

Homeric δέχεται (*Il.* 12.147) Reconsidered

Ruobing Xian

ILIIAD 12 DESCRIBES three separate assaults by the Trojan alliance on the Achaean wall. The first is initiated by Asius, who is surprised by the stubborn resistance of two Lapiths, Polypoites and Leonteus, compared to a pair of wild boars awaiting the attack of men and dogs (ἀνδρῶν ἠδὲ κυνῶν δέχεται κολοσυρτὸν ἰόντα, 12.147). In the entirety of the Homeric epics, the verbal form δέχεται (“they await,” from δέχομαι) is attested only in this simile.

It is well known that Homeric δέχομαι has both a perfective meaning (“take/accept”) and a durative one (“await/wait for”).¹ The use of δέχεται here is clearly durative.² As Debrunner

¹ See A. Debrunner, “Δέγμενος, ἐσπόμενος, ἄρχμενος,” in H. Kronasser (ed.), *Μνήμης χάριν: Gedenkschrift Paul Kretschmer* (Vienna 1956) 77–84, at 77, together with detailed bibliography. My central argument here does not depend on the genesis of the Homeric root δεχ-, which is found in place of the original δεκ-. This can be explained either by the influence of ἔχω or by invoking the athematic inflection in the third person plural (cf. O. Szemerényi, *Syncope in Greek and Indo-European and the Nature of Indo-European Accent* [Naples 1964] 173 n.2, with bibliography). In response to Wackernagel’s criticism of the former view (*Sprachliche Untersuchungen zu Homer* [Göttingen 1916] 24–25), Szemerényi pointed to the importance of the middle forms such as ἀνέχομαι, ὑπίσχομαι, and παρέχομαι, respectively matched by ἀναδέχομαι, ὑποδέχομαι, and παραδέχομαι.

² This is clear from a Homeric parallel. The simile in which δέχεται occurs (12.141–153) is contextually similar to *Il.* 13.470–477. In the latter, δέχεται is paralleled by μένει, whose durative sense is indisputable: compare ὡς ὅτε τις σῶς οὔρεσιν ἀλκὴ πεποιθὼς, / ὅς τε μένει κολοσυρτὸν ἐπερχόμενον πολλὸν ἀνδρῶν / χάρῳ ἐν οἰοπόλῳ (13.471–473) to ἀγροτέροισι σύεσσι ἐοικότε, τῷ τ’ ἐν ὄρεσιν / ἀνδρῶν ἠδὲ κυνῶν δέχεται κολοσυρτὸν ἰόντα (12.146–147).

showed,³ the durative meaning of δέχομαι “is confined to the perfect forms and δεγμ-.”⁴ Scholarly opinion is divided on the morphological analysis of δέχεται. On the one hand, some ancient critics already interpreted it as a shortened perfect to δέχομαι.⁵ δέχεται, on the other, has also been construed as an athematic root-present.⁶

The evidence for the athematic root-present of δέχομαι in the Homeric epics is controversial. Leaving δέχεται aside, such a stem is said to be found in some isolated Odyssean imperfects (ἐδέγμην, *Od.* 9.513, 12.230; ἀνεδέγμεθ’, 17.563) and in the participle δέγμενος (21 times),⁷ which mainly occurs in compounds

³ Debrunner, in *Μνήμης χάριν* 78–79.

⁴ The phrase is borrowed from Szemerényi, *Syncope in Greek and Indo-European* 172.

⁵ Aelius Herodian *Περὶ παθῶν* *GG* III.2 225.7: τὸ Ἰωνικὸν νενάεται · ἄρον τὴν νε σολλαβὴν “νέαται Πύλου ἡμαθόεντος” [*Il.* 9.153] ὅστε ὅμοιον εἶναι τῷ δεδέχεται δέχεται. Cf. Debrunner, in *Μνήμης χάριν* 80–81; E. Risch, *Wortbildung der homerischen Sprache* (Berlin 1974) 342.

⁶ E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik* I (Munich 1939) 678; P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* I (Paris 2013 [1942]) 286: “L’existence d’un présent athématique *δέγμαι est assurée par la forme δέχεται en M 147, troisième personne du pluriel athématique, où le κ a reçu l’aspiration d’après l’analogie de formes comme δέχθε (qui n’est pas attesté chez Homère), ou δέχθαι”; G. P. Shipp, *Studies in the Language of Homer*² (Amsterdam 1966) 63; J. Narten, “Zum proterodynamischen Wurzelpräsen,” in J. C. Heesterman et al. (eds.), *Pratidānam: Indian, Iranian and Indo-European Studies Presented to F. B. J. Kuiper* (The Hague 1968) 9–19, at 15 n.43; B. Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary* III (Cambridge 1993) 334. According to E. Tichy, “Gr. δειδέχαστο und idg. *dēkti, *dēktoi,” *Glotta* 54 (1976) 71–84 (= *Kleine Schriften* [Bremen 2019] 1–14), δέχεται is an archaism, which, together with the Homeric syntagma ἦσαι δέγμενον, preserves the original meaning of the root **dek- (“wahrnehmen”), while the epic forms such as δειδέχασ(ο), δειδεκτ(ο), δειδέχασται, δειδίσκετο meaning “welcome” represent the causative reduplicated aorist *δεδέχθαι of the same root. For a criticism of Tichy’s thesis see esp. B. Forssman, “Homerisch δειδέχασται und Verwandtes,” *Sprache* 24 (1978) 3–24, at 17 n.41.

⁷ Cf. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* 286, who also took Homeric δέκτο into account (*Il.* 2.420, 15.88; *Od.* 9.353). Scholars now agree, however, that

such as ποτιδέγμενος (15 times) and ὑποδέγμενος (2 times).⁸ Debrunner, however, argued that δέγμενος was a shortened present participle which replaced the metrically impossible *δεχόμενος, while ἐδέγμην (*Od.* 9.513, 12.230) and ἀνεδέγεθ' (*Od.* 17.563) had been created on the basis of δέγμενος.⁹ Similarly, Szemerényi suggested that “δέγμην, δέγεθαι would easily follow, once δέγμενος established its place,” although he conceived of δέγμενος as a shortened variant of the well-attested perfect participle δεδεγμένος.¹⁰

In light of Debrunner and Szemerényi, the root-present interpretation of δέχεται as an archaism cannot be supported with any reliable Homeric parallels. In contrast, I would like to suggest that δέχεται is an artificially-built present. The creation of such an artificial form could have been motivated by two sources. The first is the durative use of δέγμενος. Irrespective of

δέκτο “represents either a root aorist or a pre-alphathematic s-aorist (i.e. δέκτο < *dek-s-to),” since δέκτο is semantically equivalent to Homeric (ἐ)δέξατο: A. Willi, *Origins of the Greek Verb* (Cambridge 2018) 305–306, together with detailed bibliography.

⁸ A full list of attestations is found in Debrunner, in *Μνήμης χάριν* 78–79; cf. Szemerényi, *Syncope in Greek and Indo-European* 172 n.2. Unlike Debrunner, I have limited my counting to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, leaving aside the attestations of δέγμενος in *Hymn.Hom.Dem.* 29 and *Hymn.Hom.Herm.* 477.

⁹ Debrunner, in *Μνήμης χάριν* 79: “δέγμενος ersetzt das hexametrisch unmögliche δεχόμενος, und daran haben sich die vereinzelt ἐδέγμην und ἀνεδέγεθαι angeschlossen als Ersatz für die ebenfalls metrisch unbrauchbaren Formen ἐδεχόμην (δεχόμην wäre möglich, fehlt aber bei Homer) und (ἐ)δεχόμεθ(α)!”

¹⁰ Szemerényi, *Syncope in Greek and Indo-European* 172–173: “It follows therefore that at one time a poet was led to extract an anomalous δέγμενος from the regular and well-established δεδεγμένος, probably on the strength of the observation that there was no (clear or great) difference between δεδέξομαι with reduplication and δέξομαι without.” In the Homeric epics, δέγμενος (*Il.* 2.794, 9.191, 18.524) is used at verse-initial position, with only one exception (*Od.* 20.385). One might also note that δεδεγμένος (*Il.* 4.107, 8.296, 10.62, 11.124, 23.273) always occupies the same metrical position between the trochaic and the bucolic caesurae (|^{tr} δεδεγμένος/δεδεγμένα |^{buc} – υ υ – χ#).

its origin, whether it is ultimately a shortened form of the metrically impossible *δεχόμενος or a shortened perfect participle (δέγμενος < δεδεγμένος),¹¹ δέχεται could have been invented by bards who mistook (ποτι/ὑπο)δέγμενος for an athematic present participle. This interpretation coheres with Debrunner and Szemerényi on how ἐδέγμην (*Od.* 9.513, 12.230) and ἀνεδέγμεθ' (*Od.* 17.563) came into being.

The case of ἔαται/εἶατο (from ἦμαι “sit”) provides a second possible source of motivation. The similarities between ἔαται (*Il.* 3.134, 9.628) and δέχεται (*Il.* 12.147) are striking. Both are in the third person plural, and both have a similar metrical shape (υ υ -).¹² Most importantly, in the Homeric epics ἔαται/εἶατο is used in close connection with (ποτι)δέγμενοι: αἶ δέ που ἡμέτεράι τ' ἄλοχοι καὶ νήπια τέκνα / εἶατ' ἐνὶ μεγάροις ποτιδέγμενοι (*Il.* 2.236–237); οἵ που νῦν ἔαται ποτιδέγμενοι (9.628); τοῖσι δ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε δύω σκοποὶ εἶατο λαῶν / δέγμενοι ὁππότε μῆλα ἰδοῖατο καὶ ἔλικας βοῦς (18.523–524); Τηλέμαχ', ἦδη μὲν τοι εὐκνήμιδες ἐταῖροι / εἶατ' ἐπήρητοι, τὴν σὴν ποτιδέγμενοι ὀρμὴν (*Od.* 2.402–403); νῆες εὖσσελμοι μένον ἀθρόαι, ἀμφὶ δ' ἐταῖροι / εἶατ' ὀδουρόμενοι, ἡμέας

¹¹ Such a dereduplicated perfect form might be paralleled by Hom. ἔρχεται (*Il.* 16.481; *Od.* 10.283) and ἔρχατο (*Il.* 17.354; *Od.* 9.221, 14.73), as Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik* 767, has noted; *contra* E. Tichy, *Onomatopoetische Verbalbildungen des Griechischen* (Vienna 1983) 287 n.165. One of the *GRBS* referees points to the fact that dereduplication after a preverb is a well-known phenomenon in ancient Greek. Cf. Schwyzer 766–767 with n.3, who cites Gortyn Cretan καταφελμένος (*I.Cret.* IV 72.X.35 = *DGE* 179) in contrast to Hom. ἐέλυεθα (*Il.* 24.662): “die Umschreibung φηλ- (aus *φε-φελ-) [...] oder aoristische Auffassung [...] sind unnötig.” More examples can be found in D. Ringe, *The Perfect Tenses in Greek Inscriptions* (diss. Yale 1984), including Cretan προγραμμένον (*I.Cret.* I XVI 4.53) and ἀνκλημένος (I XVII 2.3), and Cnidian ἀφορισμένους (Ager, *Arbitrations* 71.I.34; all 2nd cent. BCE). In light of this phenomenon it is possible that δέγμενος (4 times) was extracted from dereduplicated ποτι/ὑποδεγμενος (17 times), reanalyzed as an aorist participle, and therefore transmitted with an aorist accent.

¹² *Lex.frühg.Epos* s.v. ἦμαι M 3; *contra* Shipp, *Studies in the Language of Homer* 25, who, following the lead of F. Bechtel, *Die griechischen Dialekte* III (Berlin 1924) 46, took ἔαται as disyllabic.

ποτιδέγμενοι αἰεὶ (9.544–545).¹³ In other words, ἔαται could have further contributed to the genesis of δέχαται, not least due to the former's connection with (ποτι)δέγμενοι, which is the main source of the latter. In contrast to Debrunner's view that "[a]ls Präsens ist δέχαται ganz singular: [...] nur in reduplizierten Formen kennt Homer -αται -ατο nach Konsonant,"¹⁴ the morphologically, metrically, and semantically similar forms ἔαται (*Il.* 3.134, 9.628) and κέαται (from κεῖμαι "lie")¹⁵ could make it easier for δέχαται to be regarded by both the bards and the audience as a present third-person plural.

One potential objection might be raised against this interpretation. The form ἔαται (υ υ –) is not the expected outcome of *ἦαται, which by quantitative metathesis should have given *ἔαται.¹⁶ To clarify it, Nussbaum has argued that ἔαται (υ υ –) might be analogical after "δέχᾱται (M 147) etc. and perhaps especially κέαται."¹⁷ In my view, it is better to assume that the model for ἔαται was κέαται, as Nussbaum himself apparently preferred,¹⁸ while the hapax δέχᾱται was modelled on ἔαται and κέαται.

To sum up, δέχαται (*Il.* 12.147) does not represent a real athematic root-present; rather, it is an artificial form created by

¹³ Cf. also *Il.* 9.190–191 (Πάτροκλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἐναντίος ἦστο σιωπῆ, / δέγμενος Αἰακίδην ὅποτε λήξειεν αἰείδων) and *Od.* 23.91 (ἦστο κάτω ὀρόων, ποτιδέγμενος εἴ τί μιν εἴποι).

¹⁴ Debrunner, in *Mνήμης χάριν* 81.

¹⁵ ἐν νηυσὶν κέαται βεβλημένοι οὐτάμενοί τε (*Il.* 11.659 = 11.826 = 16.24); νῦν δ' οἱ μὲν κέαται δεδαῖγμένοι, οὓς ἐδάμασσαν (19.203).

¹⁶ I am grateful to one of the *GRBS* referees who alerted me to this potential problem.

¹⁷ A. Nussbaum, *Two Studies in Greek and Homeric Linguistics* (Göttingen 1998) 62.

¹⁸ Cf. also Nussbaum, *Two Studies* 62 n.213, who argued that the two attestations of ἔαται (# οἱ δὴ νῦν ἔαται |⁵, *Il.* 3.134; # οἱ που νῦν ἔαται |⁵, 9.628), "because of the phonologically recent shape of the verb, might reasonably be expected to have an identifiable model, which might very well be: # νῦν δ' οἱ μὲν κέαται |⁵ (T203)."

the mechanism of analogy. I have argued that δέχεται was created through a bardic reinterpretation of δέγμενος, which was thought to be an athematic present participle. As a result, an athematic present stem δεχ-, in opposition to the normal thematic one δεχ-ε/ο, was taken for granted,¹⁹ and δέχεται was created. The invention of δέχεται could have also been facilitated by the similarities between ἔαται/κέαται and δέχεται. The mechanism of analogy can be described as follows:

(καθ)ήμενος : (ποτι/ύπο)δέγμενος = ἔαται : X, where X = δέχεται.²⁰

Admittedly, though δέχεται is an artificial form from a diachronic standpoint, it is ‘natural’ for the bards and the audience, who were familiar with forms such as δέγμενος, ἐδέγμην, and ἔαται/κέαται. To my mind, this explanation is preferable to the view that δέχεται is a shortened perfect, not least because the indicative perfect form δέδεκται/δεδέχεται, on the basis of which δέχεται is said to be formed, is *not* attested in Homer.²¹

¹⁹ Taking δέγμενος as a shortened form of δεδεγμένος, Szemerényi, *Syncope in Greek and Indo-European* 173, came to basically the same conclusion as mine, without specifying the exact creation process of δέχεται: “And within this framework it was no longer quite so absurd to coin a 3rd plural δέχεται instead of the normal δέχονται.” To the best of my knowledge, Szemerényi’s short comment on δέχεται did not have any effect on scholarship. Furthermore, my interpretation differs from Szemerényi’s in my emphasis on the significance of ἔαται.

²⁰ The long vowel in (καθ)ήμενος corresponds to that in *ἦαται (MS. εἶαται), a form which by quantitative metathesis should have given *ἔαται (the attested ἔαται, as already observed, is an artificial form built upon the model provided by κέαται).

²¹ Apart from the well-attested perfect participle δεδεγμένος, the perfect attestations to δέχομαι in the Homeric epics are confined to δέδεξο (*IL* 5.228, 20.377, 22.340) and δεδέξομαι (5.238). According to M. Leumann, “Griech. hom. ειδώς ιδύια und εοικώς ἐϊκύια, ἀρηρώς ἀραρυῖα,” *Celtica* 3 (1955) 241–248, at 242–243 n.5 (= *Kleine Schriften* [Zurich 1959] 215–258, 252 n.5), δεδέξομαι (*IL* 5.238) is an *ad hoc* formation built directly upon the imperative form δέδεξο (*IL* 5.228). It is possible that #δειδέχατ’ (*IL* 4.4, 9.671, 22.435)

If my main argument presented in this article can be accepted, two additional points might be made. On the one hand, it challenges Narten's influential thesis that δέχονται as an archaism represents "das erwartete, vollstufig-wurzelbetonte Medium," which is said to be the counterpart of the long-grade Vedic present *dāṣṭi* "await" (RV 1.127.4b, 1.127.4c).²² On the other hand, it is important to point out that δέχονται and its cognates (δέγμενος, ἐδέγμην, ἀνεδέγμεθ') as *kunstsprachliche* alternatives to a thematic paradigm can hardly be isolated cases in Homer. Particularly relevant are γέντο "seized/took" (*Il.* 8.43, 13.25, 13.241, 18.476, 18.477) and λέκτο "counted" (*Od.* 4.451), both of which have in more recent scholarship²³ been interpreted as

and #δειδέχονται (*Od.* 7.72) are originally perfect/pluperfect forms of δέχομαι (cf. L. Meyer, "Δειδέχονται, δεικανάομαι, und δειδίσκομαι," *Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen* 2 [1878] 260–264, at 262–263), with a lengthened reduplication-syllable *metri causa* (due to their verse-initial position), though the majority of scholars, following the lead of W. Schulze, *Quaestiones epicae* (Gütersloh 1892) 155 ("quam formam [δειδέχονται] non tam perfecto quae est Osthoffi sententia (Perfect 57 sq.) quam praesenti intensivo assigno"), now take them to represent an intensive present stem (**dek-dek-* > **dei-dek-*) to the same Indo-European root **dek-* (F. Škoda, *Le redoublement expressif: un universal linguistique. Analyse du procédé en grec ancien et en d'autres langues* [Paris 1982] 174–175; Tichy, *Onomatopoeische Verbalbildungen* 296; Willi, *Origins of the Greek Verb* 163–164).

²² Narten, in *Pratidānam* 15 n.43, accepted by, among others, H. Rix, *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben* (Wiesbaden 2001) 110 with n.8.

²³ J. Hardarson, *Studien zum urindogermanischen Wurzelarist und dessen Vertretung im Indoiranischen und Griechischen* (Innsbruck 1993) 206–207, has argued that γέντο, which always occurs at the same metrical position (γέντο δ' ἰμάσθλην#, *Il.* 8.43 = 13.25; γέντο δὲ δοῦρε#, 13.241; γέντο δὲ χειρὶ#, 18.476; γέντο πυράρην#, 18.477), is a "metrisch bedingte Kunstbildung für ein aoristisch verwendetes Impf. *(ἐ)γέμετο (cf. kypr. ἀπογέμω)" (from γέμω "be full of"). Similarly, Willi, *Origins of the Greek Verb* 322, has pointed to the possibility that some isolated athematic forms to λέγω (from **leg-* "count, reckon") such as ἐλέγμην (*Od.* 9.335) and λέκτο (4.451) might be "altogether artificial." As has been noted by S. West, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* I (Oxford 1988) 221, *ad Od.* 4.451, there is a deliberate word-play between λέκτο "he counted"

artificial forms.²⁴

December, 2022

Fudan University
Shanghai, China
ruobingxian@fudan.edu.cn

(4.451), which is taken up by λέγε “he counted” (4.452), and λέκτο (4.453, from λέχομαι “lie down”); both λέκτο (4.451) and λέκτο (4.453) are placed at the same metrical position (λέκτο δ’ ἀριθμόν#, 4.451; λέκτο καὶ αὐτός#, 4.453).

²⁴ I wish to thank *GRBS*’s anonymous referees for their constructive comments and the editorial board for helpful suggestions.