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THE LANGUAGE OF PINDAR

It is often said of the Greek choral song that its language, in accordance with the cultic origin of the genre, is fundamentally a religious one.[1] The actual analyses, however, see the religious character of these poems as wholes only in their deviations, mainly morphological and lexical, from everyday language;[2] all other reference is usually confined to the cultic language formulae of the prayers and hymns embedded in the choral songs.[3] As to the first of these points, i.e. the deviations from everyday language, it may be observed that these characterize the language of religion no more than they characterize that of poetry in general. As to the cultic formulae, which e.g. Dornseiff[4] — largely following Norden's by now classic analysis[5] — treats as specific features of hymnic language, these are confined almost exclusively to the supplications within the Pindaric odes, and as such cannot be used to characterize the language of the odes themselves. The question, then, remains still to be answered: what is meant by the 'religiousness' of the language of Greek choral songs, or more specifically: what linguistic forms serve to convey that religious *Weltanschauung* of which these choral songs have grown out ?

In the present study we shall analyse the poetic language of the most significant Greek choral song composer, Pindar, confining ourselves to one particular linguistic form, and thereby attempt to take the first steps towards a possible answer.

We shall be considering Pindar's triumphal odes, which are known to have been commissioned by the victors (usually one of the princes) of the great Greek Games. The Epinician, or triumphal ode, like all other kinds of choral songs, is of cultic origin: the Games at Olympia, Pytho, Nemea, and Isthmus all formed part of the cult of some deity, the Games themselves beginning and ending with the offering of sacrifices. Pindar's odes mention as an ancient tradition the practice of greeting the victor with a song at the end of the games. From Olympian 10 we learn even more about this song, the Epinician. Pindar, after telling us how Heracles had founded the Olympian Games, and who the first victors had been, goes on to say:[6]

1*

ἀείδετο δὲ πᾶν τέμενος
τερπναῖσι θαλίαις
τόν ἐγκώμιον ἀμφι τρόπον
ἀρχαῖς δὲ προτέραις ἑπόμενοι
καί νυν ἐπωνυμίαν χάριν
νίκας ἀγερώχου κελαδησόμεθα βροντάν
καί πυρπάλαμον βέλος
ὀρσικτύπου Διός

"The whole grove resounded, on the beautiful feast, with the music of the triumphal song. Following the ancient beginnings we shall again sing, in triumphal reward for a great victory, the lightning and fiery arrow of thunder-making Zeus."

Pindar, then, knows or understands the tradition[7] as saying that in the triumphal song sung in honour of the victor it was in fact Zeus who was sung about, it was he who was celebrated. This means that, in Pindar's interpretation, the triumphal song was part of the Olympian cult of Zeus in the same way as the sacrifices before and after the Games, or the Games themselves. Pindar not only knows this, but, by exhorting to follow the "beginnings", consciously continues this tradition and recognizes his Epinician, too, to be a cultic triumphal song in honour of Zeus What does this fact mean ?

It is mentioned by Pindar himself, as well as by other sources (e.g. in the scholia written to his odes,) that in ancient times it had been the custom to hail the victors with the first lines of a poem by, or at least attributed to, Archilochus. This poem must have been a hymn to Heracles, celebrating his victory over Augeas. Its first lines run as follows:[8]

Τήνελλα καλλίνικε
χαῖρ᾽ ἄναξ ʽΗράκλεες
αὐτός τε καί ʽΙόλαος αἰχμητά δύο

,,Tenella, beautifully victorious one, hail, Lord Heracles, thyself and Iolaus, two warriors with lances".

Every time these words were sung in honour of a new victory, the new victor was in fact identified with Heracles, once victorious over Augeas. This was obviously done because the participants of the feast saw in the victor they were celebrating the Beautifully Victorious One; in this new victory, it was that ancient victory over Augeas that became visible and present. And what else could they have seen ? Athletic success in itself, is a question of bodily strength and of physical achievement. But in contiguity with the world of myth, where nothing exists on its own and where everything is meaningful, athletic victory is not merely physical achievement: it is a meaningful act that conveys the facts of the myth to the participants of the feast, and represents these facts (for instance, the victory over Augeas) as occurring in the present of the feast. This is how the singers of the Tenella song, on every occasion, could see

a victory as representing Heracles' mythical victory. The participants and the victors of the Games thus re-enacted the myth; the present of the games and the victories, loaded with the facts of myth, became meaningful reality. This is what happened at Olympia, at Pytho, at Nemea, and on the Isthmus — in honour of Zeus, Apollo, and Poseidon respectively.

And, obviously, this is what Pindar's Epinicians celebrate. In Olympian 10, referred to above, the following words introduce the myth about the founding of the Olympian cult of Zeus:[9]

ἀγῶνα δ᾽ ἐξαίρετον ἀεῖσαι θέμιτες ὦρσαν
Διός, ... ὅν ἐκτίσσατο.

"Zeus' laws have induced me to sing the exceptional Games, which (Heracles) ... founded."

I.e., the Games sung of by the poet, the present ones, are the same as those founded by Heracles. In Olympian 3, we hear of the olive-branch wreathing the victor's head; this is a shoot of the tree

τάν ποτε ᾽Ιστρου ἀπό σκικρᾶν
παγᾶν ἔνεικεν ᾽Αμφιτρυωνιάδας

"which was once brought from near the shady springs of the Istrus by the Amphitryonid."[10]

And here follows the myth relating how Heracles brought the olive tree to Olympia from the land of the Hyperboreans. Or take Olympian 1, celebrating the victory of Hieron, the respected Prince of Syracuse; in its central and longest part Pindar tells the myth of Pelops. He is reminded of the myth by the fact that Hieron's fame rises from the land of Pelops:

λάμπει δε οἱ κλέος
ἐν εὐάνορι Λυδοῦ Πέλοπος ἀποικίᾳ
τοῦ μεγασθενής ἐράσσατο Γαιάοχος Ποσειδάν

"His fame shines in the land of Lydian Pelops, inhabited by noble men; (of Pelops) with whom fell in love the mighty land-possessing Poseidon".

Then Pindar relates Pelops' youth, and how he defeated in a chariot — race Oenomaus, king of Elis, gaining thereby the hand of the latter's daughter Hippodameia. Pythian 9, to take just another example, was composed to celebrate Telesicrates' victory. Telesicrates is a citizen of Cyrene — that Cyrene[11]

τάν ὁ χαιτάεις ἀνεμοσφαράγων
ἐκ Παλίου κολπῶν ποτέ Λατοΐδας
ἅρπασ᾽

"whom (scil. the nymph Cyrene) Letho's curly child once carried off
from the Pelion's wind-echoing valleys."[12] And the myth goes on about
the wedding of Cyrene and Apollo, and the founding of the city of Cyrene.

We could cite further examples, but even this much may suffice to
make our point clear: that Pindar, too, sees myth in his present; and what
happens in the present becomes meaningful for him, too, inasmuch as it
continues, re-enacts, and imitates (in the creatively imitative sense of
mimesis) the past that had turned into myth by his time. This past can be
continued, re-enacted, and imitated — i.e., lived again — exactly because,
in the form myths, it had been cast into words and shaped into *mythos*.
Thus when Pindar begins to speak of the Games, the new victory, or the
victor's native city, he, too, is telling the past. He starts to speak of the
Olympian Games, those of his day, and what he tells about them is the
myth of their founding. Mention is made of the olive branch that wrea-
thes the victors' heads, and presently we are told how the olive tree got
to Olympia. Hieron won success in the very place where Pelops had done;
and indeed, most of the ode dedicated to Hieron's victory is taken up
by references to Pelops, the mythical victor-ancestor. Telesicrates' vic-
tory adds to his city's reputation; what sort of city Cyrene is we learn
from the myth attached to it.

And now let us return to our four quotations. Each of them is an instance
of the mythical past breaking through, and materializing in, the present
victory. Grammatically, in each of them the myth is linked to some fact
of the victory in the form of a relative clause: the Games *which* Heracles
founded; the olive tree *which* Heracles brought; Pelops, *with whom* Posei-
don fell in love; Cyrene, *whom* Apollo carried off. The appearance of the
past in the present, of the myth in the world of victory is realized within
the linguistic framework of the relative clause. This type of subordinate
clause functions syntactically as an attribute; we may say, therefore,
that the myth participates in the world of the victory as an attribute
of its facts, an attribute telling us what the thing qualified is, and not
just what it is like. We have just said that the victory becomes a meaningful
momentum by conveying to the present, by re-enacting, and thus by
truly representing, the facts of myth. Now that we have seen the linguis-
tic realization of this process we can add: this representing takes place
in the form of attributes, the myth is present in the world of the victory
as the attribute of some of the latter's facts.

A myth is a fact of religion; and attribute, of poetry. In these rela-
tive clauses we are witnessing, in fact, the passing of religion into poetry:
in them, Pindar's mythical-religious *Weltanschauung* becomes poetic lan-
guage and poetic linguistic form.

This linguistic form — together, of course, with the world outlook
that produced it — Pindar inherited from the epic. The poet of the epic,
too, sees myths wherever he looks. In Book 2 of the Iliad we read of Aga-
memnon's royal sceptre:[13]

ἀνά δε κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων
ἔστη σκῆπτρον ἔχων· τό μέν "Ηφαιστος κάμε τεύχων.
"Ηφαιστος μέν δῶκε Διί Κρονίωνι ἄνακτι

"rose the king Agamemnon, holding a royal sceptre which Hephaestus' hand had wrought. Hephaestus had given it to Zeus, the Lord . . .". And here an eight-line enumeration follows describing all the hands the sceptre had passed through before becoming Agamemnon's. In this case, too, the myth of the sceptre is linked to the main sentence by a relative clause ("which Hephaestus' hand had wrought"), thus grammatically it is fully equivalent to the relevant places in Pindar. Or else, if we think of those passages in the epic where, in connexion with one or another hero, Homer relates, or has the hero relate, that he was born or begotten by such and such person, we still see this equivalence only:

Εὔμηλος τόν ὑπ' Ἀδμήτῳ τέκε δῖα γυναικῶν
"Αλκηστις . . .

"Eumelus ... whom a divine woman, Alcestis, bore for him."[14] However, the same fact (the descent of a hero) is often expressed by Homer in a single word: 'Atreides Agamemnon', which means 'Agamemnon son of Atreus', or 'Agamenon begotten by Atreus'. Agamemnon's descent, and more generally, Agamemnon's myth, may be condensed into a single adjective or a relative clause: either way it functions attributively to Agamemnon. Thus in the language of the epic, the myth is also present in a poetic shape: that of attribute. For Homer, composing in the intimate proximity of the mythical world, it makes no difference whatsoever whether he calls Agamenon 'Atreides' or 'the one who was begotten by Atreus'. Pindar, on the other hand, feels it necessary to test and reiterate constantly the connexion between present and myth for such connexion to exist at all, and in order to prevent the myth from abandoning the present world and falling back, with a pastness now irrevocable, into the past. In poetic language, thus also in the language of the attribute, this constant testing of the synopsis of present and past is only possible in an attributive construction where the temporal relation between qualifier and qualified can be expressed: that is, in a subordinate clause, namely a past-tense relative (attributive) clause attached to a present-tense main clause.

In this respect, the relationship between Pindaric language and epic language parallels that between the Pindaric situation and the situation of those singing the Tenella-song. Pindar sees, and makes us see, that the myth is there in the world of the victory, permeating its whole present, but, unlike the epic poet, Pindar cannot ignore the pastness of the myth. Similarly: Pindar, too, sees Pelops in Hieron, but, unlike the singers of the Tenella-song, he cannot simply call Hieron Pelops. Pindar, who borders on the archaic world, is still at home in the myth-permeated world

of the epic and the Tenella-song, but his mythical vision only becomes
valid if he permanently shapes it into poetry, expressing not only the
myth itself, but also its breaking through the facts of the present, that
is, the materialization and reappearance of the myth in the present. This
is carried out in the relative clauses just analysed.

In the above-quoted Pythian 9 we also read:[15]

ἐμέ. . . τις
πράσσει χρέος αὔτικα ἐγεῖραι
καί τε ῶν δόξαν παλαιὰν προγόνων·
οἷοι Λίβυσσας ἀμφί γύναικός ἔβαν. . .

"I am required to revive the glory of his (scil. Telesicrates') ancestors
too; such as they were, going to fetch the Libyan woman."
We then learn that Antaeus of Irasa held a contest between the suitors
of his daughter, and, as the contest was won by Alexidamus (an ancestor
of Telesicrates, the man celebrated in the Epinician), he obtained the
girl's hand. The word οἷοι introducing this myth is again a relative pro-
noun, but, unlike the pronoun ὅς ἥ ὅ 'who, which' seen so far, means 'such
as'. This type of relative clause, introduced by οἷος, and of mythical
content, is of epic origin as well. When looking for examples, we are first
of all reminded of Hesiod's catalogue of heroines, the so-called Ehoie.
This poem, constituted by a chain of myths on heroines, takes its later
name from the fact that the myths are invariably introduced by the for-
mula ἤ οἵη 'or such as'. In Book 4 of the Odyssey Telemachus' hostess,
Helene, in order to delight her guests (καί μύθοις τέρπεσθε 'and have
delight in my words'[16] she says to them), starts to narrate about Odysseus,
beginning her words thus:[17] ἀλλ' οἷον τόδ' ἔρεξε, roughly meaning 'such
(an act) as he performed' or even in an exclamatory sense: 'what (an act)
he performed'. This expression re-occurs in an almost identical form in
line 271: οἷον καί τόδ' ἔρεξε. The use of this phrase by Homer and Hesiod
is equally characterized by the fact that the clauses beginning with the
pronoun οἷος are not connected to the main sentences: in other words,
the myths told in them are not grammatically connected to the present.
This linguistic form could only have sprung up in a world where myth was
self-evidently part of the present, and no a propos was needed to recall it.

Examining Pindar's above quoted passage against the background
of this tradition we find that in this case he, too, narrates because he finds
it a pleasure (the phrase 'I am required' may be taken to refer to this).
And though his οἷοι . . . ἔβαν sentence, unlike its epic counterparts, is
linked to a main clause, this link is much looser than in our examples so
far. This is partly due to the meaning of the pronoun οἷος, which connects
its clause to the main sentence not so much as an attribute but much
rather as an apposition to the object (παλαιὰν δόξαν) of the main
sentence: 'that ancient glory as they were, going. . .' Moreover, as H.
Fraenkel has pointed out,[18] the plural form of the passage οἷοι . . . ἔβαν is

solely due to προγόνων in the preceding main sentence; in reality Alexidamus alone is meant in this and the subsequent clauses. Fraenkel considers this inconsistency to be an archaic linguistic feature where, in accordance with the linear nature of the narrative, more importance is given to the formal congruence of adjacent parts than to the consistency of the whole. This archaic feature seems to support our hypothesis that in this passage Pindar (yielding, perhaps, to the temptation of the pronoun οἷος) indulges in spontaneous narration. By the end of the Alexidamus story, however, we realize once more that Pindar has once again sung the penetration of the myth into the world of the present. We leave the Alexidamus story behind with the revelation that it was Alexidamus' ancient victory that was repeated in Telesicrates' feat, that the old victory became present for us in this new one — if only through being sung by Pindar.

Pindar sees a myth-filled world around him, as is expressed in his Epinicians; this fact is cast into the linguistic form of past-tense relative clauses connected to present-tense main clauses. And in these attributive clauses the Pindaric idea finds its perfect formalization: it becomes poetry. What we mean by 'perfect' will become clear if we look at other expressions of Pindar's mythical-religious *Weltbild*.

There are a number of ways in which Pindar can tell that the happenings of the past are re-enacted and made present again in the happening of the present. On Olympian 10 we not only learn that the Games being sung about are the same as those once founded by Heracles, but we also find the lines (quoted earlier in this paper): "Following the ancient beginnings, let us sing now, too, about Zeus' lightning, etc." This emphatic 'now, too' re-occurs in Olympian 3 (see quotation above): the olive branch crowning the victors comes from the tree which was once brought to Olympia by Heracles; the myth ends with the following words:

καί νυν ἐς ταύταν ἑορτὰν
ἵλαος . . . νίσεται

"Now, too, he arrives propitious at the same feast." The triumphal song is sung now, too, in honour of the victor, just like then; Heracles is now, too, present at the Games, just like then. What happened then happens now, too. Thus the expression καί νυν refers to the same thing as the relative clauses, but in a more immediate, less elaborate, less poetic manner.

Let us recall the concluding part of Pythian 9, the Alexidamus story, whose purpose, as we saw, was basically to convey the idea that Telesicrates, through his present victory, proved to be a worthy successor to Alexidamus; in other words, that this present victory has re-enacted and represented that ancient one. The same idea, that their victories make the current victors worthy successors of their ancestors, is frequently expressed in the Epinicians:

παλαισμάτεσσι γάρ ἰχνεύων ματραδελφέους
'Ολυμπία τε θεόγνητον οὐ καταλέγχεις
οὐδε Κλειτομάχοιο νίκαν 'Ισθμοῖ θρασύγνιον.

"In wrestling, treading in the footsteps of thy mother's brothers, thou
shalt not, in Olympia, bring disgrace on Theognetus, nor on Clitomachus'
brave Isthmian victory." (Pyth. 8. 35 ff.)

ἄνδρον δ' ἀρετάν σύμφυτον οὐ κατελέγκει

"He does not disgrace the men's cognate virtue." (Isthm. 3. 13 f.)

ἴχνεσιν ἐν Πραξιδάμαντος ἑόν πόδα νέμων
πατροπάτορος ὁμαιμίοις

"Treading in the blood-related footsteps of his father's brother Praxida-
mas." (Nem. 6. 15 ff.)

This type of praise expresses basically the same thing as the Alexi-
damus story. The differences between the two, however, are just as impor-
tant as the similarities. In both types we have a comparison of the current
victors with their ancestors. While in the case of the Alexidamus story
this is realized by means of a particular linguistic form (the clause intro-
duced by the pronoun οἷος), the examples just quoted are moralizing,
less poetic, almost formulaic wordings of the same comparison. The diffe-
rence we have just expressed in linguistic terms can also be described as a
difference in content: in the case of the Alexidamus story, where the idea
shapes its own language and finds expression by means of this form, we
also witness the myth's breaking into the present: we, too, see the one-
time victory as forming a unity with the current one. In these latter quo-
tations, however, where the idea is expressed in ready-made formulae
it is the moralistic messege that predominates: the ancestors' deeds, having
no myth value, serve simply as examples for the descendants. These
phrasings, moralizing in content and less well-formed linguistically,
easily lend to Pindar, who can be such an excellent teacher, a tone of
scholastic harangueing. It is exactly the comparison with these that
prompts us to say that in the relative clause Pindar's way of looking at
the world has mellowed into real poetry.

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[1] *C. M. Bowra:* Greek Lyric Poetry. Oxford 1961², p. 11 ff. *A. Meillet:* Aperçu d'his-
toire de la langue grecque. Paris 1920², p. 147 ff; *F. Dornseiff:* Pindars Stil. Berlin 1921.
p. 8.
   [2] *A. Meillet:* ibid.
   [3] *F. Dornseiff: op. cit.* p. 91.
   [4] ibid.
   [5] Agnostos Theos. Leipzig, 1913. p. 166 ff.
   [6] 76 ff.

[7] Olymp. 9. 1 ff.
[8] *Bergk:* p. 119.
[9] 45 ff.
[10] 13 ff.
[11] 23 ff.
[12] 5 ff.
[13] 100 ff.
[14] Iliad 2. 714.
[15] 103 ff.
[16] 239.
[17] 242.
[18] Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens. München 1955. p. 79.