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**Pindar, Heracles the Idaean Dactyl, and the Foundation of the Olympic Games**

Pindar's *Olympian Odes* consistently attribute the foundation of the Olympic games to the Theban Heracles, and Heracles' importance at Olympia is given programmatic emphasis in the metopes of his twelve labors in the Temple of Zeus. However, several passages in Pausanias and other writers preserve an alternate tradition claiming to be older, to the effect that the "Heracles" who founded the games was actually one of the Cretan dactyls, metalworkers with magical powers who lived in the Age of Cronus and are often conflated with the Curetes as guards present at the birth of Zeus on Mt. Ida. According to this tradition, the games were attributed to the more famous Heracles only as a result of later confusion. My present inquiry aims to explore the antiquity and sources of these competing accounts and to relate them to the interaction of pan-Hellenic and epichoric claims surrounding Olympia and its cults, and to frame these claims in turn within the historical and political factors that engendered them.

A plethora of cultic evidence in Elis and Arcadia makes it hard to dismiss Heracles the Idaean dactyl as a late deviationist fabrication. I argue that his cult evolved in Elis as a late sixth-century local response (see also Paus. 6.21.6 for his connection with an epichoric Elean temple some distance from Olympia) to the pan-Hellenic myth of Theban Heracles as founder, later recorded by Pindar and implied in the metopes of the Temple of Zeus. The strong presence of Rhea's cult and legends about the birth of Zeus in Arcadia suggest Elis' closest neighbor as a possible source of influence. The heavy involvement of both Sparta and Argos in the politics of Elis throughout its history, as well as tensions with Corinth (Paus. 5.2), made veneration of a hero perceived as "Dorian" problematic for some Eleans, particularly those who may have opposed alliance with Sparta (cf. the pro-Dorian legend about the Heraclids' ally Oxylus and his descendent Iphitus as refounders of the Olympics after Heracles [Strabo 8.354-55, Paus. 5.4.5-6] vs. the anti-Dorian story about Peloponnesian resistance to the first Olympics [Phlegon of Tralles, 257F1 *FGrH*]). This tension is also reflected in the early myths about Heracles' battles with Augeas and the sons of Actor. Pindar's odes consciously support a pan-Hellenic version of Olympic foundation against local claims, here embodied in the figure of Heracles the dactyl.

*O.3* also reassigns to the Theban Heracles the motif of bringing the olive to Olympia, which can be shown to have had its origins in *dendrophoria* rituals connected with the Idaean Mother (see Paus. 5.7.6-9 for its attribution to the Idaean Heracles); Crete as the source of olive culture in the early Greek world is also suggested by the depiction of an olive tree conveyed on a boat in Minoan signet rings, as well as by other archaeological evidence. Athens also had claims to being the source of the Olympic olive, but by assigning this motif to the mythical Hyperboreans and the pan-Hellenic Heracles, Pindar transcends local rivalries in favor of a myth acceptable to all.