

## Pindar's *ὄπλων κρίσις*: Ajax and Athens in Three Aeginetan Odes

Three times Pindar addresses Ajax's loss in the Judgment of the Arms and suicide: *Nem.* 7.20-30, *Nem.* 8.22-34, and *Isth.* 4.37-43. In *Nem.* 7 and *Nem.* 8, Pindar rejects Homeric tradition and recasts Ajax's demise as the narrative of a noble warrior who was cheated by Odysseus' rhetorical cunning. Pindar also charges Homeric poetry with the unfair outcome of the Judgment, conflating it with Odysseus' reputation for "lies and winged artifice" that "deceive us with its stories" (*Nem.* 7. 20-24). Whereas the Homeric account includes Athena as a persuading influence on the Judgment (*Od.* 11.546-7), Pindar omits her role altogether and indicates that it was Odysseus who cheated Ajax, an idea unattested up until this point.

My paper argues that Pindar revises the Homeric account and uses it as subtext for the contemporary political *agon* between Athens and Aegina, due to his Aeginetan aristocratic sympathies. I suggest that Pindar exploits the injustice of Ajax's loss in the Judgment of the Arms, and proposes that Odysseus defrauded him, in order to diminish Athenian political dominance in the Saronic Gulf. By casting Aegina as the cheated aristocratic Ajax, overshadowed by democratic Athens as the unscrupulous Odysseus, Pindar sponsors Aegina in its territorial claims against the Athenians.

Whereas Pindar often appeals to the authority of poetic tradition in his mythmaking, he sometimes faults it with inaccuracy due to envy, human error, or the embellishments of poets (Bulman 1992). Pindar's own political sensibilities may play a sizeable role in the revisions that he presents as more truthful. Scholarship has often addressed Pindaric mythmaking and its connection to contemporary political matters (Howie 1983, Segal 1986, Nagy 2010). While scholars have downplayed political allusion to the Ajax myth in Pindar's poetry (Köhnken 1971,

Pippin 2005), more recently they have found ways to incorporate his mythmaking with constructions of sociohistorical identity (Fearn 2010, Indergaard 2010, Pavlou 2012). My paper reconsiders the myth of the Judgment of the Arms as Pindar presents it in *Nem.7*, *Nem.8*, and *Isthm.4*, in light of its relevance to ideas of sociohistorical identity and suggests that Pindar advocated for a particular version of the Ajax myth in order to promote Aeginetan claims against Athens.

### Bibliography

- Bulman, P. 1992. *Phthonos in Pindar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burnett, Anne P. 2005. *Pindar's Songs for Young Athletes of Aigina*. Oxford.
- Fearn, D.W. (ed.) 2010. *Aegina: Contexts for Choral Lyric Poetry: Myth History and Identity in the Fifth Century BC*. Oxford.
- Howie, J. G. 1983. 'The Revision of Myth in Pindar *Olympian 1*' *PLLS 4*, pp.277-313.
- Indergaard, H. 2010. 'Thebes, Aegina, and the Temple of Aphaia: A Reading of Pindar's *Isthmian 6*', in Fearn (ed.) 2011. 294-322
- Köhnken. 1971. *Die Funktion des Mythos bei Pindar*. Berlin/ New York.
- Nagy, G. 2010. 'Asopos and his Multiple Daughters: Traces of Preclassical Epic in the Aeginetan Odes of Pindar, Fearn (ed.) 2010. 41-78.
- Pavlou, Mary. 2012. 'Pindar and the Reconstruction of the Past', in Marincola, Llewellyn-Jones, and Maciver (eds.) 2012. 95-112, *Greek Notions of the Past in the Archaic and Classical Eras*. Edinburgh.
- Segal, C. 1986. *Pindar's Mythmaking: The Fourth Pythian Ode*. Princeton.

