Another Note on Pindar, Nemean 7.30–35

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I have little to offer in way of apology for adding yet another post to the vast bibliography concerning this passage. Suffice it to say that I do have a point to make, which, however slight, I believe may be relevant to the constitution of the text.¹

Treated ill by public opinion, Ajax committed suicide:

30 ἀλλὰ κοινὸν γὰρ ἔρχεται
κὺμ’ Ἀίδα, πέσε δ’ ἀδόκητον ἐν καὶ δοκέοντα, τιμὰ δὲ γίνεται
ὡν θεὸς ἀβρόν αὔξει λόγον τεθνακότων
βοαθῶν· τῷ παρὰ μέγαν ὀμφαλὸν εὐρυκόλπου
μόλεν χθονός, ἐν Πυθίοισι δὲ δαπέδοις
35 κεῖται, Πριάμου πόλιν Νεοπτόλεμος ἐπεὶ πράθεν.


Hermann’s παρὰ for γὰρ is found in the scholium and has been almost unanimously accepted by editors: Young’s πὰρ is more conservative, but contraction of the biceps would hardly be acceptable here.²

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Marianne Rozsondai—another contributor to this volume—who provided me with a copy of Ottó Hóman’s note on the passage discussed, together with a needful English translation.

² It is not found in the corresponding places in the second strophe and antistrophe—and not in the vulgate text in the first strophe, where editors read,
As for the other difficulties of 33–34 critics are, to put it mildly, divided.³ I shall argue for the text printed above, as read by the Hungarian scholar Ottó Hóman (vol. I, p. xx).

Mezger (1869, 720) first suggested the crucial emendation, τῶ for τοι.⁴ This has been supported by some critics, who differ slightly in their readings;⁵ however, nobody has acknowledged that the adverb should be taken as connected with the previous particle γάρ. ἀλλὰ κοινὸν γὰρ ... βοαθών is a complete, continuous statement, which in its entirety is taken up by τῶ: the adverb is not referring back exclusively to τιμὰ κτέ, as argued by the last cited critics (n. 5). The combination is well-known, in particular from Homer: in the Iliad, the particle-combination ἀλλὰ ... γὰρ ... τῶ is employed in three of the four passages where ἀλλὰ ... γὰρ is used;⁶ γάρ simple or in other combinations is also regularly taken up and reinforced by τῶ.⁷ Sometimes, as in the case in the present passage, one or several clauses linked by δέ or καί intervenes, expanding on or exemplifying the

with Benedictus and the scholium, ἐνέβαλε. The mss. present ἐβάλε, and ἐβάλε would produce exact responson with τῶ, but for metrical reasons contraction is unlikely, being followed by resolution of the subsequent longum.

³ Reviews of the relevant interpretations are found in Woodbury 1979, 103–7, and Most 1986, 262–65: in the last two decades see Peliccia 1989, De Lucia 1993, the recent commentary by Loscalzo, and Howie 1998 (on which see further below, n. 13).

⁴ Pindar uses this adverb in P. 5.23, I. 8.5 and I. 8.66. According to Slater (1969) s.v. τῶ the mss. for these passages are unanimous in reporting τῶ, not τῶ which Apollonius Dyscolus, apparently in polemic against some other grammarian, claimed to be the correct form of adverbs ending in -ω (Adv. pp. 198–99 Schneider, severely corrupt). Modern editors usually print τῶ with circumflex but without the iota. The matter is of little or no consequence for my argument here.

⁵ Wilamowitz (1922, 162, n. 2): λόγον ... βοαθόν τῶ ... μόλον (1st pers.); Norwood (1943, 326): λόγον ... βοαθόν τῶ ... μόλεν; Most (1986, 268–71): θεὸς ... λόγον ... βοαθοῦν τῶ ... μόλεν.

⁶ 15.739–41, 17.338–40, 23.607–9: in 7.242 ἀλλὰ ... γάρ is taken up by another ἀλλὰ.

⁷ See Kirk on Il. 7.328, Denn. 99 (ἀλλὰ ... γάρ ... τῶ), 70–71 (γάρ ... τῶ).
γάρ-clause: an especially complex case is found in II. 6.216–24, where the γάρ in 216 is not answered by τῷ until eight verses later.

A literal translation of 30–35 would run something like:

But common to all comes the wave of death: it falls on the unexpected as well as on him who purposes it—honour befalls those whose reputation a god causes splendidly to surge when they have died in valiant succour. So he came to the centre of the earth, and lies in the holy Pythian ground, Neoptolemus, having sacked the city of Priam.

ἀλλὰ κοινὸν γὰρ … δοκέοντα is a transition from the subject Ajax to the subject Neoptolemus: ἀδόκητον refers to the latter, who in this version of the myth meets death unexpectedly: having returned from the war he is slain in Delphi in a quarrel over sacrificial meats.8 δοκέοντα, “expecting”, or even (as in the above translation) “purposing” (cf. LSJ s.v. I.1.b and I.3.b), refers to Ajax’ suicide, the subject of the previous verses: as opposed to Neoptolemus, Ajax was obviously δοκέων in relation to his death.9 τῷ takes up this argument as well as the part of honourable deaths.10

The same arguments would support Norwood’s and Most’s versions (above, n. 5). However, I believe the stem (βοηθ- ) with its pronounced martial flavour is out of place in this context as a description of the publicity-campaign of a benign god.11 Formally, βοαθοῶν

8 40–42. See further Rutherford 2001, 321, n. 64.
9 Thus rightly Gerber (1963, 187) and also Carey ad loc.: “δοκέοντα suggests Ajax’s situation, ἀδόκητον that of Neoptolemus (…), thus preparing for the revised version of the hero’s death.” Revised, that is, in relation to that presented in the sixth Paean, where Neoptolemus’ death was presented as not entirely honourable. Like Carey (see esp. pp. 133–36) and, e.g., Fogelmark 1972, 109–16, 123–25, passim; Fogelmark 1976, 125–26, 129–30, passim—I am convinced that the seventh Nemean contains actual references, indeed an apology, for Pindar’s treatment of Neoptolemus in the sixth Paean.
10 The whole utterance takes the form of a priamel: see, for instance, Gerber on O. 1.1–7.
11 Or, even worse, of Pindar himself (“helping, I came…”).
is just possible—the Attic contraction of ε + ω, unparalleled in Pindar, is perhaps acceptable after a vowel. On the other hand, in P. 2.84, Pindar has ὑποθεύσομαι, not -θεύσομαι which would have been expected if βοαθοῶν is correct and Pindar consistent in his contractions. βοαθόων is defended by Woodbury (1979, 106–10), and even if we remain sceptical about the adjective being an “official” title of the Heroes worshipped at Delphi (Woodbury would read Βοαθόων, τοὶ ... μόλον), the general argument is valid: Neoptolemus is recognised as one of the heroes who die valiantly “running to the aid” of a righteous cause, and whose honour the god increases.

References

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12 Buck 1955, §§ 42.6, 45.2.
13 Apart from Douglas Gerber (n. 9), another συνεγκωμαστής, Gordon Howie, has written on this passage (1998, 105–6, 122–26): an interesting piece which is not incompatible with the reading advocated here, even if Howie does prefer the reading βοαθοῶν referring either to the poet, the god, or to Neoptolemus himself. Howie stresses, in a comparison between the present ode and Thucydides’ Archaeology (1.2–19), the general, gnomic validity of 31–32, and argues against the too-specific sense proposed by Woodbury (loc.cit.), an argument with which I fully agree.

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