

Sophia adolos and Trickster Concepts: Pindar *Ol.* 7.53

This puzzling statement (*daenti de kai sophia meizôn adolos telethei*) following the announcement of Athena's gift of *tekhnan* to the highly-skilled Rhodians (*aristoponois kherisi*) and the institution of fireless sacrifices to Athena has itself produced many and varied interpretations that chiefly center around *adolos*, generally understood as 'without trick, without scheme, without guile', but which may according to the scholiasts be understood as 'natural'.

The latter interpretation was vigorously advanced by D. Young (1987) by reference to Horace's reception of *Carm.* 4.4.33, *doctrina sed vim promovet insitam* ('learning promotes inborn force'), and accepted by W. Race in his 1997 Loeb translation ('native talent'). Yet the sentiment which Pindar would be expressing in the communication of 'native talent' would be fluent and suitable (perhaps even inspirational?) not only in this ode but in many another context as well. Its specific meaning is not clearly connected to the context of *Ol.* 7.

On the other hand, *dolos*, negated in 7.53 (*adolos*), does have interesting connections with gods, goddesses, and events conspicuously present and conspicuously absent in the narration beginning with Athana's birth in 7.35ff. Significantly absent is any reference to Zeus's having swallowed *Mêtis* 'Cunning' as mother of Athana. The skills *tekhnaisin* are however present (7.35) as well as a snow shower of gold.

Immediately afterward, Helios ordered the Rhodians to perform a sacrifice to Athana and to Zeus, for which the fire was overlooked. *Promatheus* 'forethought' (Titan or concept?) was absent. Following the fireless sacrifice, a rain of gold fell upon the island by Zeus's agency.

Fire for sacrifice, necessary as well for exploiting the gold, and especially 'forethought' evoke Hesiod's Prometheus' deceit of Zeus in *Theogony*, where words for deceit, scheming, and slyness are quite frequent. Prometheus is *aiolomêtin* (511) and *agkulomêtis* (546); *tekhne* is

described as *doliê* in 540, 547, 555, and 560. Such characterizations as these have been related to the trickster figures in many cultures and mythologies, and such comparative studies identify the commonalities of scheme, guile, fire theft, metallurgy, and the personality trait paradox of slyness and stupidity, seen in the fraternal pair of Prometheus and Epimetheus. The refinement, sophistication, and expansiveness of such studies in recent years have invited attention to details not always regarded as significant in the characterization of various Greek mythological figures involved in trickery which benefited humans but which brought subsequent trouble upon themselves (Hyde 2010, Scheub 2013, et al.)

Significantly absent from the Prometheus narrative in *Theogony* is *sophie*, whose presence in Homer is conspicuous by uniqueness in *Iliad* 15.412, where its meaning is ‘skill’ rather than ‘wisdom.’ In a shipbuilding simile, we hear of a learned workman (*tektonos...daêmonos*) influenced by promptings of skill (*sophiê*) from Athena. Similarly, in *Erga* 649 Hesiod speaks of himself as ‘skilled’ (*sesophismenos*) neither in seafaring nor in boats. West’s note *ad loc.* provides other examples of *sophiê* as “technical skill.” Additionally, *h.Merc* 483 collocates *tekhnêi...sophiêi...dedaêmenos* in describing a player of the newly invented lyre.

As if such frames of reference were not sufficient for bringing an epic perspective to the interpretation of *Ol.* 7.53, Ruck and Matheson (p.60) propose to see in Pindar’s account of the birth of Athana surrounded by gold showers an exegesis of *Il.* 2.653-670 that “corrects the tradition.” For in the Catalog of Ships the Rhodians are led by Tlepolemos, who bringing settlers of Rhodes are showered with prodigious wealth by Zeus: *kai sphin thespesion plouton katekheue Kroniôn* (670).

From Pindar's Athana, then, we conclude that "guileless, trickless skill" was made available to a learned practitioner. But in "tricklessness," is reference made to the Telchines, the Rhodian metallurgic wizards, in the figures of moving beings of 7.52?

Young (1987) emphatically denies any association of the Telchines with Rhodes until after Callimachus (p.153). Blakley in her 2006 comprehensive study *Myth, Ritual, and Metallurgy*... posits such an identification in "which scholars since the nineteenth century – and presumably Pindar's contemporaries – recognized as the Telchines of Rhodes" (p.215). In the light of more recent comparative trickster studies, material on each side of this vigorously debated presumption will also be assayed in this proposed presentation.

Bibliography

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