RhM 154 (2011) 1–8

PINDAR'S PYTHIAN 6: ON THE PLACE OF PERFORMANCE AND AN INTERPRETIVE CRUX

Pindar uses Delphi's dramatic landscape in the proem to his 6th Pythian ode to further his patron's ideological interests. This ode's proem, however, has not received extended critical attention. I focus here on the depiction of Delphi in P. 6's proem. First, I rebut a long-standing assumption, namely that this ode was composed for performance at Delphi, and consider the victor's home polis, Akragas, as a venue for the performance of the ode. Second, I suggest a reading that solves a long-standing interpretive crux in line 14.[1]

Place of Performance

At the beginning of the ode, Pindar links the Emmenid patrons closely with Delphi. He mentions the omphalos, Apollo's temple, a treasury, the local valley, as well as Krisa, a nearby town used frequently as a synonym for Delphi itself. Pindar, accordingly, focuses his audience's attention on Delphi immediately as the ode begins. This is unusual; Pindar does not open any other odes with an extended reference to the place of his patron's victory. Audience members and readers aware of Pindar's generic tactics, then, will be all the more struck by this ode's opening. The lines in question are the following:

Ἀκούσατ'· ἦ γὰρ ἐλικώπιδος Ἀφροδίτας
ἄρουραν ἢ Χαρίτων
ἀναπολίζομεν, ὀμφαλὸν ἐριβρόμου
χθονὸς ἐς νάϊον προσοιχόμενοι·
Πυθιόνικος ἔνθ' ὀλβίοισιν Ἐμμενίδαις 5

1) For helpful comments and criticism, I would like to thank the journal's editor, Bernd Manuwald.

ποταμίᾳ τ' Ἀκράγαντι καὶ μὰν Ξενοκράτει
ἑτοῖμος ὕμνων θησαυρὸς ἐν πολυχρύσῳ
Ἀπολλωνίᾳ τετείχισται νάπᾳ·

τὸν οὔτε χειμέριος ὄμβρος, ἐπακτὸς ἐλθών
ἐριβρόμου νεφέλας
στρατὸς ἀμείλιχος, οὔτ' ἄνεμος ἐς μυχούς
ἁλὸς ἄξοισι παμφόρῳ χεράδει
τυπτόμενον. φάει δὲ πρόσωπον ἐν καθαρῷ
πατρὶ τεῷ, Θρασύβουλε, κοινάν τε γενεᾷ
λόγοισι θνατῶν εὔδοξον ἅρματι νίκαν
Κρισαίαις ἐνὶ πτυχαῖς ἀπαγγελεῖ.[2]

Listen! for indeed we are plowing up the field of dark-eyed Aphrodite and of the Graces, while we proceed to the enshrined navel of the loudly-rumbling land; where for the prosperous Emmenidai and for rivery Akragas, and especially for Xenokrates, a Pythian victor's ready treasury of hymns has been built in Apollo's valley rich in gold;

one which neither winter rain, coming brought in from a loudly-rumbling cloud, like a relentless army, nor wind will lead into the depths of the sea, beaten by the silt that carries all things along with it. But in clear light its facade will proclaim a chariot victory, famous in the words of men, shared by your father, Thrasyboulos, and your clan, in the dells of Krisa.

Critics practically unanimously assume that these verses prove that the poem was first performed at Delphi.[3] I would like to suggest,

2) Greek text: H. Maehler (post B. Snell), Pindari carmina cum fragmentis, pt. 1, 8th edn. Leipzig 1987. Translations are my own.

3) Scholars who read the passage as evidence of Delphic first performance include: E. Boehmer, Pindars Sicilische Oden nebst den Epizephyrischen, Bonn 1891, 3; A. Boeckh, Pindari epiniciorum interpretatio latina cum commentario perpetuo, Hildesheim 1963 (1821) ad loc; J. B. Bury, The Isthmian Odes of Pindar, London 1892, 29–30; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Pindaros, Berlin 1922, 139; L. R. Farnell, ed., The Works of Pindar, Three vols., London 1932, 183; R. W. B. Burton, Pindar's Pythian Odes: Essays in Interpretation, Oxford 1962, 15 and 17; T. Gelzer, Mousa Authigenes: Bemerkungen zu einem Typ Pindarischer und Bacchylideischer Epinikien, MH 42, 1985, 98–99; K. Shapiro, Hymnon Thesauros: Pindar's Sixth Pythian Ode and the Treasury of the Siphnians at Delphi, MH 45, 1988, 3; P. A. Bernardini / E. Cingano / B. Gentili / P. Giannini, Pindaro: Le Pitiche, Rome, 1995, 541; W. Race (ed.), Pindar: Olympian Odes, Pythian Odes, Cambridge, MA 1997, 312; J. S. Clay, Pindar's Sympotic Epinicia, QUCC 62, 1999, 33; R. T. Neer, Framing the Gift: The Politics of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi, ClAnt 20, 2001, 287.

however, that the references to Delphi in the opening of the ode do not offer any evidence for the ode's performance context. In fact, I find it highly unlikely that this ode could have been performed at Delphi.[4]

The logistics of competition and performance, as well as the language of the ode, make it extremely doubtful, if not impossible, to believe that this ode was first performed at Delphi. Epinician critics do not seem to have taken into consideration what must be assumed for this poem to have been performed at the site of victory: the chariot competitions were held on Bukatios 11, the last day of the five-day Pythian festival.[5] It would have been logistically near impossible for Xenocrates or Thrasyboulos to commission Pythian 6 from Pindar and have it composed, manned with a chorus, choreographed, practiced, and ready for performance before the festival ended. Moreover, it seems unlikely, not to mention hubristic, that the ode would have been prepared ahead of time with a chorus ready to perform it on site. We should scrutinize the possibilities for each ode's performance locations, and P. 6 has little that would favor on-site performance.[6] Moreover, Pindar's language itself suggests that the performance is not occurring at Delphi. The important phrase ὀμφαλὸν ἐριβρόμου χθονὸς ἐς νάϊον προσοιχόμενοι states that Delphi (its temple and enshrined omphalos specifically) will be the destination of a (imaginative, of course) journey.[7] Thus, for both logistical and textual reasons, I suggest that we should assume that P. 6 was first performed in

4) Independently, A. Morrison (Performances and Audiences in Pindar's Sicilian Victory Odes, London 2007, 43) has also recently questioned the assumption that this ode was first performed at Delphi, though he has not argued strongly for one space of performance or another or discussed the problems inherent in assuming on-site performance.

5) Cf. J. Fontenrose, The Cult of Apollo and the Games of Delphi, in: W. J. Raschke (ed.), The Archaeology of the Olympics: The Olympics and Other Festivals in Antiquity, Madison, WI 1988, 127.

6) If epinician poems were regularly performed or re-performed at the place of victory, we might expect deictic markers within the text as references to the Panhellenic sanctuaries. These are lacking in the odes, though deictic markers frequently suggest a performance context in the home polis of the victor, e. g. I. 5.22, I. 6.21. By deixis, I mean linguistic markers such as 'this' and 'here' that refer to objects or places in the world, what N. Felson calls "ad oculos deixis"; see N. Felson, Introduction, in: Id. (ed.) The Poetics of Deixis in Alcman, Pindar, and Other Lyric, Baltimore, MD 2004.

7) I thank B. Manuwald for this insight.

Akragas, the home of Xenocrates, and not, as the opinio communis would have it, at Delphi.[8]

While challenging general orthodoxy by suggesting that the ode was performed at Akragas, I approach these verses through N. Felson's framework of 'vicarious transport'. As Felson has noted, Pindar has particular linguistic tactics, deixis particularly, that make his odes interactive and that allow the audience to travel vicariously to places mentioned in the odes.[9] The Delphic ekphrasis that opens P. 6 allows for 'vicarious' travel to Delphi while the ode is performed in Akragas or other venues. Re-envisioning the performance of this ode in Akragas has important repercussions, since the space of performance and the space of victory are separate. Rhetorically, Pindar connects his patron to Apollo's sanctuary at Delphi during performance at Akragas. Accordingly, Pindar appropriates the symbolic capital associated with Delphi and transfers it to his patron during the ode's performance in Akragas.

Architecture and the Treasury of Hymns

After Pindar has moved his audience to Delphi through his imaginative journey, he changes his focus in lines seven and eight to architecture, introducing his famous treasury of hymns (ὕμνων θησαυρός).[10] The image depends on the audience's familiarity with

8) The opinio communis is based on the assumption that the ode was performed at Delphi essentially immediately after the victory. Insightfully, T. Hubbard has recently suggested that epinician odes may have been performed on site at later festivals. For example, a victory celebrated at one Olympiad might be celebrated on site with an ode during the following Olympiad. I find it unlikely, however, that odes would have been performed on site four years after a victory was won precisely because the victories were old news. As our own sporting traditions suggest, celebrations of transient athletic victories need to be immediate. See, however, T. Hubbard, The Dissemination of Epinician Lyric: Pan-Hellenism, Reperformance, Written Texts, in: C. J. Mackie (ed.), Oral Performance and its Context, Leiden 2004, 71–93.

9) Felson, Vicarious Transport: Fictive Deixis in Pindar's Pythian Four, HSCP 99, 1999, 5–6. For an analogous argument of figurative travel to Thebes (presumably not the place of first performance) in P. 9, see Felson, The Poetic Effects of Deixis in Pindar's Ninth Pythian Ode, Arethusa 37, 2004, 381.

10) Pindar uses θησαυρός in two other passages: O. 6.65–66, where it refers to an altar and χρηστήριον of the Iamidai, and P. 11.5, where it refers to the Ismenion at Thebes.

Delphi, the Sacred Way, and the several treasuries that lined the Sacred Way within the temenos of Apollo. Assuming this shared cultural knowledge, Pindar develops his image of a treasury of hymns for Xenocrates, the Emmenidai, and Akragas (ll. 5–6). The imagery that sustains this passage, however, still needs clarification, due to an interpretive crux that has not yet been successfully clarified. The passage in question, lines 14–18, is:

φάει δὲ πρόσωπον ἐν καθαρῷ
πατρὶ τεῷ, Θρασύβουλε, κοινάν τε γενεᾶ
λόγοισι θνατῶν εὔδοξον ἅρματι νίκαν
Κρισαίαις ἐνὶ πτυχαῖς ἀπαγγελεῖ.

After digressing on the permanence of his treasury, Pindar seems to say that a πρόσωπον will proclaim a "victory with a chariot, famous in men's speech" (λόγοισι θνατῶν εὔδοξον ἅρματι νίκαν). Πρόσωπον literally means "face", but a literal interpretation of the word here seems problematic. After all, literally, the phrase is nonsense. The word within its phrase, moreover, has had a long and contested history of interpretation. Seventy five years ago, Farnell said that the phrase had been "the crux of the ode, [and had] been the occasion for bad scholarship".[11] Forty years before Farnell, Bornemann said the same thing. He found the passage to be so problematic that he excised the noun πρόσωπον in favor of particles that would provide reference to future time.[12] Farnell believed that the πρόσωπον must refer to the face of a messenger who would arrive at Akragas to report to Xenocrates the victory won in the chariot race at Delphi. This suggestion is problematic for several reasons. The most obvious of which is the fact that Xenocrates already knows about the victory or else he would not have commissioned Pindar to compose the ode. For Pindar to say that a face of a messenger will come to proclaim the victory in the middle of his ode's performance would be awkward to say the least.

11) Farnell (as n. 3) 185.

12) "Πρόσωπον hat den Erklärern viele Mühe gemacht", L. Bornemann, Pindars sechste pythische Ode, Philologus 51, 1892, 469. Bornemann himself suggested πρόσω ποτ' in place of πρόσωπον.

There seems now to be rather strong consensus among Pindarists that πρόσωπον refers to the facade of a building;[13] however, the vocabulary used to translate πρόσωπον by many commentators suggests that the imagery of the passage is not fully transparent.[14] In fact, the best comparandum for the interpretation of πρόσωπον as facade comes from one of Pindar's own odes. At O. 6.3–4, Pindar uses architectural imagery when he develops his programmatic far-shining facade (πρόσωπον … τηλαυγές).[15] Among a split group of critics, I place myself among those who interpret πρόσωπον here both as facade and as the subject of the verb (ἀπαγγελεῖ), for reasons that will become clear below. However, taking πρόσωπον as facade is only the first step needed to clarify the image.

Even if grammatically the passage makes sense when we interpret πρόσωπον as "facade", since the broader context includes a treasury, conceptually the meaning of the phrase ("a facade will announce a victory with a chariot, glorious in the speech of men") still seems lost. We will not be able to substantiate our claim to have understood the grammar, however, until we retrieve the image latent within the Greek. The only person who has attempted to explain the imagery, while integrating facade as the nominative subject, is D. Steiner. She suggests that the facade will announce Xenocrates' victory because a notice of victory will be inscribed on the facade of the treasury: "My suggestion is that the facades receive such emphasis both because they first attract the attention of the passerby and are inscribed with the names of the donor / victor."[16] Steiner's epigraphic interpretation is commendable because it explains how a facade could announce a victory. I think, however, that we should consider the material phenomena that may have motivated Pindar's discourse.

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13) Cf., e. g., B. L. Gildersleeve, Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes, New York 1885, 315, 17; Bernardini / Cingano / Gentili / Giannini (as n. 3) ad loc.; Burton (as n. 3) 19; S. L. Schein, Unity and Meaning in Pindar's Sixth Pythian Ode, Metis 2, 1988, 241; D. Steiner, Pindar's Ogetti Parlanti, HSCP 95, 1993, 170.

14) A. Verity, for example, translates πρόσωπον as "frontage"; F. Nisetich translates it as "portal"; W. Race translates it as "front". See Verity, Pindar: The Complete Odes, Oxford 2007, 70; Nisetich, Pindar's Victory Songs, Baltimore, MD 1980, 196; Race (ed.), Pindar: Olympian Odes, Pythian Odes, Cambridge, MA 1997, 315.

15) Cf. too Eur. Ion 189.

16) Steiner (as n. 13) 171.

I would like to suggest that the imagery is based upon architecture. I think that "a victory with a chariot, glorious in the speech of men" (λόγοισι θνατῶν εὔδοξον ἅρματι νίκαν) should refer to equestrian-style pedimental sculpture or a sculpted frieze. First, we should acknowledge that the main image that Pindar develops is that of a chariot victory (ἅρματι νίκαν). The audience presumably would visualize a chariot, manned, perhaps, by the victorious charioteer and / or by the owner.[17] Second, this architectural decoration will elicit the admiration of passersby. The work of art is thus glorious to the talk of mortals (λόγοισι θνατῶν εὔδοξον). We may imagine spectators standing on the Sacred Way, looking up in awe, as they admire the treasury that Pindar has built as well as the architectural sculpture that he has crafted to announce the victory of his patron, Xenocrates.[18] Thus, a treasury can quite literally announce a victory with a chariot. Incidentally, a scholiast suggested that πρόσωπον was not the nominative subject but rather an accusative of respect. The scholiast seems to have understood the passage similarly. For he interpreted the Greek to mean that the treasury, with respect to its facade, will announce a victory.[19]

In favor of the architectural interpretation of the passage, I should note that the intended audience of this ode would have been familiar with Greek architectural sculpture and with the iconographic programs frequently exhibited on civic buildings, such as temples and treasuries. Given the generic norms of these public buildings, with their frequent depiction of martial and equestrian scenes, it presumably would have been easy for the audience to envision an equestrian scene such as the one that Pindar portrays verbally on Xenocrates' treasury of hymns. For example, at Delphi itself, the east pediment of the Alkmaeonid temple of Apollo (c. 510 BC) contained a sculpted scene of Apollo in a char-

17) On chariot sculptures, see, with reference to further bibliography, R. R. R. Smith, Pindar, Athletes, and the Early Greek Statue Habit, in: S. Hornblower/C. Morgan (ed.), Pindar's Poetry, Patrons, and Festivals, Oxford 2007, 123–136.

18) Steiner's and my own interpretation are not mutually exclusive. Pindar may have intended the facade to announce the victory in verbal as well as visual form; this would be less of a metaphorical strain on the semantics of ἀγγέλλω. If, in fact, Pindar intends his audience to understand a reference to text and image, then his poetic imagery is quite complex; but such complexity will come as no surprise to readers of Pindar.

19) For discussion see Farnell (as n. 3) 185–186.

iot flanked by young men, women, and animals. The west pediment contained a gigantomachy with Zeus in the center, in a chariot.[20] As R. Neer has argued, "the pedimental group essentially adopts the compositional formula of a monument for a chariot victory … such monuments typically combined a single figure in the car with standing ones at either side".[21] Such images, prominently located on Apollo's temple, may have motivated Pindar to use a similar iconographic scene on his own treasury at Delphi. The famed charioteer of Delphi, too, a monument to a victory in a four-horse equestrian competition at Delphi, although in a different medium, provides a similar iconographic program.[22] The eastern pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia may be noted too for comparative purposes.[23] We should not argue that any specific building or sculpture motivated Pindar's discourse, but we are obliged to place Pindar's image within its broader cultural matrix.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that there is no reason to presume that this ode was first performed at Delphi and to have shown how the decorations on treasuries and other public buildings motivated Pindar's discourse throughout the ode's proem and especially in line 17.

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20) J.-F. Bommelaer, Guide de Delphes: Le site, Paris 1991, 53–55, 182; A. Stewart, Greek Sculpture: An Exploration, Volume I: Text, New Haven, CT 1990, 86–89.

21) R. Neer, Delphi, Olympia, and the Art of Politics, in: H. A. Shapiro (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece, Cambridge 2007, 248.

22) Cf., with reference to previous bibliography, Smith (as n. 17) 123–136.

23) I note in passing only these famous iconographic examples. The Olympian facade postdates Pindar's sixth Pythian ode, and I am, accordingly, using it here only for the purpose of displaying the type of equestrian sculpture that public buildings exhibited. On the temple of Zeus at Olympia, see, with reference to further bibliography, J. Barringer, The Temple of Zeus at Olympia, Heroes, and Athletes, Hesperia 74, 2005, 211–241.