary, but such investigations combining textual criticism and tense/aspect are rare.<sup>2</sup> An additional problem, which has to be left out of the discussion here, is Herodotos and his language. While included in all the grammars of Classical Greek (as e.g. in Rijksbaron 2002 and in the most recent CGCG), it should be pointed out that he wrote in Ionic with some epic influences and therefore some scholars considered it therefore be advisory to not apply all the explanations adduced for the tense and aspect in Thoukydides, Platon and Demosthenes to Herodotos.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware only of Stork 1988, whereas in Wilson 2015a, a detailed discussion of the variants and the transmission of Herodotos' text, more often than not, problems as to tense and aspect are not treated.

<sup>3</sup> This had been noted already by Vayhinger (1880: 3, cf. *infra*).

## 2. Tense and aspect in Classical Greek

As the study of aspect in Greek alone would surpass the limits of an article (the literature on Greek tense and aspect is very large (and on tense and aspect in general and on the relation between aspect and *Aktionsart* is immense),<sup>4</sup> and time and space constraints prevent me from discussing the previous scholarship in detail, I will only briefly state that, in my opinion, the distinction aorist versus imperfect can be best described as one of punctual / completed versus durative / incomplete / ongoing. The following description of the aorist and the analysis of the difference between aorist and imperfect, although posited almost 200 years ago, are still valid: [*e] r* (sc. *Der Aorist*, FDD) *ist das absolute Präteritum, der Ausdruck einer abgeschlossenen und als Einheit gedachten Vergangenheit ohne Rücksicht auf Relation und Dauer, mithin das reine historische Tempus*,<sup>5</sup> and *der griech. Aorist verhält sich zum Impf. (und Praes.) wie Punct zur Linie* (hence the description “punctual”).<sup>6</sup> Curtius expanded this distinction to include the present-, aorist- and perfect-stem, and visualised the three respectively as a line (the continuous action of the present-stem), a point (the single action of the aorist-stem) and a clearly delineated coloured space (the finished state of the perfect-stem).<sup>7</sup> Pott’s analysis has been almost universally accepted (although his name has been forgotten),<sup>8</sup> and also Curtius’ trichotomy has become the basis for most grammars (also with the unfortunate *oblivio auctoris*). As we will see later on, however, not all scholars believe that the distinction between the present and aorist was solely aspectual and some argue that the temporal reference is the most important element.

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<sup>4</sup> In Bentein 2016: 25, two websites with an immense bibliography were quoted, but unfortunately, they are no longer active (at the time of writing, i.e. 15.IV.2024).

<sup>5</sup> Bernhardt 1829: 382. See already Buttmann 810: 486 *der Aorist laesst die gegenwaertige Zeit ganz aus den Augen, versetzt uns in die Vergangenheit und erzuehlt so nach einander das Geschehene*), and, especially but not exclusively, for Herodotos, Zander (1882: 32-33 *Aoristus cum actionem praeteriti parte quadam temporis ortam esse significet, tum usurpatur, cum simpliciter dicitur rem quandam factam esse, neque respicitur ejus progressus quem imperfectum, aut status actionem sequeus, quem perfectum et plusquamperfectum exprimunt; itaque aoristus maxime in rebus gestis enarrandis locum habet.*).

<sup>6</sup> Pott 1833: 57.

<sup>7</sup> Curtius 1863: 171-177, especially 174.

<sup>8</sup> His comparison was quoted in Curtius 1863: 171-177, Aken 1865: 11, Zander 1882: 13-14, Smyth & Messing 1956: 427, almost a literal translation of Pott’s description) and Bornemann & Risch 1973: 214. None of these scholars mentioned Pott’s name, however.

### 3. Tense and aspect in Herodotos.

In my opinion, three different stages/works need to be discussed, “pre-Hettrich”, Hettrich 1976 and the reactions to it, and Stork 1982.

#### 3.1 Pre-Hettrich scholarship on aspect in Herodotos

From the “pre-Hettrich era”, four scholars need to be discussed. Vayhinger (1880: 3) argued that the attempts made by scholars to account for the use of the imperfect where one would expect an aorist (among other with the *verba declarandi*), were motivated by what was assumed to be valid for the aspect use in Classical Greek and had no real basis in Herodotos. He argued that Herodotos had a predilection for the imperfect as narrative tense,<sup>9</sup> and for the use of the imperfect with the iterative forms.<sup>10</sup> Zander distinguished between the aorist and imperfect by stating that the aorist described different actions one after the other and the imperfect different elements of the same action.<sup>11</sup> He also argued that the perspective played a role in the determination of the aspect: when the action was witnessed, the imperfect was used (in that case, all the details are known to the speakers/writers) while the aorist was employed when we only heard about it (in this case, only the result is known but no details).<sup>12</sup> In his discussion of iterativity,<sup>13</sup> he noted that the imperfect was preferred in these passages but added that the imperfect was not iterative per se: the aorist with the iterative suffix described a repeated action, plain and simple, whereas the iterative in the imperfect referred to a repeated action that was ongoing or in its progression.<sup>14</sup> As Vayhinger had done before him, Zander stated that Herodotos mostly used the imperfect in narrative,<sup>15</sup> but added that the aorist in temporal clauses could mark anteriority.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to the two previous scholars, Schlachter provided the data per tense and mood/non-finite forms

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<sup>9</sup> In his own words Vayhinger 1880: 3 [i]m allgemeinen zeigt H. grosse Vorliebe für dieses Tempus.

<sup>10</sup> Vayhinger 1880: 6.

<sup>11</sup> Zander 1882: 5.

<sup>12</sup> Zander 1882: 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Zander 1882: 14-18.

<sup>14</sup> In his words Zander 1882: 18 *nam discrimen, quod est inter has formas iterativas, est idem atque inter imperfectum et aoristum, i. e. imperfectum iterativum significat progressum actionis repetitae, aoristus iterativus simpliciter narrat actionem repetitam.*

<sup>15</sup> Zander 1882: 21-22.

<sup>16</sup> Zander 1882: 37.

and, in agreement with his predecessors, noted that the present stem was more common than the aorist.<sup>17</sup> He noted that the imperfect intruded into the field of the aorist but not vice versa. He also noted that stories were often concluded by what he called *Fazit-Imperfekta*, forms that were used at the end of a story and described the ongoing state of the finished actions,<sup>18</sup> although he added that caution was needed as there were more imperfects than aorists, so that the predominance of the imperfect was not unexpected. Vayhinger, Zander and Schlachter were, in my opinion somewhat unjustly and too easily, dismissed by Hettrich,<sup>19</sup> and the best summary of Herodotean aspect, that by Barbour,<sup>20</sup> was not even mentioned in the work.

### 3.2 Hettrich 1976 and the reactions to his work

Hettrich (1976) focused on the verb forms (finite and non-finite such as participles) in the temporal clauses in relation to their superordinated clauses in Herodotos to determine whether the *Tempusstamm* had temporal value or not. He intended to show that, following Ruijgh,<sup>21</sup> the Greek tenses had temporal meaning and that the aorist marked the anteriority, the present the simultaneity, that the negation influenced the choice of the aspect-stem, preferring the present one but not excluding the aorist altogether,<sup>22</sup> that the iterative meaning in *se* did not influence the choice of the aspect stem but that the temporal relation with the main clause was decisive (i.e. the present stem is used when the actions are simultaneous to those of the main clause),<sup>23</sup> that the present-stem could be used for special durative and ongoing activities,<sup>24</sup> and that the aspect of the finite verb could in fact influence that of the subordinated participle.<sup>25</sup> In their reviews, Ruijgh

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<sup>17</sup> Schlachter 1908/1909.

<sup>18</sup> Schlachter 1908/1909: 181-186.

<sup>19</sup> Hettrich 1976: 20.

<sup>20</sup> Barbour 1929: 25-28.

<sup>21</sup> In Ruijgh's words (1971: 231-233, the quote is from page 231) [i]l n'est donc pas correct de dire, comme on le fait souvent, que les thèmes du présent, de l'aoriste et du parfait n'expriment pas le temps mais l'aspect and [a]près tout, nous avons donc le droit de conclure que le système des thèmes temporels du grec sert à l'expression des rapports temporels (1971: 233).

<sup>22</sup> Hettrich 1976: 46-51.

<sup>23</sup> Hettrich 1976: 52-58.

<sup>24</sup> Hettrich 1976: 59-71.

<sup>25</sup> Hettrich 1976: 77-81.

agreed with Hettrich,<sup>26</sup> but Rijksbaron argued that the traditional aspectual interpretation was still valid and that the uses of the aorist enumerated by Hettrich could be explained by the intrinsic nature of the aorist:

[a]ny action to be mentioned following the aorist form occurs after the action referred to by the aorist. Since the aorist refers to a finished action, and accordingly does not form a framework for other actions, it sometimes refers to an action that stands on its own, having no temporal relationship whatsoever with other actions.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.3 Stork 1982

Stork (1982) systematically investigated all the instances the dynamic infinitives, i.e. the ones that are not replacing an indicative in *oratio obliqua*, in Herodotos because in that manner it could be excluded that temporal factors played a role as well. In every chapter, he first provided the overall figures, analysed the positive/affirmative and the negative instances, and paid particular interest to the instances in which different variants were attested. He noted that the aorist was used when the actual completion of the action, or *effectuation* in his words, was the most important element, when a single event, a specific act or a specific context was described, whereas the present was used in non-specific contexts, when a (distributive-) iterative event, a policy, a course of action, a line of conduct or an activity in its course or start were being described. He thus arrived at the same conclusions as Rijksbaron (1979), namely that the choice of the aspect-stem was not temporally but aspectually motivated.

## 4. Two additional issues

There are two additional problems that need to be discussed.

### 4.1 The *fortwirkende Handlung*

As has been alluded to already, in Homer and also in later writers, many instances of *verba dicendi*, *verba mittendi* and *verba reliquendi* appear in the imperfect although they clearly refer to a completed action and one would therefore expect these forms to be in the aorist. For this

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<sup>26</sup> Ruijgh 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Rijksbaron 1979: 233.

apparently aberrant use, several explanations have been provided. For Homer several explanations have been adduced that cannot be applied to Classical Greek (prose): the metre played a role, the epic had been composed in a period in which the imperfect was still the narrative tense, for certain verbs there was only a past tense and not an imperfect or aorist, or alternatively, certain verb forms could be interpreted as both aorist and/or imperfect.<sup>28</sup> An alternative explanation was that by von Naegelsbach.<sup>29</sup> He argued that in (Homeric) Greek, the aorist and imperfect were not interchangeable: the imperfect can be used with verbs of sending, going, ordering and speaking (where one would have expected an aorist, because of the punctual nature of the activity) because it depicted the action not simply in its completion but also in its lasting effects. Applied more specifically to the *verba dicendi*, it meant that the aorist was used in speech conclusions when the speaker proceeds to something else (and the action is then completed),<sup>30</sup> whereas the imperfect appeared in speech introductions and conclusions to indicate that the speaking was not depicted in its punctual pronouncing of the words, but in its durative process of speaking and subsequent influence on the audience: it has an effect that lasts longer than the mere pronunciation of the words (or the sending of envoys) and will cause or provoke a reaction by the audience.<sup>31</sup> Besides Homer, this use of the imperfect was common in Attic prose,<sup>32</sup> and in Herodotos.<sup>33</sup> In this respect, the following example from Homer is often quoted.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I refer to the discussions in De Decker 2022: 65-83.

<sup>29</sup> Von Naegelsbach 1834: 103, 249-255.

<sup>30</sup> De Decker 2022: 159-182.

<sup>31</sup> De Decker 2022: 88-159.

<sup>32</sup> Blass (1889 - the title of his article was *Demosthenische Studien* - which clearly referred to the Attic nature of the phenomenon: he discussed Demosthenes and Attic inscriptions, but did not address other sources), Kühner & Gerth 1898: 144, Stahl 1907: 97-99, Sedgwick 1940, Schwyzer & Debrunner 1950: 277-278, Smyth & Messing 1956: 424, Rijksbaron 2002: 18-19, CGCG: 428-430.

<sup>33</sup> For Herodotos, one is referred to Barbour (1929: 26), Sedgwick (1940, 1957), Salmon (1950), Hettrich 1976: 59-60: *Der PSt (Präsensstamm, FDD) bezeichnet a) den Akt des Sagens unter Einschluß des fortwirkenden Zustandes, der durch diesen Akt hervorgerufen wird, bis zur Reaktion des Angesprochenen; b) den Akt des Sagens allein in seiner Erstreckung*), Bentein 2015, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Von Naegelsbach 1834: 103.



- (106) Ἀτρεὺς δὲ θνήσκων ἔλιπεν πολύαρνι Θυέστῃ  
 (107) αὐτὰρ ὁ αὖτε Θυέστ' Ἀγαμέμνονι λείπε φορῆναι,  
 (108) πολλῶσιν νήσοισι καὶ Ἄργεϊ παντὶ ἀνάσσειν. (*Iliad* 2,106-108).

“When he was dying Atreus left the sceptre to Thyestes who was rich in sheep. Thyestes then left it to Agamemnon to carry and to rule over many islands and Argos in its entirety.”

Here, the meaning is that a person left something for another to keep it and benefit from it: the leaving of the sceptre from Atreus to Thyestes is described in the aorist (ἔλιπεν) as Thyestes is no longer in charge whereas the leaving of the sceptre by Thyestes to Agamemnon as to become the ruler is related with a verb in the imperfect (λείπε) as the latter still holds this function at the moment of the events (note also the present infinitives φορῆναι and ἀνάσσειν).<sup>35</sup>

Using the metre as argument for the difference in use between imperfect and aorist can certainly not explain the “aberrant” uses in prose (and even in Homer, the metre does not explain the preference for ἔπεμπε or ἐκέλευε over ἔπεμψε or ἐκέλευσε). The fact that the imperfect was the oldest narrative tense might work for Homer but is no longer valid for prose and later poetry and while that could theoretically be argued for ἔφη or ἔφατο / φάτο, this is certainly not the case for ἔπεμπε, ἔλεγε or ἐκέλευε (and assuming that the transmission was wrong in *all* cases where the imperfect was unanimously attested in the manuscripts lacks all credibility). This leaves the durative effect theory as only possible explanation. Even Hettrich, who argued for a temporal meaning of the tenses in Herodotos, agreed that this use was present in Greek.<sup>36</sup> The response to this explanation, which is often referred to as the *fortwirkende Handlung*, has not been unanimously positive. Rijksbaron pointed out that it was insufficient to state that the imperfect was used when the addressee reacted to the speech. In his opinion, the aorist of the *verbum dicendi* was used when there was no reaction by the addressee. When the addressee responded negatively, the imperfect was used. When there was an implicit positive response, the aorist was used and when the response was explicitly positive, both imperfect and aorist could be used.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> La Roche 1870: 41 stated that there was no distinction between the aorist and the imperfect.

<sup>36</sup> Hettrich 1976: 59-60. See the quote above.

<sup>37</sup> Rijksbaron 1979: 238-245.

## 4.2 The perspective of the writers and/or witnesses

Already Kühner,<sup>38</sup> Zander,<sup>39</sup> and Gildersleeve,<sup>40</sup> argued that the imperfect was used for describing events that the speakers or writers had witnessed themselves. Zander, who exclusively treated Herodotos and did not adduce evidence from other historians, stated that when the action was witnessed, the imperfect was used, as in that case, all the details were known to the speakers/writers, while the aorist was employed when the speakers and/or writers only heard about it as in that case, only the result was known but no details, and thus no descriptions could be provided for.<sup>41</sup> This specification found relatively little response or explicit mentioning in the grammars and discussions of the individual writers, but recently, it has been repropounded by Bakker, who argued that the imperfect was used for the *mimetic description*,<sup>42</sup> and in those descriptions the aorist acted to describe the background.<sup>43</sup> Bentein (2015) adapted and improved this theory stating that the imperfect would be used by a *virtual observer* (and not necessarily a physical eyewitness), and then applied it to Herodotos.

This theory has been criticised for at least two reasons. First, it would mean that the imperfect would be used *every time* the author witnessed the events himself,<sup>44</sup> and, secondly and more fundamentally, this additional distinction unduly complicates matters and overlooks that the traditional

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<sup>38</sup> In his own words Kühner 1835: 73 “Die Erzählung nämlich hat einen doppelten Charakter. Sie besteht entweder in einem blossen Aufzählen und Referiren der Thatsachen, und dann wird der Aorist gebraucht den wir in dieser Hinsicht die referirende oder erzählende Zeitform nennen; oder sie ist historische Schilderung, Darstellung, Malerei, indem sich der Erzählende in die Vergangenheit versetzt, und das was hier geschieht, gleichsam mit eignen Augen anschaut, und dann wird das Imperfekt gebraucht, das wir in dieser Hinsicht die schildernde, darstellende, malende Zeitform nennen”.

<sup>39</sup> In his words (Zander 1882: 8) *Huc pertinet etiam hic usus: Saepissime Herodotus libris suis de quibusdam rebus, quae in itineribus suis expertus cognovit, inserit annotationes, quae imperfecto pronuntiantur, cum in lingua Graeca quae quis ipse vidit, imperfecto, quae ex aliis comperit, aoristo proferre soleat.*

<sup>40</sup> In Gildersleeve’s own words 1902: 250: “[w]e say that the imperfect is the tense of actual vision, the tense of sympathy. The aorist appeals more to the intellect, the imperfect more to the eye. The aorist descends like lightning, the imperfect comes down like a pall”.

<sup>41</sup> Zander 1882: 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Bakker 1997: 38-48.

<sup>43</sup> In his words Bakker 1997: 43 the aorist serves as background to a descriptive, visualizing foreground carried by imperfect verbs.

<sup>44</sup> Rijksbaron 2012: 363, footnote 65.

aspectual distinctions can still account for (almost) everything.<sup>45</sup> A detailed rebuttal of all Bakker's examples is impossible within the current article but the following is a clear example of how farfetched his analysis is:<sup>46</sup>

Νικίαν δὲ καὶ Δημοσθένη ἄκοντος τοῦ Γυλίππου ἀπέσφαξαν (Thoukydides *Historiai* 7,86,2).

"Nikias and Demosthenes they executed against the will of Gylippos."

In this single line (which belongs to a larger passage that Bakker did not discuss), Thoukydides describes how the generals Nikias and Demosthenes were executed by the Syrakousians against the explicit will of their leader Gylippos. As this is a single event, the use of the aorist ἀπέσφαξαν is perfectly fine and there is, in my opinion, no need to resort to more "exotic" explanations.

## 5.The text and its translation

First, I quote the text, with the variants put in *italics*.

ταῦτα μὲν δὴ ἐκ βάθεος *περιεβάλετο* / *περιεβάλλετο*, τοιήνδε δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν παρενθήκην *ἐποιήσατο*. τῆς πόλιος *εὐούσης* δύο φαρσέων, τοῦ δὲ ποταμοῦ μέσον *ἔχοντος*, ἐπὶ τῶν πρότερον βασιλέων ὅπως τις *ἐθέλοι* ἐκ τοῦ ἐτέρου φάρσεος ἐς τοῦτερον *διαβῆναι*, *χρῆν* πλοῖα *διαβαίνειν* / *διαβῆναι*, καὶ *ἦν*, ὡς ἐγὼ δοκέω, ὀχληρὸν τοῦτο. αὕτη δὲ καὶ τοῦτο *προεῖδε*. ἐπεῖτε γὰρ *ᾠρυσσε* / *ᾠρυξε* τὸ ἔλυτρον τῇ λίμνῃ, μνημόσυνον τόδε ἄλλο ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔργου *ἐλίπετο* / *ἐλείπετο*. *ἐτάμνετο* λίθους περιμήκεας, ὡς δὲ οἱ *ἦσαν* οἱ λίθοι ἔτοιμοι καὶ τὸ χωρίον *ὀρώρυκτο* / *ᾠρυκτο*<sup>47</sup>, *ἐκτρέψασα* τοῦ ποταμοῦ τὸ ρέεθρον πᾶν ἐς τὸ *ᾠρυσσε* / *ᾠρυξε* χωρίον, ἐν ᾧ *ἐπίμπλατο* τοῦτο, ἐν τούτῳ ἀπεξηρασμένου τοῦ ἀρχαίου ρέεθρου τοῦτο μὲν τὰ χεῖλεα τοῦ ποταμοῦ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὰς καταβάσις τὰς ἐκ τῶν πυλίδων ἐς τὸν ποταμὸν *φερούσας* *ἀνοικοδόμησε* πλίνθοισι ὅπῃσι κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον τῷ τείχεϊ, τοῦτο δὲ κατὰ μέσσην *κου* μάλιστα τὴν πόλιν τοῖσι λίθοις τοὺς *ᾠρύξατο* *οἰκοδόμει* γέφυραν, *δέουσα*

<sup>45</sup> Colvin (1998: §1, - in his words: "I have no doubt that Thuc. employs a complex narratological strategy; but it seems to me that the interplay of past tenses in his writing can be accounted for within existing categories" (final line of §1).

<sup>46</sup> The example was discussed in Bakker 1997: 45.

<sup>47</sup> The manuscripts have ᾠρυκτο, but Bekker (1833: 80-81) corrected it into ὀρώρυκτο. Personally, I believe that the transmitted reading can be defended, but for the current discussion this is irrelevant (also Rosén 1989: 115 preserved the transmitted reading).

τοὺς λίθους σιδήρῳ τε καὶ μολύβδῳ. **ἐπιτείνεσκε** δὲ ἐπ' αὐτήν, ὅπως μὲν ἡμέρη *γίνοιτο* / *γένοιτο*<sup>48</sup>, ξύλα τετράγωνα, ἐπ' ὧν τὴν διάβασιν **ἐποιεῦντο** οἱ Βαβυλώνιοι· τὰς δὲ νύκτας τὰ ξύλα ταῦτα **ὑπαιρέσκον** τοῦδε εἵνεκα, ἵνα μὴ **διαφοιτέοντες** τὰς νύκτας **κλέπτοιεν** παρ' ἀλλήλων. ὥς δὲ τό τε ὀρυχθὲν λίμνη πλήρης ἐγεγόνει ὑπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν γέφυραν ἐκεκόσμητο, τὸν Εὐφρήτην ποταμὸν ἐς τὰ ἀρχαῖα ῥέεθρα ἐκ τῆς λίμνης ἐξήγαγε, καὶ οὕτω τὸ ὀρυχθὲν ἔλος *γενόμενον* / *γινόμενον* ἐς **δέον** **ἐδόκεε** γεγονέναι καὶ τοῖσι πολιῆτησι γέφυρα ἦν κατεσκευασμένη.<sup>49</sup>

“So she made the deep river her protection; and this work led to another which she added to it. Her city was divided into two parts by the river that flowed through the middle. In the days of the former rulers, when one wanted to go from one part to the other, one had to cross in a boat; and this, I suppose, was a nuisance. But the queen also provided for this; she made another monument of her reign out of this same work when the digging of the basin of the lake was done. She had very long blocks of stone cut; and when these were ready and the place was dug, she turned the course of the river into it, and while it was filling, the former channel now being dry, she bricked the borders of the river in the city and the descent from the gate leading down to the river with baked bricks, like those of the wall; and near the middle of the city she built a bridge with the stones that had been dug up, binding them together with iron and lead. Each morning, she laid square-hewn logs across it, on which the Babylonians crossed; but these logs were removed at night, lest folk always be crossing over and stealing from one another. Then, when the basin she had made for a lake was filled by the river and the bridge was finished, Nitocris brought the Euphrates back to its former channel out of the lake; thus she had served her purpose, as she thought, by making a swamp of the basin, and her citizens had a bridge made for them.” (translation by the Loeb Classical Library, Godley 1920: 231, 233 - also printed on the *Perseus* website).

In this passage, Herodotos describes how queen Nitokris was confronted with the problem of the crossing of the river Euphrates and how she succeeded in solving the problem by constructing a bridge over the Euphrates in Babylon. She had many wooden logs and great stones cut out of and used them in her construction. She would guarantee the passing over the water

<sup>48</sup> The subjunctive aorist γένηται is also transmitted here but for the discussion at hand this is irrelevant (given the fact that the form is combined with an epic-Ionic iterative in the main clause, the optative has clearly preference).

<sup>49</sup> The forms in the present-stem are in boldface and the ones in the aorist-stem have been underlined.

by putting wooden logs in the water during the day but removing them at night to avoid intruders from entering the city and committing burglary.

## 6. The analysis of the uncontested forms

The aspect use in these lines offers some unexpected forms. As this is a description of how an infrastructure was built, one might have expected the aorist to have been the predominant form (as it has been interpreted as the narrative tense *par excellence*) but this is not the case.

ἐποιήσατο: this form summarises the action and does not have any notion of an ongoing action, and is therefore in the aorist.

εἰούσης, ἔχοντος: these two participles, used in a genitive absolute, describe the state of the Euphrates and Babylon as a city, and are therefore in the present-stem.

ἐθέλοι, ᾗν, χρῆν: these three verbs describe what the citizens of Babylon had to do in case they wanted to cross the river and what effect it had on them, it is ongoing and uninterrupted. Only the present-stem is suited here.

διαβῆναι will be discussed when we treat the disputed instance διαβῆναι / διαβαίνειν.

προεῖδε: this aorist summarises the action and describes the results as well. As it refers to a completed action (“she solved the problem”), the aorist is expected.

ἐτάμνετο: the use of the imperfect refers to the ongoing activity of the stone-cutting. As it does not suffice to have a few stones to build the bridge but one needs a substantial amount of stones, the imperfect is more suited than the aorist. Moreover, the verb form here is clearly causative as the queen would probably not have dug nor cut the stones herself. An interpretation of *de conatu* cannot be excluded either as stone-cutting, especially large ones as mentioned here, is a labour-intensive occupation.

ᾗσαν: this is an imperfect because it describes the nature of the stones.

ἐκτρέψασα: this is an aorist because the action described by it is a completed one and it thus refers to a change. As soon as the river is diverted, its course has been changed.

ἐπίμπλατο: the imperfect describes the ongoing filling of the basin by the river. The notion of completion is not present.

φερούσας: this participle is in the present stem because it describes the course of the water and how it is streaming downwards.

ἀνοικοδόμησε: this is an aorist that concludes the story of the diversion of the river. Only when the river is diverted, one can start building a bridge over it. The aspect use of this form is comparable to that of ἐκτρέψασα.

ὠρύξατο: this is an aorist because the act of digging up the stones has to be completed before one can turn to the construction of the bridge. Theoretically, one could explain the use of the aorist as expressing anteriority here, but, following Rijksbaron (quoted above), it is better to account for the aorist use in ἀνοικοδόμησε and ὠρύξατο by assuming that their action has to be completed before a new one can start. In this case, the river first has to be diverted before a bridge can be built over it and the stones first needed to be dug out before they could be used in building of the bridge.

οικοδομέε, δέουσα: for the imperfect οἰκοδομέε several explanations are possible. One could argue that the construction of the bridge was not an activity that was easily completed, that the construction took a while (the verb might even have had a nuance of *de conatu*) and/or that that verb described an ongoing activity that was never completed as the bridge was constructed every day and dismantled every evening. An aorist is thus not suited here. The same explanations are valid for the participle δέουσα. It describes the ongoing binding of the stones during the construction of the bridge (by binding them, the bridge is constructed) and refers to an action that is never completed as the bridge is dissolved every evening (as will become clear in the next sentence), and it is thus not necessary to explain the present in δέουσα as a case of *attractio temporalis* (i.e. that the tense of the main verb attracted that of the subordinated form, here a present participle with present-stem finite form).

ἐπιτείνεσκε, ἐποιεῦντο, ἀπαιρέεσκον, διαφοιτέοντες, κλέπτοιεν: these lines belong to the description of the possibility of burglary, its prevention and the actual construction and removal of the bridge. All forms, including the iteratives, are in the present stem because they refer to a habit or to a set of recurring actions.

ὀρυχθέν (twice): the aorist is used because the form refers to the digging of the channels for diverting the river and for the swamp. These actions are completed and thus only the aorist is suited here.

ἐξήγαγε: this verb is in the aorist because it describes how Nitokris “returned” the river into its original river-bed after the bridge had been constructed. This is also a completed action and is thus in the aorist (as was the case with the participle ἐκτρέψασα).

δέον, ἐδόκεε: these forms refer to what Nitokris considered necessary. One could argue that the forms should have been in the aorist as the works had been completed, but the fact that the works are finished does not imply that Nitokris changed her mind or stopped thinking that the works were necessary. I would state that the present-stem here expresses her ongoing belief that what she had done was indeed necessary.

Now that we have addressed the undisputed forms, it is time to discuss those for which *variae lectiones* exist.

## 7. The attested variants

Below, I quote the variants chosen by the different editions and commentaries.<sup>50</sup>

Editions/ commentaries <sup>51</sup>	περιεβάλλετο/ περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν/ διαβῆναι	ᾠρυσσε / ᾠρυξε	ἐλείπετο/ ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε/ ᾠρυξε	γίνοιτο/ γένοιτο	γινόμενον/ γενόμενον
Editions							
Bekker	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον
Stein	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε	γένοιτο	γινόμενον
OCT, Hude	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυξε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον
Teubner, Dietsch & Kallenberg	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυξε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον
Budé, Legrand	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον
Loeb, Godley	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε	γίνοιτο	γενόμενον
Teubner, Rosén	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε	γένοιτο	γινόμενον
OCT, Wilson	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυξε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον
Commentaries							
Krüger	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε <sup>52</sup>	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον
Stein	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυσσε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον
Van Groningen	περιεβάλετο	διαβαίνειν	ᾠρυσσε	ἐλίπετο	ᾠρυξε	γένοιτο	γενόμενον

Table 1: Overview of the variants in the editions and commentaries.

<sup>50</sup> The issue was not discussed in How & Wells 1912: 145, Asheri e.a. (2007: 205), nor in Wilson 2015a: 21, where they treated 1.186. The lexicon of Enoch-Powell (1938) mentioned the passages and the meaning but not the exact forms.

<sup>51</sup> The forms from the present stem are printed first but this does not imply any judgement.

<sup>52</sup> He printed ᾠρυσσε twice but asked if ᾠρυξε was not better (cf. *infra*).

## 8. Discussion of the variants

The table reveals that most editions agree on the editorial choices, but I will discuss all the *variae lectiones* as I differ in some instances.

περιεβάλετο / περιεβάλλετο: in this instance, the aorist concludes the description of the previous passage. For Thoukydides, Basset (2011) argued that many passages were concluded by an aorist form. One could theoretically argue that the *fortwirkende Handlung* could apply here as well and that thus an imperfect would have been possible, but as the next action is already announced by the aorist ἐποιήσατο, this is less likely and therefore the aorist περιεβάλετο has preference.

διαβαίνειν / διαβῆναι: the difference between the aorist διαβῆναι just before the passage and the line here could not be clearer.<sup>53</sup> This is probably one of the best examples to illustrate the distinction between the present- and the aorist-stem. The aorist infinitive, unanimously transmitted in the instance before, marks the completion and the reaching of a goal and endpoint. In this instance, a habit or repeated action is described. The verb has no object and refers to the activity as such and not to the completion of that same action. For that reason, the present infinitive διαβαίνειν has preference over the aorist διαβῆναι, a variant that in all likelihood originated under the influence of the preceding διαβῆναι.

ᾠρυσσε / ᾠρυξε (twice): Krüger and Stein almost simultaneously noted that in these two instances the imperfect was imprecise and that an aorist would have been better (Stein explicitly referred to the pluperfect ὀρώρυκτο and the aorist ὠρύξατο used in the same passage to state that the imperfect was wrong here), although they both printed the imperfect form.<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that in both instances the form is used in a subordinate clause. Zander interpreted this imperfect (I assume the second?) as a pluperfect (translating it by *foderat*) and did not discuss the corrections.<sup>55</sup> Sedgwick explained the form as “had been doing” and referred for this meaning to Kühner & Gerth.<sup>56</sup> Rosén also preserved the

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<sup>53</sup> Stork 1982: 122-123, 237 and especially 433, but the variants were not discussed, nor did he discuss it in Stork (1988). The issue was not discussed in Krüger 1855: 109, Stein (1870: 207), Vayhinger 1880: 18-19 nor in Zander 1882.

<sup>54</sup> Krüger 1855: 109, Stein 1856: 151, so also Legrand 1932: 181, with reference to Stein.

<sup>55</sup> Zander 1882: 11.

<sup>56</sup> Sedgwick 1940: 120-121, 1957: 114-115 with reference to Kühner & Gerth 1898: 145.



imperfect and referred to Kühner & Gerth as well.<sup>57</sup> The editors disagree on this, as some of them preserved the imperfect in both cases and others adopted the change only in the second instance. None of the editors changed the imperfect into the aorist twice, which surprises as the first one appears in a temporal clause and the second in a relative clause and both actions seems to refer to completed actions and seem to have anterior meaning. At first sight, the aorist does indeed seem more suited. The digging has to be completed before the diversion and the bridge-building can be performed. On the other hand, however, the imperfect here can be compared to ἐτάμνετο and would then refer to the ongoing activity of the construction. If one decides to change the text, would one not change both forms? Personally, I would also argue that there is a difference between the digging of the stones expressed by ὠρύξατο and that of the new river beds expressed by ὥρυσσε. The latter is in my opinion more durative and refers to an ongoing action. For the purely temporal interpretation of the tenses in Greek, the transmitted forms ὥρυσσε are problematic,<sup>58</sup> but when one analyses them from an aspectual point of view, the problem becomes less pressing.

ἐλείπετο / ἐλίπετο: this is a much more difficult case and one has to ask why the aorist would have been chosen by all editors and commentaries. This instance is a clear case of a *fortwirkende Handlung*, especially as μνημόσυνον τόδε ἄλλο ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔργου is explicitly added and therefore, the imperfect would clearly be preferred.

γίνοιτο / γένοιτο: both the optative present γίνοιτο and the aorist γένοιτο are possible, as the latter would mean that the putting of the wooden logs on the water would start only when it had already dawned and the former that they started to put the woods in the water as soon as the first beams of the morning sun appeared. Given the transitional nature of dawning and the ongoing nature of the works, I would prefer the present but the aorist cannot be excluded either.

γενόμενον / γινόμενον: this passage describes how the plain that was dug out and once was the new river-bed had become the swamp because the water had left (after the Euphrates was returned to its original trajectory). As such, the form refers to a completed action and the aorist is more suited.

<sup>57</sup> Rosén 1987: 115, quoting Kühner & Gerth 1898: 143.

<sup>58</sup> This instance was not discussed in Hettrich 1976.

## 9. Conclusion

In this article I discussed the tense and aspect use in Herodotos *Historiai* 1.186 and the different *variae lectiones* related to this (often both an aorist and present form were transmitted). In order to do so, it was necessary to treat in some detail the previous scholarship on tense and aspect in Classical Greek. I paid special attention to two debated issues, namely that of the *fortwirkende Handlung* (i.e. when an imperfect with durative meaning as used where a punctual aorist would have been expected) and the assumption that the author's perspective influenced the aspectual choice. Then, an overview of the most recent editions and commentaries as to the variants was given (time and space constraints prevented me from taking into account all the commentaries and editions). In a third step, the undisputed forms were analysed and finally, I treated the disputed cases. In general, the distinction between punctual/completed and durative/ongoing has been confirmed (it is not necessary to ascribe a temporal meaning to the aorist as a simple aspectual interpretation can also account for all the occurrences) but my analyses differ in two respects from most editions: first, I think that the imperfects ὄρουσσε (twice) can be preserved as they describe the long ongoing process of the digging and, second, the imperfect ἐλείπετο has preference over the aorist ἐλίπετο as this form is a clear instance of a *fortwirkende Handlung* (as is confirmed by the context).

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