Homer Bھ ΔΤΕΝΑΙ: A Serial Verb Construction in Greek?

Anthony D. Yates
University of California–Los Angeles
adyates@ucla.edu

§1 The Problem(s)

[1.1] Only in Homeric Greek, a set of relatively fixed collocations:

\[\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{infinitive} & \text{frequency} \\
\hline
\text{βῆ δ’ ἰέναι} & 24x \\
\text{βῆ δὲ θέειν} & 9x \\
\text{βῆ δ’ ῎ ιμεν} & 34x \\
\text{βῆ δ’ ἐλάειν} & 1x \\
\text{βῆ δ’ ῎ ιμεναι} & 15x \\
\end{array}\]

[1.2] As clear in (1), the vast majority (73/83) contain one of three infinitival variants of the verb ‘to go’, Aeol. ἰέναι, ἰεν, or Att.-Ion. ἰέναι; among these, some variation in person/number (3rd s. βῆ, 1st s. βῆν, 3rd pl. βάν) and in the intervening particle (either δέ or ῥα), with representative examples in (2-4):

(2) ὡς φάτο, Τηλέμαχος δὲ φίλωι ἐπιπείθετο πατρί,
βῆ δ’ ῎ ιμεναι ὡς ἐλεύθερον, ὡς ἂν καὶ τὴν τεύχεα κεῖτο
‘So [Odysseus] spoke, and Telemachos obeyed his dear father,
and he set out toward the chamber where the famous weapons lay.’

(3) οἱ δ’ ἐπεὶ ἠρήσαντο Διὸς κούρηι μεγάλοι,
βάν ῥ’ ῎ ιμεν ὡς τε λέοντε δύω διὰ νύκτα μέλαιναν
‘When [Diomedes and Odysseus] had prayed to the daughter of great Zeus,
they set out like two lions through the black night.’

(4) ὡς ἔφαθ’· οἱ δ’ ἔρα τοῦ μάλα μὲν κλύον ἢδ’ ἐπιθύμοντο
βάν δ’ ῎ ιμεν, ἢρχε δ’ ἄρα σφίν ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων.
‘So [Diomedes] spoke, and [the Achaians] listened well and obeyed him.
They set out, and Agamemnon, lord of men, was first among them.’

[1.3] Syntactic behavior of the infinitive in these expressions remains unexplained; impossible are:

i. **verbal complement**: this function only with modal verbs (ἐθέλω, δύναμαι, etc.)

ii. **‘infinitive of purpose’**: viz. ‘he went to go…’; while plausible in (e.g.) (2-3), yields only semantic pleonasm when no destination or goal is specified, as is the case in (e.g.) (4); note that this feature distinguishes it from superficially similar structures, e.g. *Od*. 7.14 ὡς τὸ πόλιν ἵππον ἵππον ‘he rose to go to the city’, where simple purposive readings are available *(pace Létoublon 1985:127)*
[1.4] Until recently, this syntactic issue generally neglected, likely owing to the ‘semantic non-problem problem’, i.e. the basic interpretation of the expression is clear: it indicates a movement away from the location of the action, often at the conclusion of a verbal exchange, as in (e.g.)

The case-form of the infinitive is discussed by Wackernagel (1928:261-62), Schwyzer-Debrunner (GG II: 359-60), and Vanséveren (2000:76-78); the syntax briefly by Létoublon (1985:127-28), as well as the semantics in more detail (op. cit. 137-38); this literature reviewed more extensively in Yates (2011:3-6)

§2 New Hypotheses

[2.1] Two hypotheses have now independently emerged regarding the collocation βῆ δ’ ἰέναι and its variants, Yates (2011) and most recently, García Ramón (2013)


(5) DU-aš ΤασμισOrderIdu memiškiwan daiš
‘The Storm-god began to speak to Tasmisu.’

(KUB 17.7 iv 49)

(6) pāṇzi DINGIR-LUM ŠA URU Astasta iwar ēššuwan tianzi
‘They go—begin to worship the god in the manner of the city of Astata.’

(KUB 5.6+ 17)

(7) wá/i-na | i-zi-i-sa-tá-na ta-ya (“FLUMEN”)há-pa + ra/i-sá | OMNIS-MI-i-sá |
‘And every river-land will begin to honor him.’

(Karatepe §XLVIII Hu.)

[2.3] prima facie cannot be ruled out; some semantic similarities (cf. Yates 2011:58), and the diffusion of syntactic structures from Anatolia has potential parallel in the σχῆμα Πινδαρικόν (cf. Watkins 2000:3), the use of a singular verb with animate plural subject

[2.4] However, restriction of non-finite form to verbs of motion wholly unexplained in Greek! From (5-7), plainly no such restriction in Hittite or Luwian

García Ramón (2013) offers just one example of an inceptive construction with nonfinite verb of motion: iyanniwan [dăir] (KUB 14.1 vs. 1 74); even here, though, an imperfect match, since we find here ḏăi- ‘place’—the original and predominant type, with later extension to tiya- ‘step’, likely via homophonous 3rd pl. pres. (tiyanzi) as pivot; a Luwian source is triply problematic: (i.) verb is primarily ‘stand’ (< PIE *steh₂), only secondarily step; (ii.) for García Ramón the non-finite verb is crucially a locative case-form, but the Luw. infinitive does not reflect a locative; (iii.) the ex. in (7) is (to my knowledge) hapax in Hier. Luw.

[2.5] Building on Yates (2011), I will offer an alternative proposal for βῆ δ’ ἰέναι, arguing:

i. that there is a direct relationship in Homeric Greek between βῆ δ’ ἰέναι and βάσκ’ ῎ ιθι (§3)
ii. that βάσκ’ ῎ ιθι reflects an inherited Indo-European syntactic type, namely, the PIE QUASI-SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTION (QSV) (§4)
iii. that the irregularity of βῆ δ’ ἰέναι may be explained as the product of a poetic ‘transformation’ of regular βάσκ’ ῎ ιθι, a process with near analogue in the development of QSV in other IE languages (§5)
§3  βάσκ’ ἰθι: the Source of βη δ’ ἱέναι?

[3.1] βάσκ’ ἰθι occurs 6x in Homeric epic, only Iliad: 2.8, 8.399, 11.186, 15.158, 24.144, 24.336

[3.2] βάσκ’ ἰθι also treated by García Ramón (2013), though divorced from βη δ’ ἱέναι ("βάσκ’ ἰθι is not the present of βη δ’ ἱέναι"); crucial evidence is the absence of ‘responsion’ in (8), where we find not Xβη δ’ ἱέναι but simplex βη:

(8)  βάσκ’ ἰθι, οὐλὲ Ὄνειρε, θοᾶς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
......

......

βή δ’ ἱέναι ὁ δ’ ἀρ’ Ὅνειρος, ἐπεὶ τὸν μῦθον οἴκουσεν,
χαρταλίμως δ’ ἵκες ὅδε ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
“Go forth, destructive Dream, to the swift ships of the Achaians!”

......

So [Zeus] spoke; and the Dream set out when it heard the speech, and swiftly arrived at the swift ships of the Achaians.’

(Iliad 2.8, 16-17)

[3.3] However, at least as compelling positive evidence for a relationship is the responsion apparent in (9), where βάσκ’ ἰθι (v. 336) is ‘narrated’ by βη δ’ ἱέναι (v. 347):

(9)  βάσκ’ ἰθι, καὶ Πρίαμον κοίλας ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
ως ἀγαγ¨, ὡς μήτ’ ἀρ τις ἀρ τις ἱδηι μήτ’ ἀρ τε νοήσηι
......

βη δ’ ἱέναι κούρωι αἰσυιητῆρι ἐοικώς
πρῶτον ὑπηνήτηι, τοῦ χαριεστάτη ἦβη
“Go forth, and lead Priam to the hollow ships of the Achaians in such a way that none [of the Danaans] should see or perceive him…”

......

And [Hermes] set out, looking like a princely young man, newly-bearded, whose youth is most graceful.’

(Iliad 24.336-7, 347-8)

[3.4] Further indirect support added by ‘correlative’ phrasal pairs, where βάσκ’ ἰθι / βη δ’ ἱέναι are collocated with identical lexical items, e.g. (10):

(10) a. “βάσκ’ ἰθι, Ἰρι ταχεῖα, λυποῦσ’ ἐδος Ὀυλύμπωοι
ἀγγειλον Πριάμῳ μεγαλήτορι Ἐλιον εἴσω”

“Go forth, swift Iris, leaving behind the seat of Olympos!
Bring word to great-hearted Priam within Ilion…”

(Iliad 24.144-5)

b. βη δ’ ἱμεν ἀγγειλέων πρὸς δόματα ποιμένι λαῶν

‘He set out to the halls to bring word to the shepherd of the peoples.’

(Odyssey 4.528)
(11) a. “βάσκ’ ἰθι, Ἰρὶ ταχεῖα, Ποσειδάωνι ἀνακτὶ πάντα τάδ’ ἀγγεῖλαι, μηδὲ ψευδάγγελος εἴναι.”

“Go forth, swift Iris! To lord Poseidon bring word of all these things, and do not be a false messenger.”

(Iliad 15.158-9)

b. βῆ δ’ ἰέναι διὰ δώμαθ’, Ἰν’ ἀγγείλει τοκεύσι, πατρὶ φίλωι καὶ μητρί· κιχήσατο δ’ ἐνδον ἐόντας

“She set out through the halls to bring word to her parents, her dear father and mother. And she found them within.”

(Odyssey 6.50-1)

[3.5] Significant shared features support clear interrelationship:

i. metrical localization: βῆ δ’ ἰέναι overwhelmingly line-initial (83/86 = 96.5%), βάσκ’ ἰθι exclusively in this position; imperative predictable in line-initial position, but this localization of βῆ δ’ ἰέναι probably best explained by association with βάσκ’ ἰθι

ii. lexical identity: the same two lexical roots, suppletive *gw-em- / gw eh₂- ‘go, come’ and *h₁e₁- ‘go’ occur in both expressions in the same order

iii. semantics: in §4 I’ll discuss in greater detail the semantics of βάσκ’ ἰθι, which I’ll argue parallel other expressions of the same syntactic type; then in §4.8 I’ll show that that βῆ δ’ ἰέναι exhibits the same semantic properties

iv. syntax: theoretical basis for a connection between βάσκ’ ἰθι and βῆ δ’ ἰέναι first established by Watkins (1975:96-97), who suggested that they, along with Hittite phraseological construction and (obliquely) English go get construction originate in a common underlying syntactic type of which βάσκ’ ἰθι is representative; in Yates (2013), I’ve argued that this type is, specifically, the PIE QUASI-serial VERB CONSTRUCTION

§4 What is βάσκ’ ἰθι? The PIE Quasi-Serial Verb Construction

[4.1] Contra García Ramón (2013), βάσκ’ ἰθι reflects an inherited syntactic type, productive both within Greek and more broadly, Indo-European: the PIE QUASI-serial VERB construction (QSV) (cf. Yates (2013); Hock (2002, forthcoming)); it consists of two imperatives—the first a verb of motion—identically marked for person, tense, and number; crucially, both verbs appear to be monoclausal, as in (12) Homeric Greek, where ἰθι hosts the pronominal clitic οἱ which is an argument of στάξον:

(12) άλλ’ ἰθι οἱ νέκταρ τε καὶ ἀμβροσίην ἑρατεινὴν στάξον ἐνὶ στήθεσσι, ἵνα μὴ μν λιμὸς ἑκηται.

‘But go pour nectar and lovely ambrosia into him, in [his] breast, so that hunger will not reach him.’

(Iliad 19.347)

▶ For the IE comparanda, see Yates (2013); more generally, on the Hittite ‘phraseological construction’, see van den Hout (2003, 2010), Hoffner and Melchert (2008 324-29) (cf. Koller 2011); on Vedic, Hock (2002, forthcoming); on Latin, Fortson (2008 41, 200); on Classical Armenian, Kolligan (2012); and on Greek, Yates (2011, 2013) and Hock (forthcoming)
Why not \( \text{ἀλλ’ ἵθι νέκταρ τε οἱ . . .} \)? The ‘special’ property of QSV already in PIE is to be treated as a single prosodic unit (\( i \)), i.e. (13b) rather than normal (13a):

\[
(13) \quad \begin{align*}
(\text{a}) & \quad \text{X } \left[ \text{ἀλλ’ ἵθι } \right] \begin{bmatrix} t_j \text{ νέκταρ } \tau \varepsilon \text{ } \phi \text{ στάζον} \end{bmatrix} \\
(\text{b}) & \quad \text{✓ } \left[ \text{ἀλλ’ ἵθι } \right] \begin{bmatrix} t_j \text{ νέκταρ } \tau \varepsilon \text{ } \phi \text{ στάζον} \end{bmatrix}
\end{align*}
\]

▶ For the unmarked clitic order, cf. Il.5.359 δός δέ μοι ἶππους ‘And give me horses’; the pre-movement position of the clitic is evident when an initial conjunction is present, e.g. Il. 23.75 καὶ μοι δός τῆν χεῖρ(α) ‘And give me (your) hand’

Continuation of QSV into Classical Greek guaranteed by certain examples in prose authors, e.g. (14-15); in (14), clitic argument \( \muοι \) of ἔξευρε is hosted by (ἵθι); in (15), the phrase headed by \( τόν \), which is the nominal object of εἰπέ, undergoes movement left of ἵθι:

\[
(14) \quad \text{ἵθι } \muοι \text{ ἔξευρε } \text{καὶ } τά τοῦ μάντεώς τε καὶ μαντικῆς
\quad ‘Go find out for me also those (which) are of the seer and the seer’s art . . . ’
\]

\[
(15) \quad τὸν δὲ δὴ βελτίους ποιοῦντα \text{ἵθι } \varepsilonιπέ \text{καὶ } \muήνυσον αὐτοῖς τίς ἐστιν.
\quad ‘Go proclaim (their) improver and reveal to them who is.’
\]

Function of βάσκ’ ἵθι? Strong possibility suggested by formal and lexical similarities with deictic-directional serial verb constructions (SVCs) very frequent in productively verb-serializing languages (e.g. West Africa, Oceania, New Guinea; cf. Aikhenvald (2006: 39-40, 47-50)); in this type, a motion verb imparts its deictic orientation to construction as a whole, e.g. (16) Akan (Niger-Congo) and (17) Tetun Dili (Austronesian):

\[
(16) \quad \text{Ebo } \text{so-a } \text{adaka no } \text{ko-o } \text{skuul}
\quad ‘Ebo carried the box to school.’
\]

\[
(17) \quad \text{lori } \text{hahaan } \text{bá!}
\quad ‘Take the food over there!’
\]

A similar function is generally observed in modern English QSV—informally, the go get construction (cf. Zwicky 1969; Pullum 1990); rather than pure exhortatives, come / go have clear deictic function in (18); in particular, deictic conflict in (18d) results in confusion or ungrammaticality
(18) a. Put the hat on the shelf.
    b. Go put the hat on the shelf.
    c. Come put the hat on my head.
    d. *Go put the hat on my head.

[4.6] βάσκ' ῎ ιθι most likely to be understood in the same way, i.e. as the result of projecting the centrifugal deictic orientation of ῎ ιθι/ἳέναι onto deictically-neutral βάσκε/βῆ (cf. Létoublon 1985:137)

[4.7] βάσκ' ῎ ιθι is, then, aspectually ingressive (−σκε-), spatially centrifugal (ἐἴμι ‘go (there)’, i.e. away from the speaker), and directed toward a specific destination or (accomplishing a) a goal—this last property stemming both from this deictic quality and imperatival modality; in §4.8 it will become clear that these semantic properties find exact match in βῆ δ' ἰέναι

§4.8 The Semantics of βῆ δ' ἰέναι

[4.8.1] Yates (2011:52-60, 86-7) argues that βῆ δ' ἰέναι similarly shows three prototypical semantic properties: (i) ingressive aspect; (ii) centrifugal deixis; (iii) goal-orientation

[4.8.2] Properties (ii) and (iii) are apparent in the elevated frequency of goal complements (44/73 = 60.3%)—either destination or purpose (fut. ptcpl., rel. clause of purp., etc.)—relative to deictically-neutral simplex βῆ (98/207 = 47.3%); this contrast, which is exemplified in (19-20) vs. (21), already approaches levels of statistical significance (.05 < p < .06)

(19) βὰν δ' ἰμεναὶ πόλεμόνδε
     θεοὶ δῆχα δημον ἔχοντες
     ‘And the gods set out for war with hearts divided.’
     (Il. 20.32)

(20) βῆ δ' ἰμεν ἀνστήσων ῦ αδελφεόν, ῦ ὦς μέγα πάντων // Ἀργεάων ἦνασσε
     ‘And he set out to rouse his brother, who ruled mightily over all the Argives.’
     (Il. 10.32)

(21) βῆ δ' ἀκέων παρὰ θῖνα πολυφλοίσβοι θαλάσσης
     ‘And he walked off silently beside the shore of the loud-roaring sea.’
     (Il. 1.34)

[4.8.3] Moreover, a radical divergence ($\chi^2 = 5.17, p = .023$) between forms of the collocation with Aeol. ἰμενα / ἰμεν (34/49 = 69.4%) and Att.-Ion. ἰέναι (10/24 = 41.6%), the latter patterning more closely with simplex βῆ

► The data depends on editorial judgement, since both ἰμενα and ἰέναι frequently coexist in mss.; figures here are based on the text of West (1998, 2000) for the Iliad and Allen (1922a,b) for the Odyssey

[4.8.4] If we therefore exclude forms with ἰέναι, the very strong tendency for the collocation to select a goal becomes clear—again vs. βῆ, $\chi^2 = 7.71, p = .005$; statistical analysis thus confirms goal-orientation as a prototypical property of the collocation

[4.9] With the semantic match established, it remains only to explain the development βάσκ' ῎ ιθι ⇒ βῆ δ' ἰμεν(α)
§5 The Development of $β̄ν ὃ ἵναι$

[5.1] Parallels for this development offered by Hittite, Classical Armenian, and modern English, which all show QSV-like indicative structures with two identically-marked monoclausal verbs, the first being a verb of motion; building on the proposal of [Zwicky (2003, 2012) for English QSV, Yates (2013)] argues for a semantic, prosodic, and syntactic reanalysis of imperatival structures, whence the extension to non-imperatival modality

▶ Similarly already [Dunkel (1985)] for Hittite ‘phraseological construction’, who points to potential parallel in ἔσθι ‘eat!’ = ἑσθίο ‘I’m eating!’; the basic naturalness of this process further supported by Modern Greek, where QSV-like imperative constructions have been extended by some speakers to other finite verbal forms (cf. Bjorkman 2009)

[5.2] Though Greek shows no evidence for such a generalized extension, possible as a poetic development? Given the emergence of $βάσκ’ ἵθι$ as a unitary, formulaic syntagm in Homeric language, the need may have arisen for a corresponding ‘narrative’ aorist:

\[
\begin{align*}
β̄ν ὃ ἵναι \\
β̄ν ὃ ἵμεν \\
β̄ν ὃ ἵμεναι \\
\end{align*}
\]

(22) 3rd report ← 2nd imperative

[5.3] Evidence for this origin? Most compellingly, the ‘correlative’ pairs discussed in [§2] e.g. (23), where both $βάσκ’ ἵθι$ and $β̄ν ὃ ἵναι$ are collocated with the same lexemes and functionally parallel:

(23) (=10)

a. “$βάσκ’ ἵθι$, ἶρι ταχεῖα, λιποῦσ’ ἔδος Οὐλύμποι ἀγγειλον Πριάμωι μεγαλήτορι Ἰλιον εἴσω

Bring word to great-hearted Priam within Ilion...”

(b. $β̄ν ὃ ἵμεν ἀγγελεών πρὸς δῶματα ποιμένι λαῶν$

‘He set out to the halls to bring word to the shepherd of the peoples.’

(22) 34.144-5)

(23) 4.528)

[5.4] The limited evidence for direct responsion likely owes primarily to two factors:

i. infrequency of $βάσκ’ ἵθι$: only 6x in Hom., specialized to Zeus

ii. semantic change: because of its marginal status in the grammar, $β̄ν ὃ ἵναι$ syntactically opaque and diachronically prone to semantic bleaching; this development evident in distribution of forms of the collocation with productive Att.-Ion. inf. ἵναι (vs. ἵμεν(αι)), which seem to have lost original ‘purposive’ semantics, patterning rather as metrical variants of simplex $β̄ν$

▶ On the diachronic semantics, cf. [Létoublon (1985:127)]: “… le sens de la formule ne soit plus très bien compris des grecs, peut-être dès l’époque homérique.”
§5.5 The Syntax of βῆ δ’ ἰέναι

[5.5.1] But why infinitive ἰέναι / ἴμεν / ἴμεναι?

[5.5.2] ‘Transformation’ subject to lexical and semantic identity, preserving relationship *gʷem-/gʷeh₂- ~ *h₁ei-; putative Xβῆ δ’ ἐλθόν—probably the default means of expression, cf. μολὼν λαβέ ‘come get (it)’—thus ruled out (protypically centrifugal εἴμα but centripetal ἴμαι(υ)θον); same objections apply to QSV-like Xβῆ δ’ ἴλθε, as well as general unwillingness for speakers to fully generalize a marginal syntactic pattern

► A potential Xβῆ δ’ ἴσων might introduce an aspectual mismatch (pres. ptcpl. vs. ingressive aor.), and further, is metrically problematic (⽔-); the absence of Xβάσκ’ ἴμεν can only be attributed to a preference for a narrative aorist

[5.5.3] Infinitive as optimal candidate? Lexico-semantic identity maintained, and for the process, cf. Eng. pres. go get ⇒ pret. went to get; moreover, in this configuration βῆ δ’ ἰέναι parallels ‘single-marking’ SVCs in which “there is one verbal constituent that is evidently the morphosyntactic locus, plus one or more others that appear to be in some non-finite governed category also used in subordination” (Zwicky 1990:8; cf. Aikhenvald (2006))

[5.5.4] In addition, infinitive frequently interpretable in this context; prototypical instantiation of βῆ δ’ ἰέναι oriented towards goal, admits ‘purposive’ function of infinitive common in Homer

§6 Summary: The Evolution of βῆ δ’ ἰέναι

[6.1] Greek has inherited from Proto-Indo-European the QUASI-SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTION, which syntactic type is directly continued by βάσκ’ ἴθι

[6.2] βάσκ’ ἴθι was integrated into formulaic Homeric diction, and served as the impetus for the creation of a corresponding aorist βῆ δ’ ἰέναι used to ‘narrate’ the action of βάσκ’ ἴθι immediately subsequent to it and in same metrical position

[6.3] From this original locus, βῆ δ’ ἰέναι was generalized to post-discourse contexts, where it is frequently found, and as a device to mark transitions between scenes in the dramatic narrative; in this function, βῆ δ’ ἰέναι flourished, even generating analogic formations with infinitives of verbs of motion (βῆ δὲ θέειν, βῆ δ’ ἐλάαν)

[6.4] With the connection to βάσκ’ ἴθι increasingly unclear, syntactically opaque βῆ δ’ ἰέναι was subject to semantic bleaching, and came to be used only as a metrical variant of simplex βῆ; consequently, it was lost entirely after the Homeric period

References


