

## The Materials of Motherhood: Images of Generativity in Pindar's *Olympian 6*

Women and weaving may seem to be unlikely themes in Pindar's epinician poems, which were commissioned by male patrons and performed in celebration of male athletes. Yet, as I will show in this paper, women's work indeed occupies a central place in this corpus. The mythic portion of *Olympian 6* clearly illustrates this focus: of the myth's forty-eight lines, thirty are directly connected with pregnancy, childbirth, and the care of children. Moreover, in this poem, Pindar further incorporates feminine elements into his song when he construes his process of composition in terms of textile production: he is "weaving a dappled, multi-colored song" (πλέκων ποικίλον ὕμνον: *Ol.* 6.86-87). These feminine aspects of Pindar's epinician poetry have been overlooked by scholars, and they warrant further study.

My paper has two parts, both of which interrogate the theme of generativity. In the first, I examine the ways in which the myth's emphasis on sensory perception assimilates the poem to a woven textile, the material object most often associated with women across Greek literature. Through the poem's use of color contrasts, patterns of doubles, marked changes in narrative pace, and appeals to the tactile, Pindar metaphorically imitates the craft and mechanics of weaving and evokes the materiality of a woven object, inspiring an imaginative experience of perception (see Grethlein and Huitink 2017 on "imaginative perception"). In the second part, I focus on the content of the narrative to show how Pindar compares poetic production to childbirth, implicitly positioning the male poet as a mother. Pindar makes this image of the poet-as-mother more explicit elsewhere in his corpus, especially in *Olympian 10*, and the textilic materiality of *Olympian 6* further enriches this image. Throughout his corpus, and especially in

*Olympian 6*, Pindar asserts a common conceptual domain for poetic production, weaving, and childbirth, all connected through the theme of generativity.

My close readings of *Olympian 6* are situated with the theoretical frameworks offered by the New Materialisms (e.g. Canevaro 2018; Fearn 2017; Kurke 2016; Mueller 2010; Neer and Kurke 2019). Harnessing the explanatory power of New Materialist methodologies enables us to focus on the material aspects of this text. The myth's materiality, in turn, allows us to explore the conceptual connections between women's work, generativity, and Pindar's own poetic authority in these gendered labor systems.

### Bibliography

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