

PINDAR'S *OLYMPIAN* 1 AND THE AETIOLOGY OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

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In Pindar's *Olympian* 1, as is well known, the voice of the poet explicitly rejects the myth that told of the dismemberment of Pelops and how he was cannibalized at a feast of the gods. In its place, the poem substitutes a myth that told of the young hero's abduction by the god Poseidon, who eventually repaid Pelops by helping him win a chariot-race with Oinomaos. The telling of the second myth, however, is launched in *Olympian* 1 with a partial retelling of the first, and the resulting juxtaposition of the two myths has led to major problems of interpretation. The focal point of these problems is the ongoing dispute over the meaning of ἐπεὶ at *Olympian* 1.26: was Pelops abducted "after" or "since" (in the causal sense) Klotho the Moira 'Fate' took him out of the "purifying cauldron" (καθαροῦ λέβητος, 26), resplendent as he was with his shoulder of ivory (ἐλέφαντι φαίδιμον ὦμον κεκαδμένον, 27)? The bibliography for both alternatives, "after" or "since" (causal), is massive, and consensus is lacking.¹

In attempting a new interpretation, I shall take a different approach: instead of assuming that Pindar is literally substituting one myth for another, I shall argue that the "substitution" as represented in *Olympian* 1 is in fact a poetic expression of a preexisting fusion of two myths, where the earlier myth is officially subordinated to but acknowledged by

¹ There is a useful inventory of opposing views at pp. 66–67 of A. Köhnken, "Time and Event in Pindar *O.* 1.25–53," *CA* 2 (1983: *Studies in Classical Lyric: A Homage to Elroy Bundy*) 66–76. Köhnken himself argues for the interpretation "since" (causal). Although I disagree with his conclusions, I have learned much from Köhnken's observations, as also from those of W. J. Slater, "Pindar's Myths," *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to B.M.W. Knox*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, W. Burkert, and M. C. J. Putnam (Berlin 1979) 63–70, and of D. E. Gerber, *Pindar's Olympian One: A Commentary* (Toronto 1982) 55–56. In what follows, I shall use the following abbreviated references: Burkert *HN* = W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, transl. P. Bing (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1983); Burkert *GR* = W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, transl. J. Raffan (Cambridge, Mass. 1985); Rohde = E. Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* I (Freiburg i. B. 1898²).

the later myth. Furthermore, I shall argue that the relative earliness and lateness of these two myths has to do not with any innovation by Pindar himself but rather with the historical sequence of the accretion of traditional myths officially associated with the complex institution of the Olympics. In other words, my claim is that both myths are traditional and in fact signal that they are traditional. As for the subordination of the myth that told of the dismemberment of Pelops to the myth that told of the abduction of Pelops by Poseidon and the hero's victory in the chariot-race, I shall argue that this pattern corresponds to the subordination of the oldest athletic event of the Olympics, the single-course foot-race, to the most prestigious athletic event of the Olympics in Pindar's time, the four-horse chariot-race. In this sense, Pindar's *Olympian* 1 could reflect the actual aetiology of the Olympics in the early fifth century.

By using the word "aetiology" here, I am implying that the relationship of given myths to given athletic events corresponds to the general relationship of myth to ritual. I do so, as we shall see, on the basis of an understanding of the essence of the ancient Greek athletic games, including the four great pan-Hellenic festivals known as the Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games, as fundamentally a matter of ritual.

Before we may proceed, however, some definitions of terms are in order. By "ritual" I mean a given set of formal actions that correspond to a given set of thought-patterns that can take shape as a given myth. The myth may refer to itself as the motivation, in Greek, the *aition* 'cause', of the ritual. Such self-reference, commonly known as "aetiology," should not be taken as evidence for the notion that myth exists in order to explain ritual. It would be more accurate to say that ritual motivates myth as much as myth motivates ritual. In another context, I have offered the following additional observations on Greek *aition* 'cause' in the sense of a myth that *traditionally* motivates an institution, such as a ritual: "I stress 'traditionally' because the myth may be a tradition *parallel* to the ritual, not *derivative* from it. Unless we have evidence otherwise, we cannot assume in any particular instance that an aetiological myth was an *untraditional* fabrication intended simply to explain a given ritual. The factor of *motivating*—as distinct from *explaining*—is itself a traditional function in religion, parallel to the traditional function of ritual. It is only when the traditions of religion become obsolescent that rituals may become so obscure as to invite explanations of a purely literary nature."²

For a most convenient introduction to the subject of the ritual essence of ancient Greek athletics, on which there is a considerable

² G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore 1979) 279, par. 2, note 2.

bibliography, I refer to the compressed summary in Walter Burkert's handbook on Greek religion; he concludes that the archaic institutions of athletic activity evolved out of practices that could be described as 1) rituals of initiation into adulthood and 2) rituals of compensation for the catastrophe of death.³ This is not to say, of course, that Greek athletics can be described exclusively in terms of such rituals. Burkert says explicitly: "Of course, age groups and initiation were no longer part of the pan-Hellenic festival."⁴ Still, an objective description reveals surviving features of the two kinds of ritual just noted. Moreover, such features will help us find a connection between these two kinds of ritual in the specific instance of Greek athletics.

A universally common characteristic of initiation is that it ritualizes or symbolizes "death" and "rebirth" from one given status to another: one has to "die" to one's old self in order to be "reborn" to one's new self.⁵ In this light, we may note the following themes of symbolized "death" in the institutions of the pan-Hellenic Games:

1. at the Olympics, the athletes' 30-day period of separation, sexual abstinence, and fasting on a vegetarian diet;⁶
2. the wearing of black garb by the judges at athletic events;⁷
3. the crowning of the victor with garlands that bear funerary connotations.⁸

Such themes of symbolized death for the athlete on the level of ritual correspond to the themes of primordial death for a hero on the level of myth. Each founding of a Greek athletic festival was apparently motivated by at least one myth that told of a hero's death.⁹ In the case of the four great pan-Hellenic Games, the main foundation myths are as follows:¹⁰

³ Burkert *GR* 105–7.

⁴ Burkert *HN* 101.

⁵ Cf. e.g. H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes* (Lille 1939) 342–43; also A. Brelich, *Paides e parthenoi*, *Incunabula Graeca* 36 (Rome 1969).

⁶ See Burkert *GR* 106; fuller documentation in Burkert *HN* 102, note 43.

⁷ See the discussion by Rohde 152, note 1.

⁸ *Ibid.* Note too Rohde 151, note 5 on the funerary symbolism of the myrtle and the use of this flower for victory garlands in the Theban games known as the Iolaia.

⁹ There is a list of 20-odd examples collected by F. Pfister, *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum* II (Giessen 1909) 496–97, to be supplemented by the additional list of A. Brelich, *Gli eroi greci* (Rome 1958) 94–95. The variations in these myths reflect the political vicissitudes of the festivals themselves, in that different versions may represent the traditions of different groups, places, times.

¹⁰ It is important to keep in mind the following formulation of Rohde 151–52: "The greatest Games of all, to which all Greece assembled, the Pythian, Olympian, Nemean, and Isthmian, were during the historical period, it is true, celebrated in honor of the gods; but that they had been originally instituted as Funeral Games of Heroes and only subsequently transferred to higher guardianship was, at any rate, the general opinion of an-

Olympian Games (Olympics), founded by the hero Pelops in compensation for the death of Oinomaos;¹¹ alternatively, founded by the hero Herakles, in compensation for the death of his great-grandfather, Pelops¹²

Pythian Games, founded by the god Apollo himself in compensation for his having killed the Python¹³

Isthmian Games, founded by the hero Sisyphos in compensation for the death of the baby-hero Melikertes = Palaimon¹⁴

Nemean Games, founded by the heroes known as the Seven against Thebes in compensation for the death, by snakebite, of the baby-hero Opheltēs = Arkhemoros.¹⁵

tiquity” (from translation of Rohde’s *Psyche* by W. B. Hillis [New York 1925] 117). Rohde’s accompanying note at 152, note 1 is particularly helpful.

¹¹ Phlegon *FGrH* 257 F 1: the Delphic Oracle is quoted as saying (lines 8–9): . . . *θήκε δ’ ἔπειτ’ ἔροτον καὶ ἔπαθλα θανόντι / Οἰνομάω* “he [Pelops] established a festival and contests for the dead Oinomaos.” On the basis of observations to be presented below concerning the semantics of *ἐπί* + dative of the person in funerary contexts, I infer that the collocation of *ἐπ-αθλα* ‘contests’ with the dative in this present passage conveys the notion that Pelops instituted the contests in compensation for the death of Oinomaos. In this particular case, furthermore, myth has it that it was Pelops who actually caused the death of Oinomaos.

¹² Phlegon *ibid.*: the Delphic Oracle is quoted as saying (lines 9–11): *τρίτατος δ’ ἐπὶ τοῖς παῖς Ἀμφιτρυῶνος / Ἡρακλῆς ἐτέλεσσ’ ἔροτον καὶ ἀγῶν’ ἐπὶ μήτρῳ / Τανταλίδῃ Πέλοπι φθιμένῳ* “after them, the third was Herakles, son of Amphitryon: he established the festival and the contest [*agōn*] for the dead Pelops, son of Tantalos, a maternal relative” [the daughter of Pelops, myth has it, was the mother of Amphitryon, father of Herakles]. On the basis of the phraseology here, I am ready to argue that the collocation of *agōn* ‘contest’ with *ἐπὶ* with the dative conveys the notion that Herakles instituted the festival in compensation for the death of Pelops. See further below. From the standpoint of this oracular poem, Pelops and Herakles were respectively the second and the third founders of the Olympics; the “first founder” was one Pisos (lines 6–7), the eponymous hero of Pisa, the site of the Olympics (see also Pausanias 5.17.2, 6.22.2). On Herakles as the founder of the Olympics, see also Aristotle *fr.* 637 Rose (cf. Pausanias 5.13.12); cf. Brelich (above, note 5) 103.

¹³ Anon., *Peplos* (quoted by scholia to Aristides, *Panathenaea* 189); Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 7.17; Clement *Protrepticus* 1.2. Besides Burkert *GR* 105–7, see Brelich (above, note 5) 95–97, esp. 96, note 70 on Python as a ritual hero. According to a variant, Diomedes was first to hold the Pythian Games in honor of Apollo; Pausanias 2.32.2 (Trozenian version).

¹⁴ Pindar *fr.* 6.5 (1); Pausanias 2.1.3 (note the phraseology: *ἀγῶνα ἐπ’ αὐτῷ*); Hyginus, *Fabulae* 273; Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.29; *Hypotheses* to Pindar, *Isthmians*. Cf. Brelich (above, note 5) 103.

¹⁵ Bacchylides 9 (8) 12; Aeschylus, *Nemea* (*TGF* p. 49); Euripides, *Hypsipyle* (ed. Bond) 97–103; Apollodorus 3.6.4 (note the phraseology: *ἐπ’ αὐτῷ . . . ἀγῶνα*); Hyginus, *Fabulae* 74, 273; Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.29; *Hypotheses* to Pindar, *Nemeans*. This myth can function as a supplement to the myth of Herakles and the Nemean Lion; cf. Callimachus *fr.* 254–69 in H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons, edd., *Supplementum Hellenisticum* (Berlin 1983).

Besides seasonally recurring festivals of athletic events officially motivated by the death of heroes, there are early and rare traces in archaic Greece of occasional or once-only festivals of athletic events motivated by the death of immediate ancestors or relatives. This evidence comes from dedicatory inscriptions that memorialize various prizes won at such events.¹⁶ Just as the heroes of epic narrative can respond to the death of a fellow-hero by instituting a once-only festival of athletic events “for” this hero, a concept that is regularly conveyed by the idiom of ἐπί + dative of the hero’s name,¹⁷ so also the bereaved in real life could institute what appear to be once-only festivals “for” the deceased, a concept again conveyed by the idiom of ἐπί + dative of the name of the deceased.¹⁸ This rarely-attested custom of instituting once-only athletic events in honor of immediate ancestors was clearly obsolescent even by the archaic period,¹⁹ and the custom that decidedly replaced it is clearly represented by the countless attestations of seasonally recurring athletic events “for” heroes, a concept yet again conveyed by the idiom of ἐπί + dative of the given hero’s name.²⁰ After the obsolescence of once-only athletic events instituted in honor of immediate ancestors, the way to institute funeral games for a person who had just died was for that person to be made a cult-hero under the authority of the *polis*, so that seasonally recurring athletic festivals could be held in his honor.²¹

The thought-patterns that underlie both the once-only and the seasonally recurring Greek athletic festivals are analogous to what Karl

¹⁶ There is a valuable collection of eight such inscriptions, ranging in date from the early seventh to the early fifth centuries B.C., in L. E. Roller, “Funeral Games for Historical Persons,” *Stadion* 7 (1981) 1–18. The author is helpful in addressing various questions raised about the geographical distribution of the evidence (15, note 47).

¹⁷ E.g. *Odyssey* 24.91, where the idiom refers to Achilles as the dead hero in whose honor the Achaeans set up a once-only festival of athletic events.

¹⁸ The idiom is attested in seven of the eight inscriptions adduced by Roller (above, note 16) 2–3; the eighth is too fragmentary for us to be certain whether the idiom was used there as well.

¹⁹ See Roller (above, note 16) 5–6, who ascribes the obsolescence of this custom to the progressive encroachment of the *polis* upon funerary practices and other such practices characteristic of powerful extended families. In the case of once-only athletic events in honor of immediate ancestors and the like, we must take note of the tendency toward pan-Hellenism even in this obsolescent custom: we know from the inscriptions that the athletes who competed in such events could come from other city-states (Roller, p. 3). Thus there must have been some degree of pan-Hellenic “advertisement.”

²⁰ E.g. Hesychius s.v. ἐπ’ Εὐρυγύη ἀγών, with reference to the Athenian festival of the Panathenaia: see Amelesagoras *FGH* 330 F 2 and Jacoby’s commentary. See also notes 11 and 12 above, with reference to the festival of the Olympics.

²¹ See e.g. the list in Rohde 151, note 4: the Delphic Oracle orders hero-cults, taking the form of seasonal athletic festivals, in honor of such historical figures as Miltiades (Herodotus 6.38), Brasidas (Thucydides 5.11), Leonidas (Pausanias 3.14.1; note the phraseology: ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς . . . [sc. for both Brasidas and Leonidas] ἀγῶνα). A comparable case is that of the murdered Phocaeans at Agylla/Caere (Herodotus 1.167.2).

Meuli has found in various rituals of combat or mock combat in a wide range of societies throughout the world.²² From Meuli's far-reaching survey we find that, in some specific instances of ritual combat, a fundamental motive is to compensate for feelings of guilt—defined or undefined—about someone's death.²³ The dead person's anger can be assuaged—and the guilt or pollution cancelled—by a death or a mock-death that serves as compensation for the original death.²⁴ More fundamentally, the combat in such instances is a special kind of *ordeal*—where you fight for your "life" or run for your "life" or struggle in whatever other form of competition for your "life." Thus a word more appropriate than "combat" might be "contest."²⁵ Who is to "live" and who is to "die" is determined not by chance but by the given society's sense of cosmic order. In some societies, the real death of one person is compensated proportionately: one other person "dies" in a ritual contest, while the one or ones who competed with this other person "live." In Greek society, however, the proportion is inverted: one person "lives" by winning in a ritual contest, while the one or ones who competed with this person "die" by losing. In this way, the compensa-

²² K. Meuli, *Der griechische Agon* (Cologne 1968; publication, ed. by R. Merkelbach, of Meuli's 1926 *Habilitationsschrift*); also "Der Ursprung der Olympischen Spiele," *Die Antike* 17 (1941) 189–208, reprinted in K. Meuli, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Basel and Stuttgart 1975) 881–906.

²³ There is of course no reason to assume that all instances of human ritual combat are built on any one motivating principle.

²⁴ On the notion of compensation as owed by the living to the dead and, more generally, on the notion of a contract or pact between the living and their ancestors, see C. Lévi-Strauss, "La Visite des âmes," *Paroles données* (Paris 1984) 245–48.

²⁵ In this connection, I found it helpful to read W. J. Ong, *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (Ithaca 1981) 104–7 on the custom of "land diving" as practiced on the New Hebrides island of Pentecost. In an annual ritual intended to promote a good yam crop, the men of the community compete with each other by diving "from tree-and-vine towers as high as eighty feet and more, headfirst, with lianas tied to their ankles, the woody vines just long enough to break the men's fall as they hit the bare ground below" (p. 104). For the participants, the aetiological motivation for the ritual is as follows: once, "a man named Tamalie quarreled with his wife, who ran away and climbed a banyan tree. Tamalie followed to recapture her, she jumped down to escape him, and he jumped after her. But she had tied lianas around her ankles to break her fall, while he, without lianas, simply plunged to his death. The other men took up the practice of land diving so that no woman would trick them again" (p. 106). I infer that the mock death of the men engaged in the ritual, modeled on the mock death of the primordial woman in the myth, compensates for the "real" death of the primordial man in the myth. Note too that the setting for the stylized death in the ritual is a thing of culture, that is, a tower, while the setting for the "real" death in the myth was a thing of nature, a tree. Ong continues: "The threat of death is real enough, though accidents, which occur with fair frequency, are generally minor (pulled muscles, sprains, contusions, skinned shoulders), since even if the lianas break, they generally do so at a point where they have already notably decelerated the fall. But death is in the air, literally and figuratively, and it is meant to be" (p. 105).

tion for the pollution of a death takes the form of winning one other life rather than losing one.

From this point of view, we can see how the inherited features of initiation in the preliminary rituals of Greek athletic festivals are connected to the inherited features of ritual contest in the actual athletic events: the athlete, like an initiate, undergoes a ritualized death in preparation for the new “life” that will be his if he wins in his contest. And, as he engages in the contest, he is struggling for this “life” in order to compensate for the death that called for his own “death.”

Such a pattern of thought can be elicited from a rethinking of Burkert's analysis of the chronologically oldest athletic event in the Olympics, the *stadion*, a single-course foot-race in the stadium (the recording of victors in this race starts with 776 B.C.).²⁶ This event was as a rule inaugurated with the sacrifice of a black ram at the *Pelopion* ‘precinct of Pelops’,²⁷ to be followed by the corresponding sacrifice of a bull²⁸ at a heap of ash known as “the altar of Zeus,” which was to serve as the finishing-point of the foot-race to follow (in fact, the early stadium at Olympia ended at the altar of Zeus).²⁹ As Pausanias observes (5.13.1), the preeminence of Pelops among all the heroes involved in the sacrifices at Olympia corresponded to the preeminence of Zeus among all the gods. Thus the inaugural set of sacrifices to Pelops and to Zeus before the foot-race unites the hero and god in a “polar tension,”³⁰ while the foot-race itself “presupposes the bloody act of killing.”³¹ Moreover, from an aetiological point of view, the foot-race was actually part of the overall sacrifice, as we learn from the observation, made by Philostratus, that the sacrifice to Zeus was not complete until the foot-race was won:

στάδιον δὲ ὧδε εὖρηται· θυσάντων Ἡλείων ὅποσα νομίζουσι, διέκειντο μὲν ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ τὰ ἱερά, πῦρ δὲ αὐτοῖς οὕτω ἐνέκειτο. στάδιον δὲ οἱ δρομεῖς ἀπείχον τοῦ βωμοῦ καὶ εἰστήκει πρὸ αὐτοῦ ἱερεὺς λαμπάδι βραβεύων· καὶ ὁ νικῶν ἐμπυρίσας τὰ ἱερά Ὀλυμπιονίκης ἀπῆει. (*On Gymnastics* 5)

And the single-course foot-race [*stadion*] was instituted in the following way.³² After the Eleans had completed all their customary sacrifices [to Zeus], the consecrated parts would lie on the

²⁶ Burkert *HN* 95–98.

²⁷ See Pausanias 5.13.1–2 and the comments of Burkert *HN* 98.

²⁸ Burkert *HN* 98, note 25.

²⁹ Burkert *HN* 97. Such sacrifices in the context of the Olympics, as Burkert notes (p. 96), would have had smaller-scale analogues in the context of epichoric ritual practices at Olympia on occasions other than the Olympics.

³⁰ Burkert *HN* 97.

³¹ Burkert *HN* 98.

³² The wording here indicates clearly that the author is concerned not so much with describing current athletic practice as with indicating the aetiology that accompanies athletic practice.

altar, though not as yet set on fire. The runners would stand at a distance of one stadium [*stadion*] from the altar, in front of which there was a priest signaling the start with a torch. And the winner would set fire to the consecrated parts and then depart as an Olympic victor.³³

Another athletic event that counted as part of the overall scenario of sacrifice was the *diaulos*, a double-course foot-race that followed the foot-race of the *stadion* and was twice the stadium in length (this athletic event of the *diaulos* was apparently introduced in the Olympics at 724 B.C.).³⁴ Again, we turn to the description by Philostratus:

ἐπεὶ δὲ Ἡλεῖοι θύσειαν, ἔδει μὲν καὶ τοὺς ἀπαντῶντας Ἑλλήνων θύειν θεωρούς. ὥς δὲ μὴ ἀργῶς ἡ πρόσδοδος αὐτῶν γίγνοιτο, ἔτρεχον οἱ δρομεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ βωμοῦ στάδιον οἷον καλοῦντες τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν καὶ πάλιν εἰς ταῦτὸν ὑπέστρεφον οἷον ἀγγέλλοντες, ὅτι δὴ ἀφίξειτο ἡ Ἑλλὰς χαίρουσα. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν περὶ διαύλου αἰτίας. (*On Gymnastics* 6)

When the Eleans made their sacrifice [i.e., the sacrifice to Zeus, where the winner of the *stadion* set fire to the consecrated parts], all the Greek envoys present had to sacrifice. But in order that their procession not be delayed,³⁵ the runners ran one stadium-length away from the altar [of Zeus], calling on the Greeks [= the envoys] to come, then turned and ran back as if to announce that all Greece was arriving to share in the joy. So much for the aetiology [*aiitiā*] of the double course [*diaulos*].³⁶

Burkert concludes about the foot-race of the *stadion*:³⁷

The end of the race, its goal, is the top of the ancient heap of ash [= the altar of Zeus], the place where fire must blaze and burn up the thigh-bones. The race marks the transition from

³³ The translation follows Burkert *HN* 97. Note the parallel wording adduced by Burkert 97, note 22, from an inscription concerning institutional procedures at Delphi (as funded by Eumenes II), *LSS* 44.15: ὁ δὲ δρόμος γινέσθω . . . ἄχρι ποτὶ τὸν βωμόν, ὁ δὲ νικέων ὑφαπτέτω τὰ ἱερά "the running is to extend up to the altar, and the winner is to set fire to the consecrated parts." I am puzzled by the translation in *LSJ* s.v. ὑφαπτω: "is to set the fire for lighting the sacred lamps."

³⁴ Cf. Philostratus *On Gymnastics* 12; also Pausanias 5.8.6.

³⁵ Note the translation of ὥς δὲ μὴ ἀργῶς ἡ πρόσδοδος αὐτῶν γίγνοιτο by J. Jüthner, *Philostratos über Gymnastik* (Leipzig 1909) 139: "damit aber deren Anfkunft nicht ohne Zeremoniell vor sich gehe. . . ."

³⁶ Translation, with modifications, after Burkert *HN* 97, who notes (p. 100) that the portent recounted in Herodotus 1.59.1 about Hippokrates, father of Peisistratos, must be understood as taking place immediately after the Olympic event of the *diaulos*, as the envoys were approaching the altar of Zeus. Hippokrates was one of these envoys, and, as he approached, the water inside the sacrificial cauldrons (presumably at the altar of Zeus) started to boil before the application of fire. This portent seems to have conveyed the idea that the very presence of Hippokrates, as the future father of Peisistratos, was the equivalent of the Olympic victor's fire that was required to start the sacrifices at the altar of Zeus.

³⁷ Burkert *HN* 98.

blood to purifying fire,³⁸ from encountering death to the joyful satisfaction of surviving as manifested in the strength of the victor.³⁹ Thus, the most important [athletic event] at Olympia is part of a sacrificial act moving between the *Pelopion* and the altar of Zeus.

In other words, the transition from the pollution of bloodshed to the purification of fire is a transition from participating in death to experiencing a life after death *as manifested in the victory of the athlete and as symbolized by the sacrificial fire that he lights at the altar of Zeus*.⁴⁰

This foot-race, then, framed by the set of sacrifices at the precinct of Pelops and at the altar of Zeus, is the ritual core of the Olympics. And we can see the deeper significance of this ritual core as a diachronic feature of initiation by following through on Burkert's discovery⁴¹ that the very festival of the Olympics was from the earliest times onward correlated with a myth that told how the hero Pelops was killed, dismembered, and served up by his father Tantalos as sacrificial meat boiled inside a tripod cauldron, to be eaten by the gods—only to be reassembled and brought back to life inside the same sacrificial caul-

³⁸ On purification as transition, consider the semantics of Latin *pūrgō* 'purify', the etymology of which, according to R. Thurneysen, "Zur Wortschöpfung im Lateinischen," *Indogermanische Forschungen* 31 (1912–13) 276–81, is **pūrigō* 'carry [verb *agō*] fire' [**pūr*, as attested in Oscan *pūr*, Umbrian *pīr*, and Greek *ῥῑπ*]. The context of **pūr agere* 'carry fire' is actually attested in a ritual recorded in the *Iguvine Tables* (Ib 12), where fire is being carried in a portable altar or brazier called an *ahti-* (from verb *agō*). See G. Nagy, "Six Studies of Sacral Vocabulary relating to the Fireplace," *HSCP* 78 (1974) 71–106, esp. 105.

³⁹ Burkert's formulation can be more fully appreciated in light of the following observation on the typology of initiation: "Just as pollution is disease and disease is death, so purification is a renewal of life" (G. Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*, [London 1946²] 93).

⁴⁰ On the symbolism of fire-as-victory, see note 36 on the portent presaging the pan-Hellenic importance of the birth of Peisistratos: the fire of the victor is here made analogous to the begetting of the tyrant. Note too that the Greek word *kratos* designates not only political and military power but also athletic victory (Nagy [above, note 2] 90, par. 37, note 6). For a parallel thought-pattern, consider the Roman aetiology for the *lūdī* 'games' known as the *Compitālia*, a word derived from *com-pitum* 'crossroads', further derived from *com-petō* 'meet, come together; compete with others in pursuit of a given honor' (for the latter definition, see Nonius Marcellus 276.10 Lindsay). According to this aetiology, as reported by Pliny the Elder (*NH* 36.204), the *lūdī* of the *Compitālia* were founded by Servius Tullius, a primaeval king of Rome who was begotten by a flaming phallus that appeared out of the royal hearth tended at the time by his mother; young Servius succeeded to the kingship when it was discovered that his head lit up while he slept (for more on this myth, see Nagy [above, note 38] 96–100). The aetiology specifically accounts for the foundation of the games as resulting from the belief that Servius Tullius had thus been begotten by the *Lār familiāris* 'the ancestral spirit of the family' of the previous king, Tarquinius Priscus (Pliny, *ibid.*). Moreover, it is specified that Servius Tullius founded the games in honor of the *Lārēs* 'ancestral spirits' (*ibid.*).

⁴¹ Burkert *HN* 100.

dron by the agency of these same gods.⁴² Burkert adduces a crucial parallel:⁴³ the athletic festival of the Lykaia in Arcadia was aetiologically correlated with a myth that told how Arkas, the eponymous ancestor of all the Arcadians, was killed and served up by his grandfather Lykaon as sacrificial meat to be eaten by the gods—only to be brought back to life by Zeus.⁴⁴ Now it so happens that the pan-Arcadian athletic festival of the Lykaia, as Burkert has demonstrated, is a network of rituals and myths that are overtly characteristic of initiation into adulthood,⁴⁵ so that the very parallelism of the aetiological myth of Arkas with the myth of Pelops can be taken as a particularly telling point in support of Burkert's arguments concerning reflexes of initiation-practices in the Olympics.

Specifically, as Burkert shows, the myth of the slaughter of Pelops must have been an *aition* correlated with the ritual of the slaughter of the black ram at the precinct of Pelops. In the myth, the only part of the dismembered Pelops that was actually eaten by the gods was the hero's shoulder, consumed by Demeter, which was later replaced with an ivory piece in his reintegrated body.⁴⁶ Here we see a specific *aition* for the ritual reverence of the ivory shoulder-blade of Pelops, a larger-than-life cult object on display at Olympia,⁴⁷ in that the shoulder-blade of the slaughtered hero is analogous to the shoulder-blade of slaughtered rams: in ancient Greece, as Burkert points out, "a ram's shoulder blade played a special part in the sacrifice of a ram."⁴⁸ Burkert adds that Demeter, who had eaten the hero's shoulder in the myth, also figures in the rituals of the Olympics: the only woman allowed to enter the stadium was a priestess of Demeter (Pausanias 6.20.9).⁴⁹ Burkert concludes: "Thus, the Olympic ritual combines the very [figures] that went together in the myth—Pelops, Zeus, and Demeter. The canni-

⁴² A survey of testimonia in Burkert *HN* 99, note 32.

⁴³ Burkert *HN* 100.

⁴⁴ On the dismemberment and eating of Lykaon by the gods, see Hesiod fr. 163 MW (and the comments by Burkert *HN* 86–87). On the revival of Lykaon, see [Eratosthenes] *Katasterismoi* (*Fragmenta Vaticana* ed. Rehm) p. 2 (and the comments by Burkert *HN* 87, note 20).

⁴⁵ Burkert *HN* 84–93. Note his discussion of age-divisions at p. 90 and of expulsion/impulsion rituals at p. 92. I would draw special attention to this observation (p. 92): "The younger members of the rising generation had to be forced away into the wild 'outdoors' while the [older] twenty-five-year-olds, now marriageable, entered athletic competitions." In other words, age-classes could be differentiated by way of overt vs. stylized separation (i.e., rustication vs. athletics respectively).

⁴⁶ Sources in Burkert *HN* 99, note 32; note esp. Bacchylides fr. 42, Euripides *IT* 386–88, Lycophron 152–55, Apollodorus *Epitome* 2.3.

⁴⁷ Pausanias 5.13.4–6; Burkert *HN* 99, note 30, cites further sources.

⁴⁸ Burkert *HN* 100, with documentation.

⁴⁹ Burkert *HN* 100 and note 34.

balistic myth of Pelops that so shocked Pindar clearly refers to the Olympic festival."⁵⁰

I propose two qualifications. First, as we shall see, Pindar's "shock" is a poetic convention that allows the subordination of one myth, the dismemberment and reintegration of Pelops, to another myth. Second, the myth of Pelops' dismemberment and reintegration need not be viewed as an *aition* for the Olympic festival as a whole. True, it suits admirably the oldest aspect of the festival, the foot-race of the *stadion* as framed by the sacrifices at the precinct of Pelops and at the altar of Zeus. But we must keep in mind that the Olympics kept evolving with later accretions of more and more athletic events, and that the ritual features of these events would have required a corresponding evolution in aetiology, with later accretions of myths.

For example, let us take the athletic event of the chariot-race at the Olympics, supposedly introduced there in the year 680;⁵¹ whether or not this date is exact,⁵² up until the introduction of the chariot-race *only the victors of the foot-race had been consecutively recorded since the year 776*.⁵³ Corresponding to the athletic event of the chariot-race is an *aition*, the myth of the life-and-death chariot-race of Pelops with Oinomaos. The death of Oinomaos, resulting from the race, led to the very foundation of the Olympics by Pelops, according to one version of this myth that we have already seen.⁵⁴ As an *aition* for the foundation of the Olympics from the standpoint of the chariot-race, the myth of the death of Oinomaos would at first seem to be at odds with the myth of the death of Pelops, an *aition* from the standpoint of the foot-race. But in fact the two layers of myths are integrated into a sequence, just like the two layers of athletic events. Pelops had his chariot-race with Oinomaos *after* he had been restored to life, as I shall argue presently on the basis of the narrative sequence in Pindar's *Olympian* 1.

The very activity of a chariot-race, as an athletic event, which would be expectedly conceived in myth as a custom *resulting from* a hero's death,⁵⁵ is instead treated in the myth of Pelops as a preexisting institution: Oinomaos is represented as customarily challenging each of the suitors of his daughter, Hippodameia, to a chariot-race to the death, where the loser in the race between the given suitor and Oinomaos had

⁵⁰ Burkert *HN* 100.

⁵¹ Pausanias 5.8.7; this date seems to parallel the era when chariot-fighting was becoming obsolescent in warfare. I owe this insight to J. L. Bentz.

⁵² Burkert *HN* 95, note 9, gives bibliography on counter-arguments in favor of an earlier date.

⁵³ Burkert *HN* 95.

⁵⁴ Above, note 10.

⁵⁵ Consider the general aetiologies connected with the four pan-Hellenic games, as discussed above.

to forfeit his life. In a fragment from Hesiod, we witness a reverse-victory-list, as it were, of successive suitors who had in this way lost their lives to Oinomaos.⁵⁶ The race between Pelops and Oinomaos, however, transforms the preexisting institution, from the standpoint of the myth: with the death of Oinomaos, the “old institution” with its consecutive series of losers *before Pelops* becomes a “new institution” with its consecutive series of winners *after Pelops*. The “new institution,” clearly, is based on the death of Oinomaos; but what about the “old institution”? We must keep in mind that the “new institution” of the chariot-race, from an aetiological standpoint, is also “new” by opposition to the genuinely older institution of the foot-race, which as we have seen is based on the death of Pelops. What is more, as we shall see presently, the chariot-race of Pelops happens *after* this same death in the narrative. Thus the “old” institution of the life-and-death chariot-race could be considered equivalent, *in terms of the myth*, to the genuinely older institution of the foot-race on the level of ritual: in the chicken-and-egg pattern of mythopoeic thinking,⁵⁷ the death of Pelops could motivate the competition in which Pelops himself competes.⁵⁸ The death of Oinomaos in this competition could then motivate the successive competitions of the athletic event of the Olympic chariot-race founded by Pelops himself.

Even in the later *aition* about the chariot-race of Pelops and Oinomaos, however, there is a narrative connection with the earlier *aition* about the death of Pelops. The story has it that Oinomaos would sacrifice a ram before his chariot-race with each suitor, letting the suitor have a head start until the consecrated parts of the meat were consumed by fire; then he would chase after the suitor, catch up with him, and kill him.⁵⁹ This theme, by being parallel to the Olympic ritual of the ram’s slaughter at the precinct of Pelops, is thereby also parallel to the Olympic myth about the slaughter of Pelops himself. In this way, the older *aition* about the slaughter of Pelops leaves its signature, as it were, on the newer *aition* about the chariot-race of Pelops.⁶⁰

The integration of an older *aition* that motivates the foot-race with an expanded newer *aition* that motivates both the foot-race and the

⁵⁶ Hesiod fr. 259a MW.

⁵⁷ On which see Nagy (above, note 38) 77.

⁵⁸ Cf. Nagy (above, note 2) 284 on the aetiological significance of the myth concerning the death of Aesop at Delphi: “The *Life of Aesop* tradition actually presents the death of Aesop as a *cause* of the First Sacred War, but the institutional reality that Aesop reproaches—namely, that the people of Delphi are sacred to Apollo—is a lasting *effect* of the First Sacred War. From the standpoint of the myth, the death of Aesop is the *effect* of his reproaching the institutions of Delphi; from the standpoint of these institutions, on the other hand, his death is their indirect *cause*. It is this sort of ‘cause’ that qualifies as an *aition*.”

⁵⁹ Diodorus 4.73.4; cf. Burkert *HN* 98.

⁶⁰ I note in passing the use of the word “signature” by J. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris 1972) 393.

chariot-race leads to modifications or reshapings of the older *aition*. Thus for example the setting of the cannibalistic feast of the gods is shifted from Olympia in the Peloponnesus to Sipylus in Asia Minor;⁶¹ this shift, as attested in Pindar's *Olympian* 1,⁶² makes room for the chariot-race of Pelops as the central *aition*, at Olympia, of the Olympics proper.⁶³ I see no reason to ascribe this shift to Pindar's invention,⁶⁴ since it is in keeping with the pan-Hellenic prestige of the chariot-race as the central event of the Olympics in Pindar's time: I cite the testimonia of the Kypselos chest of about 570 B.C.⁶⁵ and the pedimental sculptures on the east side of the temple of Zeus at Olympia.⁶⁶ In fact, I prefer to think that the mythological rearrangements in *Olympian* 1 reflect the official contemporary aetiology of the Olympics.⁶⁷

The most remarkable of these rearrangements in *Olympian* 1 is a narrative substitution, whereby the story about the dismemberment of Pelops is ostentatiously replaced by a story that starts with his abduction by Poseidon, which as we shall see leads into the story about the chariot-race of Pelops. The story that tells about the dismemberment of Pelops by Tantalos and about the eating of his flesh by the gods is being ostentatiously rejected as a "false" substitute for the "true" story that told about the abduction and sexual forcing of Pelops by Poseidon.⁶⁸ And yet, the "true" story turns out to be aetiologically equivalent to the rejected "false" story. In the "true" story as well, Pelops undergoes a process of symbolized "death" and "re-birth," since his being abducted and sexually forced by Poseidon is a scenario of initiation into adulthood.⁶⁹ As Jean-Pierre Vernant has noticed,⁷⁰ there is a striking analogue attested in some legally sanctioned

⁶¹ Burkert *HN* 99, note 33.

⁶² Pindar *Olympian* 1.38.

⁶³ Moreover, the "new" setting in Asia Minor is perfectly in keeping with evolving patterns of mythopoeic thinking about the origins of Peloponnesian dynasties. As I hope to show in a forthcoming study, these patterns tend to augment the political prestige of Sparta and to diminish that of Argos.

⁶⁴ *Pace* Burkert *HN* 99.

⁶⁵ Burkert *HN* 95. Cf. Pausanias 5.17.7. For a slightly different dating, see L. E. Roller, "Funeral Games in Greek Art," *AJA* 85 (1981) 109–10.

⁶⁶ Burkert, *ibid.*

⁶⁷ My views here differ from what is found in most available publications on Pindar, which favor the idea that substantial parts of the myths related in *Olympian* 1 were the poet's own personal invention. For an example of this different view, see M. Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode: An Introduction* (Park Ridge 1976) 81–82.

⁶⁸ Pindar *Olympian* 1.28–29, 30–42, 46–53.

⁶⁹ This point is effectively argued by C. Calame, *Les Choeurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque I: Morphologie, fonction religieuse et sociale* (Rome 1977) 421–27 and by B. Sergent, *L'Homosexualité dans la mythologie grecque* (Paris 1984) 75–84.

⁷⁰ J.-P. Vernant, *Les Origines de la pensée grecque* (Paris 1969) 13–14. See also Sergent (above, note 69) 80–81.

customs of Crete,⁷¹ where a boy can be abducted, sexually forced, and thereafter reintegrated with his society by an older citizen, who is then obliged to present the boy with various legally specified gifts.⁷² A final sacrifice, also legally specified,⁷³ underscores the institutional and even ritual nature of the proceedings. The diachronic features of initiation are perhaps most overt in the period of segregation, legally limited to two months in duration: after the boy is abducted, sexually forced, and taken away to the abductor's *andrôn* 'men's house', he is taken by his abductor into the wilderness, where men and boys spend their time hunting.⁷⁴ After this period of marginal activity, the boy is returned to his society as a grown man: one of the legally prescribed gifts that he then gets from his abductor is military equipment, as befits an adult warrior.⁷⁵ Similarly with Pelops: after the boy is abducted, sexually forced, and taken to his divine abductor's home on Olympus,⁷⁶ the young hero receives from Poseidon the gift of a magnificent chariot-team.⁷⁷ It is with this chariot-team that Pelops wins his race against Oinomaos⁷⁸ and the hand of Hippodameia, thereby inaugurating a kingship that serves as foundation for the royal Peloponnesian dynasties of Argos, Sparta, and Messene. There is even an analogy with the Cretan boy's period of segregation: before Pelops gets his chariot-team, he is expelled from his abductor's home on Olympus and banished to a place that is as yet foreign to him, the Peloponnesus.⁷⁹

The expulsion of Pelops from Olympus is on account of a crime committed by his father Tantalos against the gods: according to Pindar's *Olympian* 1, Tantalos had stolen nectar and ambrosia from the gods and given some to his human drinking-companions.⁸⁰ Here again we see a

⁷¹ The primary source is Ephorus *FGRH* 70 F 149 in Strabo 10.4.21 C483–84; cf. also Brelich (above, note 5) 198–200.

⁷² Ephorus, *ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* For more on the Ephorus passage, see Sergent (above, note 69) 15–53.

⁷⁶ On the topic of Poseidon's home on Olympus, as it figures in this story, see A. Köhnken, "Pindar as Innovator: Poseidon Hippios and the Relevance of the Pelops Story in *Olympian* 1," *CQ* 24 (1974) 204.

⁷⁷ Pindar *Olympian* 1.86–87.

⁷⁸ On the pertinence of this theme to Hieron in *Olympian* 1, see Köhnken (above, note 76) 205: after having won in the single-horse competition of 476 B.C., the king is looking forward to winning a future Olympic victory in the four-horse chariot competition.

⁷⁹ In this "foreign" land, it is Poseidon who helps Pelops succeed in his exploits. At *Olympian* 1.24, the Peloponnesus is described as the *apoikiâ* 'settlement' of Pelops. After his ordeal in the chariot race, the Peloponnesus finally becomes his new home.

⁸⁰ Pindar *Olympian* 1.60–64. We may contrast the story of the abduction and sexual forcing of Ganymede by Zeus in *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 200–217. In this case, the boy never leaves Olympus (nor does he ever become a grown man), and the gift of a magnificent chariot-team goes not to him but to his father—a fitting compensation for perma-

narrative substitution, with the story about Tantalos' stealing of nectar and ambrosia serving as a functional equivalent of the story about his crime of cannibalism: in both cases, Tantalos perverts the reciprocity of the feast by serving up inappropriate categories of food. In Pindar's retelling, however, the wording conveys a sense of both stories.⁸¹ Having access to the ultimate food of nectar and ambrosia, the insatiable Tantalos is described as not being able literally to "digest" his happiness:

ἀλλὰ γὰρ καταπέψαι
μέγαν ὄλβον οὐκ ἐδυνάσθη, κόρῳ δ' ἔλεν
ἄταν ὑπέροπλον (55–57)

He [Tantalos] could not digest his great bliss [*olbos*], and, with his insatiability [*koros*], he brought upon himself an overwhelming disaster [*aiê*].

We are reminded of the witch who lived in the candy house in the story of Hänsel and Gretel: having access to the ultimate food, she lusts to eat the flesh of plump children.⁸²

Thus the Pindaric retelling of the Tantalos story, though it steers away from the theme of cannibalism, still bears the "signature" of this theme. Besides the image of "digesting" just noted, there is also that of "boiling" one's youthful vitality for an excessively long period of time, presumably just as fresh meat loses its vitality from overboiling. Pelops himself is pictured as using this image in the context of asking Poseidon for the gift of a chariot-team and declaring to the god his desire to risk death in his quest for the hand of Hippodameia:

nently losing the boy. I consider this story a variant, just as the story of the abduction and sexual forcing of Pelops by Poseidon must be considered a variant. It is methodologically unsound to insist that one variant is the exemplum and the other the imitation.

⁸¹ I see no reason to argue that the story about Tantalos' perverted sharing of nectar and ambrosia was an invention of Pindar. That Tantalos had received the gift of nectar and ambrosia—a gift that he proceeded to misuse—is typical of a traditional story-pattern where 1) the gods give a mortal a divine gift in compensation for something, 2) the mortal misuses the gift, thereby wronging the gods, 3) the gods punish the mortal and take back the gift. It may be that Tantalos' gift of nectar and ambrosia from the gods was viewed as a payment in compensation for the gods' having taken Pelops to Olympus, just as the gift of a chariot-team to the father of Ganymede was in compensation for the gods' having taken Ganymede to Olympus (see note 80). Then, after Tantalos wrongs the gods, the gift is taken back and Pelops is expelled from Olympus. The compensation that was owed to Tantalos, so long as Pelops stayed on Olympus, now reverts to Pelops himself, once he is released, just as the abducted Cretan boy gets compensated by his abductor upon being released. Thus Pelops gets the gift of a chariot-team.

⁸² I owe this parallel to J. Nagy. It may well be that even the story of Tantalos' perverted feeding of human flesh to the gods—not just the story of his feeding nectar and ambrosia to mortals—presupposes that Tantalos had enjoyed the ultimate bliss of having access to nectar and ambrosia in the first place. (Note the collocation of the theme of nectar and ambrosia with the theme of cannibalism in the myth of the daughters of Minyas: Antoninus Liberalis 10 Papatomopoulos, Plutarch *QG* 38.299E–F, Aelian *VH* 3.42.)

ὁ μέγας δὲ κίνδυνος ἀναλκιν οὐ φῶτα λαμβάνει.
 θανεῖν δ' οἷσιν ἀνάγκα, τὰ κέ τις ἀγώννυμον
 γῆρας ἐν σκότῳ καθήμενος ἔψοι μάταν,
 ἀπάντων καλῶν ἄμμορος; ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ μὲν οὗτος ἄεθλος
 ὑποκείσεται. (81–85)

Great risk does not take hold of any cowardly mortal. But if it is destined for humans to die, why should anyone sit around in the darkness and *boil* away his life to a futile old age without a name, having no share⁸³ in all the beautiful things of the world? I will undertake this ordeal at hand.

Clearly, the crucial theme of death as an aetiological analogue of initiation into adulthood has been transferred from the story of Pelops in the cauldron to the story of Pelops in the chariot-race, *but the imagery of the cauldron has been ostentatiously retained*. Even more remarkable is the fact that the replacement of the story of Pelops in the cauldron by the story of Pelops in the chariot-race is not complete; although the voice of Pindar, as we have seen, rejects the first story as “false,” the second and “true” story is begun with a detail from the first: Poseidon fell in love with Pelops after the young hero was taken “out of a purifying cauldron” by the goddess of fate, the Moira called Klotho (*Olympian* 1.26: καθαροῦ λέβητος).⁸⁴ Even more, Pelops is described in this same context as *having a shoulder of ivory* (*Olympian* 1.27: ἐλέφαντι φαίδιμον ὦμον κεκαδμένον). This detail presupposes the myth that tells how Demeter mistakenly ate the shoulder of the dismembered Pelops, which then had to be replaced with the artifact made of ivory.⁸⁵ Thus the aetiological sequence of the composite myth that motivates the Olympics is maintained, even though the aetiological emphasis is shifted.

The maintenance of the aetiological sequence of the Olympics in *Olympian* 1 is at the cost of a narrative inconsistency: the emergence of Pelops from the cauldron, ivory shoulder and all, just *before* his abduction by Poseidon (*Olympian* 1.25–27), gives the false impression that, even from the standpoint of *Olympian* 1, there were two perverted feasts of

⁸³ One of the anonymous referees for this presentation points out that the word *ammos* ‘having no share’ in this passage may convey yet another image of eating; on the semantics of *moira* and related words in the sense of ‘share, portion’ of meat, see Nagy (above, note 2) 134–35. I quote from the referee’s incisive remarks: “Pelops, sitting by the cauldron of his stewing old age, cannot get a name for himself because he does not *reach in* and ‘get his share’—the champion’s portion.” On the theme of the “champion’s portion” of meat in Greek and Irish traditions, see Nagy (above, note 2) 133, par. 19, note 4.

⁸⁴ On the “purification” in the cauldron, cf. the formulation of Thomson quoted at note 39. My interpretation of *ἐπεὶ* at line 26 as ‘after’ rather than ‘since’ will be explained at a later point. On the associations of Klotho with the theme of birth, see Köhnken (above, note 1) 70; I find it unnecessary, however, to deny the associations of Klotho with the theme of rebirth.

⁸⁵ See note 46; cf. Burkert *HN* 99, note 32.

Tantalos. It is as if Tantalos first fed human flesh to the immortals *before* the abduction of Pelops and then fed nectar and ambrosia to mortals *after* the abduction. The false impression is reinforced by the description of the feast at which Poseidon fell in love with Pelops after he emerged from the cauldron, where the wording fits the context of the “first” feast (*Olympian* 1.37–40). In terms of *Olympian* 1, however, the two stories of the two perverted feasts must be alternatives, and Pindar’s composition in fact treats them that way, explicitly rejecting one of the stories as “false” (= ABC) in favor of the other, which is “true” (= A’B’C’):

- A Tantalos perverts feast by serving up inappropriate food (the flesh of Pelops) to immortals.
- B Tantalos is punished by gods.
- C Pelops survives cauldron.

Pelops abducted by Poseidon.

Tantalos gets nectar and ambrosia as compensation.

- A’ Tantalos perverts feast by serving up inappropriate food (nectar and ambrosia) to mortals.
- B’ Tantalos is punished by gods.
Pelops is exiled from Olympus to Peloponnesus.
Pelops calls on Poseidon for help.
- C’ Pelops survives chariot-race against Oinomaos.
Pelops settles Peloponnesus.

In fact, the rejection of the “false” story is already being introduced immediately after mention of the emergence of Pelops from the cauldron:

ἡ θαυματοῦν πολλά, καὶ πού τι καὶ βροτῶν
φάτις ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον
δεδαυδαλμένοι ψεύδεσι ποικίλοις ἐξαπατῶντι μῦθοι. (27–29)

Indeed there are many wondrous things. And yet, the words that men tell, *myths* [*mûthoi*] embellished by varying falsehoods, beyond wording that is *true* [*alâthês*], are deceptive.

Still, the details about the cauldron and the ivory shoulder, parts of the “false” story, are linked with the details about the abduction of Pelops by Poseidon, parts of the “true” story. To paraphrase: “after the god saw you emerging from the cauldron, with your shoulder of ivory, then it was that Poseidon abducted you.” The prominent details of the “false” story are but a momentary flash: Poseidon abducts Pelops immediately after the young hero emerges from the cauldron (ἐπεὶ at *Olympian* 1.26).⁸⁶ With the *immediate* disappearance of Pelops, the

⁸⁶ My interpretation of ἐπεὶ here as ‘after’ rather than ‘since’ is explained in the discussion that immediately follows.

“false” story about the cannibalization has a chance to spread at the expense of the “true” story about the abduction:

ὥς δ' ἄφαντος ἔπελες,

...

ἔννεπε κρυφᾶ τις αὐτίκα φθονερῶν γειτόνων,
ὅτι . . . (46–48)

As soon as you disappeared, immediately one of the envious
[*phthoneroi*]⁸⁷ neighbors said stealthily that . . .

What “steals” into the story is the rejected idea that Pelops had in fact never emerged from the cauldron. At the same time, what “steals” into Pindar’s own story is the ostentatiously rejected “false” story of Pelops in the cauldron. To repeat, Pindar’s story even begins with a detail from the “false” story, namely, the ivory shoulder of Pelops.

The detail of the ivory shoulder, which is out of joint with the “true” story of Pindar’s *Olympian* 1, is also out of joint with the rest of Pelops’ body. So too in the ritual dimension: we recall the larger-than-life size of the cult object venerated as Pelops’ ivory shoulder at Olympia.⁸⁸ And yet, just as the ivory shoulder of Pelops was on display as a centerpiece in the ritual complex of the Olympics, so also it occupies primacy of place in the aetiological complex of Pindar’s *Olympian* 1.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ On the programmatic use of the adjective *phthoneros* ‘begrudging, envious’ in the diction of praise poetry to designate the generic opponent of praise poetry, see Nagy (above, note 2) 223–32.

⁸⁸ See at note 47.

⁸⁹ I thank Hayden Pelliccia and William H. Race for their valued advice.