

*Nemean* 3, composed for Aristoclidēs' victory in the pancration, presents in lines 80-82 one of Pindar's most famous images: the swift eagle (αἰετὸς ὠκύς) suddenly snatches his bloody prey (ἔλαβεν αἰψά... δαφρινὸν ἄγραν), while garrulous jackdaws fly below (κραγέται δὲ κολιοὶ ταπεινὰ νέμονται). In this paper I will argue that, inasmuch as the *laudandus* of *N.3* is to be recognized in the figure of the eagle, his defeated opponent is to be identified not with the jackdaws but with the eagle's bloody prey.

While this passage (with *O.2.87-88* and *N.5.21*) has long been recognized as a metaphor for poetic activity (e.g., Norwood 1945, 82), recent scholarship has argued either that Pindar's eagles always represent his *laudandus* (Stoneman 1976, refuted by Bernardini 1977), or more commonly that they apply both to poet and to *laudandus* (Steiner 1986, 106; Pfeijffer 1994, 305-306). For all their differences, those scholars who wish to associate eagle and athlete at *N.3.80-82* are in agreement concerning the remaining imagery: the jackdaws represent Aristoclidēs' defeated opponents, while the eagle's prey represents a generalized notion of "victory" (Stoneman 1976, 194; Steiner 1986, 105-106; Pfeijffer 1994, 315).

This reading of the "prey" does not, however, take into account the themes of hunting and combat found in the myths of this ode. The most obvious parallel is Pindar's account of the childhood hunting exploits of Achilles, whose speed in the chase (ἴσα τ' ἀνέμοις 45; ποσσὶ γὰρ κράτεσκε 52) foreshadows the swift and sudden motions of the eagle in our passage. Earlier in the mythic section, Telamon "sacked Laomedon" (Λαομέδοντα... ἔπερσεν, 36-37), a turn of phrase that not only emphasizes Aeginetan excellence by omission of Heracles (Pfeijffer 1999, 319-320), but also personalizes the first sack of Troy and thus makes it more closely parallel the one-on-one contest of the pancration. The mythic section closes with the adult Achilles' determination to deny Memnon a homecoming (62-63), again emphasizing an Aeginetan hero who kills his individual opponent. In light of this mythic pattern, the eagle killing its prey at 80-82 is understood to represent Aristoclidēs defeating his opponents.

The standard reading of the eagle's "prey" also fails to take into account the violent imagery used by Pindar elsewhere to describe victory and defeat in combat sports. At *P.8.82-83* the victor in wrestling has "fallen upon the bodies" of his opponents (ἔμπετες... σωματέσσι), language recalling Homeric battle (Pfeijffer 1999, 582). Pindar similarly characterizes defeat in boys' wrestling as death in epic battle when at *O.8.68-69* he says that the victor "placed upon four bodies of boys a very hateful homecoming" (ἐν τέτρασιν παίδων ἀπεθήκατο γυίοις νόστον ἔχθιστον). The image of the eagle killing its prey *N.3* is therefore most likely to represent Aristoclidēs "killing" his nameless defeated opponent in the pancration.

If I am correct in my reading, then the jackdaws at *N.3.82* should be taken as generic φθονεροί, who are Aristoclidēs' rivals only in the sense that they have failed to match his achievement. The defeated opponent is no rival at all, but merely "prey" upon which Aristoclidēs has worked his achievement.

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