4. Indirect question clauses

An indirect question (or indirect interrogative) is a question inside a main sentence. For instance:

- Direct question: ποῦ ἔστιν ὁ Σωκράτης? WHERE IS Socrates?
  - Indirect question: θεωρεῖν τι ποῦ ἔστιν ὁ Σωκράτης HE WANTS TO KNOW WHERE Socrates is.

a) What happens to the original verb?

The same tense must be kept, and also the indicative mood (unless it is a deliberative question in subjunctive, in which case subjunctive tense must be kept). If, for instance, the original question is formulated in future tense,

- τί ποιήσεις αύριον; WHAT WILL YOU DO TOMORROW?

the verb of the indirect question will be in the future tense, regardless of the tense of the main sentence:

- εἰδέναι ἐπιθυμεῖ τί ποιήσω αύριον HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WOULD DO TOMORROW
  - Observe that, as the introductory verb is past, the English will has become would, but in Greek the sentence reads literally as HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WILL DO TOMORROW.

- ταύτην δὲ ἔχων τὴν ἥλικίαν οὔτε τί ἔστιν ὀλιγαρχία ἡπιστήμην AT THAT AGE, I DID NOT EVEN KNOW WHAT Oligarchy is / was (Lysias, In Theomnestum).

BUT: As in the cases of reported speech, the oblique optative can be used if the introductory verb is in a secondary tense, creating the so called secondary sequence:

- πῶς μαχητόνται οἱ Ἄθηναίοι; HOW WILL THE ATHENIANS FIGHT?
  - ήρετο πῶς μαχητόντοι οἱ Ἄθηναίοι HE ASKED HOW THE ATHENIANS WOULD FIGHT.

- Remember that this is optional; μαχητόνταί would also have been correct.

b) What happens to the interrogative word?

1/ In the examples above, the interrogative word has not changed; nevertheless, it is very common to add the prefix ὅ-, but this is optional (note that some accent alteration will occur if used):

- ἠρετο ὅπος μαχητόντοι οἱ Ἄθηναίοι HE ASKED HOW THE ATHENIANS WOULD FIGHT.
- βούλεται εἰδέναι ὅπου ἔστιν ὁ Σωκράτης HE WANTS TO KNOW WHERE Socrates is.
- εἰδέναι ἐπιθυμεῖ τό τί ποιήσω αύριον HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WOULD DO TOMORROW.
  - Usually we write ὅ τι in two words to avoid confusing it with the other ὅτι.
- ἐρωτάτω ὅποτε ὁ Σωκράτης πρὸς τὴν Λακεδαιμονίαν ἔστιν THEY ASK WHEN Socrates will go to Lacedaemonia.
- θαυμάζω ὅπος ἠθλησάρη ποιήσας τοῦ τοῦ δεσμοποιήσας ψύκαναι I WOnder HOW THE PRISON GUARD WANTED TO AGREE TO YOUR REQUEST (Plato, Crito).
- οὔκ οἶδ’ ὅποι ὁμήρη ψέχει (Lucian, Philopseudeis).

2/ The use of τίς, τί or any of its forms is a separate issue:

- τίς ἔστιν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ? WHO IS IN THE HOUSE?
  - ἐρωτάτα τίς ἔστιν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ HE ASKS WHO IS IN THE HOUSE.