

PINDAR'S *PYTHIAN* 10: THE CASE OF THE MYTH

Myth in Pindar is a very complex issue. The complexity relates to two important questions: firstly, what its function is, and secondly, the extent to which there is a detailed correspondence between myth and contemporary situation in the ode. The two questions are closely related and the answer is not always a simple one: Pindaric myth can have more than one function and can contribute to the ode in many different ways. The issue is too large to explore in detail, but I shall give a brief overview of the problem and illustrate with a discussion of *Pythian* 10.

An exploration of the problem needs to start with a narrative of the different views of Pindaric scholars on the myth. My survey starts with the ancient commentators. A brief reading of the scholia shows that the ancient commentators on Pindar tend not to engage in the analysis of myth. For them, those myths, the relevance of which to the case of the victor is not immediately obvious, are dismissed as illogical 'digressions' (*παρεχβάσεις*)<sup>1</sup>. What they mean, however, by digression is not something wholly irrelevant, but something which leads away from the main point. It is noteworthy that they never complain of the irrelevance of the digression, only of its irrationality (*alogos*) or inopportunity (*akairos*). They do not attempt to find the relevance<sup>2</sup>.

Modern studies of Pindar effectively start with the works of Boeckh and Dissen at the beginning of 19th century<sup>3</sup>. These scholars saw myth

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1. See schol. 40a on *Pyth.* 2, schol. 46a on *Pyth.* 10, schol. 45c on *Nemean* 3.

2. For a useful discussion of how the scholiasts regarded digression, see Heath (1989) 160-161; Heath strongly opposes Lefkowitz's notion that the ancient commentators regarded myths as excursions rather than integral and inevitable facets of the ode.

3. See Young (1970) 3 n. 4, who points out that 'Pindar was generally misunderstood, unappreciated and unpopular before Boeckh'.



as an important contribution to the thought of the ode; myth is explained as an allegory of a real event that happened to the victor. Boeckh interprets the myth of *Olympian 7* as an allegory of a political misfortune of the Eratidai, and Dissen conjectures that Diagoras had accidentally killed one of his opponents.<sup>1</sup> The problem with this approach is a readiness to conjecture. As Young notes in his *Pindaric Criticism* 'the critic makes an hypothesis that something has happened to the victor similar to an event in the myth, and then checks closely through the poem for additional hints of the hypothetical occurrence'.<sup>2</sup> This method, despite its disadvantages, had great influence on the works of modern scholars: Cole explains the end of the myth in *Nemean 9* as a reflection of the victor's aristocratic beliefs,<sup>3</sup> Instone takes the emphasis on the erotic element and sexual union in *Pythian 9* as evidence that marriage was imminent for Telesicrates,<sup>4</sup> and Pfeijffer finds the full relevance of Herakles' story in *Nemean 3* in the conjecture that the victor was severely injured and 'had to put an end to his career because of that'.<sup>5</sup>

The tendency to search for the relevance of the myth outside the text is also seen in Wilamowitz's work. Throughout his work he cites many instances of allusions to real events in the life of both poet and victor. But in some cases, Wilamowitz reduced the role of myth to something purely decorative without any relevance to the present occasion: for example, he saw the myth of *Nemean 1* as something which simply reveals the nature of Herakles and has nothing to do with the victor.<sup>6</sup>

With the emergence of the generic studies in the middle of the 20th century, the interest moves to the study of rhetorical figures and conventional motifs. Emphasis is laid on the structural functions of the mythical sections. In Bundy's work little is said about myth; it is seen as a simple foil for the praise of the victor. Probably the clearest indication of this approach can be found in Bundy's discussion of lines 14 - 32 of the first *Isthmian*: 'the figures (Kastor and Iolaos) emerge

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1. See Boeckh (1811-1821) 177 ff., Dissen (1930) 88; for more instances see Young (1970) 9-10.

2. See Young (1970) 9.

3. Cole (1992) 114.

4. See Instone (1996) 12.

5. See Pfeijffer (1999) 21.

6. Wilamowitz (1922) 256.



and recede to take their place in the perspective, leaving always in the foreground that single figure to whom our eyes must return, Herodotos...'<sup>1</sup>. This approach looks back to the ancient commentators in that both Bundy and the scholiasts insist on the structural function of the myth: the scholiasts see myth as a *parekbasis*, Bundy as a foil. Thummer also insists on the structural place of the myth as part of the categories 'praise of homeland' or 'praise of victor', and adds a chapter on decorative parts for other mythical sections.<sup>2</sup>

Among the generic critics, myth comes to the foreground in the works of Young, Lefkowitz and Köhnken. These scholars discuss myth in detail, and give it a precise role to play contributing to the meaning and argumentation of the ode. For Young, myth contributes to the unity of the poem and is relevant to broader issues. For him, the relevance of the myth of *Olympian 7* is obvious: as Tlepolemus found recompense from his earlier misfortune, so too, does Diagoras find recompense 'in the form of an epinician song as reward for the gruelling boxing - match he has won'.<sup>3</sup> The myth draws its relevance from the ode itself and not from external and conjectural circumstances. Lefkowitz follows Young's method. By emphasising the function of thematic repetition as a unifying element in the ode and by offering a linear discussion, she seeks to show the development and elaboration of the meaning of the ode in the mythic section.<sup>4</sup> Finally, myth receives detailed treatment in Köhnken's book. Köhnken believes that the myths are closely connected with the non-mythical parts, and contribute to the unity of the ode;<sup>5</sup> like Young, he gives emphasis to the paradigmatic aspect of the myth. The basic problem with his method, however, is that although the myth itself receives great attention, there is no satisfactory discussion of the relation of the myth to the rest of the ode.

The approach of these scholars survives in the more recent works of Carey, who stresses the paradigmatic use of myth and the need to look at both the pre-mythic and post-mythic sections to determine its function,<sup>6</sup> of Rose, who defends the myth of *Nemean 1* against the

1. See Bundy (1986) 47.

2. See Thummer I (1968) 111.

3. See Young (1968) 90.

4. See Lefkowitz (1976) 11.

5. See Köhnken (1971) 14.

6. See Carey (1981) 10-11.



old scholars by showing its relevance in the implicit parallel between Herakles and the victor's struggles,<sup>1</sup> of Most, who interprets the myth of Ixion in *Pythian 2* as a negative example to show the result of ingratitude, and of Krummen, who shows the relevance of some Pindaric myths to the victor's city. For these contemporary scholars, myth is relevant in at least one way to the victor, the victory or the victor's city.

After this brief survey of Pindaric scholarship, it is difficult to resist the conclusion firstly, that myth always contributes to the ode in more than a purely decorative way, secondly, that it often makes a specific contribution to the argument of the ode, and finally, that it can have more than one function. It is unwise to assume that there is always a single point of relevance. The poet, by not making the role of the myth explicit, offers the possibility that the myth may interact with the rest of the ode in more than one way. At this point, I would like to offer a linear discussion of *Pythian 10* to demonstrate the above generalisations.

*Pythian 10* is the earliest extant ode of Pindar, dated by the scholiasts to 498 B.C. The ode opens with a direct praise of the victor's city, Thessaly, and a comparison with another city, Sparta (lines 1-3).<sup>3</sup> The cities are both praised for their good fortune, but Thessaly the more so: it is called *makaira*, which also has connotations of divine favour.<sup>2</sup> This is an impressive opening that catches the attention of the audience.

The reference to the common ancestor of both cities, Herakles, which follows immediately after, might give the audience the momentary impression that a mythical narrative is about to begin. Pindar's audience would naturally expect a mythical narrative when they hear Herakles' name. This expectation is, however, frustrated; a break-off follows which leads to a statement about the poet's task (lines 4-7), imposed by the place of the victory, the victor's homeland and the Aleuadai. This abrupt change of direction from the subject of Herakles would certainly have had an effect of surprise on the audience. From this case, we can see that Pindar keeps the audience guessing about the length and development of a mythical reference.

1. See Rose (1974) 145ff.

2. Other odes which open with a reference to the victor's city are *Pythian 2*, *Pythian 7*, *Nemean 10*, *Isthmian 1* and *Isthmian 7*.

3. See Burton (1962) 2.



Besides these effects, the lines also show Pindar's tendency to insert mythical references in the pre-mythic section of the ode.<sup>1</sup> Here we have a very early mythical reference, in the opening of the ode. The length of the mythical references also varies from one word to a short narrative.

The pre-mythic section of the ode (lines 7-29) is an extensive praise of the victor and his father. In this section, the poet elaborates on ideas already touched on in the *proemium*, ideas which are to re-appear in the mythic section. To be more specific, the idea of divine favour and Apollo's helping the victor (lines 10-12) looks both backwards and forwards. It looks backwards to the reference to the divine favour enjoyed by Thessaly, as is implied in the adjective *makaira* (line 2);<sup>2</sup> it looks forwards to the myth, to the presence of Apollo in the land of the Hyperboreans and to the divine favour these people enjoy. Similarly, the idea of inherited excellence, in line 12, refers back to the ancestry of the city from Herakles. Thessaly is thus associated with the victor in that both enjoy divine favour and inherited excellence. The poet establishes this link progressively and demands from his audience an active engagement with the developing text in order to make this association.

The praise of the victor's father in lines 15 ff. presents Phrikias as a fortunate man who has reached the limits of human happiness. The praise is interrupted by prayers for the continuity of this happiness and for the avoidance of divine *phthonos* (lines 17-21). In this section, the poet also gives his definition of human happiness in general terms (lines 22-26). A gnome on the limits of this happiness follows. These gnomes imply that human happiness depends on divine favour, an idea, which the poet is going to elaborate in the myth and in the final section of the ode (lines 59-63). At the same time, the gnomes serve to generalise the case of Phrikias: by speaking of the limits of human happiness in general terms, the poet gives the impression that the ode is not only about the victor and his father. In this way, the poet aims at securing a positive response from his audience.

The idea of human limitation also fulfils a structural function by allowing the poet to introduce the mythical narrative smoothly. The inaccessibility of the bronze heaven leads to the inaccessibility of the

1. See *Ol.* 10. 15-17, *Nem.* 3. 20-26, *Nem.* 4. 25-32.

2. See Rose (1992) 168.



Hyperboreans and this to a full narrative about these people. The effect is to give the listeners the temporary impression that the story has been sparked merely by a random association of ideas.<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, only the impression of informality, but also the psychological effects, which are of great importance. The audience is led receptively into the myth, and this has the effect of surprise. There is also a fluency of progression. What also emerges is Pindar's tendency to blur the distinction between myth and programme.<sup>2</sup> There is a formal distinction, but the blurring of boundaries has the effect of treating the myth as an organic part of the ode.

Another important point concerning the introduction of the myth of the Hyperboreans in the ode, is the fact that the myth disguises its relevance. The poet reveals neither the motives for his choice of the story nor the relevance of the story to the present occasion. At this point, the audience does not know the function and purpose of the myth.

The main narrative covers lines 31-48. It is divided into two big sections: the first section (lines 31-44) describes the arrival of Perseus in the land of the Hyperboreans and provides a detailed description of the latter's sacrifices and way of life; the second section uses the arrival of Perseus as the starting-point for the description of the preceding events which led to his visit, i.e. his heroic exploits. Köhnken has argued, plausibly, that the form of the narrative reveals Pindar's intention to present Perseus' visit as the result of these exploits. Perseus' journey to the land of the Hyperboreans is a reward for the killing of Gorgon and the inhabitants of Seriphos.<sup>3</sup>

In the first section of the myth, many details would have led the audience to see parallels with the present occasion. It has been claimed, by the majority of modern scholars, that the motif of feasting, music and dance serves to establish a parallel between the Hyperboreans and the celebration of the victory at Thessaly; this is surely the case here.

1. The associative way of transition and its effects have been discussed by Miller (1993) 21 ff.

2. One has to say here that modern scholars accept this distinction, which has its basis on Schadewaldt's use of the term 'Programm' which consists of specific information about the victor, such as announcement of victory, victor's name, his family, city and earlier victories; see Schadewaldt (1928) 264, 269.

3. See Köhnken (1971) 175-176; for the problem concerning the chronological sequence of the events, see Barkhuizen (1976) 18-19.



What has not been discussed is the effect of these details on the audience; it is to this I now turn.

The parallel between the Hyperboreans and the feast in Thessaly allows the audience to see the occasion in which they themselves participate reflected in the myth and shared by both the present and the past.<sup>1</sup> The important point is that present and past are mixed and that we have the illusion of multiple audiences; there are two audiences mixed here, the Hyperboreans and Pindar's audience. The present audience experience both the performance of the present song and the music and dance of the Hyperboreans. It is important to note that the music, the dance-movements, the lyre and the wreaths, are all elements found in a feast-performance and so would have a special visual effect on the audience.

In this section, there are also other details, which establish the parallel with the present occasion. The presence of Apollo at the sacrifices of the Hyperboreans looks back to the pre-mythic section, that is, to Apollo's contribution to Hippokleas' victory. The idea of divine presence is a common element that links the victor, his father and his city with the story of the Hyperboreans. Lines 39-41 which refer to the enjoyment of the songs by the Hyperboreans and the crowns on their hair look forwards to lines 57 ff., where the poet speaks of his own song and refers to the crowns of the victor. It can be said, therefore, that this section picks up issues from the pre-mythic section, and at the same time raises issues which are to be developed in the post-mythic section.

While lines 31-41 establish a parallel between the Hyperboreans and the Thessalians, lines 42-44 establish a contrast between these people and ordinary mortals. The fact that the Hyperboreans never grow old and live without pain distinguishes them from the victor and his father. In particular, the absence of pain in the lives of the Hyperboreans is in stark contrast to the pain experienced by the victor and his father: this contrast is emphasised in line 24, where the poet tells us that it was with courage and strength that Hippokleas and his father won these victories. The emphasis on the justice of the Hyperboreans in line 44 similarly looks forward to the post-mythic section, to the praise of the Thessalian regime (lines 67-68).<sup>2</sup>

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1. This has been discussed by Carey, in an unpublished article on performance, cited by Pfeijffer (1999) 45 n. 98.

2. For this connection, see Rose (1992) 172.



The second section of the myth, the account of Perseus' exploits, establishes a parallel between the hero and the victor. The parallel is twofold: first, both achieve things with courage and effort,<sup>1</sup> and second both have experienced divine favour and have been assisted by the gods in their attainments: Perseus was helped by Athena, the victor by Apollo.<sup>2</sup> The gnome at the end of the myth about divine aid underlines the parallels between the victor and his father and Perseus. Another common element is that both enjoy feasting and music as reward for these exploits. It should also be noted that the term *makaron* (line 45) is used to describe the Hyperboreans; the same word had been applied to the victor's homeland in line 2: yet another parallel is thereby established between Thessaly and the Hyperboeans.

All these points are established progressively and implicitly. Pindar demands from his audience an active engagement with the text. While it is easy for the modern reader to go over the text and discover these points of correspondence, for the audience who receives the ode as performance this is impossible. The audience has to listen carefully, to respond to the text, to be able to remember and to pick up the thematic connections which the poet never makes explicit.

Another important point in this second section of the myth is the allusive nature of the references to the killing of the Gorgo and the punishment of the people of Seriphos by Perseus. The poet does not give details; he is very brief and leaves deliberate gaps for the audience to fill. Lurking behind these references, are long narratives familiar from Hesiod. The poet assumes the audience's familiarity with this tradition. The myth closes with a gnome on the power of gods in lines 48-50, which generalises the case of Perseus.

The introduction of the break-off in line 51 has the effect of surprise. The audience would not be expecting a break-off at this point, because they could not be sure where the myth is going to end. The break-off is introduced by the metaphor of sailing for poetic composition. The image implies that the poet has travelled to the end of the world like Perseus. The poet is, thus, implicitly paralleled to Perseus. This parallel with Perseus places the excellence of the poet on a par with that of the victor, and implies that the victor has found a capable

1. The expression *θρασεῖαι δὲ πτόων καρδίαι* (line 44) recalls *τόλματι τε καὶ σθένει* (line 24).

2. For Perseus as parallel to both the victor and his father, see Köhnken (1971) 181, Barkhuizen (1976) 13-14.





poet to celebrate his achievement. That the poet, like the victor, is compared to the hero and presented as an exemplary figure has been shown by Lefkowitz.<sup>1</sup> The ode celebrates not only the victor's achievement, but also the poet's excellence in his professional area. The break-off also implies a superficial contrast between the associative and the random drift of the myth. Pindar relies on his audience to realise that the drift is an illusion. The careful selection of mythical material is implied in the image of the bee flying from flower to flower. The end of the narrative of Perseus' exploits is fully justified: it ends when it has made its point.

Lines 55-59 are an assertion by the poet that his song can glorify the victor and make him admired by his friends and by young girls. The lines look back to Pindar's definition of human happiness as athletic success recorded in song (lines 22-26). Not only does Pindar's song record athletic success, it has also the power to make the victor desirable. The reference to the unforeseeable future in line 62 also ties up with the pre-mythic section, with the statements on the limitations of human happiness.

The ode closes with praise of the patron, Thorax, and of his brothers. Thorax has contributed to the poet's task of glorifying the victor by commissioning the song. The idea is expressed by the common image of the chariot for Pindar's song in line 65.<sup>2</sup> The description of the Thesalian regime in the last lines of the ode leads the audience to see a parallel with the land of the Hyperboreans in the mythic section: both are places distinguished by justice. The praise of Thessalys' ruling class looks back to the opening of the ode and forms a ring-composition. The end of the ode finds the poet having fulfilled his task of praise the victor, his city, and the Aleuadai.

From the above discussion, it emerges that the myth has a variety of potential links with the contemporary occasion: firstly, it can pick up aspects of the victor and his achievement, such as the importance of inherited excellence, a link explicit in *Pythian* 10. Secondly, it can pick up on the results of victory, for example, the happiness enjoyed by the victor and the celebration. This is clear in the parallel between the victor's and the Hyperborean celebration. Thirdly, the myth can relate to the victor's city. This is implicit in *Pythian* 10,

1. See Lefkowitz (1991) 111-126, especially 118 ff.

2. For the image of chariot, see *Ol.* 9. 81, *I.* 2. 2, *I.* 8. 61.



where the blessedness of Thessaly is paralleled to the Hyperborean. Finally, the myth can relate to the poet, since the poet is implicitly paralleled to Perseus in that both travel to the far limits. These links are far from obvious when the myth begins; they are only revealed in the post-mythic section.

To sum up, myth is for Pindar a potential means for both magnifying the victor and making the audience more tolerant and more receptive to the praise of the victor and song. It is used by the poet to raise important issues and to set victory as a paradigm of human achievement in general.

### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το άρθρο αυτό αναλύει τη λειτουργία του μύθου στον δέκατο Πυθιόνικο του Πινδάρου. Βασικό στοιχείο τη δομής του επινίκου, ο μύθος αποτελούσε πάντα αντικείμενο συζήτησης και έριδας ανάμεσα στους ερμηνευτές του Πινδάρου. Μια παραδειγματική ανάλυση του δέκατου Πυθιόνικου αποδεικνύει: α. ότι ο μύθος έχει περισσότερες από μία λειτουργίες, β. ότι παίζει ουσιαστικό ρόλο στην επιχειρηματολογία της ωδής, γ. ότι για την ερμηνεία του μύθου απαιτείται ανάλυση της ωδής στίχο προς στίχο και δ. ότι στην ερμηνεία του μύθου πρέπει να λάβουμε υπόψη τις προσδοκίες του κοινού του Πινδάρου. Η πραγμάτευση του μύθου από τον Πίνδαρο δείχνει ότι για τον ποιητή τίποτα δεν είναι τυχαίο, αλλά όλες οι λεπτομέρειες είναι επιλεγμένες προσεκτικά για να προσδώσει το μέγιστο έπαινο στο νικητή.<sup>1</sup>

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