

Pylades and Orestes in Pindar's *Eleventh Pythian*:
The Uses of Friendship

The relevance of the myth of Pindar's *P.11* to the ode's encomiastic program has long been a crux. As Hubbard (2001, 2003) has shown, major poems may have had a pan-Hellenic audience from the earliest days, and were disseminated through networks of inter-state *xenia* for the purpose of re-performance before multiple audiences; *O.6* and *N.9* are particularly clear cases of odes intended for performance in at least two states. I will argue that *P.11* must date to 454BCE (not 474) and that the aristocratic Theban family who commissioned it favored a Spartan alliance (see Bowra 1936) and planned to facilitate the ode's performance at both Thebes and Sparta. I will further argue that Pindar consciously supports the Spartan version of the myth related by Stesichorus against the more recent and impressive Arive version of Aeschylus.

This hypothesis explains several puzzling features of the ode. Few commentators have noticed that Pindar begins the myth not with Orestes or Clytemnestra, but Pylades (v.15) and then returns in ring-form to Orestes' sojourn with Pylades' father, characterized as *xenia* (vv.34-36). Slater (1979) interprets this as a hint at Thrasylus' enjoyment of Delphic *xenia*, but I would re-direct our attention to the links of *xenia* between Thebes and Sparta. Louis Gernet (1955) and Gabriel Herman (1987) have explored myths and historical practices of foreign fosterage (including Orestes') as a *xenia* obligation among aristocratic families with inter-state connections.

The hypothesis of a Spartan audience also explains Pindar's otherwise obscure gnomic assertion about preferring the "mean estate" (vv.51-54), which has no clear connection with the preceding Orestes-myth (see Finglass 2007), but can well be understood as an appeal to Spartan ideals of *isonomia* and unpretentious lifestyle. The parallelism of Sparta and Thebes is confirmed by the poem's close (vv.59-64) with the twin paradigms of Iolaus (Theban symbol of friendship) and the Dioscuri (Spartan symbol of friendship).

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