

# Sprachgeschichte und Epigraphik

Festgaben für Rudolf Wachter zum 60. Geburtstag

Herausgegeben von

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## Aspect and agency in epigraphic signatures

Stephen Colvin

Around 1500 Michelangelo completed the Pietà, the only piece he signed:

MICHAEL.ANGELUS.BONAROTUS.FLORENT.FACIEBA(T)

'Michaelangelo Buonarroti, Florentine, made [this]'

He used the Latin imperfect *faciebat* (the final letter is hidden by the Virgin's head covering), an unexpected choice of tense which has generally been ascribed to the enormous influence of Pliny in the Renaissance. In the preface to his *Natural History*, Pliny defends the sober title of his work in a rambling discussion of 'honourable modesty' (*pudor ingenuus*) on the part of writers and artists:

[26] *me non paenitet nullum festiviorem excogitasse titulum et, ne in totum videar Graecos insectari, ex illis mox velim intellegi pingendi fingendique conditoribus [...] absoluta opera et illa quoque, quae mirando non satiamur, pendenti titulo inscripsisse, ut APELLES FACIEBAT aut POLYCLITUS, tamquam inchoata semper arte et imperfecta, ut contra iudiciorum varietates superesset artifici regressus ad veniam velut emendaturo quicquid desideraretur, si non esset interceptus. [27] quare plenum verecundiae illud, quod omnia opera tamquam novissima inscripsere et tamquam singulis fato adempti. tria non amplius, ut opinor, absolute traduntur inscripta ILLE FECIT, quae suis locis reddam. quo apparuit summam artis securitatem auctori placuisse [...]* (Gaius Plinius Secundus, *nat.*, praef. 26–27)

'[26] I do not regret not having devised a fancier title [for my work]; and, because I would not be thought altogether to condemn the Greeks, I should wish to be understood like those founding masters of painting and sculpture [...] who inscribed their rare and perfect pieces of work – which the more we look upon, the more we admire – with a provisional signature; such as "Apelles (or Polyclitus) worked at this", as though art was always a thing in process and not completed, and as though, in the face of diverse critical judgments, the artist

might have recourse to the excuse that he meant to have returned to correct any failings, had he not been interrupted. [27] It is a mark of their modesty, that they inscribed all their works as though they were their latest pieces, and as though in each case they had been snatched away by death. I think there are only three works of art inscribed in the absolute form “x made this” (which I shall return to in due course). This form of words makes it clear that the works were so perfectly finished that they satisfied their creator [...]

Pliny translates the Greek imperfect tense (of ποιέω ‘make’) with the Latin imperfect. The Greek imperfect tense is found in a small number of artists’ signatures in the Classical period, and though the number appears to rise in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it was always outnumbered by the aorist tense (Pliny is mistaken here). He ascribes the use of the imperfect tense to a mixture of prudence and modesty, and takes it for granted that it denotes uncompleted action.<sup>1</sup>

It is perfectly possible, of course, that Michaelangelo had this passage in mind; but it seems likely to me that he was inspired by the Belvedere Torso, rather than directly by Pliny.<sup>2</sup> It is well known that the Torso had a profound influence on Michelangelo, and the form of the signature is identical:

Ἀπολλώνιος | Νέστωρος | Ἀθηναῖος | ἐποίει (IG XIV 1234)

‘Apollonius [son] of Nestor, Athenian, made [this]’

Artists’ signatures on Greek vases and on stone monuments (grave monuments and votive offerings) mostly have the verb in the aorist, but occasionally in the

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1 Pliny’s interpretation may also have been influenced by discussion in his sources of the relationship between slow work, including the willingness to return and modify or correct one’s work, and perfection: cf. Plin. *nat.* 35.79 on Apelles (*manum de tabula*) and 35.84 (*ne supra crepidam sutor*), and his near contemporary Plutarch on Zeuxis (*Life of Pericles* 13.2, *On Having Many Friends* 5.1).

2 Michelangelo’s signature is not unique: there are other instances of the imperfect tense in the signatures of fifteenth-century artists in Italy (Della Latta 2013). Some of those who suppose he was following Pliny have seen in the omission of the final *-t* a playful linguistic gesture: “a visio-verbal pun, since the imperfect implies an unfinished action, and the inscription is in fact orthographically incomplete, the final letter T lost beneath the Virgin’s kerchief” (Lavin 2013: 279). The hidden letter could also, of course, be M (‘I Michelangelo made [this]’).

imperfect. Greek grammar (as traditionally conceived since the early Byzantine period)<sup>3</sup> would lead us to expect the aorist, since this form of the verb (it is generally agreed) denotes an action in the past, with no emphasis on the duration (the action itself need not have been instantaneous):

μετὰ πλείστων γὰρ πόνων καὶ φανερωτάτων ἀγώνων καὶ καλλίστων κινδύνων  
ἐλευθέραν μὲν ἐποίησαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα (Lysias 2.55 [*Epitaphios*])

‘With much labour and conspicuous struggle and glorious danger they made  
[aor.] Greece free’

οἰκῶν δ’ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ πόλει πολλὰ μὲν ἀγαθὰ ὑμᾶς ἐποίησεν (Lysias 5.3 [*In  
defence of Kallias on a charge of sacrilege*])

‘While dwelling in this city he has done [aor.] many good things for you’

The imperfect, in the words of Gildersleeve (1900: 88), “denotes continuance in the past. It is the tense of evolution, of vision.” Gildersleeve further notes (*ibid.*), “The continuance is in the mind of the narrator; it has nothing to do with the absolute duration of the action.” It may describe a situation or action in the past (rather than simply stating its occurrence); repeated or customary action; attempted, inceptive, or intended action.

ἡμέρας μὲν πέντε ἡσύχαζον, τῇ δ’ ἕκτη ἑτάσσοντο ἀμφοτέροι ὡς ἐς μάχην (Thuc.  
3.107.3)

‘For five days they kept quiet [impf.], but on the sixth both sides began to draw  
themselves up [impf.] as though for battle’

3 Cf. the discussion attributed to Stephanos (7th cent. AD) in the Vatican scholia to the *Ars Grammatica* of Dionysius Thrax (p. 249 Hilgard, Bekker *Anecd.* II p. 889): Παρατατικός ἐστὶ καθ’ ὃν ὁ μὲν χρόνος παρώχεται, τὸ δὲ ἔργον μετὰ παρατάσεως πέπρακται, οἷον ἔτυπον ἔπειθον ἐπαίδευσον· ὁ δὲ παρακείμενος νοεῖται ἀπὸ τοῦ παρακεῖσθαι καὶ ἐγγὺς εἶναι τοῦ ἐνεστώτος τὴν πρᾶξιν αὐτοῦ· δηλοῖ γὰρ τὸ μὴ πρὸ πολλοῦ τοῦ χρόνου πεπραχθαι τὸ πρᾶγμα [...] ὁ δὲ ἀόριστος οὐδὲν ὠρισμένου χρόνου ἐμφαίνει, ὡς οἱ ὑποκείμενοι, ἀλλὰ σὺν μὲν τῷ ἄρτι ταῦτόν δύναται τῷ παρακειμένῳ ‘The imperfect signifies past time, and that the action occurred with extension (such as *I was striking*, *I was trying to persuade*, *I was teaching*). The perfect is conceived and thus named from being close at hand, and its action is of the present; it shows that the action has just been accomplished [...] The aorist does not encode defined time, like situations, but has the same force as the perfect, with the added notion of occurrence in the not too distant past’.

Περικλῆς δὲ ὄρων μὲν αὐτοῦς πρὸς τὸ παρὸν χαλεπαίνοντας [...] ἐκκλησίαν τε οὐκ ἔποιει (Thuc. 2.22.1)

‘But Pericles, seeing that they were currently in an angry mood, [...] would not convene [impf.] an assembly’

An interesting and less straightforward use of the imperfect also puts emphasis on the process, but implies reduced agency (and to some extent reduced transitivity). It is found with verbs of ordering, asking, persuading (and others), when the achievement of the verb is not yet known or guaranteed, and usually depends on the agency of others (Humbert 1960: 139–140):

Ταῦτα δὴ ὧν πάντα πυνθανόμενος ὁ Κροῖσος ἔπεμπε ἐς Σπάρτην ἀγγέλους δῶρά τε φέροντας καὶ δεησομένους συμμαχίης (Hdt. 1.69)

‘Learning all this Croesus sent [impf.] messengers to Sparta with gifts to ask for an alliance’

Humbert argued that this sense grows out of the meaning of the verbs in question combined with the recognised inchoative function of the imperfect, and most others have thought that the meaning of this group of verbs is critical in this usage.<sup>4</sup> The semantics of a verb like ποιέω ‘make, do’ does not fit with this lexical group, but we observe that what is expressed by the verb “is not just a point on a temporal continuum, but a moment of doing and experiencing things” (Bakker 2010: 161); and that a particular verb or small group of verbs, in combination with grammatical aspect, may have a specific, perhaps unique, force.

The use of the imperfect in artists’ signatures is perplexing, and has given rise to a range of explanations since Pliny. The traditional explanatory categories of Greek grammar are based on literary texts, and on literary prose in particular; indeed, the whole concept of grammaticality in the post-classical Greek world was based on the norms of literary prose, a position inherited by and entrenched in the Roman, mediaeval, and modern worlds.

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4 This use of the imperfect “may denote the beginning of an action or of a series of actions” (Smyth 1956: 426); “Les verbes exprimant l’idée d’un ordre, d’une mission, d’un message s’emploient à l’imparfait parce qu’ils [...] sont le point de départ d’un développement” (Chantraine 1953: 192). See Martínez Vázquez (2010) for a critical review of the bibliography.

It has not been obvious to modern scholars what motivated the choice of the imperfect or aorist in this or that epigraphic signature. The unexpected interchange of the aorist and present stems in Greek<sup>5</sup> is an area in which the temptation to offer speculative (or ‘common sense’) explanations has proved strong, using the conceptual framework of English, French, and other modern European languages. However, the opening up of traditional syntactic categories to make room for the linguistic approach generally known as ‘pragmatic’ has been helpful in shifting attention from the traditional sentence-bound grammar to considerations of function, discourse structure, and a wider communicative context. A good example is the so-called ‘tragic aorist’, a term which reflects its relative frequency in tragic drama, and the belief that it is a feature of poetic syntax (Colvin 2010):

ἦσθην σέρφω σφαγιαζομένω (Ar. Av. 570)

‘I like [aor.] that – immolating a gnat!’ (tr. A. H. Sommerstein)

The verb here is the aorist of ἡδομαι ‘enjoy oneself, take pleasure in’. The phrase appears in an Aristophanic comedy, a genre in which poetic language is scrupulously avoided (except in the parody of tragedy, which is easy to identify), and there are dozens of comic parallels. Classical scholars have tried to explain them in terms of time: see, for example, Dover (1968: 117) on Ar. *Nub.* 174: “The aorist often puts into words a movement or noise already made”. But they do not encode action in the past: analysis of the contexts of occurrence in drama points up some interesting restrictions. They do not appear randomly, but specifically in dialogue: their function is reactive and performative. Their position in the utterance can be coordinated in a revealing way with oaths and expletives, suggesting that they are performing a similar role. They belong not to the discourse of the knower, but to that of the experiencer. It should be stated in a syntactic description that this aorist occurs only in the first or second persons: the first person and the third person of a verbal paradigm are not functionally equivalent (compare ‘I accept the verdict’, which is performative, with ‘He accepts the verdict’ and ‘I accepted the verdict’, which are not).

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5 The imperfect tense is built on the present stem (with secondary personal endings and the addition of the past tense prefix *e-*).

These aorist expressions can, similarly, be compared to demonstratives and interjections in the semantic and syntactic challenges that they pose.

To return to ancient Greek signatures, the honorand's indispensable *Non-Attic Greek Vase Inscriptions* has a ceramic house, or temple, from Thera which has two inscriptions painted on the wall on either side of the front porch (Wachter 2001: 209, 650–625 BC):

L: Ἀρκηιδίκᾱς ἡμὶ ἐγὼ	R: Ἀνδριάς με : ἐποίηε
'I am of [belong to] Arkhidika'	'Andrias made [impf.] me'

The artist's signature is in the imperfect (this is the only instance of this imperfect in the collection, as against 28 instances of the aorist ἐποίησε). My premise in this paper will be that it is impossible to understand this and similar uses of the imperfect tense on material objects without expanding the 'grammar' of the Greek verb to include wider social and contextual factors.

A functional approach to language in society, rather than taking an *outside moving in* approach (which seeks to understand the unfamiliar by assimilating it to or explaining it in terms of what is familiar), takes an *inside moving out* approach: this means attempting to achieve analytical distance on close-to-hand data, material (like classical Greek) which is a familiar part of the cultural landscape (for the terminology and the approach see Rampton 2007). Blommaert and Maly (2016), in a paper on 'signs' in social space, define the object of their study as "publicly visible bits of written language: billboards, road and safety signs, shop signs, graffiti and all sorts of other inscriptions in the public space", and argue that these texts have three types of reach:

Backwards	<i>past</i>	conditions of production, producers
Forwards	<i>future</i>	conditions for uptake, addressees
Sideways	<i>present</i>	specific emplacement among other signs (‘syntagmatic’ position)

In addition to the referential meaning of the signs, we are looking also for the sociolinguistic meaning, or indexical meaning (where the signs are indexes of some state of affairs). Linguists in the Western tradition are trained to investigate the choice of a particular grammatical form over another, motivated by the semantics of the sentence in which the form is to play a role. This can be challenged by functional approaches to language, in two ways: firstly, the

boundaries of investigation are expanded beyond the sentence as traditionally conceived; and secondly, the notion of choice on the part of the language can be challenged (or reappraised in a specific socio-historical context). That there are complex social constraints on the speaker, unimagined in the classic Saussurean description of the linguistic sign, was demonstrated by Labov in the 1960s, and is at the heart of modern anthropological linguistics:

“Much work in discourse analysis, and, in fact, in the social sciences in general, starts from the assumption that social life is governed by choices made by individuals. There is a long intellectual and ideological history to this, of course, but the argument developed in this chapter will produce a view in which choice is an object of inequality and consequently, a matter that needs to be investigated, not posited.” (Blommaert 2005: 18)

In the case of the unexpected selection of the imperfect stem, the reaction of classical scholars has on the whole been to ignore it, on the assumption (not unreasonable) that the distinction is so fine that we cannot hope to understand the stem variation completely. Heubeck, a distinguished classical linguist, simply calls it ‘strange’ in a comment on *Odyssey* 23.178, and draws a comparison between the usage on vases and the imperfect in Homer:<sup>6</sup>

ἀλλ’ ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,  
ἐκτός ἐϋσταθέος θαλάμου, τὸν ῥ’ αὐτὸς ἐποίει. (*Od.* 23.177–178)

‘But come, set out the sturdy bed for him, Eurykleia, outside the chamber which he himself built [...]’

The imperfect tense is striking. This is Penelope’s last test of Odysseus, and there is huge tension in the narrative (we are reaching the climactic point of the *Odyssey*). She uses the imperfect of the verb ‘make’ to refer to a non-existent set-up: it is impossible to remove the bedstead from the real bed-chamber of Odysseus. His explosive reaction constitutes the passing of the final test. He knows the answer because he did *in fact* make the bed, and he articulates this with an aorist:

6 Heubeck (1993: 333), *ad locum*: “on the strange imperfect cf. the common signature on pots, ὁ δεῖνα ἐποίει”.

τὸ δ' ἐγὼ κάμῳ οὐδέ τις ἄλλος (*Od.* 23.189)

'It was I that built it and nobody else'

This is an isolated example. There is a systematic alternation of aorist and imperfect in Homer in the recounting of human genealogy, and the biographies of 'biographical objects' (such as the staff of Agamemnon in *Iliad* 2). These show a characteristic pattern of aorists followed by (or concluding with) an imperfect. When Glaukos tells his genealogy to Sarpedon in *Iliad* 6, the aorist coincides with focus on the named actors, who are the object of ἔτεκε 'bore, begat', while the final imperfect brings the narrative back to the speaker, who is known to us.<sup>7</sup>

ἦ δ' ἔτεκε τρία τέκνα δαΐφρονι Βελλεροφόντη ← focus on the Object  
 Ἴσανδρόν τε καὶ Ἴππόλοχον καὶ Λαοδάμειαν.  
 Λαοδαμείη μὲν παρελέξατο μητίετα Ζεὺς,  
 ἦ δ' ἔτεκε ἄντιθεον Σαρπηδόνα χαλκοκορυστήν. [...] ← focus on the Speaker  
 Ἴππόλοχος δέ μ' ἔτικτε, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ φημι γενέσθαι  
 πέμπε δέ μ' ἐς Τροίην [...] (*Il.* 6.196–207)

'She bore three children to warlike Bellerophon, Isander and Hippolochos and Laodameia. With Laodameia lay Zeus, the wise counsellor, and she bore godlike Sarpedon of the bronze armour. [...] And Hippolochos begat me, and from him I claim my being.'

Whatever the function of this alternation, it is clear that duration and perfectivity in the action are not relevant.

The pragmatic analysis of literary prose by the 'Dutch school', by which an aorist introduces salient or new information, while the imperfect gives the topic, or background, is familiar now to all classical linguists; the approach is attractive, though one can disagree with aspects of the case studies, because it recognises that what a text is *about* does not necessarily determine the structure of the text.<sup>8</sup> I shall argue that, in the case of the use of aorist and imper-

7 Crespo (2014) concludes that "the action referred to by the verb [sc. in the imperfect] is pragmatically connected to the preceding members of the sentence and forms a discourse unit with them". See also Grethlein's interesting discussion (2008) of biographical objects.

8 Cf. Sicking (1993: 46), "It should be borne in mind that the form of a text is never determined directly by the events recounted or states of affairs described [...] but always by the

fect in artists' signatures, the selection of one or the other does not reflect a desire to stress duration, the process of manufacture, or the artisan (as opposed to the artefact). It can, I believe, be connected with the pragmatic analysis of literary prose by reference to the notion of background and foreground.

In a paper demonstrating that neither participles nor any other part of the Greek verb encode relative time, Méndez Dosuna (2017) produced a useful minimal pair as an illustration in passing that +/- perfectivity does not work as a criterion in the selection of aorist or imperfect tense:

- (i) Πῦθις : τόδε ἐποίηε 'Pythis made [impf.] this' (IG I<sup>3</sup> 1018-3, Prasiai, c. 500 BC)  
 (ii) Πῦθις ἐποίησεν 'Pythis made [aor.] (this)' (IG I<sup>3</sup> 680.1, Athens, c. 500 BC)

IG I<sup>3</sup> 680 (ii) comprises three lines written in the fluting of a column which supported a votive statue of Athena (Raubitschek 1949: 16):

Πῦθις ἐποίησεν	'Pythis made (this)
Ἐπιτέλες ἀνέθηκεν : ἀπαρχὴν	Epiteles dedicated (it) as a first-fruit offering
Ἀθηναίαι	to Athena.'

Lines 2 and 3 are engraved in a different hand from the signature of Pythis.

IG I<sup>3</sup> 1018-3 (i) is inscribed on a statue base found at Prasiai. The hand is not the same as the signature in (ii) (Viviers 1989: 524).

Various explanations have been offered for the selection of the imperfect tense by the artist, and these are schematised below (using the example of Pythis):

- (a) Pythis made this (and left it incomplete): Gaius Plinius Secundus  
 (b) Pythis spent time sculpting this (Wackernagel): "Also ἐποίηι bedeutet 'Arbeit tat an diesem Werk der und der', während der Aorist ἐποίησεν heisst 'der und der ist der Verfertiger'" (Wackernagel 1926-28: 1.181)  
 (c) The sculptor was Pythis (Minon 2002: 10, x "était le peintre, le créateur")<sup>9</sup>

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author presenting these data and placing them in some particular light for reasons of his own." See also Bakker (1993).

9 "Les rares imparfaits des signatures de peintres ou de potiers doivent alors avoir la même valeur stative ('était le peintre, le créateur') que ceux des signatures de sculpteurs. Il est en effet peu vraisemblable que le travail du peintre, ou même du potier, ait été présenté

(d) Pythis made this [and there's more information coming]

The final option (d) would represent a literary attempt to apply the interpretation of Sicking (1993), but since this analysis is designed to shed light on the interplay of imperfect and aorist in literary prose it is inappropriate, without modification, for an epigraphic signature. Nobody, of course, holds the romantic view of Pliny; (b) reflects what one might call the normal belief, that the imperfect stresses the process. Minon's view (c) is articulated in a thoughtful study which points to formulas such as ὁ δεῖνα ἐγραμμάτευε 'x was secretary (impf.)' in Athenian decrees as a parallel for her 'stative' reading. But this is a stative verb 'be a secretary' (LSJ 359, s.v.), a denominative built to γραμματεὺς 'scribe', and is a doubtful parallel for strongly transitive verbs such as ποιέω 'make'.<sup>10</sup> Nor does this account give any suggestion as to when, or why, an artist might choose to select one over the other. Her claim (2002: 7) that "[l]'emploi le plus souvent absolu de ποιεῖν indique bien que l'oeuvre vient en second par rapport à son auteur et au procès. L'absence de complément focalise l'attention sur le sujet, mais aussi sur le verbe, qui ne s'efface jamais devant celui-ci" is hard to reconcile with the relative social statuses of patron and artist in the ancient world. As Blommaert (2005: 99) argues, "a lot of what we observe in human communication is not a matter of freedom, choice, or creativity, but [...] constrained by normativities, determined by [...] general patterns of inequality". This can be seen in an 'epigraphic hierarchy' in the ancient Greek world; the point is emphasised by Whitley (2012) in a comment on the signature of Pythis on the acropolis dedication ((ii) = IG I<sup>3</sup> 680): "Archaic dedicatory inscriptions from the Acropolis underscore the priority of the dedicant's agency over that of the artist. [...] it is very rare for the artist to be named before the dedicant (as in the Athena of Pythis)."

My approach to the choice of the stem in the epigraphic examples is based on this, and on the central notion of agency.

Since the work of the anthropologist Alfred Gell, agency has become an important part of the understanding of cultural artefacts (art objects), in direct competition with aesthetic and semiotic approaches. Gell argued that an artefact is an 'index' of various types of agency, and their relations to each

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comme un travail à la chaîne, même si telle pouvait être la réalité, ou que l'imparfait ait été employé pour faire voir, au contraire, l'oeuvre en cours d'élaboration" (Minon 2002: 10).

10 A point made to me by Julián Méndez Dosuna.

other: the creator or creators, the commissioner or patron, and other recipients in the cultural context (not restricted to the contemporary context). (He means *index* in the sense that smoke is an index of fire.) The ‘communicative event’ on a Greek vase is short, but it is complex: apart from signatures, there are *kalos* inscriptions, and animation of the scene with labels and sometimes dialogue (and it is also the case, as Lissarague 1985 and others have argued, that inscriptions also have to be considered in the framework of the design of the vase). In this respect vases are quite different from stone monuments, and within the category of stone monuments, funerary and votive monuments are also likely to be different from each other.

As Gell (1998: 18) argued, “the ways in which social agency can be invested in things, or can emanate from things, are exceedingly diverse”. A vase, or a funerary monument, is a significant object (an aesthetic object in the modern world). The language on the object can be expected to reflect the circumstances of production and relations between artist, commissioner, purchaser, and audience. In this case the imperfectivity of a verb can be related to backgrounding, and reduced transitivity on the part of the subject: Hopper and Thompson (1980) have shown in an influential paper that reduced transitivity, imperfectivity, and backgrounding are regularly associated in language. They proceed on the assumption that “a linguistic universal originates in a general pragmatic function, and that the universal is not explained until this function has been isolated and related to the universal” (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 280), and their conclusion points to a line of investigation for the Greek data: “[...] high Transitivity and low Transitivity correlate with the independent discourse notions of foregrounding and backgrounding respectively. The fact that semantic characteristics of high Transitivity such as perfective Aspect, individuated O(bject), and agentive subject tend strongly to be grammaticized in the morphosyntax of natural languages points to the importance of the foregrounding/backgrounding distinction” (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 294).

In Greek artisanal signatures, aorist is the unmarked choice: in the archaic and classical periods it is the norm. The imperfect tense is relatively rare (fewer than 35 secure examples in Immerwahr’s *Corpus of Attic Vase Inscriptions (CAVI)*).

In the case of funerary monuments, there may be three named agents: the deceased, the dedicator, and the artist. In order of frequency, the monument names: (i) deceased; (ii) deceased and dedicator; (iii) deceased and dedicator

and artist. But all combinations are found.<sup>11</sup> The imperfect tense appears to signal a reduced degree of agency on the part of the artist:

- (a) *IG I<sup>3</sup> 1196 (CEG 14)*, statue base, Attica, c. 575–550 BC (metrical)

← Χαιρεδέμῳ : τόδε σῆμα : πατέρ̄ ἔστῃ[σε]  
 → [θ]ανόντος : Ἀνφικάρ<ε>ς : ἀγαθὸν : παῖδα ὀ-  
 ← λοφυρόμενο[ς : ] Φαίδιμος ἐποίῃ.

‘This *sēma* of Chairedemos his father Antichares set up [aor.] when he died, grieving a good son. Phaidimos made it [impf.]’

Here Antichares has set up the monument for his son: Phaidimos’ agency is of a different order. He is not part of the grieving *oikos*; he has made the monument at the commission of Antichares. The signature (Φαίδιμος ἐποίῃ) stands outside the couplet (hexameter + pentameter).

It is worth pointing out that the verb ποιέω ‘make’ is ambiguous in these inscriptions: it can be used of the family or friends who have commissioned the memorial, or it can be used of the artist/artisan. In (b) the sons are presumably not responsible for making the object (and there are examples where women are the subject of ποιέω). Similarly Dexandrides in (c) takes responsibility for the grave of his brother and his friend.

- (b) *IG I<sup>3</sup> 1226 (CEG 61)*, Athens, mid-6th cent. BC (metrical)

[...]ερυλίδῳ, ἡδὲ τόδε σῆμα  
 παῖδες ἐποίησαν μετρὸς ἐφῆμοσύναι

‘[...] of [-]erulides, whose tomb here his sons built [aor.] at the behest of their mother.’

- (c) *IG I<sup>3</sup> 1231 (CEG 70)*, Athens, c. 500 BC (metrical)

Φιλοτιῖο καὶ Κτεσίῖο τὸ σῆμα· καὶ  
 <χσυνόν> μ’ ἐποίησεν φίλος Δεχ[σ]ανδρίδῃ[ς]  
 ἀδελφῷ <ι> ἑαυτῷ μνῆμα κάκένῳι τάδε.

11 Omission of the name of the deceased is rare and possibly suspicious: *IG VII 3225 (CEG 150)*, Orchomenos, c. 490–475 (relief in local stone of an old man feeding a grasshopper to his dog), Ἀλχσὴνῶρ ἐποίησεν ἡ Νάχσιος· ἀλλ’ ἐσίδεις[θε], ‘Alxenor of Naxos made (this). Just look!’ Either something is missing, or it is advertisement for the skill of the sculptor.

‘The *sēma* of Philoitios and Ktesias. And loving Dexandrides made me [aor.] as a [common] memorial for his brother and for him, this that you see.’

In (d) the artist has imperfect agency, but is incorporated in the verse dedication (the hexameter is dubious, which raises interesting questions about who composed it). It may be relevant that this period is the high period of the Little Master cups, in which the signature was an integral part of the design.

(d) IG I<sup>3</sup> 1242 (CEG 31), Attica, c. 540–520 BC (couplet + 1 faulty hexameter)

– ∞ – ∞ – ∞ – ∞ ἦν] γὰρ ἀπάσῃς  
 νὸν τε καὶ ἀνο[ρέ]αν ἔχσοχος ἡλικίας.  
 [...]ιστέμῶν τόδ’ ἐπόῃ ἵποστ[ράτ]ο(ς) σῆμα

‘[...] for he was outstanding among all of his age for his wisdom and courage. [Not unskilfully] Hippostratos made [impf.] this *sēma*.’

In the Phrasikleia memorial, Aristion of Paros has the aorist of a famous sculptor, but his secondary agency is signalled visually by its inscription on the left-hand side of the base.

(e) IG I<sup>3</sup> 1261 (CEG 24), Attica, c. 540 (metrical)

- i. σῆμα Φρασικλείας κόρῃ κεκλέσομαι αἰεὶ,  
 ἀντὶ γάμῳ παρὰ θεῶν τοῦτο λαχῶσ’ ὄνομα (Front)
- ii. Ἀριστίων : Πάρι[ός μ’ ἐπ]ο[ί]εσε (Left side)

‘The *sēma* of Phrasikleia. I shall be called a maiden always, instead of marriage having been allotted this title by the gods. Aristion of Par[os] ma]de [me] [aor.]’

The epigram of Phrasikleia is a couplet, but Aristion’s signature is in prose.<sup>12</sup>

In votive offerings the balance of social agency was presumably very different. The dedicator sets up a splendid *agalma* to the god, and the more splendid and prestigious it is, the better (as Hurwit 2015: 6 puts it, a dedication is “an entry into a competition of votives”); there is therefore less motivation to marginalise the artist than in a funerary monument. In the late sixth century

12 So rightly Wachter (2010: 255), against Svenbro’s (1993: 25) attempt to see a metrical pattern in the signature.

the Athenian elite clearly felt that Ionian forms, and Ionian artists, were prestigious; they added value to the *agalma*. In (f) Iphidike has mixed Attic and Ionic letter forms, and the signature of the Ionian artist is parallel to the main dedication (cf. Immerwahr 1990: 96, and Kaczko 2010). The inscriptions are written in two lines in the fluting of a marble column:

(f) *IG I<sup>3</sup> 683 (CEG 198, DAA 3)*, Athens Acropolis, c. 510-500 BC.

i. Ἄρχερμος ἐποίησεν ὁ Χῖος

ii. Ἴφιδίκε μ' ἀνέθεκεν Ἀθηναίαι πολιόχῳι (hexameter)

'Archermos of Chios made (this) [aor.]. Iphidike dedicated me [aor.] to Athena protector of the city.'

Returning to Pythis above (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 680*), we observe that the signature in the aorist is in fact followed by a dedicatory inscription in a different hand: the name Pythis, as well as the style of the sculpture, indicates that the sculptor was an Ionian. Raubitschek (1949: 16) speculates that "the fact that all parts of the monument are made of island marble [...] might support the assumption that the whole monument was made outside Attika and shipped to Athens". In this case the dedicator's inscription would have been added (in Athens) later than the artist's signature; the decision to place it after the signature (so that it was impossible to read one without the other) implies that the dedicator wanted to incorporate the signature in the dedication.

On votives the artist and the dedicator can unproblematically be the same. On many votives the dedicator seems happy to be associated with an artist: the artist is part of the dedicator's identity. So if there is a question, 'Who set this up and why?', the question 'Who made it?' partly answers 'Who set it up?'. In the dedication by Alkmeonides below the jockey is mentioned in the victory dedication, but as in a Pindaric epinician, the chief glory is with the aristocratic owner.

(g) *IG I<sup>3</sup> 1469 (CEG 302)*, Boeotia, Ptoion, c. 540 BC (metrical)

[Φοί]βῳ μὲν εἰμ' ἄγαλ[μα Λ]ατ[οί]δᾶ καλ[ό]ν·

[ἠο δ' Ἀ]λκμέονος ἠῦς Ἀλκμεονίδεος

[ἠ]ίπ(π)οισι νικ[έ]σας ἔ[θ]εκέ μ' [ὀκείας],

ἡὰς Κνοπι[άδα]ς ἔλαυν' ἠο [...]

ἡότ' ἐν Ἀθάναις Παλ(λ)άδος πανέ[γ]υρις].

'I am a beautiful *agalma* of Phoebus son of Leto. Alkmeonides son of Alkmeon dedicated me, having been victorious with his swift mares, which Knopiadas drove [impf.] [...] when the games of Pallas took place in Athens.'

So too Damonon in his famous victory inscription from Sparta is keen to tell us that he rode his own horses: after the initial claim to victory, in the aorist ἐνίκηε, he resumes the victories in a list with the imperfect ἐνίκη.<sup>13</sup> Wackernagel (1926–28) refers to this in his discussion of the tenses of artistic signatures,<sup>14</sup> but I prefer to see it as a reflection of how the information is foregrounded or backgrounded in the inscription.

Hurwit's (2015) recent excellent book on artists' signatures has a lively discussion of all aspects of the topic. His chapter on gems (though it includes a useful note of caution on generalisations<sup>15</sup>) discusses the relationship between the signature and the other elements: there is a tendency for the artist's signature to be less deeply cut than the name of the owner/commissioner, and to be located in a more marginal position. On a gem in Cambridge, for example (Fitzwilliam GGFR 467, c. 440–430 BC), "Dexamenos judiciously understates his name compared to that of the subject and owner [...] MIKES ['of Mika'] is written larger and is carved more deeply than DEXAMENOS, which almost obediently accommodates itself to the curve of the dentil-like border behind her" (Hurwit 2015: 35). It is also worth noting that when Dexamenos uses the verb ποιέω 'make', he has it in the imperfect.

To return to vases: writing 'animates' the vase and inscribes agency. I assume that the impressive grave monuments and votive statues which survive were *usually* commissioned, or made to order (Pythis may be a counter-

13 IG V/1 213 (= Colvin 2007: no. 33); c. 450–400 BC.

14 Wackernagel (1926–28: 1.182): "Realiter sind es genau die gleichen Siege. Wo sie mit dem Imperfekt genannt werden, werden sie einfach unter einem andern Gesichtspunkte besprochen als in der aoristischen Überschrift; es wird an den Vorgang, nicht an das Faktum an und für sich gedacht."

15 See Hurwit (2015: 34): "[...] any distinctions made between statements of authorship and statements of ownership based on the quality or relative depths of inscription cannot be hard and fast."

example); whereas vases were generally made *prêt à porter*.<sup>16</sup> This is not universally true, however: there is clearly a difference between vases made for the Etruscan export market, and those made for domestic consumption in Greece. For example, if Exekias writes a dedication on a vase in Sikyonian script, that vase was surely commissioned by a client from Sikyon:

- (h) Villa Giulia 50599 (Beazley 1956: 146, no. 20): Exekias, black-figure dinos, c. 540–530 BC

Ἐχσῆκίας μ' ἐποίησε	(Attic script)
Ἐπαίνετος μ' ἔδωκεν Χαρόπῳ	(Sikyonian script)

'Exekias made me [aor.]. Epainetos gave me [aor.] to Charopos.'

In this case the artist is very famous, and his signature (in the aorist) adds value to the product and the gift.<sup>17</sup>

It is true (as Pécasse 2002: 89 has noted) that when a vase contains both ἐποίησε 'he made [aor.]' of the potter and ἔγραψε 'he painted [aor.]' of the decorator, there is no hierarchical distinction between them: but when γράφω 'paint' is in the imperfect, there is some evidence of hierarchy. For example, two similar cups by Erginos and Aristophanes have Ἐργίνος ἐποίησεν 'Erginos made (me) [aor.]' straight across the top of the exergue, with Ἀριστοφάνης ἔγραφε 'Aristophanes painted (me) [impf.]' underneath, as though written in whatever space was remaining:

- (i) Berlin 2531 (Immerwahr 1990: 163, no. 1124; CAVI 2387): red-figure cup (Vulci), late 5th cent. BC

<i>Interior:</i>	Ἐργίνος ἐποίησεν
<i>Exergue:</i>	Ἀριστοφάνης : ἔγραφε

16 There is a long debate on the possible meanings of the verb ποιέω 'make' on Greek vases (whether it indicates the agency of the potter, the painter, or the workshop owner), which I will not touch on. See Cohen (1991: 49) with notes and bibliography.

17 Cf. Beazley (1956: 146): "Both inscriptions were added by Exekias after the vase was complete, doubtless at the request of the purchaser Epainetos". See also Cohen (1991: 57) and Hurwit (2015: 84).

- (j) Boston MFA 00.344 (Immerwahr 1990: 117, no. 813; CAVI 2689): red-figure cup (Tarquinia), late 5th cent. BC

*Interior:* Ἐργίνοσ ἐπο[ίε]σεν

*Exergue:* Ἀριστοφά[ν]ε : ἔγραφε

More strikingly, in a red-figure eye cup (k) in the British Museum, Ἴσχύλοσ ἐποίησεν ‘Hischylos made (this) [aor.]’ runs round the archer in the middle of the cup, while Φεΐδιπποσ ἔγραφε ‘Pheidippos painted (me) [impf.]’ is painted on the side. Similarly, a rhyton by Sotades (l) has a signature on the base ‘Sotades made (me) [impf.]’, and a dedicatory inscription on the rim ‘x dedicated (me) [aor.]’:

- (k) London E 6 (Immerwahr, CAVI 4420): red-figure eye cup (Vulci), last quarter of the 6th cent. BC

*Centre:* ἱσχύλοσ ἐποίησεν

*Edge (under side):* Φεΐδιπποσ ἔγραφε

- (l) Brauron 709 unpublished (Immerwahr, CAVI 2876): fragment of sphinx rhyton, c. 475–450 BC

*On the base:* Σο[τ]άδεσ | ἐπ[ο]ίε

*On the rim, larger letters:* [–]ικη ἀγ[έθηκ]εν

These inscriptions can be contrasted with vases which have a double signature with the verb ποιέω ‘make’. In this case both verbs are in the aorist, and the signatures are in balanced positions:

- (m) Munich 2243 (Immerwahr 1990: 49, no. 233; CAVI 5251): black-figure band cup (Vulci), c. 550–540 BC. Inscriptions are under each handle (context includes much decorative writing).

Γλαυκύτεσ μ’ ἐποίησεν ‘Glaukytes made me [aor.]’

Ἀρχικλέσ ἐποίησεν ‘Archikles made (me) [aor.]’

- (n) Berlin 1801 (Immerwahr 1990: 49, no. 232; CAVI 2245): black-figure band cup (Orvieto), c. 550–540 BC, now lost. Signature on either side of the picture.

Ἄνακλέσ με | ἐποίησεν χαῖρε ‘Anakles made me – greetings’

Νικοσθένεσ με | ἐποίησεν χαῖρε ‘Nikosthenes made me – greetings’

It would be misleading to claim that there is an obvious correspondence between verbal aspect and overt agency: a black-figure neck amphora in the British Museum (London 1980.11-29.1) has Ἀνδοκίδῃς ἐποίησεν ‘Andokides made (me)’ in the imperfect on the top of the mouth. There is no formula to explain this. But in general the decision to use the imperfect is easier to understand if it was motivated by considerations of agency grounded in situations of manufacture that we cannot always hope to reconstruct. In some cases the signature was central to the design (Little Master cups); in some cases it does look rather like a ‘brand’ which might help to sell a vase, or which would add prestige to a commission.

It is clear that in the archaic and classical periods the aorist marking a straightforward statement of manufacture is the norm. An imperfect of reduced transitivity, a slight backgrounding of agency, could reflect a range of social variables; it is harder to see why, in pure semantic terms, an artist might occasionally try to stress the progressive aspect of his work, or write ‘x was the maker’ instead of ‘x made (me)’.

In the Hellenistic and Roman periods the use of the imperfect increases dramatically, to the point where Pliny could think of it as the norm (though he was wrong): this was perhaps a marked or artificial use of the imperfect which became associated with high sculpture, or a claim to the status of high sculpture. To return to an anthropological linguistic approach, “a lot of what we perform in the way of meaning-attributing practices is the post-hoc recontextualisation of earlier bits of text that were produced, of course, in a different contextualisation process, at a different time, by different people, and for different purposes” (Blommaert 2005: 46). Urban (1996) calls this process of replication an aspect of the “natural history of discourse”.

Here one could compare strange archaisms like the English ‘bespoke’. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods the use of the imperfect in signatures on sculpture took off again. My suggestion is that this is ‘fashion’, or to be more precise, redeployment of a piece of text that in its ‘original’ context had been used very differently.

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