

What's Past is Pro(cata)logue: Pindar and History in *Nemean 2*

In *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides remarks that his work is useful inasmuch as it provides “a true picture of the events which have happened, and of the like events which may be expected to happen hereafter” (1.22). Thus, Thucydides’ history has an explanatory force. In this paper, inspired by recent attempts to acknowledge the pre-history of Greek historiography (e.g., Grethlein 2010), I reveal a Thucydidean-style theory of history in the epinician odes of Pindar. History, in epinician, underpins athletic praise and the memorialization of victory: I interact with the most “historical” element of epinician – the victory catalog – and I consider how Pindar puts individual, familial, and social identity into play in the performance of the victory ode.

Catalogs are a common feature of early Greek poetry: the great “Catalog of Ships” in *Iliad 2* is simply the most complex example of a phenomenon found throughout Homer and Hesiod (e.g., *Il.* 18.39-49, the Nereids who mourn Patroklos; Hes. *Theog.* 76-79, the names of the Muses). Catalogs of victories are frequent in the epinician corpus; Gerber (2002: 72) collects 38 examples of catalogs from Pindar's corpus: records of the victories of the athlete himself (e.g., *Ol.* 12.17-19), his father (e.g., *Ol.* 2.46-51) or the clan to which both belong (e.g., *Ne.* 2.16-23). These Pindaric catalogs, despite Gerber’s salutary admiration, have generally been overlooked, especially as historical data in the poetic mode and epinician genre. With this recognition in mind, I address the function of these records in Pindar’s poetry: is there a rationale for the inclusion of catalogs beyond their role in the praise of the victor? How do catalogs interact with Pindar’s role as a poet of memory broadly?

I use *Nemean 2*, the short victory ode for Timodemos of Acharnai, as a case-study of Pindar’s historiography, and his mediation of individual, familial, and social memory. In Pindar, the past has an explanatory role that is structured across different identities (whether family, clan,

or *polis*), which coalesce in the person of the victor. In the ode's second stanza, current victory and the genealogy of the victor are reconciled in a casual relation, when Pindar describes the metaphorical travel of the victor along the "ancestral path" (*Ne.* 2.6-7); this address to the past serves not only as an explanation of his current victory, but also as prophecy of future victories (*Ne.* 2.9-10). From the implication of genealogy in individual victory, Pindar moves in the fourth stanza to the role of civic history and identity in victory (*Ne.* 2.16-17); thus the "famous men" of Acharnai played a role in Timodemos' victory. Finally, Pindar returns to family in the fourth stanza, when he then connects the fame of Timodemos' clan – the Timodemidai (*Ne.* 2.18) – to success in the games; unlike the "famous men" of Acharnai, the quality of the family's fame, and its role in his current (and future) victories is specified. In the final one and a half stanzas, Pindar turns then to the victory catalog (*Ne.* 2.19-23), which acts as a proof of the abstract and metaphorical role of the past throughout the ode: the catalog is a guide to the events that have already happened – the victory at the Nemean Games that the ode celebrates – and the similar events that can be expected to happen. In his coupling of a belief in the predicative force of history with the deployment of specific examples that prove these past predictions, Pindar implicitly offers a theory of history that accords with the Thucydidean vision of historiography's value, despite his use of the poetic mode, and epinician genre.

The history of victories and the recording of historical events act as a guarantee of expectations for the future. Pindar's theory of history, like that of Thucydides, aims for a true account of the past, which can act as a guide for expectations in the future. Unlike Thucydides, however, Pindar sees the repetition of the past in the future as the goal of history; his historiography is not didactic, but predicative and performative. Moreover, by implicating a record of historical events in the celebration of an individual victor, Pindar's history is part of its

performance, and an integral element to epinician praise, which is surely not “disappointing to the ear” (Thuc. 1.22).

Bibliography

Gerber, D. *Olympian Nine: a Commentary*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Grethlein, J. *The Greeks and Their Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.