What does εὐκλεᾶ λαοσσόων μναστῆρ’ ἀγώνων at *Pythian* 12.24 mean?

*Pythian* 12, for Midas the aulete, stands as the only surviving example of an epinician ode composed for a victory in a musical contest. It is only natural, then, that scholarly discussion has emphasized the musical qualities of the Greek aulos in general, or those of the *polycephalus nomos* in particular, e.g., the question whether its likely mimetic character included a blending of the Gorgons’ lament and Perseus’ victory-cry (Clay [1992] 523-5, followed by Segal [1995] 12-13; for contrasting views, see Gentili and Luisi [1995] 8, Held [1998] passim). This focus on piping *qua* music, however, can be taken too far, and has led to the misinterpretation of some passages in the ode.

One such passage is found at line 24, where scholars take the phrase εὐκλεᾶ λαοσσόων μναστῆρ’ ἀγώνων to speak either to pipe-music’s epinician functionality (e.g., Köhnken [1971] 138-40) or to its ability to draw an audience (e.g., Gentili [1995] ad loc.) In this paper I shall argue that this interpretation is incorrect. Piping in general—and the *polycephalus nomos* in particular—is “suitor of the games” in the sense that it actively seeks out the games, i.e., it is a personified athletic competitor. Such an interpretation is well in line with Pindar’s use of μνηστήρ and related imagery in connection with athletes in *Olympian* 1 and 7, *Pythian* 9, *Nemean* 1, *Isthmian* 2, and fr. 20. It is also consistent with the treatment of suitors in myth, as well as the metaphorical usage of μνηστήρ and related terms in Josephus, Philo, and other later authors.

The *polycephalus nomos* is called εὐκλεῆς in line 24 not because it imparts glory to others, but because it has received the reflected glory of Perseus through the name bestowed on it by Athena. This mirrors the linking of *kleos* and suitors found in *Olympian* 1 and *Pythian* 9. Athena’s act of naming the *polycephalus nomos* imparts to that melos some of the virtue exemplified by the mythic narrative to which the name refers. In this way, Athena’s action is analogous to Pindar’s own use of myth in epinician.

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