The Imperfect Indicative of Latin: A Study Based Chiefly Upon Vergil’s Aeneid Books I-VI

by Lulu Brown

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Submitted to the Department of Latin of the University of Kansas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
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A STUDY BASED CHIEFLY UPON

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The fact that Dr. Arthur L. Wheeler and Dr. Chas. E. Bennett recognize an aoristic use of the imperfect indicative in early Latin led me to begin an investigation in this field of Latin Literature with the purpose of ascertaining if such a tense meaning could be attributed to the imperfect. I examined "The Captives" of Plautus but did not find any imperfects that seemed to me to be aoristic.

Neither Wheeler nor Bennett state that such a use continued into later Latin but one might easily infer from their discussions that they believe this to be true. If found in early Latin only it seemed reasonable to believe that the tense meanings had not yet become firmly established and that such a use was simply a sign of the somewhat unsettled state of the language at that early period of its development. Therefore without continuing my investigation in Plautus I turned to Caesar and Cicero to see if

such a tense meaning could be found in the works of these prose writers of the classical period. My investigations covered Book I of Caesar's "Gallic War" and Cicero's "Manilian Law" and again I found no examples of the imperfect that seemed to me to be aoristic.

Thinking that verse might present some peculiarities of tense usage not to be found in either of these authors I next began an examination of "The Aeneid" of Vergil and becoming interested in investigations in this work I did not return to early Latin but continued my study through the first six books. Therefore my statements concerning the imperfects of early Latin will not be of any great value but I shall include those of "The Captives" in this discussion.

As one would not be able to study any supposed aoristic use of the imperfect apart from all of its other tense meanings and the tense meanings of the aoristic perfect and present my investigations cover all imperfects, aoristic perfects and presents of all authors examined. First I shall discuss the imperfect uses.

Both Wheeler and Bennett agree in assigning two general values to the imperfect: the progressive and aoristic and recognize an occasional use which they term the "shifted imperfect." Therefore they make all imperfects aoristic that
are not progressive or shifted. My study has led me to believe that the aoristic use is questionable as I will attempt to show later and I have found but two examples of the shifted imperfect. The progressive use therefore seems to be the real function of the tense.

Before proceeding farther it will be necessary to define the terms already employed.

The shifted imperfect is the imperfect indicative which is equivalent to an imperfect subjunctive with present force or in other words equivalent to the apodosis of a contrary to fact condition in the present. As Prof. Hale (Hale-Buck Grammar 582-3) points out, this use is found with verbs or phrases expressing obligation, possibility and the like and certain other phrases made up of a neuter adjective with "est" or an equivalent.

By the aoristic imperfect is meant the use of that tense as an equivalent for an aoristic perfect. In the words of Prof. Hale "the aoristic perfect views the past as seen in the summary from the present." This tense and the historical or aoristic present, a tense that is freely employed as its equivalent, are used in telling of past events to record those acts or states that in the mind of the writer

are regarded as the most important and that advance his ac-
count. They are also used in dependent clauses to refer to
a time antecedent to that of the main clause. An aoristic
imperfect would have to be used in a similar way.

The imperfect tense is primarily used to represent an
act in progress or a state as existing at a certain past
time which the writer or speaker has in mind. Therefore
this use is called the progressive imperfect.

To understand my classification of all the imperfects
examined it will be necessary to explain this progressive
use in greater detail. The especial need of a progressive
verb form I believe is to describe some state or situation
under which the events told or recorded took place and
therefore I shall for convenience use the term "descriptive
imperfect" for this usage although Wheeler and Bennett ob-
ject to the term as one that cannot be employed with accur-
acy. They suggest that it be called the progressive imper-
fecf in description." This imperfect use will be shown to be
the one mainly employed and in narrative it is opposed in
use to the aorists for as has been said the aorists advance
the narrative and the descriptive imperfects tell how things
were at the time of the aorists.

Quite often this descriptive imperfect conveys the ad-
ded idea of action that is repeated at intervals of any
length by a single person or a succession of persons or action that is persisted in by a single person or a succession of persons. Such imperfects I have classed as descriptive repeated or descriptive persistent. No sharp line of distinction can be drawn between these two ideas. Those descriptives that do not have these accessory ideas I have called "simple descriptives."

At times the progressive force is not as clear but the idea of repeated or persistent action seems to be the prominent one. This is probably a development from the repeated and persistent use in description. They are classed under the progressives as repeated and persistent uses.

From an examination of the articles of Wheeler and Bennett it will be noticed that my treatment of the progressive differs from theirs. All that Wheeler includes under his "simple progressive" I call "simple descriptive" without making the further distinctions of the imperfect of the immediate past and the reminiscent imperfect. Wheeler also recognizes as a progressive use a customary and frequentative imperfect, the customary representing habitual action and the frequentative actions repeated at intervals close together. My terms "repeated" and "persistent" include examples that Wheeler would place in one of his two groups and seem to me to denote a better distinction.
Bennett uses the term "persistent" as I have used it and makes all other repeated actions "customary."

In outline form my classification of the progressive imperfect is as follows:

A. Descriptive
   1. Simple Descriptive
   2. Repeated Descriptive
   3. Persistent Descriptive

B. Repeated

C. Persistent

Before proceeding to give my classification according to this outline I shall state the variety of ways in which the descriptive imperfect may be used to describe the situation of some other act or state. It may express an action or state:

(1) Continued during but more extensive than the time of some other act or state expressed or implied.

Aeneid II 760-763.

procedo et Priami sedes arcemque reviso | et iam port-
icibus vacuis Lunonis asylo| custodes lecti Phoenix et dirus Ulixes | praedam adservabant.

(2) In progress before the time of some other act or state and interrupted by it.
Aeneid I 167-188

consititit hic arcumque manu celerisque corripuit fidu... quae tela gerabat Achates Sagritas

(3) Beginning at the time of some other act but not ending with it.

Prof. Hale (Hale-Buck Latin Grammar 492) recognizes the use of the past perfect and the picturesque present perfect to indicate the rapid succession of events and the first six books of the Aeneid seem to furnish ten examples of a similar use of the imperfect. All but two of the ten follow some verb of ordering. The descriptive force is not lost.

Aeneid I 360.

his commota fugam Dido sociosque parabat

The shade of Sychaeus has bidden Dido to depart and has disclosed a treasure to aid her on her journey and then this verse immediately follows indicating that Dido without any loss of time "was preparing" to depart. Certainly an analogous use is found in English in such sentences as: "He ordered me to stop the train and instantly I was waving the signal."

Such a use might be called the "instantaneous" use of the simple descriptive because it represents the action as occasioned by and going on immediately after some act.
(4) Contemporaneous with the time of some other act or state and beginning and ending with it.

Aeneid II 88-90.

dum sfabat regno incolmis regumque vigebat conciliis et nos aliquod nomenque decusque gessimus.

a. Contemporaneous with the time of some other act and beginning and ending with it but merely presenting it in summary.

In the first six books of the Aeneid ten times a verb of "saying" was used with "sic" or some form of "talis" not to advance the story but to describe in summary that that had already been told. This might be called "the descriptive in summary."

Aeneid V 852
talia dicta dabat

b. Contemporaneous with the tense of some other act or state and representing one of a series of acts that begin and end with it. The details of some other act are thus told.

Gallic War Bk. I 26 (1-10)

Ad multam noctem etiam ad impedimenta pugnatum est, propetere quod pro vallo carros obiercerant et e loco superiore in nostros venientes tela coniciebant, et non nulli in-
My classification of all imperfects examined is as follows:

I. Progressive Imperfect.

A. Descriptive

1. Simple Descriptive

Capt. (Plautus--Text--Fleckeisen)

20 erat

215 erat

247 servibus

(a past tense is implied)

273 erat

285 erat

(The mind has been carried back by "liquimus" 282. "Fuit" 288 appears to be used in the same way as erat" but in this case the writer is not telling how things were at a past time but is giving a new fact.)

303 audebat

(past time is implied and then described by imperfect).

474 erat

504 eminebam
audebas

(The verb here has the idea of "mean". Perhaps the imperfect is used to express some such thought as "While you were making that list did you not mean etc."

705 dabam

("abissent" 705 means "would have")

887 erat

913 formidabam

(memoi" 912 takes the mind back to past time and the imperfect describes)

913 frendebat

The same use as "formidabam".

916 erant

983 erat

Descriptive of the time of "dedit" 982

Man. Law. (Cicero—Text C. F. W. Mueller)

IV 9 gerebamus
10 habebat

V 13 audiebant

VIII 21 erant

IX 23 concitabartur
23 erat
23 commovetatur
24 invabatur
| XII | 33 | videbatis |
|     | 35 | premebantur |
| XIV | 41 | videbatur |
|     | 41 | habebamus |
| XVI | 46 | erat |
| XVII | 53 | videbatur |
|     | 53 | capiebantur |
|     | 53 | prohibebamur |
|     | 53 | erant |
| XVIII | 55 | poteramus |
|     | 55 | poteramus |
|     | 55 | carebamus |
|     | 55 | commeabant |
|     | 55 | timebat |
|     | 55 | habebamus |
|     | 55 | pudebat |
| XIX | 56 | erant |
|     | 56 | sentiebatis |
| XX  | 60 | minitabantur |
| XXI | 62 | constituebatur |
| XXIII | 67 | videbat |

Gallic War Book I (Caesar -- Text--Walker)

2° fiebat
2 (li) afficiabantur
2 (ili) arbitrabantur
2 (n) patebant
3 (vi) abtinebat
3 (v) erat
4 (n) oportebat
4 (n) habebat
5 (l) portaturi erant
5 (v) oppugnabat
6 (n) erant
6 (n) impendebat
6 (l) existimabat
6 (v) erat
7 (l) erat
7 (n) obtinebat
7 (n) tenebat
7 (n) putabat
7 (n) existimabat
8 (n) habebat
8 (v) erat
9 (n) relinquebatur
9 (n) poterant
9 (l) poterat
9 (l) erat
9 (2) studiebat
9 (1) volebat
10 (1) intellegebat
10 (1) hiemabant
11 (3) populabantur
11 (1) habebant
12 (1) transibant
12 (1) appellabatur
15 (4) habebat
15 (1) habebat
16 (4) erant
16 (5) suppetebat
16 (4) poterat
16 (1) nolebat
16 (1) habebat
16 (1) habebat
16 (1) praeeerat
18 (2) sentiebat
18 (2) nolebat
18 (2) praeeerat
19 (6) arbitrabatur
19 (7) repugnabat
19 (12) verebatur
19 (15) habebat
21 (16) habebatur
23 (i) supererat
23 (ii) aberat
25 (ix) poterant
25 (ix) suberat
25 (ix) claudebant
25 (ix) erant
28 (iv) erat
29 (v) erat
32 (i) aderant
38 (v) videbat
33 (vi) intellegebat
33 (vi) arbitrabatur
33 (vi) videbat
33 (vi) existimabat
33 (vi) putabat
36 (v) existimabat
36 (iv) erant
38 (iv) erat
36 (iv) muniebatur
39 (ix) habebant
39 (ix) poterant
39 (ix) habebant
39 (ix) praeerant
perturbatur
volebant
nuntiabant
videbatur
confidebat
habebat
arbitrabatur
veniebat
volebat
audebat
confidebat
erat
aberat
videbat
putabat
existimabat
utebatur
utebatur
erat
erant
versabantur
prodeundum erat
recipiendum erat
erat


Aeneid (Vergil--Text--Ribbeck)

I.  

31  arcebat
32  errabat
35  dabant
35  ruebant
113  vehebat
188  gerebat
223  erat
268  erat
343  erat
346  habebat
360  parabat

Instantaneous use in description

362  erat
395  turbabat
419  ascendebat
Dates back to the time of "fuit" 534

Instantaneous use in description
695 ibat
Instantaneous use in description
696 portabat
Instantaneous use in description

II 1 tenebant
22 maneabant
29 tendebat
34 ferebant
58 trahebant
84 vetabat
88 vigebat
88 stabat
92 trahebam
Instantaneous use in description
93 indignabar
Instantaneous use in description
145 videbant
202 mactabat
209 tenebant
211 lumbebant
254 ibat
Instantaneous use in description
265 erat
274 erat
The perfect might have been expected here but the imperfect seems to be used to continue the description of the dream and not to be used as "visus." 271

Descriptive in summary
664 erat

Used to express the discovery of a state of affairs existing before.

672 insertabam
672 ferebam
679 replebat
726 movebant
730 propinquabam
730 videbar
757 tenebant
763 adservabant
801 surgebat
802 ducebat
802 tenebant
803 dabatur

III. 9 iubebat
19 ferebam
21 mactabam
34 venerabar

This imperfect is used to describe the situation between the second and third attempts of Aeneas to uproot the twigs on the mound of Polydorus and seems to lead to "auditur" 40.
84 venerabar
110 habitabant
137 dabam
140 liquebant
140 trahebant
142 negabat
142 arebant
147 erat
147 habebat
151 fundebat
173 erat
174 videbar
175 manabat
303 vocabat
303 libabat
344 fundebat
  Descriptive in summary
344 ciebat
  Descriptive in summary
353 accipiebat
354 libabant
355 tenebant
472 imbebat
490 ferebat
511 subibat
521 rubescbat
585 erant
587 tenebat
588 surgebat
608 haerebat
636 latebat
717 docebat

Descriptive in summary and also leads up to "conticuit" 718.

717 renarrabant

Descriptive in summary and also leads up to "conticuit" 718.

IV. 6 lustrabat
14 canebat

Past time implied—the time before Aeneas left her presence.

149 ibat
238 parabat

Instantaneous use of the descriptive.

256 valabat
257 secabat
262 erat
262 ardebat
This does not refer to one definite or independent act but rather describes the situation of "decuit".

"Fuit" of the same verse gives the time and "petebas" the description.
V 1. tenebat
2. secabat
88 incendebat
98 fundebat

An aorist coordinate with "caedit" 96, might seem to be the natural use here but "caedit" represents a single act and then seems to be followed by the imperfects used to describe the situation under which the events beginning with verse 100, took place.

98 vocabat

Used as "fundebat" of same verse

104 aderat
105 vehebant
159 propinquabant
167 revocabat
263 ferebant

Imperfect used in continuing the description of the "lorica" of 260.

265 agebat
269 ibant
272 agebat
280 movebat
286 cingebant
This imperfect in the parenthetical clause is certainly not coordinate with the aorist "infit" 708. The two parenthetical verses seem to explain or describe the nature of the power given by Pallas to Nautes. Both Connington and Henry hold this view.
721 tenebat
724 manebat
833 agebat
836 laxabat
852 dabat

Descriptive in summary.
853 amittebat
853 tenebat
864 subibat
866 sonabant

VI. 124 tenebat
175 fremeabant

This imperfect appears to describe the situation at the time of Aeneas arrival. However, the "praecipue pius Aeneas" that follows seems to contradict such a view as Aeneas is included but included apparently as an afterthought and so the verb form is not affected.

208 erat
209 crepitabant
213 flebant
214 fereabant
239 poterant
241 ferebat
"As they went on" they saw the monsters of verses 273 and following.

This imperfect seems to be descriptive of the prophecy that misled him.

Refers back to "imitatur" 586 and describes.
589 poscebat

Used as "ibat" of same verse.

596 erat

608 manebat

661 manebat

681 lustrabat

682 recensebat

699 rigabat

706 volabant

860 videbat

2. Repeated Descriptive Capt.

244 imperitabam

483 solebam

925 sustentabam

Gallic War. Book I.

25 (a) erat

26 (a) coniciebant

26(g) subiciebant

26(o) vulnerabant

33 (e) hortabantur

37 (i) referebantur

37 (o) veniebant

39 (G) praedicabant
Act repeated by a succession of persons.

Aeneid

I  239  solabar
   625  ferebat

II 30  solebant
    456  solebat
    459  iactabant

III 690  monstrabat

   Descriptive in summary

IV. 485  dabat

V  373  ferebat

VI 160  serebant
    167  obibat

   Fuerat 166 dates back to past time.

3. Persistent Descriptive

Capt.

491  obambulabant
Gallic War Book I

39 (ii) petebat
39 (ii) remanebant
39 (ii) dicebant
51 (ii) implorabant

Aeneid

I  482  tenebat

II 124  canebat

Instantaneous use in description
650  manebat
650  perstabat
674  haerebat

Instantaneous use in description
674  tendebat

Instantaneous use in description

III 269  vocabat

IV  189  repblebat
190  canebat
331  tenebat
332  presmebat
437  orabat

Descriptive in summary

458  celebat
465  servabat
VI. 124 orabat
Descriptive in summary
350 haerebam
350 regebam
469 tenebat

B. Repeated
Capt.
561 aibat
676 aiebatis
885 autumbas

Gallic War Book I
13u reperiebat
39(u) dicebant
Perhaps influenced by "praedicabant" 39
50(0) reperiebat
53(o) dicebat

Aeneid
VI 116 dabat
690 ducebam
This might possibly be taken to refer to the time before Aeneas' arrival and thus be descriptive of it.
690 rebar
Used as "ducebam" of the same verse
C. Persistent

Capt.

654 adsimalabat
917 percontabatur

Gallic War Bock I

15 (I) continebat

This may possibly be descriptive of the time of the preceding perfects

22 (m) expectabat

The imperfect may be descriptive of the time of the preceding perfects

22 (m) abstinebat

Used as "expectabat" 22

43 (m) docebat
43 (m) docebat
52 (m) premebant

This too may be descriptive

Aeneid

VI 113 ferebat

II Shifted Imperfect

Man. Law

XVI 50 (erat) mittendus
50 erat deligendus
III. Apparent Aoristic

I hesitate to recognize such a group at all (1) because the large number of progressive imperfects is almost overwhelming evidence that some such force is inherent in all imperfects and (2) because I can see something of such a force in the six imperfects found in the Aeneid which I shall place in this class. I shall class them here rather than as progressives because the progressive idea is not as clear as in the case of all of the others examined and because I am doubtful of my interpretation of them. However I am not ready to concede that Vergil used them as aorists. It is quite possible that he employed them to convey an idea that I have failed to grasp.

Aeneid

III 183 canebat

This may possibly be used to express repeated action.

492 adfabar

The imperfect may possibly be used in this verse as a whole descriptive of Aeneas' feelings during the preceding acts.

559 canebat

The idea of repeated action may possibly be expressed by this imperfect.
This may be used in description relating back to the two preceding verses.

It is very doubtful whether this imperfect could indicate action going on at the time of the preceding verbs. "Tum" does not seem to permit such an interpretation.

The instantaneous use of the descriptive might account for the imperfect.

It will be noted that four of these six verbs are verbs of "saying." Wheeler practically confines the aoristic use to two verbs "eram" and "aibam" and says that it is due to some peculiarity of the verbs and he calls them "colorless verbs." It is not clear why these verbs are "colorless" and others are not. Why, for example, are other verbs of saying as "dico" not "colorless" also? All of these verbs of "saying" "aio" included are used in the writers with distinct meanings. To me Wheeler's explanation does not seem satisfactory. Perhaps however, verbs of saying do present some peculiarities of use. One is reminded of the English colloquial use of "he was saying" for "he said."
In the "Captives" Wheeler recognizes but one aoristic imperfect "aibatis" 676. This I have classed as repeated. In his statistical table given at the close of his article (Classical Philology I) he has only accounted for 12 imperfects and the play contains 24. He states that his citations are complete "excluding all passages of dubious authorship, corrupt text, or insufficient text." For these reasons I was unable to account for three of the twelve omissions. However no forms of "aibam" were thus excluded but five of "eram" were.

Bennett recognizes a much larger number of aoristic imperfects and does not confine the usage to the two verbs but in his examples from the "Captives" only those two verbs are included. They are "aibat" 561, "aibatis" 676 and "erat" 273. The first two I have classed as repeated and the last as descriptive. It is not difficult to understand why Bennett's number of aorists is greatly increased, especially by his count of "eram" and its compounds. He is not able to distinguish between a descriptive use and an aoristic. In "The Syntax of Early Latin--The Verb" page 34, he says: "It is so difficult for me to see any notion of continued action in the imperfect of "sum" that I have classed unhesitatingly as aoristic nearly all the instances of "eram" and its compounds." He then proceeds to give this example: Amph. 429.
"cadus erat vini, inde inplevi hirneam" and states that "erat" seems to be of the same nature as "implevi". He could not have found an example that would have served much better to indicate the distinction between the descriptive use of the imperfect and the aoristic use of the perfect.

The following table gives my count of all imperfects examined and the figures bear out the statements that I have made.

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<tr>
<th>Progressive Shif-</th>
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<td>Descriptive</td>
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<td>Simple Repeated</td>
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<td>Capt. 15 3</td>
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<td>Man Law 29 0</td>
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<td>Gallic War Bkl 102</td>
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<td>Aeneid I-VI 229</td>
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Perfects and Historical Presents

As I have stated I examined all of the perfects and historical presents of the works studied for I believe that one cannot draw true conclusions especially concerning the possibility of an aoristic use of the imperfect without watching these aoristic tenses and noticing how they act under simil-
ar circumstances. My count of these tenses is as follows:

- Captives 283 Perfects
- Man. Law 208 Perfects
- Gallic War Book I 199 Perfects  98 Historical Presents
- Aeneid I-VI  944 Perfects  1387 Historical Presents.

I shall not attempt to classify or explain all of the uses that these tenses presented. For present purposes I consider it sufficient to call attention to those aorists that are apparently used as imperfects and to make a few general distinctions concerning the uses of the tenses.

I found but three perfects that seemed to be used as imperfects.

Capt.

430 volui

This perfect seems to present much the same difficulty and to require a similar explanation as "noluit" below.

Gallic War

28 noluit

This form of "nolo" appears to be used as "nolebat" 18 and to give the situation for "fecit" 28.

It is possible however, that Caesar wanted to express the idea of "noluit" as quite independent of the time of "fecit."

Aeneid I

I 121 vectus
As the form of "sum" is omitted this is not a clear case. In what seems to be a similar usage "vehebat" is used in 113. It would seem that a pluperfect might be used here but perhaps it would be claiming too much to say that where Vergil omitted the form of "sum" he did so without consciously having in mind the form that would be used if one were to be expressed. If such were the case we might explain this difficulty.

I now call attention to the following general distinctions and to idiomatic uses.

(1) Perfects and historical presents of verbs of "thinking" are used to express the idea of past decision while the imperfects are used to describe some mental state that existed at a certain past time.

(2) Often the perfect of "sum" was used where the imperfect might have been expected but in every case the perfect seemed to express an independent fact or to be the first point in an account and therefore its use justified that the mind of the reader might be taken back to this past time.

Caesar 2 (ii)

Apud Helvetios longe nobillissimus fuit et ditissimus Orgitorix.

(3) Repeated or persistent action has been given as a meaning of the imperfect tense. The perfect tense is frequently used to express these ideas but in every case
noted some word as "saepe", "semper", "cotidie" etc was used. The imperfect tense on the other hand conveys the idea of repetition or persistency without the aid of any such words. In other words it is really a tense forced in the imperfect.

Aeneid I 669

et nostro doluisti saepe dolore.

(4) Perfects and historical presents of verbs of saying were freely employed with the aoristic use. No perfect of such a verb was found that could be confused with the progressive or imperfect use.

(5) "Dum" meaning "as long as" and expressing coincidence in time is by a fixed idiom regularly used with the perfect. Otherwise the imperfect would often be expected if it was used of past time. However in the Aeneid the imperfect was often used with "dum". "Ut" introducing a clause coincident in time was also found with the perfect rather than the imperfect. (Clauses coincident in time by fixed usage regularly employed the same tense)

(6) "Dum" meaning "while" was found used with the present rather than the imperfect. This, too, is a fixed idiom however.

(7) In clauses of equivalent action (Hale-Buck 551) with "quom" (Plautus) and with "ubi" the perfect was used where
(8) In the "cum inversum" clause the aoristic perfect or present is used and not the imperfect for logically the "cum" clause is the principal clause and expresses the event rather than describes the situation under which the event took place. It is the independent clause that uses the imperfect because it is the descriptive clause.
an imperfect would have been expected. This again was accounted for by the fact that by idiomatic use clauses of equivalent action employ the same tenses.

Conclusion

My search for an aoristic imperfect that led me into an investigation of all the imperfects, the perfects, and historical presents of the works included in this discussion has convinced me that there is practically no confusion of tense usage to be found here and: (1) That the imperfect tense is essentially progressive and is chiefly used to describe some state or situation that the writer has in mind. Out of the 453 imperfects I have only recognized 2 shifted imperfects, 6 apparent aoristic uses, and 19 progressives where the descriptive use is not evident and which I have classed as repeated or persistent. (2) That the perfect tense is used to express "a past act or state as seen in summary from the present" and is mainly employed to advance a narrative or to record past events of independent importance.