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## Pindar's Olympian 3

### The Olive Branch as a Symbol of the Cohesion of the Human Community

*Summary* – In Pindar's Olympian 3 Theron is glorified all the more because his victory is connected to the ancient tradition of the olive branch and its concomitant symbolism; it is presented as a link in a chain which ultimately originates from the supreme god, Zeus, and reaches through Heracles and the Dioscuri to the present. On the one hand, the olive branch is suggestively presented as conflating the opposites; it is destined both for every man and for the few, because all are inspired by it to strive for excellence, pursuing therefore, happiness; thus, it ensures the cohesion of mankind. On the other hand, the *laudandus*, Theron, is also implicitly depicted as fusing the opposites; he has changed by becoming an Olympic victor and he has remained the same, since he continues worshiping the Dioscuri who have granted him this victory; thus, his victory, which has as its recipients not only himself but also his compatriots, secures the coherence of his community. This latent correlation between the implications of the Olympic symbol of victory and those of its present awardee is elicited by Pindar through an intricate network of verbal repetitions, subtle mythological allusions and innuendos.

Pindar's Olympian 3 was composed along with Olympian 2 in 476 B.C.E. in honor of Theron, the tyrant of Acragas who had won the chariot race.<sup>1</sup> The largest part of the ode is devoted to narrating the myth of Heracles bringing the olive branch to Olympia, which comprises the middle section of the poem, while the victor is mentioned at its beginning and end along with honorary references to the Dioscuri, enveloping so to speak the myth. In this way, Theron is glorified all the more because his victory is connected to the ancient tradition of the olive branch and its concomitant symbolism; it is presented as a link in a chain which ultimately originates from the supreme god, Zeus, and reaches through Heracles and the Dioscuri to the present. On the one hand, the olive branch is suggestively presented as conflating the opposites; it is destined both for every man and for the few, because all are inspired by it to strive for excellence, pursuing therefore, happiness; thus, it ensures the cohesion of

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<sup>1</sup> It is presumed that this ode has been performed at the theoxenia, but I agree with Shelmerdine, *Pindaric Praise*, 67, that we do not need to assume such an occasion in order to understand and appreciate the poem.

mankind. On the other hand, the *laudandus*, Theron, is also implicitly depicted as fusing the opposites; he has changed by becoming an Olympic victor and he has remained the same, since he continues worshipping the Dioscuri who have granted him this victory; thus, his victory, which has as its recipients not only himself but also his compatriots, secures the coherence of his community. This latent correlation between the implications of the Olympic symbol of victory and those of its present awardee is elicited by Pindar through an intricate network of verbal repetitions,<sup>2</sup> subtle mythological allusions and innuendos, which will be examined in detail below.

Τυνδαρίδαις τε φιλοξείνοις ἀδεῖν  
καλλιπλοκάμῳ θ' Ἑλένῃ  
κλεινὰν Ἀκράγαντα γεραίρων εὐχομαι,  
Θήρωνος Ὀλυμπιονίκαν  
ὕμνον ὀρθώσας, ἀκαμαντοπόδων  
ἵππων ἄωτον.

To begin with, we must notice that Pindar attaches far more importance to the divine agents, the deified Castor and Pollux along with their sister, Helen, than to the human victor and his city, since he expresses the wish to be pleasing to the Dioscuri and their sibling.<sup>3</sup> This wish might be construed as a sign of moderation, as it is only the gods who have the power to make the glory obtained at the Olympic games enduring and everlasting. Thus, Pindar will set the hymn in honor of Theron “straight” (ὀρθώσας, 3)<sup>4</sup> by essentially subjugating through the content and syntax of his ode his *laudandus* and his city to the deities that protect them. Notably enough, the mention of Acragas precedes that of Theron because it receives the benefits of the latter’s victory. There is a syntactic correlation between the adjective “glorious” (κλεινάν, 2), that qualifies the city of the tyrant, and the epithet Ὀλυμπιονίκαν (3), that refers to Pindar’s hymn in honor of the victor, since both nouns are objects of participles; the implication might be that Acragas has won fame through

<sup>2</sup> Many of these verbal repetitions have been noted by previous scholars; see Méautis, *Pindare le Dorien*, 64 and 66; Segal, *God and Man*, 228–249; Robbins, *Heracles*, 298f.; Köhnken, *Mythical Chronology*; Newman – Newman, *Pindar’s Art*, 177–187; van den Berge, *Unity in Context*, 61f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Race, *Style and Rhetoric*, 110, who rightly notices that the Tyndaridae are the beginning and the end of the ode.

<sup>4</sup> Verdenius, *Commentaries*, 8, believes that with this participle an architectural metaphor is meant.

Theron's athletic triumph.<sup>5</sup> The question that arises is how exactly Pindar will please the Tyndarids and Helen. Since the Dioscuri are called "hospitable" (φιλοξείνοις, 1), it is not inconceivable that they are going to appreciate and enjoy the "hospitality" that the poet offers them in his ode through the commemoration of their contribution to Theron's victory, so that they might later on return the favor to the tyrant and his city either by continuing to protect them or by granting Theron additional victories that will only augment the glory of his city. On the other hand, by stressing Helen's beauty (καλλιπλοκάμῳ, 1) Pindar suggests that he might please her precisely by constructing a beautiful ode;<sup>6</sup> and if Pindar's poem is alluring, then the Dioscuri will certainly be more pleased by their "hospitality" in it and will be more likely to favor Theron and his city all the more. Pindar's ambition is not so covert, if we take into consideration the fact that he calls his hymn "the choicest" (ἄωτον, 4).<sup>7</sup>

Μοῖσα δ' οὕτω ποι παρέ-  
στα μοι νεοσίγαλον εὐρόντι τρόπον  
5 Δωρίῳ φωνὰν ἐναρμόξαι πεδίλῳ  
ἀγλαόκωμον·

As Pindar had previously subjugated through his syntax the human agents involved in Theron's victory to their divine helpers, so in these lines he subordinates himself to the deity that assists him in composing his poem, the Muse. The Muse literally "stands besides" the eulogist, because, as he had stated before, his primary objective was to be pleasing to the demigods<sup>8</sup> and not to his patron, a connection established through the adverb οὕτω (4). Furthermore, the fact that Pindar has found a "new shining manner" (νεοσίγαλον ... τρόπον, 4)<sup>9</sup> conceivably increases the glory of the victory procession (ἀγλαόκωμον, 6), because he has invented something that has never been heard or witnessed before. Therefore, the voice (φωνάν, 5) most probably refers to the content of his poem and to its innovative treatment of

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Méautis, Pindare le Dorien, 64: "le poète ne sépare pas le vainqueur de la ville; la gloire de l'un est la gloire de l'autre, les deux sont solidaires."

<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Sheldermine, Pindaric Praise, 69–71, maintains that Pindar pleases Helen through his choice of mythical material, the story of the olive tree's import to Olympia and that of Artemis and the hind, which is consonant to her aspect as a fertility figure, an aspect which was alive or remembered in a cult at Acragas. On the connection of Helen and Taygeta see Krummen, Pysos Hymnon, 255.

<sup>7</sup> On the meaning of ἄωτος in Pindar see Raman, Homeric ἄωτος.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Σ 7a and 8a.

<sup>9</sup> On the various hypotheses on what precisely the novelty is see Catenacci, Introduction and Commentary, 417f.

the myth of Heracles bringing the olive branch to Olympia, as well as to the particular significance with which he invests this myth, while the Dorian sandal (Δωρίῳ ... πεδίῳ, 5) refers to the underlying rhythm of the ode, which dictates the dancing step and which pays homage not only to the Dioscuri, but also to Theron and the Acragantines, who were descended from that particular race. Once again human and divine celebrants are united into a harmonious whole, especially if we take into consideration that the voice of the victory procession represents the co-citizens of Theron who have undertaken the task of performing this ode. Thus, one of Pindar's artistic aims in this poem, the coexistence and cooperation of men and gods, is implicitly and emphatically stated from the very outset.

ἐπεὶ χαίταισι μὲν  
 ζευχθέντες ἔπι στέφανοι  
 πρᾶσσοντί με τοῦτο θεόδματον χρέος,  
 φόρμιγγά τε ποικιλόγαρυν  
 καὶ βοὰν αὐλῶν ἐπέων τε θέσιν  
 9 Αἰνησιδάμου παιδὶ συμμεῖξαι πρεπόν-  
 τως, ἃ τε Πίσσα με γεγωνεῖν·

Indeed, the debt that the wreaths exact from Pindar is literally “built by the gods” (θεόδματον, 7), that is the poetic celebration of athletic triumph is in accordance with the divine will; the wreaths, in their turn, assume their authoritarian position and the right to command the poet as soon as they are placed on the head of the victor; it is at this precise moment that their special value is revealed and that they evolve into an almost autonomous entity with a privileged connection to the divine. And as the wreaths order the eulogist, accordingly he devotes the greatest part of his poem to the story of the import of the tree of which they are made to Olympia, a story which will presumably outline the implications or the hidden significance of Theron's victory.

The divine debt that the wreaths exact from Pindar is to blend different voices, that of the lyre, that of the flute and the words of his ode; the instruments mentioned were widely considered as representatives of different social strata, since the lyre was usually associated with the upper class of the aristocrats or the rich, a connection which might well justify the application of the compound adjective ποικίλος to the lyre, indicating, thus, the way of thinking and acting of this particular class, while the flute was customarily linked with the ordinary folk, justifying, therefore, the word “cry” (βοὰν, 8) used to refer to the sound it produces, a word commonly associated with the world of the assemblies. On the other hand, the rather unusual term “position