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The Text of Pindar, *Isthmian* 3/4.68

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Abstract: This note proposes a new reading of the text at Pind. *Isthm.* 3/4.68.

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οὐ γὰρ φύσιν Ὠαριωνείαν ἔλαχεν·
ἀλλ᾽ ὀνοτὸς μὲν ἰδέσθαι,
συμπεσεῖν δ᾽ ἀκμᾷ βαρύς.

69 αἰχμᾷ: Pauw[1]

For he was not granted the build of an Orion; but although he was paltry to look at, to fall in with he was heavy in his strength.[2]

If the text in v. 68 is sound, Pindar calls the *laudandus* Melissus "contemptible to behold".[3] In a discussion of this ode MacNeal reflects:

> Why should the poet deliberately emphasise Melissos' physical shortcomings? He did not have Orion's physique, and in fact he was contemptible to look upon. This statement is not much palliated by the compliment of 55 and is seemingly made even worse by the strange description of Herakles as short of stature. It is no wonder that many critics have asked whether this is a proper way to praise a victor, let alone the hero Herakles.[4]

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[1] Pind. *Isthm.* 3/4.67–69. The text and apparatus printed are those of Snell-Maehler 1987, 147. Pauw's correction is preferable because a spear-fight is not relevant here.

[2] Tr. Race 1997, 169.

[3] Doubt has been expressed about whether these lines refer to Melissus or Heracles: see Thummer 1968–1969, 2.76 (n. on vv. 67–69). But on balance it seems preferable to understand them as referring to Melissus since he has been mentioned in v. 62 and καί τοί ποτε in v. 70 seems to introduce a mythological exemplum rather than to be the continuation of a description of Heracles. As to the meaning of ὀνοτός, LSJ s.v. ὀνοστός gives the sense 'to be blamed or scorned' and *CGL* s.v. ὀνοτός gives three senses: 'despicable', 'to be scorned' and 'unimpressive'. The last appears to be a watering down of the principal sense. Boeke 2007, 120 observes that "most commentators and translators appear to find it too strong, preferring renderings such as 'paltry' (Race 1997b: 169), 'unansehhnlich' (Dönt 1986: 257), 'äußere Unscheinbarkeit' (Köhnken 1971: 94), 'unimpressive' (Willcock 1995: 83) and 'ill-favoured' (Bury 1892: 73) … [renderings that] underplay the fact that [ὀνοτός] also, perhaps primarily, points to a negative attitude towards the person observed on the part of the onlookers". Regardless of how it is translated, the adj.'s primary sense is one of disapproval and this was how the scholia took it: Σ 83a (= Drachmann 1903–1927, 3.235.2–3) μεμπτὸς μὲν καὶ εὐτελὴς κατὰ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὄψιν.

[4] MacNeal 1978, 148. Of the critics who pose the question McNeal mentions Norwood 1945, 172–173 and Bowra 1964, 47–48; to them may be added Farnell 1930–1932, 1.258–259 who was left wondering

In fact, v. 68 is positively rude but calling Heracles short of stature (μορφὰν βραχύc, v. 71) is not.[5] To say that someone is short of stature is inoffensive *per se*;[6] to say that someone is "contemptible to behold" is gratuitously offensive. In addition to this unforgettable insult, there is another reason for suspicion. The particles οὐ γὰρ ... ἀλλὰ ... μὲν ... δέ imply a statement to the effect "For he is not X, but is on the one hand Y and on the other Z", where Y and Z are distinct from X and to a greater or lesser extent antithetical to each other.[7] Instead, what we have is "For he is X, but he is X, but he is Y". Why does Pindar say in effect that Melissus is small twice? It serves little purpose to say both that Melissus is not huge and that he is small. If Pindar did, why did he use the strong ἀλλά rather than an 'and' to join two apparently complementary notions?

Had there been a lacuna in our text of v. 68 so that the passage read "He is not massive, but [...] and on the other he is heavy to fall in with", I would have expected it to contain another attribute with which βαρύc contrasts. Obvious candidates would be lightness and swiftness. He is not huge, but he is light and fast on the one hand and on the other heavy to fall in with. Ivanov aptly cites a passage in Philostratus regarding athletes called οἱ ἐν μικρῷ μεγάλοι, "big in small":[8]

"whether all the compliment and consolation that follow could quite atone for that easily remembered phrase" and more recently Willcock 1995, 83, who describes the lines as "Surprisingly uncomplimentary" (although he does not doubt the paradosis).

[5] Ivanov 2010, 143–149 (n. on vv. 45–55) gives a detailed and useful discussion of this passage. He explains that there is little sign of the humour in the passage detected by Kurz 1974, 8, Schmitz 1994, 213 and Willcock 1995, 83. He also exposes difficulties in the interpretation of Pfeijffer 1999, 284 and Boeke 2007, 111–130 that "the meaning of the remark is that Melissos' ugliness belies his real worth". Ivanov suggests that ὀνοτὸc μὲν ἰδέcθαι is not necessarily derogatory. Instead, "The negative comparison with the giant is ... covertly complimentary and serves not only as a foil for Melissos' actual performance in the ring but also sets the stage for a more appropriate comparison of the victor with another Boiotian hero, Herakles". Context no doubt helps, but it does not explain the straightforward and I think undoubtedly derogatory sense of the phrase.

[6] It is no more offensive than, say, Hom. *Il.* 5.801 Τυδεύc τοι μικρὸc μὲν ἔην δέμαc, ἀλλὰ μαχήτηc. Heracles' (relatively?) short stature is a positive advantage in his wrestling match with the giant Antaeus because a low centre of gravity enabled him to remain low and prevent the giant from establishing contact with his mother Gaia and thereby having his strength restored.

[7] See e.g. Thgn. 203–206, 441–444; for ἀλλά "following a neg. sentence, clause; clarifying a previous denial", see Slater 1969, 30 s.v. ἀλλά 1.

[8] 2010, 147–148, citing Philostr. *Gym.* 36. Ivanov also mentions the successful Cilician pancratist, Ἀλτήρ, who μικρὸc ἦν καὶ τῶν ἀντιπάλων παρὰ πολύ but achieved success because he discovered the tactic of heel tripping (Philostr. *Her.* 14–15). Philostr. gives another example of a small but effective wrestler in the Egyptian Mῦc (presumably a Gk. nickname based on his size), who ἀνθρώπιον μὲν ἦν οὐ μέγα, ἐπάλαιε δὲ πρόcω τέχνηc (*Gymn.* 41).

> We should view these as athletes who are smaller in size than those who are squarely built or well proportioned, but who nevertheless have well structured bodies that are large in appearance and more bulky than is normal for people of their size … Wrestling shows off their skills best; for they are flexible and versatile and vigorous and light and quick and uniform[9]

This is probably the kind of athlete to which Pindar is likening Melissus. In the last sentence the adjectives used by Philostratus are εὔστροφοι, πολύτροποι, σφοδροί, κοῦφοι, ταχεῖς and ὁμότονοι. That Melissus was συμπεσεῖν … βαρύς may reflect him being "more bulky than is normal for people of [his] size". It almost certainly reflects σφοδρότης. Pindar has already likened him to a lion in boldness and a fox in cunning (vv. 63–65) and observed that χρὴ … πᾶν ἔρδοντ᾽ ἀμαυρῶσαι τὸν ἐχθρόν (v. 66),[10] which makes Melissus πολύτροπος. Rolling on his back like a fox, in addition to showing off his μῆτις, also suggests flexibility and agility. In Philostratus' terms he is εὔστροφος. What is lacking is reference to Philostratus' κοῦφος and ταχύς.[11] How then might Pindar have conveyed this in such a way as to make sense of οὐ γὰρ … ἀλλὰ … μὲν … δέ? Something fast and light, but that can also be heavy to encounter, is a wind.[12] Could it be that Pindar's ΑΛΛΟΝΟΤΟΣΜΕΝΙΔΕΣΘΑΙ represented not ἀλλ᾽ ὀνοτὸς μὲν ἰδέσθαι, but rather ἀλλ᾽ ὁ Νότος μὲν ἰδέσθαι ("but he was Notus to behold")?[13]

[9] Tr. Rusten-König 2014, 463.

[10] The verb ἀμαυρόω can mean "blind" or "weaken" as well as "dim". The choice of verb may subtly refer to eye gouging and if so, Pindar may have been seeking to deflect criticism attracted by the victor's use of this tactic.

[11] The absence of anything like ὁμότονοι ('having equal muscular power in every muscle' according to LSJ s.v. ὁμότονος A.1) need not concern us. Overall equivalence will be made out if we have a reference to lightness and speed.

[12] For βαρύς applied to the wind, see Arist. *HA* 597b; Paus. 10.17.11 applies it specifically to ὁ νότος.

[13] For Pindar's use of the article with proper nouns, see Slater 1969, 368 s.v. ὁ, ἥ, ὅς C.1.a. For other such limiting or explanatory infinitives involving a verb of seeing in Pindar, see *Ol.* 8.19 ἐσορᾶν καλός, *Pyth.* 1.26 τέρας … θαυμάσιον προσιδέσθαι, *Nem.* 6.8 τὸ συγγενὲς ἰδεῖν (which as with the reading suggested here involves the article, with τὸ συγγενὲς being equivalent to a noun), *Isthm.* 7.22 ἰδεῖν μορφάεις. The nouns which such an infinitive may complement are not confined to obvious ones like θαῦμα, θέαμα, τέρας, φάος and φέγγος: their range includes χάρμα (Aesch. *Ag.* 266), δείματα (*Pers.* 210), χρυσήλατον ἄνδρα τευχηστήν (*Sept.* 644); τάριχος Αἰγύπτιος (Soph. fr. 712 *TrGF*); ἡδόνη (Hdt. 2.137); γοργὸς ὁπλίτης (Eur. *Andr.* 1123), φόβῳ (*IT* 1342), γαλήνης (*Or.* 1025), πολύκρανος ἰδεῖν δράκων ἢ πυριφλέγων ὁρᾶσθαι λέων (*Bacch.* 1017–1019); ἔκπληξιν (Pl. *Criti.* 115d). It may be relevant that *Isthm.* 3/4 contains other meteorological metaphors: ἄλλοτε δ᾽ ἀλλοῖος οὖρος | πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἐπαΐσσων ἐλαύνει (vv. 23–24); the testimony of inextinguishable glory is said to "blow" to men, ἄηται (vv. 27–29); a cruel blizzard of war, νιφὰς πολέμοιο, robbed the hearth of four members of Melissus' family (vv. 35–35b). It is tempting to speculate that the victor's name, Melissus, prompted Pindar to compare him to something with wings from its similarity to the bee, μέλισσα, or the bird described in the *Cyranides*, μελισσός; on the latter see

Comparisons of gods and humans to winds are not uncommon in Greek poetry.[14] They are not limited to similes. In a metaphor in Aristophanes, *Knights* Paphlagon likens himself to a storm-wind as follows:

Πα. ἔξειμι γάρ coι λαμπρὸc ἤδη καὶ μέγας καθιείc,
ὁμοῦ ταράττων τήν τε γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλατταν εἰκῇ.
Αλ. ἐγὼ δὲ cυcτείλας γε τοὺc ἀλλᾶντας εἶτ' ἀφήcω
κατὰ κῦμ' ἐμαυτὸν οὔριον, κλάειν cε μακρὰ κελεύων.
Δη. κἄγωγ', ἐάν τι παραχαλᾷ, τὴν ἀντλίαν φυλάξω.
Πα. οὗτοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα καταπροίξει τάλαντα πολλὰ
κλέψας Ἀθηναίων.
Δη. ἄθρει καὶ τοῦ ποδὸc παρίει·
ὡc οὗτοc ἤδη καικίας καὶ cυκοφαντίας πνεῖ.[15]

PAPHLAGON: I'll hit you like a hurricane, awesome and strong, roiling land and sea every which way!
SAUSAGE SELLER: But I'll furl my sausages and let myself run fairly before the waves, after bidding you fare-ill.
FIRST SLAVE: And I'll man the bilges in case of a leak.
PAPHLAGON: By Demeter, you won't get away with the huge pile of money you've filched from the Athenians!
FIRST SLAVE: Ahoy there, slacken the sheets! He's ready to blow up a nor'easter, or a frame-upper.[16]

That Pindar associated swiftness with the winds is confirmed by *Nem.* 3.44–46, where Achilles is said to kill fierce lions ἴcα τ' ἀνέμοιc, "swiftly as the winds". Orion, just mentioned, seems to have been associated with storms.[17] The association of Orion and Notus is explicit in Horace's *deuexi rabidus comes Orionis* | *... Notus*.[18]

Arnott 2007, 207–208 s.v. Melissos, ? -ittos, who explains that this bird was either the *Merops apiaster* (Boeot. *Eirops*) or the *Anthreptes metallicus* of the Nile.

[14] Hom. *Il.* 11.297 (Hector), 747 (Nestor), 12.40 (Hector), 375 (Lycian leaders), 13.39 (Trojans), 795 (various heroes), 20.41 (Ares); *Od.* 6.20 (Athena); *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 147 (Hermes); [Hes.] *Scut.* 345–346 (Cycnus and Ares); Ibyc. fr. 286.6ff *PMG* (Eros, also winged like the wind-gods); Lycoph. *Alex.* 1119 (Cassandra); Theoc. *Syr.* 6 (Echo); Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.877 (Thetis, who is likened to a wind specifically in respect of her δέμας); Quint. Smyrn. 4.111 (Thetis), 8.184 (Neoptolemus and Eurypylus), 13.486 (Achaeans); *Anth. Pal.* 9.531 (Anon., the "Isaurians"), 11.386.6 (Pall., Nike). Animals are also likened to winds for their speed: horses at Hom. *Il.* 10.437; Simon. fr. 515 *PMG*; Bacchyl. 5.47; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1368; Quint. Smyrn. 4.552, 8.157; *Anth. Pal.* 9.20.4 (Arch.); and a hare at Nic. *Ther.* 453.

[15] Ar. *Eq.* 430–437.

[16] Tr. Henderson 1998, 285; for discussion of the imagery, see Taillardat 1965, 180–181 (§ 399). I thank *Eranos*' anonymous referee for drawing this passage and Taillardat's discussion to my attention.

[17] See Gow on Theoc. *Id.* 7.53f.

[18] *Carm.* 1.28.21–22.

It may be less obvious to the modern way of thinking that something might "look" like a wind. One thinks of Christina Rosetti's "Who Has Seen The Wind?" But the Greeks conceived of the winds in anthropomorphic terms as winged humans like those depicted on the Tower of the Winds in the Athenian Agora. In like terms Pindar describes Boreas equipping his human sons Zetes and Calais with wings.[19] Notus was also associated with the South[20] and it is Libya to which Pindar's train of thought takes us next with his description of the wrestling bout between Heracles and Antaeus (vv. 70–73).

Melissus did not have the bulk of an Orion, but he was like Orion's companion Notus [i.e. swift and light] to behold and he was heavy to encounter in a fight. This, I suggest, does justice to the sequence of particles οὐ γὰρ … ἀλλὰ … μὲν … δέ. Since we see and feel the effects of a wind rather than seeing the wind itself (albeit the personification allows Pindar to suggest that we can), the thought moves effortlessly to the "heavy" effect of an encounter with Melissus. At no cost this proposal yields something that makes poetic sense, fits the flow of thought implied by the particles and avoids an anomalous and embarrassing insult that has long perplexed critics and lacked satisfactory explanation.

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[19] *Pyth.* 4.181–183; see Braswell 1988, 265–266 for discussion.

[20] See LSJ s.v. νότος II.

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