

THE EXPLOITATION OF AMBIGUITY IN PINDAROS O. 3. 27

It is proposed to clarify the meaning of Pindaros' *Olympic* 3. 27, in terms of the role which the event described in that verse plays in the myth of the Keryneian hind, as Pindaros seeks to present it to his audience. It will also be shown that this verse represents a turning point in the evolution of this myth toward a conception of the conduct of the gods and of the heroes which is more in conformity with Pindaros' conception of behavior befitting the gods, than the older version of the myth appears to have been.

The verse in question describes a meeting between Artemis and Apollo on the one hand, and of Herakles, who had just captured the Keryneian hind, on the other hand. In order to describe this encounter, Pindaros uses the verb *δέξασθαι*, which Dornseiff translates as "empfängt", Puech as "reçut", Sandys as "welcomed" and Lattimore as "received". All of these translations – and most of all that of Sandys – emphasize the positive, hospitable meaning of the ambiguous verb *δέχομαι*. It is proposed to show that this interpretation is incompatible both with tradition and with the psychological structure of the situation described, and overstresses one aspect of Pindaros' extremely subtle use of this word.

Textual Tradition: Very few texts describe the meeting in question. In Apollodoros' (*Bibl.* 2. 5. 3) the encounter is distinctly unfriendly: Artemis and Apollo *rebuke* Herakles for the capture of the hind, and Herakles pleads necessity. By insisting that he had no choice in the matter, he appeases Artemis and then brings the hind alive to Mykenai. Diodoros (4. 13. 1) mentions Eurystheus' command even *before* he begins to describe the pursuit of the hind. This arrangement of the sequence of events clearly implies the *need* to stress extenuating circumstances. In neither of these accounts is there anything which would permit one to assume that Artemis and Apollo did *not* object to the capture of the hind.

The Evidence of the Monuments also emphasizes the hostile element in Herakles' encounter with Artemis and Apollo.

(1) *Statuary*: The well known Veii group strongly suggests that a physical clash took place between Herakles and Apollo¹). An early VI Century B.C. decorated bronze helmet from Vulci, in the Corinthian style, shows Apollo shooting and Herakles swinging his club; a Cretan bronze relief also depicts a physical clash²), though the captured animal is not a hind but, according to Furtwängler, a "Steinbock".

(2) *Vases*: The number of vase paintings pertaining to the myth of the Keryneian hind is fairly large. Brommer³) lists 21 b.f. items and also 7 additional b.f. items in which the clash, though it seems to involve the tripod, occurs *in the presence* of a deer or hart. He also lists 4 r.f. items pertaining to the hind and 2 additional r.f. items in which the fight over the tripod occurs *in the presence* of a deer or hart. The ratio of 28 b.f./6 r.f. items suffices to highlight the increasing reluctance of Greek vase painters to depict a fight between a god and a hero. On the other hand, the reluctance to depict this encounter can only be due to the fact that the *original* version of the myth called for a physical clash. In some cases, of course, vase paintings depicting the hind do *not* portray a clash. In fact, in some instances Artemis and/or Apollo are not even represented as being present, either during or after the capture. Thus, a geometric style object⁴) shows Herakles *approaching* the hind and her fawn, i.e., it depicts the moment *preceding* the capture, which suffices to explain the absence of Leto's children.

Vase paintings actually depicting the *encounter* must be scrutinized objectively. One must avoid preconceived ideas presumably inspired by the usual interpretation of Pi. O. 3. 27, which do not take into account the much more explicit text of Apollod. *Bibl.* 2. 5. 3. The need for a new scrutiny is indicated by the influence which Pindaros appears to have exerted upon the otherwise excellent discussion of these scenes by Brommer⁵).

1) M. Pallottino, *Art et Civilisation Etrusques* (Musée du Louvre), Paris 1955.

2) A. Furtwängler, s.v. Herakles in *der Kunst*, Roscher I, 2, cols. 2200-1.

3) F. Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Mythologie*, Marburg a.d. Lahn 1956.

4) F. Brommer, *Herakles*. Münster/Köln 1953, fig. 6.

5) F. Brommer, *Herakles*, section on the Keryneian hind, *passim*.

(a) Attic b.f. item (British Museum) (Brommer pl. 15 a), is said to be *unique* in showing Herakles actually *breaking off* the hind's horns (in the presence of Artemis and of Athena). For a proof that it is *not* unique, cf. below, discussion of item (e). The specification that the vase does *not* depict a killing or wounding of the hind disregards the fact that the dehorning of a deer is necessarily painful for the animal.

(b) Attic b.f. mastos (Munich) (Brommer pl. 13 b), slightly more recent than item (a), shows Herakles swinging his club. Brommer feels, however, that obviously no ("sicher nicht") harm is intended. He believes that the club "only" serves to identify Herakles. However, apart from the fact that, even without the club, the scene is recognizable enough, it is hard to see why, if no harm is intended, Herakles actually *swings* a particularly *ferocious looking* club, while grabbing the hind by its right foreleg.

(c) Attic b.f. plate (Oxford) (Brommer pl. 16) antedating 550 B.C., shows Apollo and Herakles aiming their bows at each other. Brommer explains that Artemis, who stands between them, probably seeks to mediate ("wohl vermitteln"). Actually, Artemis' body is represented in a state of tense and violent motion. Her arms are akimbo, with the elbows pressed backward; in the typical gesture "language" of European women, this posture indicates anger. Moreover, Artemis is obviously *screaming*⁶). As for the deer, it is depicted without any horns, i.e., as presumably already dehorned, which suffices to explain Artemis' anger and the incipient struggle between Apollo and Herakles.

(d) B.f. amphora (Würzburg) (Brommer pl. 15 a), end of VI Cent. B.C. Brommer rightly emphasizes the intensity of the

6) A (long overdue) modern catalogue of postures and gestures ("expressive behavior") on Greek monuments would facilitate their correct interpretation (A. de Jorio, *La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gesture*, Naples 1832, is interesting but already obsolete). It would also constitute a major contribution to Greek ethnography, since ethnologists have shown that postural-gestural metacommunication varies from culture to culture (W. La Barre: "Paralinguistics, Kinesics and Cultural Anthropology" (in) Th. A. Sebeok et al. (eds.): *Approaches to Semiotics*, The Hague, 1964). Such a catalogue would, moreover, enable us to trace the history of the Greek system of "kinesics" over a period of nearly 3,000 years. The technique of cataloguing and analysing gestures has already been worked out by ethnologists. The study of expressive behavior, as a psychological phenomenon, goes back at least to Ch. Darwin, *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, (many edd.).

clash, which he compares to representations of the fight for the tripod. In the presence of Athena (holding a sword) and of Artemis (with her bow), Apollo seeks to wrest the animal – carried head downward – from a club-swinging Herakles.

(e) R. f. vase (Louvre) (Brommer pl. 17). Apollo holds his bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right hand. Herakles kneels on the rear portion of the deer's back. He grasps *one* of the deer's horns with *both* hands. Brommer feels that he is simply forcing the animal to its knees. A scrutiny of the play of Herakles' arm muscles does not seem to confirm this interpretation – even if it were possible to force a deer to its knees, by grasping *only one* of its horns. Indeed, it is quite obvious that Herakles' two arms exert force in *opposite directions*. His left hand grasps the horn near the skull; the bulge of his *biceps* muscle shows that this flexor muscle exerts an *upward pull*. The right hand grasps the distal end of the horn. The right arm is not pulling upward but *pushing downward*; the muscle which bulges most conspicuously is the *triceps extensor cubiti*. The play of the muscles therefore conclusively proves that Herakles is engaged in breaking off the animal's horn; he is not, and could not, by using *these* muscles, be forcing the animal to its knees. This is therefore the exact parallel of the *allegedly unique* dehorning scene depicted on item (a).

In brief, especially before the lifetime of Pindaros, representations of scenes of violence between Herakles and the children of Leto were common, both in statuary and in vase painting. Moreover, it is not easy to concur with Brommer that, whenever a deer is present while Apollo and Herakles are struggling, this need *not necessarily* imply that the animal is the Keryneian hind, simply because the deer is one of Apollo's attributes. It is admittedly one of his attributes, albeit only a secondary one. (Moreover, as Furtwängler⁷⁾ indicates, the deer may also have been one of Herakles' original attributes.) Hence, the very *frequency* of the presence of a deer or hart in scenes of struggle between Apollo and Herakles suggests that the Keryneian hind must be meant. Why a deer or a hart should so often be present *also* while Apollo and Herakles are *ostensibly* struggling over the tripod is a relatively unimportant problem. It may conceivably represent an attempt to combine the two clashes into one, or else it may be a means of reminding the spectator also of the

7) Furtwängler l.c. col. 2189.

clash over the Keryneian hind, so as to underline the constant enmity between Apollo and Herakles. Moreover, in view of Apollo's Asiatic affinities, mention should be made of the fact that on some vases the hind is probably not a female red deer, but the spotted (Asiatic) *cervus dama* (Brommer, pll. 13 b, 15 a) even though it is *not* depicted as having palmate horns.

The preceding data clearly indicate that the tradition inherited by Pindaros and his contemporaries is one in which Herakles actually clashes with Apollo (and with Artemis).

Psychological Considerations: If, as is usually done, one interprets δέξαι (Pi. O. 3. 27) as meaning a *friendly* reception, one would have to accept the following, inherently both illogical and unpsychological, sequence of events:

(1) Herakles commits a sacrilege: he captures, kills or de-horns Artemis' Keryneian hind.

(2) *Despite* this sacrilege, Artemis – a notoriously implacable goddess – as well as her brother Apollo – who is one of Herakles' enemies – “welcome” or at least “receive” him.

(3) The very next verse (v. 28) reminds us that Herakles committed this sacrilege because he was ordered by Eurystheus to commit it. This order, Pindaros tells us, Herakles had to carry out, because Zeus' oath to Hera compels Herakles to obey Eurystheus. Had Herakles *already* been “welcomed” by Artemis, a mention of his “alibi” would have been supererogatory. It was, on the other hand, extremely necessary to mention this “alibi”, if Artemis did take him to task for his actions⁸).

(4) In vv. 31 ff. the sacrilegious hero is actually rewarded, or is given a gift by the very deities whom he had offended: Apollo's own Hyperboreans give him the wild olive. Since Herakles repeatedly clashed with Apollo, the leniency of this god is even more startling than is the leniency of Artemis.

A kindly welcome, from the very first moment of the meeting, would be logical and psychologically plausible *only* if v. 28 preceded v. 27; if the “alibi” preceded the “welcome”. Needless to say, the two verses cannot be transposed.

8) It should also be stressed that, in the original version of the myth, Artemis would probably *not* have felt *obliged* to accept this “alibi” as a *valid* excuse. The Erinyes do not accept Orestes' excuse that he was ordered by Apollo to kill his mother. In many early versions of various Greek myths, the decisions of one deity are not binding for another deity, especially where a mere human being, or even a hero, is involved. (E. *Hfi.* 1328 ff. proves this, by (innovatingly) denying it for dramatic reasons.)

Pindaros' Theological Predicament: The tendency of the Theban poet to expunge from traditional myths all that which he deemed to be incompatible with the dignity of the gods, hardly need be recalled. He expressed his reluctance to mention clashes between gods and human beings quite forcibly in *O.* 9. 35 ff. This passage is particularly relevant in the present context, since it, too, specifically pertains to a clash between Apollo and Herakles. On the other hand, it would have been quite awkward for Pindaros to stress Herakles' sacrilege in a poem praising the great deeds of this hero... especially in a poem celebrating the victory of the ruler of the *Dorian* city of Akragas. (It suffices to recall here the "slandering" of Neoptolemos; *Pi. Pae.* 6. 118 vs. *Pi. N.* 7. 61-69, 102-104.) On the other hand, it would have been equally impossible for so pious a poet to represent the gods as actually *rewarding* sacrilege with a kindly welcome and a sacred and desirable gift. Fortunately for Pindaros, the rich vocabulary of the Greek language provided him with the perfect means of sidestepping this thorny issue.

The Ambiguity of δέχομαι: According to Liddell-Scott-Jones, this verb has two – mutually contradictory – meanings.

(1) To welcome (kindly and hospitably).

(2) To receive as an enemy; to await the attack of; to lie in wait for (in a hunting context).

Now, even though Benveniste⁹⁾ recently refuted Abel's¹⁰⁾ theory of the antithetical sense of primal words, he left the psychological core of the conclusions which Freud¹¹⁾ drew from Abel's theory intact and constructively refined them. Thus, what Benveniste says of "sacer" is equally applicable to δέχομαι: "cultural conditions determined with regard [to it] two opposite types of attitudes." Indeed, ethnopsychologically any encounter is a Van Gennep type "rite de passage". Like the encounter-"ritual" of two strange dogs, it has, theoretically, two equally probable, though diametrically opposite, possible outcomes – and has them simultaneously.

It could, of course, be argued that the *primary* meaning of this verb is "to welcome" and that its *secondary* meaning (hostile reception) presupposes a military or hunting context, which is

9) E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale*, Paris 1966, pp. 75-87.

10) K. Abel, *Über den Gegensinn der Urworte*. Leipzig 1885.

11) S. Freud, (Referat, of Abel's monograph), (1910) = *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10, pp. 221-228, 1924 = *Ges. Werke* vol. 8, pp. 214-221, 1943.

needed in order to make it clear that the *secondary* meaning of the word is being exploited. This objection can easily be disposed of, by stating that the definite *tradition* of a hostile encounter between Herakles and Leto's children also provides the type of context which could indicate that the word is being used in the sense of a *hostile* encounter.

Δέχομαι as "hostile encounter". This interpretation of Pi. O. 3.27 has much to recommend it. It is completely in harmony with the tradition transmitted to us by the pre-Pindaros period statuary and vase paintings, and restores the internal logic of the events described by Pindaros:

(1) Herakles lays sacrilegious hands on the Keryneian hind.
 (2) He is therefore immediately taken to task – either physically or verbally – by Artemis and by Apollo (*δέχομαι* = hostile encounter).

(3) Herakles pleads extenuating circumstances (necessity).

(4) As suggested by Wilamowitz¹²), on the basis of an archaic vase painting, Herakles *restores* the hind to Artemis. Wilamowitz' interpretation is extremely attractive, for two reasons (which he does *not* state):

(a) *Every one* of Herakles' *sacrilegious* labors ends in a restoration of the *status quo ante*: Keryneian hind, Erymanthian boar, (perhaps the Cretan bull), the cattle of Geryon, the apples of the Hesperides, Kerberos.

(b) Persephone *lends* Kerberos to Herakles, as Artemis (perhaps) *lent* the hind, to enable Herakles to show it to Eurystheus. (Even his ultimate reconciliation with Hera may echo this theme.)

(5) Herakles' explanations and apologies (and perhaps the restitution of the hind) *then* earn him a friendly welcome. Moreover, in recognition of his piety and loyalty (*πιστὰ φρονέων*, v. 17), he is given a *permanent* gift: The wild olive, representing a paragon. Similarly, the ergon of Kerberos also involves a *permanent* gift: the freeing of Theseus, representing a paragon.

Despite these considerations, the *exclusively* hostile interpretation of the encounter (*δέχομαι*) has an important *theological* flaw; a flaw which Pindaros would have wished to avoid: this flaw consists in the fact that, for a poem purporting to *praise*

12) U. v. Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, Euripides Herakles ³III p. 91, Bad Homburg 1959.

Herakles, the sacrilegious clash would be too strongly emphasized, even if – as in Apollodoros – it involved only a verbal rebuke on the part of Leto's children, and a respectful but dignified statement, on Herakles' part, of certain extenuating circumstances related to the force of necessity (*ἀνάγκη*, v. 28).

The Recourse to Ambiguity: Since Pindaros was first a poet, and only secondarily a theologian, it was easiest for him to reconcile the contradictory claims of tradition, of his wish to glorify Herakles and of the indisputable right of the gods to punish sacrilege, by *poetic* means. It was in his capacity as a poet that Pindaros successfully *exploited* the potentialities inherent in the basic ambiguousness of the verb *δέχομαι*. He used it in such a manner that it implied *both* a hostile *and* a friendly reception, which is *quite different* from saying that he used this word in a *neutral* sense, denoting simply an "encounter" of *some kind*¹³). On the contrary, he fully exploited, for poetic as well as for theological purposes, *both* meanings of this word, *simultaneously*.

This interpretation of Pi. O. 3. 27 has even more to recommend it than has the "hostile" interpretation:

(1) It leaves it up to the audience to decide whether it does, or does not *wish* to recall the tradition of the clash, i. e., whether or not it *prefers* to dwell on the sin of sacrilege *or* on the rewards of heroism. In presenting the listener or the reader with this alternative, Pindaros actually *invites the collaboration* of the listener in determining the meaning of his poem. This is an important and extremely powerful poetic device. It is, moreover, a device which modern *writers*, such as Robbe-Grillet, are only now beginning to exploit systematically, explicitly and consciously, but which *poets* have always resorted to, by using *multivalent* evocative words, as means of triggering off the reader's *own* associations, and of mobilizing the reader's *own* unconscious and preconscious (unbewußt, vorbewußt) emotions and image complexes¹⁴).

13) This is the more probable as I have been unable to locate any *classical* text in which *δέχομαι* is definitely used in an *actively neutral* sense.

14) A good example is E. *Hi.* 231 and 1131: *Enetian* horse. It evokes *both* the poetry of Homeros (*Il.* 2. 852) and of Alkman (*Parth.* 51). It also points in three different directions geographically: Paphlagonia (Hom. *Il.* 2. 852), the Northwest Balkans (Eustath. *ad Il.* 361. 10) and the land of the Veneti (sch. E. *Hi.* 230). Hippolytos is linked with Paphlagonian Enete both through his ancestor Pelops (A. R. 2. 358–9, D. S. 4. 74) and through his Amazon mother. (Amazons on the Thermodon River near Amisos, which – cf. Hekat. fr. 199, FHG I, p. 31 – is Enete.) I note in passing that

(2) From the viewpoint of poetic craftsmanship, it is one of the many, brilliantly successful means whereby Pindaros – like all first rate poets – manages to create an impression of “over-compression” or of “brimmingness” in his poetry, by the use of words and images charged with many-hued, multivalent meanings and haloes of meanings. This multivalence of the poet’s language, vocabulary and imagery is related to the multivalence (“condensation”) which the Dream – the greatest of all poets – also manifests, simply because every one of its elements is heavily over-determined¹⁵).

(3) From the viewpoint of his personal conception of piety, which necessarily included respect for tradition, the use of *δέχομαι*, in an ambiguous *and* double sense, enabled Pindaros to highlight, by means of a single word, both the dignity and benevolence of the gods *and* the rewards of *πίστις* and piety, without being forced to challenge openly Artemis’ right to punish sacrilege or to deny the time-hallowed tradition of a clash.

A detailed study of Pindaros’ brilliant use of ambiguity and multivalence (“obscurity”) – which, in my estimate, accounts for much of his complexity of style – is still to be written. It would contribute a great deal to a better understanding of the greatness of his poetry. It is, moreover, quite likely that, in the development of Pindaros’ art and craftsmanship, the official version of the myth played the same role which the rules of counterpoint play in the art of a Bach or of a Mozart. A tradition – or a rule – which, to the bad artist, is a strait-jacket, and a crutch for the mediocre one, is a challenge to the great artist, to whom it lends additional inspiration¹⁶).

both the scholiast and Eustathios accuse Euripides of an anachronism in giving Hippolytos “Venetic” horses. Nothing proves that E. had Venetic, rather than Paphlagonian Enetic horses in mind. The charge of anachronism is “proved” by a reference to the *first* victory of a *Venetica* team, dated by sch. E. *Hi.* 230 Ol. 89, and by Eusth. l.c. Ol. 85. If Ol. 89 were correct, E.’s *Hi.* having won the prize in Ol. 87. 4 (Argum. ad fin.), his mention of Enetic (= Venetic) horses would have been practically kledonomania, which the scholiast would certainly have noted... but did *not* note. I therefore consider Ol. 89 a copyist’s error and accept Ol. 85, given by Eustath. and antedating E.’s *Hi.*, as the correct date of Leon’s victory. Cf. Herm. 94 (1966) 129 ss.

15) The hellenist will find in E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1951, a psychoanalytically impeccable explanation of the concept of “overdetermination”, together with many illuminating applications of this concept to the analysis of Greek material.

16) For a discussion of the stimulating functions of artistic rules cf.

Nor is that all! In some cases it is possible to show that where Pindaros actually does change the tradition quite radically – for example, when substituting for the cannibalisation of Pelops his abduction by Poseidon (Pi. O. 1. 26) – he only changed the narrative itself, but carefully *preserved the psychological-emotional structure* of the original version: *Anxiety combined with pleasure*¹⁷, thus achieving still another type of ambiguity laden with the magic of great poetry¹⁸.

SUMMARY

(1) The translation of *δέξαι* as “welcome” in Pi. O. 3. 27 is untenable.

(2) In that verse Pindaros exploits to the utmost – both for poetic and for theological purposes – the ambiguous meaning of this verb.

(3) The use to which the ambiguity of this word is put, is a particularly striking example of the exploitation of ambiguity and overdetermination, both by Pindaros the poet and by Pindaros the theologian.

(4) By exploiting the ambiguity of this word, Pindaros preserves intact the basic psychological-affective structure of the original version of the myth.

(5) A systematic study of Pindaros’ use of ambiguity and of his deliberate “complexity” (= obscurity) is long overdue and would assuredly shed new light upon the genius and the craftsmanship of this magnificent poet.

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G. Devereux: *Art and Mythology, a General theory* (in) B. Kaplan (ed.) *Studying Personality Cross-Culturally*. New York, Harper & Row, 1961.

17) The clinical findings of psychoanalysts indicate that children react to *fantasies* of being cannibalised by a mother figure (Demeter), or of having to submit to pederastic advances by a father figure (Poseidon) by “erotized anxiety”. (G. Devereux, *Why Oedipus killed Laius*, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 34 pp. 132–141, 1953. Cf. R. Laforgue, *De l’Angoisse à l’Orgasme*, *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* 4 pp. 245–258, 1930.) It is this *affective* structure which Pindaros, with consummate skill, preserved, even though he changed the narrative itself.

18) For a general theory of the role of ambiguity in poetry cf. W. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, ³ New York 1964. For its psychological implications, cf. Devereux, *Art and Mythology*, l.c.