

## The Role of Thebes in Pindar's Cyrenaean Odes

Despite Bundy's continued influence on Pindaric scholarship, critics now emphasize the occasion of the *epinicia*'s performance alongside considerations of genre (Sigelman 2016; Kurke, 1991). This historicist approach may be of use in examining a neglected aspect of Pindar's victory poems, the eminent position of Pindar's own *polis* of Thebes (Larson, 2017). While Pindar highlights Theban figures in a number of poems, their prominence in his three *Pythian* odes for the Cyrenaean victors Arcesilaus IV (*Pythian* 4 and 5) and Telesicrates (*Pythian* 9) is marked. A close reading of Pindar's accounts of the colonization of Thera and Cyrene with reference to other narratives of their settlement, particularly those found in Herodotus (Hdt. 4.145-158), reveals Pindar's conception of Thebes as the figurative Metropolis of Sparta, Thera, and Cyrene. Similarly, the prominent role of Thebes in the odes combine to form an image of the *polis* as a font of poetic wisdom and protector of aristocratic concord and excellence, as symbolized by the Cyrenaean exile Damophilus.

In *Pythians* 4 and 5, Pindar declares Arcesilaus' ancestor Battus to be Cyrene's founder and highlights the divinely sanctioned colonization of Libya by recounting both his selection by the Pythia and the earlier gift of territory to his ancestor, the argonaut Euphamus (Pi. P. 4.3-37; 5.27-29; 55-62). While Battus' selection by Apollo suggests the poet follows local tradition, the temporality of *Pythian* 4's narrative, which shifts among the present, the distant past, and the heroic age, serves to undermine the Cyrenaean version of the tale (Calame, 2003). After highlighting the antiquity of the *oikist*'s Delphic oracle (ἐνθα ποτὲ; Pi. P.4.4), Pindar immediately undermines it by reporting Medea's earlier prophecy, which glorifies Thera as the mother of great cities, likely reminding the audience of the rival Theran/Spartan tradition (Pi. P.

4.19-20). Medea's statement likely reminded the audience of the rival Theran/Spartan tradition, which Pindar employs to glorify Thebes.

In the Theran narrative, it is Theras, a former regent at Sparta and descendant of the Theban Labdacids, who ensures the prophecies' eventual fulfillment. After preventing the Spartans from slaughtering a band of rebellious Minyans, he conveys them to Thera to join an existing population with kinship ties to Thebes (Hdt. 4.1.47.4-5). While an unnamed ancestor of Battus was supposedly among the Minyans, his insignificance during these events is telling (Dräger, 1993). Also significant is Medea's description of an unrealized settlement of Cyrene by legitimate Euphemidae, which would have occurred had the clod of earth Euphamos received from Triton not been lost (Pi. P. 4.47-49). In comparison, the delayed colonization by illegitimate offspring tainted with Lemnian blood is clearly less desirable (Pi. P. 50-53; Calame, 2003).

In *Pythian 5*, Pindar's celebration of the Aigeidai, the descendants of Theras at Sparta and Thera, similarly diminishes the Battiads' and ultimately subordinates Cyrene to Thebes. By recounting the Aigeidai's participation in the festival of Apollo Carneios, the poet evokes a rival tradition ascribing the cult's foundation at Cyrene to the Aigeids rather than Battus (Pi. P. 5.74-81; Call. Ap. 71-79). Pindar's description of the Aigeids as his ancestors clearly foreground Thebes' as the ultimate source of the cult, whose foundation at Sparta a scholiast similarly attributes to them (Pi. P. 5.74-81; Call. Ap. 71-79; Σ Pi. P. 5.69-106).

Pindar's vision of Thebes as the source of poetic wisdom and bulwark of traditional aristocratic virtue is most prominent in *Pythian 4*, following his conclusion of the Argonaut myth. The wisdom of Oedipus, which Pindar offers to Arcesilaus as a guest-gift to help heal Cyrene's factionalism, is emblematic of Thebes' salutary knowledge (Pi. P. 262-69). Pindar

proclaims Thebes a guardian of the aristocratic ideal by underscoring its role as a haven for Damophilus, the embodiment of aristocratic purity (Pi. P.277-99), including the preservation of *xenia* relations, an image which the poem's final words (Θήβα ξενωθείς, Pi. P. 4.299) serve to reinforce.

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