PINDAR

Olympian Ode I

Text and Grammatical Notes for Enthusiastic Neophytes

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The Greek text is given first in traditional printed form following the complex metrics of Aristophanes Byz and other Hellenistic metricists. This is the usual Greek reading text.

But Dionysus of Halicarnassos states that the text falls into kola or phrases which reflect the original choral performance when sung by a trained group at the festivals, so I give here a reformatted text according to his standards. Nothing has been changed, every word it is its place, the metrics can be read naturally rather than by schema. You will see that it is much easier to read and understand in this format.
Translation has several quite different purposes. A close translation is certainly useful for the person reading an original text, it makes it clear whether he has got the meaning right, something which is often not easy to determinate in a complicated poet like Pindar. So here is a close translation for use beside the Greek:

Noblest is water, then gold ----like a blazing light in the night--
- shines out far beyond the wealth of great men. But if (my heart) you want to sing of contests, look for no other star than
the sun, hot and shining in the daylight, throughout the empty aether. Nor will we speak of better contest than
Olympia where much-sung hymn is cloaked with the wits of
seer-poets, coming to sing the son of Kronos at the wealthy
happy hearth of Hieron.

But this prosy and quite pedestrian passages hardly give a hint of the blazing style of Pindaric language, which the following may be a better choice to read aloud with a certain dynamic and dramatic flair. Lacking verbal precision, this version has the thrust of meter in action, and some of the jumbling mystery of the amazing Greek.

Noblest is shimmering water and then gold
like flashing fire that shines forth in the night
far beyond a rich man's treasury
And if (dear heart) you want to tell great feats,
look to no other SUN for a burning star
blazing in empty universe by day
nor speak of a finer contest than Olympia
whence comes the grand sung hymn of praise
robed with the wits of wizard seers
now, singing Son of Kronos aloud
to the rich the joyful
hearth of Hieron,
coming.
It is usually thought that one begins studying a language with the easiest prose texts, and for generations students of Greek suffered through their Xenophon page by page with little more impression of the Anabasis than its length and dullness. (Reading it years later in English it turns out to be quite a story when read through rather than pored over...).

I believe it makes little difference if one reads an easy or a hard text at the start, provided that the person is interested and aided by enthusiasm. Greek verse is in many ways easier to read than Attic prose since there is virtually no real Syntax to poetry beyond the placement of the words in artistic configuration, while prose sentences tends to be lengthy, stylistically mani-cured with mannerisms and conventions.

Reading Pindar word by word, you see the same grammar and forms as in any Greek text, and considering the effort required to alembicate meaning from the words, you are not likely to forget what you have read. So the following over-detailed list of the words in the above passage should open the door to someone with no more than a term's study of Greek, and give a glimpse in to the mind of a poet one might not reach even in a college sequence of Greek poetry, the light (as it were) at the far end of the tunnel.

I suggest printing out this study at this point to you can align the Greek and the following notes on separate sheets of paper for reading.
ἀριστονον
μέν
υδωρ.
ο
δὲ
χρυσός
αιθόμενον
πῦρ
άτε
διαπρέπει
νυκτὶ
μεγάνωρος
έξοχα
πλούτου
εἰ
δ'
άεθλα
γαρώνει
έλδεια̂ς,
φίλον
ητορ.
μηκέδ'
άλιον
σκόπει
άλλο
δαλινότερον
ἐν
αμέρας
φαενῶν
αστρών
ἐρήμας
δι'
αἰθέρος,
μηδ'
"Ολυμπίας
άγώνα
φέρτερον
αὐτάσομεν·
όθεν
ὁ πολύφατος
ύμνος
ἀμφιβάλλεται
adj n sg neut
men....de
n sg neut 'water' hetroclite noun *hudr/at
m sg of the article
men...de
n sg masc 'gold'
adj n sg neut pres ppl 'shining'
adj n sg neut 'fire'
'like' ....n sg plur used as adv., postpositive here
3 sg present 'shine'
dat sg fem 'night' ...n sg is nux
gen sg cpd adj 'great + man'
advv 'beyond'
gen sg masc 'wealth'
'if'
= de
n pl neut 'contests'
Doric pres inf 'to tell'
2 sg mid verb 'you wish'
adj neut sg vocative with next
n sg Voc. 'heart'
adv. me+eti = 'no longer, further'
gen sg masc (comparison) 'the sun'
2 sg imperative 'look'
neut sg 'other'
acc sg middle ppl 'flaming'
'in'
dat sg fem "by day'
acc sg masc 'shining'
acc sg masc "star" with above adjs
g fem adj 'empty'
for dia 'through' with genitives around it
gen sg fem 'ether, open sky'
'nor'
gen sg fem as comparison 'Olympia'
acc sg masc 'contest'
acc sg masc adj comparative 'better';
1 plur future 'we will sing'
'whence'
adj n sg masc 'much sung'
n sg masc 'song'
3 sg pres middle 'is cloaked, wrapped'
My long study on Pythian 8 is online from my website in the Classics section, with Greek and English translation and comment, so you can see if some of the grammar from this section has stayed with you as a test.

At this point I am going to pause, and wait to see if there are people who feel that can profit by this kind of early introduction to the poetry of this difficult poet. This is a long poem and putting it into shape requires time and many hours at the monitor, so I will wait to see if this part of the project is being used. If you have worked through this first strophe, and would proceed to the rest of the poem, please send me an email with a note about your experience, and I will see if I can add later.

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