A Systemic Functional 'Three-Dimensional' Approach to Aspect

in Thucydides' *Histories* III.

Simon Aerts
UGENT

Ghent University

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Ghent

Master Thesis

A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL
'THREE-DIMENSIONAL' APPROACH TO ASPECT
IN THUCYDIDES' *HISTORIES* III.

Simon Aerts

Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature – main subject Latin - Greek

Advisor: dr. K. Bentein
Co-advisor: prof. dr. M. Janse
2013-2014

Acknowledgements

Nearly one year after the completion of my first Master's dissertation, which dealt with Latin tense and aspect, I have now completed my classical studies with a second dissertation on Ancient Greek aspect. I have learned much since then, and plan to learn much more in the four years that lie ahead. I would like to thank dr. Klaas Bentein, my advisor, in advance, but also for the knowledge he has given me in the past year. I regret that I had not yet heard of the three-dimensional approach when I wrote my first dissertation, but I rejoice in the fact that I have been given the chance to apply it to my research on Latin tense and aspect in the years to come.

I would also like to thank my co-advisor, prof. Mark Janse, who has done so much to help me prepare my PhD application, and who has introduced me in his international network of connections.

I also thank my parents for their patience, their love, and their encouraging words; but most of all, for granting me the opportunity to start and complete yet another year of university studies.

I thank Nick, for keeping me posted on his progress and thereby stimulating my own, and for keeping it light until the end.

Finally, I thank Lobke, for many of the above reasons, and for many more, but most of all, for her endless love and support.

Ghent, 26nd of May 2014

Simon Aerts

Summary in Dutch

Dit werkstuk benadert de semantiek van de verbale categorie 'aspect' in Klassiek (Attisch) Grieks vanuit een systemisch-functionele driedimensionale aanpak. Het corpusmateriaal voor dit onderzoek is boek III van Thucydides' *Historiën*, waaruit tien paragrafen werden geselecteerd ter discussie. De analyse concentreert zich op werkwoorden in hoofdzinnen in de aorist, het imperfectum en het historisch praesens.

Het eerste hoofdstuk behandelt het leven en het werk van Thucydides van Athene, en maakt de vergelijking met Herodotus van Halicarnassus en Xenophon van Athene, gevolgd door een overzicht van de belangrijkste verhaallijnen van boek III.

Het tweede hoofdstuk bevat een bondige literatuurstudie, waarin eerst het algemeen taalkundig kader geschetst wordt, zijnde Systemisch-Functionele Grammatica, gevolgd door een overzicht van de verschillende *Aktionsarten* en manieren om ze te herkennen. In drie opeenvolgende secties wordt verder ingegaan op de verschillende semantische metafuncties of dimensies: (a) de ideationele dimensie (de propositionele inhoud), (b) de tekstuele dimensie (de manier waarop een tekst structuur krijgt), en (c) de interpersonele dimensie (betreffende de relatie tussen spreker/schrijver en toehoorder/lezer). Inzake de categorie *aspect* heeft de ideationele dimensie te maken met (on)begrensdheid en de interactie daarvan met het *Aktionsart*/situatietype van individuele werkwoorden, die resulteert in interpretaties als conativiteit en iterativiteit), de tekstuele dimensie met het onderscheid tussen voorgrond en achtergrond, discourscohesie, anticipatie en crucialiteit, en de interpersonele dimensie met het onderscheid tussen intern en extern perspectief.

In het derde hoofdstuk wordt, door middel van een uitgebreide semantische bespreking van aspectkeuze in tien paragrafen uit het derde boek van de *Historiën*, in de eerste plaats de hypothese nagegaan dat deze metafuncties alledrie nodig maar

ook voldoende zijn om elk gebruik van de aorist, het imperfectum en het historisch praesens in de vertelling van Thucydides te verklaren. Een bijzonder onderdeel hiervan is de noodzaak om steun te vinden voor de interpersonele dimensie als bijkomende factor in de semantische studie van aspect, naast de reeds stevig gevestigde ideationele en tekstuele dimensies. Bovendien wordt gezocht naar de standaarddimensie *in een vertelling*, ook al ligt de ideationele dimensie aan de basis van de twee andere.

Deze discussie levert de volgende conclusies op. Ten eerste blijkt dat het belangrijk is om altijd individuele werkwoordsvormen apart te bespreken, en niet paragrafen als een geheel. Daarnaast is het ook van belang om rekening te houden met een wijdere context en daarvoor over de vaak kunstmatige en misleidende grenzen van de paragraaf heen te kijken.

Ten tweede gaan we akkoord met Allan (2013) dat wat hij de 'displaced diegetic mode' noemt, de standaard 'discourse mode' in historiografische vertelling is. Het resultaat voor de interpretatie van aspect is dat de standaardaspectkeuze gebaseerd is op de tekstuele waarde van 'grounding': het imperfectum schildert gewoonlijk de achtergrond voor een voorgrond in de aorist. Het standaardperspectief is dus het externe gezichtspunt van de verteller.

Ten derde kan deze standaardaspectwaarde van 'grounding' terzijde geschoven worden door een gemarkeerde waarde op het ideationale, interpersonele, of zelfs het tekstuele niveau zelf. Een gebeurtenis op de voorgrond kan bijvoorbeeld toch in het imperfectum voorkomen om iterativiteit, intern perspectief, anticipatie, discourscohesie, of een combinatie van deze waarden weer te geven. Anderzijds kan een achtergrondelement in de aorist voorkomen om expliciet extern perspectief aan te duiden.

Ten vierde bleek dat Allans (2013) drievoudige distinctie tussen extern (aorist), panoramisch (historisch praesens) en intern (imperfectum) perspectief gereduceerd

moet worden tot een onderscheid tussen intern (historisch praesens, imperfectum) en extern (aorist) perspectief. We gaan akkoord met Fanning (1990: 228) dat het verschil tussen historisch praesens en imperfectum in hun ideationele betekenis ligt. Het historisch praesens ontleent zijn waarde van intern perspectief aan de temporele illusie van aanwezigheid op de scene, terwijl het neutraal is wat (on)begrensdheid betreft: de gebeurtenissen vinden simpelweg plaats, in chronologische volgorde, op de voorgrond. Anderzijds ontleent het imperfectum zijn waarde van intern perspectief aan zijn aspectuele waarde van onbegrensdheid: de gebeurtenis wordt bekeken van binnenuit, terwijl ze zich ontwikkelt. Daardoor vinden intern geperspectiveerde gebeurtenissen tezelfdertijd plaats, hetzij als achtergrondelementen, hetzij als zich herhalende cycli van voorgrondgebeurtenissen.

Ten vijfde gaan we akkoord met Allan (2013) dat de interne waarnemer die de gebeurtenissen ervaart, hetzij een menselijke participant, hetzij een virtueel camera-oog kan zijn. De eerste moet effectief in de mogelijkheid verkeren om de gebeurtenissen waar te nemen, de tweede kan over de hele scene heen bewegen en heeft die beperking niet, hoewel de gebeurtenissen wel observeerbaar moeten zijn: wat in het geheim of uit het zicht gebeurt, kan door niets of niemand waargenomen worden.

Ten zesde bleek dat werkwoorden zoals εἰμί, die geen aoristvormen hebben, de betekenis van het imperfectum alleen maar benadrukken. Aangezien Thucydides hoogstwaarschijnlijk een ruime keuze had uit verschillende werkwoorden, kan het imperfectum niet verklaard worden door een gebrek aan aoristvormen.

Ten zevende domineert de ideationele waarde van (on)begrensdheid de tekstuele en interpersoonlijke dimensies in de zin dat (a) gebeurtenissen in de aorist altijd in sequentie plaatsvinden, doch niet altijd in chronologische volgorde, (b) gebeurtenissen in het historisch praesens altijd na elkaar plaatsvinden, in de

volgorde waarin ze verteld worden, en (c) gebeurtenissen in het imperfectum altijd tezelfdertijd plaatsvinden.

Ten achtste moet een motivatie, reden of oorzaak die vanuit een intern perspectief verteld wordt, toegekend worden aan het inzicht van de interne waarnemer. Wanneer de verteller niet akkoord gaat, kan hij tussenkomen met een aorist die zijn eigen mening uitdrukt gebaseerd op zijn volledige kennis van het gebeurde, aangezien hij de gebeurtenissen retrospectief, i.e. vanuit een extern perspectief, kan beoordelen. Die retrospectie verleent hem ook de mogelijkheid om gebeurtenissen samen te vatten of te herformuleren, hoewel deze dan niet op de voorgrond plaatsvinden, maar op de (begeleidende) achtergrond. De voorgrond wordt in dat geval vaak gedragen door imperfectumvormen.

Ten slotte kunnen gebeurtenissen op de voorgrond ook in (temporele) bijzinnen voorkomen. Hoewel deze masterscriptie zich voornamelijk concentreerde op gebeurtenissen in hoofdzinnen, kan in een toekomstig onderzoek het inbegrip van zulke bijzinnen nuttig zijn om de volledige invloed van aspect op een tekst te begrijpen.

Het algemeen besluit is dat de hoofdhypothese van deze masterproef bevestigd wordt. Het werd aangetoond dat het Klassiek-Griekse werkwoord een waaier aan betekenissen kan uitdrukken door middel van de categorie *aspect*. Drie verschillende niveaus van aspectuele betekenissen verlenen het werkwoord een divers betekenispotentieel, waarvan sommige waarden benadrukt en andere uitgesloten worden als resultaat van verschillende interacties met de lexicale betekenis van het werkwoord en met de context.

Table of contents

Word count: 25.753, of which 4.646 constitute text samples from *Histories* III, and their translations.

1. Introduction

1.1. Thucydides' life and works

The sources for this section are: Hornblower (1987), Finley (1967), and Rood (1998).

Thucydides of Athens is widely regarded as the greatest historian of Antiquity. Although three ancient biographies have come down to us, not much is certain. The only irrefutable information is to be found in the *Histories.* He was born around 460 BC as the son of Olorus, a wealthy Athenian citizen of aristocratic descent. He started his *magnum opus* at the outset of the Peloponnesian War, which he followed attentively. He caught the plague in 429 BC, but survived and wrote a very detailed account of the dreadful disease (2.47-54). He was elected *strategos* in 424 BC and served at the coast of Thrace. However, he failed to liberate Amphipolis and was sent to exile for twenty years, where he was able to travel and gather detailed information on the course of the war. He died shortly after his return to Athens, probably before 396 BC.

Thucydides' *Histories* cover the Peloponnesian War, but he was not able to finish his work entirely, which breaks off in the year 411. He started writing during the war, when he was still actively participating on the side of Athens, but other parts were composed after 404. At any rate, the eight books he delivered were revolutionary with respect to both content and style. Thucydides is the first historian who employs a scientific approach and a critical mind. Unlike his predecessor Herodotus (ca. 485-425 BC), he is objective, checks his sources, and never resorts to supernatural powers in his explanations and interpretations of historic events. His narrative is strictly systematic and chronological, and his material is limited to political and military aspects.

The war actually consisted of three conflicts with one shaky truce after another. Thucydides was not given the chance to turn them into a unified whole: he died

suddenly before 396. Thucydides was still working on the first conflict (431-421) when the war started anew, spreading to Sicily (415-413), his account of which he could never fit in the whole. His story of the final conflict in Greece (413-404) ends mid-sentence in 411, leaving the *Histories* unfinished and unrevised.

Usually, when he is merely narrating the course of events, Thucydides' style is clear, direct, and graphic. However, his descriptions of critical events, battles, and speeches are often so concise and condensed that even his contemporaries could hardly understand them. This erudite style was probably influenced by the sofist Gorgias, who was renowned for his literary tropes, and certainly worthy of praise, being as poetic and pregnant as it is difficult and obscure.

Thucydides' speeches, his characteristic way of presenting crucial events and the actors on his stage of history, were inspired by Homer and the Attic drama, and inspired later historiographers of Antiquity. He never claims complete verbal accuracy, but rather composes the speeches himself, putting those words in the speaker's mouth that most befitted the situation (2.22.2). However, Thucydides' words give us a clear idea of the speaker's attitude and character, resulting effectively in a sense of being a spectator on the part of the reader, as Plutarch expressed it. Without adding much comments of his own, Thucydides thus succeeds in making his audience think critically and form judgement for themselves.

Most often Thucydides' merits are expressed in terms of impartiality, trustworthiness, vivid description, sense of contrast, conciseness, epigrammatic sententiousness, reserve, and pathos. He is never a partisan, and if he would not have constantly reminded us, calling himself "Thucydides the Athenian", we might have forgotten what his nationality was. Historians do not always agree with his attitude, but no one contests the truth of his statements as fact. The way he describes battles suggest that he was eyewitness to all of them. He dramatizes history by contrasting events in such a way that his moral concerns are manifest without

explicitly stating them. His condensed language is so rich in meaning that at times a sentence is longer than entire paragraphs, or a word more meaningful than a sentence. Although his reserve is regrettable for many events he could have informed us about and for which we do not have any other witnesses, many do regard it as a great art. As for pathos, no historic account contains so many sublimely narrated passages as Thucydides' *Histories*, where dramatic events and catastrophes seem to occur right in front of our eyes, leaving us dazzled and overwhelmed.

1.2.   Thucydides compared to his contemporaries

The source for this section is Immerwahr & Connor (1985).

With the works of Herodotus and Thucydides, historiography was set apart from poetry and philosophy and became a distinct literary genre in the 5th century BC. The key factors in the creation of this new genre were the great wars of their time, the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War. People began to consider the importance of the past, its influence on the present, and the lessons they could learn from it.

Only great subjects were thought worthy of historical narration, and each of them was to have its own historian. Both Herodotus and Thucydides claimed to be superior to the poet. Rather than invoking the Muse, they emphasised their strict criteria of truth: Herodotus distinguished his subject matter from the poets' legendary times, while Thucydides denigrated their methodology. The function of their histories lay in the acceptance of their narrative by their audience: both of them sought to actively stimulate patriotism, morality, and social values by an understanding of the past. However, where Herodotus tried to influence all the Greeks, Thucydides' audience was more specifically intellectual. Nevertheless, they were both patriotic rather than completely objective.

Herodotus and Thucydides established an exceptionally literary style of narration that would be followed by almost every ancient historian. They often presented events as if they had been there themselves, providing the audience with a look in their characters' minds. The long speeches are particularly representative for their style: their abundance in narrative detail makes us forget that we are not dealing with facts, but with interpretations.

Among the many historians who attempted to imitate Thucydides is Xenophon of Athens (c. 428-354). The similarities between Xenophon's *Hellenica* and Thucydides' *Histories* are particularly their contemporary subject matter, their political interest,

and their austerity. However, although it features powerful passages and signs of psychological detail, the *Hellenica* is not characterised by a single theme or subject: rather than a coherent narrative, Xenophon wrote a *historia perpetua* that could easily have been continued. Remarkably, many important events were excluded from his history, probably by lack of attention, or as a result of flawed selection criteria.

Xenophon paid little attention to the constitutional differences between the states acting in his *Hellenica*, contrary to Herodotus (who was always eager to include ethnographic and constitutional information) and Thucydides, whose main theme revolved around Athenian openness and Spartan conservatism. However, Xenophon did write on this topic in other works by his hand, such as the *Hiero* and the *Politeia of the Lacedaemonians*. Apparently, Xenophon preferred to divide Thucydides' subject matter over different literary forms: the monograph on the Spartan constitution was written in a less pretentious style than his Thucydidean *Hellenica*.

1.3.   *Histories*, book III

In book 1, Thucydides narrates the events taking place on both sides, Athens and Sparta, that led to the war. In book 2, we hear about the first three years of the conflict, from the occupation of Plataea by Thebes in 431 to the siege of the same by Sparta in 429. Book 3 relates the next three years (428-426) and focuses primarily on important strategic areas such as Mytilene (428-427), Plataea and Corcyra (427), and Sicily and north-western Greece (426).

It begins with the revolt of Lesbos against Athens, at the instigation of Mytilene (3.2-6). The Mytileneans present their case at Olympia in a long indictment of Athenian imperialism and submission of other Greeks (3.8-14; speech). Athens sets up a blockade of Mytilene while Sparta promises reinforcements in the next year (3.15-18). In the winter of 428, the Plataeans break out of their besieged city (3.20-24). In the summer of 427, the Mytilenean common people take over and surrender to Athens before Sparta's fleet arrives (3.26-29). The Athenians are very harsh in their punishment of the Mytileneans (3.36), about which there is internal debate (3.37-48; speeches).

Plataea surrenders (3.52) and pleads for Spartan leniency (3.53-59; speech), while Thebes argue for Spartan inclemency toward Plataea (3.60-67; speech). Ultimately, Plataea is razed to the ground (3.68).

Thucydides relates the Corcyrean revolution (3.69-81; 3.85), adding an exhibition of the evils of civil strife (3.82-84). Next, he gives an overview of the situation in Sicily: the allies of Sparta control Sicily and the grain supply, while the Athenian side controls Rhegium and the access to sea (3.86). In the winter of 427, Athens invades the Aeolian islands (3.87-88).

In the summer of 426, there was a tsunami and a series of earthquakes (3.89). Sparta establishes a colony (Heraclea) in Trachis, while Demosthenes, an Athenian

commander, launches two land campaigns in north-western Greece (3.92-93): the first results in an Athenian defeat in Aetolia, but the Athenians also successfully defend Naupactus from land attack (3.94-102); the second campaign, in the winter of 426, against Amphilocian Argos, results in a great victory (3.104-114). The book ends with more operations in Sicily, including an increase of the Athenian reinforcements (3.103; 3.115-116).

1.4.   Scope and development of this paper

It is an almost universally acknowledged fact that aspect is a valid grammatical category for Ancient Greek.[1] However, the exact nature of the aspectual distinction between perfective and imperfective states of affairs has been the topic of much debate. The traditional view that the perfective aspect represents boundedness, whereas the imperfective aspect expresses unboundedness, has already been proven to be insufficient by the theory of grounding: perfective aspect can also be explained as displaying events on the narrative time-line, while imperfective states of affairs depict the scenery or describe the background against which the perfective forms occur. Recent studies, however, including Allan (2013), have pointed out that a combination of these two views still cannot fully account for each verb in Ancient Greek narratives: aspectual oppositions can also indicate the perspective (i.e. internal or external point of view) from which a story is told. This threefold theory of Ancient Greek aspect concurs with Halliday & Matthiessen's (2004) theory of general linguistics, which postulates three levels of meaning: the ideational, the textual, and the interpersonal metafunction or dimension.[2]

It will be the purpose of this paper to solidify the claim that a three-dimensional system should be handled when it comes to aspect in Ancient Greek. To accomplish this goal, we will look at some text samples from Book 3 of Thucydides' *Histories.* The fact that Thucydides' historiographical narrative lends itself perfectly for a case study of aspect may be clear from the many aspectual studies devoted to him.[3]

---

[1] One of the few opponents of aspect is Ruijgh (1991); he supports the theory that the different stems of the Ancient Greek verb primarily express relative tense, which most linguists acknowledge only as a secondary value at best.

[2] See also Fleischman (1989; 1990) and Bentein (2016).

[3] See Michel Buijs' website, featuring an extensive bibliography on tense and aspect in Ancient Greek (accessed most recently on 2014/5/22):

http://vkc.library.uu.nl/vkc/antiquity/knowledgeportal/Wiki/Tense%20and%20Aspect.aspx.

Chapter 2 contains an overview of Ancient Greek aspect according to the three metafunctions as put forth by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004). We will look at a number of key articles and book chapters that discuss these dimensions, starting with the traditional, ideational dimension (De Boel 1991; Fanning 1990), moving on to the textual dimension (Rijksbaron 1986, 1988, 2002, 2011; Bentein 2016), and finishing with an elaboration on the interpersonal dimension (Bakker 1997; Allan 2013). Throughout this chapter we will refer to corresponding theories in general linguistics, such as Fleischman (1989; 1990), Janda (2004), Comrie (1976), Bache (2008), Hopper (1979), de Jong-Van den Berg (2000), and Longacre (1983).

In Chapter 3 we will look at a number of paragraphs from the third book of Thucydides' *Histories*, and try to account for each state of affair using the aforementioned three-dimensional system. We will focus on main clause verbs only, insofar as they are indicative imperfect, aorist, or historical present verbs. The 116 paragraphs[4] that make up the corpus for this paper have been tagged and marked for the following criteria: (a) verb tense (aorist, imperfect, present), mood (indicative), and voice (active, medial, passive, medio-passive[5]) of the individual main clause verbs; (b) psychological impact of the events; and (c) predominance of a single verb tense vs. equal distribution of verb tenses. We will discuss the relevance of these criteria further on in this paper.

---

[4] The following paragraphs in direct speech were excluded from the analysis: 3.9-14, 3.30, 3.37-40, 3.42-48, 3.53-59, 3.61-67.

[5] The medial and passive voice were analysed together for verbs formed on the present aspect stem.

2.   Status Quaestionis: Aspect in Ancient Greek linguistics

In the following chapter, we will look at the category of aspect in Ancient Greek in accordance with the functional model of language used by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) and Fleischman, "according to which sentences realize meanings located in three interdependent components: the referential or propositional, the textual or discourse component, and the expressive component." (Fleischman, 1989: 1)

> Briefly, the referential[6] component is concerned with the propositional content of utterances (referential meanings, grammatical functions); the textual component includes all the resources available in a language for creating and organizing discourse that coheres within itself ('text') and with its situation content, and for signalling information relevant to the structure of the text itself (e.g., relative saliency of different segments of the discourse – 'grounding'); the expressive[7] component includes linguistic devices relating to the social, affective, and conative functions of language: its resources for expressing personal attitudes toward what is being talked about, toward the text itself, and toward the participants in the communicative transaction. (1989: 1-2)

An interesting preliminary digression is the work of Janda (2004), who studies Russian and Slavic aspect from a cognitive linguistic point of view. She recognises the distinction between discrete solid objects and fluid substances as the cognitive basis for the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect in human language. A detailed description of her theory would lead us to far, but of special importance for this study is the fact that she divides the characteristics of matter and aspect in three dimensions as well: "inherent properties" (e.g. boundedness, wholeness, exterior vs. interior reference), interactions of matter and discourse structure (e.g. sequencing vs. simultaneity, grounding); human interactions with matter and pragmatic structure (e.g. successful completion vs. frustration). (Janda, 2004: 478-479). The fact that Janda's version of the interpersonal dimension does not

---

[6] Termed 'ideational' in this paper.
[7] Termed 'interpersonal' in this paper.

correspond to our interpretation (cf. infra) does not detract from the importance of the threefold distinction she puts forward in her model of aspectuality.

Before we begin our discussion of Ancient Greek aspect, it is of vital importance to expand on the concept of *Aktionsart*. An exploration of *Aktionsart* is necessary for the purpose of this paper, as will become clear from our discussion of the ideational dimension of Ancient Greek aspect in section 2.1. For now, let us have a look at a number of ways to identify the *Aktionsart* of a state of affairs.

Most scholars would agree on the subdivision of states of affairs into states and non-states: states do not change throughout their duration and lack agency, while non-states require constant input of energy to continue. Non-states can be further subdivided into atelic activities and telic events[8]: the latter have a culminative phase, and are able to finish as well as merely stop or cease. Finally, telic situations comprise non-punctual accomplishments and punctual achievements: the latter refers only to the culmination phase, without mention of the activity that precedes it.[9] (Binnick, 1991: 180-195)

Concerning the difference between states and non-states, Binnick (1991: 173-174) states:

1. Only non-statives occur in the progressive:

    *John is knowing the answer.

    John is running.

---

[8] In this paper, the term 'event' is never used to refer to telic states of affairs, but always in its common sense of 'something that happened'.

[9] See also Fanning (1990: 128-129). However, we should be aware of certain limitations to any classification of verbs with respect to *Aktionsart*. As Fanning (1990: 127-128) puts it: "First, it must be noted that these features of meaning are characteristic ultimately of entire *propositions* or sentences, and not of the verb alone, although the verb is central. ... Second, it is important to emphasize that no verb is entirely uniform in its actional behaviour, although some verbs are more stable than others. ... Third, these categories apply primarily to propositions describing *specific* situations. Statements about repetitions and general occurrences behave differently in regard to aspect-function ..."

John is building a house ...

2. When an activity or accomplishment occurs in the simple present tense (or any non-progressive tense), it has a frequentative (or habitual) interpretation in normal contexts ...

John knows the answer. (right now)

John runs. (habitual)

John recites a poem. (habitual) ...

7. The [*Aktionsarten*] act differently as complements of the aspectual auxiliary verbs. Statives do not normally occur with aspectual auxiliary verbs such as *start, stop, finish,* though they do so occur in a habitual or frequentative sense ...

Joan started being ill (all the time).

stopped being ill (all the time).

*finished being ill.

Activities and accomplishments are different in the following features (Binnick, 1991: 175-176):

1. Whereas accomplishment verbs take adverbial preposition phrases with *in* but only very marginally with *for,* activity verbs allow only the phrases with *for:*

?John painted a picture for an hour.

John painted a picture in an hour.

John walked for an hour.

*John walked in an hour ...

4. For activity verbs, *x VERBed for y time* entails that at any time during *y, x VERBed* was true. For accomplishment verbs, *x VERBed for y time* does not entail that *x VERBed* was true during any time within *y* at all. *John walked for an hour* entails that during that hour it was true that *John walked. John painted a picture for an hour* does not entail that during that hour it was true that *John painted a picture.*

5. For activity verbs, *x is (now) VERBing* (or *x VERBs,* this latter too with statives) entails that *x has VERBed.* For accomplishment verbs, *x is (now) VERBing* entails that *x has not yet VERBed. John is painting* entails that *John has painted. John is ill* entails that *John has been ill. John is painting a picture* entails that *John has not yet painted a picture ...*

7. For activity verbs, *x stopped VERBing* entails that *x did VERB*, but for accomplishments, *x stopped VERBing* does not entail *x VERBed* but only *x was VERBing*. *John stopped walking* implies *John did walk. John stopped painting a picture* does not imply *John did paint a picture,* but only *John was painting a picture*.

8. Only accomplishment verbs can normally occur as the complement of the verb *finish.*

> John finished painting a picture.

> *John finished walking.

Finally, achievements differ from accomplishments in these traits (Binnick, 1991: 177):

1. Although accomplishments allow both *for*-phrase and *in*-phrase time adverbials with equal success, achievements are generally strange with a *for*-phrase.

> John noticed the painting in a few minutes.

> ??John noticed the painting for a few minutes ...

4. Unlike accomplishment verbs, achievements are generally unacceptable as complements of *finish*:

> *John finished noticing the picture.

> John finished painting the picture.

5. *Stop* occurs with achievements only in a habitual sense: *John stopped noticing the picture* can only mean that he was broken of the habit of noticing the picture, not that he "finished" noticing the picture on a certain occasion.

The same is true of *start*: *Joan started noticing the lint on her suit* can only have a progressive or frequentative/habitual sense: over a period of time she noticed more and more lint, or she over and over again had occasion to notice lint, on her suit.

With achievements, but not accomplishments, *start VERBing* entails *VERBed:* if Joan started winning the race at 12:01, she must have won the race. But if she started painting a picture at 12:01, she didn't necessarily ever paint a picture.

2.1. The ideational dimension (boundedness-unboundedness): De Boel (1991); Fanning (1990)

According to De Boel, the interaction between aspect and *Aktionsart* is fundamental to the interpretation of aspect on the ideational level.[10] He defines *Aktionsart* as the portion of the state of affairs in reality described by the verb: it is part of the inherent, lexical meaning of the verb, which remains constant in all its morphological forms.[11] Aspect, on the other hand, is not lexical in nature, but rather morphological and grammatical: in languages where aspect is a meaningful category, it can be expressed by any verb, within its own paradigm. (De Boel, 1991: 386)

Aspect is basically a matter of which point of view is taken by the speaker with regard to a state of affairs that occurred in the past.[12] When the speaker regards the state of affairs from the outside, the state of affairs is in his field of vision *as a whole*, the duration of the action being irrelevant. The speaker merely states the fact of that state of affairs: he summarises it, relating it as an event. In this case he uses the perfective aspect[13], expressed by the aorist aspect stem in Ancient Greek. However, when the speaker displaces himself inside the state of affairs, in his imagination, he describes it from the inside, in its course or development. In this case he uses the

---

[10] See also Bache (2008: 109): "Though aspect and [*Aktionsart*] are thus in principle separate categories, and should be kept separate in our metalanguage, they enter a complex relationship in terms of compatibility and incompatibility which serves as a basis for a dynamic categorical interplay."

[11] Compare with Bache (2008: 109): "The general category actionality thus concerns the classification of processes into types according to the phasal (or procedural) characteristics that we assign to them." Note the variety in linguistic terminology for *Aktionsart* (actionality) and states of affairs (situations, processes).

[12] Compare with Comrie (1976: 3): "As a general definition of aspect, we may take the formulation that aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation." See also Fanning (1990: 124).

[13] Compare with Comrie (1976: 3): "[Perfective aspect] presents the totality of the situation referred to ... without reference to its internal temporal constituency, the whole of the situation is presented as a single, unanalysable whole, with beginning, middle and end rolled into one; no attempt is made to divide this situation up into the various individual phases that make up the action …" See also Fanning (1990: 124).

imperfective aspect[14], expressed by the present aspect stem in Ancient Greek. (De Boel, 1991: 387)

First, verb forms made with the present aspect stem generally cannot refer to achievements, since a speaker cannot situate himself in the course of a courseless situation.[15] One important counterexample is when in certain circumstances a series of achievements in the past is described as a single activity, i.e. iterativity.[16] For instance, iterativity can result from a multiple direct object, or from a multiple subject.[17] (De Boel, 1991: 389-392)

Second, De Boel states that the interference of aorist aspect and accomplishments is the reason for the traditional view that the aorist has perfective value *per se*. In reality, the aorist aspect expresses a complete action, which has not necessarily been completed (note the crucial difference between "complete" and "completed"). Contrary to what some linguists believe, the aorist aspect does not emphasise the culmination phase of the accomplishment more than any other phase, but merely presents the different phases together, as a whole. The completion is only conveyed if the action is situated in the past: the whole of an action which leads to a completion,

---

[14] Compare with Comrie (1976: 4): "[Imperfective aspect makes] explicit reference to the internal temporal constituency of the situation …, while there is no explicit reference to the beginning or to the end of [the situation]."

[15] Note that Fanning (1990: 155, 158-159) divides achievements even further into 'climaxes' and 'punctuals': the former are the momentary culmination of a separate process (expressed by a different lexeme) which is its preface, while the latter have no such approach-phase. Because of their resemblance to accomplishments, climaxes in the present aspect usually indicate conativity, focussing on the prefaced action as in progress, without the actual climax being reached, e.g. *She was finding her coat*. In the aorist aspect, both climaxes and punctuals very naturally convey the complete and momentary occurrence of the action, leaving any approach-phases out of consideration.

[16] See also Fanning (1990: 160-161).

[17] See also Fanning (1990: 164-166).

and its being presented as having indeed occurred, necessarily contains that completion.[18] (De Boel, 1991: 393)

The present aspect, on the other hand, describes an accomplishment as having not yet been fully realised. If the accomplishment expresses an intentional action (i.e. an action controlled by the will of the subject, of which the endpoint is the subject's goal), the present aspect can receive a conative meaning. De Boel notes that the imperfect in itself does not have this meaning: both the intentional character of the action and the goal which the subjects aims at, are given by the lexical meaning of the verb; the imperfect merely adds the information that the action is still in its course, and that the goal has not yet been realised.[19] (De Boel, 1991: 393)

Third, Fanning explains that the present aspect is the most natural option for activities; "the result is a sense of cutting into a process at some point as it is unfolding, with part of the process stretching out before and part running on after the point at which it is viewed ... Even though there is no endpoint indicated, the action is not thought of as 'incomplete', since an activity does not have a natural or expected endpoint." (Fanning, 1990: 145-146).

With the aorist aspect, activities denote a limited stretch of time during which the action took place, but there is no consummation. The action is merely described as 'done', not 'done to completion'. The end of the action is an arbitrary limit, not an absolute conclusion or culmination. (Fanning, 1990: 147)

Fourth, the standard aspect for states is again the present aspect: "it denotes the *continuing existence* of the subject in the condition indicated by the verb." (Fanning, 1990: 137). In the aorist aspect, states usually convey an ingressive sense: the subject of the clause enters into the condition indicated by the verb, which shifts to an active

---

[18] Compare with Fanning (1990: 152-153): "Duration is implied but the more important point is that the action is viewed as *completed.* Again, this completion may be of minor significance (showing a sequenced event in narrative) or it may reflect a major point of the description."
[19] See Fanning (1990: 152).

verb. Ingressivity is caused by the focus on both beginning and endpoint, indicated by the aorist aspect. (Fanning, 1990: 137-138)

2.2. The textual dimension (foreground-background; discourse cohesion; anticipation): Rijksbaron (1986; 1988; 2002; 2011); Bentein (2016)

In his chapter on the use of the imperfect and aorist indicative in narrative texts, Rijksbaron (2002) explains the textual dimension of aspect in Ancient Greek. He says (2002: 11):

> Since the *imperfect* characterizes the state of affairs as 'not-completed' it creates a framework within which other states of affairs may occur, while the *aorist indicative* characterizes the state of affairs as 'completed', as a mere event. This difference in value between imperfect and aorist indicative is significant for the way in which a story is told. The imperfect creates a certain expectation on the part of the reader/hearer: what else happened?; the aorist indicative, on the other hand, does not have this effect: the state of affairs has simply occurred.

These values lend themselves to various purposes on what he calls the "micro-level, i.e. the level of a small scale narrative unit" (1988: 249-250): the aorist indicative can serve to express states of affairs located within a framework indicated by imperfect verbs; a series of imperfect forms can "paint a scene," describing a number of simultaneous states of affairs; and a sequence of aorist forms can describe a series of successive states of affairs.[20] (2002: 11-13)

Focussing on the grounding value of aspect, he says that the imperfect creates a temporal framework in which aorist states of affairs can occur, "serving as their time-

---

[20] Hopper (1979: 213) notes: "One finds … a tendency for punctual verbs to have perfective aspect (i.e., to occur in foregrounded sentences) and conversely for verbs of the durative/stative/iterative types to occur in imperfective, i.e. backgrounded, clauses. … Foregrounded clauses generally refer to events which are dynamic and active. Furthermore, the sequencing of these clauses usually imposes the constraint that a foregrounded event is contingent on the completion of a prior event. The tendency for foregrounded events to have punctual verbs follows as a probability from these two factors, but it is by no means a requirement."

anchor." The aorist verbs, which express completed events, are therefore to be seen as simultaneous with the imperfect states of affairs.[21] (1988: 249)

Apart from its function on the micro-level, Rijksbaron claims that the basic semantic value of the imperfect aspect has another effect at the "macro-level, the level of large-scale narrative units," sc. that of discourse cohesion: by creating a framework, the imperfect indicates that the narrative has not yet been completed, and raises the expectation that the author has yet to relate other states of affairs within the current framework. (2002: 13)

Rijksbaron (1986: 223) also notes that the historical present takes up a special position with respect to discourse cohesion: it indicates that a certain action is of special importance for the rest of the story. In a more recent paper, he mentions some syntactic and semantic features of the historical present which clearly indicate this value of 'decisiveness': (2011: 10): (a) stative verbs do not occur in the historical present, since their semantic value restricts them to providing background information; (b) historical presents occur rarely in the passive voice, since decisive events normally require an Agens rather than a Patient; (c) historical presents rarely occur in subordinate clauses, since decisive events typically occur at the highest hierarchical level; (d) historical presents are rarely negated, since non-events are unlikely to be decisive; (e) sentences featuring historical presents rarely begin with the particle γάϱ, because the main function of γάϱ is to provide backgrounded material. Rijksbaron (2011: 16-17) also emphasises that all the authors who contributed to the volume in question, agree on this value of decisiveness.

---

[21] Hopper (1979: 219-220) notes that the function of aspect considered from a discourse perspective is "to guide the language user through a text. … The aspects pick out the main route through the text and allow the listener (reader) to store the actual events of the discourse as a linear group while simultaneously processing accumulations of commentary and supportive information which add texture but not substance to the discourse itself. Aspect can therefore be likened to a 'flow-control mechanism.'"

Finally, Bentein (2016) postulates another textual value of the imperfect, which is to be situated in between Rijksbaron's micro-level and macro-level. Verbs of communication, which often anticipate some kind of answer, and verbs of movement, which precede the arrival at some destination, are likely to receive a reaction (in the broad sense of the word) on much shorter notice than the cohesive value described by Rijksbaron. Therefore, this final value of 'anticipation' should be clearly distinguished from the value of discourse cohesion.

2.3.   The interpersonal dimension (perspective; discourse mode): Bakker (1997); Allan (2013).

Bakker is one of the first linguists to focus on the interpersonal dimension of aspect in Ancient Greek.[22] In his article, he proposes a view on aspect that is different from the traditional distinction between unbounded and bounded states of affairs. According to Bakker, the need for such a view on aspect results from the fact that the traditional view on aspect cannot by far account for all occurrences of perfective and imperfective forms. There are both bounded imperfects and unbounded aorists in Ancient Greek narratives, and the theory of grounding suffers counter examples as well. Therefore, a combination of only the ideational and textual dimensions cannot sufficiently explain every form in Ancient Greek historiographical narrative, or even beyond this genre. The solution is the introduction of the dimension of point of view (i.e. the interpersonal dimension). (Bakker, 1997: 16)

However, since it is the most recent and most elaborate approach of this topic, we will concentrate on Allan's discussion of discourse modes in Thucydides' narrative, which partially builds on Bakker's analysis of the same (cf. infra). Allan distinguishes four discourse modes, each of them characterised by a distinct aspectual choice.[23]

   a) Two diegetic modes: the displaced and immediate mode

Allan divides Bakker's diegetic mode into a displaced diegetic mode and an immediate diegetic mode. Together, they form the 'backbone' of a narrative, presenting a sequence of states of affairs connected by a consequential relation, usually in chronological order. (Allan, 2013: 373)

---

[22] Note that Bakker and Allan never refer to a three-dimensional approach as put forth by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) and Fleischman (1989; 1990). The idea to apply Halliday's model to Ancient Greek linguistics, combining Bakker and Allan's more recent research with that of linguists like De Boel, Fanning, and Rijksbaron, stems from Bentein (2016).

[23] Allan discusses other linguistic phenomena as well, but the present study is interested in aspect only.

In the displaced diegetic mode, there is a distance between the time of narration and the time of the story, allowing the narrator to be in control of his narrative: his ability to look back on what happened, i.e. his external point of view or perspective, provides him with perfect knowledge of the complexity of the story. Therefore, the distinction between foreground and background – and thus the use of aorist and imperfect – is typical for the displaced diegetic mode. The narrator's omniscience further permits him access to his characters' state of mind ('embedded focalization'). (Allan, 2013: 373-375).

In the immediate diegetic mode, the author uses the historical present tense to create the illusion of immediacy[24], i.e. the illusion that there is no distance between perceiving and narrating the events. As a result, the narrator's role as a mediating voice is downplayed: he pretends to be a neutral observer/reporter of the facts that are unfolding before his eyes. There is only narratorial, non-actorial focalization: the narrator assumes a position 'on top of the hill', where he has a panoramic overview of the events. (Allan, 2013: 375-377).

(b) Descriptive mode

In the descriptive mode, a scene is scanned by an internal point of view. It is characterised by the use of the imperfect tense, whose ideational function of presenting a state of affair in its unfolding makes it especially suitable for the painting of a scene. This visualizing effect of the descriptive mode is especially relevant with respect to Thucydides' ability for depicting battle scenes, which involve a certain degree of internal dynamism. However, where the aorist and historical present tenses of the diegetic mode present the events as completed, the imperfect tense of the descriptive mode presents them as ongoing, with the effect that the action is not propelled forward: there is simultaneity rather than sequentiality. (Allan, 2013: 377-379)

---

[24] See also Rijksbaron (2002: 22).

The descriptive mode can involve both narrator and embedded focalization. In the first case, the narrator adopts the perspective of a virtual, non-human "camera-eye", e.g. when he zooms in on both sides on the battlefield. In the second case, he adopts the perspective of a specific character or group of characters, e.g. when he describes the perceptible events on a battlefield from one side of the battlefront.[25] In the case of the latter, the psychology and subjective viewpoint of that group or individual are important. (Allan, 2013: 378-382)

Allan clarifies that his descriptive mode must be distinguished from Bakker's mimetic mode, despite the obvious similarities such as the use of the imperfect tense and internal perspective. The most important difference lies in the fact that Allan employs yet another discourse mode involving an observing narrator, viz. the immediate diegetic mode: "the immediate diegetic mode is used to record dynamic sequences of events in a relatively straightforward manner, whereas the descriptive mode portrays scenes of simultaneously occurring states and activities, often abounding with various kinds of sensory details." (Allan, 2013: 382-383)

In Bakker's mimetic mode, on the other hand, imperfect verbs carry the narrative forward, forming a descriptive, visualizing foreground or 'foregrounded description' (i.e. narration from the internal perspective of an observer on the spot), while aorist verbs serve as background, representing information known to the historian and given as explanation to what is shown by the imperfect verbs (i.e. narration from the external perspective of the historian). (Bakker, 1997: 29, 43-44)

---

[25] Compare with de Jong – Van den Berg (2000: 80-81, 102-103, as paraphrased in Bentein, 2016): "The external point of view [conveyed by the perfective aspect] can be associated with the narrator's perspective, ... the internal point of view with a character's perspective [conveyed by the imperfective aspect]. In the latter case, we may distinguish between the point of view of a concrete character versus that of a virtual character."

(c) Discursive mode

Allan's fourth narrative mode is less relevant to the present study. It suffices to say that it is primarily used for authorial comments on the events, on his act of writing, on his methodology, on the structure of his narrative, or on his status as a writer. It allows the use of the present, perfect and future tenses, since the reference point in the discursive mode is the *hic et nunc* of the author. It also allows other moods such as the imperative, and other forms of illocution such as questions, exclamatives, and directives.

This alternation between discourse modes can be linked to Longacre's (1983) treatise on discourse analysis. He distinguishes between seven 'discourse units', but most essential for the present study is the concept of 'Peak', which corresponds to the Climax and the Denouement of a certain episode. The transition to the Peak of a narrative episode may be indicated by a change in verb tense:

> Routine features of the event-line may be distorted or phased out at Peak. Thus, the characteristic event-line tense/aspect may be substituted by another tense/aspect. Alternatively, the characteristic tense/aspect of the main line of a discourse may be extended to unexpected uses at Peak. (Longacre, 1983: 25)

There are two main consequences of such a verbal substitution: changing to the present aspect or tense may lead to a "heightened vividness" (Longacre, 1983: 28) or a "change in vantage point", i.e. "by whom do we stand, through whose eyes do we view the story?" (Longacre, 1983: 35). Clearly Longacre's change in vantage point is quite similar to Allan and Bakker's change of perspective, if not identical.

2.4.   Conclusion

As we have seen in this brief discussion, there are three main 'levels' for the interpretation of aspect in Ancient Greek narrative texts. On the ideational level, the basic aspectual opposition between unboundedness (viewing a state of affairs in its development) and boundedness (viewing a state of affairs as a complete whole) interacts with the *Aktionsart* of verbs (states, activities, accomplishments, achievements), leading to such values as iterativity, conativity, and ingressivity. On the textual level, the opposition bounded-unbounded gives rise to the values of grounding, discourse cohesion, and anticipation.

Recently it was found that these two views of aspect, sc. the bounded-unbounded opposition and the foreground-background distinction, cannot adequately account for all occurrences of aspectual oppositions in Ancient Greek narratives: a third dimension is necessary to explain bounded or foregrounded imperfects, and unbounded or backgrounded aorists.

In accordance with the general linguistic model of Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) and Fleischman (1989; 1990), Bakker (1997) introduces the interpersonal dimension to the study of aspect, concretised in the notion of 'perspective'. According to his study of Thucydides' narrative, certain occurrences of perfective and imperfective aspect can only be explained on the interpersonal level. Particularly relevant are passages where the psychology of the characters and the emotional reaction of the reader are of high importance. In such cases, the historian is likely to switch to what Bakker calls the 'mimetic mode', in which aorist verbs convey external perspective (i.e. narratorial intrusions), and imperfect verbs convey internal perspective (i.e. the point of view of an observer on the spot).

In a more recent article, Allan (2013) proposes a rather different approach to the concept of discourse mode. In his displaced diegetic mode, the distinction between foreground (aorist) and background (imperfect) indicates external perspective and

narratorial control. The immediate diegetic mode is marked by the historical present and panoramic perspective: the illusion is created that the narrator reports on the events from a position 'on top of the hill', as they happen in chronological order before his eyes. In the descriptive mode, the imperfect signals internal perspective: the events are viewed through either a virtual, non-human camera-eye that shifts over the scene (rather than by the narrator himself, pretending to be at the scene)[26], or through the eyes and ears of a specific character (or characters).

However, where Allan claims that the imperfect tense typically conveys a series of simultaneous states and activities, I would like to argue with Bakker that it can also be used to express foregrounded events in a very descriptive way, i.e. events that carry the narrative forward and therefore happen in chronological order. Often in the description of battle scenes with imperfect verbs, one event is a reaction on or a result of another event, so these cannot be regarded as merely simultaneous. Rather, they should be viewed as recurring cycles of events: the events themselves do not occur at the same time (e.g. Spartan taunting is followed by Athenian advancing, after which the Spartans draw back), but the whole of those events iterates over a certain period of time. Therefore, I do not think that temporal progression may be excluded from the descriptive mode.[27]

Another point on which I disagree with Allan is the sharp distinction he postulates between the use of the historical present tense on the one hand, and the imperfect tense on the other. In my opinion, there is a strong resemblance between the two, at least as far as the interpersonal dimension is concerned. Both tenses create the illusion that we are experiencing the events through the eyes or lens of a human or

---

[26] Cf. note 25: I agree with de Jong – van den Berg rather than with Allan on this point, and will reserve terms like 'narrator focalization' and 'perspective of the narrator' for the external perspective conveyed by the aorist aspect.

[27] There is a difference between the description of stationary entities on the one hand (such as sceneries, cities, objects, or persons) and descriptions of dynamic entities on the other (such as battle scenes): the latter usually do involve temporal progression.

non-human observer on the spot. However, where the imperfect tense indicates that these events were in their progress (either as individual ongoing states of affairs or as recurring cycles of states of affairs), the historical present tense implies that the internally perspectivised events simply occur one after another, as a whole.[28]

In the next chapter, a series of paragraphs from Thucydides' *Histories* III will be examined with respect to the theory discussed in Chapter 2. A selection has been made from the corpus material that aims to represent all of the possible values of Ancient Greek aspect, on all three levels of meaning. However, since the interpersonal dimension is a more controversial and more recent domain in the study of aspect, the ideational and textual dimension will receive slightly less attention in this relatively limited paper. Therefore, the selection of text samples for analysis was often inspired by the presence of events that have a significant psychological impact on the participants or the audience, or by the predominance of either the imperfect or the historical present tense: both of these factors are possible indications of internal perspectivization.

Nevertheless, more important than our aim to prove the validity of the interpersonal dimension, is our claim that all three metafunctions or dimensions (ideational, textual, and interpersonal) are sufficient but also necessary to account for all of the individual main clause verbs in the text. The basic semantic value of the present and aorist aspects in Ancient Greek is the ideational meaning of unboundedness vs. boundedness. This opposition has led to opposite values on two other levels of meaning: (a) a textual meaning of background vs. foreground, discourse cohesion, and anticipation; and (b) an interpersonal meaning of internal vs. external

---

[28] See Fanning (1990: 228): "[A]s most acknowledge, the historical present appears more frequently as a substitute for the *aorist* in recording an event in simple, not progressive, narration. It occasionally occurs in places where an imperfect seemingly would be used, but this simply illustrates its aspectually neutral meaning." However, there is considerable disagreement among linguists about the aspectual nature of the historical present tense. For more information, see e.g. Basset (2011), Weinrich (1964), and Kiparsky (1968).

perspective. This paper aims to apply this three-dimensional approach to the selected text excerpts, to find out what the default metafunction is *in narrative,* and to demonstrate the balanced interplay between all three levels of meaning.

3. Case study: *Histories* III

The translations of these passages are from Smith (1975), adapted if necessary to serve the purposes of this paper.

3.1. The Mytilenean Revolt and the Siege of Plataea (3.1-50)

[1]

In the first main episode of his third book, Thucydides narrates the revolt of (part of) Lesbos from Athens. He starts by explaining why the revolt was expedited by the Mytileneans (3.2) and how the Athenians responded by sending a fleet (3.3). After a short battle at sea, both sides concluded a truce, after which Mytilene sent envoys to both Athens and Sparta (3.4). When the Athenian embassy turned out a failure, the revolt started anew, but the Mytileneans decided to wait for Spartan reinforcements (3.5).

> οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι πολὺ ἐπιρρωσθέντες διὰ τὴν τῶν Μυτιληναίων ἡσυχίαν ξυμμάχους τε **προσεκάλουν**, οἳ πολὺ θᾶσσον παρῆσαν ὁρῶντες οὐδὲν ἰσχυρὸν ἀπὸ τῶν Λεσβίων, καὶ περιορμισάμενοι τὸ πρὸς νότον τῆς πόλεως **ἐτείχισαν** στρατόπεδα δύο ἑκατέρωθεν τῆς πόλεως, καὶ τοὺς ἐφόρμους ἐπ᾽ ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς λιμέσιν **ἐποιοῦντο**. καὶ τῆς μὲν θαλάσσης **εἶργον** μὴ χρῆσθαι τοὺς Μυτιληναίους, τῆς δὲ γῆς τῆς μὲν ἄλλης **ἐκράτουν** οἱ Μυτιληναῖοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι Λέσβιοι προσβεβοηθηκότες ἤδη, τὸ δὲ περὶ τὰ στρατόπεδα οὐ πολὺ **κατεῖχον** οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι, ναύσταθμον δὲ μᾶλλον ἦν αὐτοῖς πλοίων καὶ ἀγορὰ ἡ Μαλέα. καὶ τὰ μὲν περὶ Μυτιλήνην οὕτως **ἐπολεμεῖτο**. (3.6)

Meanwhile the Athenians, much encouraged by the inactivity of the Mytileneans, **summoned** *(impf.)* their allies, who appeared more quickly as they saw nothing energetic on the part of the Lesbians, and, having placed their ships at anchor round the southern part of the town, **reinforced** *(aor.)* two encampments on either side of the town, and **set up** *(impf.)* the blockades against both harbours. Thus they **excluded** *(impf.)* the Mytileneans from the use of the sea; but the Mytileneans and the other

Lesbians, who had now come to their aid, **dominated** *(impf.)* the rest of the island, while the Athenians **held** *(impf.)* the small strip in the neighbourhood of their camps, and the station for boats and supplies **was** *(impf.)* Malea rather than their camps. In such a way the Mytilenean war **was fought** *(impf.)*.

The first imperfect verb, προσεκάλουν 'to summon' is an event on the narrative time-line, but does not occur in the aorist aspect. However, the ideational dimension offers a solution here: 'to summon' is in itself an achievement, but the plural, unspecified direct objective ξυμμάχους 'allies' gives rise to an iterative meaning, which necessitates the imperfect tense.

The next verb, ἐτείχισαν 'to reinforce', is a telic accomplishment on the narrative time-line, and therefore occurs very naturally in the aorist aspect on both the ideational and the textual level. Although the direct object of ἐτείχισαν (στρατόπεδα δύο 'two encampments') is plural as well, Thucydides apparently did not think of 'the reinforcing of two encampments' as a repeated action, but rather as a single whole.[29] Contrast also the specificness of στρατόπεδα δύο with the unspecificness of ξυμμάχους. Moreover, Thucydides' choice for a verb with the meaning 'to reinforce' rather than 'to build' suggests that he did not want to imply ongoingness of the construction, but rather its swift completion. Therefore, there is no ideational reason to change the aspect of ἐτείχισαν.

The next verb, ἐποιοῦντο, occurs in the imperfect tense, despite the fact that it is a foregrounded event. Again, a solution is offered by the ideational dimension. Although the lexeme ποιέω 'to make, to bring about' is essentially an atelic activity, an inherent endpoint is added by the specific direct object τοὺς ἐφόρμους 'the blockades' (further specified by ἐπ᾽ ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς λιμέσιν 'against both of the

---

[29] Cf. Fanning (1990: 167-168): "The *aorist* sums up the distributive occurrences as a whole, in a composite of the various occurrences viewed from the outside, and thus pays less attention to the individual parts which make up the total situation."

harbours'), turning the entire state of affairs into a telic accomplishment.[30] As we saw earlier, the combination of the present aspect with an accomplishment indicates that its endpoint has not yet been reached: the focus is on the activity phase, while the culmination phase is left out of account. With a verb denoting an intentional action, the result is often conativity, but not necessarily. Rather, it seems that Thucydides wanted to stress the ongoingness of 'the setting up of the blockades', without automatically suggesting failure, so that the meaning shifts toward 'maintaining the blockades'.

The remainder of the imperfect verbs in this paragraph can be accounted for on the textual level: εἶργον 'to exclude', ἐκράτουν 'to dominate', κατεῖχον 'to hold', ἦν 'to be', and ἐπολεμεῖτο 'to fight (a war)' are all either states or atelic activities, occurring naturally in the imperfect tense, that do not carry the narrative time-line forward. Rather, all these unbounded and simultaneous states of affairs describe the situation on Lesbos that resulted from the establishment of the blockade, which is in turn conveyed by ἐτείχισαν and ἐποιοῦντο. Therefore, it seems that the textual dimension is dominant here: εἶργον, ἐκράτουν, κατεῖχον, ἦν, and ἐπολεμεῖτο describe the background to the foregrounded events ἐτείχισαν and ἐποιοῦντο. In addition, they may be viewed as describing the framework of unbounded and simultaneous situations for the events that will be narrated when Thucydides returns to the situation on Lesbos (3.18) after a lengthy digression (cf. infra).

It may be concluded from our discussion of this paragraph that, while a certain metafunction may be dominant in a given stretch of narrative (here: the textual dimension), there is always the possibility that another metafunction overrides the aspectual choice (here: the ideational dimension). Perhaps the ideational dimension ('the propositional content') must concede to the textual dimension as the default level of meaning when we are dealing with narrative. Is it conceivable that the

---

[30] Cf. Fanning (1990: 179-185) and Verkuyl (1989: 79-90).

primary need of a narrative is to be structured as a text, while the other two metafunctions have the potential to infringe on its control over aspect whenever necessary?

[2]

Thucydides temporarily abandons the scene at Lesbos, narrating the expedition of the Athenian commander Asopius (3.7), the speech of the Mytilenean envoys before the Spartans (3.8-14), and the positive reaction of the Spartans, who prepared a fleet at the Isthmus (3.15), which was defeated by a strong Athenian navy (3.16). After explaining Athens' financial troubles at that time (3.17), Thucydides returns to Lesbos and the Mytilenean revolt (3.18).

> Μυτιληναῖοι δὲ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον ὃν οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι περὶ τὸν Ἰσθμὸν ἦσαν ἐπὶ Μήθυμναν ὡς προδιδομένην **ἐστράτευσαν** κατὰ γῆν αὐτοί τε καὶ οἱ ἐπίκουροι· καὶ προσβαλόντες τῇ πόλει, ἐπειδὴ οὐ προυχώρει ᾗ προσεδέχοντο, **ἀπῆλθον** ἐπ᾽ Ἀντίσσης καὶ Πύρρας καὶ Ἐρέσου, καὶ καταστησάμενοι τὰ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι ταύταις βεβαιότερα καὶ τείχη κρατύναντες διὰ τάχους **ἀπῆλθον** ἐπ᾽ οἴκου. **ἐστράτευσαν** δὲ καὶ οἱ Μηθυμναῖοι ἀναχωρησάντων αὐτῶν ἐπ᾽ Ἄντισσαν· καὶ ἐκβοηθείας τινὸς γενομένης πληγέντες ὑπό τε τῶν Ἀντισσαίων καὶ τῶν ἐπικούρων **ἀπέθανόν** τε πολλοὶ καὶ **ἀνεχώρησαν** οἱ λοιποὶ κατὰ τάχος. οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι πυνθανόμενοι ταῦτα, τούς τε Μυτιληναίους τῆς γῆς κρατοῦντας καὶ τοὺς σφετέρους στρατιώτας οὐχ ἱκανοὺς ὄντας εἴργειν, **πέμπουσι** περὶ τὸ φθινόπωρον ἤδη ἀρχόμενον Πάχητα τὸν Ἐπικούρου στρατηγὸν καὶ χιλίους ὁπλίτας ἑαυτῶν. οἱ δὲ αὐτερέται πλεύσαντες τῶν νεῶν **ἀφικνοῦνται** καὶ **περιτειχίζουσι** Μυτιλήνην ἐν κύκλῳ ἁπλῷ τείχει· φρούρια δ᾽ ἔστιν ᾗ ἐπὶ τῶν καρτερῶν **ἐγκατοικοδομεῖται**. καὶ ἡ μὲν Μυτιλήνη κατὰ κράτος ἤδη ἀμφοτέρωθεν καὶ ἐκ γῆς καὶ ἐκ θαλάσσης **εἴργετο**, καὶ ὁ χειμὼν **ἤρχετο** γίγνεσθαι. (3.18)

Around the same time when the Lacedaemonians were at the Isthmus, the Mytileneans and their auxiliaries **marched** (aor.) with their army against Methymna, which they supposed was being betrayed into their hands; and having assaulted the city, when

their attempt did not succeed as they had expected, they **went off** *(aor.)* to Antissa, Pyrrha and Eresus, and after establishing their interests in these cities on a firmer basis and strengthening the walls, they **went off** *(aor.)* home in haste. But as soon as they had withdrawn, the Methymneans in their turn **marched** *(aor.)* against Antissa. But after a sortie had been made, they were defeated and many of them **died** *(aor.)* at the hands of the inhabitants of Antissa and the auxiliary troops, and the rest **withdrew** *(aor.)* in haste. Now when the Atheneans learned that the Mytileneans were masters of the country and that their own soldiers were not numerous enough to keep them within their walls, about the beginning of autumn they **sent** *(pres.)* Paches sons of Epicurus in command of a thousand Athenian hoplites. These men, who sailed rowing on the ships themselves, **arrived** *(pres.)* at Mytilene and **encircled** *(pres.)* it with a single wall; forts **were built** *(pres.)* at a number of strong positions. Mytilene **was** thus at last completely **cut off** *(impf.)* both by sea and land, and winter **set in** *(impf.)*.

As we saw earlier, Thucydides created a framework of backgrounded situations with a series of imperfect verbs at the end of 3.6, where he left the Mytilenean narrative. That framework now serves as the setting for the aorist verbs in 3.18: upon reading/hearing Μυτιληναῖοι δὲ, the audience recalls that the story of their revolt was left unfinished, and expects that the narrative time-line will now continue. The aorist verbs ἐστράτευσαν 'to march', ἀπῆλθον 'to leave', ἀπῆλθον 'to leave', ἐστράτευσαν 'to march', ἀπέθανόν 'to die', and ἀνεχώρησαν 'to withdraw' constitute that foreground. Apparently, there are no ideational influences on aspect choice here: combined with a destination[31] (introduced by the preposition ἐπί), ἐστράτευσαν, ἀπῆλθον, ἀπῆλθον, and ἐστράτευσαν are telic accomplishments, as is ἀνεχώρησαν, while ἀπέθανόν is a punctual achievement. As we saw earlier, the aorist aspect is the most natural option for such states of affairs: there is no reason for Thucydides to use the present aspect.

The next sentences of 3.18, however, feature only present aspect verbs. According to Allan (2013), the historical present may be indicative of the immediate diegetic mode,

---

[31] See Fanning (1990: 150).

in which the narrator assumes a panoramic position 'on top of the hill' and reports on the events as if he were a sports commentator. However, such a panoramic perspective differs little from an internal perspective in our opinion: if the present tense suggests the illusion of immediacy or presence at the scene, the point of view is not an external but an internal one. In any case, πέμπουσι 'to send' took place in Athens, at a considerable distance from Lesbos: this event cannot have been perceived by an internal observer on Lesbos, and happened some time before ἀφικνοῦνται 'to arrive', περιτειχίζουσι 'to encircle with a wall', and ἐγκατοικοδομεῖται 'to build'. Therefore, the tense of πέμπουσι does not create the illusion of immediacy, but rather stresses the decisiveness of the event: as will be clear from the rest of the story, the intervention of this particular Athenian general, Paches, will be of paramount importance for the suppression of the Mytilenean revolt.

The other historical present verbs (ἀφικνοῦνται, περιτειχίζουσι, and ἐγκατοικοδομεῖται), however, may very well be perceivable by an internal observer on the spot. Rather than being decisive events in the course of the story, they are presented as viewed through that observer's eyes, who can perhaps be identified with the Mytileneans in the town: their home is entered by their enemies (ἀφικνοῦνται), who immediately set to encircling the town with a thick wall (περιτειχίζουσι) and forts (ἐγκατοικοδομεῖται). This dreadful sight is emphasised by the use of the historical present tense, which indicates both the internal point of view of the Mytileneans and the sequentiality of the events. The imperfect would have only implies the former, the aorist only the latter.

If it is true that these historical present verbs are viewed from the internal perspective of an observer on the spot, how can we relate that interpersonal meaning to he ideational level? According to Fanning (1990: 228) the present aspect stem, i.e. the aspect stem on which both the present tense and the imperfect tense are formed, has no ideational influence on the interpretation of the *historical* present tense. When

the present tense is used to refer not to a genuinely present state of affairs, but to a past state of affairs, that state of affairs is no longer conceived of as unbounded, but rather as a pretended present: the illusion of temporal proximity to the events is the principal motivation for the use of the present tense. It is that temporal illusion on the ideational level that gives rise to the internal perspective on the interpersonal level, and not its present aspect, as is the case for the imperfect tense.[32] Rather, a state of affairs in the historical present tense is presented as having simply occurred.[33] In that light, it is important to remember Rijksbaron's (2011: 7) finding that the historical present tense occurs almost exclusively with accomplishments and achievements, such as ἀφικνοῦνται, περιτειχίζουσι, and ἐγκατοικοδομεῖται.

Finally, the paragraph ends with two imperfect tense forms. One of these represents an activity (εἴργετο), for which the present aspect is the most natural option on the ideational level, but ἤρχετο is an achievement: why does the ideational dimension not override the aspectual choice here by turning ἤρχετο into the aorist aspect? It appears that the textual dimension is more important here: εἴργετο and ἤρχετο represent the situation on the island that serves as a framework for later events. Indeed, the next few paragraphs are again a digression on the death of an Athenian tribute collector and the siege of Plataea, after which Thucydides returns to the Mytilenean revolt in paragraph 3.25.

The following conclusions may be drawn from the discussion of this paragraph. First, when Thucydides returns to a subject that he has temporarily abandoned earlier after presenting a framework with a series of imperfect verbs, it seems natural that he resumes the narrative time-line with aorist verbs. Second, it may prove useful to analyse individual verb forms rather than entire paragraphs: not every verb of the same tense might have the same meaning potential. Third, the value of 'decisiveness'

---

[32] See Fanning (1990: 227): "The key feature which prompts [this] use of the present is the *temporal* transfer, not some sort of *aspectual* effect."
[33] See note 28.

attributed to the historical present tense should be regarded as a textual element that signals the importance or relevance of certain events for the rest of the story. Finally, little evidence can be found for a distinction between Allan's (2013) panoramic perspective and our notion of internal perspective: the historical present tense indicates the same internal point of view as the imperfect tense does, but combines that interpersonal value with a neutral aspectual value.

[3]

Thucydides again temporarily abandons the story of the Mytilenean revolt to narrate the Athenians' need of money and the death of Lysicles, who was in charge of the tribute collection among the allies (3.19). The text then switches to the siege of Plataea by the Spartans and their allies: a group of 220 besieged Plataeans and Athenians prepared to break through the siege (3.20). The Spartan wall around the city is described in paragraph 3.21.

τὸ δὲ τεῖχος **ἦν** τῶν Πελοποννησίων τοιόνδε τῇ οἰκοδομήσει. **εἶχε** μὲν δύο τοὺς περιβόλους, πρός τε Πλαταιῶν καὶ εἴ τις ἔξωθεν ἀπ᾽ Ἀθηνῶν ἐπίοι, **διεῖχον** δὲ οἱ περίβολοι ἑκκαίδεκα πόδας μάλιστα ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων. τὸ οὖν μεταξὺ τοῦτο [οἱ ἑκκαίδεκα πόδεσ] τοῖς φύλαξιν οἰκήματα διανενεμημένα ᾠκοδόμητο, καὶ **ἦν** ξυνεχῆ ὥστε ἓν φαίνεσθαι τεῖχος παχὺ ἐπάλξεις ἔχον ἀμφοτέρωθεν. διὰ δέκα δὲ ἐπάλξεων πύργοι **ἦσαν** μεγάλοι καὶ ἰσοπλατεῖς τῷ τείχει, διήκοντες ἔς τε τὸ ἔσω μέτωπον αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ αὐτοὶ καὶ τὸ ἔξω, ὥστε πάροδον μὴ εἶναι παρὰ πύργον, ἀλλὰ δι᾽ αὐτῶν μέσων διῆσαν. τὰς οὖν νύκτας, ὁπότε χειμὼν εἴη νοτερός, τὰς μὲν ἐπάλξεις **ἀπέλειπον**, ἐκ δὲ τῶν πύργων ὄντων δι᾽ ὀλίγου καὶ ἄνωθεν στεγανῶν τὴν φυλακὴν **ἐποιοῦντο**. τὸ μὲν οὖν τεῖχος ᾧ περιεφρουροῦντο οἱ Πλαταιῆς τοιοῦτον **ἦν**. (3.21)

The wall of the Peloponnesians **was** *(impf.)* like this regarding its construction. It **had** *(impf.)* two encircling lines, the inner looking towards Plataea, the outer to guard against attack from the direction of Athens, and the two circuits **were distant** *(impf.)*

about sixteen feet from one another. This interval of sixteen feet had in building been divided up into rooms assigned to the guards; and the whole structure **was** *(impf.)* continuous, so as to appear to be a single thick wall furnished with battlements on both sides. And at every tenth battlement, there **were** *(impf.)* high towers of the same width as the wall, extending both to the inner and outer faces of it, so that there was no passage left at the sides of the towers, but the guards had to go through the middle of them. Now during the nights, whenever the weather was rainy, the guards **left** *(impf.)* the battlements and **kept** *(impf.)* watch from the towers, which were not far apart and were roofed overhead. Such, then, **was** *(impf.)* the wall by which the Plataeans were beleaguered.

Many of the main clause verbs in this paragraph are stative verbs (ἦν 'to be', εἶχε 'to have', διεῖχον 'to be distant', ἦν 'to be', ἦσαν 'to be', ἦν 'to be'), and ἀπέλειπον 'to leave' and ἐποιοῦντο 'to make, to do' are habitual states of affairs (indicated by the plural accusative of duration of time τὰς ... νύκτας 'during the nights' and the past general temporal clause introduced by ὁπότε + optative 'whenever'). One could argue, therefore, that the ideational metafunction is at work here. Sure enough, the imperfect tense is the most natural option for all of these verbs, since it conveys unboundedness: every state of affairs in this paragraph is presented as viewed in its progress. As a result, they are all valid at the same time: they occur simultaneously, not in sequence.

Be that as it may, we have to bear in mind that Ancient Greek features an abundant thesaurus with plenty of alternatives for εἰμί and ἔχω from which Thucydides had but to choose, alternatives that belong to other (telic) verbal classes as well. If we consider, therefore, that Thucydides' choice for the imperfect tense throughout this paragraph is far from unintentional, then that choice has a significant consequence: in addition to the ideational meaning, the aspectual choice for the imperfect gives rise to an explicit interpersonal meaning. The continued use of one tense with the (aspectual) meaning potential of internal perspective, i.e. the idea that we are looking at the Spartan wall through a virtual camera-eye on the spot, as if we were there

ourselves, cannot be neglected: if Thucydides did not want us to experience this paragraph as such, he would have inserted an aorist somewhere along this description, but clearly that would not have made much sense here.[34]

We already saw that the historical present tense can receive an interpersonal meaning of internal perspective based on its ideational temporal value (present) while its aspectual value is neutral rather than unbounded. The imperfect tense can be endowed with the same interpersonal value, but the ideational source for it is quite different: the aspectual value of unboundedness means viewing a state of affairs from within, as it is unfolding. Therefore, the crucial difference between the historical present and imperfect tenses is the fact that the former implies sequentiality, while the latter implies simultaneity. As far as the verb tenses are concerned, that is the only noticeable difference between Allan's immediate diegetic and descriptive modes. As a result, we will no longer be referring to Allan's distinction between the immediate diegetic mode and the descriptive mode as such: for the present paper, the only relevant element is the internal perspective conveyed by both the historical present tense and the imperfect tense.

Let us return to the discussion of 3.21. Although the interpersonal dimension is clearly at work here, it may not be Thucydides' only motive for employing the imperfect tense here. Despite the absence of an aorist verb in the immediate vicinity, there is a good reason to assume that the textual meaning of grounding can be found here as well. But if the description of 3.21 is a background to a certain foreground, where are the time-line events? Again, it is important not to focus on the 'paragraph' as a separate whole within the narrative: the foreground to 3.21 is to be found in 3.22, where it is narrated how some of the Plataeans escape the city by crossing the wall

---

[34] Note also the richly descriptive vocabulary: δύο τοὺς περιβόλους 'two encircling lines', ἐκκαίδεκα πόδας 'sixteen feet', ξυνεχῆ 'continuous', παχὺ 'thick', διὰ δέκα δὲ ἐπάλξεων 'at every tenth battlement', μεγάλοι 'high', ἰσοπλατεῖς 'of the same width', δι᾽ ὀλίγου 'not far apart', ἄνωθεν στεγανῶν 'roofed overhead'.

described in 3.21 (cf. infra). Therefore, the imperfect tense forms in 3.21 may very well have a (macro-)textual value in addition to an interpersonal one.[35]

Two main conclusions may be drawn from the discussion of this paragraph. First, because of its ideational aspectual value of unboundedness, the imperfect tense lends itself perfectly to the narration of internally perspectivised states of affairs that occur simultaneously. The audience gets the impression of looking through a virtual camera-eye on the spot that scans the various elements that constitute the wall. In this respect, I agree with de Jong – van den Berg (2000: 102-103) that the internal perspective from which the wall is viewed does not necessarily have to be a vantage point endowed with human consciousness: there is no reason to assume that we are looking through the eyes of a certain character or group of characters.[36]

Second, aspectual choice may involve an interaction of meanings on the ideational, textual and interpersonal level. While ideational meaning (here: unboundedness) is always present as the basic value of the imperfect, we are often dealing with an interplay of (macro-)textual (here: background) and interpersonal meanings (here: internal perspective). It is often difficult to exclude one metafunction completely, and often we cannot point out the dominant one. Native speakers of Ancient Greek probably thought of a range of potential values when they heard the imperfect tense, from which they made a selection after hearing the context. For all we know, at the end of 3.21 they felt like they could see the Spartan wall in front of them, while in the middle of 3.22 they remember 3.21 as the background to the current action. Perhaps any attempt by non-native speakers to single out a single dimension as the dominant one at many occasions derogates the metafunctionally diverse nature of the category aspect.

---

[35] See also Bentein (2016).

[36] See note 25.

[4]

οἱ δ᾽, ἐπειδὴ παρεσκεύαστο αὐτοῖς, τηρήσαντες νύκτα χειμέριον ὕδατι καὶ ἀνέμῳ καὶ ἅμ᾽ ἀσέληνον **ἐξῆσαν**· **ἡγοῦντο** δὲ οἵπερ καὶ τῆς πείρας αἴτιοι ἦσαν. καὶ πρῶτον μὲν τὴν τάφρον **διέβησαν** ἣ περιεῖχεν αὐτούς, ἔπειτα **προσέμειξαν** τῷ τείχει τῶν πολεμίων λαθόντες τοὺς φύλακας, ἀνὰ τὸ σκοτεινὸν μὲν οὐ προϊδόντων αὐτῶν, ψόφῳ δὲ τῷ ἐκ τοῦ προσιέναι αὐτοὺς ἀντιπαταγοῦντος τοῦ ἀνέμου οὐ κατακουσάντων· ἅμα δὲ καὶ διέχοντες πολὺ **ἦσαν**, ὅπως τὰ ὅπλα μὴ κρουόμενα πρὸς ἄλληλα αἴσθησιν παρέχοι. **ἦσαν** δὲ εὐσταλεῖς τε τῇ ὁπλίσει καὶ τὸν ἀριστερὸν μόνον πόδα ὑποδεδεμένοι ἀσφαλείας ἕνεκα τῆς πρὸς τὸν πηλόν. κατὰ οὖν μεταπύργιον **προσέμισγον** πρὸς τὰς ἐπάλξεις, εἰδότες ὅτι ἐρῆμοί εἰσι, πρῶτον μὲν οἱ τὰς κλίμακας φέροντες, καὶ **προσέθεσαν**· ἔπειτα ψιλοὶ δώδεκα ξὺν ξιφιδίῳ καὶ θώρακι **ἀνέβαινον**, ὧν ἡγεῖτο Ἀμμέας ὁ Κοροίβου καὶ πρῶτος ἀνέβη· μετὰ δὲ αὐτὸν οἱ ἑπόμενοι, ἓξ ἐφ᾽ ἑκάτερον τῶν πύργων, **ἀνέβαινον**. ἔπειτα ψιλοὶ ἄλλοι μετὰ τούτους ξὺν δορατίοις **ἐχώρουν**, οἷς ἕτεροι κατόπιν τὰς ἀσπίδας ἔφερον, ὅπως ἐκεῖνοι ῥᾷον προσβαίνοιεν, καὶ ἔμελλον δώσειν ὁπότε πρὸς τοῖς πολεμίοις εἶεν. ὡς δὲ ἄνω πλείους ἐγένοντο, **ᾔσθοντο** οἱ ἐκ τῶν πύργων φύλακες· **κατέβαλε** γάρ τις τῶν Πλαταιῶν ἀντιλαμβανόμενος ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπάλξεων κεραμίδα, ἣ πεσοῦσα δοῦπον ἐποίησεν. καὶ αὐτίκα βοὴ **ἦν**, τὸ δὲ στρατόπεδον ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος **ὥρμησεν**· οὐ γὰρ ᾔδει ὅτι ἦν τὸ δεινὸν σκοτεινῆς νυκτὸς καὶ χειμῶνος ὄντος, καὶ ἅμα οἱ ἐν τῇ πόλει τῶν Πλαταιῶν ὑπολελειμμένοι ἐξελθόντες **προσέβαλον** τῷ τείχει τῶν Πελοποννησίων ἐκ τοὔμπαλιν ἢ οἱ ἄνδρες αὐτῶν ὑπερέβαινον, ὅπως ἥκιστα πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὸν νοῦν ἔχοιεν. **ἐθορυβοῦντο** μὲν οὖν κατὰ χώραν μένοντες, βοηθεῖν δὲ οὐδεὶς **ἐτόλμα** ἐκ τῆς ἑαυτῶν φυλακῆς, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ἀπόρῳ **ἦσαν** εἰκάσαι τὸ γιγνόμενον. καὶ οἱ τριακόσιοι αὐτῶν, οἷς ἐτέτακτο παραβοηθεῖν εἴ τι δέοι, **ἐχώρουν** ἔξω τοῦ τείχους πρὸς τὴν βοήν, φρυκτοί τε **ᾔροντο** ἐς τὰς Θήβας πολέμιοι· **παρανῖσχον** δὲ καὶ οἱ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως Πλαταιῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους φρυκτοὺς πολλοὺς πρότερον παρεσκευασμένους ἐς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅπως ἀσαφῆ τὰ σημεῖα τῆς φρυκτωρίας τοῖς πολεμίοις ᾖ καὶ μὴ βοηθοῖεν, ἄλλο τι νομίσαντες τὸ γιγνόμενον εἶναι ἢ τὸ ὄν, πρὶν σφῶν οἱ ἄνδρες οἱ ἐξιόντες διαφύγοιεν καὶ τοῦ ἀσφαλοῦς ἀντιλάβοιντο. (3.22)

After they had finished their preparations, the Plataeans, having waited for a night that was stormy with rain and wind and at the same time moonless, **went forth** *(impf.)*. The men who were the authors of the enterprise, **were** their **leaders** *(impf.)*. First they **crossed** *(aor.)* the ditch that surrounded the town, then **approached** *(aor.)* the foot of the enemy's wall unobserved by the guards, who in the all-pervading darkness could not see ahead and could not hear because the clatter of the wind drowned the noise of their approach; and besides, they **marched** *(impf.)* with broad intervals, in order that their arms might not clatter against each other and cause detection. And they **were** *(impf.)* not only lightly armed but also [had been] sandaled at the left foot only, for security against slipping in the mud. So they **approached** *(impf.)* the battlements at a space between two towers, knowing that the battlements were deserted, first the men with the ladders, and they **set** them **against** *(aor.)* the wall; next **did** twelve light-armed men **ascend** *(impf.)*, with dagger and corselet only, whom were led by Ammeas son of Coroebus, and of whom that man was the first to ascend. After him his followers **ascended** *(impf.)*, six men going against each of the adjoining towers. Next after these **went** *(impf.)* other light troops armed with short spears, for whom the shields were borne by another group which followed, that the former might advance more easily, and to whom the shields were to be handed when they were close to the enemy. Now when several had got up, the sentinels on the towers **became aware** *(aor.)* of their presence; for one of the Plataeans in laying hold of the battlements **threw down** *(aor.)* a tile, which fell with a thud. And immediately there **was** *(impf.)* an outcry, and the garrison **rushed** *(aor.)* to the wall; for they did not know what the danger was, as the night was dark and stormy, and at the same time the Plataeans who had been left behind in the town, having departed **made an attack on** *(aor.)* the wall of the Peloponnesians on the side opposite that over which their men were climbing, to distract attention from them as far as possible. Now the sentinels **were confused** *(impf.)*, remaining at their several posts, and no one **dared** *(impf.)* to lend aid away from his station, but all **were** *(impf.)* at a loss to conjecture what was going on. The three hundred of them, who had been appointed to bring aid wherever it was needed, **proceeded** *(impf.)* outside the wall in the direction of the outcry, and beacon fires indicating danger from the enemy **were flashed** *(impf.)* towards Thebes. But the

Plataeans in the town at the same time **raised in answer** *(impf.)* many beacons from their wall, which had been prepared beforehand with this very purpose, that the enemy's beacon signals might be rendered unintelligible and that the Thebans, thinking that the situation was different from what it really was, might defer bringing aid until the Plataeans who were leaving should have made good their escape and reached safety.

After the description of the Spartan wall in the previous paragraph, Thucydides continues his narrative with the Plataean attempt to break through that wall and escape the besieged city. The first main clause event in this paragraph is the imperfect verb ἐξῆσαν 'to go forth'. Its aspect conveys the ideational meaning of unboundedness, indicating that this telic accomplishment has not yet reached its culmination phase, i.e. that the intended destination has not yet been reached. Rather than describing the background, the imperfect here has the function of anticipation: the completion of the Plataeans' journey from the town towards the siege works is postponed but already suggested by Thucydides' choice of aspect.

The next important verb is ἡγοῦντο. Here, the choice for the imperfect tense has again ideational and textual reasons: ἡγέομαι with the genitive case has the meaning 'to be the leader of'[37], and is therefore a stative verb, for which the imperfect is the most obvious choice. In addition, the information provided in this sentence is backgrounded material: the fact that 'the authors of the enterprise' were its leaders does not move the time-line forward, since it is valid the entire time.

The aorist verbs διέβησαν 'to cross' and προσέμειξαν 'to approach' indicate that the Plataeans have reached the destinations anticipated by ἐξῆσαν: the 'going forth' lasted until the moment when the Plataeans crossed the ditch (the first destination) and approached the foot of the wall (the second destination). Note that both verbs are also telic accomplishments and foregrounded states of affairs, both of which naturally prefer the aorist aspect. Combined with the *Aktionsart*/situation type, the

---

[37] "ἡγέομαι." *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1940).

aorist aspect indicates that the 'crossing' of the ditch and the 'approaching' of the wall has been completed, so that the latter may be interpreted as 'reached the wall'.

The next two verbs, ᾖσαν 'to march' and ἦσαν 'to be', are again in the imperfect tense, an obvious choice on both the ideational level and the textual level. The 'marching' is not telicised by, for instance, the mention of a destination, and thus remains an atelic activity, which makes it very suitable as a background element.[38]

Next, Thucydides continues with another imperfect verb that is actually a repetition of something he said before: προσέμισγον repeats προσέμειξαν, which is the same verb in the aorist aspect. The explanation for this difference in aspect is quite straightforward: since προσέμειξαν is a foregrounded event, its repetition cannot move the time-line forward as well, both verbs referring to the same state of affairs. Therefore, the imperfect is necessary to indicate that προσέμισγον is now the background to what happens next. On the ideational level, this implies that the 'approaching' of the wall has not yet been completed here, i.e. the Plataeans have not reached it yet. This seems odd, since Thucydides has already narrated the completion of their march to the wall a few lines higher. In fact, ᾖσαν and ἦσαν describe what is going on prior to the 'reaching' of the wall,[39] while προσέμισγον recapitulates the 'approaching of the wall' up until (but not including) the moment of the actual 'reaching'. Allan (2013: 373), however, explains such 'anachronies' as perfectly normal for his displaced diegetic mode, due to the narrator's omniscience which results from his hindsight on the narrated events. Therefore, the external perspective of the narrator is manifest here, both through his use of the imperfect and aorist as background and foreground tenses, and through his ability to narrate the events out of their chronological order.

---

[38] The verb εἰμί has already been proven to be perfectly suitable to describe background situations (cf. supra, p. 37).

[39] Note that ᾖσαν and particularly ἦσαν also last beyond that moment.

With προσέθεσαν 'to set against' we return to the action: the aorist indicates that the 'setting against the wall' of the ladders resumes the time-line. Note that there is no ideational reason to alter the aspect here: προσέθεσαν is clearly a telic state of affairs, for which the aorist is the default choice.

The next three main clause verbs (ἀνέβαινον 'to ascend', ἀνέβαινον 'to ascend', and ἐχώρουν 'to go') are all imperfect forms denoting the same action by three subsequent waves of soldiers, viz. the 'going up the ladders'. These are not particularly backgrounded situations, but much like the first verb (ἐξῆσαν) they convey unboundedness, i.e. that their culmination phase has yet to follow. Again we see, therefore, a textual meaning of anticipation derived from an ideational meaning of 'ongoingness'. The completion of the ascension is not narrated by a main clause verb[40], but rather by an aorist in a temporal subordinate clause, ἐγένοντο.

The foreground then continues with two aorist verbs, ἤσθοντο 'to perceive' and κατέβαλε 'to throw down'. The latter of these achievements is (as indicated by the particle γάρ) an explanation for the former, and therefore necessarily happens first. It would seem, then, that in Allan's displaced diegetic mode not only the imperfect can be used for anachronies in the narrative, but the aorist as well. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that, although there cannot be any overlap between foregrounded events in the aorist, sequentiality is not obligatory.

The next verb is very interesting. The signal given in the form of 'an outcry' is rather important to the story, and certainly not meant to be a background situation. Smith's translation suggests that a certain outcry 'was' only very briefly, and had immediate results after its completion. The obvious choice would then have been an aorist verb denoting a foregrounded event, such as ἐβόησαν 'they cried out'. However,

---

[40] Note that ἐχώρουν, unlike ἀνέβαινον, is an atelic activity, and therefore has no inherent endpoint or destination, nor is there an explicit mention of a destination by, for instance, an adverbial phrase. However, the current context does limit the extent of this movement: it is clear that the intended destination is implied to be the same as for ἀνέβαινον and ἀνέβαινον.

Thucydides chose for βοή 'an outcry, shouting' (without an article) combined with εἰμί, a verb with no aorist form. As we saw earlier, such an explicit choice for a lexeme that can only occur in the imperfect tense is especially significant for its interpretation: since the importance of the tense is emphasised, its meaning is as well. That meaning should be looked for on both the ideational and the interpersonal level: on the former, the imperfect tense indicates that there was no single, brief outcry, but rather an extended period of shouting that continued in part beyond the logical reaction to the shouting, ὥρμησεν 'to rush'. On the latter, (βοή) ἦν constitutes a single state of affairs that is described from an internal perspective. A virtual camera-eye momentarily zooms in on the action, rendering the shouting visible (or hearable) for the reader/hearer as if he is there himself. The imperfect indicates that (βοή) ἦν is an important event on the time line and at the same time (at least partly) simultaneous with ὥρμησεν.

The aorist aspect of ὥρμησεν carries the ideational meaning that the accomplishment 'rushing towards the wall' has been completed, as well as the textual meaning that it is an important event on the narrative time-line. The next aorist verb, however, has an additional meaning: apart from being a foregrounded, completed accomplishment, προσέβαλον 'to make an attack on' also serves as one of the reasons for ὥρμησεν. Such an explanation is a typical indication of the narrator's hindsight on the events, i.e. his external perspective. Although an external point of view in narrative is usually not particularly conspicuous, it is quite relevant in the vicinity of verbs that indicate an internal perspective.

With ἐθορυβοῦντο, an imperfect verb and the first word in its sentence, the focus shifts dramatically to a new centre of attention: the point of view of the Spartan sentinels on the wall. We are informed about their thoughts, fears, and confusion by three imperfect verbs that clearly indicate an internal perspective. ἐθορυβοῦντο 'to be confused', ἐτόλμα 'to dare', and ἦσαν 'to be' are all states that naturally select the imperfect tense, and therefore typical background elements that do not carry the

time-line forward. But more importantly, they denote states of affairs that provide us with information on the sentinels' state of mind: their thoughts and feelings are internally perspectivised as a result of the unboundedness indicated by the imperfect tense.

The paragraph ends with three other imperfect verbs: ἐχώρουν 'to proceed', ἤροντο 'to flash', and παρανῖσχον 'to raise in answer'. The first one denotes the movement of three hundred soldiers selected from the Spartan garrison (οἱ τριακόσιοι αὐτῶν), who are differentiated from the sentinels on the wall, whose internal perspective has just shown us their thoughts. That elite group of three hundred Spartans marches in the direction of the shouting (ἐχώρουν), but the sentinels are still utterly confused. The 'raising' of the fire beacons is expressed by a passive verb (ἤροντο): the sentinels have no part in that action, they merely perceive it as it happens before their eyes. The same holds for all three verbs: the marching of the three hundred, the lighting of the Spartan beacons, and the raising of the Plataean beacons in reply (παρανῖσχον) are all experienced by the Spartan sentinels on the wall and presented from their internal point of view.

Although the interpersonal dimension may therefore be dominant here, it is not always possible to rule out the other dimensions entirely. ἐχώρουν is a verb of movement in the imperfect tense, so the textual value of anticipation is possible, and then the ideational metafunction always plays a part as well: together with the adverbial phrase πρὸς τὴν βοήν 'in the direction of the shouting' (i.e. the intended destination), ἐχώρουν is a telic accomplishment viewed as unbounded, which means that the source of the shouting will be reached later.[41] However, since παρανῖσχον 'to raise in answer' can only occur when ἤροντο 'to raise' has been completed, these events cannot be seen as unbounded if they are interpreted as single events. Rather, the plural indefinite subject of ἤροντο (φρυκτοί 'beacon fires') and the plural

---

[41] Cf. 3.23.3: καὶ ἐν τούτῳ οἱ τριακόσιοι αὐτοῖς ἐπεφέροντο λαμπάδας ἔχοντες 'and at the same time the three hundred bore down upon them, carrying torches'.

indefinite object of παρανῖσχον (φρυκτοὺς πολλοὺς 'many beacon fires') indicate that both states of affairs are to be regarded as iterated over a certain period of time. Together, ᾔροντο and παρανῖσχον form a recurring cycle of foregrounded events on the ideational level, which is perfectly suited to be described from an internal perspective.[42]

After a lengthy discussion of paragraph 3.22, we can draw the following conclusions. First, the textual value of anticipation is always derived from the combination of unboundedness and telic *Aktionsart*. Second, states and activities are very suitable as background material, while telic states of affairs are likely to be on the time-line. Third, the external perspective of the narrator is often indicated by a distinction between foreground and background, and by narrating the events out of their chronological order. Fourth, the choice for verbs without an aorist declination, like εἰμί, emphasises the use of the imperfect and thereby its meaning as well. Fifth, the imperfect tense cannot indicate sequentiality due to its ideational value of unboundedness. However, simultaneity does not exclude foregrounding: recurring cycles of events in the imperfect tense may carry the narrative time-line forward. Sixth, on the interpersonal level, the imperfect can be used to convey either backgrounded situations (e.g. thoughts, fears, confusion) or recurring cycles of foregrounded events, as long as these states of affairs are unbounded and, therefore, simultaneous.

[5]

> οἱ δ᾽ ὑπερβαίνοντες τῶν Πλαταιῶν ἐν τούτῳ, ὡς οἱ πρῶτοι αὐτῶν ἀνεβεβήκεσαν καὶ τοῦ πύργου ἑκατέρου τοὺς φύλακας διαφθείραντες ἐκεκρατήκεσαν, τάς τε διόδους τῶν πύργων ἐνστάντες αὐτοὶ **ἐφύλασσον** μηδένα δι᾽ αὐτῶν ἐπιβοηθεῖν, καὶ κλίμακας προσθέντες ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους τοῖς πύργοις καὶ ἐπαναβιβάσαντες

---

[42] Note that the adverbial clause following παρανῖσχον need not indicate the narrator's hindsight or external perspective: the information in that clause may very well have been an insight on the part of the sentinels.

ἄνδρας πλείους, οἱ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν πύργων τοὺς ἐπιβοηθοῦντας καὶ κάτωθεν καὶ ἄνωθεν **εἶργον** βάλλοντες, οἱ δ᾽ ἐν τούτῳ οἱ πλείους πολλὰς προσθέντες κλίμακας ἅμα καὶ τὰς ἐπάλξεις ἀπώσαντες διὰ τοῦ μεταπυργίου **ὑπερέβαινον**. ὁ δὲ διακομιζόμενος αἰεὶ **ἵστατο** ἐπὶ τοῦ χείλους τῆς τάφρου καὶ ἐντεῦθεν **ἐτόξευόν** τε καὶ **ἠκόντιζον**, εἴ τις παραβοηθῶν παρὰ τὸ τεῖχος κωλυτὴς γίγνοιτο τῆς διαβάσεως. ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντες διεπεπεραίωντο, οἱ ἀπὸ τῶν πύργων χαλεπῶς οἱ τελευταῖοι καταβαίνοντες **ἐχώρουν** ἐπὶ τὴν τάφρον, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ οἱ τριακόσιοι αὐτοῖς **ἐπεφέροντο** λαμπάδας ἔχοντες. οἱ μὲν οὖν Πλαταιῆς ἐκείνους **ἑώρων** μᾶλλον ἐκ τοῦ σκότους ἑστῶτες ἐπὶ τοῦ χείλους τῆς τάφρου, καὶ **ἐτόξευόν** τε καὶ **ἐσηκόντιζον** ἐς τὰ γυμνά, αὐτοὶ δὲ ἐν τῷ ἀφανεῖ ὄντες ἧσσον διὰ τὰς λαμπάδας **καθεωρῶντο**, ὥστε φθάνουσι τῶν Πλαταιῶν καὶ οἱ ὕστατοι διαβάντες τὴν τάφρον, χαλεπῶς δὲ καὶ βιαίως· κρύσταλλός τε γὰρ ἐπεπήγει οὐ βέβαιος ἐν αὐτῇ ὥστ᾽ ἐπελθεῖν, ἀλλ᾽ οἷος ἀπηλιώτου [ἢ βορέου] ὑδατώδης μᾶλλον, καὶ ἡ νὺξ τοιούτῳ ἀνέμῳ ὑπονειφομένη πολὺ τὸ ὕδωρ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐπεποιήκει, ὃ μόλις ὑπερ ἔχοντες **ἐπεραιώθησαν**. **ἐγένετο** δὲ καὶ ἡ διάφευξις αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον διὰ τοῦ χειμῶνος τὸ μέγεθος. (3.23)

Meanwhile, when the foremost of the Plataean scaling-party had mounted and, having slain the guards, got possession of the two towers, they themselves, having taken position inside the towers, **guarded** *(impf.)* the passageways, that no one might come to aid against them, and, having placed ladders from the top of the wall against the towers and having made a number of men mount them, some of the Plataeans **kept** the assailants **away** *(impf.)* from the towers, shooting at them from below and above, and meanwhile the others, the main body, having put up a large number of ladders and having thrown down the battlements, **climbed over** *(impf.)* through the space between the towers. And as each one got over he **halted** *(impf.)* on the edge of the ditch and **shot arrows** *(impf.)* and **hurled javelins** *(impf.)* from there, if any enemy tried to approach along the wall and interfere with their crossing. And when all these had reached the other side, the men from the towers, the last of whom descended with difficulty, **advanced** *(impf.)* toward the ditch. And at the same time the three hundred **bore down** *(impf.)* upon them, carrying torches. Now the Plataeans, as they stood on the edge of the ditch, **saw** *(impf.)* them better out of the darkness, and **shot arrows** *(impf.)* and

hurled javelins *(impf.)* at their uncovered sides, while they themselves, being in the shadow, **were spotted** *(impf.)* less easily because of the enemy's torches, so that even the last of the Plataeans got safely across the ditch, though only with difficulty and after a hard struggle. For in the ditch ice had formed that was not firm enough to walk on but mushy, such as is formed when the wind is east instead of north, and the night, being somewhat snowy because of such a wind, had formed a lot of water in the ditch, for which reason they crossed scarcely keeping there heads above it. Their escape **took place** *(aor.)* chiefly because of the violence of the storm.

When we look at the aspect distribution in this paragraph, it is obvious that the imperfect tense is dominant here. However, it is essential not to jump to conclusions based on the sheer number of imperfect verbs in a paragraph: we must examine each verb one by one, and analyse the metafunctionally diverse semantic potential of each individual verb. Only then will it be possible to appreciate the full meaning of the interaction between aspect, lexeme, and context.

First, the aspectual choice for ἐφύλασσον 'to guard' and εἶργον 'to keep away' is perfectly normal on the ideational level: as activities, states of affairs with no inherent endpoint, they prefer the imperfect tense. As a result of their ideational meaning of unboundedness, they are very well suited to form the background against which ὑπερέβαινον occurs. However, the most important implication of the use of the imperfect tense is here that we are viewing these events as they take place, i.e. from an internal perspective: ἐφύλασσον and εἶργον are presented as unfolding before the eyes of a human or non-human observer on the spot. In fact, it is not inconceivable that the point of view adopted in 3.22 (i.e. the point of view of all of the Spartan sentinels on the entire wall) endures in the current paragraph, although a virtual camera-eye is also a possibility.

The next verb, ὑπερέβαινον 'to climb over', is a telic accomplishment, but since the whole of οἱ πλείους 'the main body' obviously cannot cross such a narrow space as a single body, that plural subject indicates that ὑπερέβαινον is an iterative state of

affairs. Therefore, the imperfect tense is obligatory on the ideational level. However, unlike ἐφύλασσον and εἶργον, the 'climbing over' is an important event on the narrative time-line. If we look at the sentence with the next three main clause verbs, there is one important word that sheds light on this passage: αἰεὶ 'each time' explicitly indicates that ὑπερέβαινον, ἵστατο 'to halt', ἐτόξευόν 'to shoot with a bow', and ἠκόντιζον 'to throw a javelin' (normally all telic states of affairs, except ἐτόξευόν, which is an atelic activity) constitute a pattern of iterated events[43] that keeps repeating itself until the last Plataean has reached the other side. Earlier we argued that such recurring cycles of foregrounded events are typical of Thucydidean descriptions of battle scenes (cf. supra, p. 26). It would seem, therefore, that the function of the imperfect verbs in this paragraph up until now has been primarily to signal the perspective of an internal observer on the spot through whose eyes we are viewing the Plataean breakout.

The next verb, ἐχώρουν 'to advance', is a verb of movement in the imperfect tense. It can be said to have textual meaning, though not as background material. Rather, the ideational meaning of unboundedness signals that the destination given by the adverbial phrase ἐπὶ τὴν τάφρον 'toward the ditch', which makes ἐχώρουν a telic accomplishment, is anticipated and will be reached later. [44] However, the interpersonal dimension is equally important here, if not more: ἐχώρουν may be seen as internally perspectivised by the same human or non-human "eyes" as the other imperfect verbs in this paragraph. In any case, the 'advancing' is unbounded and therefore simultaneous not with ὑπερέβαινον, ἵστατο, ἐτόξευόν, and ἠκόντιζον (as indicated by the temporal subordinate clause ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντες διεπεπεραίωντο 'when all these had reached the other side'), but with ἐπεφέροντο, ἑώρων, ἐτόξευόν,

---

[43] Note that ἐτόξευόν, being an atelic activity, is not iterated but occurs simultaneously with ὑπερέβαινον, ἵστατο, and ἠκόντιζον nonetheless.

[44] Cf. 3.23.4: ὥστε φθάνουσι τῶν Πλαταιῶν καὶ οἱ ὕστατοι διαβάντες τὴν τάφρον 'so that even the last of the Plataeans got safely across the ditch'.

ἐσηκόντιζον, and καθεωρῶντο (as indicated by the adverbial phrase ἐν τούτῳ 'at the same time').

Indeed, as the remainder of the Plataeans are advancing toward the ditch, they are attacked (ἐπεφέροντο) by the three hundred Spartans who were seen 'proceeding for the source of the shouting' (by their allied sentinels on the wall) at the end of paragraph 3.22. It is not unlikely that these sentinels are still the spectators through whose eyes we are experiencing the current events. On the ideational level, ἐπεφέροντο 'to bear down upon' is an atelic activity: the imperfect tense very naturally presents it as unbounded, and simultaneous with the other imperfect verbs in its immediate context (cf. supra).

As a stative verb, ἑώρων 'to see' naturally occurs in the imperfect tense as well: there is no prefix as in καθεωρῶντο 'to perceive' (a few lines below) that turns it into a telic state of affairs. Sure enough, it seems that ἑώρων can be background material: it does not advance the narrative time-line, but rather serves as the background against which ἐτόξευόν 'to shoot with a bow' and ἐσηκόντιζον 'to throw javelins'[45] occur. The reason why these two foregrounded events are not in the aorist aspect, is that they are again narrated from an internal point of view: the audience experiences the Plataeans' bombardment of the three hundred Spartans as if they see it unfolding themselves, i.e. through the eyes of either a virtual camera-eye or indeed the Spartan sentinels on the wall. Note that ἐτόξευόν and ἐσηκόντιζον, being atelic activities, form a cycle of recurring foregrounded events that is simultaneous with ἐχώρουν, ἑώρων, and καθεωρῶντο.

Just like ἑώρων, καθεωρῶντο fulfils more of a background function to these iterated foregrounded events. However, the (in)visibility of both parties may very well be thought of as being 'perceived' (mentally) as an explanation for the Plataeans victory,

---

[45] Apparently, the prefix εισ- turns ἀκοντίζω into an atelic activity ("εἰσακοντίζω." *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1940).

not by the narrator with hindsight, but by the internally perspectivised consciousness.[46] In that case, however, a virtual, non-human camera-eye is not an option anymore; it would seem that the events of 3.23 are indeed perceived by the same sentinels as in 3.22.

However, Thucydides apparently does not fully agree with these Spartan sentinels: the *actual* reason for the Plataeans' escape was not the favourable lighting, but rather the condition of the ditch as a result of the bad weather. The fact that the main clause verb at the centre of this authorial explanation (ἐγένετο 'to happen, to take place') is an aorist verb[47], gives only the more weight to our analysis of this paragraph: by his aspectual choice, the narrator indicates that *his* explanation is more truthful because it is an explanation with hindsight, i.e. an analysis made from an external perspective, with full knowledge of the situation and its circumstances. On the textual level, there is no value of foregrounding: ἐγένετο is not on the time-line of the story, but rather a concluding authorial comment on this episode that serves as background to the foregrounded events in the imperfect tense.[48]

We can draw the following conclusions from the discussion of this paragraph. First, the importance to analyse each verb form individually, has been confirmed. Second, an internal perspective can describe two different types of entities: static entities and dynamic entities. The latter includes battle scenes, and cannot be said to lack temporal progression, albeit in the form of recurring cycles of events. Third, background and foreground can be distinguished by an internal observer as well, provided that the backgrounded explanations, motivations, etc. are to be attributed

---

[46] See also note 42.

[47] Note that ἐγένετο is also an achievement, for which the aorist is the most natural aspect (ideational level).

[48] Cf. Bakker (1997: 43): "To [the] flow of visual information, commentary may then be added, as background explanation, as "regulatory" information, or as argumentative information. The result is a mixture of "showing" and "telling" in which the relation between the aorist and the imperfect is reversed with respect to the [displaced] diegetic mode ... : the aorist serves as background to a descriptive, visualizing foreground carried by imperfect verbs."

to the insights of that internal observer. If the author does not agree with that opinion, he is able to present his own view as more truthful by means of the aorist aspect, which conveys external perspective, i.e. hindsight on the events and full knowledge of their circumstances.

[6]

After their escape, the Plataeans reached Athens safely by a road the Spartans did not expect them to take (3.24). Thucydides then shifts the narrative back to the Mytilenean revolt: the Spartans sent an ambassador to encourage the Mytilenean people with promises of help (3.25), which took the form of a reinforcing fleet of forty ships and another devastating invasion of Attica (3.26). However, since the Spartan reinforcements were delayed, the Mytileneans were forced to make terms with the Athenians (3.27-28). The conditions were that they could send an embassy to Athens, Paches agreeing not to harm any Mytilenean until there was a response from Athens (3.28). When the Spartan fleet learned about the taking of Mytilene, they took counsel on the present situation, after which their admiral decided to sail home to Sparta (3.29-31). They lingered for a while in Ionia, and word of their presence reached Paches, who set off in pursuit, fearing for the vulnerable Ionian cities; but the Spartans escaped through open sea, after which Paches' fleet began the voyage back to Lesbos (3.32-33). Before returning to the Mytilenean revolt, however, Thucydides devotes a paragraph to Paches' intervention in Notium (3.34).

> παραπλέων δὲ πάλιν **ἔσχε** καὶ ἐς Νότιον τὸ Κολοφωνίων, οὗ κατῴκηντο Κολοφώνιοι τῆς ἄνω πόλεως ἑαλωκυίας ὑπὸ Ἰταμάνους καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων κατὰ στάσιν ἰδίαν ἐπαχθέντων· **ἑάλω** δὲ μάλιστα αὕτη ὅτε ἡ δευτέρα Πελοποννησίων ἐσβολὴ ἐς τὴν Ἀττικὴν ἐγίγνετο. ἐν οὖν τῷ Νοτίῳ οἱ καταφυγόντες καὶ κατοικήσαντες αὐτόθι αὖθις στασιάσαντες, οἱ μὲν παρὰ Πισσούθνου ἐπικούρους Ἀρκάδων τε καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων ἐπαγαγόμενοι ἐν διατειχίσματι **εἶχον** (καὶ τῶν ἐκ τῆς ἄνω πόλεως Κολοφωνίων οἱ μηδίσαντες ξυνεσελθόντες **ἐπολίτευον**) οἱ δὲ ὑπεξελθόντες τούτους καὶ ὄντες φυγάδες τὸν Πάχητα **ἐπάγονται**. ὁ δὲ

προκαλεσάμενος ἐς λόγους Ἱππίαν τῶν ἐν τῷ διατειχίσματι Ἀρκάδων ἄρχοντα, ὥστε, ἢν μηδὲν ἀρέσκον λέγῃ, πάλιν αὐτὸν καταστήσειν ἐς τὸ τεῖχος σῶν καὶ ὑγιᾶ, ὁ μὲν **ἐξῆλθε** παρ᾽ αὐτόν, ὁ δ᾽ ἐκεῖνον μὲν ἐν φυλακῇ ἀδέσμῳ **εἶχεν**, αὐτὸς δὲ προσβαλὼν τῷ τειχίσματι ἐξαπιναίως καὶ οὐ προσδεχομένων **αἱρεῖ**, τούς τε Ἀρκάδας καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων ὅσοι ἐνῆσαν **διαφθείρει**· καὶ τὸν Ἱππίαν ὕστερον ἐσαγαγὼν ὥσπερ ἐσπείσατο, ἐπειδὴ ἔνδον ἦν, **ξυλλαμβάνει** καὶ **κατατοξεύει**. Κολοφωνίοις δὲ Νότιον **παραδίδωσι** πλὴν τῶν μηδισάντων. καὶ ὕστερον Ἀθηναῖοι οἰκιστὰς πέμψαντες κατὰ τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νόμους **κατῴκισαν** τὸ Νότιον, ξυναγαγόντες πάντας ἐκ τῶν πόλεων, εἴ πού τις ἦν Κολοφωνίων. (3.34)

On the way back as he sailed along the coast, he **put in** *(aor.)* at Notium, the port of the Colophonians, where the Colophonians had settled when the upper town had been taken by Itamenes and the barbarians, who had been called in on account of party discord by one of the factions. And this place **had been taken** *(aor.)* about the time when the second Peloponnesian invasion of Attica was made. When those who had fled for refuge to Notium and settled there had fallen in sedition again, one party, having hired mercenaries, both Arcadian and barbarian, from Pissuthnes, **kept** *(impf.)* these in a space walled off from the rest of the city (and the Colophonians from the upper town who sympathised with the Persians, having joined them there, **were admitted to citizenship** *(impf.)*); the other party, having secretly made their escape and being now in exile, **called in** *(pres.)* Paches. And when he had summoned Hippias, the commander of the Arcadians in the fortified quarter, to a conference, on condition that if his proposals were unsatisfactory he would restore him safe and sound to the fortress, Hippias **came out** *(aor.)* to him, and Paches **kept** *(impf.)* him under guard but unfettered, and he himself, having made a sudden and unexpected attack upon the fortress, **captured** *(pres.)* it, and **put to death** *(pres.)* all the Arcadians and barbarians that were in it. As for Hippias, when he had taken him into the fortress afterwards, just as he had agreed to do, and when he was inside, he **seized** *(pres.)* him and **shot** him **down** *(pres.)*. He then **delivered** *(pres.)* Notium over to the Colophonians, excepting the Persian sympathisers. Afterwards the Athenians, having sent a commission, **recolonized** *(aor.)* Notium according to their own institutions, after they had first brought together all the Colophonians from cities where any of them were to be found.

The first main clause verb of this paragraph is ἔσχε, the aorist form of ἔχω 'to have, to hold', which is usually an atelic activity. However, the context here suggests the meaning 'to put in, land' at a certain location, which is a telic accomplishment. Therefore, the aorist is the default aspect for this verb, indicating that the action is viewed as complete. Not surprisingly, *A Greek-English Lexicon* mentions that this meaning of ἔχω occurs especially in the aorist.[49] Moreover, this ideational value is compatible with the fact that ἔσχε is also a foregrounded event that advances the plot.

The next verb, however, does not carry the time-line forward, although it is an accomplishment in the aorist aspect. Rather, ἑάλω takes a step back in the chronology of the historical events and explains something that happened some years before ἔσχε (viz. in 430 BC).[50] Nevertheless, the capture of Notium is not seen by Thucydides as a mere background to the current events, for which he could have used the pluperfect or another (atelic) verb in the imperfect tense: the use of the aorist aspect indicates the importance attributed to ἑάλω as an independent event on the time-line. Remember that we have already established such anachronies as compatible with the Ancient Greek aorist and as typical of Allan's displaced diegetic mode (cf. supra, p. 44).

The next two verbs, εἶχον and ἐπολίτευον, are in the imperfect tense. On the ideational level, this is the most natural option, since 'to keep' and 'to act as a citizen' are both atelic activities: the present aspect indicates that they are unbounded and still going on. On the textual level, this ideational meaning has the effect that εἶχον and ἐπολίτευον are well suited to describe the background against which the main events of this episode are about to happen.

---

[49] "ἔχω." *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1940).
[50] The use of an aorist form instead of a pluperfect form is not an unusual phenomenon in Ancient Greek. Cf. Smyth (1920: 433).

Those main events are mostly in the historical present tense, which often indicates the textual value of decisiveness, i.e. that the state of affairs in question is of particular relevance with respect to the further development of the story. The first present verb, ἐπάγονται 'to call in', could very well be explained as such: we have already seen that Paches' intervention in Mytilene - also introduced by an historical present - was an important factor in the solution of the Lesbian crisis (cf. supra, p. 34). In much the same way, Paches' employers make the right decision by hiring him, contrary to the other faction in Notium, whose saviours are to be Arcadian and Persian (!) mercenaries.

The next main clause verb, ἐξῆλθε, is an aorist verb that informs us of an action undertaken by the leader of the mercenaries, Hippias. There are a number of ways to explain the use of the aorist aspect here. First, the accomplishment 'to go out to him' is viewed in its entirety, i.e. as a completed whole. Second, there is no textual reason to use another tense here: the imperfect would have meant that Hippias was still on his way to Paches, or that his move does not carry the time-line forward, while the historical present would have implied that Hippias somehow had the ability to influence the further development of the story. The opposite is true of εἶχεν: the imperfect is necessary on the ideational level, since 'to keep under guard' is an atelic activity, and also on the textual level, since it is the background to αἱρεῖ and διαφθείρει: the mercenaries were defeated *while* their leader was being held in custody.

The next five verbs are all in the historical present tense. Together, they form what Longacre (1983: 25) calls the "Peak" of this small episode, i.e. its "Climax" and "Denouement"[51]: the episode reaches its pinnacle (αἱρεῖ 'to take', διαφθείρει 'to slay') and the situation is resolved (ξυλλαμβάνει 'to seize', κατατοξεύει 'to shoot down', παραδίδωσι 'to deliver over'). According to Longacre, such a "zone of turbulence" is

---

[51] Longacre's theory of discourse structures is considerably more nuanced than the way it is presented here, but a more extensive description would lead us to far at present.

typically marked by a change to the present aspect, resulting in a "heightened vividness" (1983: 28) or "change in vantage point" (1983: 35).

All of the above features of Peak are also typical of Allan's immediate diegetic mode: the historical present induces a "Haltung der Gespanntheit" on the account of the audience (Weinrich, 1964, as cited in Allan, 2013: 375) because it is viewing the events through the eyes of an internal observer present at the scene.[52] Therefore, what Allan calls the immediate diegetic mode seems highly compatible with Longacre's Peak.

If we look at the historical present verbs in question, they strike us as having a considerable psychological impact on the audience: Paches has tricked Hippias into a trap, and most shockingly breaks the truce and ends the conflict with bloodshed. The last verb, παραδίδωσι, is less shocking, but reveals the internal perspective observing the events: the Colophonians to whom Paches hands over Notium after the other faction has been defeated. They spectate as their hero saves them from the barbarian mercenaries and restores their rule, while the audience spectates with them, through their eyes.

Apart from this interpersonal meaning of internal perspective, what other values may be attributed to αἱρεῖ, διαφθείρει, ξυλλαμβάνει, κατατοξεύει, and παραδίδωσι? On the ideational level, they are all telic states of affairs that are presented by the historical present tense as bounded.[53] On the textual level, they are foregrounded and decisive for the resolution of the situation: all of them occur on the narrative time-line sequentially, in that particular order.

Let us turn to the last verb of this paragraph, κατῴκισαν 'to colonise'. Its aorist aspect indicates that we are again in the displaced diegetic mode, i.e. the default narrative mode: the narrator is once again writing from the external perspective of

---

[52] Remember that the value of internal perspective is my own replacement of Allan's 'panoramic' perspective (cf. supra, p. 26, 34).

[53] For an explanation of the aspectual value of the historical present tense, see p. 34.

his writing desk, from where he is able to narrate – with hindsight – what happened after the resolution of the situation at Notium (note the explicit use of the adverbial ὕστερον 'later'). Apart from clearly indicating external perspective, the aorist aspect also indicates that the telic accomplishment κατῴκισαν is viewed as a whole, i.e. as a bounded state of affairs, and that it is another step on the narrative time-line. However, the interpersonal meaning seems to be the primary reason for the choice for the aorist aspect here.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of this paragraph. First, the textual value of decisiveness is one of the possible reasons for employing the historical present tense, but it can also be subordinate to an interpersonal value of internal perspective, i.e. the sense that we are viewing the events through the eyes of an observer present at the scene. Second, it has been confirmed that the interpersonal meaning of the historical present tense is based on the ideational meaning of the present *tense*, since the aspectual value of the historical present tense is neutral rather than unboundedness. Therefore, events in the historical present tense always occur sequentially as foregrounded events, and never simultaneously as backgrounded events: that is the function of the imperfect tense.

After Paches had returned to Mytilene, he sent some of their men as hostages to Athens (3.35). When these arrived, the Athenians made a rash decision to put them to death, as well as the other adult men of Mytilene, and to enslave the rest. A trireme was sent to Paches in Mytilene to inform him of their decision. However, the next day they repented their rashness, and the case was brought before the assembly again (3.36). A certain Cleon argues in favour of severe punishment (3.37-40), but Diodotus is able to convince the Athenians to reconsider their verdict (3.41-48), and they sent a second trireme to cancel the command they had sent to Paches the previous day (3.49). However, the Mytilenean hostages in Athens were put to death, and Lesbos was made a colony of Athens (3.50).

3.2.   The Corcyrean revolution (3.69-81)

[7]

The forty Spartan ships that had been chased by Paches regrouped and decided to sail to Corcyra, which was on the brink of revolution from Athens (3.69). Supporters of Athens were killed in the senate of Corcyra (3.70), and the ones responsible convinced the people to remain neutral henceforth (3.71). Envoys to Athens carrying this message were detained there as revolutionists, and in Corcyra civil war erupted between the oligarchs and the people (3.72). The latter prevailed, but the oligarchs retaliated by setting fire to their houses (3.73-74). Nicostratus, an Athenian general, intervened and negotiated a truce between the two factions which included an alliance with Athens (3.75). A few days later, the Spartan fleet arrived at Corcyra (3.76). The Corcyreans launched sixty ships in all haste, some with divided crews, so that the Spartans saw fit to array only twenty ships against these and the rest against the twelve Athenian ships (3.77).

> καὶ οἱ μὲν Κερκυραῖοι κακῶς τε καὶ κατ᾽ ὀλίγας προσπίπτοντες **ἐταλαιπώρουν** τὸ καθ᾽ αὑτούς· οἱ δ᾽ Ἀθηναῖοι φοβούμενοι τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τὴν περικύκλωσιν ἀθρόαις μὲν οὐ **προσέπιπτον** οὐδὲ κατὰ μέσον ταῖς ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοὺς τεταγμέναις, προσβαλόντες δὲ κατὰ κέρας **καταδύουσι** μίαν ναῦν. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα κύκλον ταξαμένων αὐτῶν **περιέπλεον** καὶ **ἐπειρῶντο** θορυβεῖν. γνόντες δὲ οἱ πρὸς τοῖς Κερκυραίοις καὶ δείσαντες μὴ ὅπερ ἐν Ναυπάκτῳ γένοιτο, **ἐπιβοηθοῦσι**, καὶ γενόμεναι ἀθρόαι αἱ νῆες ἅμα τὸν ἐπίπλουν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις **ἐποιοῦντο**. οἱ δ᾽ **ὑπεχώρουν** ἤδη πρύμναν κρουόμενοι καὶ ἅμα τὰς τῶν Κερκυραίων **ἐβούλοντο** προκαταφυγεῖν ὅτι μάλιστα, ἑαυτῶν σχολῇ τε ὑποχωρούντων καὶ πρὸς σφᾶς τεταγμένων τῶν ἐναντίων. Ἡ μὲν οὖν ναυμαχία τοιαύτη γενομένη **ἐτελεύτα** ἐς ἡλίου δύσιν. (3.78)

> Now the Corcyreans, attacking in disorder and with few ships at a time, **were having trouble** *(impf.)* in their part of the battle; and the Athenians, fearing the enemy's superior numbers and the danger of being surrounded, **did** not **fall upon** *(impf.)* the

whole body together nor the centre of the ships that were arrayed against them, but charging upon one of the wings they **sank** *(pres.)* a single ship. And then, when the Peloponnesians after this move formed their ships in a circle, they **sailed round** *(impf.)* the Peloponnesian fleet and **tried** *(impf.)* to throw it into confusion. But those who were facing the Corcyreans, perceiving this manoeuvre and fearing a repetition of what happened at Naupactus, **came to the rescue** *(pres.)*, and the whole fleet, now united, **made** *(impf.)* the approach towards the Athenians simultaneously. Thereupon the Athenians **retired** *(impf.)*, backing water, and **hoped** *(impf.)* at the same time that the Corcyrean ships might as far as possible escape into the harbour, as they themselves retired slowly and the enemy's attacks were directed only against them. The battle, which took place in that fashion, **came to an end** *(impf).* toward sunset.

The first main clause verb, ἐταλαιπώρουν 'to suffer distress', is an atelic activity, for which the present aspect is the default choice on the ideational level. The second verb, προσέπιπτον 'to fall upon', is basically a telic accomplishment, but its negation turns it into an atelic activity: 'not falling upon' has no inherent endpoint. As we have seen earlier, ongoing activities are usually very suitable as background material. Sure enough, ἐταλαιπώρουν and προσέπιπτον can be interpreted as the background to καταδύουσι. In that case, the historical present verb καταδύουσι 'to sink' is a foregrounded accomplishment that occurs at the time of the Corcyreans' distress and the Athenians' resolution not to attack the whole body of Spartan ships. Moreover, καταδύουσι can also receive the textual value of decisiveness: the sinking of this one ship is regarded by Thucydides as an essential event in the course of the battle.

Next, περιέπλεον 'to sail round' and ἐπειρῶντο 'to try' can be interpreted as background to ἐπιβοηθοῦσι 'to come to aid'. Since περιέπλεον is basically a telic accomplishment, the imperfect tense indicates that the culmination phase has not yet been reached. Because 'to sail round' is a volitional action, i.e. its culmination phase is the goal consciously aimed at by the Athenians, the combination with the imperfect tense may be explained as conveying conativity: the Athenians do not succeed in sailing round the Spartan fleet, but get stuck in the attempt. The imperfect verb

περιέπλεον emphasises the unboundedness of that attempt, and together with ἐπειρῶντο, an atelic activity which occurs in the imperfect by default, it lends itself perfectly to constitute the background for ἐπιβοηθοῦσι: while the Athenians are trying to outmanoeuvre one part of the Spartan fleet, the other interferes and decides the outcome of the battle. Note that the decisiveness of ἐπιβοηθοῦσι is stressed by the use of the historical present tense.

The next four imperfect verbs can by analysed in much the same way. First, as we have seen before, ἐποιοῦντο 'to make' is an atelic activity that is often turned into a telic accomplishment by a specific, definite object. In this case, τὸν ἐπίπλουν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις 'the sailing against the Athenians' acts as the object that provides ἐποιοῦντο with an inherent endpoint. Once again this accomplishment in the imperfect tense may indicate conativity: the Spartans' intended goal cannot be reached because that goal, i.e. the Athenians, is falling back to the harbour. Second, ὑπεχώρουν 'to retreat' is an atelic activity without a destination to make it telic. The implication of Thucydides' silence about the destination, which is obviously the safety of the harbour, is that ὑπεχώρουν cannot possibly be interpreted as conative, because such an interpretation would imply something contrary to reality. The Athenians will reach the harbour in the end, but for now they are still retreating from the approaching Spartans. Third, ἐβούλοντο 'to wish', is a stative verb expressing the hopes of the Athenians which motivate the manner of their retreat, and therefore occurs naturally in the imperfect tense on the ideational level. Finally, ἐτελεύτα 'to come to an end' is a telic accomplishment, but note that there is no volition or agency: the battle did not consciously come to an end of its own accord. Therefore, conativity is not an option here. Rather, the imperfect tense presents the 'coming to an end' as unbounded, leaving the culmination phase out of consideration: a more accurate translation would read *the battle was coming to an end.*

The ideational values of these last four verbs very naturally lead them to serve as background material on the (macro-)textual level: the Spartans' pursuit of the

Athenians, who hope to save the Corcyrean ships by retreating slowly, is exactly the way the battle is ending when the events of the following paragraph take place. The fact that the OCT edition of Thucydides' *Histories* places a comma at the end of 3.78[54] emphasises the continuity of the narrative: the aorist verbs of 3.79 move the narrative time-line forward against the background depicted by ἐποιοῦντο, ὑπεχώρουν, ἐβούλοντο, and ἐτελεύτα.

However, in addition to the textual structure provided by the imperfect and historical present tense forms, the entire paragraph may receive an interpersonal meaning of internal perspective: a virtual camera-eye shifts over the battle map, zooming in on the action and the thoughts and feelings of the participants[55], making the audience spectate both background and foreground as if they were there themselves. Note once again that the unbounded states of affairs are narrated in the imperfect and the bounded states of affairs in the historical present tense.[56]

Tho main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of this paragraph. First, foregrounded events may occur in the historical present tense as well, but then they receive in addition either the (textual) value of decisiveness, the (interpersonal) value of internal perspectivization, or both. Either way, they indicate bounded events that carry the narrative forward. Second, the imperfect verbs constitute the background in both of those cases, conveying the various states of affairs that form the situation as it was at the time of the foregrounded events: whether they are internally perspectivised or not, they are always unbounded.

[8]

When the Corcyreans in the city saw the enemy winning, they took measures to protect the city, but the Spartans decided not to attack them in the end (3.79). The

---

[54] See Jones (1900).

[55] Note the use of emotive and cognitive vocabulary: φοβούμενοι 'fearing', γνόντες 'perceiving', δείσαντες 'fearing', ἐβούλοντο 'to hope'.

[56] Cf. supra, p. 34.

next day, the Corcyrean people persuaded some of the opposite faction to go on board the ships, and then word arrived that Athenian reinforcements were approaching Corcyra (3.80).

οἱ μὲν οὖν Πελοποννήσιοι τῆς νυκτὸς εὐθὺς κατὰ τάχος **ἐκομίζοντο** ἐπ᾽ οἴκου παρὰ τὴν γῆν· καὶ ὑπερενεγκόντες τὸν Λευκαδίων ἰσθμὸν τὰς ναῦς, ὅπως μὴ περιπλέοντες ὀφθῶσιν, **ἀποκομίζονται**. Κερκυραῖοι δὲ αἰσθόμενοι τάς τε Ἀττικὰς ναῦς προσπλεούσας τάς τε τῶν πολεμίων οἰχομένας, λαθόντες τούς τε Μεσσηνίους ἐς τὴν πόλιν **ἤγαγον** πρότερον ἔξω ὄντας, καὶ τὰς ναῦς περιπλεῦσαι κελεύσαντες ἃς ἐπλήρωσαν ἐς τὸν Ὑλλαϊκὸν λιμένα, ἐν ὅσῳ περιεκομίζοντο, τῶν ἐχθρῶν εἴ τινα λάβοιεν, **ἀπέκτεινον**· καὶ ἐκ τῶν νεῶν ὅσους ἔπεισαν ἐσβῆναι ἐκβιβάζοντες **ἀπεχρῶντο**, ἐς τὸ Ἡραῖόν τε ἐλθόντες τῶν ἱκετῶν ὡς πεντήκοντα ἄνδρας δίκην ὑποσχεῖν **ἔπεισαν** καὶ **κατέγνωσαν** πάντων θάνατον. οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ τῶν ἱκετῶν, ὅσοι οὐκ ἐπείσθησαν, ὡς ἑώρων τὰ γιγνόμενα, **διέφθειρον** αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ ἀλλήλους, καὶ ἐκ τῶν δένδρων τινὲς **ἀπήγχοντο**, οἱ δ᾽ ὡς ἕκαστοι ἐδύναντο **ἀνηλοῦντο**. ἡμέρας τε ἑπτά, ἃς ἀφικόμενος ὁ Εὐρυμέδων ταῖς ἑξήκοντα ναυσὶ παρέμεινε, Κερκυραῖοι σφῶν αὐτῶν τοὺς ἐχθροὺς δοκοῦντας εἶναι **ἐφόνευον**, τὴν μὲν αἰτίαν ἐπιφέροντες τοῖς τὸν δῆμον καταλύουσιν, **ἀπέθανον** δέ τινες καὶ ἰδίας ἔχθρας ἕνεκα, καὶ ἄλλοι χρημάτων σφίσιν ὀφειλομένων ὑπὸ τῶν λαβόντων· πᾶσά τε ἰδέα **κατέστη** θανάτου, καὶ οἷον φιλεῖ ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ γίγνεσθαι, οὐδὲν ὅ τι οὐ **ξυνέβη** καὶ ἔτι περαιτέρω. καὶ γὰρ πατὴρ παῖδα **ἀπέκτεινε** καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερῶν **ἀπεσπῶντο** καὶ πρὸς αὐτοῖς **ἐκτείνοντο**, οἱ δέ τινες καὶ περιοικοδομηθέντες ἐν τοῦ Διονύσου τῷ ἱερῷ **ἀπέθανον**. (3.81)

The Peloponnesians accordingly **set sail** *(impf.)* that very night for home, going with all speed and keeping close to the shore; and hauling their ships across the Leucadian isthmus so as not to be seen sailing around, they **got away** *(pres.)*. Now the Corcyreans, when they had seen that the Athenian fleet was approaching and the enemy's fleet had gone, they secretly **brought** *(aor.)* the Messenians, who had till then been outside the walls, into the city; and having ordered the ships which they had manned to sail round into the Hyllaic harbour, while these were on their way, they **slew** *(impf.)* any of their personal enemies whom they could lay hands upon; and putting ashore all those on

board the ships whom they had persuaded to go aboard, they **despatched** *(impf.)* them, and having gone into the temple of Hera, they **persuaded** *(aor.)* about fifty of the suppliants to submit to trial, and **condemned** *(aor.)* them all to death. But most of the suppliants, who had not been persuaded, when they saw what was happening, **destroyed** *(impf.)* one another in the sacred precinct itself, while a few **hanged themselves** *(impf.)* on trees, and still others **made away with themselves** *(impf.)* as best they could. And during the seven days that Eurymedon, after his arrival, stayed there with his sixty ships, the Corcyreans **slaughtered** *(impf.)* such of their fellow citizens as they considered to be their personal enemies, bringing the charge of conspiring to overthrow the democracy, but some in fact **perished** *(aor.)* merely to satisfy private enmity, and others, because money was owing to them, at the hands of those who had borrowed it. Death in every form **ensued** *(aor.)*, and whatever horrors are wont to be perpetrated at such times, it all **happened** *(aor.)* then – aye, and even worse. For father **slew** *(impf.)* son, men **were dragged** *(impf.)* from the temples and **were slain** *(impf.)* near them, and some even **perished** *(aor.)* having been walled up in the temple of Dionysus.

The events in this paragraph clearly have a huge psychological impact on the audience as well as the participants who experienced them. As we have seen earlier, a passage with such an emotional charge tends to be narrated from an internal perspective. However, we must remember to analyse each verb form individually so as to be able to appreciate the full, metafunctionally diverse meaning potential of Thucydides' aspectual choices.

The first verb form, ἐκομίζοντο 'to go back', is an imperfect verb of movement with the primary (textual) function of anticipation. Due to its ideational value of unboundedness, the reaching of the destination (i.e. the culmination phase) of the accomplishment ἐκομίζοντο (ἐπ᾽ οἴκου) 'to go back (home)' is left out of consideration: the Spartans are still on their way there for now. With ἀποκομίζονται 'to get away, to return', their journey home is presented as completed, since the historical present indicates that the event has occurred. In addition, ἀποκομίζονται

receives an interpersonal value: rather than being decisive for the outcome of the story, the Spartans' escape from the precarious situation near Corcyra is presented from their own internal perspective, indicating their psychological relief.

The next verb, ἤγαγον (ἐς τὴν πόλιν) 'to bring (into the city)', occurs in the aorist aspect for three reasons. First, as a completed telic accomplishment it needs to be presented as bounded. Second, it is an event that carries the narrative time-line forward. Third, it cannot be presented from an internal perspective, since no one saw the Corcyrean people bringing the Messenians into the city (λαθόντες: 'without being noticed'): only the narrator with hindsight can tell what happened in secret.[57]

With the following two imperfect verbs, ἀπέκτεινον 'to kill' and ἀπεχρῶντο 'to despatch', the monstrosities that will dominate the rest of the paragraph, begin. Such important events cannot be regarded as background material, although they are presented as unbounded by the present aspect. Since ἀπέκτεινον should be regarded as iterative (as indicated by the past general conditional clause εἴ τινα λάβοιεν 'whenever they could lay there hands on someone'), and ἀπεχρῶντο as well (as indicated by the plural direct object ὅσους ἔπεισαν ἐσβῆναι 'as many as they had persuaded to go aboard'), we are again dealing with a recurring cycle of events: even though Thucydides situates ἀπέκτεινον 'to kill' ἐν ὅσῳ περιεκομίζοντο 'while the ships were on their way', and ἀπεχρῶντο 'to despatch' ἐκβιβάζοντες 'while they put them ashore', it seems more than likely that part of the 'killing' continued while the 'despatching' had already begun. These unbounded, simultaneous, but foregrounded events receive the additional meaning of internal perspective: they are presented from the point of view of an observer on the spot, possibly the people of Corcyra not

---

[57] One could argue that events carried out in secret may still be narrated from the internal perspective of a *virtual* observer, i.e. a non-human camera-eye. However, I believe that expressions such as λαθόντες explicitly indicate that such events are not observable by *any observer* on the spot, either character or camera-eye, and that knowledge of them is restricted to a narrator with full knowledge of what happened, even beyond the awareness of the participants.

participating in the slaughtering (either as perpetrators or as victims), or alternatively a virtual camera-eye scanning the city.

The aorist aspect of the next verb, ἔπεισαν 'to persuade', indicates that ἀπέκτεινον and ἀπεχρῶντο have now stopped: if it would have occurred in the imperfect tense, ἔπεισαν would have been simultaneous with ἀπέκτεινον and ἀπεχρῶντο, which would have been contrary to reality. Rather, ἔπεισαν is a bounded accomplishment, and therefore a completed, foregrounded state of affairs. However, it is not viewed from an internal perspective, which would, ceteris paribus, have necessitated the historical present tense. The reason why Thucydides adopts an external perspective here, may be clear from his aspectual choice for the next (telic and momentaneous) verb, κατέγνωσαν 'to condemn'. Obviously, there had to be a certain interval of time between 'persuading them to go to trial' and 'condemning them at the end of the trial'. However, the events that follow κατέγνωσαν in the text do not follow κατέγνωσαν in reality, but occur after these fifty people had been persuaded to leave the temple. The external perspective from which these two foregrounded events are narrated is typical for Allan's displaced diegetic mode, which allows for such deviations from the chronological order of events.

According to Smith's translation, the next three imperfect verbs, διέφθειρον 'to destroy', ἀπήγχοντο 'to hang oneself', and ἀνηλοῦντο 'to make away with oneself', began when the remaining suppliants in the temple ἑώρων τὰ γιγνόμενα 'saw what was happening'. However, such an interpretation implies that the sentence had already been passed and the execution (which is not mentioned by Thucydides) carried out when διέφθειρον, ἀπήγχοντο, and ἀνηλοῦντο occurred. In my opinion, ἑώρων should be translated as 'realized': the suppliants in the temple understood what was going on and what it would lead to in the end. Now, just as ἀπέκτεινον and ἀπεχρῶντο, διέφθειρον, ἀπήγχοντο, and ἀνηλοῦντο form a recurring cycle of foregrounded events viewed from an internal perspective: they are all achievements that should be interpreted as iterative due to the plural direct object ἀλλήλους 'each

other', and the plural subjects τινὲς 'some' and οἱ δὲ 'others'. Moreover, the next (telic and momentaneous) verb, ἐφόνευον 'to murder', is even more clearly an unbounded and therefore iterative state of affairs, because of the plural direct object τοὺς ἐχθροὺς 'their enemies' and particularly the adverbial phrase ἡμέρας τε ἑπτά 'during seven days'. Therefore, it is part of the recurring cycle of διέφθειρον, ἀπήγχοντο, and ἀνηλοῦντο, as well as a foregrounded event narrated from an internal perspective.

The reasons for ἐφόνευον are internally perspectivized as well: the common people of Corcyra that did not participate in these events, thought that people murdered each other out of personal enmity or on the charge of revolutionary ideas. However, the aorist aspect of ἀπέθανον 'to perish' indicates that Thucydides did not fully agree with these people: from his external hindsight he is able to tell that some people were being killed because of debts as well. This extra motivation is one of Thucydides' interventions in the narrative: since the internal observers on the spot could not have known this reason, Thucydides had to add it himself. Note that the aorist aspect also presents ἀπέθανον, an achievement, as bounded: it is not a separate event occurring simultaneous with ἐφόνευον, but rather summarises or retells it, giving a different explanation. Therefore, ἀπέθανον is not an event on the narrative time-line, but rather a backgrounded authorial comment.[58]

Likewise, the next two aorist verbs are Thucydides' own thoughts and comments on the events: κατέστη 'to ensue' and ξυνέβη 'to happen' are not internally perspectivised, but explicitly convey the external point of view of the narrator. Moreover, like ἀπέθανον, they are bounded, telic states of affairs that do not narrate new events, but rather summarise or retell the previous and following events.

In that light, ἀπέκτεινε 'to kill', ἀπεσπῶντο 'to drag away from', and ἐκτείνοντο 'to kill' should be seen as belonging to the same cycle of recurring internally

---

[58] Cf. note 48.

perspectivized foregrounded events as διέφθειρον, ἀπήγχοντο, ἀνηλοῦντο, and ἐφόνευον that are summarized by κατέστη and ξυνέβη: all these events 'ensued' and 'happened' in the aforementioned time span of seven days. Not surprisingly, ἀπέκτεινε, ἀπεσπῶντο, and ἐκτείνοντο are again iterated telic states of affairs: πατὴρ 'father' and παῖδα 'son' indicate generalization, the ending of ἀπεσπῶντο implies an unspecified plural subject, as is οἱ δέ τινες 'some'.

Finally, the aorist aspect of ἀπέθανον 'to perish' can be explained on the same levels of meaning. Ideationally, ἀπέθανον is a bounded state of affairs because it does not occur simultaneously with the imperfect verbs that precede it. Rather, it is narrated as a completed and separate event because of the manner in which they are killed. If 'to wall them up' would have been a main clause event, it would have been in the imperfect tense, but death as a result of starvation usually occurs after an extended period of time. Similarly, the deaths of these people cannot have been *perceived* by an internal observer, only the act of erecting the wall that removed them from sight. Therefore, the aorist conveys both boundedness and external perspective here.

Three main conclusions may be drawn from the discussion of this paragraph. First, events with a considerable psychological impact tend to be narrated from an internal perspective. Second, it has been confirmed that the imperfect tense can be used to narrate recurring cycles of foregrounded events from an internal perspective; in this case, there is no textual value (grounding) attributed to the imperfect tense, only ideational (unboundedness) and interpersonal (internal perspective) values. Finally, the aorist can be used to explicitly indicate external perspective in the form of authorial comments or summaries.

3.3.   The battle of Aegitium (3.94-98)

In the summer of 426 BC, the Athenians sent thirty ships round the Peloponnesus under the command of Demosthenes (3.91), aided by allied Acarnanians, Cephallenians, Messenians, and Zacynthians. The Messenian troops persuaded Demosthenes to attack the Aetolians, because they were hostile to Athens' ally Naupactus (3.94), but the Acarnanians did not agree and desisted from the attack. The Locrians, neighbours of the Aetolians, were rallied to fight with the Athenian army (3.95). Demosthenes decided to take the smaller settlements in the country first, but this did not go unnoticed by the Aetolians, who started to rally their forces (3.96).

[9]

> τῷ δὲ Δημοσθένει τοιόνδε τι οἱ Μεσσήνιοι **παρῄνουν**, ὅπερ καὶ τὸ πρῶτον· ἀναδιδάσκοντες αὐτὸν τῶν Αἰτωλῶν ὡς εἴη ῥᾳδία ἡ αἵρεσις, ἰέναι **ἐκέλευον** ὅτι τάχιστα ἐπὶ τὰς κώμας καὶ μὴ μένειν ἕως ἂν ξύμπαντες ἀθροισθέντες ἀντιτάξωνται, τὴν δ᾽ ἐν ποσὶν αἰεὶ πειρᾶσθαι αἱρεῖν. ὁ δὲ τούτοις τε πεισθεὶς καὶ τῇ τύχῃ ἐλπίσας, ὅτι οὐδὲν αὐτῷ ἠναντιοῦτο, τοὺς Λοκροὺς οὐκ ἀναμείνας οὓς αὐτῷ ἔδει προσβοηθῆσαι (ψιλῶν γὰρ ἀκοντιστῶν ἐνδεὴς **ἦν** μάλιστα) **ἐχώρει** ἐπὶ Αἰγιτίου, καὶ κατὰ κράτος **αἱρεῖ** ἐπιών. **ὑπέφευγον** γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ **ἐκάθηντο** ἐπὶ τῶν λόφων τῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως· **ἦν** γὰρ ἐφ᾽ ὑψηλῶν χωρίων ἀπέχουσα τῆς θαλάσσης ὀγδοήκοντα σταδίους μάλιστα. οἱ δὲ Αἰτωλοί (βεβοηθηκότες γὰρ ἤδη ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ Αἰγίτιον) **προσέβαλλον** τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις καὶ τοῖς ξυμμάχοις καταθέοντες ἀπὸ τῶν λόφων ἄλλοι ἄλλοθεν καὶ **ἐσηκόντιζον**, καὶ ὅτε μὲν ἐπίοι τὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων στρατόπεδον, **ὑπεχώρουν**, ἀναχωροῦσι δὲ **ἐπέκειντο**· καὶ **ἦν** ἐπὶ πολὺ τοιαύτη ἡ μάχη, διώξεις τε καὶ ὑπαγωγαί, ἐν οἷς ἀμφοτέροις ἥσσους ἦσαν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι. (3.97)

The Messenians, however, **advised** *(impf.)* Demosthenes in the same way as at first: informing him that the conquest of the Aetolians was easy, they **urged** *(impf.)* him to proceed as quickly as possible against the villages, and not to wait until all of them, having united, should array themselves against him, but to try to take always the first

village in his way. Having been persuaded by these people, and being hopeful because of his good fortune, since he was meeting with no opposition, he **advanced** *(impf.)* against Aegitium without waiting for the Locrians, who were to have brought him reinforcements (for he **was** *(impf.)* greatly in need of light-armed men that were javelin-throwers), and **took** *(pres.)* it by storm at the first onset. For the inhabitants **fled** *(impf.)* and **took post** *(impf.)* on the hills above the city; for it **stood** *(impf.)* on high ground, being about eighty stadia removed from the sea. But the Aetolians (for they had come to the aid of Aegitium) **attacked** *(impf.)* the Athenians and their allies, running down from the hills on every side, and **threw javelins** *(impf.)* at them, and whenever the Athenian army advanced, they **retreated** *(impf.)*, but when the Athenians retreated, they **pressed upon** *(impf.)* them. And the battle **was** *(impf.)* like this for a long time, alternate pursuits and retreats, in both of which the Athenians were weaker.

The first three verbs in this paragraph, παρήνουν 'to advise', ἐκέλευον 'to urge', and ἦν 'to be', occur in the imperfect tense by default: the former two are atelic activities, since they have no inherent endpoint that needs to be reached before the state of affairs can be said to have occurred; the latter is a state. As a result, they constitute the background of unbounded, simultaneous states of affairs against which ἐχώρει 'to advance' occurs. The imperfect tense of ἐχώρει can be said to have textual value as well, though not as background, since it is on the narrative time-line. Rather, the unboundedness of the telic accomplishment ἐχώρει ἐπὶ Αἰγιτίου 'to advance against Aegitium' indicates anticipation of the intended destination, which has not yet been reached for now.[59]

The only verb in this paragraph that occurs in a tense other than the imperfect, is αἱρεῖ. As we saw earlier, I concur with Fanning (1990: 228) on denying the historical present any aspectual value of unboundedness: events in the historical present simply occur, one after another. The reason, then, why Thucydides did not use the aorist for the 'taking' of Aegitium, could be looked for on two levels of meaning: on

---

[59] The actual arrival at Aegitium is conveyed by the participle ἐπιών, which can more accurately be translated as 'upon arriving'.

the textual level, the capture of this city could have been regarded by Thucydides as decisive or unexpected.[60] On the interpersonal level, he might have wanted to present this event from the internal perspective of the inhabitants of Aegitium: they were in a position, as will become clear in the following sentence, from which they could watch as the Athenian forces entered their hometown.

The next three verbs, ὑπέφευγον 'to flee', ἐκάθηντο 'to take post', and ἦν 'to be', explain why the Athenians could seize Aegitium so easily (indicated by the explanatory particle γὰρ): as they entered the city, the inhabitants fled and were taking post on the neighbouring hills, provided by the geographical position of the city. The background function of ὑπέφευγον, ἐκάθηντο, and ἦν stems from their ideational function: ὑπέφευγον is an atelic activity, ἐκάθηντο ἐπὶ τῶν λόφων 'on the hills' is a telic accomplishment presented as unbounded, and ἦν is a state that was true long before and long after these events. Together, they describe the different states of affairs that were taking place at the time of αἱρεῖ.[61]

The next four verbs, προσέβαλλον 'to attack'[62], ἐσηκόντιζον 'to throw javelins', ὑπεχώρουν 'to retreat', and ἐπέκειντο 'to press upon', are separated from the foregrounded event αἱρεῖ (and its satellites ὑπέφευγον and ἐκάθηντο) by the parenthesised pluperfect βεβοηθηκότες ἦσαν 'they had come to aid': it was only after the taking of Aegitium that the Aetolians arrived at the scene. The events that

---

[60] Cf. Basset (2011: 160).

[61] In this reading of the text, the inhabitants of Aegitium were fleeing at the moment of αἱρεῖ. However, Herwerden (1877) reads the aorist ὑπέφυγον instead of the imperfect ὑπέφευγον. If he is correct, ὑπέφυγον 'they had fled' is a foregrounded activity with a activity phase limited in time that occurred before (and not during) the taking of Aegitium; ἐκάθηντο would then be interpreted as the activity 'to hold a position' and as the background to αἱρεῖ, which in turn would then be even more suited for perception, i.e. from the perspective of the inhabitants of Aegitium on the hill. However, the accuracy of this reading is unclear: Smith defended Herwerden's interpretation in his commentary on Thucydides' narrative (1894), but disregarded any dispute on the matter in his edition of the same (1975[6]).

[62] Note that we translated προσβάλλω earlier as the accomplishment 'to make an attack on' (cf. supra, p. 45). However, προσβάλλω may also be translated as the activity 'to attack' ("προσβάλλω." *A Greek-English Lexicon,* 1940).

occured next primarily have an interpersonal meaning: they are perceived by the inhabitants of Aegitium from their position on the hills that tower over the land. Ideationally, the latter two constitute a recurring cycle of events that is to be regarded as simultaneous with the atelic activities προσέβαλλον and ἐσηκόντιζον: the attack of the Aetolians consisted of constant javelin-hurling and a repeating pattern of retreating and pressing on, as indicated by the past general temporal clause introduced by ὅτε + optative, 'whenever'. As we have shown before, this simultaneity results from the value of unboundedness.

Finally, ἦν 'to be', is a state that encompasses and summarises the previous four verbs. The imperfect tense[63] can be explained on two levels of meaning. Ideationally, its value of unboundedness signifies that the battle was not over yet, which leads to the (macro-)textual value of backgrounding: the foreground continues in the very next paragraph, and the way this battle was progressing conveys the framework for the events to come.

As a concluding statement, it only remains to observe that none of our previous conclusions have been refuted. They will be recapitulated in the final chapter of this paper.

[10]

> μέχρι μὲν οὖν οἱ τοξόται εἶχόν τε τὰ βέλη αὐτοῖς καὶ οἷοί τε ἦσαν χρῆσθαι, οἱ δὲ **ἀντεῖχον** (τοξευόμενοι γὰρ οἱ Αἰτωλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ψιλοὶ **ἀνεστέλλοντο**)· ἐπειδὴ δὲ τοῦ τε τοξάρχου ἀποθανόντος οὗτοι διεσκεδάσθησαν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐκεκμήκεσαν καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ τῷ αὐτῷ πόνῳ ξυνεχόμενοι, οἵ τε Αἰτωλοὶ ἐνέκειντο καὶ ἐσηκόντιζον, οὕτω δὴ τραπόμενοι **ἔφευγον**, καὶ ἐσπίπτοντες ἔς τε χαράδρας ἀνεκβάτους καὶ χωρία ὧν οὐκ ἦσαν ἔμπειροι **διεφθείροντο**· καὶ γὰρ ὁ ἡγεμὼν αὐτοῖς τῶν ὁδῶν

---

[63] Remember that, although εἰμί has no aorist form, the aspectual choice for the imperfect tense is far from insignificant: Thucydides had plenty of other options to chose from if he wanted to convey boundedness (cf. supra, p. 37).

Χρόμων ὁ Μεσσήνιος **ἐτύγχανε**[64] τεθνηκώς. οἱ δὲ Αἰτωλοὶ ἐσακοντίζοντες πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ τροπῇ κατὰ πόδας αἱροῦντες ἄνθρωποι ποδώκεις καὶ ψιλοὶ **διέφθειρον**, τοὺς δὲ πλείους τῶν ὁδῶν ἁμαρτάνοντας καὶ ἐς τὴν ὕλην ἐσφερομένους, ὅθεν διέξοδοι οὐκ ἦσαν, πῦρ κομισάμενοι **περιεπίμπρασαν**· πᾶσά τε ἰδέα **κατέστη** τῆς φυγῆς καὶ τοῦ ὀλέθρου τῷ στρατοπέδῳ τῶν Ἀθηναίων, μόλις τε ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὸν Οἰνεῶνα τῆς Λοκρίδος, ὅθεν περ καὶ ὡρμήθησαν, οἱ περιγενόμενοι **κατέφυγον**. **ἀπέθανον** δὲ τῶν τε ξυμμάχων πολλοὶ καὶ αὐτῶν Ἀθηναίων ὁπλῖται περὶ εἴκοσι μάλιστα καὶ ἑκατόν. τοσοῦτοι μὲν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ἡλικία ἡ αὐτὴ οὗτοι βέλτιστοι δὴ ἄνδρες ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τῷδε ἐκ τῆς Ἀθηναίων πόλεως **διεφθάρησαν**· **ἀπέθανε** δὲ καὶ ὁ ἕτερος στρατηγὸς Προκλῆς. τοὺς δὲ νεκροὺς ὑποσπόνδους ἀνελόμενοι παρὰ τῶν Αἰτωλῶν καὶ ἀναχωρήσαντες ἐς Ναύπακτον ὕστερον ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας ταῖς ναυσὶν **ἐκομίσθησαν**. Δημοσθένης δὲ περὶ Ναύπακτον καὶ τὰ χωρία ταῦτα **ὑπελείφθη**, τοῖς πεπραγμένοις φοβούμενος τοὺς Ἀθηναίους. (3.98)

Now so long as their bowmen had arrows and were able to use them, the Athenians **held out** *(impf.)* (for the Aetolian troops, light-armed men, being shot at, **were kept back** *(impf.)*). But when the captain of the archers had been killed and his men had been scattered, and when the hoplites were worn out, having been engaged in the unremitting struggle for a long time, and since the Aetolians were pressing them hard and hurling javelins upon them, the Athenian hoplites, having turned around, **fled** *(impf.)*; and falling into ravines from which there was no way out and into places with which they were unacquainted, they **were slain** *(impf.)*. For Chromon, the Messenian, who had been their guide on the way, **had unfortunately been killed**. The Aetolians, plying their javelins and catching many there in the rout, being swift of foot and lightly equipped, **slew** *(impf.)* them. But the greater number, who had missed the roads and had got into the forest, from which there were no paths out, having brought fire, they **set on fire** *(impf.)*. Then every manner of flight **ensued** *(aor.)*, and every manner of destruction for the army of the Athenians, and the survivors **escaped** *(aor.)* only with

---

[64] Because of the idiomatic nature of this verb, it will not be analysed in the current paper. ("τυγχάνω." *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1940).

difficulty to the sea at Oeneon in Locris, from where they had set out. Many of the allies **perished** *(aor.)*, and of the Athenians themselves about one hundred and twenty hoplites. So great a number of men, and all of the same age, **were destroyed** *(aor.)* in this war, the best men in truth from the city of Athens; and Procles, on of the two generals, **perished** *(aor.)* also. Having received back their dead from the Aetolians and having retreated to Naupactus, they **were** afterwards **taken back** *(aor.)* by the fleet to Athens. Demosthenes, however, **was left behind** *(aor.)* in Naupactus and the region round about, being afraid of the Athenians because of what had happened.

The first part of this paragraph is narrated in the imperfect tense, while the second part features only aorist verbs. The main reason for this division of aspect is to be found on the interpersonal level: the imperfect verbs convey internally perspectivized states of affairs, whereas the aorist verbs indicate the narrator's external point of view. However, let us first analyse each verb form individually with respect to the other metafunctions as well.

The first two imperfect verbs, ἀντεῖχον 'to hold out' and ἀνεστέλλοντο 'to keep back' are both atelic activites, naturally presented as unbounded, and simultaneous with the last five imperfect verbs of the previous paragraph.[65] The foregrounded events that occur against that entire internally perspectivised background of simultaneous states of affairs, however, are narrated in a genitive absolute (τοῦ τε τοξάρχου ἀποθανόντος 'when the captain of the archers had been killed') and a number of temporal subordinate clauses introduced by ἐπειδὴ 'when' (the pluperfect forms διεσκεδάσθησαν 'had scattered' and ἐκεκμήκεσαν 'had been worn out'). Apparently, there is a difference between sequential events that are important to the story, and events that merely occur in chronological order, such as these three states of affairs.

---

[65] Note the importance to analyse verb forms across paragraph borders, which have often been artificially imposed on classical texts by editors in later times.

As a result of the death of the captain of the archers, their confusion, and the weariness of the hoplites, and at the same time because of the length of the battle and the continuous activity of the Aetolians, the Athenian forces fled. Indeed, the imperfect verbs ἔφευγον 'to flee', διεφθείροντο 'to be slain', and διέφθειρον 'to slay' occur simultaneously with respect to each other (as a result of their unboundedness), but only after the 'foregrounded' events (i.e. events on the narrative time-line) of the preceding subordinate clauses, which separate them from the previous series of imperfect verbs. While they 'were fleeing' (atelic activity), they were 'slain' and 'slain' (iterated achievements, once passive and once active) by the Aetolians. Again, this ideational value of unboundedness does not lead to a textual value of grounding, but to an interpersonal meaning of internal perspective: the events continue to be viewed through the eyes of our observers on the spot, the inhabitants of Aegitium. Rather than constituting the background to a certain foreground, the slaying of the Athenians is described as they are unfolding before their eyes.

In that light, the last imperfect verb of this paragraph, περιεπίμπρασαν 'to set on fire', has an even greater pyschological impact on both observers and audience. The direct object of περιεπίμπρασαν is explicitly identified as the Athenian soldiers in the forest, and not the forest itself (τοὺς δὲ πλείους τῶν ὁδῶν ἁμαρτάνοντας καὶ ἐς τὴν ὕλην ἐσφερομένους 'the ones who had missed the roads and had got into the forest'). Therefore, the combination of the imperfect tense with the achievement περιεπίμπρασαν should be interpreted as iterativity: the Aetolians set fire to all of these individual soldiers. Again, the ideational value of unboundedness leads to the interpersonal meaning of internal perspective: the people on the hills perceive how the Athenian forces were killed by arms and fire at the same time.

The remainder of this paragraph is narrated from the external perspective of the narrator, as indicated by the aorist aspect. First, κατέστη 'to ensue' summarises the

various ways in which the Athenians perished.[66] Next, κατέφυγον 'to escape' cannot be in the line of sight of our internal observers on the spot, and is only known to the narrator. Similarly, it is only the narrator himself who possesses the hindsight and the knowledge required to give the exact numbers of how many hoplites perished (ἀπέθανον). Next, διεφθάρησαν 'to be slain' is an explicit authorial comment on the special valour of the ones who were killed in this entire expedition. The death of Procles, ἀπέθανε, is presented as a mere afterthought. In fact, κατέστη, κατέφυγον, ἀπέθανον, and διεφθάρησαν[67] constitute some kind of report of the casualties and survivors of this battle: these events do not carry the narrative time-line forward, but rather convey the events that accompanied the foregrounded events, i.e. the preceding imperfect verbs, but that could only be known to an external narrator who looks back on the events.[68]

The accomplishment[69] ἐκομίσθησαν 'to take back' and the achievement ὑπελείφθη 'to leave behind', do carry the narrative time-line forward: in addition to an interpersonal value of external perspective, they receive a textual value of foregrounding, based on their ideational value of boundedness, which occurs naturally with their telic *Aktionsart.*

One main conclusion can be drawn from the discussion of this paragraph. Foregrounded states of affairs, insofar as they move the narrative time-line forward, can occur in subordinate clauses (often temporal) as well. Although the scope of the present paper is limited to main clause events only, the inclusion of these 'foregrounded' events is sometimes necessary to be able to account for the aspectual choices for the main clause verbs.

---

[66] Compare with the analysis of the previous instance of this verb on p. 67.

[67] All of these states of affairs are telic, and occur naturally with the aorist aspect, which conveys boundedness.

[68] Cf. note 48.

[69] The plural subject is viewed collectively by Thucydides. Cf. Fanning (1990: 166-167).

4. General conclusions

In this Master's dissertation, an attempt was made to ascertain the metafunctionally diverse nature of the grammatical category *aspect* in Ancient Greek historiographical narrative. The corpus material for this linguistic investigation was the third book of Thucydides' *Histories*, and from it were selected ten paragraphs for discussion. The analysis focussed on the aspectual nature of main clause verbs, insofar as they occurred in the aorist, imperfect, or historical present tense.

The general framework for this research was Systemic Functional Linguistics, which postulates a three-dimensional semantic approach of language. According to SFL, there are three levels of meaning: the ideational dimension (the propositional content), the textual dimension (the way a discourse is organized), and the interpersonal dimension (concerning the relationship between speaker/writer and hearer/reader). With respect to the category *aspect*, the ideational dimension is concerned with (un)boundedness and its interaction between the *Aktionsart*/situation type of individual verbs (resulting in such interpretations as conativity and iterativity), the textual dimension with the foreground-background distinction, discourse cohesion, anticipation, and decisiveness[70], and the interpersonal dimension with point of view, i.e. internal or external perspective.[71]

The main thesis of this dissertation was that all three metafunctions are necessary but also sufficient to account for all of the aorist, imperfect, and historical present verbs in Thucydides' narrative. Especially the claim for including the interpersonal dimension in semantic discussions of aspect needed support. In addition, while it is

---

[70] Note that the historical present is not considered to have any marked aspectual value, but only temporal value.

[71] This value of aspect has led Allan (2013) to distinguish between various discourse modes with more features than merely perspective, based on specific uses of particles, subordination, participles, negation, mood, and vocabulary. However, this paper was concerned with verbal aspect only, a category that, in my opinion, has the ability to indicate only one of those features, viz. perspective.

true that the ideational dimension lies at the basis of textual and interpersonal dimension, we tried to ascertain the default metafunction *in narrative.*

The extended semantic analysis of ten excerpts from the corpus led to the following concrete conclusions. First and foremost, it was found that a semantic analysis of aspect must always examine individual verb forms, and not entire paragraphs as a whole. However, it is also important to hold a wider context into account: paragraph boundaries are rather artificial and therefore often misleading.

Second, we agree with Allan (2013) that what he terms 'the displaced diegetic mode' is the default discourse mode in historiographical narrative. The result for the interpretation of aspect is that the default aspectual choice is based on the textual value of grounding: the imperfect tense usually depicts the background to a foreground carried by the aorist tense. The default perspective is, therefore, the external point of view of the narrator. Third, the default aspectual value of grounding can be overridden when there is a marked meaning on either the ideational or the interpersonal level, or even on the textual level itself. For example, a foregrounded event may be in the imperfect tense to indicate iterativity, internal perspective, anticipation, discourse cohesion, or a combination of these and other values. Alternatively, a background element may be in the aorist to indicate external perspective.

Fourth, it was found that the threefold distinction made by Allan (2013) between an external (aorist), a panoramic (historical present), and an internal (imperfect) point of view, should be reduced to a distinction between internal (historical present, imperfect) and external (aorist) perspective. I agree with Fanning (1990: 228) that the difference between the historical present and the imperfect tenses lies in their ideational meaning: the historical present derives its value of internal perspective through its ability to convey presence at the scene by means of the temporal illusion of immediacy. As regards aspect, the historical present is unmarked for either

boundedness or unboundedness: the events simply occur, one after another, on the narrative foreground. The imperfect, on the other hand, derives its value of internal perspective through its aspectual value of unboundedness: the event is viewed from within, in its unfolding. Unlike the historical present, therefore, internally perspectivised events in the imperfect tense occur simultaneously, either as background or as recurring cycles of foregrounded events.

Fifth, the internal observer on the spot that experiences the states of affairs can be either a human participant of the events, or a virtual camera-eye. The former must have the opportunity to perceive the states of affairs in order to be eligible as the internal observer. The latter can shift over the different areas of, for example, a battlefield, and has nu such obligation: it is omnipresent. However, internally perspectivised states of affairs must always be potentially observable by *some* observer on the spot: events that take place in secret or excluded from sight are only known to the narrator, and cannot be presented from an internal point of view.

Sixth, the choice for a verb with an aorist declination, like εἰμί, only serves to emphasise the meaning of the imperfect tense. Since Thucydides most probably had plenty of other lexemes to choose from, the imperfect cannot be explained as being due to the lack of an aorist form for εἰμί.

Seventh, the ideational value of (un)boundedness dominates the textual and interpersonal dimensions in the sense that (a) states of affairs in the aorist aspect always occur sequentially, though not always in chronological order, (b) states of affairs in the historical present tense occur always one after another, in the order in which they are narrated, and (c) states of affairs in the imperfect tense are always simultaneous.

Eighth, when a motivation, reason, or cause is narrated from an internal point of view, it is attributed to the insight of the internal observer. When the narrator does not agree, he may intervene with an aorist verb that expresses his own opinion based

on full knowledge of the events due to his ability to view the events in retrospect, i.e. from an external point of view. His hindsight also provides him with the ability to summarise or rephrase the events with aorist verbs, but these do not carry the narrative forward: rather, they are backgrounded states of affairs that accompany the foreground conveyed particularly by imperfect verbs.

Finally, events on the narrative time-line can occur in subordinate clauses (often temporal) as well. Although this dissertation was primarily concerned with main clause events, it may prove useful to include an investigation of such subordinate clauses in future aspectual studies of historiographical narrative, in order to fully understand the influence of aspect on the understanding of an Ancient Greek text.

Therefore, it seems that this Master's dissertation has found solid evidence for its main hypothesis. The Ancient Greek verb has been proven to feature a range of meanings due to the category of aspect. Three different levels of aspectual meaning provide the verb with a diverse meaning potential, from which some meanings are emphasised and other ruled out as a result of various interactions with the lexical meaning of the verb and the context.

Nevertheless, this paper's limitations of time and space restrict the exhaustiveness and accuracy of its findings: extending the scope of this and similar research to other genres, such as drama and epic, could broaden our comprehension of Ancient Greek texts. Are all three metafunctions always necessary to account for the meaning potential of aspect? To what extent do tragedies and comedies, not coincidentally 'mimetic' literature in Aristotle's words, feature the same interpersonal distinction between internal and external perspective as historiographical texts, which as we saw in this paper combine *diegesis* 'telling' with *mimesis* 'showing' in a very implicit way (i.e. even if we disregard direct speech, Aristotle's criterion for *mimesis*)? And in what way do Homer's epics differ from historiography in this respect? Do the poet's Muses provide him with the ability to narrate the events from an internal point of

view as well? More extensive three-dimensional research on various verbal (and other linguistic) categories and different literary genres is required for a full understanding of Ancient Greek texts.

5.   References

5.1. Editions, commentaries, translations

HERWERDEN, H. VAN. 1877. *Thoukudidou Xuggrafē.* Utrecht: Kemink.

HORNBLOWER, S. 2003. *A Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. 1: Books I-III.* Oxford: University Press.

HUDE, K. 1913-25. *Thucydides Historiae.* Bibliotheca Teubnerania. Leipzig: Teubner.

JONES, H. S. 1900 (revised by J.E. Powell, 1942). *Thucydides Historiae.* Oxford Classical Texts. Oxford: University Press.

SMITH, C.F. 1894. *Commentary on Thucydides Book 3.* Bosten: Ginn & Company.

SMITH, C.F. 1975[6]. *Thucydides, with an English Translation.* Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press & London: Heinemann.

5.2. Other works

AERTS, S. 2013a. *Tense and Aspect in Caesar's De Bello Gallico IV-V*, diss. Gent.

AERTS, S. 2013b. *Aspect and the Interpersonal Dimension in Herodotus' Histories I*, diss. Gent.

ALLAN, R.J. 2007. Sense and Sentence Complexity. Sentence Structure, Sentence Connection, and Tense-aspect as Indicators of Narrative Mode in Thucydides' Histories. In R.J. Allan & M. Buijs (eds.), *The Language of Literature. Linguistic Approaches to Classical Texts,* 93-121. Leiden: Brill.

ALLAN, R.J. 2013. History as Presence. Time, Tense and Narrative Modes in Thucydides. In A. Tsakmakis & M. Tamiolaki (eds.), *Thucydides Between History and Literature*, 371-390. Berlin: De Gruyter.

BACHE, C. 2008. *English Tense and Aspect in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar: a Critical Appraisal and an Alternative.* London: Equinox Pub.

BAKKER, E.J. 1997. Verbal Aspect and Mimetic Description in Thucydides. In E.J. Bakker (ed.), *Grammar as Interpretation: Greek Literature in its Linguistic Contexts*, 7-54. Leiden: Brill.

BASSET, L. 2011. Imparfait, Aoriste et Présent Historique dans les Récits des Quatre Batailles Navales de Syracuse (*Guerre du Péloponnèse,* Livre 7). In J. Lallot, A. Rijksbaron & B. Jacquinod (eds.), *The Historical Present in Thucydides: Semantics and Narrative Function,* 159-176. Leiden: Brill.

BENTEIN, K. 2013. Aspect in het Oudgrieks: een Introductie. Handout, *Lectuur van Oudgriekse Teksten*. Gent: Department of Linguistics (Greek).

BENTEIN, K. 2016. Aspectual Choice and the Presentation of Narrative. An Application to Herodotus' Histories. Glotta.

BOEL, G. DE. 1991. Aspect en Lexicale Betekenis van het Griekse Werkwoord. *Kleio* 20 (4), 383–399.

COMRIE, B. 1976[1]. *Aspect. An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems.* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics). Cambridge: University Press.

FANNING, B.M. 1990. *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

FINLEY, J.H. 1967. *Three Essays on Thucydides.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

FLEISCHMAN, S. 1989. Temporal Distance: A Basic Linguistic Metaphor. *Studies in Language* 13, 1-50.

FLEISCHMAN, S. 1990. *Tense and Narrativity: from Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction.* London: Routledge.

HALLIDAY, M.A.K. 1978. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning.* London: Arnold.

HALLIDAY, M.A.K. & C.M.I.M. Matthiessen. 2004. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar.* London: Edward Arnold.

HOPPER, P.J. 1979. Aspect in Foregrounding and Discourse. In T. Givón (ed.), *Discourse and Syntax,* 213-241. New York & London: Academic Press.

HORNBLOWER, S. 1987. *Thucydides.* London: Duckworth.

HORNBLOWER, S., A. Spawforth & E. Eidinow (eds.). 2012[4]. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

IMMERWAHR, H.R., & W.R. Connor. 1985. Historiography. In P.E. Easterling & B.M.W. Knox (eds.), *The Cambridge history of classical literature.* Vol. 1, *Greek literature,* 426–471. Cambridge: University Press.

JANDA, L.A. 2004. A metaphor in search of a source domain: The categories of Slavic aspect. *Cognitive Linguistics* 15, 471-527.

JONG - VAN DEN BERG, P. DE. 2000. *Tijd Zien: Het Perspectivisch Potentieel van Werkwoordsvormen in Franse en Nederlandse Narratieve Teksten en hun Vertalingen*, diss. Utrecht.

KIPARSKY, P. 1968. Tense and Mood in Indo-European Syntax. *Foundations of Language* 4, 30-57.

LIDDELL, H.G. & R. Scott. 1940. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

LONGACRE, R.E. 1983. *The Grammar of Discourse*. New York: Plenum.

RIJKSBARON, A. 1986. Taalkunde en de Structuur van Herodotus' Historiën. *Lampas* 19, 220-230.

RIJKSBARON, A. 1988. The Discourse Function of the Imperfect. In A. Rijksbaron, H.A. Mulder & G.C. Wakker (eds.), *In the Footsteps of Raphaël Kühner*, 237-254. Amsterdam: Gieben.

RIJKSBARON, A. 2002[3]. *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek: An Introduction.* Amsterdam: Gieben.

RIJKSBARON, A. 2011. Introduction. In: J. Lallot, A. Rijksbaron & B. Jacquinod (eds.), *The Historical Present in Thucydides: Semantics and Narrative Function*, 1-18. Leiden: Brill.

ROOD, T. 1998. *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

RUIJGH, C.J. 1991. Les Valeurs Temporelles des Formes Verbales en Grec Ancien. In J. Gvozdanovic & Th. Janssen (eds.), *The Function of Tense in Texts*, 197-217. Amsterdam: North-Holland.

SMYTH, H.W. 1920. *A Greek Grammar for Colleges.* New York: American Book Company.

VERKUYL, H.J. 1989. Aspectual Classes and Aspectual Composition. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 12, 39-94.

WEINRICH, H. 1964. *Tempus: Besprochene und Erzählte Welt.* Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.