**The third person plural ending -ασι(ν) of the aorist: diachronic and stylistic issues**

The polymorphic nature of verb endings in many medieval Greek tenses has been the subject of several recent studies. Martin Hinterberger (2001) in particular, has demonstrated that often these are not artificial contrivances created for the benefit of poetic meter. Instead, they originate in the spoken language, and can be found in prose at both an informal and colloquial sociolinguistic level. In this essay I plan to examine the occurrence and success within Byzantine literature of the endings -ασι(ν), -ασινε, in the third person plural of the aorist tense.

In post-classical Greek, an alternative form already existed for the thematic aorist in the third person plural. Cases like ἔλαβαν, which can be found in the *Septuaginta*, indicate an early analogical leveling of the thematic aorist over the alphathematic form with the convenient importation of endings in -αν, which had the advantage of disambiguating the third person plural endings from the first person singular. As is well known, the third person plural of the aorist in KNE was constructed on these analogical forms.

Based on the written evidence, both literary and non, the success of the -ασι ending appears to have been a later development. From the texts I have analyzed, it is clear this form enjoyed little initial socio-linguistic prestige. It was perceived as colloquial, and avoided in *Hochsprachliche Literatur*, instead finding its place in the repertoire of works of popular literature of the Byzantine Middle Ages such as the *Digenìs Akritas*. A survey of its appearance in the drafts present in the Escorial produces the following data: εἴδασι 5x, ἤλθασι 2x, ηὕρασιν 2x, εἴπασι 1x, ἐπήρασι 1x, ἐλάβασι 0x. The presence of such forms greatly increases in a later work like the *Cronaca di Morea*. An analysis of rec. Π reveals the following: ἤλθασι 45x, εἴπασι 33x, ἐπήρασι 31x, ηὕρασιν 10x, εἴδασι 8x, ἐλάβασι 1x. Even a poet such as Leonardo Dellaporta, the author of a number of compositions in demotic Greek dating to the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century, uses many of these forms as an alternative to those ending in -ν.

The situation changes considerably when we consider prose, both literary and non. A systematic perusal leads to some interesting discoveries: for example, ἤλθασι is allowed in Ducas' *Historia turcobyzantina* (9x), but not in other historiographical works of the late Byzantine period such as those by Laonicus Chalcocondyles and Michael Critobulus. Legal and administrative writings also provide valuable documentation: the Parisian codices which contain the Greek translation of the Assizes of the Kingdom of Jerusalem (*Par. Suppl. Gr.* 465 and *Par. Gr.* 1390), for example, attest to the vitality of these forms in legal writing (ἐλάβασι 4x, εἴδασι 18x).

The creation of new standards in literary language gradually led to the full recognition of the -ασι ending in the third person plural of the aorist. However, there were notable divergences and a distinct lack of consensus amongst authors. The aim of this study is to undertake a survey of the use of these endings by authors of the mid and late Byzantine age, principally in poetry and literary prose, in order to decipher stylistic preferences and variations in their perception of linguistic correctness.