

The impersonal *accusative absolute* (henceforth AA) first appears, unambiguously absolute, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. This paper will argue that the patterns in which the AA appears in early prose (Herodotus, Antiphon) still reflect the syntax of a construction from which the AA arose.

The impersonal participles of the AA come into regular use at around the same time as the majority of finite impersonal verb forms. Almost every participle employed in the AA has a corresponding finite impersonal: ἔξεσσι – ἐξ(ε)όν; δεῖ – δέον; δοκεῖ – δοκοῦν, δόξαν, etc). The participle will always express the same semantic nuance as the finite impersonal. This is most noticeable in the case of παρ(ε)όν ‘it being possible’ and πάρεσσι ‘it is possible’ (contrast πάρειμι ‘I am near, present at’).

By far the majority of participles in the AA govern an infinitive. Throughout, we find a logical contrast between this infinitive and the main verb of the matrix clause; cf. ex. 1 below, with the contrast of taking power/allowing someone else to have it. In the majority of early prose AAs, this contrast is expressed not by two verbs that are semantically opposed to each other (X vs. Y), but by X vs. negated X (cf. ex. 2) or by X vs. ‘not wanting to [do X]’ or ‘not considering it good [to do x]’ (cf. exx. 3, 4).

These facts indicate the following possibility: The later impersonal participle originally agreed with an infinitival head, such as \*οὐκ ἐθέλησε νοστήσαι παρὲν αὐτῷ ‘he did not want a return(ing) which was present/at hand to him’. At some point, the participle semantically aligned itself with the finite impersonal πάρεσσι; the link between the thus reanalysed, now impersonal participle and its original head disappeared, resulting in a ‘he did not want to return, it being possible for him (to return)’. Perhaps for the purpose of disambiguation, the two clauses were inverted, giving us the clausal order we find attested in the majority of early AAs, παρὲν αὐτῷ νοστήσαι οὐκ ἐθέλησε νοστήσαι ‘it being possible to return, he did not want to return’. In most cases, we then find an ellipsis of the second infinitive, giving us the παρὲν (e.g.) νοστήσαι οὐκ ἐθέλησεν frequent in Herodotus. When the AA is taken over into verse, these original prose patterns are discarded.

1) παρὲν αὐτῷ βασιλέα γενέσθαι (...) ἄλλῳ περιέθηκε τὸ κράτος.

‘although it was possible for him to become king (...), he gave the power to someone else’ (Hdt. 1.129)

2) ...φάμενοι μιν δωροδοκήσαντα οὐκ ἐλεῖν τὸ Ἄργος, παρὲν εὐπετέως μιν ἐλεῖν

‘saying that he, having been bribed, did not take Argos when he might easily have taken it’ (Hdt. 6.82)

3) παρὲν αὐτῷ (...) νοστήσαι ἐς τὴν Ἀσίην, οὐκ ἐθέλησεν

‘when he could have... returned to Asia, he did not want to’ (Hdt. 7.107)

4) ἐξὸν αὐτοῖς ἀπογράφεσθαι καὶ εἴργειν ἐμὲ τούτων ἀπάντων, οὐκ ἠξίου ἀπογράφεσθαι

‘when they could have registered their charge and debarred me from all of this, they did not see fit to register their charge’ (Antiphon, *De choreuta* 46)