

AN INVITATION TO THE OLYMPIAN ODES OF PINDAR ADDRESSED TO CLASSICISTS  
AND FOUR EMAILS THAT FOLLOWED

1

Allow me to invite you to my virtual public readings of Pindar's Olympian Odes – online on [www.juliustomin.org](http://www.juliustomin.org). To make the task of recording and of listening to the recordings as easy as possible, I typed the Olympian Odes, marking the long syllables in red, leaving unmarked the long syllables in anacrusis and wherever they take the place of short syllables; the texts thus marked accompany the recordings.

I began to read Pindar less than a year ago, intrigued by Bury's opening words in his edition of Pindar's Nemean Odes (London 1890): 'Those who desire to study the Greek mind as revealed in literary art will probably find that there are more secrets to be learned in Pindar than in any other writer.'

In response to the invitation to my readings of Pindar David Miller replied: 'I fear that my attitude to Pindar is, first, that he is too difficult; second, that I don't admire athletic prowess as much as he did, or was paid to say that he did.'

I have taken the liberty of quoting Miller's reply, for he put into words my own attitude to Pindar that had prevented me for more than forty years from approaching him. When I eventually decided to try, I soon realized that my fears were exaggerated and my misgivings unfounded.

Concerning Miller's first point, the presumed difficulty derives at least in part from the old-fashioned approach. Gildersleeve in his 'Introductory essay' instructs the novice: 'The poem must be read rhythmically over and over until it can be read fluently aloud, and this must precede the intellectual study. Then, of course, the vocabulary must be looked after ...' (*The Olympian and Pythian Odes* (London, Macmillan & Co. 1890, pp. lxiii-iv.)

My approach was quite different. Firstly, I took recourse to Race's 'readable, clear translation that reflects the grammar of the original Greek text' (W. H. Race, Pindar, LOEB edition, 1997. 'Preface' p. vii.) to shed light on Pindar. Then I studied Gildersleeve's 'Commentary', and then I read the text just with the help of Liddell & Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*. Then I typed the Odes, marked them in accordance with Gildersleeve's metrical analysis, and finally read them and recorded my readings.

The laborious typing of the Odes facilitated Race's, Gildersleeve's, and Liddell & Scott's stepping aside and Pindar's original words rendering their meaning of their own accord. My first and second recordings were almost always faulty, for I was seduced again and again by Pindar's dactyls or trochees to read a triseme as the beginning of the next trochee or dactyl, a tetraseme as the beginning of the next dactyl – being each time immediately compelled to realize that the metre went all wrong in consequence. Penetrating thus deeper and deeper into Pindar's metre and rhythm went hand in hand with understanding better what he was saying, and it all proved to be a sheer delight.

Concerning Miller's second point, Pindar's 'if you wish to sing of athletic games (*ei d' aethla garuen eldea*), my heart' in the first strophe of the first Olympian Ode might suggest that poetic admiration of athletic prowess is indeed to be the main theme of his odes. But the context speaks against it:

'Best is water, while gold, like fire blazing in the night, shines preeminent amid lordly wealth. But *if you wish to sing of athletic games, my heart*, look no further than the sun for another star shining

more warmly by day through the empty sky, nor let us proclaim a contest greater than Olympia.' (1. 1-7)

Pindar celebrates the Olympic games as part of the human aspiration for that which is good, great, and noble; they give rise to great songs: 'From there comes the famous hymn that encompasses the thoughts of wise men, who have come in celebration of Kronos' son' (vv. 8-10). Pindar's 'mind was enthralled with sweet considerations' when Hieron's horse Pherenikos 'sped beside the Alpheos', the river that runs through Olympia, 'needing no spur' (*demas akentêton parechôn*, 1. 19-21). Pherenikos' victory made his master famous 'in the colony of brave men founded by Lydian Pelops' [Peloponnese, 'Isle of Pelops'] (1. 22-4) This introduces the myth of Pelops, which becomes the central theme of the Ode. Pelop's chariot-race for Hippodameia anticipates the Olympic games: 'Great risk does not take hold of a cowardly man. Since men must die, why should anyone sit in darkness and coddle a nameless old age to no use, deprived of all noble deeds?' (1. 81-3)

The Olympic games take place near Pelop's tomb 'And far shines that fame of the Olympic festivals gained in the racecourses of Pelops, where competition is held for swiftness of feet and boldly labouring feats of strength. And for the rest of his life the victor enjoys a honey-sweet calm, so much as games can provide it. But the good that comes each day is greatest for every mortal (*panti brotôn*).' (1. 93-100) 'The good that comes each day' is the true concern of Pindar; this good he enhances with his victory songs, which can be shared and enjoyed by all, and which transform the ephemeral victory into an everlasting source of inspiration: 'When a man who has performed noble deeds goes without song to Hades' dwelling, in vain has he striven and gained for his toil but brief delight.' (10. 91-3)

My quotations are from Race's translation of Pindar. You might ask, why should we bother with Pindar's Greek, if we have such a good translation of his poems? This question reflects on the method of teaching and learning Ancient Greek based on translating Greek texts into English and English texts into Greek, which stands in the way of understanding Greek texts directly in Greek. Would anybody ever ask 'Why should we bother with original paintings if we can have cheap photocopies?' And yet, the difference between an original painting and a photocopy of it comes nowhere near the difference between the enjoyment and the benefit provided by even the best possible translations of the literary treasures of the Ancient Greeks and that derived from the original texts. Understanding Greek directly in Greek, without translation, must become the aim of all true lovers of Ancient Greeks, for on that basis the Greeks can enrich our lives as no translation ever can.

Plato in the *Phaedrus* views a man's life guided by philosophy as an Olympic victory (256 b), yet he never inspired me to see human life in this light. Pindar has done so. We all live longer these days, and Pindar has helped me to see the days after seventy as an opportunity for a truly Olympian contest for 'the good that comes each day'. Daily trips into the world of language that gave birth to and was shaped by Homer and Hesiod, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, Herodotus and Thucydides, Lysias, Isocrates, and Demosthenes, of the Pre-Socratics, Socrates, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, can become a constant source of intellectual nourishment, vigour and joy.

2

In January I wrote to the Members of the Oxford University Faculty of Classics: 'Allow me to inform you that I have put on my website [www.juliustomin.org](http://www.juliustomin.org) my reading of Pindar's First Olympian Ode in the original. Would you accept this as a challenge, in this Olympic year, to record in the original all of Pindar's Olympian Odes? It would be great if a special website could be opened for this purpose under the auspices of Oxford University. It should be opened to a competition of all the willing, the

best recordings should be crowned by publication on the website: to kêrugma en Olumpiasi kalei men ton boulomenon, stephanoi de ton dunamenon (Gorgias, Olympiakos, fr. B 8).'

To date I have received no reply. As I informed you, in the meantime I have put on my website all fourteen of Pindar's Olympian Odes, concerning which Professor Haslam sent me two critical remarks: 1. 'I notice that you are in the habit of stressing any syllable that precedes two shorts, resulting in a quasi-dactylic or quasi-choriambic rhythm whenever there are more than two successive shorts. I confess to finding this a bit jarring.'

In fact, this is how I have understood Gildersleeve's metrical analysis, and it seems to me that it helps to communicate what Pindar is saying, but I would gladly listen to an alternative reading. In fact I am sure that more than one legitimate different reading can be produced. Imagine if only one reading of Shakespeare's plays were deemed acceptable. However this may be, Haslam's comment emphasizes the importance of my challenge, as quoted above.

Haslam's second comment is very serious: 'Now and again you have mistyped the Greek, and then follow what you have typed in your reading.' I replied: 'If you would point to me the mistakes you find, I should be very grateful to you.' May I address the same request to you? I should like to make a list of my mistakes, put it on my website, and then correct the texts of the Odes and provide new corrected readings accordingly.

May I also use this opportunity to bring to your attention Professor Haslam's review of Mark. W. Edwards' *Sound, Sense, and Rhythm: Listening to Greek and Latin Poetry*, published in Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2003.04.04, from which I quote: 'Students expect to translate: teachers expect them to. But ... Anyone reading Greek or Latin, teachers and students alike, should view translation as a merely ancillary activity, not to be confused with the primary business of reading.'

PS

Professor Haslam replied: 'The typos I spotted, if I remember, were hag' for ag' at the beginning of Pelops' prayer to Poseidon [Ant. 3, l. 76], and aretasi for aretaisi later on in the description of Hippodameia's sons [Str. 4, l. 89]. I was not looking at the text but merely listening, and both of these brought me up short. Then when I looked at the text you had typed out, I understood (I think) what you had done. There may be other such slips but if so I did not notice them in listening. So far I have only listened to Ol.1, but I am looking forward to listening to the rest, spread out over time.'

I replied: 'If I had money to do so, I would go straight away to your place and profit from your learning.'

3

Contributors to the website of the 'Society for the oral Reading of Greek and Latin Literature' (<http://www.rhapsodes.fl.vt.edu/PindarOlympia.htm>) have restored in their readings the *iota subscript*, read 'zd' for 'Zeta', and adopted labial reading of 'Phi'. Inspired by them, in my reading and recording of *The 4<sup>th</sup> Pythian Ode* I read the *iota subscript* and the labial 'Phi'; see my website [www.juliustomin.org](http://www.juliustomin.org). I have not adopted 'zd' for 'Zeta', for Plato prevents me from doing so. I reproduce the relevant passage in Jowett's translation:

'By the letter ι (Iota) he [the giver of names] expresses the subtle elements which pass through all things. This is why he uses the letter ι (Iota) as imitative of motion, ἰέναι (*ienai*), ἴεσθαι (*hiesthai*). And there is another class of letters, φ (Phi), ψ (Psi), σ (Sigma) and ξ (Xi), of which the pronunciation is accompanied by great expenditure of breath; these are used in the imitation of such notions as ψυχρόν (*psuchron* 'shivering'), ξέον (*xeon* 'seething'), σειέσθαι (*seiesthai* 'to be shaken'), σεισμός (*seismos* 'shock'), and are always introduced by the giver of names when he wants to imitate what is φυσῶδες (*phusôdes* 'windy'). He seems to have thought that the closing and the pressure of the tongue in the utterance of δ and τ was expressive of binding and rest in place.' *Cratylus* (426e-427a)

What has this passage to do with the reading of Zeta? It does not even mention Zeta.

Jowett misrepresents the original. Jowett's 'And there is another class of letters, φ (Phi), ψ (Psi), σ (Sigma) and ξ (Xi)' stands for ὥσπερ γε διὰ τοῦ φεῖ καὶ τοῦ ψεῖ καὶ τοῦ σίγμα καὶ τοῦ ζῆτα (*hōsper ge dia tou phei kai tou psei kai tou sigma kai tou dzêta*) Jowett's 'such notions as ψυχρόν (*psuchron* 'shivering'), ξέον (*xeon* 'seething')' stands for οἷον τὸ "ψυχρόν" καὶ τὸ "ξέον" (*hoion to "psuchron" kai to "dxeon"*). Jowett's 'He seems to have thought that the closing and the pressure of the tongue in the utterance of δ and τ was expressive of binding and **rest in place**' stands for τῆς δ' αἰ τοῦ δέλτα συμπίεσεως καὶ τοῦ ταῖ καὶ ἀπερείσεως τῆς γλώττης τὴν δύναμιν χρήσιμον φαίνεσθαι ἡγήσασθαι πρὸς τὴν μίμησιν τοῦ "δεσμοῦ" καὶ τῆς "στάσεως." (*tês d' au tou delta sumpieseôs kai tou tau kai apereiseôs tês glôttês tèn dunamin chrêsimon phainesthai hêgêsasthai pros tèn mimêsin tou "desmou" kai tês "staseôs."*)

Note that Jowett's 'rest in place' for Plato's "staseôs" covers up the fact that the pronunciation of ζ (Zeta) is viewed by Plato as directly opposite to the 'st' sound, that is the sound that ends with δ (d) or τ (t). Furthermore, note that although Jowett replaced "ζέον" with "ξέον", in line with his omission of ζ, he translated his ξέον 'seething', i.e. he translated the original "ζέον". For ξέον means 'shaving (timber)', 'whittling', 'scraping', which, as he obviously realized, would not suit the context.

In the light of the given passage the classification of φ (Phi) as a 'rough voiceless aspirate stop' (H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, par. 22, p. 12) is wrong.

I look forward to your comments on this matter. I hope you will enjoy my reading of *The 4<sup>th</sup> Pythian Ode*, Pindar's 'greatest poem – a prime favorite with all Pindaric scholars' (Gildersleeve).

4

I have invited you to the virtual public reading of Pindar's *4<sup>th</sup> Pythian Ode* on my website [www.juliustomin.org](http://www.juliustomin.org). I informed you that in recording this poem I read the *iota subscript* and labial Phi, inspired by the website of the 'Society for the oral Reading of Greek and Latin Literature' (<http://www.rhapsodes.fl.vt.edu/PindarOlympia.htm>), but that I have not adopted the reading of 'zd' for 'Zeta', for Plato prevents me from doing so. A classicist replied to me:

'Are you familiar with the arguments of the late W.S.Allen in *Vox Graeca*, Cambridge UP (pp. 53-6 in the 1968 edition) for the pronunciation as *zd* in Attic? They are based on etymological considerations as well as the explicit statements of ancient grammarians, and seem to me to outweigh your point based on Cratylus.'

Would you be able to lend me W.S.Allen's *Vox Graeca*? I would love to get acquainted with Allen's arguments. Why am I addressing you with this request when the book is available on Amazon?

My weekly income consists of State Pension, which is £37.06, and Pension Credit, which is £14.73 a week.

How did it happen?

Let me give voice to Barbara Day's *The Velvet Philosophers*: 'his [Tomin's] knowledge of certain parts of Plato's work was more thorough than that of any philosopher in Oxford, but his limited acquaintance with the breadth of western philosophy would have been unacceptable in any of the posts for which he diligently applied.' (The Claridge Press, 1999, p. 67).

Day's explanation requires two corrections:

Firstly, in Prague I co-translated the second volume of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, published in the early 1960s, and wrote a book on Descartes published in samizdat Petlice in 1976 (having studied his works in French and in Latin). Before I came to Oxford I read Malebranche's *De la recherche de la vérité*, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Berkeley's *A New Theory of Vision* and *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, *Prolegomena*, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft*, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Marx' *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *The German Ideology*, *Das Kapital* (all in Czech when I was in prison in 1958-9), *Oekonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, *Cartesiansche Meditationen*, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* ...

Secondly, after I arrived at Oxford I did not diligently apply for posts. I believed and still believe that it is the duty of every university to attract the best people they can get in any given subject they offer their students. I have concentrated all my energy, in my daily travels to the Ancient Greeks, to become worthy of teaching students at any university that would have me. I have regularly informed Oxford philosophers and classicists about my progress. Why Oxford philosophers and classicists? I came to Oxford in 1980 at the invitation of the Master of Balliol College at Oxford University.

See further the texts on my website under the title 'Protests at Balliol'.

5

Allow me to thank to those of you, who directed me to the website at which I could find Allen's *Vox Greca*:

<http://books.google.es/books?hl=es&id=5i89AAAIAAJ&q=zeta#v=onepage&q=zeta&f=false>.

The pronunciation of Zeta is discussed on pages 54-56. I shall discuss Allen's arguments in the light of Plato's *Cratylus* 426e-427a. Before doing so, let me confess that I received some negative responses to my previous e-mail, like the following:

'Remove me from this email list immediately.

L. J. Samons

Loren J. Samons II  
 Professor and Chair of Classical Studies  
 NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor  
 Department of Classical Studies  
 Boston University '

Before Allen, W. W. Goodwin wrote: ‘Z is called a compound of δ [delta] and σ [sigma]; but opinions differ whether it was δσ or σδ, but the ancient testimony seems to point to σδ. In late Greek, ζ came to the sound of English z, which it still keeps.’ *A Greek Grammar*, 1879, par. 28.3).

H. W. Smyth wrote: ζ was probably = *zd*, whether it arose from the original σδ (as in Ἰθάκη, from Ἰθάκη(ν)σ-δε *Athens-wards*), or from *dz*, developed from *dy* (as in ζυγόν, from (d)γυγόν, cp. *jugum*). The *z* in *zd* gradually extinguished the *d*, until in the Hellenistic period ζ sank to *z* (as in *zeal*), which is the sound in Modern Greek.’ (*Greek Grammar*, 1920, par. 26; note 26D: Aeolic has σδ for ζ in ὕσδος (ὄζος *branch*)).

Allen introduces his arguments with ‘the following facts: (1) The combinations Ἰθάκησ+δε, θύρασ+δε (with –δε as in οἰκόνδε) are represented by Ἰθάκηζε, θύραζε; (2) In most dialects, including Attic, a nasal is regularly lost before the fricative σ; thus, whereas the ν of σνν is preserved before the stop δ in e.g. σύνδεσμος, it is lost in σύστασις. The same loss is regularly found before ζ, e.g. σύζυξ, συζῆν, and πλάζω beside ἐπλαγξα, thus indicating that **the sound immediately following the nasal was a fricative and not a stop.**’ (p. 54)

Let me begin by disputing the 2<sup>nd</sup> ‘fact’ – with Allen’s help: ‘Prehistorically the combination represented by ζ derives in some cases from an Indo-European *sd* [*zd*]; thus ὄζος ‘branch’ is cognate with German *Ast* ... But more often ζ derives from an original *dy* or *gy* – e.g. in πεζός from *ped-yos*, ἄζομαι beside ἄγιος; and these original groups must first have developed through an affricate stage, e.g. [dʒ] (as in *edge*) → [dz] (as in *adze*) (cf. Latin *medius* → Italian *mezzo*)’ (p. 54)

My point is: In *dz* pronunciation of ζ the *d* element does not function as a stop, the *dz* in its entirety functions as a fricative.

To corroborate this point, let me again refer to Allen: ‘it nevertheless remains probable that at the time when the Semitic alphabet was adopted by Greek, the ‘*zayin*’ symbol was at first applied to a still existing affricate type of combination; for it is difficult to see why a sequence [*zd*] should not have been represented by *sd* instead of by a special sign’ (p. 55).

Concerning the supposed change of *dz* reading of ζ to *zd* Allen says: ‘However, the metathesis of [*dz*] to [*zd*] must have occurred at an early date in Attic and most other dialects; and the continuation of the [*zd*] value up to 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> century is indicated by the use of ζ to represent Iranian *zd* (e.g. Ἰρομαζης = *Auramazda* in Plato, Ἄρταος = *Artavazda* in Xenophon). Later in the 4 c. we begin to find ζ replacing σ used for Iranian *z*; and in Greek inscriptions there begin to be some confusions between ζ and σ (e.g. ἀναβαζμουσ 329 B.C). This suggests that at some time in the 4 c. the change to the modern Greek value as [*z*] was already taking place; indeed it is probably referred to by Aristotle (*Met.* 993a) when he says that, whereas some people would analyse ζ into σ + δ, others consider it a separate sound which does not comprise already recognized elements.’ (p. 55-56)

In the light of Plato’s *Cratylus* 426e-427a Aristotle’s passage refers to different views concerning the same pronunciation of ζ. This is corroborated by Aristotle’s *Met.* N 1093a20-24 where Aristotle says that some people call ΞΨZ concords (τὸ ΞΨΖ συμφωνίας φασὶν εἶναι). In the given passage Aristotle argues against those who see numbers as causes of everything. These people say that because there are three concords, the double consonants too are three. But to these three συμφωνία could be added Γ and Π, Aristotle argues, for one symbol could be assigned to ΓΠ. Against the fanciful causation these people offer Aristotle suggests that the real reason why we have the three double ΞΨΖ consonants is that there are three places (τριῶν ὄντων τόπων) related in each case to sigma (ἐν ἑφ’ ἐκάστου ἐπιφέρεται τῷ σίγμα), i.e. the palate, the lips, the teeth, against which the tongue is placed when ξ, ψ, and ζ are formed by virtue of pronouncing σ in these three different situations. In other words, as Plato puts it in the *Cratylus*, φεῖ, ψεῖ, σίγμα and ζῆτα are spirants (πνευματώδη).

Allen’s point (1), that the combinations Ἰθάκησ+δε, θύρασ+δε (with –δε as in οἰκόνδε) are represented by Ἰθάκηζε, θύραζε testify to *zd* pronunciation of ζ has no power against Plato’s

testimony. Consider the metathesis involved in the pronunciation of Wednesday (Woden's Day). Allen himself says that 'such metatheses are of a particularly common type; R.P. *wasp*, for example, derives from an earlier and still dialectical *waps*.' (p. 54)

Equally powerless is his statement that 'the metathesis of [dz] to [zd] must have occurred at an early date in Attic and most other dialects; and the continuation of the [zd] value up to 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> century is indicated by the use of ζ to represent Iranian *zd* (e.g. Ὠρομαζης = *Auramazda* in Plato, Ἄρταοζος = *Artavazda* in Xenophon)'. Languages have the tendency to accommodate proper names from other languages to their own preferred usage. We say Athens not *Athênai*, Aristotle not *Aristotelês*, Prague not *Praha*; the Czechs say Drážd'any not *Dresden*, Mnichov not *München*.