On the Function of the Root-Aorist Participle

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1. Tense stems and aspects

The Indo-European aspect system with the aorist-present opposition is evidenced in Greek and Vedic; the aorist stem represents the “perfective” aspect, which views an act as a single point in time, or simply states only whether an act takes place or not, whereas the present stem represents the “imperfective” aspect which views an act in progress (for which we shall use below Schwyzer/Debrunner’s terms “confective” and “infective” respectively). Although the aspect belongs to a dimension different from the “Aktionsart,” which refers to the temporal width of the lexical meaning a verb root originally possesses, these two categories correlate to a certain degree. A root with a punctual/durative Aktionsart is naturally inclined to the confective/infective aspect, forming the aorist/present stem from the bare root form (root-aorist/-present), while it can form the present/aorist stem only with some modification of the root (suffix, reduplication etc).

Hoffmann Der Injunktiv im Veda (1967) esp. 105f., 271ff., examining the prohibitive sentence (mā + injunctive), has made clear that the aorist and present injunctive, corresponding to each aspect, represent the “preventive” sense (for acts to occur) and “inhibitive” one (for acts in progress) respectively. He, ibid. 271 ff., also points out the likely difference of aspect in non-prohibitive injunctive and indicative, but remains skeptical about the presence of such a difference in other moods.

2. The aorist participle and the aspects

The aorist participle is formed by adding -ant/-at- (active), -āna- or -māna- (middle) to the stem. It is well attested in the Rig-Veda, but only sporadically in other Mantra texts, which shows a distribution parallel to that of the modal forms of the aorist stem. Most of the attestation belong to the root-aorist. Only few participles are made from the a-aorist and, probably secondarily, from two s-aorists, dhākṣat- (dah) and sākṣat-/sākṣant- (sah).
Less attention has been payed to the semantical or functional aspects of the Vedic aorist participle which seems to have been interpreted only in certain cases after the model of Greek. It is noteworthy that Delbrück Altindische Syntax (1888) 381 examined three aorist participles bhiyānā-, drśānā-, idhānā-, concluding their ingressive meaning “in Furcht geraten” etc. However, his discussion is fragmentary and his argument is very modest. We shall below examine a wider range of examples of the root-aorist participle from the viewpoints of its semantical relationship with the present/perfect participle or with the main verb, allowing the observation of clearer aspectual difference.

3. Functions of the root-aorist participle

3.1 Preceding act

Like in Greek, the root-aorist participle often expresses an act which precedes the main act, contrasting sharply with the present participle used to express an act occurring simultaneously with the main one. In some cases one cannot tell whether the preceding act has finished completely or has only started (ingressive), cf. huvānā- below. In the latter case, however, it is the starting point that is focused on and not the act in progress.

X 22,6 ádha gmánto,śanā pṛchate vāṃ kādarthā na ā grhām | ā jagmathuḥ parākā,ḍ ...
‘Then, when [you] two arrived, Uśānas asks you two (pres, ind.): For what purpose have you come (perf. ind.) to our house from far away ...?’ — Cf. IX 63,6 sutā ānu svām ā rájo ,bh, y ārśanti babhrāvah ś indrām gāchanta indavah ‘The pressed [Somas] flow forward (pres, ind.) one after another to their own space, the brown drops, going (pres, prtc.) to Indra.’

I 130,2ab pibā sōmam indra svānām ádribhiḥ kōśena siktām avatām nā vāṃsagah ‘Indra, drink (pres, iptr.) Soma which was (when it is) pressed with stones and poured by the pail, like a big cow (drinks) [from] a well!’ — Cf. IX 101,13ab prā sunvānasyā, ndhaso márto nā vrīta tād vācaḥ ‘The mortal one 12) does not prefer (aor, inj.) the voice (the sound of pressing) of the young bud (of Soma) while it is pressed (pres, prtc.).’

Further examples: IV 6,4cd pārī agnih paśupā nā hōtā triviṣṭ’ y ēti pradiva urānāḥ ‘Agni, selected from old times as the Hotar, goes around (pres, ind.) like a cowherd with three works.’; X 99,6cd asyā trīti no v, vō jasā vydhānō vipā varāhām āyoagrayā han ‘Trita, now strengthened by his (own) power, kills (pres, inj.) the wild boar by the excited words equipped with the metallic tip.’; II 18,5ab ā viṃśatyā triṃśātā yāhy arvān ā catvārimśātā
hāribhir yujānāḥ ‘Come along hither (pres. iptv.) when you tied your [chariot] with twenty, thirty, fourty tawny [horses].’; X 112,3cd asmabhīr indra sākhībhir huvānāḥ sadhricinō mādayasvā niśādyā ‘When you are called, o Indra, by us (your) allies, inebriate yourself (pres. iptv.) sharing the same goal (with us) after sitting down!’; I 32,8ab nādām nā bhinnām amuyā śāyānam māno rūhānā āti yant y āpāḥ ‘The waters get on and over (pres. ind.) [Vṛtra] who lies cruelly like a reed cut away (i.e. get over one after another).’; VI 6,5ab ādha jihvā pāpatiti prá vṛṣṇo goṣuvyūhydro nāṣāniḥ srjānā ‘Then the tongue (flame) of the bull (Agni) flies out again and again (intens, ind.) like the arrow shot by the one fighting for cows.’ In the last two examples, the repetitiveness of the acts is understood from the contexts.

This function should not be confused with that of the perfect participle, which indicates that the achieved state or the influence/result of an act still continues (referring to the present state), II 11,20ab asyā suvānāsya mandinās tritāsya ny ārbudam vārdhānō astah ‘After he had grown strong (i.e. in the state of being strong) (by some of) the intoxicating [Soma] when it was pressed (aor, prtc.) by Trita, he struck down (aor, ind.) Arbuda,’ as opposed to the aorist participle which only refers to the performance itself, X 55,8cd pītvā sōmasya divā ā vṛdhānāḥ śāro nīr yudhādhinād dāsyūn ‘Grown strong after drinking of Soma, the valorous one (Indra) blew off (ipf.) the enemies from the heaven in the battle,’

Since the aorist participle plainly states that something happens before something else, it underlines now and again that an act presupposes another one, as can be seen in some of the above examples: ‘when ...’.

3.2 Consequence of an act

The following root-aorist participles seem to be used proleptically, expressing the consequence or the result of the main act. In other words, they anticipate the act which comes after the main act as opposed to 3.1. Here we can say that the objectified act as a point in time is placed ahead in the future, as is the case in the preventive sentence of mā + aorist injunctive,

I 122,4ab utā tyā ... yaśasā ... vyāntā pānta sixijō huvādhyai ‘And in order to call those renowned two (Aśvins) so that they seek (pres. prtc.) [and] drink (our Soma), (1.) the son of Uṣīj (. am here).’

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VII 57,3ed ṛādasi viśvapiśah piśāṇah samānāṁ añjy añjate śubhē kām ‘[Maruts] with every ornament put on the same makeup (pres. ind.) to be gorgeous so that they adorn heaven and earth.’

3.3 Agent of an act

In the following examples the root-aorist participle is apparently used as an independent substantive that signifies an agent doing something regularly or by profession, or a general characteristic of the subject.

IV 2,14 ādhā ha yād vayāṁ agne t,vāyā paṇbhīr hastebhiś caketaṁ tanubhīḥ | rātham nā krānto āpasā bhurijor ṛtāṁ yemuh sudh.yā āṣuṣānāḥ ‘Then, which (Ṛta) we, in search for you, o Agni, have created (perf. ind.) with [our] feet, hands, bodies, like those who make a chariot (or: chariot makers) with the operation of [their] both arms, (that) Rta we have been holding, snorting for (it), [we] with good consideration.’

V 86,5ab tā vyṛdhāntāv ánau dyāṁ mārtāya devāv adābhā ‘The two (Indra and Agni) are those who grow up day after day for the mortal, the two gods without deceit.’

I 70,3 gārbho yó apāṁ gārbho vānānāṁ gārbaḥ ca sthātāṁ gārbaḥ ca ārthāṁ ‘[Agni,]

who is the embryo of the waters, the embryo of the trees, the embryo of the standing ones, the embryo of the moving ones.’

Such a meaning is most likely derived from the confective aspect of the aorist stem: the one who acts so and so in the first place, in general. According to TICHY Die Nomina agentis auf -tar- im Vedischen (1995) 113f., 144f., the hysterotonic nomen agentis in -tār/-tṛ-, which represents the actual, occasional or potential agent, is interchangeable with the present participle to some extent, e. g. gṛṇānt- ~ jaritār- ‘singing; one who sings [a welcome song], singer.’ We might then say that in our context the generalizing character of the root-aorist participles above corresponds to the acrotonic nomen agentis (’-tar/-tṛ-) which expresses the habitual, generalized agent.

3.4 Co-occurring act

Some examples are only interpretable as expressing an act simultaneous with that of the main verb, just like the present participle.

IV 3,11a rātena, drim v’y āsan bhidantah ‘With Ṛta they (the Āṅgiras’) broke and scattered (aor, inj.) the rock (i.e, broke the rock asunder).’

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1) See Hoffmann Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik (1975, 1976) 364, 256f., 530. 2) The two aspects are referred to by E. Hermann GN 15 (1943) 602 as “Gesamtschau” and “Verlaufsschau” respectively. 3) Schwyzer/Debrunner Griechische Grammatik (1950) II 252. 4) See Hoffmann Aufs. 529ff. — On the general discussion and the research history of the aspect see for example Schwyzer/Debrunner ibid, 248ff. 5) E.g. mā (pāri) sṭhāḥ (aor. inj.) ‘Don’t

I 92,12ab paśūn nā citrā subhāgā prathānā ... urviyā v.y āśvait ‘The fortunate, multicolored [Uṣas] has shined forth (aor. ind.) widely, extending herself like the cattle ...’

X 45,8ab dṛśānō rukmā urviyā v.y ādyauḍ durmāṛṣam āyuḥ śriyē rucānāḥ ‘Being identified as a plate ornament (on the breast), he (Agni) has flashed (aor. ind.) widely for the beauty, while he brought the vitality hard to forget with brightening.’

A notable characteristic of the examples of this kind is that each main verb shows a highly punctual Aktionsart and correspondingly the aorist stem. Considering this fact, we could not deny that each participle is also formed from the aorist stem correlating with the main verb, though it is always possible that they are used in no different way from the present participle without any aspectual difference.

4. Conclusion

The root-aorist participle can represent an act that occurs (or whose commencement occurs) before the main act (3.1), the consequence of the main act (3.2), the agent or the general character of a subject (3.3), and an act which co-occurs with an act of the punctual Aktions-art expressed by an aorist stem (3.4). Theoretically, one whole act viewed as an extentless point in time could be objectified as a past, future or generalized act. These three possibilities seem to correspond to the three functions discussed in 3.1–3.3.

As a whole the confective aspect of the aorist stem can be regarded as still functioning in the root-aorist participle. There are indeed many cases left where we cannot tell the difference in meaning between the aorist and the present participle. Since, however, a good many examples are best explained by the aspecutal characteristics inherited from the Proto-IE language, we may safely say that these traits were still partly alive in the participles as well as in the injunctive-indicative forms, or at least that their traces were still partially extant in certain lexica or more or less fixed expressions in the Rig-Veda. We believe that in order to clarify the full significance of the aspect in the Vedic verbal system the disputed modal forms too should be investigated.
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stand in the way’ :: mā tiṣṭhaḥ (pres. inj.) ‘Don’t stay any more.’


9) The root-aorist participle is made from the zero-grade stem, but keeps the long vowel in the roots ending in -ā (pānt-, sthānt-), see Hoffmann Aufs, 241. 10) See Narten Die sigmatischen Aoriste im Veda (1964) 134, 266f. 11) The discussion by Delbrück Vergleichende Syntax der indogermanischen Sprachen (1897) 481–483, though under the title “Arisch und Greichisch,” deals only with examples from Greek. — On the functions of the Greek aorist participle see e.g. Köhner Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache II-2 (1898) 197–200. 12) The miserly one is meant, see Geldner Rig-Veda ad loc. 13) Note that vay/vi cannot form an aorist stem. 14) Cf. the similar expression sthātīs cařātham ‘standing and moving one,’ see Tichy Die Nomina agentis auf -tar- im Veditischen (1995) 71.

15) The similarity between the participle in general and the nomen agentis has been pointed out in earlier studies, cf. Tichy ibid. 21ff.

16) In fact root-aorist. I 92,12 aśvait and X 45,8 adyaut, though apparently s-aorists, are most likely renovated forms to the original root-aorists (cf, aśvita; prtc. dyuṭāṇa/-dyuṭāna-), see Narten, Aoriste 148, 261.

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