Aorist voice patterns in the diachrony of Greek

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Abstract

This paper deals with the aorist voice system in *NT* Greek and focuses on middle-passive markers, namely middle inflection, e.g. in the middle sigmatic aorist, and affixes -η/-θη-, in the so-called passive aorist. The research is corpus-based and investigates the occurrences of ca. 1800 verbal items. According to the grammarians, in the *NT* both middle and passive aorists spread. The present study confirms this observation by providing a comprehensive account of the distribution of these forms, but also shows how they have functionally reorganised. Passive aorists spread at the expense of middle aorists in all kinds of intransitive constructions, namely passive, unaccusative, and reflexive, whereas middle aorists are either found in transitive middles, e.g. possessive, benefactive etc., or occur as deponent verbs in both transitive and intransitive clauses. The parameter transitive vs intransitive appears to be relevant for this functional reorganisation.

Keywords

Ancient Greek – aorist – voice – middle – passive – deponent – New Testament

1 Introduction

This paper deals with the verbal category of voice in Koine Greek and focuses on the aorist. As Browning (1983) and Horrocks (2010) pointed out, the aorist underwent major changes in voice from Ancient to Modern Greek: “the endings of the aorist middle (-(σ)άμην [(s)áme:n], -όμην [-óme:n], etc.) were increasingly replaced by those of the aorist passive (-(θ)ην [-(θ)e:n], etc.)” (Horrocks 2010: 103) and, some centuries later, the replacement led to “[t]he reduction...
of the three voices of Classical Greek to two” (Browning 1983: 30). The avoidance of middle aorists increased over the centuries and overlapped with the collapse of the functional distinction between aorist and perfect. In the early Byzantine period, for instance, the perfect γέγονα ‘I have become’ replaced the middle aorist ἐγενόμην ‘I became’, which had already been in competition with the passive ἐγενήθην in the Koine (cf. Horrocks 2010: 256).

The aim of the paper is twofold. First, a synchronic analysis of the Hellenistic Greek system of voice is provided, through an in-depth investigation of the New Testament (henceforth NT). Second, some insights are developed concerning diachronic changes in the voice system from Classical to Hellenistic Greek. Since the language of the NT is “a reasonably close reflection of the everyday Greek of the majority of the literate population in the early centuries AD” (Horrocks 2010: 147), the NT offers a good sample for investigating the changes that occurred in Greek in the first centuries CE.

The data analysis concerns both quantitative and qualitative aspects. To carry out the quantitative analysis, all the aorist occurrences were collected, with special emphasis on middle and passive aorists. The search for all the relevant forms was made by combining a manual search through the NA28 edition of the Greek New Testament (text available on the website http://www.nestle-aland.com/en/the-28-edition/) with electronic tools (e.g. TLG, Perseus 4.0 released on www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/). The research was refined by using lexica, e.g. Kittel & Friedrich (1932–1936) and Thayer (1995). Our goal was to check how many middle aorists were replaced by passive aorists, how many were still functionally oppositional and how many were deponent or quasi-deponent forms. This quantitative analysis provides the basis for the qualitative one, which focuses on the values still retained by middle inflection in the Koine and the role of deponency within the voice system, with attention to aspects of both form and function.

Even though many studies have been devoted to the topic of voice, particularly middle voice, in Ancient Greek, most of them are not corpus-based, adopt a predominantly synchronic point of view, and mostly concern Homeric and Classical Greek.1 The perspective of this study is different in both respects. The corpus-based research provides a picture of how the voice system is organised within a single, but entire text. Even though the results obtained concern only the text investigated, they presumably reflect the voice system of the language in the first centuries CE. Further research could carry out a

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1 Cf. Risselada (1987), Bakker (1994), Rijksbaron (2002), Allan (2003, 2014a, 2014b), Benedetti (2005, 2006, 2017), Alexiadou & Doron (2012), and Tronci (2014) who, though adopting different perspectives, provide accounts of the voice in its entirety.
corpus-based analysis of texts contemporary to the NT, with the aim of giving a more complete description of the voice system(s) in Koine and Hellenistic-Roman Greek. Some differences may also be found from one text to another, depending on the language register, the regional varieties, the speakers’/writers’ knowledge of language and further sociolinguistic parameters. The issue of sociolinguistic variation might also be dealt with by comparing the texts which compose the NT, e.g. Gospels vs Acts vs Letters, which are different in terms of genre, style, author, and addressee, and, among Gospels, the more literary and Classical-shaped Gospel of Luke vs the more popular and spoken-like Gospel of Mark. However, this issue is too wide and complex to be dealt with here. The reader is referred to Porter (2000a, 2000b) for some preliminary analysis.

As far as the synchrony vs diachrony dichotomy is concerned, this study provides both a synchronic analysis of the aorist voice system in the NT and a diachronic comparison with both Homeric and Classical Greek.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2 a brief survey of the literature is provided. Section 3 is devoted to the analysis of data, by focusing on middle-inflected aorists in 3.1, passive aorists in 3.2 and some problematic cases in 3.3. In Section 4 the diachronic aspects of the aorist voice system are addressed, by comparing data from the NT with Homeric Greek (4.1) and Classical Greek (4.2). Finally some conclusions are drawn in Section 5.

Before starting the next section, a terminological remark is necessary. By passive and middle aorists, I mean the passive- and the middle-inflected aorists, namely the inflectional classes marked by the affixes -η/-θή- and the middle inflection respectively, no matter what syntactic or semantic values these forms carry. Both labels are misleading when referring to the aorist, since not all passive aorists are true passives and middle aorists can overlap with the passive ones in some middle values, the term “middle” being applied in some recent studies, e.g. Kemmer (1993), also to some functional values regardless of the verbal forms which express them.

2 A brief survey of the literature

It is commonly agreed among scholars that the system of three voices—active, middle, and passive—in general remained the same in the NT, and more generally in Hellenistic Greek, as in the Classical language (cf. Moulton 1906: 158–160; Blass, Debrunner & Funk 1961: 161). Besides the common idea of continuity with respect to Classical Greek, scholars also remark that there existed some differences between Classical and NT Greek, concerning in particular the relation-
ship between middle and passive aorists. In his historical grammar, Jannaris (1897: §1478) stated (emphasis mine):

[The middle and passive voices] should sooner or later finish by being completely identified [...]. The final outcome was then that the passive form soon gained ascendancy over the middle and began to extrude it. One, probably also the primary, cause of this issue was that the subtle functions of the middle verb [...] had been lost sight of in the popular language, which in the great majority of cases dispensed altogether with such fine shades of thought [...], or, when indispensable, preferred to express them in a different, clearer mode, [...] that is by means of a special complement [...]. This circumstance naturally led to the disuse and final disappearance of all indirect middle verbs [...]. It is now obvious that, as this class had been the commonest, the number of middle verbs was reduced to a very small group as compared with the hosts of their rival or passive verbs.

In accordance with this analysis, McKay (1994: 26) stressed that the deponent middles of Classical Greek also take on passive morphology and he quotes the example of the deponent middle ἀπεκρίνατο 'he replied', which was replaced in the NT by “the normal Hellenistic aorist” ἀπεκρίθη 'he replied' (cf. §3.1). This example also occurs in Caragounis (2004: 152), who noted that the phenomenon “is old having begun to occur already in Λ [= Classical, LT] authors”. He also refers to Hatzidakis (1892: 193–194), who remarked that “[v]on vielen Verbis kannten aber auch die Attiker nur die Formen des Passivaoristus in medialer Bedeutung” (“for many verbs, however, even Attic authors used only passive aorists in middle meanings”), e.g. ἔδωκεν 'I was able', ἔγραψαν 'I woke', ἐκοιμήθην 'I fell asleep', ἔκοιμηθήν 'I satisfied myself', ἐπιηθήν 'I believed', ἐπιθάψθην 'I tried', ἐσχάλωθην 'I was afraid', ἔχαρην 'I rejoiced', etc. This view is also shared by Aubrey’s (2016: 573) study, which is devoted to the topic of voice in Hellenistic Greek: “[f]rom Homeric to Classical and into Hellenistic, -(th)ē-slowly expanded in two directions: (1) enveloping the semantically and syntactically passive events, and (2) encroaching on and gradually displacing sigmatic middles as the marking of choice for certain middle event types”.

Some scholars also remarked that middle aorists were still abundant in NT Greek. This statement seems to conflict with the idea that passive aorists spread at the expense of the middle ones. Blass, Debrunner & Funk (1961: 161), for instance, pointed out that in NT Greek there is a “tendency to merge the middle and the passive into a single voice”, formally represented by the passive aorist, and that “NT authors in general preserve well the distinction between middle
and passive" (1961: 165). Robertson (1934: 809) stated that “[i]n the flourishing period of the language [i.e. Classical Greek, LT] this [i.e. indirect middle, LT] was by far the most frequent use, but it finally faded before the active and the intensive (reflexive) pronoun or the passive. [...] But in general the indirect middle is abundant and free in the N.T.”.

Summing up, two facts have been considered essential with respect to the aorist voice system of the NT: the spread of the “passive” aorists, which increasingly replaced the middle aorists, on the one hand, and the abundance of the middle aorists, on the other hand. Even though these two facts might appear to be inconsistent, this is not so. The fact that both classes are robustly attested in the NT seems to be in line with the state of affairs in Classical Greek. However, their functional distribution has changed with respect to Classical Greek. Our aim is to investigate the distribution of the two classes, in terms of both forms and functions, in order to determine the role of both inflectional opposition (middle vs active endings) and affixes contrast (-η-/θη- vs -σα-) in the aorist voice system of NT Greek.

3 Analysis of data

The database for this research comprises 1838 verbal items (types) and a larger number of tokens. Some types are hapax legoména in the NT and are exclusively inflected in the present stem, e.g. γυμνιτεύω ‘I am naked’, κουφίζω ‘I am light, I relieve’, λυμαίνομαι ‘I outrage’, κρυονομαί ‘I delay’. The types attested in aorist forms amount to 1016 by taking into account only finite moods (indicative, subjunctive, optative and imperative) and to 1222 by also counting non-finite forms (infinitives and participles). For simplicity’s sake, our analysis only concerns finite forms.

Before turning to the analysis of voice, some rough quantitative data is useful. This data strictly concerns the level of forms, so “active”, “middle” and “passive” refer to the verb morphology. Within the 1016 verbal items inflected in the aorist, more than half (580 types) are exclusively inflected in the active voice, 104 in the middle voice and 121 in the passive voice. Some examples are ἀλλάσσω ‘I change’, ἀμαρτάνω ‘I go wrong’, ἐγγίζω ‘I bring near’, εἰσάγω ‘I lead into’, ἐκτείνω ‘I stretch out’, ἐντυλίσσω ‘I wrap up’, ἐργάζομαι ‘I work’, κομίζω ‘I receive’, κόπτω ‘I cut’, κλέπτω ‘I steal’, κλίνω ‘I cause to lean’ for the active voice, ἀμύνομαι ‘I defend’, ἀπατάω ‘I deceive’, ἀπατάω ‘I deceive’, αἰσχύνομαι ‘I feel shame’, ἀπατάω ‘I deceive’, αὐλίζομαι ‘I lie in the courtyard’, βαρέω ‘I weight down, I depress’, βούλομαι ‘I desire’, δήσομαι ‘I pray’, διαφθείρω ‘I destroy’, δυναμόω ‘I strengthen’,
Table 1  Distribution of voice markers in finite aorists

|                         | Non-oppositional types | Oppositional types |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| *Activae tantum*        | 580                    | Active vs middle   |
| *Mediae tantum*         | 104                    | Active vs passive  |
| *Passivae tantum*       | 121                    | Middle vs passive  |
|                         |                        | Active vs middle vs passive |
| Total                   | 805                    | 211                |

*έρημούμαι* 'I set free' for the passive voice. As can be seen, a large number of verbs which belong to the two latter classes are *media tantum*. Besides these forms, which do not feature any voice opposition, in the *NT* are also attested aorists which feature some voice opposition. The distribution is as follows. Only 9 *types* feature a tripartite opposition of active vs middle vs passive, e.g. *βαπτίζω* 'I baptise', *εὐαγγελίζω* 'I bring good news'; the remaining 202 *types* show bipartite oppositions: active vs passive (167 *types*), active vs middle (22 *types*), and middle vs passive (13 *types*). See Table 1 for a summary.

In the following sections, I show the semantic and syntactic values of the three aorist voices in both their oppositive and non-oppositional uses. More emphasis is given to middle and passive voices, because in Hellenistic Greek they increased as *types* and entered into competition as strategies for marking middle meanings such as reflexive (e.g. *I washed myself*), unaccusative (*I grew*), benefactive (*I bought the book for myself*), possessive (*I touched my eyes*), etc.\(^2\) The middle voice tended to correlate with middle and deponent transitive, whereas the passive voice spread as a marker of intransitive structures, namely...

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\(^2\) Terminology is not consistent in the field of voice studies, as syntactic and semantic notions are not distinguished from one another. Unaccusative and reflexive are syntactic notions, like the passive. Unaccusative corresponds more or less to anticausative. Benefactive and possessive are, rather, semantic notions and relate to the co-occurrence on the subject argument of the semantic roles of beneficiary and possessor, respectively. I refer to Kulikov (2010), who illustrates the different terminologies, and to Kulikov (2013) and Kulikov & Lavdas (2013), who account for the different voices in Greek and other Indo-European languages. Allan (2003) proposes a description of the middle voice in strictly semantic terms by distinguishing, for instance, the unaccusative middles in four semantic classes: (i) the Spontaneous Process middle, (ii) the Middle State/Process middle, (iii) the Body Motion middle, and (iv) the Collective Motion middle (see also Allan 2014b: 496–499). In this paper, however, I do not follow this classification.
passive and unaccusative. The productivity of middle and passive aorists is not comparable. The aorist middle became a non-oppositional marker, whereas the aorist passive extended as an oppositional marker with respect to the active voice, by also replacing the intransitive middles, especially the unaccusative and the reflexive.

3.1 Middle aorists

In my database, most of the middle aorists are deponent verbs, namely verbs with middle morphology and an active meaning in all forms of the paradigm. They amount to 89 types, e.g. ἀσπάζομαι ‘I greet’, δέχομαι ‘I receive, welcome’, διηγέομαι ‘I describe’, δύναμαι ‘I am able’, ἔργαζομαι ‘I work’, ἱάομαι ‘I heal’, κτάομαι ‘I acquire’, ὀρχέομαι ‘I dance’, χαρίζομαι ‘I gratify’, and are the main group among the aorists exclusively attested in the middle voice in the NT (104 types). They are attested in both intransitive and transitive structures, e.g. ὀρχέομαι ‘I dance’ in (1a) and δέχομαι ‘I receive, welcome’ in (1b).

(1) a. γενεσίοις δὲ γενομένοις τοῦ Ἡρώδου
   birthday:DAT ptcl happened:PTCP art:GEN Herod:GEN
dance:aor.mid.3sg art:nom daughter:nom art:GEN
   Ἡρῳδιάδος ἐν τῷ μέσῳ
   Herodias:GEN in art:dat middle:DAT
   ‘But on Herod’s birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before them’ (Matthew 14:6)

   b. ὅτε οὖν ἠλθεν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν,
   when ptcl come:aor.act.3sg to art:acc Galilee:acc
   ἐδέξαντο αὐτῶν οἱ Γαλιλαῖοι
   welcome:aor.mid.3pl 3sg.acc art:nom Galileans:nom
   ‘So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him’ (John 4:45)

The functional equivalence between the middle morphology of deponent verbs and the active morphology of non-deponent verbs had been already remarked on by Mayser (1906:112) in his grammar on Ptolemaic Greek papyri and was recently emphasised by Lavidas & Papangeli (2007:105) who state: “the active and the middle/passive transitive interchange without any difference in meaning since the Koine period”. Further evidence of this functional equivalence is given by the passive counterparts for the transitive deponents. In 9 of the 13 types which are inflicted as both middle and passive, the morphological difference correlates with the functional opposition between transitive and
passive. They are ἀνατρέφω 'I nourish', θεάομαι 'I see', ιάσομαι 'I heal', κατεργάζομαι 'I accomplish', λογίζομαι 'I reckon', λυτροῦμαι 'I redeem', μωμάομαι 'I blame', ρύομαι 'I deliver', and χαρίζομαι 'I gratify': an example is given in (2a)–(2b). In the remaining 4 verbs (ἀποκρίνομαι 'I reply', γίνομαι 'I become', διαλέγομαι 'I reason', ἐμβριμάομαι 'I groan'), the voice difference appears to be meaningless; see (3a)–(3b):

(2) a. ἐπετίμησεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι rebuke:aor.act.3sg ptcl art.nom Jesus:nom art.dat spirit:dat τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ, καὶ ἱάσατο τὸν παῖδα art.dat unclean:dat and heal:aor.mid.3sg art.acc boy:acc 'But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy' (Luke 9:42)

b. καὶ ἱάθη ὁ παῖς αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ hour:dat dem.dat 'and the servant was healed at that hour' (Matthew 8:13)

(3) a. ὁ δὲ ὁ Πιλάτος ἀπεκρίνατο αὐτοῖς art.nom ptcl Jesus:nom answer:aor.mid.3sg 3pl.dat 'but Jesus answered them' (John 5:17)

b. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς art.nom ptcl Pilate:nom answer:aor.pass.3sg 3pl.dat λέγων saying:ptcp 'and Pilate answered them, saying' (Mark 15:9)

Out of the total number of 148 types inflected as middle aorists, 105 occur in biargumental structures and 43 in intransitive structures. Among the biargumental verbs, 99 are fully transitive and 6 occur with the genitive (ἀντιλαμβάνομαι 'I help', ἐπιλαμβάνομαι 'I help', τάσσω 'I appoint', φείδομαι 'I spare') or the dative (ἀνίνωμαι 'I buy', χράομαι 'I use'). A summary of these data is provided in Table 2.

Let us return to the issue of deponency, which has been debated ever since the 19th century (cf. Kühner & Gerth 1892: §324; 1898: §377) and has received renewed attention in recent years (cf. Lavidas & Papangeli 2007, Ladewig 2010, Grestenberger 2014, Campbell 2015). In particular, Lavidas & Papangeli propose an account of both semantic and syntactic approaches to deponency.
and an insightful diachronic analysis from Ancient to Modern Greek. As they cogently argue, the proposed unified analysis of deponent verbs in terms of either semantic features or syntactic parameters does not match with Greek data. According to their investigation, “the data [i.e. Greek diachronic data, LT] lack any systematic pattern: an initially deponent verb may have an active variant with identical interpretation that is used in parallel or, even, instead of the deponent” (Lavidas & Papangeli 2007:116).3

In the light of these considerations, one could interpret as “quasi-deponent” the verbs in the database which feature middle morphology in all aorist occurrences of the NT, while not being elsewhere deponent, namely ἀπονιπτῶ ‘I wash’ (*hapax legómenon*), ἀποτίθημι ‘I put, lay down’, ἀσφαλίζω ‘I make sure’, and κόλαξ ‘I punish’. Among the remaining *media tautum* aorists, ἄπτω ‘I touch’ and κομίζω ‘I receive’ are each attested only once with active morphology, ἄπτω in the present stem (*Luke* 15:8) and κομίζω in the aorist participle (*Luke* 7:37), and ἀρχέω ‘I begin’ is attested only twice in the active voice (*Mark* 10:42 and *Romans* 15:12). For some of the remaining verbs, namely ἀπειλέω ‘I warn’, συμβάλλω ‘I help’, συμβουλεύω ‘I counsel’, υποστέλλω ‘I keep back’, there is no semantic difference between active and middle forms, whereas there is a difference for the last verbs of our list, namely καταρτίζω ‘I prepare’ vs καταρτίζομαι ‘I am perfect’, κείρω ‘I cut off (hair)’ vs κείρομαι ‘I am shaved’ and κόπτω ‘I cut’ vs κόπτομαι ‘I mourn’. For instance, the active forms (present stem) of κόπτω are transitive, e.g. (4a), whilst its middle forms (both aorists and imperfects) are transitive/intransitive, e.g. (4b): the meaning ‘to mourn, to mourn for’ of middle forms is presumably a semantic extension from the reflexive middle ‘to beat or strike oneself’.

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3 For further insights into the issue, with special emphasis on *media tautum* futures, cf. also Tronci (2017).
(4) a. ἄλλοι δὲ ἔκοπτον κλάδους ἀπὸ τῶν other:NOM PTCL cut:IMPF.ACT.3PL branches:ACC from ART.GEN δένδρων καὶ ἐστρώννυον ἐν τῇ ὀδ mappedBy:GEN and spread:IMPF.ACT.3PL in ART.DAT road:DAT 'and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road' (Matthew 21:8)

b. Ἡὐλήσαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ὑρχήσασθε· play:AOR.ACT.1PL 2PL.DAT and not dance:AOR.MID.2PL ἐθρηνήσαμεν καὶ οὐκ ἐκόψασθε sing:AOR.ACT.1PL and not mourn:AOR.MID.2PL 'we played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn' (Matthew 11:17)

The semantic disjunction between active and middle forms of the same verb is evidence of the loss of the syntactic, i.e. diathetic, relationship between them (see below for further details). This phenomenon had already begun in Late Classical Greek and the new deponent verbs attested in Hellenistic Greek are evidence of this (cf. Lavidas & Papangeli 2007:105–107).

In the NT, there are also aorists which feature oppositive middle inflection. They are less frequent than the mediantantum aorists and they also occur in both intransitive and transitive structures. In (5a)–(5c) I provide examples of some oppositive values of the middle, namely possessive, benefactive and unaccusative:

(5) a. λαβὼν ὦδωρ ἀπενίψατο τὰς χεῖρας taking:PTCP water:ACC wash:AOR.MID.3SG ART.ACC hands:ACC ἀπέναντι τοῦ ὀχλου before ART.GEN crowd:GEN 'Pilate took some water, washed his hands before the crowd' (Matthew 27:24)

b. ἕνοσφίσατο ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς, συνειδυίης keep.back:AOR.MID.3SG from ART.GEN proceed:GEN knowing:PTCP καὶ τῆς γυναικός and ART.GEN wife:GEN 'Ananias] kept back for himself part of the proceeds with his wife’s knowledge' (Acts 5:2)
c. ὡς δὲ ἐγεύσατο ὁ ἀρχιτρίκλινος τῷ ὦν ὁ ὕδωρ ὁ ὕδωρ γεγενημένον water:ACC wine:ACC become:PTCP
’When the head steward tasted the water that had been turned to wine’ (John 2:9)

Paired middle vs active aorists are very rare in the NT; an example is (6):

(6) a. καὶ χρόνῳ ἵκανὼ ὦκ ἐνεδύσατο ἰμάτιον ἤκαν ἤκαν ἤκαν ἤκαν and time:DAT long:DAT not wear:AOR.MID.3SG clothes:ACC
‘For a long time this man had worn no clothes’ (Luke 8:27)

b. ἐξέδυσαν αὐτόν τὴν χλαμύδα καὶ strip:AOR.ACT.3PL 3SG.ACC ART.ACC robe:ACC and
ἐνέδυσαν αὐτόν τὰ ἰμάτια αὐτοῦ wear:AOR.ACT.3PL 3SG.ACC ART.ACC clothes:ACC 3SG.GEN
‘they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes back on him’ (Matthew 27:31)

Much more frequent are the cases in which only the middle is attested, even though the verb is not deponent and the active aorist is elsewhere attested, for instance in Classical Greek, e.g. (7a)–(7b):

(7) a. οὐχ ὑμεῖς μὲ ἐξελέξασθε, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ not 2PL.NOM 1SG.ACC choose:AOR.MID.2PL but 1SG.NOM ἐξελέξασθαι ὑμᾶς choose:AOR.MID.1SG 2PL.ACC
‘You did not choose me, but I chose you’ (John 15:16)

b. οἱ δὲ ἄκουσαντες ἐχάρησαν καὶ ART.NOM PTCL hearing:PTCP be.delighted:AOR.PASS.3PL and
ἐπηγγείλαντο αὐτῷ ἀργύριον δοῦναι promise:AOR.MID.3PL 3SG.DAT money:ACC give:INF
‘When they heard this, they were delighted and promised to give him money’ (Mark 14:11)

The distribution of middle aorists is evidence of the functional decline of middle inflection in Hellenistic Greek. Even though it is widespread in many verb forms, the occurrences in which middle inflection expresses some middle
values are very rare. It is preserved as a form, though it has lost its oppositional values. According to Caragounis (2004:152), middle inflection in its entirety, the present stem included, is no longer productive as a voice marker in NT Greek. In interpreting the passage 15:2 of the Gospel of Matthew, in which the middle present νίπτονται [wash:PRS.MID.3PL] ‘they wash’ is combined with the object τὰς [ART.ACC] χεῖρας [hands:ACC] αὐτῶν [3PL.GEN] ‘their hands’, Caragounis remarks: “[t]he use of the middle with an expressed object indicates that the feeling for the fine distinction between the active and the middle has been lost” and quotes as further evidence the passages Acts 7:58, 26:21, Ephesians 5:16, and Titus 2:7. In my opinion, there are some essential differences between the present middle and the aorist middle in the NT. The present middle preserved all the functions of middle inflection, from the intransitive (the passive and the unaccusative) to the transitive ones (see Tronci forthcoming, who investigates the functional distribution of the middle forms belonging to all tenses and moods in the Gospel of Matthew for a total number of 979 occurrences). The aorist middle continued to exist as a form but lost its main functional values, e.g. unaccusative and reflexive, which were increasingly expressed by the passive aorist. The present middle, instead, still correlated with the intransitive middle values and tended to be replaced by the active in transitive middle values, namely benefactive and possessive. The analysis of changes in voice morphology by Lavidas (2009:108) is in line with this view: “[f]rom the Hellenistic period, the marking of the benefactive (‘personal interest’) meaning by non-active [i.e. middle, LT] morphology begins to be abandoned”.

3.2 Passive aorists
The distribution of passive aorists within the database is as follows: 121 verbs are exclusively inflected as passive aorists, 167 are coupled with active aorists, 13 with middle aorists, and 9 with both of them. This picture allows us to have a clearer idea concerning the functions of passive aorists in the NT. The main function is to express the passive, e.g. (8a), and the unaccusative, e.g. (9a), by means of opposition to active morphology, e.g. (8b) and (9b):

(8) a. Τότε ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνήχθη εἰς τὴν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος
 then ART.NOM Jesus:NOM lead:AOR.PASS.3SG into ART.ACC wilderness:ACC by ART.GEN spirit:GEN
 ‘Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness’ (Matthew 4:1)

b. ἀνήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παραστῆσαι τῷ lead:AOR.ACT.3PL 3SG.ACC to Jerusalem:ACC present:INF ART.DAT
κυρίῳ
Lord:

[Joseph and Mary] brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord’ (Luke 2:22)

(9) a. τότε ἥγερθησαν πᾶσαι αἱ παρθένοι
then weak.up:aor.pass.3pl quant.nom virgins:nom
ἐκεῖναι καὶ ἐκόσμησαν τὰς λαμπάδας ἑαυτῶν
dem:nom and trim:aor.act.3pl art:acc lamps:acc refl:gen
‘Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps’ (Matthew 25:7)

b. καὶ προσελθόντες ἤγειραν αὐτὸν λέγοντες
and coming:ptcp weak.up:aor.act.3pl 3sg.acc saying:ptcp
‘So they came and woke him up saying’ (Matthew 8:25)

The occurrence of the same verbal morphology in passives and unaccusatives is syntactically motivated. Both structures are characterised by the movement of an argument from underlying object status to subject status. The difference between the two clauses concerns the underlying subject of the clause; there is a subject present in the deep structure in the passive (whether expressed or absent in the surface structure), but one does not occur in the unaccusative (cf., among others, La Faucci & Tronci 2009). For instance, the anticausative events which occurred after the death of Jesus are shaped into a sequence of unaccusative passive aorists in the Gospel of Matthew (27:51–53).

In some cases, the choice between passive and unaccusative is a matter of interpretation, e.g. in (10a) compared to the transitive in (10b). This fact is hardly surprising, since the two voices, not being formally distinguished in Greek, are not expected to diverge much in meaning either (cf. Jankuhn 1969: 18–25).

(10) a. καὶ ἐθεραπεύθη ὁ παῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἑκείνης
and heal:aor.pass.3sg art:nom boy:nom from art:gen
moment:gen dem:gen
‘and the boy (was) healed from that moment’ (Matthew 17:18)

b. καὶ πάντας τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας ἐθεράπευσεν
and quant.acc art:acc sick having:ptcp heal:aor.act.3sg
‘and he healed all who were sick’ (Matthew 8:16)
Many passive aorists occur in the NT as *passiva tantum* (121 types). A little less than half (50 types) are either deponent verbs, e.g. αὐλίζομαι ‘I spend the night’, βούλομαι ‘I desire’, δέομαι ‘I pray’, δύναμαι ‘I am able’, ἡττάομαι ‘I am overcome’, ἱλάσκομαι ‘I make reconciliation’, or quasi-deponent verbs, namely verbs which were coupled with a corresponding transitive causative in Classical Greek, but are exclusively attested in non-active voices in the NT, e.g. αἰσχύνομαι ‘I am ashamed’, θαμβέομαι ‘I am astonished’, κοιμάομαι ‘I sleep’, ὀργίζομαι ‘I am angry’, κοιμάομαι ‘I am darkened’, φοβέομαι ‘I fear’. In the former group, the following are *hapax legómena*: ἀναγνώριζομαι ‘I recognise’, ἀχρειοῦμαι ‘I am corrupted’, ἐκκαίομαι ‘I am kindled’, κοιμάομαι ‘I am enraged’, ματιοῦμαι ‘I become futile’, πιστοῦμαι ‘I am assured’, προσκλινόμαι ‘I am joined’, προσφέρομαι ‘I draw to the shore’, φανεροῦμαι ‘I am illustrious’, φοβέομαι ‘I fear’. In the latter group, there are both verbs which are inflected as passive aorists in Classical and Hellenistic Greek, e.g. αἰσχύνομαι (11a)–(11b), and verbs which occur as passive aorists in Hellenistic Greek but are active-inflected in Classical Greek, e.g. θαμβέομαι (12a)–(12b):

(11) a. ἵνα [...] μὴ αἰσχυνθῶμεν ἁπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ comp not be.ashamed:aor.pass.1pl from 3sg.gen in art.dat παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ coming:dat 3sg.gen
‘[abide in him] so that we may not shrink from him in shame at his coming’ (1John 2:28)

b. Καὶ ἡμεῖς ἄκουσαντες ἡσυχνθημέν ἃς καὶ and 1pl.nom hearing:ptcp be.ashamed:aor.pass.1pl ptcl and ἐπέσχομεν τοῦ δικρύειν control:aor.act.1pl art.gen cry:inf
‘Then we were ashamed and controlled our tears’ (Pl. Phaedo 117e)

(12) a. καὶ ἑθαμβήσατεν ἀπαντες and be.astounded:aor.pass.3pl quant.nom ‘and they were all amazed’ (Mark 1:27)

b. πάς δ’ ἑθαμβήσεθαν κλινὼν / quant.nom ptcl be.astounded:aor.act.3sg hearing:ptcp εὐφυγάν τε καρετὴν τῆς παρθένου courage:acc ptcl and.brave:acc art.gen maiden:gen ‘and each man marvelled, as he heard the maiden’s brave speech’ (E. Iph. Aul. 1561–1562)
The verb θαμβέομαι is a good example to illustrate the voice changes in Ancient Greek. The verb θαμβέω is attested in both present and aorist stems with active voice from Homer until Classical Greek, as shown by the aorist ἐθάμβησεν in (12b) and the imperfect ἐθάμβεον attested in Homeric poems, Pindar and Herodotus. The verb is commonly considered to be intransitive, the occurrences with a noun in the accusative commonly being interpreted as constructions with an accusative of relation, e.g. θάμβησαν [be.astounded:aor.act.3pl] δ’ [ptcl] δρνίθας [birds:acc] (Od. 2:155) ‘the people were seized with wonder at the birds’; τὸν [art.acc] ἐθάμβεον [be.astounded:impf.act.3pl] Ἀρτεμίς [Artemis:nom] τε [ptcl] καὶ [and] δροσεῖ’ [bold:nom] Ἀθάνα [Athena:nom] (Pi. N. 3:50) ‘Artemis and bold Athena gazed at him with wonder’; τέρας [monstrous.thing:acc] δ’ [ptcl] ἐθάμβουν [be.astounded:impf.act.3pl] (A. Supp. 570) ‘and they were astonished at the monstrous thing’. In the NT the verb is exclusively attested with non-active morphology, namely with passive morphology in the aorist, see (12a), and with middle morphology in the present stem, see (12c):

(12) c. οἱ [art] δὲ [ptcl] μαθηταὶ [disciples:nom] ἐθαμβοῦντο [be.astounded:impf.mid.3pl] ἐπὶ [at] τοῖς [art] λόγοις [words:dat] αὐτοῦ [3sg.gen] ‘and the disciples were amazed at his words’ (Mark 10:24)

Summing up, the verb θαμβέω was activum tantum in Homeric and Classical Greek⁴ and became deponent (medium or passivum tantum) in Post-Classical Greek. This phenomenon is part of a larger phenomenon which concerned many verbs throughout the history of the Greek language. According to Lavidas & Papangeli (2007: 108), “[n]ot all deponents display stable behaviour through the different stages of Greek. In many cases, the deponent verbs have changed to actives, and, in other cases, they have attracted other verbs from the class of actives’. The syntactic and semantic behaviour of the verbs which changed from active to middle/passive and vice versa remains the same, because the change concerns only verb morphology; cf. Lavidas & Papangeli (2007: 121). Deponency does not involve diathesis, since the morphology of deponent verbs, be they activa or media/passiva tantum, is not oppositional.

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⁴ The verb is especially attested in Homeric poems and in tragic authors, so it belongs to the poetic lexicon.
Let us now turn to the 71 types of *passiva tantum* aorists that belong to non-deponent verbs. Most of them are attested in the NT with both active and middle morphology in stems other than the aorist. As for the aorist, only the passive is attested. See for instance the present transitive of ἀνακρίνω 'I judge' vs the aorist passive in (13a), the future transitive of πληθύνω 'I multiply' in (13b) vs the aorist passive in (13c), the perfect transitive of πιπράσκω 'I sell' in (13d) vs the aorist passive in (13e):

(13) a. ἵνα ὑφ’ ὑμῶν ἀνακριθῶ ἡ ὑπὸ ἀνθρωπίνης comp by 2PLGEN judge:AOR.PASS.ISG or by human:GEN court:GEN but not REFL.ACC judge:PRS.ACT.ISG

‘[But with me it is a very small thing] that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself’ (*1 Corinthians* 4:3)

b. χορηγήσει καὶ πληθυνεῖ τὸν σπόρον supply:FUT.ACT.3SG and multiply:FUT.ACT.3SG ART.ACC seed:ACC 2PLGEN

‘[He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food] will supply and multiply your seed for sowing’ (*2 Corinthians* 9:10)

c. ηὔξησεν ὁ λαὸς καὶ increase:AOR.ACT.3SG ART.NOM people:NOM and multiply:AOR.PASS.3SG in Egypt:DAT

‘the people increased and multiplied in Egypt’ (*Acts* 7:17)

d. ἀπελθὼν πέπρακεν πάντα ὡσα going:PTCP sell:PF.ACT.3SG QUANT.ACC REL.ACC have:1MPF.ACT.3SG and buy:AOR.ACT.3SG 3SG.ACC

‘[who, on finding one pearl of great value,] went and sold all that he had and bought it’ (*Matthew* 13:46)

e. Διὰ τί τούτο τὸ μύρον οὐκ for Q.ACC DEM.NOM ART.NOM ointment:NOM not έπράδη τριακοσίων δηναρίων καὶ sell:AOR.PASS.3SG three.hundred:GEN denaris:GEN and
Within the database, only the verb χαίρω is inflected as a passive in the aorist stem and as an active in the present stem without any difference in meaning. In both cases it means ‘to rejoice, to be glad’ (on this verb, cf. Tronci 2005: 20, fn. 14):

(14) a. καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὀχλός ἔχαρεν ἐπὶ
and QUANT.NOM ART.NOM people:NOM rejoice:IMPF.ACT.3SG at
πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐνδόξοις τοῖς γινομένοις ὑπ’
QUANT.DAT ART.DAT glorious:DAT ART.DAT produced:PTCP by
αὐτοῦ
3SG.GEN
‘and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him’ (Luke 13:17)

b. ἐχάρησαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ ἑδόθη
rejoice:AOR.PASS.3PL PTCL ART.NOM disciples:NOM seeing:PTCP
tὸν κύριον
ART.ACC Lord:ACC
‘Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord’ (John 20:20)

Among the 71 types of passiva tantum aorists, there are also some hapax legómena, namely διαλλάσσω (διηλλάγην ‘I was reconciled’), διαλύω (διελύθην ‘I was dispersed’), διανέμω (διενεμήθην ‘I spread’), ἐξουδενέω (ἐξουδενήθην ‘I was set at nought’), ἐπικαλύπτω (ἐπεκαλύφθην ‘I was covered’), καταστρώννυμι (κατεστρώθην ‘I was spread’), κληρόω (ἐκληρώθην ‘I obtained an inheritance’), μετατρέπω (μετετράπην ‘I was turned’), μορφόω (ἐμορφώθην ‘I was formed’), πλήσσω (ἐπλήγην ‘I was struck’), πρίζω (ἐπρίσθην ‘I was sawn in two’), τυμπανίζω (ἐτυμπανίσθην ‘I was tortured’), ὑπολείπω (ὑπελείφθην ‘I was left’), and some verbs which are attested in all stems with non-active morphology, namely passive morphology in the aorist and future, and middle morphology in the present, imperfect, future and perfect. A couple of examples of each type follow in (15a)–(15b) and (16a)–(16b) respectively:

(15) a. Μακάριοι δὲν ἀφέθησαν αἱ
blessed:NOM REL GEN forgive:AOR.PASS.3PL ART.NOM
ἀνομίαι καὶ δὲν ἐπεκαλύφθησαν αἱ
lawless.deeds:NOM and REL.GEN cover:AOR.PASS.3PL ART.NOM
ἁμαρτίαι
sins:NOM
‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered’ (Romans 4:7)

καὶ πάντες ὀσοὶ ἐπείθοντο αὐτῷ
and QUANT.NOM REL.NOM obey:IMPF.MID.3PL 3SG.DAT
dieλύθησαν καὶ ἐγένοντο εἰς οὐδὲν
disperse:AOR.PASS.3PL and become:AOR.MID.3PL to nothing:ACC
‘and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing’ (Acts 5:36)

έὰν τὸν κόσμον δὸν κερδήσῃ τὴν
COMP ART.ACC world:ACC whole:ACC gain:AOR.ACT.3SG ART.ACC
dὲ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ζημιωθῇ;
PTCL soul:ACC 3SG.GEN forfeit:AOR.PASS.3SG
‘[For what will it profit a man] if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?’ (Matthew 16:26)

Μὴ φοβοῦ, Ζαχαρία, διότι
not be.afraid:PRS.MID.2SG Zechariah:voc COMP
eἰσηκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου
hear:AOR.PASS.3SG ART.NOM prayer:NOM 2SG.GEN
‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard’ (Luke 1:13)

A few passive aorists unexpectedly feature the affix η-. Following the alphabetic order of the dictionaries, they are ἀπεστράφην ‘I turned away’, διηλλάγην ‘I was reconciled’, διεσπάρην ‘I was scattered’, διεφθάρην ‘I was destroyed’, ἐνετράπην ‘I was put to shame’, ἐξεπλάγην ‘I was astonished’, ἐξετράπην ‘I turn aside’, ἐπεφάνην ‘I appeared’, κατεκάην ‘I was burned up’, κατηλλάγην ‘I was reconciled’, κατηλλάγην ‘I was pierced’, μετετράπην ‘I was turned’, ἐπλήγην ‘I was struck’, συνετάφην ‘I was buried’, συνεχάρην ‘I rejoiced with’, ἐχάρην ‘I rejoiced’. They are forms inherited from Homeric and Classical Greek which continued to exist in Post-Classical Greek, even though the affix η- was not productive. The semantic and syntactic values of the passive aorists with η- are comparable to those of the aorists with -θη-; see the passive (17a) and the unaccusative (17b):
(17) a. συνετάφημεν  οὖν  αὐτῷ  διὰ  τὸν  βαπτίσματος
bury:aor.pass.1pl  ptcl  3sg.dat  through  art.gen  baptism:gen
eis  tôn  thánaton
into  art.acc  death:acc

‘We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death’ (Romans 6:4)

b. ἵδοι  ἄγγελος  κυρίον  κατ’ ὄναρ  ἐφάνη
ptcl  angel:nom  Lord:gen  in  dream:acc  appear:aor.pass.3sg
αὐτῷ  λέγων
3sg.dat  saying:ptcp

‘an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying’ (Matthew 1:20)

Before summing up, I discuss the case of the 5 verbs, namely ἀποκρίνομαι ‘I reply’, γίνομαι ‘become’, διαλέγομαι ‘I reason’, ἐμβριμάομαι ‘I groan’, χαρίζομαι ‘I gratify’, which occur as both middle and passive aorists in the NT without any difference in syntactic distribution and meaning. The first verb, ἀποκρίνομαι ‘I reply’, is attested 109× as a passive aorist and 7× as a middle aorist; see examples above in (3a)–(3b). The quantitative relationship between the two forms in the NT is inverted with respect to Classical Greek. In Classical Greek, the passive aorist is rare: it occurs 2× in Thucydides and 1× in Herodotus, whilst the middle aorist occurs 18× in Thucydides, 83× in Xenophon, 29× in Plato, 20× in Demosthenes. Furthermore, by comparing passive and middle aorists of ἀποκρίνομαι in Thucydides, two different meanings emerge, namely, ‘to reply’ for the middle and ‘to be separated’ for the passive:

(18) a. οἱ  δὲ  Κορίνθιοι  ἀπεκρίναντο  αὐτοῖς
art.nom  ptcl  Corinthians:nom  reply:aor.mid.3pl  3pl.dat

‘The Corinthians replied to them’ (Th. 1:28)

b. οὐ  μέντοι  ἐν  γε  τῷ  παντὶ  ἔργῳ
not  ptcl  in  ptcl  art.dat  quant.dat  engagement:dat
βεβαίως  οὐδέτεροι  τελευτήσαντες  ἀπεκρίθησαν
certainly  neither:nom  finishing:ptcp  separate:aor.pass.3pl

‘Still, in respect of the whole engagement neither side when they parted had a decided advantage’ (Th. 4:72)

In Post-Classical Greek, the passive aorist became more frequent than the middle and replaced it in its meaning ‘to answer, to reply’. LSJ s.v. remarks that this use ‘condemned by Phryn.86, is unknown in earlier Att., exc[pt] in Pherecr. 51,
Pl. Alc. 2.149b" and is “regular in Lxx (but [sometimes] ἀπεκρινάμην in solemn language, as 3 Ki.2.1) and prevails in NT esp[ecially] in the phrase ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν Eu. Matt. 3. 15; ἀποκριθεὶς λέγει Eu. Marc. 8. 29”.

Let us now turn to the second verb of the list, namely γίνομαι ‘I become’. The middle aorist ἐγένομη and the passive aorist ἐγένηθη occur in the NT 301× and 40× respectively. The passive aorist is attested in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in the book of Acts, in the Pauline Epistles, and in the first Letter of Peter. In some cases, the two forms show the same textual distribution, e.g. (19a)–(19b):

(19) a. ὅτι εἰ ἐν Τύρῳ καὶ Σιδῶν ἐγένοντο  
Comp Comp in Tyre:Dat and Sidon:Dat happen:Aor.Mid.3Pl  
aἱ δυνάμεις αἱ γενόμεναι ἐν ὑμῖν  
Art.Nom mighty.works:Nom Art.Nom happened:PTcp in 2Pl.Dat  
‘For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon’ (Matthew 11:21)  

b. ὅτι εἰ ἐν Σοδόμοις ἐγένηθαν αἱ  
Comp Comp in Sodom:Dat happen:Aor.Pass.3Pl Art.Nom  
δυνάμεις αἱ γενόμεναι ἐν σοί  
mighty.works:Nom Art.Nom happened:PTcp in 2Sg.Dat  
‘For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom’ (Matthew 11:23)  

However, the middle aorist also occurs in impersonal constructions with the meaning ‘it happened’, followed by an accusative plus infinitive (19c) or a coordinate finite clause (19d):

(19) c. Καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς σάββασιν  
and happen:Aor.Mid.3SG 3SG.Acc in Art.Dat Sabbath:Dat  
παραπορεύεσθαι διὰ τῶν σπορίμων  
go:Inf through Art.Gen grain.fields:Gen  
‘And it happened that one Sabbath he was going through the grain fields’ (Mark 2:23)  

d. Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἕλθον περιτεμεῖν τὸ παιδίον  
and happen:Aor.Mid.3SG in Art.Dat day:Dat Art.Dat  
ὄγδοι ἥλθον περιτεμεῖν τὸ παιδίον  
eighth:Dat come:Aor.Act.3Pl circumcise:Inf Art.Acc child:Acc  
‘And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child’ (Luke 1:59)
The passive aorist is never found in these kinds of clauses in the NT. It occurs with a lexical subject and adjectival or nominal predicative of the subject, e.g. (19e)–(19f):

(19) e. ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ταῦτα περίλυπος
   ART.NOM PTCL hearing:PTCP DEM.ACC sad:NOM
   become:AOR.PASS.3SG
   'But when he heard these things, he became very sad' (Luke 18:23)

f. ὃς ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ
   REL.NOM become:AOR.PASS.3SG wisdom:NOM 1PL.DAT from
   θεοῦ
   God:GEN
   'Christ Jesus,] who became to us wisdom from God' (1 Corinthians 1:30)

The syntactic and semantic distribution of the passive aorist is more restricted than that of the middle aorist. Even though some uses of the two forms overlap, they do not appear to be free variants in the NT.

The verbs διαλέγομαι 'I reason' and ἐμβριμάομαι 'I groan' can be quickly dealt with because their middle and passive aorists are rarely attested in the NT (διελέξατο 2x, διελέχθησαν 1x, ἐνεβριμήσατο 1x, ἐνεβριμήθη 1x) and the occurrences of διελέξατο/διελέχθησαν, on the one hand, and ἐνεβριμήσατο/ἐνεβριμήθη, on the other hand, show the same syntactic distribution and meaning.

The last verb of the list is interesting because shows the emergence of a new passive voice in the aorist, expressed by the passive ἐχαρίσθην 'I was granted', besides the deponent transitive ἐχαρισάμην 'I bestowed'. The middle aorist is attested 7x in the NT, whereas the passive is attested only once. The following pair shows the syntactic and semantic difference between the two forms, the former being transitive and the latter passive:

(20) a. διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ
   PTCL and ART.NOM God:NOM 3SG.ACC exalt:AOR.ACT.3SG and
   ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπέρ
   bestow:AOR.MID.3SG 3SG.DAT ART.ACC name:ACC ART.ACC above
   πᾶν ὄνομα
   QUANT.ACC name:ACC
   'Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name' (Philippians 2:9)
b. ὃτι ὡμίν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ,
COMP 2PL.DAT be.granted:AOR.PASS.3SG ART.NOM for Christ:GEN
οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ
not only ART.NOM in 3SG.ACC believe:INF but also ART.NOM
ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν
for 3SG.GEN suffer:INF
‘For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should
not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake’ (Philippians 1:29)

Summing up, passive aorists are very productive in the NT. They spread at the
expense of middle aorists in unaccusatives and intransitive deponents. Middle
aorists continued to exist in transitive uses of deponent and quasi-deponent
verbs, but lost most intransitive uses. As I show in Section 4, intransitive occu-
rences of middle aorists were attested in Homeric poems and had already
decreased in number in Classical Greek. In Homeric poems we also find pairs
of middle and passive aorists derived from the same verb and both occurring in
unaccusative structures, e.g. ἔχολώθην/ἔχολωσάμην ‘I became angry’ (cf. Tronci
2011 and examples 27a–27b below).

The seemingly chaotic outcome of the competition between passive and
middle aorists is evidence of some instability. However, there is some evidence
that the system was being reorganised in binary terms: on the one
hand, the diathesis expressed by both active and middle aorists, which in-
creasingly correlated with transitive structures; on the other hand, the diath-
esis expressed by passive aorists, which embraced the core intransitive values
of middle, namely the passive and the unaccusative, and extended into in-
transitive deponents. The reassessment shows the emergence of the syntac-
tic feature transitive vs intransitive within the middle diathesis (cf. Section
5).

3.3 Some problematic cases

Three occurrences in my corpus do not fit into the illustrated patterns. They
concern the verbs ἀγαλλιάω ‘I rejoice exceedingly’, ἀπολούω ‘I wash’ and βαπτίζω
‘I baptise’. The first verb could be interpreted as a quasi-deponent, if it were not
for the occurrence of one unaccusative active aorist: see discussion below. As
for the latter two verbs, their middle aorists ἀπελουσάμην, ἐβαπτίσαμην are com-
monly interpreted as passives, though they cannot be passive, because sigmatic
middles are never passive in Ancient Greek, cf. Wackernagel (1926:137–138), Pré-
vot (1935: 17–18), Schwyzer (1990: 757), Ambrosini (1996: 21). In the following we
argue for a different reading through an investigation of all the occurrences of
these verbs.
The first case concerns the verb ἀγαλλιάω ‘I rejoice exceedingly’, which is more frequent as deponent ἀγαλλιάομαι, according to LSJ s.v. In the NT, the verb is attested 4× with middle inflection, e.g. (21a), and 1× with active inflection, e.g. (21b), without any semantic and syntactic difference between them:

(21) a. Ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἡγαλλιάσατο [ἐν]
            3sg.dat art.dat occasion:dat rejoice:aor.mid.3sg in
            τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀγίῳ καὶ ἐπεν
            art.dat spirit:dat art.dat holy:dat and say:aor.act.3sg
            ‘On that same occasion Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said’ (Luke 10:21)

b. Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχή μου τὸν κύριον, /
            exalt:prs.act.3sg art.nom soul:nom 1sg.gen art.acc Lord:acc
            καὶ ἡγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ
            and rejoice:aor.act.3sg art.nom spirit:nom 1sg.gen in
            τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου
            art.dat God:dat art.dat Savior:dat 1sg.gen
            ‘My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has begun to rejoice in God my Savior’ (Luke 1:46–47)

The inflectional opposition does not correlate with any difference concerning voice, unless we read (21b) as a transitive-causative clause ‘my soul let my spirit rejoice in God’. This would be a contrived interpretation, however, and for this reason we prefer to adopt the common reading and try to explain otherwise the occurrence of active inflection (cf. also commentaries on Luke’s Gospel, e.g. Carroll 2012: 47–48). The verb ἀγαλλιάω is attested 4× as a sigmatic middle (ἡγαλλιάσατο in Luke 10:21, John 8:56, Acts 2:26, 16:34), 1× as a sigmatic active (ἡγαλλίασεν in Luke 1:47) and 1× as a passive (infinitive ἁγαλλιαθῆναι in John 5:35). In the present stem, the verb occurs 4× as a middle (ἀγαλλίασθε in Matthew 5:12, 1 Peter 1:6, 1:8; ἁγαλλιώμενοι in 1 Peter 4:16) and 1× as an active (ἀγαλλιῶμεν in Revelation 19:7), without any difference in meaning between active and middle. The verb is also attested in the Old Testament, consistently inflected in the middle voice. According to some commentaries, e.g. Plummer (1960: 31–32), the entire passage of the Song of Mary is modelled on the Song of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1–10, in which the verb ἀγαλλιάω does not occur, however.

Let us return to the active inflection of the verb in (21b), which is awkward with respect to the consistent picture provided by the other occurrences of the verb and needs, therefore, some further explanation. The passage has received much attention among scholars because the two verbs that occur in it present
some peculiarities with respect to both voice and tense. Firstly, μεγαλύνει is a present and ἠγαλλίασεν is an aorist. The combination is unusual because the two verbs are coordinated and both refer to the present time. To explain this oddity, Buth (1984) argues that the passage was literally translated by Luke from an original Hebrew poem. In Hebrew, tense shifting is a matter of aesthetics and poetry and does not correlate with any shift in time reference. The Greek translator, presumably the evangelist Luke, “accurately transmitted the Hebrew poetic form and preserved the poetic tension of the Hebrew in the Greek” (1984: 74). By following this suggestion, it can also be argued that the active voice of ἠγαλλίασεν depends on the wish of the translator “to parallel μεγαλύνει”, as proposed by Méndez (2016: 558, fn. 3). In sum, the peculiarity of ἠγαλλίασεν as far as tense and voice are concerned could be explained in terms of an ad hoc creation to translate an original Hebrew poem (cf. Plummer 1960: 30 who argues that Jews knew many of the Old Testament lyrics by heart and that Mary had recourse to these in the moment of exultation). A comparable hypothesis can be proposed for the active present ἀγαλλιῶμεν (Revelation 19:7). The verb is preceded by χαίρωμεν and followed by δώσωμεν, both of them active. The morpho-phonetic parallelism, on the one hand, and the semantic closeness to χαίρωμεν, on the other hand, could have allowed the verb ἀγαλλιῶμεν to take an active inflection. Consider, however, that the middle form ἀγαλλιώμεθα is provided by some manuscripts, even though it is presumably to be interpreted as lectio facilior.

The second problematic case concerns the middle aorist of ἀπολούω ‘I wash’ in (22a), which is commonly interpreted as a passive (cf. commentaries by Phillips 2002: 129 and Hays 2011: 97 who translate it with ‘you have been washed’ and ‘they were washed’ respectively) along with the two subsequent passive aorists ἡγιάσθητε ‘you were sanctified’ and ἐδικαιώθητε ‘you were justified’:

(22) a. ἀλλὰ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλὰ ἡγιάσθητε, ἀλλὰ ἐν τῷ ονόματι τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God' (1 Corinthians 6:11)
The second occurrence of the verb in the NT is again with middle inflection, but the clause is transitive:

(22) b. ἀναστάς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ

Rise:PTCP baptise:AOR.MID.2SG and wash:AOR.MID.2SG ART.ACC sins:ACC 2SG.GEN calling:PTCP ART.ACC name:ACC 3SG.GEN

‘Rise and get yourself baptised and wash away your sins, calling on his name’ (Acts 22:16)

With respect to the transitive clause in (22b), the clause in (22a) could be either passive ‘you were washed’ or reflexive ‘you washed yourselves’. In both cases, the act of washing is metaphorical and implies ‘to wash of sin’: according to Hays (2011: 97) “Paul alludes here to [the] baptism”. The interpretation as a passive has presumably been encouraged by the occurrence of the passive aorists ἡγιάσθητε and ἐδικαιώθητε in the sequence. We consider that the difference in voice between the middle ἀπελούσασθε and the passives ἡγιάσθητε and ἐδικαιώθητε is meaningful. The middle aorist could be interpreted as a reflexive, thus implying an involvement of the subject in the event. The act of washing themselves (ἀπελούσασθε) could therefore imply sanctification (ἡγιάσθητε) and justification (ἐδικαιώθητε): the three verbs “are three descriptions of the one fundamental transformation that has occurred for those who now belong to Christ” (Hays 2011: 98). This reading allows us to account for the sigmatic middle ἀπελούσασθε in accordance with the syntactic and semantic values of middle aorists which are attested in the NT as well as in Homeric and Classical Greek.

Let us now turn to the third problematic case, which concerns the following occurrence of the verb βαπτίζω ‘I wash, I baptise’:

(23) a. καὶ πάντες εἰς τὸν Μωσῆν ἐβαπτίσαντο ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ καὶ ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ

and QUANT.NOM into ART.ACC Moses:ACC baptise:AOR.MID.3PL in the cloud:DAT and in ART.DAT sea:DAT

‘and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea’ (1 Corinthians 10:2)

The middle aorist ἐβαπτίσαντο is commonly interpreted as a passive (see also the modern translations on the website http://biblehub.com/), but this reading is not convincing and the syntactic structure of the clause leads to another interpretation. The verb is combined with two locative complements which designate the cloud and the sea. These complements also occur in the pre-
ceeding clause: οἱ [ART.NOM] πατέρες [fathers:NOM] ἡμῶν [1PL GEN] πάντες [QUANT.NOM] ὑπὸ [under] τὴν [ART.ACC] νεφέλην [cloud:ACC] ἦσαν [be: IMPF.ACT.3PL] καὶ [and] πάντες [QUANT.NOM] διὰ [through] τῆς [ART.GEN] θαλάσσης [sea:GEN] διῆλθον [pass:AOR.ACT.3PL] (1 Corinthians 10:1) ‘our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea’. The reference to the Hebrews’ flight from Egypt could also be a figure of speech for baptism. Modern commentaries on this passage point to the fact that “Paul reads the exodus story and the Christ event as a double exposure” (Montague 2011: 166). Because of this double reference, the verb ἐβαπτίσαντο could have two complementary readings. It can be interpreted as a true reflexive ‘they dipped themselves’ and refer to the real fact that the Hebrews dipped into the cloud and the sea, which are, respectively, the symbol of God in the Old Testament and the prefiguration of baptism. If the figured interpretation and the reference to baptism prevail, the verb can be read as a causative middle ‘they got themselves baptised’. The passive reading ‘they were baptised’ is also possible, if we adopt the lectio facilior ἐβαπτίσθησαν, accepted in the NA28 edition, instead of the lectio difficilior ἐβαπτίσαντο, transmitted by papyrus P46 of the Chester Beatty collection and accepted in both TLG and the Perseus Project.  

Both reflexive and middle causative analyses of ἐβαπτίσαντο are consistent with the other occurrences of the verb. In the aorist stem, the verb is attested 15× as a passive aorist with passive (‘I was baptised’) and reflexive (‘I washed myself’) meanings, e.g. (23b)–(23c) respectively, and 8× as an active aorist with an active and transitive meaning (‘I baptised’), e.g. (23d):

(23) b. ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου
baptise:AOR.PASS.3SG in ART.ACC Jordan:ACC by John:GEN
’[Jesus] was baptised by John in the Jordan River’ (Mark 1:9)

c. ὁ δὲ Φαρισαῖος ἵδὼν
ART.NOM PTCL Pharisee:NOM seeing:PTCP
ἐθαύμασεν ὅτι οὐ πρῶτον ἐβαπτίσθη
be.astonished:AOR.ACT.3SG COMP not first wash:AOR.PASS.3SG
πρὸ τοῦ ἀρίστου
before ART.GEN dinner:GEN
‘The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash [himself] before dinner’ (Luke 11:38)

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5 The issue of textual criticism of the NT is too complex to be discussed in detail. For an overview, I refer the reader to Aland & Aland (1987: 83–102) and Metzger & Ehrman (2005).
d. ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι
  COMP John:Nom Ptccl Baptise:Actsg.3sg Water:Dat
  'For John baptised with water' (Acts 1:5)

The verb is also twice attested with middle morphology, here in (23e)–(23f).
In the first occurrence, the verb means ‘to dip, to wash’ and is a reflexive. The
comparison with (23c), in which the reflexive is expressed by a passive aorist,
clearly shows that the two voices are in competition. In the second occurrence
(=22b), the verb means ‘to baptise’ and can be interpreted as a causative middle
(lit. ‘to get yourself baptised’), consistently with (23a):

(23) e. καὶ ἀπ’ ἀγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται οὐκ
  And from marketplace:Gen Comp Not Wash:Aor.Mid.3pl Not
  Eat:Pres.act.3pl
  'and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they
  wash' (Mark 7:4)

f. ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου
  Rising:ptcp Baptise:Aor.Mid.2sg and Wash:Aor.Mid.2sg Art:Acc
  ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ
  Sins:Acc 2sg.Gen Calling:ptcp Art:Acc Name:Acc 3sg.Gen
  'Rise and get yourself baptised and wash away your sins, calling on his
  name' (Acts 22:16)

The problem concerning the interpretation of βαπτίζω and its voices was
posed by Moule (1959: 26) in his grammar of the NT. He lists the verb among
"the specimens of problematic passages" and remarks: "[i]s there any signifi-
cance in the comparison between Acts 9:18 ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη and 22:16 ἀναστὰς
βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου? Did a Christian in fact generally 'bap-
tize himself', 'get himself baptized', or 'submit to baptism'?". It is not surprising
that the interpretation of the verb βαπτίζω, which designates one of the core
notions and practices of Christianity, is so problematic. In this verb, indeed,
the linguistic issue of diathesis, in its etymological meaning of 'disposition' (of
the arguments), meets the issue of baptism, its sacral value and its theological
meaning. Which semantic roles do the subject and the object display? Are they
'one who baptises' vs 'one who is baptised' or, rather, 'one who lets someone
get baptised' vs 'one who gets baptised'? The answers to these questions are
not trivial for Christian religion and theology.
4 Diachrony of voice: Homeric and Classical Greek

In grammars and studies concerning the diachronic changes in the verbal system of Ancient Greek, the most hotly debated topics are the changes in future expressions from analytic to periphrastic strategies, the restructuring of verbal aspects and the disappearance of the optative (cf., among others, Horrocks 2010: 82, 102, 130–131). As far as the aorist is concerned, the merging with the perfect yielded major changes in the tense and aspect systems; see chapters 1–4, 14 and 17 of the book recently edited by Runge & Fresch (2016) and references therein. Not many studies have been devoted to the diachrony of the aorist voice system. Scholars limit themselves to remarking that passive aorists spread and middle aorists were reduced in number and were no longer productive (see the studies cited in Section 2 above). Since the aorist forms are the same as in Classical Greek, the functions are also expected to have been preserved, as Aubrey (2016: 620) argues for Hellenistic Greek: “-(θ)η- is used predominantly within its original five types, marking those events that shift the focus of attention to the more patient-like participant. The sigmatic middle aorist morphology predominantly marks the other middle types, which involve a more agent-like primary figure”. This assumption proves to be mistaken, as I show in what follows; here, I compare the aorist voice system of the NT with that of Homeric and Classical Greek.

4.1 Homeric Greek

In Homeric poems two different systems of voice are attested for the aorist (cf. Benedetti 2017 for more details). In the first system, inflection (active vs middle) marks the opposition between active and middle/passive voice, as in the voice system of the present. This system is presumably inherited and is not productive. It is only found with root and thematic aorists, see (24) and (25) respectively, and occurs with a few verbal items. What is peculiar is that middle inflection also marks the passive, e.g. (24b) and (25b), compared with the active transitive in (24a) and (25a):

(24) a. ἡμεῖς δ’ ἔρμα πόλης ἀπέκταμεν […]
   ipl.nom ptcl bulwark:acc city:gen kill:aor.act.1pl
   ‘but we have killed the bulwark of the city’ (Od. 23:121)

   b. Τεῦκρε πέπον δὴ νώϊν ἀπέκτατο πιστὸς
   Teucer:voc good:voc ptcl 1du.gen kill:aor.mid.3sg true:nom
   étairos:comrade
   ‘Good Teucer, a true comrade of ours has been killed’ (Il. 15:437)
(25) a. ἤειδεν δ᾿ ὡς ἀστὺ διέπραθον
sing:aor.act.3sg ptcl comp city:acc sack:aor.act.3pl
үєєς Αχαίων
sons:nom Achaians:gen
‘he sang how the sons of the Achaeans sacked the city’ (Od. 8:514)

b. ἥ διεπράθετο πτόλις ἀνδρῶν εὐρύάγυια
ptcl sack:aor.mid.3sg city:nom men:gen with.wide.streets:nom
‘was a city of men sacked, which has wide streets?’ (Od. 15:384)

The second system involves the most productive aorist classes, namely the sigmatic and the passive aorists. Two patterns of voice markers characterise this system. On the one hand, the affixes -σα- vs -η-/-θη- codify the opposition between active and middle-intransitive, namely passive and unaccusative. On the other hand, the inflection (active vs middle) codifies the opposition between active and middle-transitive, namely reflexive, benefactive, reciprocal, etc. The three terms are exemplified in (26a)–(26c):

(26) a. οἳ δ᾿ ἵππους μὲν λύσαν ὑπὸ
art:nom ptcl horses:acc ptcl loosen:aor.act.3pl from
ζυγοῦ ἱδρώοντας
yoke:gen sweating:ptcp
‘their sweating horses they loosed from beneath the yoke’ (Il. 8:543)

b. εὗδε δ᾿ ἀνακλινθεῖσα, λύθεν
sleep:aor.act.3sg ptcl sinking.back:ptcp loosen:aor.pass.3pl
δὲ οἱ ἀψεα πάντα
ptcl 3sg.dat joints:nom quant:nom
‘and she sank back and slept, and all her joints relaxed’ (Od. 4:794)

c. Ἦ, καὶ ἀπὸ στήθεσφιν ἐλύσατο
speak:prs.act.3sg from bosom:dat loosen:aor.mid.3sg
κεστὸν ἱμάντα
embroidered:acc strap:acc
‘she spoke, and loosed from her bosom the embroidered strap’
(Il. 14:214)

In the pair (26a)–(26b), the opposition between active transitive and middle-intransitive is marked by affixes, the inflection being active in both cases. In the pair (26a)–(26c), instead, the opposition between active transitive and middle-
transitive is marked by inflection. The tripartite voice system is innovative with respect to the bipartite one, since it makes one further distinction within middle diathesis relevant, namely the syntactic difference between intransitive and transitive. The intransitive term is constituted by passives and unaccusatives. They are mostly expressed by passive aorists, but some sigmatic middles are also found in unaccusatives, e.g. (27a), besides passive aorists (27b). No sigmatic middles are found in the passive, however.

(27) a. ὡς φάτ’, Ἀθηναίη δὲ
PTCL speak:IMPF.MID.3SG Athena:NOM PTCL
χελάσατο κηρόθι μᾶλλον
become.angry:AOR.MID.3SG heart:LOC more
‘so he spoke, and Athena became the more angry at heart’
(Od. 22:224)

b. Καὶ τότε ἐς περὶ κήρι
and PTCL PTCL at heart:DAT Poseidon:NOM
ἐχολώθη
become.angry:AOR.PASS.3SG
‘and then it was that Poseidon grew furious at heart’ (Il. 13:206)

The coexistence of the two forms in the same structure is evidence that the change is in progress. The verbal markers for the unaccusative are middle inflection in (27a) and the affix -θη- in (27b). They relate to the bipartite and the tripartite voice systems, respectively. As we argue in Section 4.2, in Classical Greek there was a tendency to reduce redundancy, by selecting one of the two forms according to their transitive or intransitive behaviour.

Lastly, a remark about deponent verbs. In Homeric Greek they are mostly inflected in the middle voice, e.g. ἀγαμαί ‘I wonder, admire’ (ἡγασάμην), ἀγορά- μαι ‘I meet in assembly, harangue’ (ἡγορησάμην), ἀκε- μαι ‘I heal’ (ἥκεσάμην), ἁλέομαι ‘I avoid’ (ἁλευάμην), ἀναίνομαι ‘I refuse’ (ἁνησάμην), ἀρά- μαι ‘I pray’ (ἥρη- σάμην), ἀρνυμαι ‘I win, gain’ (ἀρόμην), γίγαναι ‘I become’ (ἐγενόμην), δέχομαι ‘I receive, welcome’ (ἐδεξάμην), εἰσάλλομαι ‘I spring, rush into’ (ἐσηλάμην), εἰσαλλόμαι ‘I exhort, command’ ἐκεκλόμην, λίσσο- μαι ‘I pray’ (ἐλισάμην, ἐλιτόμην), μάχομαι ‘I fight’ (ἐμαχησάμην), μήδομαι ‘I intend, plan’ (ἐμησάμην), μυθέομαι ‘I speak’ (ἐμυθησάμην), ὀλοφύρωμαι ‘I lament, mourn’ (ὀλοφυράμην), πετομαι ‘I fly, flutter’ (ἐπτόμην) and φείδομαι ‘I spare’ (ἐφεισάμην). Exceptions are αἰδέομαι ‘I am ashamed’, ἀρνύμαι ‘I contend’ and δύναμαι ‘I am able’, which are inflected in both middle (ἡδεσάμην, ἐδηρύμαι, ἐδυναμάσθη) and passive voices (ἡδέσθην, ἐδηρύνθην, ἐδυνάσθην), without any difference in mean-
ing. Only the deponent ἀλάομαι ‘I wander, roam’ is exclusively inflected in the passive voice in Homeric Greek (ἀλήθην).

4.2 Classical Greek

The tripartite voice system increased in Classical Greek, since passive aorists spread and replaced middle aorists in unaccusatives. For instance, the verb κοιμάω ‘I put to sleep’ is attested as both sigmatic middle (28a) and passive aorist (28b) in Homeric poems, but only occurs as passive aorist in Classical Greek (28c). Further examples are provided by κορέννυμι ‘I satiate’, μιμνῄσκω ‘I remember’, ὠρμάω ‘I set in motion, start’, πειράω ‘I attempt, try’ and the deponent verbs ἄγαμαι ‘I wonder, admire’ and ἔραμαι ‘I love’. All the data for Classical Greek come from Xenophon’s works.

(28) a. δὴ τότε κοιμήσατο παρὰ πρυμνήσια νήρος
PTCL PTCL sleep:AOR.MID.3PL by stern.cables:ACC ship:GEN
‘they slept by the stern cables of the ship’ (Il. 1:476)

b. δὴ τότε κοιμήθημεν ἐπὶ ῥηγμῖνι θαλάσσης
PTCL PTCL sleep:AOR.PASS.1PL on shore:DAT sea:GEN
‘then we slept on the shore of the sea’ (Od. 4:575)

c. ὡστ’ ἐκείνης τῆς νυκτὸς οὐδεὶς
COMP DEM.GEN ART.GEN night:GEN nobody:NOM
éκοιμήθη
sleep:AOR.PASS.3SG
‘and during that night no one slept’ (X. HG. 2:2:3)

Sigmatic middles decreased in number and continued to exist in middle transitive structures, such as benefactives (29a) and possessives (30a); the corresponding active transitives are in (b).

(29) a. ἔξεφερε δὴ καὶ ἄλλας Μηδικὰς
bring.out:IMPF.ACT.3SG PTCL and other:ACC Median:ACC
στολάς, παμπόλλας γὰρ παρεσκευάσατο
robes:ACC many:ACC PTCL provide:AOR.MID.3SG
‘he brought out other Median robes, for he had provided a great many made’ (X. Cyr. 8:3:3)

b. ἐκείνος τοῖνυν σαφῶς παρεσκεύασε τοῖς μὲν
DEM.NOM PTCL clearly provide:AOR.ACT.3SG ART.DAT PTCL
ἀγαθοῖς εὐδαιμονίαν, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖς κακοδαιμονίαν
brave:DAT happiness:ACC ART.DAT PTCL coward:DAT misery:ACC
‘Clearly, what he did was to provide happiness to the brave, and misery to the coward’ (X. Lac. 9:3)

(30) a. ἐπεδείξατο δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν ῥώμην
show:AOR.MID.3SG PTCL ART.GEN soul:GEN ART.ACC force:ACC
‘And he displayed the stalwart nature of his heart’ (X. Ap. 33)

b. ὅτι ἡμῖν τὸ κάλλος ἑαυτῆς ἐπέδειξεν
COMP 1PL.DAT ART.ACC beauty:ACC refl.Gen show:AOR.ACT.3SG
‘because she showed us her beauty’ (X. Mem. 3:11:2)

Sigmatic middles also occur with deponent verbs, e.g. ἀσπάζομαι ‘I greet’ (ἠσπάσαμην), δέχομαι ‘I receive, welcome’ (ἐδεξάμην), εὔχομαι ‘I pray’ (ἐυξάμην), ἡγέομαι ‘I go before, lead’ (ἐκτησάμην), κτάομαι ‘I acquire’ (ἐκτησάμην), μάχομαι ‘I fight’ (ἐμαχησάμην), φθέγγομαι ‘I utter a sound, speak loud’ (ἐφθεγξάμην), χράομαι ‘I use’ (ἐχρησάμην) and ψεύδομαι ‘I lie’ (ἐψευσάμην). Intransitive deponents also occur with passive morphology, e.g. ἴσαμαι ‘I wonder, admire’ (ἠγάσθην), ἴσαμαι ‘I am loaded, vexed’ (ἐχθέσθην), βούλομαι ‘I desire’ (ἐβουλήθην), δέομαι ‘I pray’ (ἐδεήθην), δύναμαι ‘I am able’ (ἐδυνήθην), ἔπιμελέσαι ‘I take care’ (ἐπεμελήθην), ἡττάομαι ‘I am inferior, defeated’ (ἡττήθην) and οἴομαι ‘I presage, suppose’ (ᾠήθην). Among the quasi-deponents, it is worth mentioning the verb ψεύδομαι ‘I lie’, which is inflected as both middle and passive with two different meanings: it is transitive in the middle and unaccusative in the passive.

(31) a. ὁ μὲν δὴ Τισσαφέρνης ἀ
ART.NOM PTCL PTCL Tissaphernes:NOM REL.ACC
ὁμοσεν εὐθὺς ἐψεύσατο
swear:AOR.ACT.3SG straightway violate:AOR.MID.3SG
‘Now Tissaphernes straightway violated the oaths which he had sworn’ (X. HG. 3:4:6)

b. ταῦτα δὲ ποιήσας οὐκ ἐψεύσθη
DEM.ACC PTCL doing:PTCP not be.disappointed:AOR.PASS.3SG
‘Having done all these things he was not disappointed’ (X. HG. 4:8:36)

Some evidence of the functional decrease of middle morphology is also given by pairs such as the following, in which the three-argument verb κατασκευάζω
'I equip' occurs; see the active form in (32a). The verb with middle morphology in (32b) should be interpreted as a benefactive middle, but the occurrence of the dative reflexive pronoun shows that middle inflection is not sufficient to express the benefactive (in Italian, it would be literally translated 'si preparò per sé', with two redundant benefactive markers, the clitic “si” and the reflexive “per sé”):

(32) a. σκηνάς δ' αὐτοῖς κατεσκεύασε
    tents:ACC PTCL 3PL.DAT make:AOR.ACT.3SG
    ‘Then, he made tents for them’ (X. Cyr. 2:1:25)

    b. Κῦρος δ' ἑαυτῷ σκηνὴν μὲν κατεσκεύασατο
    Cyrus:NOM PTCL REFL.DAT tent:ACC PTCL make:AOR.MID.3SG
    ‘And for himself Cyrus made a tent’ (X. Cyr. 2:1:30)

The bipartite system disappeared together with most of the forms which featured it in Homeric poems. In the thematic aorists which continued to exist in Classical Greek, middle forms never occurred in passive clauses, in which they were replaced by passive aorists, e.g. (33a); they sometimes occurred in unaccusatives, e.g. (33b), in which passive aorists could also occur however, e.g. (33c), and mostly occurred in middle transitives, e.g. (33d). See the verbs λαμβάνω ‘I take’, which occurs as a passive within a passive clause in (33a) and as a middle within a middle transitive in (33b), ἀπόλλυμι ‘I kill’, which occurs as a middle within an unaccusative in (33c) and ἀνάγω ‘I lead up’, which occurs as both middle and passive in unaccusatives in (33d)–(33e); on this use of ἀνάγω cf. LSJ s.v.
c. ἐν τούτοις τοῖς σταθμοῖς πολλά τῶν
    in DEM.DAT ART.DAT stages:DAT many:NOM ART.GEN
    ὑποζυγίων ἀπώλεστο ὑπὸ λιμοῦ
    baggage.animals:GEN die:AOR.MID.3SG of hunger:GEN
    ‘In the course of these stages many of the baggage animals died of
    hunger’ (X. An. 1:5:5)

d. οἱ δὲ ἀνηγάγοντο ἐπ’ αὐτὸν εἰκοσι
    ART.NOM PTCL set.sail:AOR.MID.3PL against 3SG.ACC twenty
    ναυσίν
    ships:DAT
    ‘they put out against him with twenty ships’ (X. HG. 11:2)

e. ἀνήχθη ταῖς ναυσίν ἀπάσας ἐπὶ τὸν
    set.sail:AOR.PASS.3SG ART.DAT ships:DAT QUANT.DAT to ART.ACC
    λιμένα τῶν Ἐφεσίων
    harbour:ACC ART.GEN Ephesians:GEN
    ‘[Alcibiades] set sail with all his ships to the harbour of Ephesus’ (X.
    HG. 1:5:15)

Further thematic aorists attested as middles in Xenophon are εἰλόμην ‘I caught’
(suppletive of αἱρέω), ἠρόμην ‘I raised up’ (αἴρω), ἠσθόμην ‘I perceived’
(αἰσθάνομαι), ἀφικόμην ‘I reached’ (ἀφικνέομαι), ἐγενόμην ‘I became’
(γίγνομαι), ἦψομη ‘I found’ (εὑρίσκω), ἐπυθόμην ‘I learnt’ (πυνθάνομαι) and
ἐθέμην ‘I placed’ (τίθημι).

5 Concluding remarks

In this paper it has been pointed out that the aorist voice system changed
in Hellenistic Greek with respect to Homeric and Classical Greek. The major
changes concerned the middle and passive voices. Starting from Homeric
Greek and even more in Classical Greek, sigmatic aorists and passive aorists
became the most productive aorist classes. Sigmatic aorists display a bipar-
tite voice system, based on inflection opposition. Passive aorists are opposed
to sigmatic aorists through the affixes -θη/-η- vs -σα-. The coexistence of these
two classes created a tripartite voice system, which included (sigmatic) active-
inflected forms, (sigmatic) middle-inflected forms and (passive) affixed forms.
This system spread at the expense of the bipartite system, which only displayed
inflection opposition, concerned thematic and root aorists and was attested in
Homeric Greek. In the tripartite system, the functional distribution of voice markers is as follows: active aorists occur in active clauses, passive aorists in passive and unaccusative clauses, and middle aorists in middle-transitive clauses, e.g. benefactives and possessives, in deponent verbs, and in some unaccusatives, e.g. ἐχολωσάμην ‘I was angered’ from χολόω ‘I anger’. In Classical Greek, a tendency towards a clearer distribution of voice markers developed, mostly in the middle. Passive aorists spread into unaccusatives and intransitive deponent verbs. Middle aorists increasingly occurred in middle-transitive structures. However, in some instances, e.g. (32b), middle inflection appears to be unable to express the middle meaning of the clause and other middle markers, e.g. reflexive pronouns, had to be used.

In the NT, the aorist voice system displays the same forms as Classical Greek, with some differences concerning their functional distribution. Passive aorists increasingly replaced middle aorists of deponent and quasi-deponent verbs, e.g. ἀπεκρίθην ‘I replied’ instead of ἀπεκρινάμην, and were also productive with the new items, e.g. βαπτίζω ‘I baptise’. In brief, passive aorists spread in all intransitive uses of the middle. As far as middle aorists are concerned, they continued to exist and maintained middle transitive meanings, e.g. benefactives, possessives and so on. Most deponent transitives continued to be middle-inflected in the aorist; in these verbs the opposition between middle and passive morphology was used to express the functional opposition between active and passive, e.g. (20a)–(20b). All these phenomena clearly show that the transitive vs intransitive feature became even more relevant in the middle voice and led to a reorganization of the functional distribution of aorist voice markers, as Table 3 roughly represents.

The expansion of passive aorists at the expense of middle aorists is not only a matter of forms that replace other forms; it also concerns the level
of functions. In other words, the productivity of passive aorists in Hellenistic Greek is the effect, at the level of form, of the syntactic feature associated with them, namely intransitivity. As an oppositive term, transitivity is expressed by both active and middle aorists, middle inflection being completely de-functionalised as a voice marker, with some rare exceptions; see examples (5) and (6a) above.

So, in agreement with Blass, Debrunner & Funk (1961: 180), we contend that “[t]he system of three voices of the verb—active (transitive), passive (intransitive), and middle (i.e. transitive with reference to the subject)—remains on the whole the same in the NT as in the classical language”. Our research allows us to add that the functional distribution of sigmatic middle and passive aorists changed in NT Greek, even though the forms seem to be the same as in Homeric and Classical Greek. In our opinion, the reorganisation of the middle markers on the basis of the transitive vs intransitive feature is the first step in the creation of the Modern Greek bipartite system. However, further studies are needed to investigate whether and how this feature spread in later Greek texts.

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