People have a present, a past and (hopefully) a future. So do verbs. Tense, the instantiation of time in grammar, is perhaps the most important and easy to perceive feature of verbs. Tense shapes the verbal system across the arrow of time, and combines with other features (such as the aspect) to provide the actual tenses in most languages.

Having dealt with the present (see Chapter 4 on page 51) it is now time to turn to the past, leaving the future for Chapter 9 on page 125. Modern Greek has several tenses related to the past. The leading part, though, is played by the tense called \( \alpha\οριστος \), a tense which much resembles the English past simple in terms of use.

As with the Modern Greek present tense, \( \alpha\οριστος \) is easy to use but not that easy to form. We shall then focus on matters of form and then proceed with matters of use.

8.1 The Form of \( \alpha\οριστος \)

Like the Modern Greek present tense, \( \alpha\οριστος \) comes with good and bad news for absolute beginners. Let me start with the good news. Remember the multiple endings of verbs you had to learn for the present tense? There is no such thing here. Unlike the present, \( \alpha\οριστος \) comes with only one series of endings, suitable for all verbs. Here is the inflectional model for \( \alpha\οριστος \):

| \( \pi\αω \rightarrow \pi\γα \) |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **SINGULAR**     |                  |                  |
| 1st              | \( \pi\γα \)     | \( \pi\γα \)     | -\( \alpha \)    |
| 2nd              | \( \pi\γες \)    | \( \pi\γες \)    | -\( \epsilon \)  |
| 3rd              | \( \pi\γε \)     | \( \pi\γε \)     | -\( \epsilon \)  |
| **PLURAL**       |                  |                  |
| 1st              | \( \pi\γαμε \)   | \( \pi\γαμε \)   | -\( \alpha\με \) |
| 2nd              | \( \pi\γατε \)   | \( \pi\γατε \)   | -\( \alpha\τε \) |
| 3rd              | \( \pi\γαν(\epsilon) \) | \( \pi\γαν(\epsilon) \) | -\( \alpha\nu(\epsilon) \) |

*Table 8.1: An inflectional Model for the Modern Greek \( \alpha\οριστος \).*

If you compare Table 8.1 to the tables of the present tense (see Unit 4.1 on page 52), it is a relief for students: Every Modern Greek verb will be like this. So all you have to do is memo-
The previous model basically applies to “active” verbs. Most “passive” verbs follow a slightly different inflectional model, which is part of B1-B2 levels. “Passive” verbs then should not be your concern at the moment, but for practical reasons you need to know how the verb είμαι goes. Here it is!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>είμαι → ήμουν</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SINGULAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PLURAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 8.2: The Verb είμαι in the Past.*

Let’s go now to the bad news: The endings of the past may look OK, but the stem of the verbs does not. Let me give you an example:

(1) τρώω → ἐφαγα

Τρώω represents one of the most extreme cases of irregularity: no absolute beginner would even guess that ἐφαγα is related to τρώω. And as a teacher, I have no rule to give you in order to help you relate the past to the present tense. This is an area where memory helps much more than reason. But irregularity is not the rule. Apart from irregular verbs, there are also regular verbs, and this is where reason replaces memory. Let me then introduce some order to chaos and give you a categorization frame for irregular and regular verbs in the past.

### 8.1.1 Irregular Verbs (Group I)

Let me start with a list of some irregular verbs in the past. (If you need to check their meaning, go to the Appendix on page 162. The same holds for the next Tables.)
Chapter 8 | A Tense from the Past: The Modern Greek αόριστος

8.1.2 More Irregular Verbs: A Stress Pattern for αόριστος

Here is another list of irregular verbs. As you see, τρώω is among them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT</th>
<th>PAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ακούω</td>
<td>άκουσα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>βάζω</td>
<td>έβαλα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δίνω</td>
<td>έδωσα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κάνω</td>
<td>έκανα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καταλαβαίνω</td>
<td>κατάλαβα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μένω</td>
<td>έμεινα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>περιμένω</td>
<td>περίμενα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πλένω</td>
<td>έπλυνα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τρώω</td>
<td>έφαγα</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.4: Irregular Verbs in the Past (Group 2).

I can almost hear your question: If the verbs of Group 2 (Table 8.4) are also irregular, why separate them from the irregular verbs of Group 1 (Table 8.3)? Compare two typical verbs from each group:
What really makes the difference between the two verbs is the position of the stress. The forms of παίρνω keep the stress on the same syllable (πη-). This is not the case for the verb καταλαβαίνω, where the stress may be on different syllables (-τα- or -λα-). What lies behind this difference? The answer is this: unlike the verbs of Group 1, those of Group 2 follow a strict stress pattern. And the pattern goes like this:

(3)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>κα-</td>
<td>τά-</td>
<td>λα-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κα-</td>
<td>τα-</td>
<td>λά-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to this pattern, a verb in the past must be stressed on the antepenultimate syllable (the third syllable from the end of the word).

This pattern explains the “movement” of stress in the previous example. Notice that the length of the ending is crucial for the position of the stress:

(4)  

καταλαβαν καταλάβανε

This pattern also explains the development of an initial ε- in some verbs but not others. Compare καταλαβαίνω with τρώω:

(5)  

κατάλαβα | ἐφαγα |  
κατάλαβες | ἐφαγεζ |  
κατάλαβε | ἐφαγε |  
καταλάβαμε | φάγαμε |  
καταλάβατε | φάγατε |  
κατάλαβαν / καταλάβανε | ἐφαγαν/φάγανε |  

Page 116
The past stem of καταλαβαίνω (καταλαβ-) is lengthy, and therefore suitable to carry the stress on the third syllable. The past stem of τρώω (φαγ-) is too short for this pattern. It must then develop an initial e-, which bears the stress:

(6) *φαγ-α → έ-φαγ-α

Notice that whenever the verb is enough by itself to follow the pattern, the initial e- is no longer necessary.

(7) έφαγα (-φάγαμε

In the 1st person plural the ending has two syllables, and now the verb does not need a support vowel.

Keep in mind that e- develops only in order to bear the stress. In other words, you cannot have an unstressed e-, only a stressed one (έ-).

The list of irregular verbs of Group 2 is not exhaustive. Here are some more irregular verbs you might need. (For more verbs go to the Appendix on page 162.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT</th>
<th>PAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>αρέσει</td>
<td>άρεσε</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>βγάζω</td>
<td>έβγαλα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>θέλω</td>
<td>ήθελα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κλείνω</td>
<td>έκλεισα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ξέρω</td>
<td>έξερα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πέρτω</td>
<td>έπεσα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>στέλνω</td>
<td>έστειλα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φέρνω</td>
<td>έφερα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φεύγω</td>
<td>έφυγα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>στάνω</td>
<td>έφτασα</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.5: Irregular Verbs in the Past (Group 2).

Notice that θέλω and ξέρω develop an initial ή- instead of έ-.

The trisyllabic stress pattern is the leading stress pattern for αόριστος. With the exception of the irregular verbs of Group 1 (in this respect, Group 1 is more irregular than Group 2), this pattern applies to every other irregular verb, but also to regular verbs as you will find out soon.
As a leading pattern it is essential for communication, which means that you must follow it in order to be understood.

If you check the previous tables you will find out that some of the most basic verbs are irregular in the past tense. This is not a peculiarity of Modern Greek (compare to English, where the verbs *to be* and *to go* are also irregular, unlike verbs like *to explode* or *to irritate*). For a plausible explanation press here [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regular_and_irregular_verbs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regular_and_irregular_verbs).

### 8.1.3 Regular Verbs

Regular verbs in the past share two main features:

- They all follow the trisyllabic stress pattern.
  
  \[
  \begin{align*}
  \text{kόβω} & \rightarrow \text{έκοψα} \\
  \text{δουλεύω} & \rightarrow \text{δούλεψα} \\
  \text{τρέχω} & \rightarrow \text{έτρεξα}
  \end{align*}
  \]

- Their stem derives directly from the stem of the present tense with the addition of [s]. The forms *έκοψα* or *έτρεξα* in this respect is the output of a phonetic procedure which goes like this:

  \[
  \begin{align*}
  \text{kov-} & \rightarrow \text{e-kov-s-a} \rightarrow \text{e-kops-a} \\
  \text{treh-} & \rightarrow \text{e-treh-s-a} \rightarrow \text{e-treks-a}
  \end{align*}
  \]

  The [s] of the past is common in both verbs. What makes the difference ([ps] vs. [ks]) is the final part of the present stem, which leads to a different result. I will spare you the technical explanation of the procedure to focus on the kind of reasoning you must follow with regular verbs. The verbs below represent a major group of regular verbs:

  \[
  \begin{align*}
  \text{kόβω} & \rightarrow \text{έκοψα} \\
  \text{δουλεύω} & \rightarrow \text{δούλεψα} \\
  \text{γράφω} & \rightarrow \text{έγραψα}
  \end{align*}
  \]

  Another group of regular verbs is represented by the following verbs:

  \[
  \begin{align*}
  \text{ανοίγω} & \rightarrow \text{άνοιξα} \\
  \text{τρέχω} & \rightarrow \text{έτρεξα} \\
  \text{φτιάχνω} & \rightarrow \text{έφτιαξα}
  \end{align*}
  \]
Can you now find out the past tense of the following verbs? Meaning is irrelevant at the moment, so your main concern is the form:

(12) ρίχνω → ?
    σπρώχνω → ?
    χορεύω → ?
    κρύβω → ?

What you must do is focus on the final part of the present stem: ρίχνω and σπρώχνω resemble φτιάχνω, so they their past is έριξα and έσπρωξα. Χορεύω resembles δούλευω and therefore is δούλεψα. Finally, κρύβω is more like κόβω and its past must be έκρυψα.

Here are some basic groups of regular verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT</th>
<th>PAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>γράφω</td>
<td>έγραψα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κόβω</td>
<td>έκόψα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δούλευω</td>
<td>δούλεψα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ανοίγω</td>
<td>άνοιξα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τρέχω</td>
<td>έτρεξα</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φτιάχνω</td>
<td>έφτιαξα</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.6: Regular Verbs in the Past (Group 3).

Apart from these clearly regular verbs, there are some less clear cases. Check the following verbs:

(13) αγοράζω → αγόρασσα
    αλλάζω → άλλαξα

It might be helpful to know that a final -ζ- in the stem of the present turns into -σ- or -ξ- in the past, but you would still have to guess, and guessing is beyond the kind of reasoning you must develop with regular verbs. Until you go on with Modern Greek, I would advise you to treat such verbs as irregular verbs, and therefore memorize their past tense.

The same holds for the following group:

(14) μιλάω → μιλησσα
    φοράω → φόρεσσα
All verbs of groups B1 and B2 in the present tense (see Units 4.1.3 on page 56 and 4.1.4 on page 57) are predictable in the sense that they develop the same clear [s] in the past tense. What is not predictable is the vowel that develops before the [s]. For this reason I would advise you to treat them as irregular verbs, too.

The verb ηπλεφώνω looks like τελειώνω but it does not belong to the group represented by τελειώνω. Its stress falls on the final syllable. It must thus go like the verbs of B2 and become τηλεφώνησα. Don’t get confused with phonetic similarity; Stress is also very important.

The verb τελειώνω may have two phonetic versions:
(I) τε-λει-ώ-νο τε-λειώ-νο
The two versions have a different syllabic structure, which leads to another result in the past:
(II) τε-λεί-ω-σα τέ-λειω-σα

To summarize: Regular and irregular verbs in the past are structured on a scale of regularity, where regular verbs represent the top and irregular verbs of Group 1 represent the bottom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular Verbs</th>
<th>Irregular Verbs (Group 2)</th>
<th>Irregular Verbs (Group 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENDING</td>
<td>STRESS PATTERN</td>
<td>STEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.7: Regular and Irregular Verbs on a Scale of Regularity.

### 8.2 The Use of αόριστος

The Modern Greek αόριστος is used to describe actions that took place before the moment of speaking. Therefore it typically combines with the following expressions:

- Adverbs related to the past:
χτές
“yesterday”
προχτές
“the day before yesterday”
πέρσι
“last year”
πρόπερσι
“two years ago”

Table 8.8: Adverbs Related to the Past.

- Prepositional phrases introduced by πριν (see Unit 7.1.2 on page 106):

  (15) Έφτασα πριν από τρεις μέρες. / Έφτασα τρεις μέρες πριν.
  “I arrived three days ago.”

- The single (non-prepositional) temporal accusative modified by the adjectives προηγούμενος (“preceding”) and περασμένος (“past”, “last”)

  (16a) Την περασμένη / προηγούμενη Τετάρτη πήγαμε στην Αθήνα.
  “We went to Athens last Wednesday.”

  (16b) Τον περασμένο / προηγούμενο μήνα είδα τον Πέτρο δύο φορές.
  “I met Peter twice last month.”

The past tense is also compatible with time expressions that are typically related to the present (see Unit 4.2 on page 60):

(III) Σήμερα δεν πήγα σχολείο.
  “Today I did not go to school.”

Like the present, the Modern Greek αόριστος needs no auxiliaries in order to form its interrogative or negative versions. All you have to do with questions is change your intonation. And all you have to do with negative sentences is add the particle δεν before the verb.

(17a) Πήγε σχολείο.
  “She/He went to school.”

(17b) Πήγε σχολείο;
  “Did she/he go to school?”

(17c) Δεν πήγε σχολείο.
  “She/He didn’t go to school.”
Celebrating the Past

The past is gone, but its memory is still with us to preserve it and sometimes to rewrite it through the lens of the present. As countries need national days to remind people of critical moments in their history, so do individuals need celebrations to remind them of critical moments in their life. And one of those critical moments is the day we came into being.

Two generations ago, celebrating one’s γενέθλια (unlike its English equivalent the Modern Greek word for birthday is always in the plural) was rather rare. As members of a traditional society, people used to celebrate their name day instead. From the 70’s onwards, the society rapidly adopted a westernized way of life, and γενέθλια came to the foreground. Celebrating one’s name day (γιορτή) is still common, especially in the country, but γενέθλια is becoming more and more popular, especially among children or teenagers.

The birthday ritual is no surprise for anyone familiar with the Western culture: There is a birthday cake (τούρτα γενεθλίων); people get presents, usually they go out with friends and/or the family, and they treat their guests (the verb is κερνάω and its past tense is κέρασα). What is different is the Modern Greek birthday song, which comes in two versions, one for females and one for males:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Για τη ζήσης, Άρη,</th>
<th>Για τη ζήσης, Ελένη,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>και χρόνια πολλά.</td>
<td>και χρόνια πολλά.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Μεγάλης να γίνεις</td>
<td>Μεγάλης να γίνεις</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>με άσπρα μαλλιά.</td>
<td>με άσπρα μαλλιά.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Πάντοτε να σκορπίζεις</td>
<td>Πάντοτε να σκορπίζεις</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>της γνώσης το φως,</td>
<td>της γνώσης το φως,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>και όλοι να λένε</td>
<td>και όλοι να λένε</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>να ένας σοφός!</td>
<td>να μία σοφός!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SUMMARY
Chapter 8 introduces the Modern Greek αόριστος, the most basic of the tenses related to the past. The greatest part of the chapter is dedicated to the form of αόριστος, offering a comprehensive categorization frame for regular and irregular verbs in the past. The use of αόριστος is exemplified by typical adverbials related to the past.

KEY WORDS
αόριστος (Modern Greek past simple), inflectional model of the past, past stem, irregular verbs, regular verbs, trisyllabic stress pattern
EXERCISE
Here is a fairy tale you all know and can follow using a dictionary. The verbs in bold represent the three different groups of verbs regarding the past stem. What you must do is associate them with the verbs in the present and write their 1st person singular and plural in the past.

Η ΚΟΚΚΙΝΟΣΚΟΥΦΙΤΣΑ ΚΑΙ Ο ΚΑΚΟΣ ΛΥΚΟΣ
(REVISED EDITION)

1. ΜΕΡΟΣ Α’
Μια φορά κι έναν καιρό…

…ήταν ένα κορίτσι με κόκκινα ρούχα, η Κοκκινοσκουφίτσα. Μια μέρα, η Κοκκινοσκουφίτσα δεν είχε σχολείο. Έτσι, ήπιε το γάλα της, πήρε το καλάθι της, βγήκε από το σπίτι της και πήγε να δει τη γιαγιά της στο δάσος.
Στο δρόμο την είδε ο Κακός Λύκος. «Τι ωραίο και παχουλό κορίτσι!» είπε μόνος του και πήγε κοντά της.

1. είχε   a. πάω  
2. ήπιε  b. βγαίνω  
3. πήρε  c. βλέπω  
4. βγήκε  d. έχω  
5. πήγε  e. λέω  
6. είδε  f. παίρνω  
7. είπε  g. πίνω

2. ΜΕΡΟΣ Β’
«Γεια σου, κορίτσι! Πώς σε λένε;» είπε ο Κακός Λύκος στην Κοκκινοσκουφίτσα. «Κοκκινοσκουφίτσα». «Τι; Δεν άκουσα». «ΚΟΚΚΙΝΟΣΚΟΥΦΙΤΣΑ!» «Πού πας, Κοκκινοσκουφίτσα;» «Πάω στη γιαγιά μου». Ο Κακός Λύκος έρυχε γρήγορα και έφτασε πρώτος στο σπίτι της γιαγιάς. Έφαγε τη γιαγιά, έβαλε τα ρούχα της και περίμενε την Κοκκινοσκουφίτσα πάνω στο κρεβάτι της γιαγιάς.

1. άκουσα  a. βάζω  
2. έρυχε  b. περιμένω  

Page 123
Για την Μορφολογία του Αόριστου από την Παλαιόγραφη ελληνική γλώσσα προτείνονται οι συνέχεις στοιχείων:

1. ανοίξε
2. ρώτησε
3. απάντησε
4. σκότωσε
5. άρχισε
6. τελείωσε
7. μαγείρεψε
8. έφτιαξε
9. τραγούδησε
10. χόρεψαν

For the Modern Greek translation of Chapter 8 press here www.moderngreek.eu