

PINDAR
VICTORY ODES

Olympians 2, 7, 11; *Nemean* 4;
Isthmians 3, 4, 7

EDITED BY
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INTRODUCTION

1. GREEK LYRIC POETRY

The main period of lyric poetry in Greece lies roughly between those of epic and tragedy, from about 650 to 450 BC. The poems are commonly divided into two types: personal lyric of the kind composed by Sappho, Alcaeus, Anacreon; and choral lyric, more remote from modern experience, consisting of poems sung and danced by a choir for a civic and/or religious occasion. This genre is associated particularly with the names of Alcman in the seventh century, Stesichorus in the sixth (though the exceptional length of this poet's compositions, confirmed by new finds, has caused experts to question the likelihood of choral performance),¹ Simonides, most famous poet in Greece at the time of the Persian wars, his nephew Bacchylides, and, greatest of all, Pindar. Until recently, little of the voluminous works of these poets survived apart from the epinician odes of Pindar, composed to celebrate victors in the great athletic games of Greece. But finds on papyrus since the late nineteenth century have restored to us a strange and attractive partheneion by Alcman, substantial remains of Bacchylides' epinicians and dithyrambs, and parts of Pindar's book of paeans. In recent years more has been found, including enough of Stesichorus to confirm his ancient reputation for treating extended stories from mythology in lyric verse. The main gap remains Simonides, whose ancient reputation was very high; among other achievements he is believed to have established the genre of epinician poetry, and so to have been Pindar's most important predecessor in this field.

2. PINDAR'S LIFE AND WORKS

Pindar was born in 518 BC. His earliest dated poem is the Tenth Pythian of 498, written for a young man connected with the Aleuadai, a powerful family in Thessaly. The last dated poem is the Eighth Pythian of 446 for a victor from Aegina, a poem that seems reflective

¹ M. L. West in *C.Q.* 21 (1971) 307-14, C. Segal, in *The Cambridge history of classical literature* 1 (Cambridge 1985) 187.

and melancholy. By then he would be aged 72. He probably died not long after. He was born in a village close to Thebes, where he later made his home. He is said to have received training as a choral poet in Athens.

The period of his activity thus falls in the first half of the fifth century BC, a period whose history is covered for us by Herodotus and the first book of Thucydides. Relatively little is known about his life, and such anecdotes as appear in the ancient *Lives* are clearly fictitious. He seems to have been present at the Olympic games of 476 (*O.* 10.99–105), and to have visited Sicily in that same year (*O.* 1.16–17, *P.* 1.17–28). He must indeed have travelled widely in the Greek world, both to the games and to the cities of the victors. The highest concentration of his victory odes is in the 470s, including some of the finest and greatest, among them those for the Sicilian tyrants Hieron and Theron. Five of the seven poems in the present collection are dated to that decade.

When we look back in history, we judge that the most important developments from the Greek point of view in the first half of the fifth century were (*a*) the two Persian invasions, leading to the battles of Marathon in 490 and Salamis and Plataea in 480/479, and (*b*) the growth of the power of the new democratic Athens in the following years. A deep embarrassment for Pindar personally must have been the fact that his city of Thebes, proud and ancient, but fatally exposed to the invader from the north, took the Persian side in the second invasion: and, although a Theban contingent served with the small Greek force under Leonidas at Thermopylae, the city became Mardonius' headquarters during the winter of 480/479, and its forces fought bravely on the Persian side at Plataea (*Hdt.* 9.67–9). After the Greeks led by the Spartan king Pausanias had defeated the Persians, they punished Thebes by the execution of some of its leaders. These facts imply fierce tensions of divided loyalty within the city, and traumatic unhappiness for any patriot, especially one like Pindar whose horizons had expanded to include the whole of the Greek world.

It is of course dangerous to deduce the poet's personal feelings from what we read in the odes (see p. 19), but some facts are worth recording. First, he never mentions the battle of Marathon, which for him is the site of minor local games (*O.* 9.89, *O.* 13.110, *P.* 8.79). Perhaps the rest of Greece did not share the Athenian belief in the earth-shaking

significance of what happened there. As to the second Persian attack, the Eighth Isthmian, probably for a victory in 478, seems to include a cautious reference, saying that 'we' have been released from great misery (6) and that a god has removed the stone of Tantalus from above 'our' heads (9-10). In the Fifth Isthmian of not much later he gives warm praise to the Aeginetan sailors who helped to win the battle of Salamis; and in the First Pythian of 470, with greater detachment, he speaks of Salamis and Plataea as great victories, to be credited to Athens and Sparta respectively (*P.* 1.76-8).

That however is all. Attempts by scholars such as Bowra to find hostile allusions to Athens in later poems have been shown to be erroneous (on *I.* 7, see p. 67); nor are occasional apparently political comments, about tyranny, aristocracy, democracy (*P.* 2.87-8, *P.* 11.52) to be used as evidence. While accepting that Pindar as an individual lived in the real world, we must take the odes for themselves, and not try to deduce his personal experiences and opinions from sentences that appear in them.

The Alexandrian edition of Pindar's poems produced by Aristophanes of Byzantium (p. 26) contained seventeen books: one of hymns, one of paeans, two of dithyrambis, two of prosodia, three of partheneia, two of hyporchemata, one of encomia, one of threni, and four of epinicia.² Paeans were addressed to Apollo, dithyrambis to Dionysus; prosodia were processional hymns, partheneia compositions for choirs of girls, hyporchemata a combination of dance and song. The encomia, in praise of individuals, included also skolia, or drinking songs; the threni were funeral dirges. The first six categories were addressed to gods, the last three to men. A selection made in the second century AD had the consequence that the books of epinician odes alone survived, and from that time fewer quotations are found from the other books. Before then, the epinicians were not more frequently quoted than the others. Pindar was always a deeply admired poet,³ and in addition to the direct transmission of the epinicians, over three hundred quotations from the lost material have been found in ancient authors and grammarians, some of them assigned to particular books, others of uncertain provenance. Of these fragments, three from the

² *Vita Ambrosiana*, Drachmann I, p. 3.

³ Cf. Horace, *Odes* 4.2 *Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari*, etc.

threni appear in Appendix B, for comparison with part of the Second Olympian. In the last century, as stated above, extensive parts of the book of paeans were recovered on papyrus, and more recently additions have been made to the dithyrambs and the threni.⁴

The epinicians have come down to us almost complete. The Alexandrian editor arranged them in books according to the games where the victory had been won, the order of books following the relative importance of the games: first came the *Olympians* (fourteen odes), then the *Pythians* (twelve), the *Isthmians* (at least nine), and the *Nemeans* (eight). Three odes which did not fit into this scheme were added to the end of the *Nemeans*. At a later date the last two books were interchanged, and still later the end of the *Isthmians* was lost.

Within each book the order of poems is in general according to the importance of the event (chariot victories first), and of the victors (priority to tyrants and kings). An exception to the former principle is provided by the first poem in the collection (*O.* 1), which is for a horse race and precedes those (*O.* 2 and *O.* 3) for a chariot race. But the exception was made for an easily understood reason, that *O.* 1 begins famously with glorification of the Olympic games (the lines are quoted on pp. 21–2), and later includes as part of its myth the chariot race of Pelops and Oenomaus, which was their model in myth. Elsewhere, the desire to put together poems for the same victor, as in *P.* 1–3 and *I.* 3–4, has disturbed the strict application of the principles.

3. THE GAMES

The Greeks were as fascinated by athletics as is the modern world. An appreciation of the spirit of competition enlivens the funeral games of Patroklos in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*; these also illustrate the origin of such public competitions in funeral celebrations.⁵ From such an origin, they developed in Greece into a central feature of national culture. The successful athlete brought great glory to his home city, was widely admired, and given lasting honours.

Four national festivals had each its particular basis in religion and

⁴ *Pindarus, Pars II Fragmenta*, ed. Maehler, Leipzig 1989.

⁵ L. Malten, 'Leichenspiel und Totenkult', *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts (Römische Abteilung)* 38/9 (1923–4) 300–40.

supposed foundation in myth. The greatest was that at Olympia in the north-west Peloponnese, believed to have been founded in 776 BC, and held every fourth year for a thousand years, until it was abolished by the emperor Theodosius in AD 393. These games played such an important role in the Greek world that their sequence was later used at Athens for chronology, and a historian would write, 'in the third year of the eightieth Olympiad', meaning the year we call 458/7 BC. The games were held in the late summer; Zeus was the presiding god, Herakles the founder, and Pelops was buried in the sanctuary. Second were those at Delphi, called the Pythian games, in honour of the god Apollo. From 582 BC they were held every four years, alternating at two-year intervals with the Olympics; according to Pindar, Neoptolemos, son of Achilles, was buried in the sanctuary there (*N.* 7.44-7). The Isthmian games, at Corinth, also began in 582, presumably a few months before the definitive establishment of the Pythian athletic festival,⁶ and took place every second year in honour of Poseidon, god of the sea. The baby Melikertes, child of Ino/Leukothea (see *O.* 2.28-30n.) had an altar there.⁷ And finally the Nemean games were held in a quiet valley of the north-east Peloponnese, the scene of Herakles' first labour, by which he won for himself the lion-skin which he wore thereafter. These games began in 573, and were biennial like the Isthmians, and in honour of Zeus like the Olympians; they were supposedly first held at the funeral of the baby Opheltes, also called Archemoros, killed by a snake as the army of the Seven passed that way on its march to Thebes.⁸

These four were the 'sacred games', where the prize was merely a wreath of leaves, but the prestige of victory colossal. The athlete who had won at all four was called a *periodonikes*, like one who wins the Grand Slam in modern tennis. Among Pindar's clients (patrons), Diagoras of Rhodes, the boxer for whom the Seventh Olympian was written, had this distinction.

⁶ E. R. Gebhard, 'The evolution of a pan-Hellenic sanctuary: from archaeology towards history at Isthmia', in *Greek sanctuaries: new approaches*, ed. N. Marinatos and R. Hägg (London 1993).

⁷ Apollodorus, *Biblioth.* 3.4.3.

⁸ Apollod. *Biblioth.* 3.6.4; the story is told at some length in the fourth to sixth books of Statius' *Thebaid*.

The following table⁹ illustrates the sequence of the festivals (the Attic year began in June/July, after the summer solstice, and this marked the change from one Olympiad to the next):

Ol. 75.1	Olympia	August 480
75.2	Nemea	July 479
	Isthmus	April 478
75.3	Delphi	August 478
75.4	Nemea	July 477
	Isthmus	April 476
76.1	Olympia	August 476

In addition there were numerous local games in which these athletes also took part, where prizes of local manufacture were often on offer. We hear of these in the odes when the victor or one of his relatives has won local victories worth recording. Melissos, for whom the Fourth Isthmian was composed, had won three times at the Herakleia in Thebes; Timasarchos (*N.* 4) had won at Athens and Thebes, and his family counted an Olympic victory in the past and an Isthmian one quite recently; Diagoras (*O.* 7) had a very long list of previous successes for Pindar to record. In two cases (and possibly also in the Second Pythian) Pindar's ode is for a victory in such local games: the Ninth Nemean for one at Sikyon, the Tenth Nemean for one at Argos.

The events in the games, as we see them in the odes, are as follows: Equestrian: four-horse chariot; wagon drawn by a pair of mules; single horse.

Contact sports: boxing; wrestling; pancration.

Track events: sprints, *stadion* (about 200 metres) and *diaulos* (about 400 metres); long distance, *dolichos* (about 5,000 metres); race in armour.

Mixed: pentathlon (long jump, sprint, discus, javelin, wrestling).

Musical (at Delphi): pipe-playing.

In some events there were separate classifications for boys as well as adults; and at Nemea and the Isthmus there was an intermediate category of *ageneioi* (lit. 'beardless'). When Pindar celebrates a boy victor, he regularly introduces the name of the trainer.

The odes in the present selection are for victors in four of these

⁹ It is ultimately based on G. F. Unger in *Philologus* 37 (1877) 42.

events, chariot race, boxing, wrestling and pancration. Pindar does not in practice describe the victory in the manner of a sports reporter (as Homer does in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*); nevertheless he pays attention to the particular discipline in which the victory was won, by his choice of imagery, and sometimes his choice of myth. It may be of interest therefore to set down some details about these four.

Chariot Race

Won by Melissos of Thebes at Nemea (*I.* 3), and probably previously at the Isthmus (*I.* 4); and by Theron of Akragas at Olympia (*O.* 2).

Whereas in most events the victor himself had borne the strain of competition, the equestrian events were rather different. The victor for whom Pindar composed the ode was normally, in modern terms, the owner, who employed a trainer and a charioteer. When Herodotos of Thebes himself drove the winning chariot, Pindar draws attention to the fact (ἀνία δ' ἄλλοτριῆαις οὐ χερσὶ νωμάσσαντ' *I.* 1.15). Consequently, Pindar's praise of his client cannot usually include personal athletic prowess, and he concentrates on the tremendous glory that has been won, and on the victor's wealth (necessary for keeping a stable of horses), and his willingness to spend it in a good cause (cf. p. 15).

The four-horse chariot race was the most magnificent spectacle of all. In *Iliad* 23, the chariot race comes first in the description of the funeral games of Patroklos, and it takes up more space in the narrative than all the other events put together. There the chariots are drawn by two horses each, and they race one lap, out into the country, round a turning-post, and back to the starting-point. In the Olympic chariot race, the distance was twelve laps of the hippodrome, with turning-posts at each end of the course (δυωδεκαδρόμων *O.* 2.50; cf. *O.* 3.33, *O.* 6.75, *P.* 5.33).¹⁰ There is uncertainty about the length of the race, because the ancient hippodrome, which was to the south of the surviving stadium, has been totally obliterated by changes in the course of the river Alpheius during the intervening millennia. But the indications are that it was very long, perhaps nearly nine miles,¹¹ a distance

¹⁰ H. M. Lee in *A.J.P.* 107 (1986) 162-74.

¹¹ H. Schöne in *J.D.A.I.* 12 (1897) 150-60, improved by J. Ebert in *Nikephoros* 2 (1989) 89-107.

not impossible, but unheard-of nowadays, when two or three miles are normal for a horse race, with the Grand National (over hurdles) a little over four miles. The scholia to Pindar tell us that later in the ancient world the number of laps was reduced to six (Σ *O.* 2.92a).

The races were dangerous, with so many horses for the drivers to control. There were frequent crashes, illustrated in the false messenger speech in Sophocles' *Electra* 698–756, the most critical moments being when the chariots rounded the turning-posts at the ends of the course (Nestor concentrates on this moment when he gives advice to his son Antilochos before the start of the *Iliad* race). Pindar tells us that Karrhotos, King Arkesilas' brother-in-law, who drove for him in 462, kept his chariot intact when forty others crashed (*P.* 5.49–51).

Boxing

Won by Hagesidamos of Epizephyrian Locri in the boys' event at Olympia (*O.* 11), and by Diagoras of Rhodes in the men's event (*O.* 7).

This was a more reputable activity than one might expect. Apollo himself was patron of boxers, and Pollux (Polydeukes), the demigod, was an expert. The poets were fond of describing his contest with Amykos, king of the Bebrycians. In the Iliadic games, the winner was a man of the people, Epeios, builder later of the wooden horse, his opponent Euryalos, one of the leaders of the contingent from Argos. The result was a clean knock-out (*Il.* 23.689–94).

The main differences from modern boxing were that there was no ring, although the space for the contestants might be restricted; and no rounds, the fight going on until one or other had won. The competitors wound leather thongs round their forearms down to their hands; these are mentioned already in the *Iliad*. Later in the ancient world, harder leather thongs were used, with a cutting edge; and still later the dreadful Roman *caestus* came into use, with metal sewn into the leather. The stance of the boxers, as shown in vase paintings, was upright, with the arms held high. It seems that they aimed at the head, body blows being less considered. There were no divisions by weight, so that the successful boxer, like Diagoras, would be a heavyweight in modern terms.

Wrestling

Won by Timasarchos of Aegina at Nemea (*N.* 4).

This was always one of the most popular events. Indeed the palaestra, or wrestling school, was a feature of social life, the natural place of recreation for young men. The technicalities of the sport were widely known, and metaphors taken from it common in the language. There are very many representations of the art in vase painting. A wrestler lost if his back or shoulders touched the ground. Thus much of the bout would take place with the contestants on their feet, in contrast to the pancration, although they would continue the fight on the ground if neither was on his back. It is disputed whether the winner was the first to achieve three successful throws or the one who won the best of three.¹² In the *Iliad* there is a wrestling contest between the great figures Odysseus and Aias, but it is inconclusive; they fall to the ground once, with Odysseus on top and Aias on his back (*Il.* 23.727–8), but can achieve nothing further, and the result is a draw.

Pancration

Won by Strepsiadas of Thebes (*I.* 7), and by Melissos of Thebes in his younger days (*I.* 4).

This, which was more like a martial art, or unarmed combat, than either straight boxing or wrestling, was a late addition to the events at the games. It does not appear among the contests in the *Iliad*. It is sometimes described as a mixture of boxing and wrestling, but that does not give the right picture. Kicks were used, as in modern karate; and we are told that the only things forbidden were biting and gouging the eyes. The mythical model was Herakles, especially in his fight with the giant Antaios (cf. *I.* 4.52–7), and with the Nemean lion. Much of the work was done on the ground, as in judo, and the smaller contestant might very well go to ground from the beginning, to neutralise his opponent's advantage in size and weight (*I.* 4.47n.) The contest went on until one of them indicated submission by raising a hand or a finger. It was considered the supreme test of strength, skill and resolution.

¹² See LSJ under τριάζω.

4. THE VICTORS

Pindar's clients were from wealthy and locally influential families. In consequence we get a reflection of the society of the archaic period before the intellectual domination of Athens. The festivals where the games were held were truly Panhellenic; competitors came from all over the Greek world.

We might not have expected the western Greeks to be so strongly represented. But they were the 'new world' from the point of view of mainland Greece, and such colonial representatives naturally wished to preserve their connections with the old country. No fewer than seventeen of Pindar's forty-five odes are for western Greeks, among them seven for Syracusans and five for citizens of Akragas. Cyrene also, in North Africa, provides three major poems. At home, the largest single block is for the small island of Aegina (eleven odes, all but two of which are for victories at the relatively minor games of the Isthmus and Nemea); this was a time when that island was prosperous as a maritime trading nation and politically competitive in the Greek world. It produced wrestlers particularly. Pindar obviously favours it and has friends there. He sees it as closely allied to his own city of Thebes, from which not surprisingly four victors come, sponsoring five odes, three of them in the present selection. Nine odes are left, each for a single representative of a city. There is none for a Spartan, and only one specifically for an Athenian (*P.* 7); he however is, not surprisingly, a member of the powerful Alcmaeonid family.

Generally, though less so in the case of the young men of Aegina, it was the great men of the cities who competed for the honour particularly of Olympic or Pythian victories, and if successful commissioned Pindar to compose a victory ode. The powerful tyrants (military dictators) of the two richest cities in Sicily, Hieron of Syracuse and Theron of Akragas, each gave him opportunities to compose works of great complexity, in which the victory is certainly the occasion of the ode, and is duly glorified, but much else is included. These odes are placed at the head of the collection, the first three of the *Olympians* and the first three of the *Pythians*. Each of the two tyrants in due course won the highest prize of all, the chariot race at Olympia. The Second Olympian is for Theron's success there in 476; in Hieron's case, we have his Pythian chariot victory celebrated in *P.* 1, together with the founda-

tion of a new city on the slopes of Mt Etna; but when he won at Olympia in 468, it was Bacchylides who received the commission to write the celebratory poem, which in fact we have (Bacch. 3). Another ruler for whom Pindar wrote was the king of Cyrene, Arkesilas. For him he composed the quite exceptional Fourth Pythian, 299 lines long, containing as its myth the longest extant treatment of the Argonautic story until we come to the Hellenistic age and Apollonius Rhodius. Melissos (*I.* 3 and *I.* 4) was of an old aristocratic family at Thebes; Diagoras (*O.* 7) of one on Rhodes. Among those not appearing in the present selection, Chromios (*N.* 1, *N.* 9) was Hieron's general, Xenokrates (*P.* 6, *I.* 2) Theron's brother.

Pindar's relations with these often very powerful men are represented by him as personal, and on a level of equality. The formal term is *xenia*. The victors were his *xenoi* in foreign cities, his hosts if he visited them there. Isocrates (*Panegyricus* 43) says that the *panegyreis* ('great public festivals') were occasions to meet friends and form new friendships; and this applied to Pindar particularly. He speaks specifically of Thrasyboulos as his *xenos* (*I.* 2.48), and of Hieron (*O.* 1.103, *P.* 3.69), Thorax, head of the Thessalian Aleuadai (*P.* 10.64), and Thearion, father of an Aeginetan victor (*N.* 7.61).¹³ Such 'guest-friendship' was found in the heroic world, for example between Oineus and Bellerophon, referred to by Diomedes at *Il.* 6.215-25, and this is an aspect where the world of myth may be used to mirror Pindar's own day; for example, in *I.* 6, written by Pindar, a Theban, for Lampon of Aegina, to celebrate the victory of his son Phylakidas, we see the Theban Herakles visiting the Aeginetan Telamon, and prophesying the glory of his son Aias.

Furthermore, Pindar sees his own function as poet as complementary to that of his athletic patron. His world too is competitive; there are similar difficulties to overcome (*N.* 4.36-43); similar qualities are needed for success. And in the end, it is he, with the generosity of his praise, who puts the final glory on the victor's achievement. Thus he freely compares himself with the victor (e.g. *O.* 1.115-16, *O.* 11.10, *I.* 5.53-4).

¹³ G. Herman, *Ritualised friendship and the Greek city* (Cambridge 1987) esp. p. 45 and Appendix A.

5. THE GENRE

We have forty-five poems in four books for victors in the games. Though each poem is individual, and related to its particular circumstances, it is nevertheless easy to see patterns in the structure and content, and thus to conceive the idea of a 'typical' ode. Some control is provided by the epinicia of Bacchylides, Pindar's younger contemporary, the remains of fourteen of which have been recovered on papyrus, some of them of considerable length. There are however differences of style and thought between the two poets; and for Pindar it is preferable to draw information from his own composition.

In content, the odes consist essentially of three ingredients:

1. Factual details about the victor, his victory, his family, and so on. These are clearly essential if Pindar is to fulfil his contract.
2. The use of myth. This happens in two ways, either by the telling of a story from mythology as the main ornament of the poem, or by brief mythological parallels to illustrate moral points. In the Seventh Isthmian, the first triad has the former function, references in 32-3 and 44-7 the latter. Johnson, in *The vanity of human wishes* 222, makes this distinction with characteristic clarity - 'to point a moral or adorn a tale'.
3. Moralising or proverbial reflections arising mostly from the consideration of athletic success. We use the terms 'gnomic' and 'gnome'.

The 'typical' ode is structured in five parts. First comes a striking, attention-demanding, opening. Pindar, who shows an interest in discussing his own poetic art (cf. *O.* 2.83-8), says at the beginning of the Sixth Olympian that the beginning of a work of poetry should be vivid and impressive like the pillared entrance to a great house. Set normally in the centre of the ode comes, as illustration or ornament, the telling of an appropriate story from mythology. Before and after this are placed the factual details, i.e. the specific information about the victor and his victory, interspersed with the gnomic comment described above as the third ingredient of the content. Finally, and perhaps unexpectedly, the striking opening is balanced by a quiet, throw-away, close. The pattern is thus:

A Striking opening

B Circumstantial information intermixed with moralising

- C Myth
- D More circumstantial information and moralising
- E Quiet close.

Of course this pattern is far from invariable; some of the shorter odes (such as *O.* 11 and *I.* 3 here) have no room for a myth; in others, the myth itself may form the striking opening (*I.* 7) or fill the last part of the ode (*N.* 10). But it does appear with some frequency, particularly in the largest unified group of poems in the collection, the eleven odes for victors from Aegina, which include *N.* 4 here; and it may be recognised quite easily in our Fourth Isthmian and Seventh Olympian.

Pindar shows his power and originality in his selection of a theme for the opening, section A. When it comes to B and D, the requirement from him may rather be a kind of ingenuity, to provide in poetical language and suitable imagery the factual details demanded by the occasion and his client. For the moralising comments, see the later section on 'Pindar's thought'. As to the myth, which more than anything gives atmosphere and tone to the poem, selection of an appropriate story was certainly not random. There is always some relevance, even if we cannot assess it for sure. Most commonly the myth is derived from the legends of the victor's home city, thus supporting the local patriotism of the occasion. This is without exception true of the Aeginetan odes (see *N.* 4, introduction). In other cases, and especially for Sicilian victors, the relevance may be rather to the games themselves, particularly in relation to those at Olympia (see the myths of *O.* 1, *O.* 3, *O.* 10). Occasionally the myth seems to be chosen to reflect the experience of victory itself (*P.* 10),¹⁴ or the personal circumstances of the victor (*P.* 3).

Even when the five-part structure described above applies with precision, the parts are not separate blocks of lines crudely juxtaposed. Pindar is adept at providing transitions from part to part. Often this is achieved by a 'gnome' facing, as it were, both ways, applicable to the content of the section coming to an end, and also introducing the new one (e.g. *N.* 4.91-2); sometimes, particularly in the transition to the myth, he simply and ingeniously achieves the change of topic by means of a relative pronoun, leading from the passing mention of a hero

¹⁴ Köhnken 181-7.

or place into his chosen myth (e.g. *N.* 4.25), as if the connection of thought is natural and conversational. On other occasions, usually at the end of the myth, he employs what is called a 'break-off formula', alleging (in a gnomic way) that he must not go on too long, that it is not possible for him to tell all details of the story, that there is some danger even of boring the listeners. At this point he favours nautical metaphors – the ship is off course, there are hidden rocks (e.g. *N.* 4.69–72).¹⁵

The public performance of the ode normally took place after the victor returned home, so that Pindar had a reasonable time to prepare. In some cases, however, we seem to have compositions separately performed at the games themselves after the announcement of victory.¹⁶ It has been assumed from at least the time of the ancient scholia that the odes were choral, i.e. sung by a choir for whom Pindar had composed the music and dance as well as the words. Recently this view has been called into question by Lefkowitz and Heath, who argue that they were sung by a solo voice (of Pindar or his representative) as part of a general κῶμος, or band of youths brought together to celebrate the victory.¹⁷ Their argument is based primarily on the frequency of first-person-singular statements in the odes referring to Pindar himself,¹⁸ and the direct instruction at *O.* 1.17 to 'take down the Dorian lyre from its hook', implying (if taken literally) that Pindar was performing a solo at Hieron's court. C. Carey, however, has reasserted the traditional view, that these are compositions performed by a choir.¹⁹ He supports this by arguments from metre and language, and by some passages in the odes, particularly *N.* 3.3–9 and 65–6. The expression in *O.* 1.17 has then to be treated as a conventional fiction, deriving perhaps from the arrangements made for Demodokos at *Od.* 8.67–9; and the first-person statements by Pindar himself (which we see at *I.* 7.37–42, *O.* 2.89–92, etc.) are also part of the conventions of the genre, accepted by the listeners, even though they were sung by a choir of many voices.

¹⁵ Cf. Péron 312–13.

¹⁶ See *O.* 11 introduction and the article by Gelzer referred to there.

¹⁷ See under Lefkowitz and Heath in the Bibliography.

¹⁸ Lefkowitz 1963.

¹⁹ See Carey 1989 and 1991.

6. PINDAR'S THOUGHT

Mention has been made of the gnomic sentences which commonly punctuate the factual information in sections B and D of the typical ode, or appear in transitions between sections. The general source of these reflections is the occasion of the ode, i.e. victory in the games. Pindar seems to have identified four requirements for victory, and to see three important consequences.

The requirements are (1) natural ability (φυά), (2) hard work (πόνος), (3) wealth, together with a willingness to spend it (πλοῦτος, δαπάνα), (4) divine favour (θεός). The first two would be generally agreed to apply equally in modern athletics; the third, which is mentioned by Pindar mostly, though not exclusively, in relation to equestrian events, simply means that the athlete and his family can afford to engage in this activity. As to the fourth, this is what we, in a less religious age, would class as 'luck', or 'things going well on the day'; for Pindar is still affected by the archaic world of Homer, where there was no concept of chance, and all extraordinary achievement was assumed to imply the support and help of a god.

φυά: belief in inborn ability is typically aristocratic; i.e. that quality comes from birth, not training. Pindar argues that the person who has had to learn will never achieve the superiority of the natural athlete (or indeed the natural poet, *O.* 2.86-7). All the same, he does not deny the benefit of experience and practice (see δαέντι at *O.* 7.53). A clear statement of principle is found at *O.* 9.100-2, τὸ δὲ φυᾷ κράτιστον ἅπαν· πολλοὶ δὲ διδασκταῖς | ἀνθρώπων ἀρεταῖς κλέος | ὤρουσαν ἀρέσθαι 'all that is from nature is best; but many people have strained to win a reputation by acquired skills.' In our selection, see *O.* 11.19-20, *I.* 3.13-14.

πόνος: the need for effort and endurance is well understood, particularly in the harder disciplines such as boxing and wrestling. This by no means welcome requirement is closely associated in Pindar's mind with his function as poet (see below). The victory song is both reward and compensation for the strain and exhaustion of competition. See *O.* 11.4, *I.* 3.17b, *N.* 4.1-2.

πλοῦτος, δαπάνα: the aristocratic assumption that wealth is in itself meritorious certainly affects Pindar's judgement. It informs also his relationship with the victor, for the wealthier and more generous his

patrons, the better for the poet. In *O.* 2.53–4 (cf. *P.* 5.1) *πλοῦτος* even acquires a kind of mystical value. Without generosity of mind, however, leading to free expenditure, *πλοῦτος* on its own will not succeed. The general point is made at *I.* 1.67–8 *εἰ δέ τις ἔνδον νέμει πλοῦτον κρυφαῖον, | . . . , ψυχὰν ἄϊδαι τελέων οὐ φράζεται δόξας ἀνευθεν* ‘but if a man keeps his wealth hidden in his house . . . he fails to perceive that he commits his soul to death without glory’. See *I.* 4.29, *I.* 3.2, 17b, and especially *O.* 2.53–6 with the note.

θεός: nothing happens in the archaic world without the will of god; and certainly something as important as victory in the major games implies divine favour, probably identified as coming from the god of the games, Zeus (*N.* 4.9), Apollo, or Poseidon (*I.* 4.19–23). See *O.* 11.10, *I.* 3.4, *O.* 7.87–90.

When through the application of these prerequisites the athlete has won his victory, Pindar describes it as an achievement that is out of this world; often he uses the metaphor of the pillars of Herakles, the ultimate limit of human endeavour; in the Tenth Pythian he speaks of the journey to the Hyperboreans, who live beyond the north wind, as an allegory of the experience of victory; and, most famously, in his last extant poem, he says, *ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις; τί δ’ οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ | ἄνθρωπος. ἀλλ’ ὅταν αἴγλα διόσδοτος ἔλθῃ, | λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μείλιχος αἰὼν* ‘Creatures of a day! What is man? What is he not? Man is a dream of a shadow. But when god-sent illumination falls on him, bright is the light of men and pleasant their life’ (*P.* 8.95–7). Victory is like a transfiguration. However, he also analyses the situation rationally, and sees three consequences of victory to draw to the attention of the victor, and of the listeners. These may be briefly stated as ‘divine jealousy’ (*φθόνος θεῶν*), ‘human envy’ (*φθόνος ἀνδρῶν*), and ‘fame through poetry’ (*ῥῆμος*).

φθόνος θεῶν: human beings cannot, and should not, expect unbroken success. This principle is valid today also; they may become overconfident, or find that for other reasons their run of success comes to an end. To the mind of Pindar’s time it was natural to suppose that the gods resented spectacular human achievements, perhaps as bringing the humans a little too close to Olympos. The gods, then, are jealous gods, casting down the mighty from their seats, as in many tales in Herodotus; cf. *Hdt.* 1.32.1 *ἐπιστάμενον τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὼν φθονερόν τε καὶ παραχῶδες* ‘understanding that everything that is in the sphere of

the gods is jealous and dangerous'. This is the negative side of the parallel with the pillars of Herakles; not only has the victor achieved the ultimate, but he should realise that it is dangerous to try to go further. See *I.* 7.43-4, *I.* 4.11-13, *N.* 4.69; ἀθανάτων φθόνος is specifically mentioned at *I.* 7.39.

φθόνος ἀνδρῶν: this is rather different, envy in contrast to jealousy. One's fellow citizens, human nature being what it is, do not feel un-mixed pleasure at one's successes; they mutter and whisper in secret. This may be seen as typical Greek realism, and found at *N.* 4.39, *O.* 2.95. All the same, human envy is not usually dangerous, as divine jealousy is; Pindar says elsewhere (*P.* 1.85) κρέσσον γὰρ οἰκτιρμοῦ φθόνος 'envy is better than pity'. Its disadvantage is rather that it makes the poet's task harder; he must overcome this human tendency to belittle fine deeds (*N.* 4.36-43, *O.* 2.95-8).

ῥυμος: the immortalising power of poetry was known already to Homer (*Il.* 6.357-8 ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω | ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' αἰοιδίμοι ἔσσομένοισι 'so that we may be subjects of song even for future generations'). By Pindar's time it was a commonplace and one very relevant to his professional relationship with his clients. What he can offer to the victor is twofold: initially, reward and compensation for superhuman efforts; in the long run, a reputation that will continue after death. And indeed this is true. Who now would have heard of Hagesidamos of Epizephyrian Locri, or Melissos of Thebes, if it were not for the honeyed flow of Pindar's verse? This is, not surprisingly, the commonest of Pindar's gnomic themes, appearing in virtually every ode. Statements of the immediate effect (reward, compensation) will be found at *I.* 4.3, *I.* 3.7, and particularly *N.* 4.2-5, of the long-term effect (immortal glory) at *O.* 11.4-6, *I.* 7.16-19, *I.* 4.40-2, *N.* 4.6, 83-5, *O.* 2.89.

Just as there is a wealth of association in words such as φηά, πόνος, ῥυμος, so Pindar has some other terms of central significance to his mental approach. Two of them, common in the more difficult expressions elsewhere, and implying balance, selectivity, good judgement, hardly appear in our present selection. They are καιρός and μέτρον.²⁰

²⁰ For καιρός, see *O.* 2.53-4n., with references there, and R. W. B. Burton, *Pindar's Pythian odes* (Oxford 1962) 46-8; for μέτρον, R. A. Prier in *C.W.* 70 (1976) 161-9.

We do however meet some other words full of meaning – κόρος, χάρις, χρυσός, ἀρετή.

κόρος is the dissatisfaction that comes from having too much of a thing, from not being able to cope with such affluence. No English word satisfactorily translates this, as we do not use 'satiety' in this way, and 'boredom', 'tedium', are not quite the same. There is a statement about κόρος at *O.* 2.95–8 (where it comes close to φθόνος), and see also *I.* 3.2. The idea is often implicit in a break-off formula at the end of a myth (e.g. *N.* 4.69–72).

χάρις is much commoner, and singularly difficult to tie down. It means 'grace'; the three Χάριτες or Graces were worshipped at Orchomenos, and for that reason are addressed in *O.* 14, for a victor from that city. But 'grace' is not an easy or unified concept in English either; and for Pindar the word is often connected with his view of poetry. In this context it denotes the charm and beauty of poetry, in contrast with σοφία, which indicates the technical skill of the poet. See *I.* 4.72b, *I.* 3.8, *N.* 4.7, *O.* 7.11;²¹ in other contexts it means rather 'popularity within one's city', as at *O.* 7.89, *O.* 2.10.

One might expect χρυσός 'gold' to be a subdivision of πλοῦτος, as at *O.* 1.2 (quoted on p. 21). But that is not usually so. For Pindar, gold is rather a symbol of the world of the gods. Bresson explains this by the fact that gold does not deteriorate with time, and that it has a unique brightness, caused by its not reflecting other colours, but only red.²² It is used in the odes to enhance a description, often indicating the world of the gods. Even things which are not golden, such as the olive leaves of the crown of victory at Olympia, may be described as χρύσεια. In our selection we find gold representing divinity at *I.* 7.49, *I.* 4.60, *O.* 7.32, 64, cf. *I.* 7.5; see also the wreath of golden olive at *O.* 11.13 and the golden flowers on the Isle of the Blest, *O.* 2.72.

Finally, ἀρετή. The English language has no satisfactory translation of this word either. It is used by Pindar both for the abilities that lead to success or achievement (e.g. *N.* 4.41) and for the achievements themselves (e.g. *O.* 11.6). It is commonly translated 'virtue', as in later

²¹ Also G. F. Gianotti, *Per una poetica Pindarica* (Turin 1975) 68–83, Verdenius 103–6.

²² A. Bresson, *Mythe et contradiction: analyse de la VIIe Olympique de Pindare* (Paris 1979) 104.

Greek, but with the conventional warning that 'ἀρετά is not a moral term in archaic thought'. Thus, in *O.* 2.53, πλοῦτος ἀρεταῖσι δεδαιδαλμένος does not imply a wealthy man who is also virtuous, except in a special sense of 'virtuous', i.e. a wealthy man who has the talents (decisiveness, commitment, ability) that lead to success. All the same, moral implications are not absent; good deeds are the work of a person with ἀρετά, and Theron, the possessor in *O.* 2 of πλοῦτος ἀρεταῖσι δεδαιδαλμένος, is later praised as a benefactor (εὐεργέτας 94).

All these – requirements for victory, consequences of victory, καιρός, κόρος, χάρις, χρυσός, ἀρετά – constitute part of a closed world of thought surrounding the occasion of an epinician ode. And Pindar finds ever new ways to make these points, coining variations on well-worn themes. Sometimes, for the very reason that the variations are far-sought, his expressions have bewildered those in the modern world who were not quite on his wavelength, and have been a major cause of his reputation for obscurity. Consequently there grew up a habit of finding hidden meanings in obscure comments, and relating them to Pindar's personal life or political views, or the historical events we know about from his time. The culmination of this approach came in the book *Pindaros* by Wilamowitz, where he treated the surviving poems and fragments as source material for an attempt to sketch a biography of the poet. Bowra's book *Pindar* was in the same tradition.

This came to an end in 1962, with the publication of two very influential pamphlets by the American scholar E. L. Bundy, called *Studia Pindarica*, I and II. Bundy saw the odes as much more conventional than had most previous interpreters, and set his face firmly against the discovery in them of private opinions or beliefs of the poet; he insisted that everything in an ode was there for one purpose and one purpose only, the praise of the victor and his victory. What appear to be personal views are not those of Pindar the citizen of Thebes, but of Pindar the poet, privileged to praise this extraordinary achievement. Even apparently unhappy or sombre expressions are there for the purpose of praise, as a kind of 'foil', enhancing the brightness of the rest. Difficulties that Pindar seems to claim to be in his way and threatening to impede his aims merely represent another way of extolling the victor; acting as a pair, the poet and his client will overcome this hypothetical opposition (*N.* 4.36–43).

Thummer's edition of the *Isthmians* (1968–9) whole-heartedly