

Human and Divine *Oikos* in Pindar's *Olympian* 13

In this paper I offer a new interpretation of Pindar's *Olympian* 13, an ode composed for the Corinthian victor, Xenophon. Boeke 2007 has made the important observation that Pindar strategically conflates *oikos* and *polis* in the ode, beginning with the poet's opening claim that "by praising an *oikos* victorious three times at Olympia . . . I will get to know (or, 'make known,' γνώσομαι) blessed Corinth" (1-4). In this paper, I build on the insight of Boeke, suggesting that Pindar's weaving together of family and city is also integral to another of the ode's central themes: the fraught relationship between humans and gods. While several scholars have recognized the ode's emphasis on the need to respect mortal limits, especially in the myth of Bellerophon (Boeke 2007, Hubbard 1986, Dickson 1986), I argue that a full appreciation of this theme requires a closer look at Pindar's construction of a Corinthian *oikos* in the proem. Ultimately, Pindar's Corinth is emblematic of the contradictory relationship to the gods that defines human life: on the one hand, the Corinthian *oikos*, as both physical space and family, is distinguished by close connections to the divine. On the other, Corinth is not Olympus; the city's prosperity remains contingent on the continuance of the gods' favor and proper respect for humanity's subordinate position in the cosmos.

Pindar's idealizing portrait of the Corinthian *oikos* in the proem connects the city's enviable fortune to the close proximity of an impressive ensemble of gods. In the first place, Corinth is the πρόθυρον of Isthmian Poseidon (i.e., the front porch of his *oikos*, the sea, 4-5). This spatial overlap between the *oikos* of Poseidon and Corinth anticipates a familial link between the god and the city established in the myth, where the god is identified as the father of the local hero Bellerophon (69). Pindar also represents Corinth as the dwelling place of a family

of goddesses who guide the conduct of human life – *Eunomia*, *Dikē*, and *Eirenē*, daughters of *Themis* (6–8). Not only do the sisters reside spatially within the *oikos* of Corinth, but *Eirenē*'s influence on human life is described in terms of the Greek household: she is the *τάμι' ἀνδράσι πλούτου* (“household manager of wealth for men,” 7). Additionally, Pindar's reference to *Dikē* as the *βάθρον πολιῶν ἀσφαλές* (“unshakeable foundation of cities,” 6) represents the stable foundation she provides to the *polis* in architectural terms reminiscent of the poet's epic description in *Nemean* 6 of the gods' heavenly home as the *ἀσφαλές αἰὲν ἔδος* (“ever-unshakeable seat,” 3).

At the same time, Pindar underscores that the stability of the human situation in Corinth remains a contingent one, unlike the permanent security the gods enjoy. It is only the willingness of *Themis*'s daughters to ward them off (*ἐθέλοντι . . . ἀλέξειν*, 9) that keeps a destructive family of divine forces, *Hybris* and her son *Koros* (10), outside the *oikos*. And in fact, the ode's myth makes clear that *Hybris* has her place in the Corinthian family history as well. Although Pindar refuses to narrate how Bellerophon met his doom (91), the poet's reference to Pegasus's reception into Olympian stables (92), as many readers have recognized, makes a clear allusion to the hero's fatal transgression: his attempt to invade the gods' abode (narrated in full at *Isth.* 7.44–47). Bellerophon's error, then, is to overstep the very line, between human and divine *oikos*, that Pindar blurs in the proem. Consequently, *Olympian* 13 is a poem about both the perks of close relations between humans and gods and the dangers of forgetting the difference.

Bibliography

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