

Helios' Rhodes in Pindar's *Olympian 7*

In this talk, I make two arguments. First, I argue that Rhodes comes from under the sea in *Olympian 7*, when she meets Helios, because it is important that Rhodes be a virgin when she meets Helios, and she would not be a virgin if she had already arisen from the sea. Second, I argue that, although scholars assume that Rhodes is Helios' wife in this ode, there is not sufficient evidence in favor of this assumption.

If Rhodes had already existed above the surface of the sea, Helios would have been penetrating her with his rays previously (on Helios' rays in relation to sexual penetration, see Eckerman 2013:20-25), and Helios, accordingly, would not receive Rhodes as a virgin. Although the rest of the earth is fully formed when Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon meet to allocate the sky, sea, and underworld among themselves, Rhodes has not yet appeared as land out of the sea. Pindar says that Rhodes was 'hidden in the salty depths' (57), and I suggest that Pindar stresses the point that Rhodes was hidden in the depths so that we understand that she was so deep that Helios' rays would not have reached her in the sea.

Rhodes does not have to be Helios's wife in this ode, although scholars interpret Rhodes as Helios' wife (Gentili et al. 2013: 479; Athanassaki 2003: 111; Dougherty, 1993, 121; Felson Rubin, 1980: 74, 78; Bresson, 1979, *passim*; Wilamowitz, 1922: 363). Pindar refers to Rhodes as the *nymphē* of Helios (14), and *nymphē* can mean nymph, bride, or simply girl. But Pindar does not do enough to encourage his audience to infer that Rhodes should be interpreted as something other than a nymph. In fact, Rhodes is also Helios' *geras* in this ode (68), and, in Greek thought before Pindar, the female as *geras* is closely associated with concubinage, since Agamemnon's decision to take Achilles' *geras*, Briseis, motivated Achilles' wrath, around which the *Iliad* revolves; some members of Pindar's intended audience may have assumed that Pindar refers to

Rhodes as Helios' *geras* because Pindar wishes to activate the Homeric concept of female as concubine. Accordingly, although it would be in the interest of the Rhodians to envision Rhodes as Helios' bride and to construct a matrimonial relationship between Rhodes and Helios (since their own status is thereby privileged), Pindar has not constructed the ode in such a manner that a matrimonial relationship can be assumed within the ode.

Recognizing the reason for Rhodes' rising from the sea (when Helios needs an allotment) and recognizing the ambiguity of Rhodes' status in the ode have important ramifications for our understanding of Rhodes as sexual partner to Helios. First, Pindar has constructed Rhodes' rise from the sea in line with the Greek idealization of female virginity. Second, if we assume that Rhodes is Helios' wife, we enable systemic violence against the female, because we do not acknowledge that Rhodes may be envisioned, not as a wife (with all the trappings that marriage to an elite husband might offer), but as a mere possession.

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