

## MISZELLE

THE DIOSCURI AND THE ΑΓΩΝ  
AT PINDAR'S OLYMPIAN 3.36

Keywords: Pindar, Olympian 3, Dioscuri, Olympia

Scholars interpret the reference to Herakles entrusting the ‘splendid ἀγών’ (36) to the Dioscuri as a reference to Herakles entrusting the Olympic games to the Dioscuri.<sup>1</sup> If we follow this interpretation, the passage is peculiar both because we have no other reference to the Dioscuri as overseers of the Olympic games and because it is most obviously Zeus who is the overseer of the Olympic games. The purpose of this note is to suggest that Herakles, in the respective passage, entrusts not the supervision of the Olympic games generally, as scholars assume, but that of chariot racing specifically, to the Dioscuri. This makes better sense of the passage both in regard to the relationship that the Greeks attributed to the Dioscuri and horsemanship and in regard to the relationship that the Greeks attributed to Zeus and Olympia. Furthermore, as I shall suggest, this interpretation makes better sense of Pindar’s use of τε and καί (37), of the phrases ἀνδρῶν ἀρετᾶς πέρι (37) and ῥιμφοαρμάτου διφρηλασίας (37–38), and of the passage in relation to the context of patronage for the ode. The ‘splendid ἀγών’ (36) is the τέθριππον competition, and the ‘excellence of men’ (37) is a phrase that is relevant to the ‘excellence’ that Theron has shown by winning the τέθριππον competition at Olympia (according to Pindar’s rhetoric, at any rate).

I suggest that we have misinterpreted the passage because we have misinterpreted Pindar’s language at lines 37 and 38. Mezger suggests that ἀνδρῶν ἀρετᾶς πέρι (37) references gymnic events, but neither of the two passages that he cites as comparanda for his suggestion are comparable, since neither has the important term ἀρετά therein.<sup>2</sup> This is a problem: it is impossible to get ‘gymnic events’ from the

1) For this position, see e. g. M. Briand, *Pindare. Olympiques* (Paris 2014) 54, B. Gentili / C. Catenacci / P. Giannini / L. Lomiento, *Pindaro: Le Olimpiche* (Florence 2013) 83, W. Race, *Pindar. Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes* (Cambridge, MA 1997) 83, W. Verdenius, *Commentaries on Pindar, Volume 1, Olympian Odes 3, 7, 12, 14* (Leiden 1987) 5 (with reference to further bibliography), S. Shelmerdine, *Pindaric Praise and the Third Olympian*, *HSCPh* 91 (1987) 65–81, at 78, A. Köhnken, *Mythical Chronology and Thematic Coherence in Pindar’s Third Olympian Ode*, *HSCPh* 87 (1983) 49–63, at 54, L. Lehnus, *Pindaro: Olimpiche* (Milan 1981) 67, C. Segal, *God and Man in Pindar’s First and Third Olympian Odes*, *HSCPh* 68 (1964) 211–67, at 244, U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Pindaros* (Berlin 1922) 238.

2) Pindars *Siegeslieder* (Leipzig 1880) 174. The comparanda cited by Mezger are O. 1.95–96 (cited by Mezger as O. 1.98 ff.) and N. 9.12.

phrase ἀνδρῶν ἀρετᾶς πέρι. ἀρετά usually means ‘accomplishment’ in Pindar’s poetry and regularly refers to the victories that competitors have attained.<sup>3</sup> Less often, however, it refers to ‘excellence,’ as it does here.<sup>4</sup> Nothing in this phrase serves as a metaphor for gymnastic competitions. Furthermore, the phrase ‘excellence of men’ would be no more relevant to gymnastic events than it would be to equestrian events.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Pindar’s use of διωρηλασίας is also problematic for Mezger’s thesis. The word is a specific reference to chariot driving and is not capacious enough to reference equestrian events, such as the κέλης competition, which had no chariot. If, following Mezger, we are to assume that Pindar, with ἀνδρῶν ἀρετᾶς πέρι, is constructing a reference to gymnastic events generally, we should expect him thereafter to construct a reference to equestrian events generally, so that both the equestrian and the supposed gymnastic events of the Olympic games would be recognized. Thus, not only is the phrase ἀνδρῶν ἀρετᾶς πέρι problematic for Mezger’s thesis, διωρηλασίας is too. Nonetheless, following Mezger, scholars have continued to assume that Pindar here separates gymnastic and equestrian competition, chariot driving particularly, into two categories.<sup>6</sup>

I suggest that Pindar says that the Dioscuri oversee a ‘splendid ἀγών concerning both the excellence of men and swift-charioted chariot-driving’ (36–8) because this statement is particularly relevant to his patron, Theron. I suggest that the ἀρετά here referenced is that of a competitor who enters horses in an equestrian competition and wins the event contested by ‘men.’ This is what Theron has done by winning the victory celebrated in this ode. This ἀρετά is not to be confused with the ἀρετά that might be exhibited by a charioteer when driving a chariot. By using τε and καί, Pindar links the ἀρετά and the διωρηλασία with the singular ἀγών referenced in the previous line. ἀρετά and διωρηλασία are conjoined in this passage because they are both relevant to a singular ἀγών with the τέθριππον. διωρηλασία is capacious enough to include not only the charioteer but also the patron whose expenditure makes διωρηλασία possible. From Theron’s perspective, Pindar’s reference to ἀρετά would be welcome, since it references the importance of patrons, such as himself, in fostering chariot victories. The term ἀρετά is capacious enough that we need not limit the manner in which the patron’s ἀρετά is imagined, but, given epinician conventions, this would include the willingness to spend resources on chariot racing.<sup>7</sup>

There are further reasons to interpret the entrustment of the splendid ἀγών to the Dioscuri as a reference to equestrian competition. Pindar links ‘golden-char-

3) See e.g. Race (n. 1) 3, W. Slater, *Lexicon of Pindar* (Berlin 1969) 68–69.

4) The word does not mean ‘achievement’ here since it does not make sense to speak of an ἀγών concerning achievement. It makes good sense, however, for Pindar to speak of an ἀγών concerning excellence; cf. e.g. Race (n. 1) 85.

5) Pindar’s audience would have no way of knowing that Pindar here would be using ἀρετά as a reference to gymnastic events only. Furthermore, if Pindar wanted to reference multiple events, he probably would have chosen a noun in the plural (rather than ἀρετᾶς), so that his audience would know that he had multiple events in mind.

6) See n. 1.

7) On the importance of expenditure for the construction of ἀρετά, cf. e.g. B. 3.90–94, with, e.g., D. Cairns, *Bacchylides. Five Epinician Odes* (3, 5, 9, 11, 13) (Cambridge 2010) 213.

iated' Kastor with the chariot-victory of Arkesilas of Cyrene at P. 5.9.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Pausanias (5.15.5) informs that there was an altar to the Dioscuri near the starting point of the chariot races; thus, historically, there was a close connection between the Dioscuri and horseracing at Olympia. Pindar refers to a single *ἀγών* at line 36, and this makes good sense if he is referring to a particular event.<sup>9</sup> The adjective 'splendid' sits well with a reference to the *τέθριππον* competition, since the *τέθριππον* competition was the most prestigious competition at Olympia. It makes good sense for Pindar to celebrate the 'splendidness' of the *τέθριππον* competition since the statement occurs in an ode written for Theron's *τέθριππον* victory. Moreover, Pindar asserts that the glory that Theron and the Emmenidae have now won through Theron's chariot victory derives from the Dioscuri who are 'fond of horses' (*εὐίππων*, 39). It makes good sense that Pindar invokes the Dioscuri at the beginning of the ode, if Pindar constructs the Dioscuri as having a close connection to horse-racing in this ode (as I suggest is the case), since the ode celebrates a chariot victory that the Dioscuri oversaw<sup>10</sup> and 'gave' (39)<sup>11</sup> to Theron.<sup>12</sup> Context and comparanda, then, further encourage us to interpret the *ἀγών* in reference to the *τέθριππον* competition.<sup>13</sup>

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8) Therewith see L. Farnell, *The Works of Pindar*, V. II, *Critical Commentary* (London 1932) 168–69.

9) For *ἀγῶνες* as individual competitions, see I. 1.18. When Pindar wants to reference 'the games,' he generally does not use the singular *ἀγών* without another word modifying it. See e. g. Slater 1969, 8–9. Pindar may not use the singular *ἀγών* to reference the Olympic games at O. 1.7; for discussion, see C. Eckerman, *Pindar's Olympian 1.1–7 and its relation to Bacchylides 3.85–87*, *Wiener Studien* 130 (2017) 7–32.

10) On this topic, see, with reference to previous bibliography, Köhnken (n. 1) 59.

11) Cf. Gentili et al. (n. 1) 430.

12) O. 3.36–38 may also have caused confusion because Pindar refers to the Olympic festival in line 34, and then says that Herakles goes to the festival with the Dioscuri. Herakles goes to the festival as a general attendant, while the Dioscuri go as overseers of chariot racing.

13) For the Dioscuri, together with Hermes and Herakles, as stewards of games outside Olympia, see e. g. N. 10.49–53. For the Dioscuri as supporters of athletes generally, see e. g. N. 10.37–38. Thus, I make no claim that the Dioscuri do not take an interest in competitions other than chariot victories in Pindaric discourse. My claim is that Pindar fosters a particularly close connection between the Dioscuri, Theron, and chariot competition in O. 3, partially because it is in the interest of Theron for Pindar to do so.