NESTOR AND SARPEDON IN PINDAR,
PYTHIAN 3 (AGAIN)

In a note recently published in this journal1) David Sider addresses a question that is posed by P. 3.112–14: why, out of all the many figures available to him, did Pindar select Nestor and Sarpedon in order to illustrate the power of poetry to confer lasting fame? Rightly rejecting the notion (advanced, e.g., by Farnell and Young) that the choice was a merely random one, Prof. Sider cites one or two “more pertinent” attempts at explanation – that the two are representative of the Greek and the Trojan camp respectively2), that they embody wisdom on the one hand and martial prowess on the other3) – before advancing as “more relevant to the theme of Pythian 3” the observation that Nestor and Sarpedon “are among the very few in the Iliad who explicitly state the theme of non omnis moriar” (i.e., at 11.761 and 12.310–28). Pindar’s tacit point, on this interpretation, is that Hieron “should liken himself to those few heroes who are aware that their great deeds have already guaranteed them such status and who, furthermore, derive consolation from this fact.”

By way of supplement to Prof. Sider’s interesting proposal, and in confirmation of his belief that “randomness is not a quality one normally associates with Pindar,” I wish to argue for the existence of yet another rationale behind the choice of names, one which is briefly stated in the commentaries of Fennell and Schroeder4) but which to my knowledge has never been accepted, or indeed even reported, by more recent scholars.

In addition to wisdom, eloquence, and reminiscental loquaciousness, a quality for which Nestor was proverbial in classical antiquity is longevity. Attention is emphatically drawn to this trait on the occasion of Nestor’s first appearance in the Iliad (1.250–52):

2) B. L. Gildersleeve, The Olympian and Pythian Odes (New York 1890; repr. Amsterdam 1965) 277.
4) C. A. M. Fennell, Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes (Cambridge 1893) 174 and 184, O. Schroeder, Pindars Pythien (Leipzig 1922) 31. Fennell presents no evidence or arguments for Sarpedon’s longevity; Schroeder cites Apollod. 3.1.2.
Following an interpretation found in the scholia and in Eustathius, most modern commentators agree in taking these lines to mean that Nestor has lived through two thirty-year generations and is now king in the third, i.e. that he is “approximately in his seventies”\(^5\)). Although nothing much by the standards of a Sophocles or an Isocrates, such an age is no doubt imposing enough for a man of Nestor’s supposed era and circumstances; but is that really the intended meaning of the lines? The fact that the relative pronoun of is in grammatical apposition to δύο γενεάι must naturally suggests that that phrase refers not to two periods of time but to two sets or “bodies of persons born at about a certain time and conceived of as living for a certain period”\(^6\)), with ερεθίσατο = “had perished” rather than “had passed by, had elapsed.” In that case, however, a difficulty arises if we suppose that the “certain period” here implied is no more than the canonical thirty years: are we really to imagine that Nestor has by some miracle survived two sudden mass extinctions of men in their prime?\(^7\))

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that Od. 3.245 τοῖς γάρ δή μίν ραον ἀνάξιοσθαι γέεν’ ἀνήρων, which according to Eustathius “concisely paraphrases the more diffuse statement” in II. 1.250 ff., in fact appears to extend Nestor’s lifespan considerably beyond seventy-odd years, since “reign thrice over the generations of men” is presumably equivalent to “reign over three generations of men”\(^8\)), and reigning over three generations is distinctly more impressive than reigning among the third. Whether the relation of Od. 3.245 to II. 1.250 ff. represents “an instance of the growth of the legendary into the miraculous” (Leaf) or a “Steigerung” (Ameis-Hentze) or simply reflects a “misunderstanding” (Kirk), the ampler conception of Nestor’s longevity that it embodies was strongly influential in later (particularly Roman) literature\(^9\)).

That Sarpedon may serve along with Nestor as an example of longevity is established by Apollodorus (3.1.2), who states that “Zeus granted him to live for three generations” (με τοῖς γενεάς τριάν). The notion of an extended lifespan thus curtly reported by Apollodorus would seem to have arisen originally as a way of

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6) R. J. Cunliffe, A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect (London 1923; repr. Norman, Oklahoma 1963) s.v. γενεή. Eustathius ad loc. notes that the relative clause “is not easily reconciled” with the temporal interpretation of γενεάι (οὐκ εὐκόλος πρὸς τὴν τοιαύτην ἔννοιαν συμβιβασθῆται).

7) Porphyry’s notion that the first generation is Neleus and the second Nestor’s brothers, all of whom were killed by Heracles in his attack on Pylos (schol. ad II. 1.250), is contradicted by the patent generality of reference in γενεάι μερόπων ἀνθρώπων.


rectifying a chronological discrepancy. Although according to the *Iliad* Sarpedon is the son of Zeus by Laodameia, one of three children borne to Bellerophon by his Lycian princess-bride (II. 6.192 ff.), an alternative tradition apparently current as early as the *Ehoiai* (fr. 140 Merk.-West) makes him the son of Zeus by Europa and hence the brother of Minos – and how, save by being gifted with praeternatural longevity, could a brother of Minos have been a vigorous and effective participant in a war in which Minos’ grandsons Idomeneus and Meriones also fought? Explicit allusions to such a prolongation of Sarpedon’s lifespan appear to be lacking for the fifth century, but it is necessarily implied by, e.g., Eur. Rhes. 29 ἦ τὸν Εὐρωπᾶς, Δυσίδων ἄγον ἄνδρον, which explicitly identifies the Sarpedon of Minos’ generation with the Lycian prince who commanded a contingent of allied troops at Troy.

Far from being random, then, Pindar’s choice of names in P. 3.112 can be seen to reflect a number of mutually compatible rationales, ethical as well as aesthetic. If Gildersleeve is right to discern a careful balancing of Greek cause against Trojan, if Boeckh and others are right to see the two figures as emblematic of *sapientia* and *virtus* respectively, and if Professor Sider is right to connect them with the *non omnis moriar* theme, Fennell and Schroeder are also right to regard the pair as (in Fennell’s words) “types of longevity”. Pindar’s implicit point in invoking such *exempla* is in full harmony with the consolatory and paraenetic intention that informs the poem as a whole. Although Nestor and Sarpedon may have been granted a prolongation of life well beyond the human norm, they died in the end nonetheless, suffering a bodily extinction no less complete and no less absolute than that which faces any ordinary mortal; and they were rescued from the oblivion that otherwise would inevitably have ensued only because they had done deeds worthy of song and found a poet to sing them. It follows, then, that mere *quantity* of life is much less important than the *use* one makes of the time, long or short, that one has. In telling the story of Asclepius Pindar has already warned

10) The account found in Diod. Sic. 5.79.3, according to which there were two Sarpedons, one the brother of Minos and the other a grandson who fought at Troy, is a rationalistic – and hence presumably later – solution to the same difficulty; cf. also Eustath. *ad Il.* 6.198–99 οἱ δὲ νεώτεροι Εὐρωπῆς καὶ Δίως τίθον Σαμησάνδανα λέγοντες καὶ ἀδελφόν αὐτὸν ἱστοροῦντες τοῦ Μίνωος ἄλλον ἔκειναν Σαμησάνδανα γενεαλογοῦν παλαιότερον, ὡς φασιν οἱ ἀκριβέστέροι.

11) Cf. also Bacch. fr. 10 Snell and Herod. 1.173, in which, however, the identification is *not* made explicit. The conception according to which Sarpedon is still in his fighting prime at the end of three generations while Nestor has become the archetypical γέρων would seem to be analogous to that which has the “deathless and ageless” Olympians undergo physical maturation after birth only as long as is required in order for them to attain the bodily form that expresses their essential nature, at which point all change ceases.

12) It should be noted, however, that formulaic expressions such as “being looked at as a god” and “being honored as a god” are very common in epic diction and appear in contexts in which mortality, survival through fame, and consolation are not even implicitly at issue (cf., e.g., *Il.* 5.78, 9.155, 297, 302, 10.33, 11.58, 13.218, 16.605, 22.434, *Od.* 5.36, 7.71, 8.173, 19.280, 23.339, *Hes. Th.* 91).

13) Thus in his use of paradigmatic figures Pindar implicitly anticipates a *topos* of later philosophical consolation; cf. [Plut.] *Cons. ad Apoll.* 111a (οὐχ ὁ μακρότατος βίος ἡμῖν ἐπονομαστατός) and the discussion of that passage in R. Kassel, Untersuchungen zur griechischen und römischen Konsolationsliteratur (Munich 1958) 83–85.
Hieron (and all other auditors and readers) that it is useless, foolish, and impious to long for physical immortality; now in the final lines of the poem he implicitly reminds them that even exceptional longevity, which as a putative desideratum falls well short of immortality, offers no substantive advantages to human beings in the absence of achievement and celebration. Blessed with the resources to act effectively and to have those actions commemorated in enduring song, Hieron has no just cause to repine at the shortness of his days.

14) Cf. Nestor’s appearance as an a fortiori exemplum in two self-consolatory epigrams from the Palatine Anthology, 7.157 (ἔθανεν χῦ τριγέφων Πύλους) and 9.112 (καὶ Νέστωρ ὁ ἑλιθεν εἰς Ἀἰδην).

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WELCKER, RANGABIS UND DAS RHEINISCHE MUSEUM

Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker (1784–1868), seit 1838 zusammen mit seinem Bonner Kollegen Ferdinand Näke (1788–1838), seit 1840 mit Friedrich Ritschl (1806–1876) Herausgeber des Rheinischen Museums für Philologie, hielt sich von Januar bis August 1842 in Griechenland und Kleinasien auf1). Während dieser Reise hat er Tagebuch geführt, die Aufzeichnungen hat er später veröffentlicht2). Welcker’s Tagebuch eröffnet einen Einblick in seine vielseitige Persönlichkeit; er war interessiert nicht nur an der Antike, sondern auch am modernen Griechenland und seiner Kultur; er zeigte sich als geselliger Mensch und schildert den Lebensstil und die Atmosphäre, die damals in der Athener Gesellschaft herrschten; auch beschreibt er, wie herzlich die Beziehungen zwischen den griechischen und den ausländischen Gelehrten, die damals in Athen weilten, waren. Man besuchte sich oft und lud sich zu kleinen Festen ein. Sogar das griechische Essen beschreibt er in seinem Tagebuch3). Welcker genoß hohes Ansehen in der Athener Gesellschaft. Er wurde vom König eingeladen, ins Παλάττι, wie er auf Neugriechisch schreibt4). In

1) R. Kekulé, Das Leben Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker’s, Leipzig 1880, 265 ff.
2) F. G. Welcker, Tagebuch einer griechischen Reise (2 Bde.), Berlin 1865.
3) Welcker beschreibt an einer Stelle, wie reichhaltig das Essen und wie gut der Wein aus Paros war. Zu den sich anschließenden Gesprächen heißt es im Tagebuch Bd. 1, 94: „Was ich nach Tisch ihnen über das Übersetzen der Griechen, über Goethe, für ihre Zukunft erzählte und voraussagte, hörten die Herren ... nicht ohne Interesse.“
4) Tagebuch Bd. 1, 150 f.: „... Ich saß diesmal neben dem König ... die Königin fragte mich, wie es mit meinem Griechischreden gehe ...“. Welcker muß