

Continuation and Consistency in Pindar's Eighth *Pythian Ode*

Two of the most vexing passages in the Pindaric corpus occur, one after another, in lines 55-69 of the Eighth *Pythian Ode*. The first difficulty lies in the conclusion to the ode's central mythical exemplum (55-60), in which the poetic speaker describes an encounter with the hero Alcman during a journey to Delphi. The second involves the correct reading and interpretation of a prayer to Apollo: ὦναξ, ἐκόντι δ' εὔχομαι νόῳ || κατά τιν' ἀρμονίαν βλέπειν | ἀμφ' ἕκαστον, ὄσα νέομαι (67-69). In this talk, I will offer a new solution to these interpretative cruces based on an analysis of the ode's central themes of continuation and consistency.

Scholarly confusion has surrounded the passages in question from the time of the scholiasts, who already demonstrate the same preoccupations as most modern scholars, particularly in regard to the meeting of the poet (or Aeginetan chorus, or victor) with Alcman (or Amphiaraus). While many have assumed that Pindar refers to a shrine of Alcman in or near Thebes (e.g. Gildersleeve 1885), more recent scholarship has tended to obscure the issue. Lefkowitz argues that the location of Alcman's shrine is deliberately vague, and that γείτων and κτεάνων φύλαξ ἐμῶν (58) indicate only the friendliness of the encounter (1977). Hubbard, meanwhile, argues that the lines do not refer to Alcman at all, but rather to Amphiaraus and his Theban shrine (1993). Van 't Wout combines the two arguments with the novel suggestion that Pindar describes a vision of Alcman experienced near Amphiaraus' shrine (2006).

Interpretations of the prayer to Apollo are equally manifold, with the identity of the speaker and the meaning and subject of the phrase κατά τιν' ἀρμονίαν βλέπειν (68) being the central points of dispute. Lefkowitz translates: "Lord, with willing mind I pray that you look along some harmony about each event, however many times I return" (1977, 220). The English is intentionally awkward, but its obscurity is hardly explicated in the accompanying discussion.

Hubbard offers: “With willing mind, O lord Apollo, do I pray to look according to some harmony concerning each thing, as many things as I come to” (1983, 288). ἁρμονία, he argues, refers to the poet’s combination of unlike elements into felicitous praise. Miller argues that the prayer constitutes a *Siegeswunsch*, in which the use of the first-person indefinite defines the proper behavior of the victor (1989).

I argue that both passages become explicable when considered in light of the ode’s central themes of continuation and consistency, themes which are repeatedly expressed through the metaphor of travel. The exemplum of Amphiaraus and Alcman explicitly demonstrates the continuation of excellence between generations for which the victor too is praised: with his victory, Aristomenes followed the track of his kinsmen just as the Epigoni followed the Seven against Thebes (35-42). The progression of thought from the introduction of the exemplum to its conclusion militates against taking lines 58-60 as an encounter with Amphiaraus; yet a literal interpretation which posits either a shrine or an epiphany of Alcman is equally unsatisfying. I propose a third solution: the journey to Delphi is purely metaphorical, and Pindar speaks of a meeting with Alcman in thought. He says, in other words, “Alcman occurred to me as I journeyed along the road of praise.”

Continuation of excellence between generations is praiseworthy; but consistency of fortune even within a single individual’s lifetime lies beyond mortal reach, as the second half of the ode forcefully argues. The prayer to Apollo is a response to this fact of life. Accordingly, I argue that Apollo is the natural subject of *κατά τιν’ ἁρμονίαν βλέπειν* (68), which I translate as “look with some consistent favor.” ὅσα νέομαι is metaphorical, meaning “all my endeavors.” There is no need to posit any indefiniteness in the prayer’s reference. The prayer is parallel to the

one that follows: the laudator makes one prayer for himself, and an equivalent one for the victor's family.

Bibliography

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