

Pindar, Hieron, and the guest-friend: The commodification of *xenia* in the Hieron victory odes

This paper concentrates on the relationship between the poetic “I” and the idea of *xenia* (guest-friend hospitality) and *philia* (friendship) that is advanced in late archaic / early classical epinician, especially by Pindar. Focusing on Pindar’s odes for Hieron I of Syracuse (*Ol.* 1, *Pyth.* 1-3) and his general Khromios of Etna (*Nem.* 1, 9), I make a twofold argument. First, I argue that in the royal odes (i.e., those addressed to kings, tyrants, and their associates), a uniquely Pindaric emphasis is placed on the *symposion* and on the intimate relationship between the royal athletic victor and the poet in instances where there was almost certainly little intimacy—in Bacchylides’ contemporary odes for the same Hieron (*Bacch.* 3-5), which I use throughout as a point of comparison, the praise of hospitality and references to *xenia* are not as salient. Thus, the relationship of poet and royal patron is modeled in Pindar’s royal odes around the *symposion*, the main environment for the celebration of *xenia* (e.g., *Ol.* 1), or the *kōmos*, the procession that celebrates a victor in games and prelude to hospitality. Indeed, when the *kōmos* arrives at the victor’s house, a feast to which the poet is invited follows (e.g., *Nem.* 1, 9). In the odes for Hieron, the relationship between Pindar and the tyrant is not limited to their being fellow aristocratic drinking companions at the *symposion* but is also defined as *philia* (*Pyth.* 1.92, “ὦ φίλε”) and qualified as *homilia*, company (*Pyth.* 2.96, *Ol.* 1.115b-116), which further emphasizes and reaffirms Pindar’s shared intimacy with the Sicilian tyrant. Pindar’s emphasis on *xenia*, *philia*, and the *symposion* is especially striking, for, although allusions to the bonds of hospitality are present in many of his epinician odes, *xenia* is not, as Gundert (1978: 35) notes, explicitly invoked in every composition, even when such a relationship most probably existed.

Second, I identify the reason for Pindar's emphatic use of *xenia* in the royal odes. I argue that Pindaric *xenia* has little in common with normative, Homeric *xenia*—even if it does seek to invoke the Homeric institution—but is a carefully-crafted device through which the poet camouflages the economic rather than reciprocal transactions that finance epinician poetry. I disagree that guest-friend hospitality can be “a metaphor for the patronage of poetry,” as Hubbard (1985: 156) defines it, and as Fränkel (1975), Kurke (1991), and Miller (2023) suggest. Metaphorically expressing patronage through *xenia* would imply acknowledging the receipt of payment in exchange for praise poetry. Such an acknowledgment in the context of the sympotic culture in which Pindar operated would turn him into a *banausos* (artisan) and cause him to lose both social standing and any claim to sincerity in his praise. Thus, to ensure both his own reputation and that of his royal *laudandus*, Pindar appeals not only to *xenia*, but also to *philia* and *homilia* in those cases, such as Hieron's, in which little real intimacy seems to have existed. By means of such appeals, Pindar seeks to effectively persuade his audiences that his praise songs to the tyrant are true gifts of *xenia*, willingly offered.

Works Cited

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