

**VARIATIONS OF DIALECT
IN PINDAR'S *SECOND OLYMPIAN ODE***

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ῥῆμα δ' ἔργμάτων χρονιώτερον βιοτεύει,
ὅ τι κε σὺν Χαρίτων τύχα
γλῶσσα φρενὸς ἐξέλοι βαθείας.
– Pindar, *Nemean* iv.6-8

The odes of Pindar demonstrate a number of dialect variations with which the student of Attic Greek must wrestle. This is probably due to what Leonard Palmer, in his book The Greek Language refers to as Pindar's "polymorphism;" that is, a deliberate mixture of many different forms to achieve the poet's desired outcome. Palmer writes:

...the poetic repertoire [of Pindar] includes a number of alternative dialect forms on which he may draw at his convenience for particular effects ... this is an artificial language, modelled on the first literary language of the Greeks, the Epic language, toward which it gravitated in the course of its development. (p. 123).

Thomas Seymour, writing nearly a century earlier, in his book Selected Odes of Pindar suggested this mixture of dialects added a "grandeur and dignity to the style" (p. 216). Not all scholars have accepted this artificiality of Pindar's dialect. The nineteenth century scholar Basil L. Gildersleeve in his text Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes suggested that some in his day would attempt to "reconstruct a Pindar in uniform dialect" (p. lxxvi). In more recent years the Russian scholar N. S. Grinbaum has argued that the poetry of Alcman and (later Pindar) represent a language independent of the Epic tradition looking back to the North Greek Mainland as its source.¹

Whatever the cause of Pindar's "polymorphism," its reality is evident. The more poignant questions perhaps are why it was employed and what effect it had on the poetry itself? In this study we shall analyze a few dialect variations found in Pindar's *Second Olympian Ode* and consider what value and contribution they offer to the text.

Vowel Changes.

Seymour identifies in the *Second Olympian Ode* an example of some dialect variations relating to vowel changes exemplified by the word ἰδοῖσα as follows:

ἰδοῖσα δ' ὄξεϊζ' Ἐριννύς
ἔπεφνέ οἱ σὺν ἀλλαλοφονίᾳ
γένος ἀρήιον...(41-42)

But sharp Erinys, having seen,
slayed with mutual-slaughter
the warlike race...

This form which is the second aorist singular nominative feminine active participle of εἶδον, differs from the more familiar Attic form ἰδοῦσα. Seymour explains this change as "compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel, α to αἰ and ο to οἰ when ν is dropped before σ..." (pp. 217-218, see also Smyth, p. 16).

Typically we might expect ο (omicron) to be lengthened to ω (omega) rather than to the diphthong. Such lengthening however, is not without precedent. Echoing Seymour's evaluation Anatol Semenov in his book The Greek Language in Its Evolution, lists this tendency in a summary of Aeolic phonetics (p. 58). It is also attested in the Lesbian Aeolic of Sappho in the use of ἐοῖσα, for the feminine nominative singular participle of εἶμι.² Some older sources, citing Pindar classify this feature as a Doric (see Bullions, p. 146; the abridged Liddell & Scott, p. 239). More properly however, Pindar must be considered what Willcock calls "literary Doric" (i.e. Palmer's "polymorphism,"), explaining that...

Choral lyric was composed in 'literary Doric', an artificial dialect with a Doric flavor but containing also Aeolic forms from north Greece... (p. 22).

Common Doric differs from "literary Doric" in that it made use of the -ουσα form, as can be seen in the word ἐγκαθεύδουσα found on a Doric inscription from the temple of Aesculapius at Epidaurus.³

Another example is also found in *Olympian Two*, where the text reads:

ζῶει μὲν ἐν Ὀλυμπίοις ἀποθανοῖσα βρόμῳ κεραυνοῦ τανυέθειρα Σεμέλα...(25-26)	She lives among the Olympians having died by the crash of the thunderbolt - flowing-haired Semele...
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M. M. Willcock points out this example in his book Pindar: Victory Odes in the section entitled "Pindar's Language." Willcock in a list of "linguistic features" states "Present and strong aorist participle feminine in -οισα: ἀποθανοῖσα, Ol. ii.25." (p. 23). Gildersleeve claimed this form was "used exclusively" in Pindar (p. lxxxv). Palmer claims that Pindar was the "first of the choral lyricists to add aorist participles in -σαις and -σαισα to those in -οισα, etc" (p. 126). No example of -σαις and -σαισα participles are found in *Olympian Two*.

The use of the two examples of the Lesbian Aeolic form above contribute to the artistry of the text in at least two ways. First, they add contextual geographic coloring. While we certainly could not suggest that Pindar only uses Aeolic forms when referring to people or places associated with Aeolic, in the instances above this is certainly true. Both Erinyes and Semele are associated with Thebes. Coming from Thebes himself Pindar's "natural language was the Aeolic of Boeotia" (Willcock, p. 22). Carl Darling Buck in his work The Greek Dialects outlines the historical and linguistic connection that existed between Lesbos and Boeotia (p. 4-5). So in reference to two people associated with Thebes and in the context of a Theban story, Pindar uses a dialect associated with the region. While here he uses Lesbian, in general,

Pindar avoids Boeotian Aeolic, which Gildersleeve suggests “was not refined, and inspite of criticism, Pindar preferred the Asiatic form of the dialect [i.e. Lesbian]” (p. lxxvii). L. R. Farnell in his Critical Commentary to the Works of Pindar describes Boeotian as “rough and strange” (p. xix).

A second contribution comes in the fact that these particular dialect forms function as elements in rhetorical devices. Both examples above demonstrate assonance. The Aeolic -οι sound produced by ἰδοῖσα is followed in line forty-two by the word οἱ. In the same way the Aeolic ἀποθανοῖσα itself follows the dative plural Ὀλυμπίοι. In both instances the more common -ουσα form would not lend itself to such a device.

Consonant Changes.

The next variation we will explore concerns what Seymour calls “sporadic interchanges of consonants” (p. 219). He offers three examples of such interchanges from *Olympian Two*. The first is the word ὄρνιχα below:

...ὥς, ἄκραντα γαρεύετον	...like a pair of crows, in vain
Διὸς πρὸς ὄρνιχα θεῖον. (87-88)	against the divine bird of Zeus.

Although clearly this is the accusative singular form of the word, it differs from the Attic form ὄρνιθα, exchanging the θ for χ. Although neither of the two oldest manuscripts (Π¹ and Π²) contain this section to be able to check for error, Bowra in the critical apparatus of his Pindari Carmina offers only the thirteenth century manuscript A and the fourteenth century manuscript V as witnesses for ὄρνιθα (p. 11). This does not necessarily indicate that the χ form is erroneous, given that the majority of the manuscripts have ὄρνιχα.

Most likely ὄρνιχα here is a distinct dialect form. While most grammars (i.e. Bullions, Hadley & Allen, Goodwin and Smyth) suggest no dialect characteristics that equate θ with χ, Raphael Kühner in his work Ausführliche Grammatik der Griechischen Sprache suggests that θ and χ are sometimes interchanged with one another, giving ὄρνιχος as an example along with the Lesbian Aeolic form πλήχω for πλήθω (Vol. 1, p. 145). Expanding upon this, Satya Misra in his work The Comparative Grammar of Sanskrit, Greek & Hittite, suggests that in many instances consonants that were originally the labio-velar gh-sound in Indo-European evolved into Greek in three different directions: either χ, θ, or φ (pp. 30, 33). If this is the case the two forms of ὄρνις reflect two different streams of etymological change. In fact LSJ cites the third century grammarian Athenaeus who identified ὄρνιξ as Doric, as well as the ninth century

lexicographer Photius who claimed it was Ionic and Doric in dialect (p. 1254).⁴

Seymour's second example from *Olympian Two* is the word μόριμος, as follows:

...ἐξ οὔπερ ἔκτεινε Λᾷον μόριμος υἱὸς	...since the fated son, having met (him)
συναντόμενος, ἐν δὲ Πυθῶνι χρησθὲν	killed Laias, and fulfilled the oracle
παλαίφατον τέλεσσε. (38-40)	spoken long ago in Pytho.

Π¹ and Π² are both missing this section of line thirty-eight.⁵ Bowra indicates that the textual basis for this reading rests on the thirteenth century manuscript A, the correction of the thirteenth century manuscript G, and the scholia; the rest of the manuscripts all have μόρσιμος (p. 8). As we shall see the primary evidence for the shorter reading concerns metrics rather than manuscript evidence.

Concerning this shorter form LSJ claims this form is a “poetic” form of μόρσιμος meaning “appointed by fate” (pp. 1146,1147). Since as Gildersleeve says of Pindar's language “the basis is the language of Epic” (p. lxxvii), we might think of this as an Epic form. It is found in Homer, then later in Aeschylus (who was prone himself to use Epic language).⁶ Pindar uses the usual spelling of μόρσιμος in line ten. Henrico Stephanus in his *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* describes this consonant change as “pleonasmo literae σ” (Vol. VI, p.1204).

Seymour's last example from *Olympian Two* is the word ἐσλός, normally spelled ἐσθλός meaning “good, brave, stout, noble” (LSJ. p. 696). The text reads:

ἐσλῶν γὰρ ὑπὸ χαρμάτων	For under noble joys
πῆμα θνάσκει	spiteful pain
παλίγκοτον δαμασθέν (19-20)	is subdued [and] dies

Again Π¹ and Π² are both missing this section.⁷ Bowra indicates that ἐσλῶν is attested by the thirteenth century manuscripts A and V and by the twelfth century manuscript B. All the remaining manuscripts have ἐσθλῶν (p. 7). Gildersleeve claims the shorter form is Boeotian (p. lxxx). Yet LSJ clarifies this a bit by indicating that ἐσλός (accented on the ultima) is Doric, while ἔσλος (accented on the penult) is Aeolic (pp. 696, 697).⁸ Buck clarifies further claiming that ἔσλος is Lesbian and ἐσλός is literary Doric. (p.77). While the shorter form is used frequently in Pindar, ἐσθλός is never found.

The value of the three types of variations listed above is found in the role each can play either in the meter of the ode, in stylistic, rhetorical and euphonic concerns or perhaps even as instruments of social or cultural interplay. Metrical concerns demonstrate themselves acutely in the example of the word μόριμος

if the common spelling μόρσιμος were adopted it would serve to lengthen the penult, and in this particular case alter the meter used in each of the epodes throughout the ode.⁹ In our other two examples it would be difficult to make the argument that meter explains the choice of variation in that neither consonant change would affect a change in syllable quantity.

Ὅρνιχα and ἐσλῶν then may have been chosen in light of stylistic, rhetorical or euphonic concerns. In the text Ὅρνιχα is immediately followed by θεῖον. Perhaps Pindar was avoiding a repetition of the θ-sound that would result from the phrase Ὅρνιθα θεῖον. In the case of ἐσλῶν the -σθλ- of the longer spelling is difficult to pronounce. Especially if the θ was pronounced as an aspirated τ it would give the line a harshness of sound which is out of context. Pindar is talking about the subduing of pain; the harshness of an aspirated τ combined with the palatal χ of χαρμάτων would give a cutting sound that is avoided by deleting the θ. Even in the case of μόρσιμος, although meter may be a primary concern, in the text it modifies νίος (which immediately follows it). If the σ were retained the line would end with three sibilants in a row - μόρσιμος νίος. This would actually serve to soften the phrase and (in contrast to the previous example) detract from its harshness. After all there Pindar is talking about murder.

Finally, throughout history there have been examples of the conquest of one group of people over another having a significant effect on the language of the conquered region. In English for example some have suggested that as a result of the Norman conquest of the British Isles the English language has come to have a number of duplicate words for the same thing; a refined word and a common word. In many instances what we find is that the refined word has a French/Latin root, while the common (or even) vulgar word has a Anglo-Saxon/Germanic root. For example while we would never speak of eating “cow” (< OE *cū*) or “swine” (< OE *swīne*) we would think nothing of eating “beef” (< OF < LAT *bos, bovis*) or “pork” (< OF < LAT *porcus*). In the same way if indeed there was a Doric invasion of Greece it may be that the same thing took place in ancient Greek. Palmer offers an interesting analysis of Pindar’s *Pythian Two* suggesting that the many “Lesbianisms were a conscious poetical device.” After Palmer identifies these Lesbian Aeolisims he concludes:

What Pindar may be saying is that as a good Dorian Hieron of Syracuse (whose victory is being celebrated) will expect a good Spartan [i.e. a Doric dialect] martial song...but what is sent has been given an Aeolic twist (p. 126).

It may be that in Pindar's choice of words in *Olympian Two*, celebrating the Dorian Theron he adds the same "twist" at various points.

The Digamma.

Aeolic, like all other Greek dialects, originally made use of a letter of the alphabet which eventually fell out of usage known as the digamma producing a w-sound. Buck claims that initial digamma was used in Boeotian Aeolic up until about 200 B.C., and in many Doric dialects through the 400's (pp. 152, 161-172). Since Pindar's life is generally dated from 518-442 B.C. it is highly probable that his original work utilized the digamma in the spelling of many words. Seymour suggests:

Before some words it [i.e. the digamma] seems to have retained the force of preventing hiatus, although it is hard to say how many of these examples of apparent hiatus were justified merely by poetic precedent. (p. 220).

Such "poetic precedent" Gildersleeve felt was not a sufficient explanation for utilizing the digamma, even though he claims that nearly all instances of digammated words in Pindar are Homeric (p.lxxx). The evidence for the digamma is metrical and linguistic rather than textual. Seymour claimed that "No Ϝ (digamma) is found in the mss. and there is no mention of it in the scholia" (p. 220). Willcock and Seymour following the example of the manuscripts do not include the digamma in their texts while Gildersleeve writes it in where he deems it appropriate (see Gildersleeve, ll. 75, 154, 169 - note these are note the same as Bowra's line numbers).

The example we will consider in *Olympian Two* is the word ἐτέων, the genitive plural of the word meaning "year." The text reads:

τεκεῖν μή τινῶς ἑκατόν γε ἐτέων	indeed no city in one hundred years
πόλιν φίλοις ἄνδρα μᾶλλον	has born a man to friends more
εὐεργέταν πραπίσιν ἀφθονέστερόν	upright in mind and more ungrudging
τε χέρα	with respect to his hand
Θήρωνος....(93-95)	that Theron...

We notice that Pindar places ἐτέων immediately after the particle γε (which is incidentally not the Doric γα). This placement of two vowels one after the other would commonly lend itself to elision. The awkwardness of this construction is difficult to explain if the digamma was not originally present. There is much evidence that in Pindar's time this word was written with a digamma. A bronze tablet from Olympia commemorating a treaty between the Eleans and Heraeans dated to 500 B.C. written in Laconian Doric

establishes the treaty ἑκατὸν φέτεα - “for one hundred years.”¹⁰ Centuries earlier in the Linear B inscriptions the word 𐀓𐀶 *we-to* has been discovered, believed to be the accusative, singular, neuter of ἔτος.¹¹

While Doric, and Boeotian retained the digamma in Pindar’s day, that does not mean that it was used by all the Greeks of Pindar’s day. Buck claims that “in Attic-Ionic φ was lost at a very early period,” and “in East Ionic there is no trace of it even in the earliest inscriptions” (p. 46). Hesiod demonstrates this with the very word we are considering. In *Works and Days* he uses the phrase - ἑκατὸν μὲν παῖς ἔτεα without the φ in reference to one of those of the silver race who lived as a child one hundred years. (*Works and Days*, 130). The significance of this is that it tells us that while the digamma was in use, it was not the vernacular for all of Pindar’s audience. While the digamma would eventually be taken out of the text by latter copyists (as in other authors as well) it did have an Epic quality when it was used (see Kühner, p. 30). The use of the digamma does solve problems of hiatus, but as seen in the previous dialect variations above, it may also give a certain Epic (or even monumental) quality to the text. When Pindar cites Theron’s superiority over others for a period ἑκατόν γε φετέων, it might well have called to mind monumental treaties, or Homeric vocabulary.

Verb Variations.

The last variation we will consider deals with verb forms. Willcock points out two forms in *Olympian Two* of the third person plural present indicative which vary from the Attic form -ουσι. The first is exemplified by the word περιπνέοισιν as follows:

...ἔνθα μακάρων	...there ocean
νᾶσος ὠκεανίδες	breezes blow around
αὔραι περιπνέοισιν...(70-72)	the island of the blessed...

Buck suggests that Lesbian Aeolic regularly used the -οισι form for the third plural (p. 149, see also Seymour, p. 224). An inscribed decree of Mytilene in Lesbian Aeolic exemplifies this making use of the word ἀπαγγέλλοισι.¹²

Willcock’s second form presents the third plural in -ντι in the word λέγοντι.¹³ The text reads:

λέγοντι δ᾽ ἔν καὶ θαλάσῃ	And they say (that) in the sea
μετὰ κόραισι Νηρηῆος ἀλίσαις	with the sea-daughters of Nereus
βίοτον ἄφθιτον	life undecaying
Ἴνοϊ τετάχθαι τὸν ὅλον	has been arranged for Ino
ἀμφὶ χρόνον. (28-31),	for all time.

Smyth and Hadley & Allen both claim that this *-ντι* ending is what they describe as “original” and retained in Doric. (Smyth, p. 153, Hadley & Allen, p. 17). The Doric character of this form is exemplified by the word *ἀνφιλέγοντι* discovered on a fifth century B.C. Doric inscription from Tegea.¹³ Of this “original” Indo-European Language Misra suggests that the Indo-European third plural forms *-enti/onti-nti/-nni* evolved variously into *-anti/-nti/-ati* in Sanskrit, *-enti/-nti/-ati/-anti* in Greek, and *antsi/ntsi* in Hittite (Misra, p. 98). Semenov clarifies this somewhat by claiming that while in most Greek dialects the *τ* of early forms became *σ*, this change never occurred in all the variations of Doric except in the territory of Argolis (Semenov, p. 63).¹⁴

So in this last example Pindar would have had a number of choices available to him: *λέγουσι* (Attic-Ionic), *λέγοντι* (Doric), *λέγοισι* (Lesbian), and even a fourth option which Kühner suggests the Boeotian form *λέγονθι* (Vol. 1, p. 8). Why does Pindar sometimes use the Aeolic form and other times use the Doric? Seymour may offer one answer to this question. He writes:

The third person plural never ends in *-ουσι*. The Doric ending *-οντι* is preferred; but as that does not assume *ν*-movable, to prevent hiatus or elision the Aeolic form is used *-οισιν* (Seymour, p. 224).

If Seymour is correct Pindar alternates between Aeolic and Doric forms to allow for artistic variation. In the second example above, the word *περιπνέοισιν*, in the text it is followed by the *ἄνθεμα*. If the Doric form had been used here it would read *περιπνέοντι ἄνθεμα* causing the problem of an hiatus, discussed above regarding the digamma.

So clearly dialect variation offered him not only different options regarding meter, rhetorical device, geographic and cultural flavoring, but there is one possibility yet to consider, that is the mood conveyed by different dialects. As we look at these matters not only through the blurry lens of time, but as cultural outsiders looking into an ancient culture we surely miss the subtleties which they would have understood. It may very well have been that the use of these dialect variations themselves communicated aspects of mood or atmosphere. Gildersleeve suggests that the Doric elements of Pindar’s text add a “majesty and sonorous fullness of utterance,” even though “the older and stiffer inflections are set aside.” On the other hand he claims the Aeolic aspects “give fire and passion and a certain familiar sweetness” (p. lxxvii). The examples above may well reflect this. In describing the beautiful and pleasant winds of the

Isle of the Blessed Pindar uses the “familiar sweetness” of the Aeolic; yet in referring to those who tell immortal tales of immortal characters, he uses the “majesty” of the Doric.

Conclusion.

The variations in dialect in Pindar’s *Second Olympian Ode* (as most scholars suggest) clearly reflect a composite language unlike any particular regional dialect. Whether we think of his approach as composed in “literary Doric” (Willcock) or “polymorphism” (Palmer) we must reject any suggestion that it represents a distinct dialect unto itself. Pindar’s use of dialect variations however, is not haphazard nor random. Instead these variations contribute to the artistry of Pindar’s work in two ways:

1.) They serve to broaden Pindar’s audience. In the use of the Epic and Doric forms, Pindar speaks to those concerned with nobility and regal tradition. Yet in flavoring this same work with occasional Aeolisims, of both the smoother Lesbian variety and the more harsh and less sophisticated Boeotion, Pindar seems to almost whisper in the ear of his own countrymen, with the language they know so well.

2.) They serve to broaden Pindar’s artistic palette. While dialect variations expand the poet’s options whenever metrical concerns are at hand, they do more than simply offer a ready set of synonyms from which the poet may choose. Instead they add not only the tools necessary to construct interesting rhetorical devices, but they also hold the potential to add a cultural, geographic and even emotional component to the text. While these variations may seem slight and subtle to the modern ear, to the ancient audience they undoubtedly painted distinct images upon the minds of the hearers with each different form employed.

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¹⁰ ΑΦΡΑΤΡΑΤ ΟΙΡΡΑΓΕΙΟΖ:ΚΑΙΤΟΙΣΕΡ|ΦΑΟΙΟΙΖ:ΖΙΝΜΑΝΙΑΚΕΑ
 ΕΚΑΤ ΟΝ ΦΕΤΕΑ:|ΑΡΝΟΙΔΕΚΑΤΟΙ – 'Α φράτρα τοῖρ φαλείοις καὶ τοῖς Εὐ|φαοίοις.
 Συμμαχία κ'ε(ῖ)α ἑκατὸν φέτεα, | ἄρχοι δὲ κα τοῖ. (SGDI 1156, ll. 1-2, taken from Buck, p. 220, see
 also Giles, p. 481 and B. F. Cook, from Hooker, pp. 316-317 who classifiy this inscription as Laconian
 Doric).

¹¹ [ΑΨ]ΑΤΕ | []ΘΗΨ·ΤΤ·ΖΤ·ΨΗΨΨ... [-si-r]e-wi-jo-te | []-ja mo-ro-pa₂
 to-to we-to o-a-ke-re-se... (Translated by Michael Ventris - “Those functioning as *basilewes* [contribute
 as follows?]: [So-and-so] the shareholder this year took as follows...” (From PY 43 (Sn 64) taken from
 Bennett, p. 10 and Ventris p. 176).

¹² Περὶ ὧν οἱ στρόταγοι προτίθεισι προσταξάισας τ(ᾱ)ς [βόλ-] | [-λ]ας καὶ οἱ πρέσβεις
 οἱ ἀποστάλεντες εἰς Αἰτω[λίαν] | [ᾱ]παγγέλλοισι καὶ δόγμα ἤνικαν παρ τῷ κοίνῳ Αἰτ[ώ-
 λων]... (Hoffman, vol. ii. 61, from Giles p. 469).

¹³ Some manuscripts contain a second example of this adding in line twenty-six the phrase -
 φιλέοντι δὲ Μοῖσαι. Π¹, Oxy. 1614 shows evidence that it contained this phrase, preserving -
 φιλε[οντι δε Μ]οισαι, Π², Oxy. 2092 is missing these lines.

¹⁴ ...εἰ δέ κα | μὲ νόθοι ζῶντι τοὶ 'ς ἄσισταπόθικ || ες ἀνελόσθο· εἰ δὲ κ'ἀνφιλέγοντ | (ι, τ)οὶ
 Τεγεᾶται διαγνόντο κα τὸν θεθμόν. (SGDI 4598, B, l. 10-13 from Buck, p. 267).

¹⁵ What we seem to find is three different branches of change: 1.) Attic, Ionic and Aeolic follow
 the same course reflected in Linear B, 2.) Doric and Sanskrit (and Latin) retain the “original” Indo-
 European form, while 3.) Hittite actually reveals both sounds ending with an *-nsti* form. The chart
 below illustrates these three branches of change considering the verb “to be” in present, indicative, third
 person plural for each language.

-nt words			-si words			-tsi words
Doric	Sanskrit	Latin	Attic-Ionic	Aeolic	Linear-B	Hittite
ἐντί enti	सन्ति sánti	sunt sunt	εἰσί eisi	εἰσί eisi	AA/Δ eensi (e-e-si)	𐎶𐎵𐎶𐎶𐎶𐎶 ashantsi (a-sʼa-an-zi)

Composed from information in:

A Sankrit Grammar, by William Whitney,

Documents in Mycenaean Greek, by Michael Ventris & John Chadwick, and
Beginning Hittite, By Warren H. Held, Jr., William Schmalstieg and Janet Gertz