Thrasyboulos and the Perforated Labor of Bees: Pindar's *Pythian* 6.52-54

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In this note, I argue for a new interpretation for the end of *P.* 6. In this note, I argue for a new interpretation for the end of *P.* 6. I begin by providing W. Race's text and translation for the relevant passage, in order to provide an introduction to the discussion.

τῶν νῦν δὲ καὶ Θρασύβουλος  
πατρώφαν μάλιστα πρός στάθμαν ἔβα,  
πάτρῳ τ’ ἐπερχόμενοσ ἀγλαίαν ἅπασαν.  
νόῳ δὲ πλοῦτον ἀγεί,  
ἀδίκον οὐθ’ ὑπέροπλον ἢβαν δρέπων,  
σοφίαν δ’ ἐν μυχοῖσι Πιερίδων·  
τίν τ’, Ἐλέλιχθον, ἄρχεις ὃς ἱππιᾶν ἐσόδων,  
μάλα ἁδόντι νόῳ, Ποσειδάν, προσέχεται.  
γλυκεῖα δὲ φρὴν  
καὶ συμπόταισιν μελισσᾶν ἀμείβεται τρητὸν πόνον. (Pi. *P.* 6.44-54)

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1 The end of *P.* 6 has caused difficulty and has occasionally been disparaged by commentators (for statements of discontentment with the ode’s end, see e.g. Farnell 1932, 189; von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1922, 137; Gildersleeve 1890, 320). I believe that the frustration that commentators have exhibited derives from our previously misunderstanding the passage, as argued below.

2 1997, 318-319. I provide the translation of Race because it is indicative of the manner in which most scholars now interpret the end of *P.* 6.
... but of men now, Thrasyboulos has come closest to the standard of filial devotion, while approaching his uncle in all manner of splendor. He uses his wealth with intelligence, he enjoys a youth without injustice or insolence, and culls wisdom in the haunts of the Pierians. And to you, Earthshaker, who rule the paths to horse racing, he keeps close, Poseidon, with a mind you greatly favor. And his sweet spirit, in company with his drinking companions, surpasses the perforated labor of bees.

The last three lines are the lines addressed in this note. I provide the preceding material for the sake of context.

Following a scholiast, scholars, nearly universally, suggest that ἀμείβεται here means ‘surpass’ vel sim., but I believe this interpretation is incorrect. First, as Kurke and Gentili et al. note, there is no evidence that ἀμείβομαι can mean ‘surpass’. The scholiast, I believe, suggested that ἀμείβεται here means ‘surpass’ because he did not understand the passage. Unsatisfied with the traditional interpretation of the proposed semantics of ἀμείβομαι in this passage, Svenbro and Kurke suggest that ἀμείβομαι here means ‘repay, requite’. This is in line with the semantics of ἀμείβομαι in Pindar. Building on Greengard, Kurke also suggests that ‘perforated labor of bees’ is a metaphor for Pindar’s song, P. 6. According to Kurke, Pindar declares that Thrasyboulos’ sweet temperament requites Pindar’s song. Following Svenbro, Greengard, and Kurke, in various manners, I suggest that the meaning ‘surpass’ cannot be defended and I believe that the perforated labor of bees is a metaphor for song.