

TENSE AND ASPECT IN THE COUNTERFACTUAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN CLASSICAL GREEK: A CASE STUDY BASED ON HERODOTOS 8

TEMPO E ASPETO NAS CONSTRUÇÕES CONTRAFACTUAIS EM GREGO CLÁSSICO: UM CASO DE ESTUDO EM HERÓDOTO 8

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Abstract

Many different analyses have been provided for the use of the tenses and moods in the counterfactual and potential constructions in Greek. So far, however, the actual instances of the counterfactual constructions in Classical Greek have not been studied in detail as to their temporal and/or aspectual meaning. In this article, I use the instances of the modal indicatives of Herodotos, *Historiai* Book 8 (the preparations for the Battle of Salamis, the Battle itself and its aftermath) as a case study for such an investigation. As this article focuses exclusively on the aspect of the modal indicatives, I will only briefly discuss the aspect in Classical Greek and Herodotos and will neither treat the relation between aspect (or “grammatical aspect”, i.e. the use of a certain tense or form to express aspect) and *Aktionsart* (or “lexical aspect”, i.e. the meaning of a root, such as “see” versus “look”), nor the origins of the counterfactual and past potential constructions. After the overview of the aspect uses, I analyse the passages in which these forms occur and use as *Arbeitshypothese* that the use of the aorist or imperfect with the modal indicatives is based on aspectual criteria and not on temporal reference. By this I mean that

the aorist is not confined to the so-called *irrealis* of the past and the imperfect to that of the present. If different variants are attested or when it is unclear whether a certain form is modal or not, they will be discussed as well.¹

Keywords: counterfactual constructions, aspect, tense, Classical Greek, Herodotos.

Resumo

Muitas têm sido as teses aventadas sobre o uso de tempos e modos verbais nas construções contrafactuais e potenciais na língua grega. No entanto, até agora, as construções contrafactuais em grego clássico não têm sido estudadas de forma detalhada quanto ao seu significado temporal e /ou aspetual. Neste artigo, sirvo-me dos indicadores modais usados por Heródoto nas *Historiai* Livro 8 (correspondentes aos preparativos para a batalha de Salamina, à própria batalha e às suas consequências) para desenvolver o meu caso de estudo. Uma vez que o presente artigo se foca apenas no aspeto dos indicadores modais, limitar-me-ei a discutir brevemente o aspeto no grego clássico e em Heródoto, não abordando nem a relação entre aspeto e *Aktionsart*, nem as origens das construções contrafactuais e das construções potenciais passadas.

Depois de uma incursão pelos usos do aspeto, analiso trechos exemplificativos e avento como *Arbeitshypothese* que o uso do aoristo ou imperfeito com os indicativos modais se baseia no critério aspetual e não na referência temporal. Com isto, pretendo dizer que o aoristo não se reduz ao chamado *irrealis* do passado, tal como o imperfeito não se reduz ao do presente. Caso se verifique a existência de diferentes variantes ou caso seja pouco evidente se determinada forma é modal ou não, esses exemplos também serão aqui discutidos.

Palavras-chave: Construções contrafactuais, aspeto, tempo, grego clássico, Heródoto.

Tense and aspect in Classical Greek

The literature on Greek tense and aspect is very large and the one on tense and aspect in general and on the relation between aspect and *Aktionsart*

¹ This article was started while working as a scholar at the *Università degli Studi di Verona* in the project *Particles in Greek and Hittite as Expression of Mood and Modality* (PaGHEMMo), which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement Number 101018097 and was concluded and finalised while working as a postdoctoral researcher at the *Università degli Studi di Firenze*. I would also like to thank the journal *Humanitas*, its reviewers and editors, and the editorial assistants, Marisa das Neves Henriques and Eulália Marques, for their useful remarks and suggestions for improvement. It goes without saying that all shortcomings, inconsistencies and errors are mine and mine alone.

is immense.² Time and space constraints prevent me from discussing the previous scholarship on Greek aspect in detail. In most standard grammars of Greek one can find this description of the use of aorist and imperfect: the aorist does not indicate anteriority *per se*, but only refers to the punctual meaning of the action or a completed action,³ while the imperfect is used for durative actions in the past, conative actions and depictions of past actions.⁴ Below I quote the comparison between the two tenses, provided for by Smyth & Messing (1956: 427), which can serve as a summary of what most grammars teach about these two tenses:

<i>Imperfect</i>	<i>Aorist</i>
circumstances, details, course of action	mere fact of occurrence, general statement
progress, enduring condition, continued activity	consummation (culmination, final issue, summary process)
general description	isolated points, characteristic examples
endeavour	attainment
actions subordinate to the main action	main actions, without reference to other actions

In short, the distinction aorist versus imperfect is be described as one of punctual / completed versus durative / incomplete /ongoing.

² The best and most thorough overview of the study of Greek aspect can be found in Fanning (1990: 1-89) and Bentein (2016: 29-51).

As this is a journal article and not a monograph on the issue, I will limit my references to the most common standard grammars of Classical Greek (Goodwin 1865, 1900, Kühner & Gerth 1898, 1904, Gildersleeve 1900, Brugmann 1900, Stahl 1907, Schwyzer & Debrunner 1950, Smyth & Messing 1956, Humbert 1960, Bornemann & Risch 1973, Delaunois 1988, Duhoux 1992, Rijksbaron 2002, Van Emde Boas e.a.2019) and to the treatments of tense and aspect that treated specifically Herodotos.

³ Goodwin 1865: 24-25, Kühner & Gerth 1898: 154-156, 198-199, Delbrück 1879: 102-111, Brugmann 1900: 493, Gildersleeve 1900: 90, Schwyzer & Debrunner 1950: 280-281, 300-301, Smyth & Messing 1956: 414, 420, Humbert 1960: 120-121, Bornemann & Risch 1973: 213-219, Duhoux 1992: 358-364, Rijksbaron 2002: 125, Van Emde Boas e.a. 2019, chapter 33.

⁴ Goodwin 1865: 6-8, Kühner & Gerth 1898: 142-146, Gildersleeve 1900: 88-90, Schwyzer & Debrunner 1950: 275-277, Smyth & Messing 1956: 423-427, Humbert 1960: 116-118, Bornemann & Risch 1973: 213-216, 220-222, Duhoux 1992: 386-390, Rijksbaron 2002: 11-17, Van Emde Boas e.a. 2019: 404-437.

A detailed study of the specificities of the aspect use in Herodotos has been performed elsewhere,⁵ so that I now proceed to the tense use in the counterfactual constructions in Classical Greek.

2. The tense usage in the counterfactual in Classical Greek

In general, there are four theories for the use of the tenses in the counterfactual in Classical Greek:

- some scholars stated that the tense use was based on aspectual distinctions;⁶
- others hold that the temporal reference was the sole factor;⁷
- most grammars, however, argue that the distinction between the tenses in the counterfactual could be explained from an aspectual point of view, but that, in most cases, it was the temporal reference that decided on which tense was used;⁸

⁵ For a detailed treatment and overview of the scholarship on tense and aspect in Herodotos, the reader is referred to De Decker 2024: 45-51.

⁶ Brugmann 1900: 513-514, Stahl 1907: 280-281, Humbert 1960: 110-113, Bornemann & Risch 1973: 229-230, Delaunoy 1975: 5-7, 1988: 96-106, Hettrich 1992: 267, 1998, Horrocks 1996: 163, 2010: 237, Gerö 2001: 188, Basile & Radici-Colace 2001: 432-436, De Decker 2021: 140-149, La Roi 2022.

In his treatment on the tense use in Herodotos, Zander 1882: 22-25 stated: *[i]taque non est accuratum simpliciter dicere, imperfectum in rebus praesentibus, aoristum in praeteritis usurpari, ex natura imperfecti, cum sit tempus praeteritum, elucet id non minus in rebus praeteritis quam in praesentibus locum suum habere.*

⁷ Kühner 1835: 89-93, 546, 554, 1870: 174-175, 191-197, Rijksbaron 2002: 73.

⁸ Kühner & Gerth 1898: 212 accepted the aspectual explanations but in their analysis of the conditional clauses they preferred the temporal explanation without excluding the aspectual interpretation (1904: 468-472).

Schwyzler & Debrunner 1950: 344-351 stated that in origin the tenses were chosen based on the aspectual distinction but that slowly but steadily the temporal distinction “took over”.

Smyth & Messing 1956: 518-520 stated that the imperfect referred to the present or to a continuative, habitual or conative action in the past while aorist always referred to a simple occurrence in the past (but their translations of the Greek examples show that they preferred the temporal interpretation).

Van Emde Boas e.a. 2019: 442-443 accepted the aspectual difference as well, but nevertheless stated that the aorist usually referred to the past counterfactual, while the imperfect to the present.

Wakker 1994: 210-214 stated that in Homer the counterfactual of the past was expressed with the past indicative (imperfect or aorist) in the conditional clauses while

- a last category are the ones who accept the temporal distinction but state that the imperfect could be used for the past counterfactual as well.⁹

The aspectual explanation is accepted for the past potential without any hesitation (it has to be added that this construction by definition refers to the past so that a temporal distinction would not make much sense anyway).

For our analysis here, we will use the following *Arbeitshypothese*:

- (a) the use of the tense (imperfect, aorist and exceptionally pluperfect) is based on aspectual factors and not on the temporal reference of the event and
- (b) that in all instances an aspectual explanation can be found (which does not imply that there might not have been a temporal meaning, but this is secondary).

Now that I have outlined and discussed previous scholarship on the tense and aspect in the counterfactual constructions, I will proceed to the actual analyses of the individual passages in Books 8, focusing on the aspectual nuances and temporal reference.

the non-past could still be expressed by the optative. She did not address the use of the tenses in Homer. For Classical Greek she accepted the usual temporal distinction (1994: 132), although she later emphasised that both the imperfect and aorist are past tenses (my underlining) and therefore argued that the distinction was based on their semantics (1994: 146-150), the consequence being that an aorist cannot occur in a present counterfactual and an imperfect tends to be rare in a past counterfactual.

⁹ Goodwin 1865: 93-94, 1900: 285-286, 298-300 and Gildersleeve 1900: 169-170 stated that the imperfect could be used for the present and the past with the usual aspectual distinctions whereas the aorist was only used for the past).

Bizos 1947: 159-161 accepted the temporal distinction but noted that sometimes the imperfect was used for the past counterfactual (in cases of repetition, duration, simultaneity and “vividness” (*pour y reporter plus vivement*)).

Rodríguez-Adrados 1992: 513-517 accepted the aspectual difference, nevertheless stated that the aorist usually referred to the past counterfactual, while the imperfect to the present, and yet also added that the imperfect could be used for the past but that the aorist was very rare for the present counterfactual.

Reuelta-Puigdollers 2022: 650 argued for the temporal explanation but did not exclude the use of the imperfect in the past counterfactual.

3. The instances of Book 8

3.1. *Historiai* 8.30 lines 340-345 Wilson¹⁰

*εἰ δὲ Θεσσαλοὶ τὰ Ἑλλήνων ἠϋξον, ὥς ἐμοὶ δοκέειν, ἐμῆδιζον ἂν οἱ Φωκέες· οἱ ταῦτα ἐπαγγελλομένων Θεσσαλῶν οὔτε δώσειν ἔφασαν χρήματα παρέχειν τε σφίσι Θεσσαλοῖσι ὁμοίως μηδίζειν, εἰ ἄλλως βουλοίατο ἄλλ' οὐκ ἔσεσθαι ἐκόντες εἶναι προδόται τῆς Ἑλλάδος.*¹¹

Had the Thessalians aided the Greek side, then the Phokians would certainly have sided with the Medes (i.e. Persians). When the Thessalians made their proposition, the Phokians replied that they would give no money to the Thessalians and could, similar to the Thessalians, take the side of the Medes if they wished this for some other reason, but (also stated) that they would not willingly become traitors of Greece.

Herodotos describes how the Thessalians and the Phokians hated each other and had fought several wars in the past. Faced with the threat of the Persians, the Thessalians acceded to the Persian demand and sided with them. The Thessalians then came to the Phokians requesting they pay money to avoid being enslaved and their country being destroyed by the Thessalians and the Persians. The Phokians refused this offer and stated that they would never voluntarily betray the cause of the Greeks. In spite of this explicit statement, Herodotos adds that the animosity between the two tribes was so great that the Phokians would nevertheless have joined the Persians, if the Thessalians had joined the Greek cause. The question is whether the irrealis-construction here is omnitemporal (and would thus be valid for the past, present and future) or is just valid for the past. In Herodotos' story, the animosity is not a thing from the past, because at the time when the Thessalians make their offer to the Phokians, the hatred is still very much vivid. I would not, therefore, state that this is an irrealis of

¹⁰ Wilson numbered the lines of every book continuously besides the traditional division in sections and subsections. As I quote from his edition (while taking into account any variant that might have been attested), I provide these numbers as well because they render it easier to find the exact lines of the passage.

¹¹ The aorist forms are underlined, the imperfect ones and the ones from the present stem are printed in boldface and the pluperfect forms have been underlined and boldfaced; in case forms are disputed, they are italicised.

the past. In this construction, the imperfect is used and as the reference is not exclusively to the past, one might be tempted to think that the choice of the tense was based on the temporal reference, but an aspectual explanation is not excluded. The meaning of both verbs is durative:¹² ἡϋξον means “had continuously supported the Greek cause” and ἐμήδιζον “would have sided with the Medes for a long period”. The present-stem is used here because the action is described without a clear endpoint as it states that they would have supported the Greeks/Persians but does not indicate that when their support would have ended. As such, it is a process without endpoint and in such instances the present-stem is preferred. This instance does not contradict the assumption that the choice of an aspect-stem in the counterfactual constructions was determined by aspectual factors.

3.2. *Historiai* 8.53, lines 570-576 Wilson

*ἔδεε γὰρ κατὰ τὸ θεοπρόπιον πᾶσαν τὴν Ἀττικὴν τὴν ἐν τῇ ἡπείρῳ γενέσθαι
ὑπὸ Πέρσῃσι. ἔμπροσθε ὧν τῆς ἀκροπόλιος, ὅπισθε δὲ τῶν πυλέων καὶ τῆς
ἀνόδου, τῇ δὴ οὔτε τις ἐφύλασσε οὔτ' ἂν ἤλπιε μὴ κοτέ τις κατὰ τοῦτο ἀναβαίῃ
ἀνθρώπων, ταύτῃ ἀνέβησάν τινες κατὰ τὸ ἶρόν τῆς Κέκροπος θυγατρὸς Ἀγλαύρου,
καίπερ ἀποκρήμνον ἐόντος τοῦ χώρου*

According to the oracular response, all of Attika that was on the mainland had to be ruled by the Persians. In front of the Akropolis, and behind the gates and the ascent, was a place where no one was on guard, since no one ever expected any man could go up that way. Here some men ascended, near the sacred precinct of Kekrops' daughter Aglauros, although the place was a sheer cliff. (translation by the Loeb Classical Library, Godley 1925: 49, with small adaptations)

These lines describe how the Athenians, who normally protected and guarded the Akropolis, decided to leave the mainland of Attika unguarded in accordance with what the oracle had advised and how, as a consequence of this absence, the Persians succeeded in climbing up the Akropolis without being hindered and in spite of the difficult route (as the road was deemed inaccessible, the Athenians considered protecting the Akropolis at that place unnecessary). The aorist ἤλπιε is a modal indicative but the form could either be an irrealis or potentialis of the past “none would ever have

¹² Van Groningen 1955: 117.

thought”. Theoretically, the modal particle might even have indicated the repetition of the action, although this seems less likely and begs the question why then ἐφύλασσε would not have been used with such a particle as well.

Theoretically, one could even argue that belongs to the optative ἀναβαίη, but the distance between the particle and the verb form makes this improbable.¹³ While the subject of ἐφύλασσε and ἤλπισε is grammatically the same, they still refer to different entities, as the former applies to the men capable of guarding the Akropolis whereas the second refers to the entire population of Attika. As the expectation that no-one would ever be able to ascend the Akropolis, is anterior to the decision of not guarding it, the aorist seems to have temporal meaning and seems to indicate anteriority. This instances thus seems a strong example for the use of the aorist with temporal and anterior meaning. What is also striking is that the grammatical relationship between ἐφύλασσε and ἤλπισε is one of coordination but semantically, it is a causal one. As a reviewer points out, this causal relationship makes it all the more likely that we are dealing here with a temporal use (the expectation that there will be no attack on that side naturally precedes the decision not to guard that part of the Akropolis). On the other hand, however, one could also argue that the difference between ἐφύλασσε and ἤλπισε is not owed to the temporal reference in relation to each other not to aspect: the former refers to the long period of the Akropolis being unguarded and does not describe a single action whereas the latter refers to the fact that not even one single person thought it possible (or hoped) for a moment that the steep cliff would allow anyone to climb up the hill to the Akropolis. As such, the difference in tense use between these two verb forms can be explained from an aspectual point of view after all.

3.3. *Historiai* 8.93, lines 1078-1083 Wilson

ἐν δὲ τῇ ναυμαχίῃ ταύτῃ ἤκουσαν Ἑλλήνων ἄριστα Αἰγινῆται, ἐπὶ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀνδρῶν δὲ Πολύκριτός τε ὁ Αἰγινήτης καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι Εὐμένης τε {ὁ} Ἀναγυράσιος καὶ Ἀμεινίης Παλληνεύς, ὃς καὶ Ἀρτεμισίην ἐπεδίωξε. εἰ μὲν νυν ἐμαθε ὅτι ἐν ταύτῃ πλέοι Ἀρτεμισίη, οὐκ ἂν ἐπαύσατο πρότερον ἢ εἰλέ μιν ἢ καὶ αὐτὸς ἦλω.

In this battle it was said that the Aiginetans acted in the bravest manner and after them the Athenians (showed most courage). Among the men, there

¹³ This issue was not discussed in Gaisford & Creuzer & Baehr 1835: 70, Krüger 1856: 122, Abicht 1866: 38, Macan 1908: 440.

were Polykritos from Aigina and the Athenians Eumenes from Anagyros and Ameinias from Pallene, who chased Artemesia. If then he had learnt that she was sailing in that ship, he would not have stopped (his pursuit) before he had either caught her or had been caught himself.

Herodotos describes here which Greek cities were the bravest in the Battle of Salamis and which soldiers particularly excelled. He then relates the story of a certain Ameinias. That Ameinias was chasing a female officer, Artemisia, and after not finding her, he stopped his pursuit. Herodotos adds that if Ameinias had known that Artemisia was still on a ship in Salamis, he would not have stopped chasing her but would have continued until he had either found her or had been taken prisoner himself (by the Persians). An additional factor, not mentioned in the passage discussed here (Herodotos described this in *Historiai* 8.88), is that her ship seemed to attack Persian ships, which misled the Greeks into believing that her ship was on their side and did not belong to the Persians. The story describes a single event in the past and, as a consequence, the modal indicatives ἔμαθε and ἐπαύσατο are used in an irrealis of the past. While they refer to the past, they also describe completed and single actions, namely the hearing of Artemisia's presence on the ship (by which I mean that it would have been a single action, had he indeed heard that she was on the ship, but he never received that news) and his decision to stop the pursuit. The aorist can thus also be explained from an aspectual point of view. The question is whether the indicatives εἶλε and ἦλω are also modal ones, in which case they could be unreal themselves¹⁴ or have been subjected to a type of *attractio modalis*, or simply past indicatives.¹⁵ Both explanations are possible but in any case, these two aorist forms refer to single and completed actions as well (capturing a single person or being captured oneself is an action with a clear endpoint). In this passage, the 2 (or 4) aorist forms do not contradict the aspectual interpretation for the aorist-use in the irrealis.

3.4. *Historiai* 8.103, lines 1226-1230 Wilson

ἦσθη τε δὴ τῇ συμβουλίῃ Ξέρξης· λέγουσα γὰρ ἐπετύγχανε τά περ αὐτὸς ἐνόεε.
οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰ πάντες καὶ πᾶσαι **συνεβούλευον** αὐτῷ μένειν, **ἔμενε** ἂν δοκέειν
ἐμοί· οὕτω καταρρωδήκεε.

¹⁴ Van Groningen 1955: 143, La Roi 2023: 195.

¹⁵ This was not discussed in Gaisford, Creuzer & Baehr 1835: 127, Krüger 1856: 139-140, Abicht 1866: 68, Macan 1908: 504.

Xerxes was pleased with her (sc. Artemesia's) advice. She had namely by chance lighted upon what he was thinking himself. In my opinion, he *would not have remained / would not remain* even if all men and women *had advised / advised* him to stay. He had been struck so intensely by fear.

When Xerxes was faced with serious resistance by the Greeks and noticed that the Greeks were stronger on the sea, he started to fear a defeat and asked Mardonios for advice. Mardonios replied that they could switch the attack to the Peloponnese and attack Athens later (*Historiai* 8.100). Pleased with that advice, Xerxes consulted Artemesia alone and asked for her input as well (*Historiai* 8.101). She answered that it would be better that Xerxes withdrew and left Mardonios to lead the battles: should Mardonios lose and die, Xerxes would not have suffered himself, but should Mardonios obtain the victory, the fame and glory would still be Xerxes' as he was the one who sent the military and it were his servants and not Mardonios' who won the battle (*Historiai* 8.102). In this passage here, Herodotos describes how the advice by Artemesia to Xerxes to depart from Greece and leave Mardonios alone to fight the battle pleased him very much, because he was filled with fear for his life. Herodotos adds that even if everyone had advised him to stay, he would have left Greece anyway. The passage refers to a single event in the past but at the moment of speaking the verbs of the counterfactual construction do not refer to an action solely anterior to the events described but also simultaneous to them: when Artemesia speaks to him, Xerxes still has the intention of not staying. The use of the imperfect is noteworthy. On the one hand, one could argue that the fact that the construction does not refer to the past alone caused the present-stem to be used. The form συνεβούλεον could still be interpreted as an *imperfectum de conatu* and describe the (imaginary) attempts made by his entourage to convince him to stay in Greece (this is an unreal situation as Xerxes himself sent his entourage away as he did not want to receive any additional advice, having decided already on what course of action to take), but for ἔμενε an explanation is harder to find. It is true that the simplex verb μένω has 5 aorist forms (2 finite verb forms and 3 participles)¹⁶ against 11 imperfect forms,¹⁷ but that in itself is not sufficient to explain the use of the imperfect

¹⁶ The instances of the participle are *Historiai* 2,121, lines 1824-1825 Wilson, 7,139, line 1743 Wilson, 8, 9, line 99 Wilson.

¹⁷ The instances are *Historiai* 1,169, line Wilson, 1,190, line 2896 Wilson, 3,158, line 2423 Wilson, 4,136, line 1726 Wilson, 4,202, line 2539 Wilson, 5,99, line 1463 Wilson,

here. What is noteworthy, is that the two finite aorist forms of the verb are used in a construction in which the verb is accompanied by an adverbial complement that describes the exact or limited duration of the stay. Of the 59 instances of the present stem of the simplex μένω, only one has an indication of a defined period with it (*Historiai* 1,199, line 3087 Wilson), and that form is a present indicative where an aorist cannot be used. I quote the passage with the present indicative and the two aorist examples below (the aorist verb form is underlined, the present indicative is italicised, the temporal indication is underlined and put in boldface).

ὅσαι μὲν νῦν εἰδεός τε ἐπαμμέναι εἰσὶ καὶ μεγάθεος, ταχὺ ἀπαλλάσσονται,
ὅσαι δὲ ἄμορφοι αὐτέων εἰσὶ, χρόνον πολλὸν προσμένουσι οὐ δυνάμεναι τὸν
νόμον ἐκπλῆσαι: καὶ γὰρ **τριέτεα καὶ τετραέτεα** μετεξέτεραι χρόνον μένουσι.

The ones that have beauty and stature, are quickly freed. The ones among them who do have not a (beautiful) face, stay there a long time as they cannot fulfil the (requirements of the) law and some of them (even) stay a period of three or four years.

In this passage, Herodotos describes a custom at the temple of the Assyrian goddess of love Mylitta. Every Babylonian woman is obliged to undergo once in her lifetime a ritual in which she has to sit down at the temple and accept money from a stranger (whatever the sum may be) and have intercourse with that stranger. Herodotos adds that for the attractive women this ordeal is finished relatively swiftly, but that the less attractive women sometimes have to wait for three or four years. The present indicative μένουσι is used because Herodotos describes here a habit that at the moment of his writing is still in use and therefore an aorist would not have been suited. I now analyse the two aorist forms of μένω.

ἔμειναν δ' ἐν ταύτῃ καὶ εὐδαιμόνησαν ἐπ' ἔτεα πέντε, ὥστε τά <τε ἄλλα>
ἱρὰ τὰ ἐν Κυδωνίῃ ἐόντα νῦν οὗτοί εἰσι οἱ ποιήσαντες καὶ τὸν τῆς Δικτύνης
νηόν. (Herodotos *Historiai* 3.59, lines 927-930 Wilson).

Here they stayed and prospered for five years, so that it was they who erected the other sanctuaries that are now in Kydonie and the temple of Diktyнна.

6,107, line 1351 Wilson, 7,222, line 2880 Wilson, 8,56, line 603 Wilson, 8,103, line 1229 Wilson, 9,6, line Wilson.

This passage describes how Samian conquerors settled in Kydonie in Crete, stayed there for five years in happiness and built many sanctuaries. Here, the aorist ἔμειναν is used because the verb is accompanied by an adverbial component that indicates a precisely determined time period.

ἐστρατήγεε δὲ Λακεδαιμονίων μὲν Εὐαίνετος ὁ Καρήνου ἐκ τῶν πολεμάρχων ἀραιρημένος, γένεος μέντοι ἐὼν οὐ τοῦ βασιλίου, Ἀθηναίων δὲ Θεμιστοκλέης ὁ Νεοκλέος. ἔμειναν δὲ ὀλίγας ἡμέρας ἐνθαῦτα· (Herodotos *Historiai* 7,173, lines 2280-2284 Wilson).

Euainetos son of Karenos was the general of the Lakedaimonians, chosen from among the war-leaders, certainly not being of royal descent, and Themistokles son of Neokles (was the general) of the Athenians. They remained there for only a few days.

In this passage, Herodotos describes how after the Greeks sent an embassy to the Thessalians, they answered that they would join the Greek cause but that the pass over the Olympos would need to be protected, and that protection could only be guaranteed by a large army. In response, the Greeks did indeed send a land army to guard the pass but the Spartan and Athenian generals stayed only a few days there. Here, the aorist ἔμειναν is used because the verb is accompanied by an adverbial component that indicates a short period of time.

It has been observed, first by Strunk and then by many others, that the aorist indicates the start and end of a period, whereas in this specific instance here there is no start nor end date and the action seems to be ongoing.¹⁸ As such, the use of the present stem is expected. In this passage, the choice for the imperfect can thus be explained from an aspectual point of view as well: as there is no clearly delineated period of time added as adverbial complement to the verb μένω in this passage (this also explains the use of the present infinitive μένειν in the same passage), the imperfect ἔμεινε and not the aorist ἔμεινε is used.

¹⁸ This was first stated by Strunk 1971 and then reiterated by Hettrich 1976: 72-73. It could also be found in Mourelatos 1978: 429 and Armstrong 1981, and most recently, in George 2014: 24-26, 2016: 600, Van Emde Boas e.a. 2019: 418 and Nijk 2022: 20-21 but none of them mentioned either Strunk or Hettrich.

Basset 2009 was more skeptical and stated that the use of the aorist in this type of constructions was simply due to the confective nature of the aorist.

3.5. *Historiai* 8.119, lines 1472-1478 Wilson

εἰ γὰρ δὴ ταῦτα οὕτως εἰρέθη ἐκ τοῦ κυβερνήτεω πρὸς Ξέρξην, ἐν μυρίησι γνώμησι μίαν οὐκ ἔχω ἀντίζοον μὴ οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι βασιλέα τοιόνδε, τοὺς μὲν ἐπὶ τοῦ καταστρώματος καταβιβάσαι ἐς κοίλην νέα, ἐόντας Πέρσας καὶ Περσέων τοὺς πρώτους, τῶν δ' ἐρετέων ἐόντων Φοινίκων ὅκως / κῶς οὐκ ἂν ἴσον πλῆθος τοῖσι Πέρσῃσι ἐξέβαλε ἐς τὴν θάλασσαν; ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν, ὥς καὶ πρότερόν μοι εἴρηται, ὁδῶ χρεώμενος ἅμα τῷ ἄλλῳ στρατῷ ἀπενόστησε ἐς τὴν Ἀσίην.¹⁹

For if indeed the pilot had spoken these words to Xerxes in this way, I think that out of ten thousand opinions not one would hold that the king would have bidden the men on deck (who were Persians and of the best blood of Persia) to descend into the ship's hold, and (that he) would have taken from the Phoenician rowers a number equal to the number of the Persians and cast them into the sea. No, Xerxes did as I have already said, and returned to Asia with his army by road.²⁰

When Xerxes and his fleet was crossing the Hellespont, they were suddenly stuck in a fierce storm and were about to capsize. The King then inquired with his pilot what should be done, to which the man answered that there were too many men on board. Xerxes then addressed his direct entourage and asked who of them would be willing to sacrifice himself for his king. As a reaction, many rowers jumped overboard and the threat was averted. The pilot received a golden crown for his heroism but was subsequently decapitated because he caused the death of many Persians. In this chapter, Herodotos voices serious doubts about this story, as the Persian rowers were among the best and it would have been very unwise to lose them (although they were supernumerary and not needed for the steering of the ship nor for the victory in the battle).

He suspected that if this event had really occurred, the Persians would have thrown the Phoinikian rowers into the sea. In this passage, we have two “modal infinitives”, which are underlined and italicised in the passage and are infinitives that would be a modal indicative in direct speech, namely *ποιῆσαι* and *καταβιβάσαι*, one modal indicative in a conditional clause,

¹⁹ The aorist infinitives have been underlined and italicised. The disputed conjunction is italicised without boldface.

²⁰ Own translation.

εἰρήθη, and one indicative in a subordinated complement clause introduced by ὅκως, ἐξέβαλε. All modal forms in this passage are in the aorist, because they refer to single and completed actions, as the storm and the reaction to it occurred only once. While this describes an event in the past, there is thus no need to ascribe temporal value to the aorist forms as they can also be explained from an aspectual point of view.

Although it has no direct influence on the analysis of tense and aspect in this passage, the construction dependent on οὐκ ἔχω is noteworthy and complicated.²¹ As a reviewer of the journal correctly points out, this statement is actually already counterfactual in itself as Herodotos did not look for an opinion on this story, let alone look for ten thousand opinions. Yet, he asserts this as if he had indeed done so. The meaning seems to be that “if the captain had spoken in that manner to the king, the king would never have done what the people tell he did but he would have ordered the Phoinikians to be thrown overboard and the Persians to be brought down into the deck (to compensate for the weight lost by the Phoinikians thrown overboard) and I think that everybody would agree with what I say”. The infinitive μὴ οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι is thus linked with the conditional clause εἰ εἰρέθη and, the infinitive and the conditional clause constitute the counterfactual construction. There seems little doubt about the link between εἰρέθη and ποιῆσαι, but the question is what needs to be done with the other infinitive καταβιβάσαι and the indicative ἐξέβαλε. The infinitive καταβιβάσαι can be accounted for in a relatively straightforward manner but the indicative ἐξέβαλε poses problems. Hermann and Baehr interpreted μὴ οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι as a synonym for οὐκ ἔστιν “it is impossible” and assumed that ὅκως ἐξέβαλε depended on it,²² whereas Matthiae, Krüger, Abicht and Macan assumed that ὅκως ἐξέβαλε depended on οὐκ ἔχω as some type of complement construction after a *verbum cogitandi* or *verbum dicendi*.²³ Matthiae was probably right in assuming that some type of anakolouthon occurred here,²⁴ but stated at the same time that a construction with an infinitive-construction and an indicative with conjunction after *verba cogitandi* or *verba dicendi* was possible. Confronted with the confused syntax of this passage, Pingel admitted

²¹ This was noted in the commentaries by Krüger 1856: 153, Abicht 1866: 88-89, Macan 1908: 546.

²² Hermann 1831: 52, Gaisford & Creuzer & Baehr 1835: 167.

²³ Matthiae 1827: 1267, Krüger 1856: 153, Abicht 1866: 88-89, Macan 1908: 546.

²⁴ Matthiae 1827: 1267. Pingel 1874: 38 accepted that there was some type of anakolouthon here but suggested to change the text after all.

that an *anacolouthon* was possible here but suggested to read κῶς instead of ὅκως,²⁵ as then the last sentence would be interpreted as an independent interrogative clause summarising the event “how would he not have ...”. Macan noted that there were two different constructions (and that μὴ οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι should have been an indicative as well) and considered Pingel’s conjecture *seductive*.²⁶ Stein, followed by How & Wells, stated that the ὅκως ἐξέβαλε clause should actually have been on the same level as καταβιβάσαι and in the infinitive (ἐκβαλεῖν, without ὅκως),²⁷ but that Herodotos made it depend on οὐκ ἔχω and put the verb in a finite form. They thus imply that the construction should actually have been subordinated to μὴ οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι, but, surprisingly enough, neither of them discussed Pingel’s correction.²⁸ Van Groningen also considered this construction to be an *anacolouthon* and argued that instead of ὅκως ἐξέβαλε one would have expected ἐκβαλεῖν.²⁹ Of all the editions published after Pingel’s conjecture, only Wilson adopted it,³⁰ the others preserved the transmitted reading.³¹

Pingel’s correction is indeed very attractive but, as mixed constructions are possible and attested in several authors (as Matthiae had already pointed out), it is maybe better to interpret the construction with the infinitives, namely ποιῆσαι and καταβιβάσαι, and ὅκως ἐξέβαλε as all being dependent on οὐκ ἔχω. In favour of this interpretation argues in my opinion the fact that καταβιβάσαι, which has not been discussed so far in any of the scenarios, is preceded by with τοὺς μὲν ... καταβιβάσαι whereas ὅκως ἐξέβαλε is preceded by τῶν δ’ ἐρετέων ἐόντων Φοινίκων. The two constructions are thus connected with μὲν and δέ, a prototypical Greek manner to mark a coordination between two closely related elements. I see thus no reason to adopt Pingel’s correction.

²⁵ Pingel 1874: 37-38, but he and his suggestion had already been quoted in Madvig 1871: 306, meaning that he must have made the observation earlier.

²⁶ Macan 1908: 546.

²⁷ Stein 1893: 95, How & Wells 1912: 275.

²⁸ Stein 1893: 95 (in his edition of 1871, he did not mention this conjecture, but it is possible that at the time he was still unaware of it, 1871: 342), How & Wells 1912: 275.

²⁹ Van Groningen 1955: 153.

³⁰ Wilson 2015a: 170, 2015b: 761.

³¹ Hude 1909 *on this passage* quoted the reading but did not adopt it while Dietsch & Kallenberg 1928: xxxviii ascribed the correction to Madvig but did not print the correction either (1928: 307). Macan 1908: 546 preserved the transmitted text but considered Pingel’s correction “seductive” (cf. note 25). Legrand 1953: 116 and Rosén 1997: 368 preserved the transmitted reading and did not even mention the correction in their apparatus. Godley 1925: 122 also maintained the transmitted text.

3.6. *Historiai* 8.125, lines 1534-1536 Wilson

ὁ δέ, ἐπεῖτε οὐκ ἐπαύετο λέγων ταῦτα ὁ Τιμόδημος, εἶπε· Οὕτω ἔχει τοι· οὐτ' ἂν ἐγὼ ἐὼν Βελβινίτης ἐτιμήθην οὕτω πρὸς Σπαρτιητέων, οὐτ' ἂν σύ, ὦνθρωπε, ἐὼν Ἀθηναῖος.

And as Timodemus would not stop saying those things, he (sc. Themistokles) said: ‘This is the situation. I would not be honoured / have been honoured among the Spartans in that manner if I came from Belbina nor would you (have been honoured), although you are Athenian.’

After winning the Battle of Salamis, the Greek generals were asked to vote a first and second prize for the leader who had best performed. Each general voted for himself for the first place but nominated Themistokles for the second. No honouring took place, however, and all the generals sailed home to their respective cities. Themistokles did not receive an honour either, and when he went to Sparta, he obtained it there. Upon his arrival, he was welcomed, treated with great respect and celebrated as one of Greece’s saviours. This passage here describes the later response by Themistokles to a certain Timodemus from Aphidna, who was an enemy of Themistokles’ and continuously complained that Themistokles was treated with too much honour by the Spartans and that the actual honours were meant for Athens and not for Themistokles himself. To this, Themistokles replied that if he had come from Belbina, the honours would not have been bestowed upon him but neither would Timodemus have been celebrated, if he had been an Athenian. The (implied) message (also conveyed by Plato *Res Publica* 329e-330a)³² is that Themistokles’ greatness was the reason for the honours as another person leading the Athenians would not have been able to achieve what Themistokles had done. The question is whether aorist ἐτιμήθην only refers to the past or also to the present. It is clear that the statement and also Timodemus’ complaints refer to the honour that Themistokles had already received in Sparta. The aorist does, therefore, refer to the past, but is the temporal reference the only reason for the aorist-use? It refers to a single honorary ceremony for Themistokles and thus describes a single and completed event. For this type of descriptions, the aorist is the normal tense. As such, the use of the aorist can be explained by aspectual factors and there is no need to resort (exclusively) to the temporal explanation.

³² I owe the reference to Plato to an anonymous reviewer of the journal.

3.7. *Historiai* 8.136, lines 1692-1695 Wilson

τούτων δὲ προσγενομένων κατήλιπε εὐπετέως τῆς θαλάσσης κρατήσειν, τὰ περ
ἂν καὶ ἦν, πεζῇ τε ἐδόκεε πολλῶ εἶναι κρέσσων· οὕτω τε ἐλογίζετο κατύπερθε
οἱ τὰ πρήγματα ἔσεσθαι τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν.

If they joined, he seriously hoped to swiftly rule over the sea, which would have been possible; with the infantry he thought to be much more powerful and thus considered that his position was superior to the Greeks.

After their defeat at Salamis, the Persians changed their tactics and Mardonios, a member of the high Persian nobility and a cousin of King Xerxes, considered it more fruitful to have the Athenians on the side of the Persians. He therefore used as go-between Alexandros I, King of Macedonia and Persian subject, to Athens with the goal to “recruit” them (the reasons for doing so are not mentioned in this specific passage but Herodotos stated elsewhere that King Alexandros I was already aiding the Athenians to a certain extent; choosing Alexandros was thus a sensible thing to do). The passage describes how the joining of Athens would make the Persians the undisputed masters of the seas. The passage with ἦν describes a situation simultaneous to Mardonios’ and Alexandros’ hopes of turning the Athenians. It would therefore be tempting to explain the use of the imperfect as temporally motivated, meaning that it was chosen because the irrealis did not refer to an event or state that preceded his attempts but that was simultaneous to it. I agree that this is a convincing argument but would state that the fact that ἦν describes a state of affairs that existed for a while and not a single event or a completed action, explains the use of the present-stem. I would therefore argue that the choice for the imperfect ἦν was motivated by aspectual factors. One could argue that the imperfect ἦν was chosen by default as no aorist is available in the paradigm but as aorist forms can be taken from other verbs such as γίνομαι, with which a suppletive relationship exists, this is not a convincing argument. A reviewer of the journal points out to me that an interpretation as a single event is not to be excluded (“this could have happened”) as the offer made by Mardonios was very exceptional, namely clemency and a set of concessions towards the Athenians (this type of leniency would have been unprecedented in the history of the Persians). If one were to accept that interpretation, ἦν would either be

“neutral” as to aspect or act as an aorist. As an explicit aorist expression for εἰμί is possible by using the aorist forms of γίνομαι, this explanation seems less likely to me.

3.8. *Historiai* 8.140, lines 1769-1773 Wilson

*ἐνορῶ γὰρ ὑμῖν οὐκ οἴοισί τε ἐσομένοισι τὸν πάντα χρόνον πολεμέειν Ξέρξῃ
(εἰ γὰρ ἐνὼρῶν τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν, οὐκ ἂν κοτε ἐς ὑμέας ἦλθον ἔχων λόγους
τούσδε)· καὶ γὰρ δύναμις ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων ἡ βασιλείος ἐστὶ καὶ χεὶρ ὑπερμήκης.*

I see in you that you will not be capable to fight the entire time against Xerxes (if I had seen it in you, I would not have come towards you, speaking these words), and the king's power is above men and his hand is overreaching.

When Alexandros, the envoy sent to Athens by Mardonios (cf. the previous passage), arrives in Athens, he speaks these words trying to convince the Athenians to forgo their resistance to the Persians. He points out that the power of the Persians is much stronger than the Athenians themselves can ever be, that they cannot maintain their resistance for a long time and that the Persian king is omnipresent. The irrealis-construction used here clearly refers to the past, because it describes something that could have prevented the speech from taking place. One could thus argue that the aorist ἦλθον serves the purpose of referring to the past. In that scenario, the imperfect ἐνὼρῶν poses a problem, although – as was noted above – it is often argued that the imperfect can be used in a counterfactual of the past. Even in that scenario, the difference between ἐνὼρῶν and ἦλθον has to be of aspectual nature and the imperfect of ἐνὼρῶν is in need of an explanation. Contrary to normal verbs of “seeing, perceiving”, a form as ἐνὼρῶν does not mean “see, notice”, but “see that something is present in ...”. Contrary to the simplex verb, this verb refers to a durative action without endpoint. Therefore, the imperfect is more suited than the aorist. I would argue that also for ἦλθον an aspectual explanation can be provided and that is unnecessary to assume that ἦλθον as aorist only marked the pastness. This form is constructed with a clear endpoint and refers to a single and completed action, thereby fulfilling all the conditions for the aorist to be used. The choice of the aorist is thus based on aspectual criteria.

Conclusion

In this article, I used Book 8 of Herodotos' *Historiai* as a case study to investigate whether the tense usage in the counterfactual constructions was determined by aspectual or temporal factors. I first briefly discussed tense and aspect in Classical Greek and then provided a short overview of existing scholarship on the tense usage in the counterfactual constructions, summarising most (recent) grammars on Classical Greek have stated on the issue. Then I formulated my *Arbeitshypothese*, which is that the tense usage was aspect-based. After that, I proceeded to the actual passages of Book 8 in which these forms occur. In the process I also discussed textual criticism when necessary. My analyses showed that all instances allowed for an aspectual explanation. The imperfect ἐνόρῳν in 8.140 poses problems for the temporal explanation as the imperfect described an action anterior to that of the aorist and yet not the aorist was used. The imperfect is used in that instance because it refers to durative noting of a certain characteristic in a certain person and does not describe how someone suddenly sees something. Even the aorist ἤλπισε in 8.53, which could seem to be motivated by temporal factors as the expectation or fear has to be anterior to the decision not to guard the Akropolis, can still be accounted for with an aspectual explanation. The instance 8.30 is probably the best example for an aspectual explanation as it shows two verbs in the imperfect referring to an ongoing activity without a clear endpoint.

As conclusion, I would therefore state that also in Herodotos the use of the aorist and imperfect in the irrealis-constructions was not based on tense but on aspect, and that, as a consequence, the aorist is not confined to the so-called irrealis of the past nor is the imperfect to that of the present.

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