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The Emblems of Excellence in Pindar's First and Third *Olympian Odes* and Bacchylides' Third *Epinician*

ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, ὃ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ
ἄτε διαπρέπει νυκτὶ μέγανος ἕξοχα πλούτου·
εἰ δ' ἄεθλα γαρούεν
ἔλδαι, φίλον ἦτορ,
μηκέτ' ἀελίου σκόπει
ἄλλο θαλπνότερον ἐν ἀμέρῃ φαεινὸν ἄστρον ἐρήμας δι' αἰθέρος,
μηδ' Ὀλυμπίας ἀγῶνα φέρτερον αὐδάσομεν.

Water is most excellent, and gold, like blazing fire,
appears prominent in the night, beyond all lordly wealth.
But if you wish to sing of contests,
dear heart, do not look for
another star shining by day warmer than the sun in the desert sky,
nor may we name a better contest than Olympia¹.

According to the received opinion, at the beginning of the first *Olympian Ode*, Olympia is praised as one in a series of four things, each of which is pre-eminent in its sphere of existence: water, gold, the sun, and the Olympic Games. So already the first scholium on the passage, leaving out the sun or rather equating it with Olympia². Their intrinsic, ethical, or ideal value, that of being 'best', is considered to be the matter that connects the three natural or elemental entities with the civic organisation, which is understood to be linked to the former as an equal in excellence, without suggestion of the sun or Olympia excelling in particular³. 'Excellence' of different kind is the sole meaning of the symbolism. «Much in P. is merely foil», Gildersleeve dryly remarks⁴.

I will here argue that the received opinion might be partly mistaken; that the sun, being in this context the symbol or representative of Olympia, should be understood as excelling over water and gold; and that the two lesser entities carry particular, allusive symbolic significance in addition to representing superior distinction. (Nothing will be added on the subject of the *priamel*, which has received its fair share of attention during the last century⁵.)

¹ The translation aims to be literal; eccentric details will be the topic of discussion.

² Schol. Pind. *Ol.* 1a τρία ἐν ἀνθρώποις ὁ Πίνδαρος ἄριστα εἶναι λέγει· ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ εἰς τὸ ζῆν, οὗ ἄνευ βιοτεύειν ἀδύνατον· εἶτα χρυσὸν ἐν πλούτῳ τῶν ἄλλων χρημάτων ἐκπρέποντα καθάπερ ἐν νυκτὶ πῦρ· πρὸς δὲ δόξαν τὴν Ὀλυμπίασι νίκην. 'Three things among men Pindar says are best. Water is best with regard to life, it being impossible to live without it; gold, in turn, among riches, appearing prominent before other wealth like a fire in the night; but when it comes to glory, the victory in the Olympic Games'.

³ E.g. Gerber 1982, 3 f.

⁴ Gildersleeve 1890, 129.

⁵ Select bibliography by Gerber 1982, 6 f.

The comparison between gold, water and a third, which is not explicitly named but symbolized by the Pillars of Heracles, recurs, probably in derivative form, at the end of the third *Olympian Ode* (42-5):

εἰ δ' ἀριστεύει μὲν ὕδωρ, κτεάνων δὲ χρυσὸς αἰδοιέστατος,
νῦν δὲ πρὸς ἔσχατιάν Θήρων ἀρεταῖσιν ἰκάνων ἄπτεται
οἴκοθεν Ἡρακλέος σταλᾶν. τὸ πόρσω δ' ἔστι σοφοῖς ἄβατον
κάσφοις.

If water is superior, and of possessions gold is the most venerable,
then Theron now through his virtues attains the utmost limit, and grasps
from home the Pillars of Heracles. That which is further is untrodden by wise
and unwise.

Theron's achievement is the victory in an Olympic contest, and most of the third *Olympian Ode* is devoted to a narrative that depicts Heracles as the founder of the Olympic Games. Hence the Pillars of Heracles ought here to allude to Olympia, while at the same time representing the limits of human endeavour. While the physical 'pillars' at Gibraltar mark a geographical limit, the symbolical pillars represent an absolute, ideal limit for human aspirations: the Olympic victory.

In the first and third *Olympian Odes*, then, water and gold are juxtaposed with Olympia in a comparison which is not unfavourable to the latter (despite the superlative afforded to water: see below). There is nothing wrong in seeing water and gold as representatives of excellence, which is explicitly stated for the case of water in both poems, but the reason for suspecting that a specific, concrete symbolism is also intended, is that in the context of places and contests, gold and water carry ready associations in antiquity. I contend that each of the two elements would make an informed contemporary audience associate to a particular location, one of them twice named πολύχρυσος by Pindar, the other called εὔυδρος and πολυπίδαξ by Simonides and πόντιος, ἀμφιάλος and ἄλιερκής by Pindar.

Gold, first, was a prominent feature and frequent poetical attribute of the seat of the Pythian Games, Delphi, with its immense dedicatory riches. The earliest extant literary example is the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*⁶:

εἶμι γὰρ εἰς Πυθῶνα μέγαν δόμον ἀντιτορήσων·
ἔνθεν ἄλις τρίποδας περικαλλέας ἠδὲ λέβητας
πορθήσω καὶ χρυσόν.

For I shall go to Pytho to break into the great house,
whence an abundance of beautiful tripods and cauldrons
I shall plunder, and gold.

Gold is the standard attribute of Delphi and the Pythian sanctuary in Pindar, Bacchylides and the tragedians, πολύχρυσος being a particularly common epithet. Cf. Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 4.53 πολυχρύσωι ποτ' ἐν δώματι Φοῖβος, 6.8 f.

⁶ Vv. 178-80. *Il.* 9.404 f. and *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 531-9 celebrate the wealth of Delphi without mentioning gold.

πολυχρύσοι Ἀπολλωνίᾳ [...] νάπᾳ, *Raean* 6.1 f. χρυσέα κλυτόμαντι Πυθοῖ, and Bacchylides, *Epinician* 3.17-21:

λάμπει δ' ὑπὸ μαρμαρυγαῖς ὁ χρυσός,
ὑψιδαιδάλτων τριπόδων σταθέντων
πάροιθε ναοῦ, τόθι μέγιστον ἄλσος
Φοίβου παρὰ Κασταλίας ῥεέθροις
Δελφοὶ διέπουσι.

With sparkles shines the gold
of tripods, high and richly wrought, which stand
before the temple, where the grove most great
of Phoebus by Castalia's stream
the Delphians serve.

See also Herodotus 1.14.50-2, 54 for picturesque descriptions of the Pythian gold. Further poetical examples are Bacchylides, *Epinician* 3.65 f. χρυσὸν Λοξιάϊ πέμψαι, Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 151 τᾶς πολυχρύσου Πυθῶνος, Euripides, *Andromache* 1093, *Ion* 54, 146, 157, 434 f., 909, and Callimachus, *Hymn* 2.32-5⁷:

χρῦσα τ' Ὀπόλλωνι τό τ' ἐνδυτὸν ἢ τ' ἐπιπορπίς
ἢ τε λύρη τό τ' ἄεμμα τὸ Λύκτιον ἢ τε φαρέτρη,
χρῦσα καὶ τὰ πέδιλα· πολύχρυσος γὰρ Ἀπόλλων
καὶ πουλκτέανος· Πυθῶνι κε τεκμήραιο.

Golden are Apollo's garment and his cloak,
his lyre, his Lyctian bow, his quiver,
even his sandals are golden: for rich in gold is Apollo
and rich in goods: from Pytho you would conclude as much.

In lyrical poetry, Pindar in particular, Apollo is also described as having golden hair; prominently so in a passage from the seventh *Isthmian Ode* where the wording could suggest an allegorical hint at the Delphic treasures⁸:

ἄμμι δ', ὧ χρυσέᾳ κόμᾳ θάλλων, πόρε, Λοξία,
τεαῖσιν ἀμίλλαισιν
εὐανθέα καὶ Πυθόι στέφανον.

Bring us, Loxias, flourishing with golden hair,
in your contests
at Pytho also the flowery crown.

H.L. Lorimer has suggested that this attribute, and indeed all golden compound epithets used to describe gods, originally take their inspiration from cult statues⁹.

⁷ Further refs. by Jebb on Soph. *OT* 151.

⁸ Also Pind. *Isthm.* 7.49-51. Cf. *Ol.* 6.41; 7.32, *Pyth.* 2.16, *Pae.* 5.41, Bacchyl. 4.2, Alc. S1 *PMGF*, Sappho 208 Voigt (ap. Himer. *Or.* 46), *Orac.* ap. Tyrt. 4 *IEG*², *Ion FGrHist* 392 F 6, Eur. *Supp.* 975, *Tro.* 254, *IT* 1236, *Ion* 885-90, Ar. *Av.* 216.

Apollo is more consistently golden-haired than any other god, and in the case of Delphi the inner sanctum of the temple, from where an Apollo χρυσοκόμας of Pindar once utters an oracle, housed his golden idol¹⁰.

All major gods, and almost exclusively gods, have golden attributes in Greek lyrical poetry, in particular in Pindar, but none in greater abundance and with greater consistency than Apollo, who apart from his hair is given by our poet also a golden phorminx, a golden sword (or possibly lyre), a golden plectrum, a golden chariot, and even, as later Callimachus, a golden bow, in opposition to Homer and the epic tradition which invariably speak of him as ἀργυρότοξος¹¹. Pindar attributes the golden bow to the specifically Pythian Apollo, perhaps alluding to a cult image (see n. 10). Callimachus may also view the golden bow as characteristic for the Pythian Apollo, suggesting that he killed the serpent with it¹².

A peculiar detail of a Pythian foundation myth may also be mentioned as adding to the picture of Delphi as the land of gold: according to this myth, preserved in a letter attributed to Thessalus, son of Hippocrates, the games are celebrated partly in honour of one Χρύσος (Gold), buried in the hippodrome¹³.

Water, in turn, in the first place suggests Isthmus, the «neck of land between two seas» (*LSJ*) and home of Poseidon: *Olympian Ode* 13.40 ἀμφιάλοισι Ποτειδᾶνος τεθμοῖσιν (i.e., the Isthmian games), *Isthmian Odes* 1.9 f. τὰν ἀλιερκῆα Ἴσθμοῦ δειράδα, 4.19 f. ὁ κινήτηρ δὲ γᾶς Ὀγγηστὸν οἰκέων καὶ γέφυραν ποντιάδα πρὸ Κορίνθου τειχέων, etc.¹⁴. The Isthmian games were celebrated in honour of Poseidon and, according to the foundation myth, the drowned (and in some versions boiled) boy Melicertes, deified as Palaemon, protector of seafarers in storm¹⁵. His mother Ino, who took him with her into the sea, became the sea goddess Leucothea, an honorary member of the Nereid family with a role to play in the *Odyssey*¹⁶.

⁹ Lorimer 1936.

¹⁰ Pind. *Ol.* 7.32, Philoch. *FGrHist* 328 F 7, Paus. 10.24.5. Frazer on Paus. loc.cit. argues that it must not have been older than the third Sacred War (356-346 B.C.), «else the Phocians would probably have put it in the melting pot». But Pindar's expression seems to me to allude to a statue. Perhaps the statue was originally fitted with a bow, which would explain *Ol.* 14.10 f.; if that is the case, Frazer may be correct about the melting, since later images on coins, taken to be representations of the statue, show no bow (Frazer *ibid.*).

¹¹ *Pyth.* 1.1 χρυσῆα φόρμιγγῆ, 5.104 χρυσάορα, 9.6 χρυσέωι ... δίφρωι, *Nem.* 5.24 χρυσέωι πλάκτρωι, *Ol.* 14.10 χρυσότοξον. (ἀργυρότοξος: 11x *Il.*, 3x *Od.*, 6x *Hymn. Hom.*, Hes. fr. 185.9 M-W, Panyas. 3 *PEG*).

¹² Callim. *Hymn* 2.97-104.

¹³ [Hippoc.] *Ep.* 27 (IX 410-4 Littré). Cf. Davies 2007, 50 f., who suggests that this «if anything looks ... towards ... Dionysos». Philoch. *FGrHist* 328 F 7 is our earliest source for the claim that the grave of Dionysus lay next to the golden statue of Apollo in the inner sanctum of the temple in Delphi (see *supra* text for n. 10). According to Callim. fr. 643 Pf. and Euphor. 13 Pow. (ap. schol. Lycoph. 207), Apollo had himself buried him next to the tripod.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ol.* 8.48 f. Ὀρσοτρίαινα δ' ἐπ' Ἴσθμῶι ποντιάι ἄρμα θεὸν τάνυεν; 13.4 f. Κόρινθον, Ἴσθμίου πρόθυρον Ποτειδᾶνος, *Isthm.* 1.32; 2.13 f.; 6.5 f., *Nem.* 5.36 f., Simon. 861 f. *FGE* (AP 13.19.5 f.), Eumel. *Cor.* 8 *PEG*, Aesch. *Isthm.* fr. 78a.18-22; 78c.46 f. *TrGF*, and the later instances cited in the Appendix, n. 109.

¹⁵ Pind. fr. 5 f. Maehler; schol. Pind. *Isthm.* hyp. a-d (III 192-5 Drachmann); cf. Hellenic. *FGrHist* 4 F 165; 323a F 15, *Trag. adesp.* 100 f. *TrGF*, Eur. *IT* 270, *Ino* fr. 398-423 *TrGF*; further refs. by Frazer 1921, I 320 n. 3.

¹⁶ *Od.* 5.333-65, Pind. *Ol.* 2.28-30, *Pyth.* 11.2, Burkert 1972, 199 f.

Pindar has the Nereids appear before Sisyphus, king of Corinth, who according to the scholia had found and buried the mortal remains of Melicertes, enjoining him to found the Isthmian games¹⁷.

Even more important for a place that is to be emblematically represented by water, Corinth on the Isthmus was of all Greek cities the one most renowned for its fresh water. The first distich of the epitaph attributed to Simonides over the Corinthians fallen at Salamis reads¹⁸:

ὦ ξειν', εὐυδρόν ποκ' ἐναίομες ἄστν Κορίνθου,
νῦν δ' ἄμ' Αἴαντος νᾶσος ἔχει Σαλαμῖς.

Stranger, once we inhabited the well-watered town of Corinth,
but now the isle of Ajax, Salamis, keeps us.

For εὐυδρόν, 'well-watered', Campbell suggested that it is «the harbours of Corinth that the dead sailors recall»; whereas Page observes that the pride of Corinth, Peirene, was «the most famous of fountains in Greek cities»¹⁹. But as hinted already by Cougny, the epithet does not allude to the sea and/or Peirene exclusively²⁰. Ancient Corinth exhibited what seems to have been an unparalleled number of freshwater springs and fountains, several of them mentioned by name in ancient literature, with one or two (including Peirene) on record as contestants for the best drinking water in the entire inhabited world (see the Appendix). Corinth also had «what must have been one of the most extensive underground water systems in the ancient world»²¹, in the earliest period consisting of tunnels cut out from the rock and clay under the ground, supplying a remarkable abundance of wells and artificial fountains in the town²².

M.E. Landon has demonstrated this characteristic aspect of Corinth in a synthesis of a large number of archaeological studies, beginning with Fiedler in 1840, but with the major part relating to the American excavations of the city during the twentieth century²³. Landon lists twenty-four discovered natural springs and nine ancient artificial fountains or fountain houses in the town, offering a scholarly bibliography for each. He observes that «more than 500 ancient and medieval wells, manholes and cisterns have been recorded at the site, and most of those from the central excavation zone, which represents only a small fraction of the city's total area»²⁴. Intended as a modest supplement to the work of Landon, I present in this article a

¹⁷ Pind. + schol. loc.cit. n. 15. Cf. *Ol.* 13.52.

¹⁸ *FGE* 720 f., *App.anth.* 2.4.1 f. ap. Plut. *De mal. Hdt.* 870e, [Dio Chrys.] (Favorin.) *Or.* 37.18.

¹⁹ Campbell 1967, 398; Page 1981, 203.

²⁰ Cougny 1890, 225, adducing Livy 45.28 to the verse (see Append.). Cf. Campbell 1991, 529, Petrovic 2007, 150, Salmon 1984, 19, and further refs. concerning the fresh water of Corinth in what follows and the Appendix.

²¹ Wiseman 1969, 75.

²² Landon 2003, 44, *passim*.

²³ Landon 2003, *ad l.*, Fiedler 1841, 241-4. The American excavations are documented in several issues of *Hesperia* and, in particular, in the series "Corinth" (1929-), both publications of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Of particular interest here may be Hill 1964.

²⁴ Landon 2003, 55.

review of a number of instances of Corinthian sweet water mentioned in ancient literature. The most ancient passages will be discussed immediately in the following, whereas those postdating Pindar are relegated to an Appendix.

Whether the Corinthian epitaph cited above is really by Simonides is widely doubted, although it is not perhaps entirely out of the question²⁵. That the date (ca. 480 B.C.) is accurate is hardly in doubt, as the stone has been found²⁶. Another early reference to the Corinthian fresh water occurs in an elegiac fragment attributed to the same author, at the time of writing generally accepted as authentic:

μέσσοι δ' οἷ γ' Ἐφύρην πολυπίδακα ναιετάοντες
παντοίης ἀρετῆς ἴδιοι ἐν πολέμοι,
οἷ τε πόλιν Γλαύκοιο, Κορίνθιον ἄστρῳ νέμονται,
< – ☐ > κάλλιστον μάρτυρ ἐθέεντο πόνων
χρυσοῦ τιμηέντος ἐν αἰθέρι²⁷.

In the midst, the inhabitants of Ephyra, rich in fountains,
possessing varied prowess in war,
who share the city of Glaucus, the Corinthian town,
< > found the most beautiful witness to their toil,
the witness of glorious gold in the clear sky.

As (pseudo-?)Plutarch, who cites these verses, and other poets, historians and grammarians agree²⁸, 'Ephyra' is already in the archaic period a poetical name for Corinth, even if this identification was based on a misreading of Homer, perhaps the innovation of a pseudepigraphic 'Eumelus' in the sixth century²⁹. At any rate, the identification is secure in Pindar, since Sisyphus, the king of Ephyra in Homer, is

²⁵ No 'Simonidean' epigram is authentic save perhaps one or possibly five, not including this one, according to the until recently *communis opinio* (see Petrovic 2007, 25-51, Page 1981, 119-23). But Petrovic presents (153-7) what seems like balanced and reasonable arguments in favour of a «very probable or at least probable» authenticity of this epigram.

²⁶ *IG* I³ 1143, containing only remains of the first distich, which however may be due to material deterioration (Boegehold 1965). If the date has been doubted, it is as too recent: due to the archaic and somewhat peculiar letter forms, it has been suggested that the stone commemorates a battle ca. 600 B.C. rather than the famous one against the Persians, the following distich found in literary sources being accordingly spurious (Carpenter 1963, 81-3).

²⁷ Simon. 15-16.2 *IEG*², *App.anth.* 3.6.1-5. γ' Ἐφύραν B : γέφυραν E. I fail to see merit in altering γ' into τ'. The limiting or epexegetic force of the particle is in accordance with the use of the alternative, pseudo-Homeric name and the articular οἱ, whereas τ' disrupts the syntax and makes further emendation necessary (νέμονται Ald.). The following οἷ τε is 'Homeric' with the force of *quippe qui*: cf. Pind. *Ol.* 14.2 Καφισίων ὑδάτων λαχοῖσαι, ταί τε ναίετε καλλίπυλον ἔδραν, Denniston 1954, 521-4. The paradosis μέσσοισι at the beginning may be a case of assimilation to Plutarch's preceding τούτοις in combination with quasi-dittography of a script where the sigma has a rounded form (-οι{σι}), perhaps abetted by the Byzantine pronunciation of -σοι as *si*. μέσσοι (Turnebus *in marg. libri sui teste* Plut. edd.) may therefore be a likelier correction than μέσσοις (West, *IEG*¹).

²⁸ Plut. *De mal. Hdt.* 872d; cf., e.g., Eumel. fr. 3, 8 *PEG*, *FGrHist* 451 F 1 f., Epimenid. *FGrHist* 457 F 11, Callim. fr. 59.9; 384.4 Pf.

²⁹ *Il.* 6.152-9, 210. 'Eumelus' understands the Homeric Ἐφύρη of Sisyphus as Corinth for the purpose of adding Homeric precedence to the otherwise barely noted city: see Eumel. *l.cit.* n. 28, Jacoby *ad l.* (*FGrHist* vol. 3b), and West 2002.

now associated with Corinth (see above), and in this poem referring to Glaucus, the son of Sisyphus³⁰. In the early fifth century, literary Corinth is accordingly ‘well-watered’ and ‘rich in fountains’. Of course this was not a novelty at the time, but in fact likely to have been one of the reasons for the Corinthian settlement in the first place³¹. The wild celery that crowned the victors in the Isthmian games in Pindar’s time is also associated with water in literature, as Pindar may himself hint (see further below on the Nemean games)³².

The rest of the instances mentioning either the fresh water of Corinth in general or individual springs are later than Pindar, with two exceptions: Pindar himself, who in the thirteenth *Olympian Ode* acknowledges that Corinth is ‘the town of Peirene’ and tells the story of the Pegasus, which was captured by Bellerophon at the spring; and a Pythian oracle in Herodotus, allegedly from the time of Eëtion, that is, early seventh century, which defines the Corinthians as those ‘who live by the beautiful Peirene’³³. See further the Appendix.

The proposition, then, is that gold and water are veiled allusions to the Pythian and (primarily) Isthmian games, respectively, in both the first and the third *Olympian Odes*, whereas the sun and the pillars of Heracles represent Olympia. As for water being ‘best’, we will address this apparent contradiction in the second part of the article, after a brief look at Bacchylides and an apology for selling the Nemean games somewhat short.

Indeed the Nemean were the youngest and least important of the four contests³⁴, and their absence from a showcase of excellence – as in the *aitia* presented by a scholium on the Isthmian odes³⁵ – need not be a major cause for scandal. However, geographically close neighbours, the biannual Nemean and Isthmian games are often mentioned as a more or less united pair in comparison with the two greater contests³⁶, and as a matter of fact, Nemea carries as distinct (if not as exuberant) water associations as does the Isthmus, being not only a valley but a river, and a water nymph³⁷. The foundation myth of the Nemean games features a fresh-water

³⁰ The wording might suggest some sort of distinction between Ephyra and Corinth here, at least if we read, with most editors but against the mss., οἱ τ’ in the first verse (see n. 27). It has been suggested that Simonides takes ἄστν in the sense of the lower town (as in Herodotus and older Attic), distinguishing this from Ephyra, which would be the citadel or Acrocorinth, which was indeed particularly renowned, at least in later times, for its many fountains (see Append.). Cf. Hdt. 1.176, *LSJ* s.vv. ἄστν I 2, πόλις I 1; III 2. (πόλιν Γλαύκοιο could then refer to the political entity once ruled by Glaucus, the city state.) So Rutherford 2001, *ad l.*, whereas Schneidewin 1835, 83 less convincingly suggests the opposite relationship. Cf. Simon. 91 (596) *PMG* ap. schol. Ap. Rhod. 4.1212-4.

³¹ Salmon 1984, 19.

³² Pind. *Ol.* 2.73.

³³ Pind. *Ol.* 13.63-86 (cf. Strabo 8.6.21, Paus. 2.4.1), Hdt. 5.92 β.

³⁴ Meier 1893, 844; Schroeder 1923, 54; Farnell 1961, 242; Amandry 1990, 279.

³⁵ Schol. Pind. *Isthm.* hyp. a (III 192 Drachmann).

³⁶ Cf. Pind. *Ol.* 13.32 f., 98, *Nem.* 10.26, *Isthm.* 5.17 f.; 8.4, Bacchyl. 8.17, Pl. *Leg.* 950e, Lys. 19.63, Paus. 6.4.2, 16.5, Anon.hist. *FGrHist* 257a F 4, Euphor. 84 Pow. and Callim. fr. 59.6-9 Pf. (*Suppl.Hell.* 265), the last two cited by Plut. *Quaest.conv.* 677a-b.

³⁷ Nemea the nymph is mentioned in late sources but also by Aesch. fr. 149a *TrGF*. According to Plut. *Alc.* 16.5, she was painted by Aristophon, the brother of Polygnotus.

spring, the Adrasteia or Langeia near the stadium³⁸, and the river, or at this point rather brook, «fed by the numerous rills which descend from the neighbouring hills», furnishes in combination with rains the Nemean valley with marshland vegetation³⁹. According to Dissen, ὕδωρ δ' ἄλλα φέρβει, juxtaposed in *Olympian Ode* 2.72 f. with ἄνθεμα δὲ χρυσοῦ φλέγει (water and gold yet again), alludes to the wild celery garlands which in Pindar's time were the prizes in both the Isthmian and the Nemean games, the plant thriving on wet soil, growing on marshland and in the vicinity of water in poetic tradition and called 'marsh celery' by Greek botanic scholars⁴⁰. It grows by the Nemean spring and plays a role in the Nemean foundation myth in one of its (late) versions⁴¹. Nemea therefore belongs to the domain indicated by the emblem of water, but as a secondary, subordinate part, as the Nemean games are secondary to the Isthmian.

Towards the end of the third *Epinician* (85-92), Bacchylides offers what is usually taken to be an imitation of the opening of the first *Olympian Ode*. Here the sun is replaced by the aether:

φρονέοντι συνετὰ γαρούω· βαθὺς μὲν
αἰθὴρ ἀμίαντος· ὕδωρ δὲ πόντου
οὐ σάπεται· εὐφροσύνα δ' ὁ χρυσός·
ἀνδρὶ δ' οὐ θέμις, πολὺν παρέντα
γῆρας, θάλειαν αὖτις ἀγκομίσσαι
ἦβαν· ἀρετᾶς γε μὲν οὐ μινύθει
βροτῶν ἅμα σώματι φέγγος, ἀλλὰ
Μοῦσά νιν τρέφει.

Let me speak that which is comprehensible to the intelligent man. The deep sky is without stain. The water of the sea does not rot. Gold is mirth.

For a man though, it is not allowed to let grey age pass, and bring back again plentiful youth. But of the worth of mortals does not the light wane with their body, but the Muse nourishes it.

³⁸ On the spring, see Meyer 1935, 2321, Frazer on Paus. 2.15.3. Pindar makes no allusion to this foundation myth in the preserved odes and fragments, the earliest source being *Hypsipyle* by Euripides: on the significance of the spring see Eur. fr. 752h.29-32; 753; 754a.1 *TrGF*. Most sources are late, Statius in the fourth and fifth books of the *Thebaid* being most comprehensive (although eccentric in details); see esp. 4.680-850; 5.505-703. Kannicht in *TrGF* V.2 739-41 and Bond 1963, 147-9 offer full lists of references to mythographers and scholia.

³⁹ Frazer on Paus. 2.15.2 (III 89-90).

⁴⁰ Dissen 1847, *ad l.* 'Marsh celery': *Il.* 2.776 ἐλεόθρεπτον ... σέλινον, Theoc. 13.39-42, Nic. *Ther.* 597, Verg. *G.* 4.121, Hor. *Carm.* 2.7.23 f. *udo* ... *apio*, ἔλειον σέλινον or ἐλειοσέλινον in Speusipp. 6 Tarán (ap. Ath. 2.61c), Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 4.8.1; 7.6.3; 9.11.10, Dioscor. 3.64.2, Poll. 1.183. See Teodorsson 1990, 163-5, 170 f., 173 f., for learned notes on the celery and an assessment of the evidence for a pine crown predating the celery crown at the Isthmia.

⁴¹ Hyg. *Fab.* 74.

The initial words φρονέοντι συνετὰ γάρωω suggest that these images have a particular, hidden meaning. As Maehler observes, the expression is not quite equivalent to the passages in Homer, Pindar and Aeschylus where recipients of utterances are identified as εἰδότες, ‘knowing’⁴². In our case, as in *Olympian Ode* 2.85, Theognis 681 f., *Sammelbuch* V 8026.20, the spoken words are instead given esoteric status, being comprehensible to the few, who are not εἰδότες, already in possession of the given information, but φρονέοντες, συνετοί, σοφοί, συνιέντες, that is, *intelligent*, able to understand that which is not immediately clear⁴³.

The hitherto proposed symbolical interpretations of the elements in Bacchylides do not seem to me to qualify as the sort of enigma or esoteric lore that one expects with this kind of expression, and finds in the three examples referenced above⁴⁴. We shall instead attempt to apply the suggested symbolical scheme from Pindar on the verses. If 86 αἰθήρ answers to αἰθέρος in *Olympian Ode* 1.6, it may here represent Olympia, not only with reference to the Pindaric example, but also because of the central position held by Zeus, intimately associated with the element of αἰθήρ⁴⁵, at the Olympian sanctuary and Games⁴⁶. Construction of the great Temple of Zeus had begun in 472 B.C., four years before the Olympic victory of Hieron that occasioned Bacchylides’ poem. The water is explicitly that of the sea, which could indicate the Isthmus of Poseidon, and the gold of Delphi has been mentioned twice before in this ode (cited above), the dedicatory gifts of Croesus and Hiero to the Pythian sanctuary being one of its central motifs. ‘Gold is mirth’ is difficult and much discussed, however. With regard to the Pythian games, a particular note of festivity does adhere to them in comparison with the other games, as their musical contests were especially prominent⁴⁷.

If Bacchylides here intends the three principal contests as the esoteric symbolism of aether, water and gold, they will constitute a fitting backdrop for the motif of man’s worth or virtue. The incorruptible elements represent the arenas in which ἀρετή is born, following which it receives the fostering care (τρέφει) of the muse.

* * *

⁴² Maehler 2004, *ad l.*, comparing *Il.* 1.365; 23.787, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.142, and Aesch. *Supp.* 742, where see Friis Johansen and Whittle (with further examples): «a traditional way of stating, when one says something, that it is, from an informative viewpoint, superfluous to say it». Cf. Richardson on *Il.* 23.306-8, Macleod 1982, 47.

⁴³ A third, slightly different variant is Hes. *Op.* 202 (cf. also Theoc. 24.71), where the speech is directed at identified listeners, the ‘kings’, but who are identified not as ‘knowing’, but as ‘clever’ and hence «pressed to agree» (West *ad l.*, with further examples) with the speaker’s agenda.

⁴⁴ According to Jebb *ad l.*, «veiled counsels of resignation and of comfort to the moribund Hieron», with the implication that unlike life, but like the elements, fame nourished by the muse is permanent; according to Maehler 2004, «(a) heaven and sea are eternal, (b) joy and youth are transient, (c) only fame of achievements, ‘nourished’ by poetry, will last».

⁴⁵ Ζῆνα μὲν τὸν αἰθέρα according to Pherecyd.Syr. 7 A 9 DK, who also identifies Zeus with the sun. See Cook 1914, 25-33; cf., e.g., *Od.* 15.523, *Il.* 2.412; 4.166, Thgn. 757.

⁴⁶ Pind. *Ol.* 2.3 Πίσσα μὲν Διός· Ὀλυμπιάδα δ’ ἔστασεν Ἡρακλῆς, *Pyth.* 7.13 ἐκπρεπής | Διός Ὀλυμπιάς, 2.12 f.; 6.5; 8.1-3.

⁴⁷ Krause 1841, 11 f., 17-9, 28, 41; Amandry 1990, 306-8, Davies 2007, 61.

If accordingly the Isthmus and the Nemean valley are represented by water and the Pythia by gold, almost incomparably excellent things, Olympia still prevails because she, in comparison with these things, is the Sun and the Pillars of Heracles, the *non plus ultra*. This is what Pindar intimates.

How is that possible when he says that water is best? Must not the sun, and Olympia, then as a logical consequence be lesser? As Instone observes, Pindar may not really say ‘water is best’⁴⁸. ἄριστον need not be a logical, comparative superlative, but may be an absolute, meaning approximately ‘top class’ or ‘superior’. The same goes for the verb ἀριστεύω in the third *Olympian Ode*, similarly to in for instance the first *Nemean*, ἀριστεύοισαν εὐκάροπου χθονός Σικελίαν πείροαν, ‘fertile Sicily, showing excellence in its fruitful earth’, and Tyrtaeus, ὄντιν’ ἀριστεύοντα μένοντά τε μαρνάμενόν τε, ‘anyone displaying excellence, staying put and fighting’⁴⁹. The absolute sense would in the absence of the exegetical tradition normally be attributed to the superlative in a sentence such as ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, since according to empirical study of Greek poetical syntax, «the superlative adjective only takes on straightforward logical superlative significance in association with a genitive, or when the group within which it represents the superlative example is otherwise clearly mentioned in its sentence»⁵⁰. If we want to read ἄριστον as ‘best’, we should perhaps be obliged to provide a parallel for such a use.

Water may not be the best thing in the universe (which seems an overly sentimental notion), but instead a most excellent thing, one of several. As well as the observed rules of Greek poetical syntax, the references that follow to gold and the sun ought in fact to show this, and determine the value of the superlative. For how could anyone asked about it not agree that gold and the sun are things that are at least as good as water? With a limited amount of gold, you may buy a piece of land with a spring, that is, for all practical purposes, an unlimited amount of fresh water. The sun is simply beyond human evaluation, the inherent value of gold itself being a derivate of its essence, according to Pindar (*Isthmian Ode* 5.1-3, discussed further below). That water is ἄριστον needs spelling out since its abundance may make people forget its importance and consider it cheap. Gold and sun do not want plain, explicit superlatives: nobody will ever forget that they are superior things.

Hence the translation ‘gold is most excellent’, which is undoubtedly to the detriment of the English poetical expression, but formally renders the absolute significance of the superlative in an equivalent manner, this being possible in English in the periphrastic construction with ‘most’. Similarly in *Olympian* 3.42 ‘water is superior’. In neither case is this superiority exclusive, but the implication is that water belongs to a class of superior things, together with, but not yet compared with, gold.

With the last article, a comparison comes into play: the sun, identified with Olympia, should be perceived as a climax, prevailing over gold and, despite the semi-paradoxical use of the superlative, water. For the sun can never be lesser than or equal to anything on earth. Even if we were to grant that rather than gold, water is the best thing on earth, the most useful and the *sine qua non* of nourishment, this

⁴⁸ Instone 1996, 94.

⁴⁹ Pind. *Nem.* 1.14 f., Tyrt. 12.33 *IEG*².

⁵⁰ Cooper – Krüger 2002, 2194 (§ 2.49.8.0).

superiority evaporates (appropriately) when it becomes clear that the competition is not a thing of the earth. The sun is a heavenly object and divine entity, not in the same league as the terrestrial elements. No material entity on earth is in itself comparable to the sun in its zenith; this is a poetical and pagan religious truism.

In a comparison of relative worth, though, the institution of Olympia may be like the sun in relation to the lesser contests. That such a comparison is intended, and that the sun constitutes a climax in relation to water and gold, can be seen as explicitly stated in the text, if we take into account a few details which, in our opinion, have been neglected or misunderstood. We should defer the idealistic symbolical interpretation for a little while, and take a closer look at the concrete poetical image. Apart from the part about water, the image is not primarily concerned with ‘excellence’. By his literal expression, Pindar instead emphasizes the quality of appearance, in particular that of gold; its brightness. This has been perceptively brought forward by Jacqueline Duchemin, whose paraphrase of the relevant passage reads⁵¹:

[...] mais l’or, semblable à un feu flamboyant, répand son éclat dans la nuit, effaçant de bien loin la richesse orgueilleuse.

Duchemin’s paraphrase is especially valuable, as it includes two important and often ignored aspects of the image, one of which is implicit in the text of Pindar, the other of which is explicit, but still left out in all other translations I have seen (admittedly a limited selection). The first aspect is that the brightness of gold is a case of reflection. The other is that the image expressed by Pindar is not that of gold in general, but of nocturnal gold. *In the night*, gold διαπρέπει, «appears prominent or conspicuous, strikes the eye» (*LSJ*) like fire. The Greek does not say (*pace* the scholia) ‘appears prominent like a fire blazing in the night’, but ‘appears prominent in the night like blazing fire’: νυκτι goes syntactically with the subject χρυσός and the predicate διαπρέπει, whereas the blazing fire, αἰθόμενον πῦρ, is dependent on ἄτε, in characteristic Pindaric enjambment post-placed at the beginning of the following verse.

Lucian clarifies the syntactical structure in a paraphrase offered in *Timon* 41: ὃ χρυσέ, δεξιῶμα κάλλιστον βροτοῖς· αἰθόμενον γὰρ πῦρ ἄτε διαπρέπεις καὶ νύκτωρ καὶ μεθ’ ἡμέραν⁵². Knowing Classical Greek syntax as good as any one of his contemporaries, Lucian construes the finite verb (διαπρέπεις) and the adverbial (νύκτωρ) with χρυσός as subject. So does Pindar, whose νυκτι may certainly be taken ἀπὸ κοινοῦ with gold and fire, but it cannot be *absent* from the image of conspicuous gold, which is the central matter. We are not allowed to confuse the separate layers of representation to the point of distortion of the imagery: the fire is a simile; nocturnal gold is the given image.

⁵¹ Duchemin 1970, 278; cf. Instone 1996, 93; Gerber 1982, 10; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1922, 491.

⁵² The first half of the paraphrase is a quotation from the *Danaë* of Euripides, fr. 324.1 *TrGF*.

Night has a significance, but not that proposed by the scholia, that gold stands forth in relation to other lordly wealth like a fire burning in the night⁵³. Intuitively, this is untrue, requiring us to regard as ‘night’ any other kind of treasure, not only landed goods, horses and ships⁵⁴, which is awkward enough, but also hoarded treasure such as the silver, pearls and precious stones that lie on top of gold in any treasure-trove worth fantasizing about. When described as like unto fire, gold can only be gold, a resplendent yellow metal, not a representative for ‘precious metals and stones’ in opposition to non-hoarded wealth. Nor, as we maintained, can the Greek be construed to mean this, *pace*, e.g., Heyne who, following the scholia 1c and 1g ἀπὸ κοινοῦ τὸ διαπρέπει, paraphrased ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς διαπρέπει μ. ἐ. πλούτου, ἅτε πῦρ αἰθόμενον διαπρέπει νυκτί⁵⁵. Heyne’s paraphrase is not good Greek⁵⁶: ἅτε is not construed as a conjunction with a finite verb, but goes with noun and participle, in our case as often in poetry post-placed⁵⁷. The symbolical significance of night is not that of other treasure in comparison with gold (which is infantile), but another, residing in contrast.

The scholiast frame of understanding has obscured what is in fact an important contrast, that between χρυσὸς [...] νυκτί, ‘gold [...] in the night’, and ἀελίου [...] ἐν ἀμέρῳ, ‘the sun [...] in daytime’⁵⁸. This contrast is not primarily concerned with excellence, but with appearance and light, a tendency which receives emphasis by the respective finite verbs to the adverbials, which have phonetically identical endings and denote opposite aspects of visibility; that of the image and that of the observer⁵⁹: 2 διαπρέπει, ‘(gold) appears prominent (in the night)’, and 5 σκόπει,

⁵³ Schol. 1c ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς ἐν ἅπασιν τοῖς κτήμασι τοῦ δυνατοῦ πλούτου οὕτω διαλάμπει ὡς ἐν νυκτί πῦρ. Cf. schol. 1a, b, d, g.

⁵⁴ Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1922, 491.

⁵⁵ Heyne 1773 (several new editions and reprints 1798-1824).

⁵⁶ Dissen 1847, 6, and Fraccaroli 1894, 96 n. 1 offer paraphrases similar to Heyne’s, and the latter is cited with approval by Gerber 1982, 13, who also argues that «the primary reference of νυκτί is to the blazing fire, as in Emped. fr. 62.2 [...] and 84.2» (on the other hand that «its reference extends also to gold»). Kirkwood 1982 comments on νυκτί: «though its position is ambiguous, goes in sense with πῦρ»; similarly Gildersleeve 1890, who argues that the position of πῦρ connects it with νυκτί. But the position of νυκτί is not ambiguous, coming immediately after a finite verb, the subject of which must be χρυσὸς, as is made perfectly clear by the following adverbial, μέγανος ἔξοχα πλούτου. If there is an ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction, the finite verb has to be supplied with πῦρ, not with χρυσὸς, which by all rules of Greek syntax and idiom has the first claim to the explicit verb as well as to both adverbials. But neither does the syntax require (or would admit) a finite verb and subjunctive clause with πῦρ, nor does πῦρ need to (or should) be said to ‘appear prominent’, as it is already αἰθόμενον, *blazing*.

⁵⁷ Not in Pindar (see Slater 1969, 393), nor in any of the 65 instances supplied by Herodotus, nor in the examples given by Denniston 1954, 526, does ἅτε ever govern a subjunctive clause. Eur. *Herc.* 667 is difficult and possibly corrupt, but as it stands, ἴσον ... πέλει is an asyndetic main clause whereas ἅτε determines ἄριθμος: ‘it becomes like the count of stars in the clouds for sailors’. (Read perhaps ἴσα δ’.)

⁵⁸ When the contrast between night and day receives mention by commentators, which is rarely (Gildersleeve 1890, 129; Christ 1896, 4; Gerber 1982, 20), it seems to be understood as purely ornamental, without symbolical implications for the concepts that occur in these respective time frames.

⁵⁹ While not obvious to the silent reader, the phonetic echo would be very clear in oral (sung) performance.

‘(do not) *look for* (something other than the sun in the daytime)’. Observe that ἔξοχα does not mean ‘best’ or ‘most excellent’, but constitutes together with μέγανος [...] πλούτου an adverbial to the finite verb, and means that its particular action (appearing prominent) is executed in the highest degree by the subject (χρυσός), higher than by any lordly wealth. The literal sense is that gold is more remarkable *at night* than any other lordly wealth.

This is not an arbitrary or irrelevant proposition, but expresses an empirical observation of a conspicuous quality of gold: it reflects the orange and reddish flames of lamp- and torchlight, which in antiquity were seen at all places in which humans gather at night, better than any other metal; that is, better than any object known to Pindar and his contemporaries. Gold reflectivity exceeds 90% for most of the yellow to red light spectrum, being higher than silver for red and orange and only slightly lower for yellow and amber. An audience at a place like Olympia or Syracuse, not to mention Delphi, would have had no difficulty visualizing Pindar’s image, having experience from nightly ceremonies and celebrations at religious festivals, where golden cult objects, tripods and priestly adornments quite literally shone in the night like fire, illuminated by torches and pyres. The select few, such as Pindar himself, might also have had the pleasure of associating the image of gold in the night with the bowls, goblets and jewellery that glow in the lamplight at aristocratic dinner parties.

We should visualise nocturnal, radiant gold, taking the fire only as a simile for metallic radiance, as in the Homeric examples cited below. We should not by the words ‘fire in the night’ evoke fire as an independent poetical image here, among other reasons because this makes the poetry trivial. A fire in the night may appear impressive to the modern reader due to its relative rarity in the electric age, but it was not a remarkable thing to the ancients. There was fire in almost every ancient Greek night witnessed by humans, because naked fire from lamps and torches was, apart from the moon and stars, the source of light available to those who desired or were required to stay awake. For this reason, gold observed by humans in the night is also, with few exceptions, gold illuminated by fire. But while many fires may be impressive⁶⁰, and a nightly fire may carry some special significance⁶¹, a single fire burning in the night is in itself a trivial matter⁶². The impressive thing here is the metal, a material, earthly thing, which is not *prima facie* expected to emit light, but still does, as intensely as the actual fire⁶³.

⁶⁰ II. 8. 554-61.

⁶¹ Aesch. Ag. 8-10.

⁶² There is nothing particularly grand about the nightly fires as such in Emped. 31 B 62 and 84 DK, adduced by Gerber (see n. 56). If the former is remarkable it is because it is the Primordial Fire, and the night – if such it is, the sense of the adjective ἐννυχίους is not perfectly clear («nachtverhüllte» DK; ἐμνυχίους Panzerbieter *teste* DK) – may be the Primordial night, but the matter of appearance is not important; what is described is a biological or elemental process that takes place without mortal witnesses. The latter fire is a flame from a lamp, the typical source of light for the nightly wanderer, in a simile that describes a biological process.

⁶³ Several scholars have compared a dictum by Karl Marx to our passage (emphasis added): «Andererseits sind Gold und Silber nicht nur negativ überflüssige, d.h. entbehrliche Gegenstände, sondern ihre ästhetischen Eigenschaften machen sie zum naturwüchsigen Material von Pracht, Schmuck, Glanz, sonntäglichen Bedürfnissen, kurz zur positiven Form des Überflusses und

Literary precedents for metallic radiance in general abound, especially in the *Iliad*, where the shine of bronze armour is a frequent image, for example in 2.455-8; 13.242-5, and especially 19.373-84 of the new armour of Achilles⁶⁴. Pindar's πῦρ αἰθόμενον is an adaptation of a Homeric formula, and a particularly interesting point of reference and possible source of inspiration would be *Il.* 22.134 f., also of Achilles, where fire and the rising sun are juxtaposed as similia for metallic radiance: ἀμφὶ δὲ χαλκὸς ἐλάμπετο εἴκελος αὐγῆι | ἢ πυρὸς αἰθομένου ἢ ἡελίου ἀνιόντος, 'the bronze shone around him like a flash of fire blazing or of the sun rising'⁶⁵. This passage, not indexed by Sotiriou⁶⁶, is more relevant with regard to the opening of the first *Olympian Ode* than the superficially similar 16.293 κατὰ δ' ἔσβεσεν αἰθόμενον πῦρ, even if the latter is the only place in Homer where this formula does not take the genitive case⁶⁷.

The visual and aesthetic emphasis on shining gold in Pindar's poetical image has been expanded on more than once by Lucian, whose *Timon* was cited above. He is more elaborate in *The Dream*⁶⁸:

– Πολύ, ὦ Πυθαγόρα, χρυσίον εἶδον, πολύ, πῶς οἶει καλὸν ἢ οἶαν τὴν αὐγὴν ἀπαστρέπτου; τί ποτε ὁ Πίνδαρος φησι περὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπαινῶν – ἀνάμνησον γάρ με, εἶπερ οἶσθα – ὅποτε ὕδωρ ἄριστον εἰπὼν εἶτα τὸ χρυσίον θαυμάζει, εὔ ποιῶν, ἐν ἀρχῇ εὐθὺς τοῦ καλλίστου τῶν ἀσιμάτων ἀπάντων; – Μῶν ἐκεῖνο ζητεῖς, ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, ὁ δὲ χρυσοῦς αἰθόμενον πῦρ ἅτε διαπρέπει νυκτὶ μεγάνορος ἔξοχα πλούτου; – Νῆ Δία αὐτὸ τοῦτο· ὥσπερ γάρ τοῦμόν ἐνύπνιον ἰδὼν ὁ Πίνδαρος οὕτως ἐπαινεῖ τὸ χρυσίον.

– Much gold, Pythagoras, did I see, so much, and can you imagine how beautiful it was, what radiance it reflected? What is it that Pindar says about it, praising it – for you must remind me, since you know it – when he says that water is superior and then admires gold, putting it well, in the immediate beginning of the most beautiful of all songs? – Surely you are thinking of this, *Water is most excellent, and gold, like blazing fire, appears prominent in the night, beyond all lordly wealth?* – By Zeus, exactly that! It is as if Pindar had seen my dream when he praises gold in this manner.

Reichtums. Sie erscheinen gewissermaßen als gediegenes Licht, das aus der Unterwelt hervorgegraben wird, indem das Silber alle Lichtstrahlen in ihrer ursprünglichen Mischung, das Gold nur die höchste Potenz der Farbe, das Rot, zurückwirft. Farbensinn aber ist die populärste Form des ästhetischen Sinnes überhaupt. Der etymologische Zusammenhang der Namen der edlen Metalle in den verschiedenen indogermanischen Sprachen mit Farbenbeziehungen ist von Jakob Grimm nachgewiesen worden. (Siehe seine Geschichte der deutschen Sprache.)» (Marx 1956-68, XIII 130). Cf. Bresson 1979, 104; Willcock 1995, 18; Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2010, 46.

⁶⁴ See Mugler 1960, 52; Krischer 1971, 36-8, and Marina Coray in Bierl – Latacz 2009, on *Il.* 19.374-83, for fuller, if not exhaustive lists of references.

⁶⁵ Gold is well known to be shinier than bronze, of course. Schol. *Il.* 6.234 and unnamed scholars mentioned by Porph. *ad l.* argue perversely that the silliness of Glaucus exchanging his golden breastplate for Diomedes' brazen one is not due to the former being more valuable, but to its stronger shine yielding a tactical advantage, blinding the enemy.

⁶⁶ Sotiriou 1998.

⁶⁷ As it does also in Pind. *Pae.* 6.97 f. (of burning Troy); cf. Eur. *Tro.* 1080.

⁶⁸ *Somn.* 7. Cf. *Contempl.* 11 for a third example of Lucian's lyrical *philochrysia*.

Note that here too Lucian may hint in the last sentence that he takes νυκτί, ‘in the night’, to refer to the gold (the speaker’s dream occurring at night), and that he, unlike for instance Aelian and Athenaeus⁶⁹, understands ἄριστον as absolute, not relative (logical) superlative, as he writes, in a prose paraphrase, ὕδωρ ἄριστον εἰπὼν – not τὸ ἄριστον or ἄριστον πάντων.

As for Pindar, a related image is found in *Isthmian Ode* 7.5, where the golden rain of Zeus on Danaë is described as taking place at night, χρυσῶι μεσονύκτιον νείφοντα. For the phenomenon that shiny objects are more remarkable at night than in the daytime, cf. also Herodotus 2.44, Strabo 16.4.6, Aristides *Panathenaius* 129. For gold radiance in general, cf. *Olympian Odes* 2.72 ἄνθεμα δὲ χρυσοῦ φλέγει (see above), 6.3 f. χρυσέας [...] κίονας [...] ἔργου πρόσωπον [...] τηλαυγές, *Pythian Ode* 3.55 χρυσὸς ἐν χερσὶν φανείς, *Nemean Ode* 4.82 f. ὁ χρυσὸς ἐψόμενος αὐγὰς ἔδειξεν ἀπάσας, Bacchylides 3.17-9 cited above, Euripides, *Hecuba* 151 f. and 924 f. with Collard’s note⁷⁰. At the beginning of the fifth *Isthmian Ode*, the power of gold is attributed to Theia, mother of the sun (and of moon and dawn: Hesiod, *Theogony* 371-4)⁷¹.

The gleam of metal and other reflective materials is never in Homer and archaic poetry and seldom in later poetical tradition described as reflection, but seemingly as innate qualities of the objects⁷², as Pindar on gold in *Olympian Ode* 2.72 and *Nemean Ode* 4.83. Mugler’s supposition that metal reflection was poorly understood by Homer may seem unlikely⁷³, but could possibly receive some support by apparent misunderstandings of water reflection by philosophers as late as classical times (see below). Still, the latter misunderstandings concern an especially complex case, and it is reasonable to assume that the ‘naïve’ descriptions of shining objects in Homer and archaic poetry owe more to the contemporary taste for simple, forceful imagery and conservative poetical tradition than to ignorance on the part of poets. Overly subtle descriptions of reflected light would fail to attract archaic taste, not getting a foothold in tradition⁷⁴.

Accordingly, we maintain that the significance of the contrastive comparison at the beginning of the first *Olympian Ode* is that the glory of Olympia is like the sun in daytime in comparison to gold – an esoteric emblem for the Pythian games – illuminated at night. However opulent and fashionable that other place may be, in comparison with Olympia it amounts to a nocturnal reflection before the sun.

Perhaps it would be possible to see also in the reference to water in this context an allusion to its luminous qualities, and read the beginning of the first *Olympian Ode* as a modified version of the comparative light simile, a poetical commonplace

⁶⁹ Ath. 2.40f, Ael. *VH* 1.32.

⁷⁰ Collard 1991.

⁷¹ See Duchemin 1970, 286 f. and *passim*.

⁷² Mugler 1960, 52; cf. Janko on *Il.* 13.339-44.

⁷³ Mugler 1960, *ibid.*; *contra* Treu 1965, 94.

⁷⁴ As might be expected, Hellenistic and Latin poets were more willing to experiment with this kind of subtle imagery: cf. Ap. Rhod. 3.755-60, Lucr. 4.210-3, Verg. *Aen.* 8.20-5, Hor. *carm.* 2.5.18-20, Ov. *her.* 18.77 f., *ars* 2.723 f.

used by for instance Homer, Sappho and Bacchylides⁷⁵. Bowra and Instone have remarked that the brightness of water may be relevant here⁷⁶, the former adducing Aeschylus, *Supplices* 23, Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 1294, and Callimachus, *Hymn* 1.19, where water receives the epithet λευκόν, ‘white’; originally ‘brilliant, light-coloured’⁷⁷. *Eumenides* 694 f., Hippocrates, *De aera, aquis, locis* 5, and Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.3.19 may also be relevant, where water is λαμπρόν, although the contexts suggest that the epithet should be translated as ‘clear’ rather than ‘bright’⁷⁸. Galen reports older philosophical theories about the peculiar character of the brightness of pure water, which describe it as a case of transformation (ἀλλοίωσις) brought on by external light, as opposed to proper luminosity and ordinary illumination⁷⁹.

On the other hand, water may be dark or black, as often in Homer⁸⁰. Of significance in the present context may be that just as in the case of gold, the distinct luminous qualities of water are particularly remarkable at night. On the one hand, water is black as night itself; on the other, but simultaneously, as it were, it may be bright and conspicuous. Even without a torch, water will strike the eye on a cloudless night, because the light of the moon and stars is reflected in it. The ancients were able to appreciate this phenomenon more fully than we; it is often remarked that before the age of electric light, night was dark in a way that we have almost forgotten, and the spectacle of cosmic light, stars and moon and their reflections, at the same time much more impressive. Aristotle mentions that the Milky Way is visible reflected in water, a claim initially baffling to a modern urban resident who cannot see it in the clear sky at midnight⁸¹.

This latter kind of water luminosity has been remarked on before Pindar by the philosopher Anaximenes, who is said to have compared lightning to the phenomenon of an oar dipped into water⁸²: Ἀναξιμένης ταῦτά τούτοι [sc. Ἀναξιμάνδρῳ] προστιθεὶς τὸ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης, ἥτις σχιζομένη ταῖς κόπαις παραστίλβει, ‘Anaximenes [says] the same as he [sc. Anaximander about lightning] adding the thing about the sea, which glitters when parted by an oar’. The fact that this phenomenon is observable at night is left out by the doxographer Aëtius, who preserves the fragment⁸³, but night is a necessary condition, as stated by the (fifth-century?) philosopher Cleidemus on the same subject, quoted and commented on by Aristotle⁸⁴:

⁷⁵ *Il.* 22.317 f. (cf. 8.555 f.), Sappho 34, 96 Voigt, Bacchyl. 9.26-8, Hermocl. 9-12 Pow., Mel. *HE* 4528 f. (*AP* 12.59), Leon. *HE* 2147-50 (*AP* 9.24), Strat. *AP* 12.78. For examples in Latin poetry, see Müller 1887, 13-5.

⁷⁶ Bowra 1961, 204, Instone 1996, 94, Instone 2007, 141.

⁷⁷ So also *Il.* 23.282, *Od.* 5.70, Hes. *Op.* 739, Thgn. 448, Eur. *Hel.* 1336, Callim. fr. 546 Pf.; cf. *Od.* 12.172, Eur. *Cyc.* 17, *Hyps.* 844 (fr. 757 *TrGF*).

⁷⁸ *LSJ* s.v. λαμπρός I 3; cf. also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 2.41, NT *Apoc.* 22.1.

⁷⁹ Chrysipp. *Stoic. fr. phys.* 433 *SVF* ap. Gal. in *Hippoc. Epid.* XVII b 161 f. Kühn.

⁸⁰ μέλαν 3x *Il.*, 4x *Od.*, ὄβριμον *Il.* 4.453, δνοφερόν *Il.* 9.15; 16.4, κρήνη μελάνυδρος 4x *Il.*, *Od.* 20.158.

⁸¹ Arist. *Mete.* 345a-b.

⁸² Anaximen. 13 A 17 DK.

⁸³ Aët. p. 368 Diels, Stob. *Flor.* 1.29.1.

⁸⁴ 62 A 1 DK, *FGrHist* 323 F 31, cit. Arist. *Mete.* 370a.

εἰσὶ δέ τινες οἱ τὴν ἀστραπὴν, ὥσπερ καὶ Κλειδήμιος, οὐκ εἶναί φασιν ἀλλὰ φαίνεσθαι, παρεικάζοντες ὡς τὸ πάθος ὁμοιον ὄν καὶ ὅταν τὴν θάλατταν τις ῥάβδῳ τύπτῃ· φαίνεται γὰρ τὸ ὕδωρ ἀποστίλβον τῆς νυκτός· οὕτως ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ ῥαπιζομένου τοῦ ὕγροῦ τὴν φάντασιν τῆς λαμπρότητος εἶναι τὴν ἀστραπὴν. οὗτοι μὲν οὖν οὕτω συνήθεις ἦσαν ταῖς περὶ τῆς ἀνακλάσεως δόξαις, ὅπερ αἴτιον δοκεῖ τοῦ τοιοῦτου πάθους εἶναι· φαίνεται γὰρ τὸ ὕδωρ στίλβειν τυπτόμενον ἀνακλωμένης ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ τῆς ὄψεως πρὸς τι τῶν λαμπρῶν. διὸ καὶ γίγνεται μᾶλλον τοῦτο νύκτωρ· τῆς γὰρ ἡμέρας οὐ φαίνεται διὰ τὸ πλεον ὄν τὸ φέγγος τὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ἀφανίζειν.

There are those, for instance Cleidemus, who say that lightning does not exist but is only a mirage, likening the incident to when somebody strikes the sea with a stick: for then the water appears to shine at night; similarly when the damp is struck in the clouds, lightning is the mirage of brightness that appears. These have not yet understood the theory of reflection, which seems to be the cause of this incident. For the water appears to shine, when the sight of something bright is reflected from it. That is why this appears rather at night. For during the day it is not visible as the greater amount of daylight makes it disappear.

For water reflectivity in Greek poetry, not a very common topic, see *Pythian Ode* 9.9 ἀργυρόπεζ’ Ἀφροδίτα with the note of Gildersleeve 1890: «ἀργ. refers to the sheen on the waves, the track of the moonlight. We have here the lunar side of the goddess». Compare also other poets’ uses of this and other adjectives formed from ἄργυρος, ‘silver’, with reference to water⁸⁵.

Whether or not the brightness of water deserves such extensive consideration, the main point remains the same, namely that the sun prevails over terrestrial elements and nocturnal reflections, however prominent and dazzling these may be. Nothing can be more prominent or dazzling than the sun; it is not in its nature to be equal, nor even with hallowed matters such as water and gold. Certainly these are excellent things, indeed the best there are in certain contexts, but when it comes to brightness, warmth, and in fact general importance, they must defer to the sun, just as the lesser games have to give way to the Olympian when it comes to *glory*, the symbolical meaning of brightness, which we may now acknowledge. Here is a distinction that is trivialized by some commentators, since glory is not quite the same thing as ‘excellence’. Glory is the external effect of excellence, as light is the external effect of whatever inner qualities material entities such as gold, water and fire may possess. It would be a mistake to believe that Pindar inquires urgently after these inner qualities. Whereas idealists will look for internal and essential qualities, for abstract ‘excellence’ in ethical and material phenomena, what really matters to the

⁸⁵ ἀργυρόπεζα (of Thetis: 12x *Il.*, *Od.* 24.92, *Hes. Theog.* 1006, etc.; for its significance see *Lfgre s.v.*), δίνης ἀργυρέης (*Hes. Theog.* 791), ἀργυροδίνης (3x *Il.*, *Hes. Theog.* 340, etc.), δίνης ἀργυροειδής (*Eur. IA* 752, *Ion* 95), ἀργυρορρύτων Ἐβρου [...] ὄχθων (*Eur. Herc.* 387), ὕδατος [...] ἀργυφείοιο *Emped.* 31 B 100.11 DK. A very late, prosaic and theological but still remarkable metaphor is offered by Symeon Neotheologus, *Or.theol.* 2, ll. 260-5 Darrouzès: Θεὸς ὁ [...] τοσοῦτον παρ’ ἡμῶν γνωσκόμενος, ὅσον τις πέλαγος ἀόριστον ὑδάτων θαλάσσης, ἐν νυκτὶ παρὰ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν ἰστάμενος καὶ λαμπάδα φαίνουσαν κρατῶν, καθορᾷ. ‘God [...] known by us to the degree to which one can see the boundless mass of water in the sea, standing by the shore in the night with a burning torch’.

aristocratic materialism of Pindar and his like-minded, is what is outward. ἀγαθοί, τὰ καλὰ τρέψαντες ἔξω.

Appendix: Corinthian water after Pindar

As in Landon's article on the archaeological evidence, which is called *Beyond Peirene* (Landon 2003), the focus here will be on the lesser known waters and the general quality of 'well-wateredness' of the city, since already several collections of literary sources referring to Peirene itself have been published, most comprehensively (and lavishly, including pictorial evidence) by Betsey Robinson in a recent monograph on the spring⁸⁶. Some instances of Peirene in literature will be mentioned, though, in particular those which relate the spring to the Isthmian games or highlight special qualities of its water. For the earliest literary instances of Isthmian and Corinthian water, see the main article, text for nn. 14-17 (sea) and 18-33 (fresh). For later poetical praise of sea-girt Corinth, see below n. 109.

As for the Corinthian sweet water, a handful of individual springs or fountains other than Peirene in or around the town receive mention in later literature, three of them by name, two by Pausanias only. One of the latter is Glauce, situated near the temple of Apollo, where Jason's second bride is said to have tried to quench the burning of Medea's poison⁸⁷. Pausanias also mentions the Bath of Helen (Ἑλένης λουτρόν) in view of the eastern port, taking note of its brackish and lukewarm water⁸⁸. The opposite goes for another remarkable spring outside of town, found by Ptolemy's army approaching Corinth on the 'Shortroad' (Κοντοπορεία) in 308 B.C. This spring had water colder than snow, so that many did not drink for fear of injury, but Ptolemy drank⁸⁹. In an anonymous Ptolemaic papyrus listing (among other things) the most beautiful fountains in the world, the spring Lerna is included as one of two Corinthian specimens. The spring is mentioned later also by Pausanias, Lucian and a symposiograph by the name of Parmeniscus, according to whom some consider it to offer the best water in the world (see below)⁹⁰. Pausanias takes note of two artificial (and almost certainly Roman-period) fountains worth seeing in Corinth, one with water coming out of a dolphin's head beneath a statue of Poseidon, and one where it flows from the hoof of the Pegasus, mounted by

⁸⁶ Robinson 2011, 27-64, superseding Hill 1964, 1-4.

⁸⁷ ὡς λέγουσι, Paus. 2.3.6. The motif does not seem to have figured in 'Eumelus' (see *supra* text for n. 29), of which Pausanias used a prose version (2.1.1): its (eccentric) version of the Medea legend is epitomized in Paus. 2.3.10 f. The archaeological remains show an artificial construction but no trace of a natural spring at the location; Landon 2003, 48 n. 21 believes the construction to be Hellenistic at the earliest, in opposition to «most of the literature» (e.g., Elderkin 1910, 19, 25; Hill 1964, 222) which takes it to be from the archaic period.

⁸⁸ Paus. 2.2.3; see Frazer *ad l.* on this spring, not mentioned elsewhere. (Steph. Byz. ε 44 mentions a spring *Helen* on Chios, «in which Helen washed herself».)

⁸⁹ Ptol. *Euerg. FGrHist* 234 F 6 ap. Ath. 2.43e, Eust. *II*. IV 596 van der Valk.

⁹⁰ Diels 1904, 14 (*PBerol.* inv. 13044 col. xii), Paus. 2.4.5, Lucian *Hist. Conscr.* 29, Parmenisc. ap Ath. 4.156e (see below n. 97). It is uncertain whether the 'complex of springs and waterconduits, wells and cisterns' (Waele 1935, 223) between the gymnasium, Asclepieum and temple of Zeus revealed by archaeologists in the early twentieth century was, as they assumed, the Lerna of literature; another candidate is the *Fountain of the Lamps* unearthed in the immediate vicinity in the 1960s (Landon 2003, 48 n. 21).

Bellerophon⁹¹. Dio Chrysostom claims that a spring in Corinth arose from the track of the hoof of the Pegasus, and judging from the last of the fountains mentioned by Pausanias and three allusions to such an origin of Peirene by Statius, it seems that this may be the report of an independent, perhaps local Corinthian tradition rather than a confusion of myths⁹². It may be likely that Dio also has Peirene in mind. Euripides refers to Pegasus as the Πειρηναῖος πῶλος and twice praises the spring's water as σεμνόν⁹³.

Certainly as far as Corinthian waters are concerned, the fame of Peirene was unrivalled. There were two springs that lay claim to the name, one near the summit of the Acrocorinth and one at the foot, in antiquity thought to be connected, as both Strabo and Pausanias report, vouching for the clear, sweet water of either⁹⁴. For the mythologies involved, see the sources collected and commented on by Robinson 2011, 30-5; here only the *aition* that Pausanias regards as canonical shall be mentioned, as it includes relations to other waters. According to Pausanias, Peirene, daughter of the river Achelous⁹⁵, became the mistress of Poseidon and mother of his sons Leches and Cenchrias, after whom Cenchreae and Lechaeum, the ports on either side of the Isthmus were named. After the death of Cenchrias, the grieving nymph was transformed into the lower spring⁹⁶.

Dinner guests in a fragment of Theocritus of Chios, others in one of Parmeniscus, claim that Peirene's water is the best in the world, the latter as we saw proposing Lerna as a rival contestant, certainly referring to the Corinthian spring rather than (ironically) to the Argive wetland⁹⁷. In Athenaeus we hear that Peirene's water is the

⁹¹ Paus. 2.2.8; 2.3.5.

⁹² Dio Chrys. *Or.* 36.46, Stat. *Silv.* 2.2.38; 2.7.2-4, *Theb.* 4.60-2. According to reports in Paus. 2.31.9 and 9.31.3, Pegasus gave rise to at least two springs, Hippocrene on Mt. Helicon and one with the same name in Troezen, but apparently none in Corinth. Hippocrene was not originally attributed to Pegasus: at least it appears not to be so in Hesiod, who offers a different *aition* for the name of the horse (*Theog.* 281-3, cf. 6), nor explicitly in Aratus, *Phaen.* 214-24, who simply talks of the Horse, the constellation of which is wingless (Kidd *ad l.*) and adjacent to the head of Andromeda, not Medusa. Eratosth. *Cat.* 1.18 admits that Pegasus and the Horse of Hippocrene may be different horses, understanding Aratus as *not* referring to Pegasus. [Asclep.] (Archias?) 1022-32 *HE* (*AP* 9.64.5 f.), Strabo 8.6.21, Prop. 3.3.1 f., and Honest. *GP* 2414-21 (*AP* 9.225, 230) seem to be the first to make the explicit connection between Pegasus and Hippocrene; Eratosth. *loc. cit.* and German. *Arat.* 216-23 first identify Pegasus with the star constellation, although this identification is controversial according to the former.

⁹³ Eur. *El.* 475, *Med.* 69, *Tro.* 205 f.

⁹⁴ Paus. 2.3.3, 5.1, Strabo 8.6.21.

⁹⁵ Paus. 2.2.3. She was the daughter of Asopus according to Bacchyl. 9.62 (with Jebb's probable supplement) followed by Diod. Sic. 4.72.1, Honest. 2414-7 *GP* (*AP* 9.225). In the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, Peirene is said to be the daughter of Oebalus, a Laconian king (Hes. fr. 258 M-W ap. Paus. 2.2.3).

⁹⁶ Paus. 2.3.2, our only testimony for this myth as well, although Steph. Byz. s.v. Κεγγραει mentions Cenchrias as the son of Poseidon.

⁹⁷ Theoc.Ch. in *Gnomol.Vat.* 339 Sternbach; Parmeniscus' *Cynics' Drinking Party* in Ath. 4.156e. The anecdote, if not the exact wording, is the same in both sources, so if the former attribution is correct, Parmeniscus, who is younger than Theocritus, must have taken it from him, or from a common source, despite his claim to have been present at the discussion in person. I suspect, though, that the *terminus post quem* of the symposiograph, the reference to Μελέαγρος ὁ Γαδαρεὺς ἐν ταῖς Χάρσιον (Ath. 4.157b), should perhaps read Μένιππος κ.τ.λ., as the author of

lightest, allegedly ascertained by experiment⁹⁸. Pausanias reports that the ‘Corinthian bronze’ got its unique colour from being tempered in the water of Peirene⁹⁹. According to Antipater of Sidon, the beautiful Laïs is Πειρώνης λευκῶν φαιδροτέραν λιβάδων, ‘more radiant than the clear water of Peirene’¹⁰⁰.

Apart from Glauce, Lerna, the Bath of Helen and Peirene, Strabo and Pausanias observe an abundance of anonymous wells, fountains and baths in Corinth, a feature which as we saw has been verified by archaeologists¹⁰¹. Callimachus refers to the streams of Corinth in the plural, claiming them to be more important in one respect – the honour conferred by the Isthmian Games – than the Nile¹⁰². Strabo cites Euripides for what he mistakenly believes to be a eulogy of the town’s subterranean fresh water, but which in fact refers to the two seas¹⁰³. For the springs on the Acrocorinth, Strabo relies on secondary sources (λέγουσι), either locals or perhaps Eudoxus of Cnidus (ca. 400-340 B.C.) and Hieronymus of Cardia (ca. 350-270 B.C.), authors which he has earlier in the chapter section mentioned as his authorities on Corinth¹⁰⁴. According to a saying from later times (recorded first in

the Χάριτες is called a Cynic πρόγονος, which in the context of philosophical and literary schools properly means ‘founder’ or at any rate ‘pioneer’, whereas Meleager is a late (early first century B.C.) proponent of the Cynic school. Menippus of the third century B.C., also from Gadara (Strab. 16.2.29), may be called a founder, if the reference is to Cynicism as a literary school, i.e., ‘the Menippean satire’ (and the dining Cynics’ interests are markedly literary). As for the work title, cf. Meleager’s references to Μενιπείους [...] Χάρισιν in *HE* 3987, 3999 (*AP* 7.417.4, 418.6), which may refer to works of the master as well as his own (they are both reported to have written a *Symposium*). Parmeniscus the symposiograph could then be the same person as Parmeniscus the grammarian (edited by Breithaupt 1915), whose *terminus ante quem* is the time of Varro and Didymus Chalcenterus. At least the two Parmenisci seem to share a certain anti-Corinthian bias. While the punch line of the present anecdote intimates that the water of the Corinthian springs is nothing very special, the grammarian denies that the Homeric Ἐφύγη is to be identified as Corinth in fr. 11 (ap. Steph.Byz. ε 180) and scandalizes Corinth and Euripides in fr. 12 f. (ap. scholl. *Eur. Med.* 9.264). In the latter case he follows ‘the philosophers’, which could indicate a Cynic affiliation.

⁹⁸ Ath. 2.43b. The many witnesses to the superior sweetness and quality of the water of Peirene may owe much to its literary and mythological prestige: tests made in 1932 and 2006 show that the water of the lower Peirene is «very hard to extremely hard» (Robinson 2011, 18), having been so probably throughout its recorded history (ibid. – although the experiment of Athenaeus would refute this, if accurate), with the upper source being somewhat softer, yet well above the limits of «very hard» (ibid. 19).

⁹⁹ Paus. 2.3.3. The passage is corrupt, but Pausanias may refer to or perhaps misunderstands a report about the distinctively coloured alloy of this name, which according to the sources (no artefact has been found) contained amounts of silver and gold in addition to copper. This ‘Corinthian bronze’ was highly fashionable in Rome in the first century A.D. (Jacobson – Weitzman 1992, 239), but the production, which may have been a feat of rather advanced metallurgy (ibid. 241-5), had been discontinued by the time of Pausanias (ibid. 246), already as it seems attaining some mythological features.

¹⁰⁰ Antip.Sid. 323 *HE* (*AP* 7.218.4). Laïs was a legendary courtesan by whom, according to an anecdote in Ath. 13.588c-d, the painter Apelles was struck when she, still a young girl, fetched water from Peirene.

¹⁰¹ Strabo 8.6.21, Paus. 2.3.5.

¹⁰² Callim. fr. 384.32-4 Pf.

¹⁰³ Eur. fr. 1084 *TrGF*, cited below n. 109.

¹⁰⁴ Eudox. 357 Lasserre, Hieronym. *FGrHist* 154 F 16.

the seventeenth century), the Acrocorinth has as many springs as there are days in the year¹⁰⁵.

Callimachus, in an elegiac poem written for an Isthmian victor, speaks of ‘the celery of Peirene’¹⁰⁶. Posidippus and an anonymous epigram on the victories of one Pythocles also associate Peirene with the Isthmian games¹⁰⁷. Livy epitomizes Corinth and the Isthmus as the lands of sweet and salt water in the passage adduced by Cougny to the Simonidean εὐδρον [...] ἄστυ¹⁰⁸:

*Urbs erat tunc praeclara ante excidium; arx quoque et Isthmus praebuere
spectaculum: arx intra moenia in immanem altitudinem edita, scatens fontibus;
Isthmus duo maria ab occasu et ortu solis finitima artis faucibus dirimens.*

The city was then [167 B.C.] world-famous before its destruction; its citadel and the Isthmus were also sights to see; the citadel rising to a huge height, enclosed by the city wall and flowing with springs, while the Isthmus separated by its narrow passage two neighbouring seas lying toward the sunrise and sunset¹⁰⁹.

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¹⁰⁵ Landon 2003, 54, text for n. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Callim. fr. 384.22 Pf. (II 121).

¹⁰⁷ Posidipp. 82 Austin – Bastianini, *App.anth.* 1.291.4 (*IG* IV 682.4).

¹⁰⁸ Livy 45.28.2, Cougny 1890, on *App.anth.* 2.4.1.

¹⁰⁹ Schlesinger 1961. Further literary instances of ‘sea-girt Corinth’ are Eur. *Tro.* 1097 f. δίπορον κορυφάν Ἰσθμῶν, fr. 1084 *TrGF* περίκλυτον ... Ἀκροκόρινθον, ἱερὸν ὄχθον, *Trag.adesp.* 586b *TrGF* (II 1129) = Phot. α 1363, Antip.Sid. 322 *HE* (*AP* 7.218.3) ἀλιζώνιο Κορίνθου, Callim. fr. 384.9 f. Pf. ἀλιζώνιο ... στείνεος, Lobo *Suppl.Hell.* 516 (*AP* 7.619) Κόρινθος | κόλποις ἀγχίαλος γῆ Περίανδρον ἔχει, Nonnus, *Dion.* 37.152 f. εἰ ναέτης βλάστησεν ἀλιζώνιο Κορίνθου, | Ἰσθμῶν ἡμετέροιο Παλαιμόνος οἶδεν ἀγῶνα, Hor. *Carm.* 1.7.2 f. *bimarisve Corinthi moenia*, Ov. *fast.* 6.496 *unaque pulsatur terra duabus aquis*; further Latin examples in *ThLL* s.v. *bimaris*.

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Periocha: Optima aqua sed non omnium rerum omnino optima initio carminis Olympici primi canitur. sol enim Olympiae caeleste signum iudice Pindaro aquam aurumque, res terrenas, vincit. hae materiae certamina minora illi maximo aemula eo modo signare volunt, ut quamvis optimae Isthmii Neptuni Corinthiorumque fontium aquae sint et noctu pulcherrime flammae ab auro copioso Pythii Apollinis niteant, unice tamen velut sol die gloria Iovis Olympii luceat. columnae Herculis tertii in fine Olympici carminis, quae victoriam in Olympico ab Hercule condito certamine latam signant, stant quo non plus, ut dicunt, ultra, ut eas aquam optimam atque aurum venerabilissimum in eo carmine dicta, Isthmi scilicet ac Delphorum, superare necesse sit. nescio an Bacchylides tertii sui epinicii in versibus post lxxxiv quasi Pindarice expressis aethere puro Olympiam, aqua maris Isthmum, auro festivo Pythia solemnia designare velit, cum arcanam istorum significationem esse indicet.

Abstract: In the beginning of the first Olympian ode, water is ‘most excellent’ rather than ‘the best thing in the universe’, the superlative being absolute, not relative. The sun, heavenly sign of Olympia, excels over water and gold, elements of the earth. Water and gold symbolize the lesser Isthmian and Pythian games, water being indicative of the famed wells and springs of Corinth and the two seas surrounding the Isthmus, possibly also the wetland of the Nemean valley; whereas gold is the defining element of Delphi, where the proverbial treasures of the Pythian sanctuary shine in the night like fire. Like the sun, the glory of the Olympian Zeus outshines them both. The pillars of Heracles at the end of the third Olympian ode stands for the Olympian victory, the ultimate achievement, being superior to ‘most excellent’ water and ‘awesome’ gold, allusions to Isthmus and Delphi. Bacchylides may use a similar symbolism in the alleged imitation of Pindar in vv. 85 ff. of the third Epinician, where of the symbols which he designates as secret the pure aether would indicate Olympia; sea water Isthmus; and mirthful gold the festival of the Pythia.

Keywords: Corinth, Delphi, Gold, Olympia, Water.