Introduction: archaeologies of literature

1 "How can Pindar be anything to us?" The poet and the *longue durée*

Pindar concludes his Eighth Nemean ode, performed on Aegina to celebrate the victory of the runner Deinias, with the following lines:

> χαίρω δὲ πρόσφορον
> ἐν μὲν ἔργῳ κόμπον ἱείς, ἐπαοιδαῖς δ' ἀνήρ
> νώδυνον καί τις κάματον θῆκεν· ἦν γε μὰν ἐπικώμιος ὕμνος
> δὴ πάλαι καὶ πρὶν γενέσθαι τὰν Ἀδράστου τάν τε Καδμείων ἔριν.
> (N. 8.48–51)

I rejoice in having cast a vaunt that befits the deed – what is more, with sung incantations it is possible to undo the pain of any toilsome effort. After all, the festive hymn has existed from days of yore and even before the strife of Adrastus and the progeny of Cadmus.

These lines encapsulate three fundamental elements in the poetics of epinikion (victory ode), a late Archaic Greek lyric form represented by nearly sixty extant poems by Pindar and his contemporary Bacchylides. First, they posit a functional relation of a statement of praise "befitting" a particular deed (πρόσφορον ἐν . . . ἔργῳ). Second, by mentioning healing incantations (ἐπαοιδαῖς δ'), they point out the capacity of poetic performance to have an effect, psychic or social, on its participants. Finally, they foreground the antiquity of the literary form Pindar employs, the festive hymn (ἐπικώμιος ὕμνος).

This passage also invites theoretical reflection, charting three modes of contextualization, and thus three different approaches to the historical study of epinikion. The broadest context is supplied by the continuity of genre in which Pindar's discursive medium is grounded. The other two aspects of epinician poetics implicitly identified in the conclusion of Nemean 8 are the text's pragmatic anchoring and its social efficacy, corresponding to two proximate modes of historical contextualization:

at the level of event and at the level of practice. Ideally, the interpretation of a text should seek to integrate these three levels of historical inquiry.[1]

While the principal interest of this study is in uncovering the workings of Pindar's genre within the *longue durée* of literary history, to achieve this goal I build on lower-level, context-oriented analysis. This means that while my approach is informed by a set of theoretical concerns, it is both enabled by empirical philological work and, in its method, builds on insights that, although rarely explicated theoretically, are in practice familiar to many Classical philologists. The chief methodological objective of this book is to elaborate and test a framework for the study of literary texts, which could provide a rigorous alternative both to trans-historical, universalizing approaches to literature and to historicist work that, by limiting itself to the proximate modes of contextualization, often relinquishes an interest in poetics altogether.

Pindar's oeuvre is part of a series of poetic acts that extends both back in time, to the mythical expedition of Adrastus against Thebes, and into the future, up to our own time. It enters this series, as I see it, not by adhering to generally valid aesthetic, cognitive, or linguistic principles, but by employing discourses, practices, and modes of thought that, on the one hand, were uniquely available to Pindar and his contemporaries and, on the other, are genealogically related to discourses, practices, and modes of thought that we recognize as our own. This shared participation in a historical tradition, in part made possible by literature itself, is the reason why texts written millennia ago continue to have an effect on us, and, in particular, to convey something we perceive as truths.[2]

Shifting the lens back to a more immediate mode of contextualization, Stephen Greenblatt puts it as follows:

> The "life" that literary works seem to possess long after both the death of the author and the death of the culture for which the author wrote is the historical consequence, however transformed and refashioned, of the social energy encoded in those works.[3]

Greenblatt's early work, which set the paradigm for New Historicism, focuses on the generation of "social energy" – a term he intends to evoke rhetorical *energeia* – within a particular historically circumscribed culture. While this study participates in the ongoing investigation of Pindar's poetry in the time and place of its composition, it is also interested in

[1] On the need to combine different scales of historical analysis, see Tynianov (2002 [1927]); Medvedev (1978 [1928]); Jameson (1981); Kurke (2013).
[2] This is the argument of Gadamer (1989 [1960]).
[3] Greenblatt (1988: 6).

asking how literary texts package "social energy" in ways that make it persist across cultural milieus and historical periods. In particular, the book argues, first, that the life of literary texts and literary forms is contingent on a set of conditions of possibility that pertain to the logic of literature, analyzed as a historical phenomenon; second, that Pindaric epinikia can tell us a lot about how this historical phenomenon came about.

How does participation in a tradition define the modes of being and signification peculiar to literary texts? What can we learn about the phenomenon of literature at large from its purported beginnings? Is there any substance to literary history at all, seeing that the texts it comprises are so ostensibly invested in their own historical moment? The conclusion of Nemean 8 can offer us some initial insights into these overarching questions.

First, why does Pindar choose the *second* expedition against Thebes, the one undertaken by the so-called Epigonoi, those "born later," as the significant event that his genre is claimed to antedate? A scholiast, commenting on this passage probably sometime in the Hellenistic period, tells us that Adrastus founded the Nemean Games around the time of his expedition, to commemorate the death of Archemoros.[4] In other words, Pindar claims that poetic praise is older than the very series of events that includes the occasion for composing Nemean 8. Poetry is more than a "fitting" reaction to an experience: inasmuch as it instantiates a genre, it is more ancient than the very institutional conditions of that experience. More speculatively, by placing the origin of festive hymn in relation to an event known to be an *iteration* of an earlier mythical episode, Pindar implicitly comments on the nature of poetic tradition. For a text to be recognized as literary, it must have a precursor. However confident in its originality, literature is necessarily "epigonic."

The self-consciousness with which Pindar's poetry addresses these issues suggests a further set of questions. Pindar's epinikia form the first substantial corpus of lyric in the Occidental tradition – but can they testify about a still earlier moment in the constitution of "literature" as we know it? What significance does the prominent Pindaric "I" – the speaker who "rejoices" (χαίρω) in the completion of Nemean 8 – assume in this process? In particular, in what ways does the individual speaker relate to

[4] Drachmann 3.148–9. Since Nemean 8 also commemorates the victor's father, Megas, the origination of the Nemean Games as a memorial for the dead hero gains particular relevance: both Deinias's athletic success and its poetic celebration are *reactions* to an ancestor's death. For the structural significance of this compensatory mechanism in the Panhellenic Games, see Nagy (1990b: 118–42). I return to this passage in Nemean 8 in the Epilogue.

the communal voicing that is proper to choral hymn? What impact do practices of socially efficacious speech – such as those current in the domains of religion and the law – have on the emergent structures of authorship and literary praxis?

Finally, as already adumbrated earlier, the last lines of Nemean 8 communicate a methodological challenge. Pindar's work can and has been approached from a variety of scholarly vantage points. The prevalent mode of inquiry into Pindar's poetry, which is concerned with its rootedness in the immediate context of production, rests largely on the premises of cultural history as it evolved in the 1990s. The other two modes of contextualization suggested by this passage, however, demand a renewed effort of theoretical reflection. First, the social efficacy Pindar ascribes to poetry is achieved with the help of nonpoetic types of communication, implying a vision of literary history as semiautonomous, as it was originally put forward in the later work of the Russian Formalist Yuri Tynianov.[5] Literature possesses both, an immanent history (the history of tropes, rhetorical conventions, metrical forms, etc.) and evolves in proximity to the "neighboring systems" of culture, such as everyday speech, philosophy, oratory, and cult. (The task of contextualization at the level of practice will be most relevant to Chapters 3 and 4 of this book.)

The *longue durée* of literature itself, the deep past of literary forms and their capacity for persistence and survival, poses a greater hermeneutic challenge and one that dominates this study. In the rest of the Introduction, I develop, based on insights from literary theory, anthropology, and philosophy of history, a method of literary-historical analysis whose validity, it is hoped, extends beyond the study of Classical literatures.

This book assigns to Pindar a central role in the major transformation of signifying practices that was underway in Archaic Greece. In part, this picture is due to the vagaries of reception. Pindar's victory odes comprise the largest extant body of texts, except for Homer's, before the period of Athenian dominance. The preservation of the Pindaric corpus, on the other hand, is by no means a historical accident, in the sense in which the discovery of Bacchylides' poetry on a papyrus scroll in 1896 was a stroke of luck. Pindar was unequivocally regarded by the ancients as the greatest of the nine Archaic lyric (melic) poets, and a similar view prevailed throughout Europe since the rediscovery of his corpus in Italy in the

[5] According to Tynianov (2002 [1927]), the neighboring systems mediate literature's interaction with such "distant" systems as economics or politics. Tynianov's approach is taken further in Jauss (1970). See also Kurke (2013) on the congeniality of Tynianov's notion with some aspects of New Historicism.

fifteenth century until the triumph of privatized poetic expression in the context of eighteenth-century sentimentalism.[6] Pindar's current exclusion from the global literary canon is reminiscent of the eclipse of Virgil's reputation in the Romantic period, and the history of Pindar's reception suggests a likely future resurgence of his poetic significance.

"Wie kann uns Pindar etwas sein?"[7] – "How can Pindar be anything to us?" – for Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, the great German philologist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this rhetorical question was not prompted, as one might think, by the divide that had come to separate Pindar's poetry from modern sensibility and poetic praxis. Rather, it reflected the hesitant stance of a scholar who, committed as he was to Enlightenment rationalism, perceived in Pindar a force resistant to the putative dawn of rational thought in fifth-century Athens. A figure standing at the threshold of the Classical age – the age that witnessed the rise of radical democracy, imperial expansion within the Greek world, and the development of science and skepticism – Pindar appeared to Wilamowitz to be entrenched in a time when power was in the hands of aristocracies, culture was local and religious, and knowledge the privilege of poets and priests.[8] In ethnic terms, which seem particularly dated today, Pindar was said to fight for a lost "Dorian" cause in the face of the imminent "Ionian" triumph.

In his magisterial survey of pre-Classical Greek literature, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, Hermann Fränkel echoes Wilamowitz:

> In Pindar's poetry archaic art reaches its pinnacle . . . Unlike his Athenian contemporary Aeschylus, Pindar was and remained entirely an archaic Greek. In those tendencies which during his lifetime powerfully contributed to the advance of human spirit he took no part at all . . . A pious and respectful adherent of tradition, he felt himself the chosen voice of the Greek race when he bore witness to the beliefs and purposes of the age that was to die with him.[9]

Today, this grandiose vision of Greek literary history appears both overly antagonistic and naïvely essentializing. Nevertheless, German idealist literary history stood at the origin of the historicist strand in Pindaric

[6] On Pindar's reputation in antiquity see Most (1985: 11–19). For an overview of Pindar's reception in the early modern period, see Revard (2009).
[7] Wilamowitz (1925: 124).
[8] His particular version of a historicist approach to Pindar involved a claim that Pindar's outstanding piety has a lot to teach us in the modern age; a biographical approach, prominent in his influential monograph (1922), in part continues the preceding critical tradition that saw the value of Pindar's work in his "fanciful" personality. Further on Wilamowitz's view of Pindar, see Hamilton (2003: 23–35).
[9] Fränkel (1975 [1951]: 505–6).

interpretation. From then on, Pindar's distinction was affirmed not on the basis of a difference from classical conventions or from the general norm of poetic language, but for historical reasons specific to late Archaic Greece: Pindar became a witness to his age and its sociopolitical transformations.

Partly as a result of this shift in perspective, Pindar and his poetics were largely treated in the twentieth century as phenomena unto themselves. A radical specialization of the knowledge of Pindar's poetry is evident even in Elroy Bundy's highly influential *Studia Pindarica*, a book ostensibly uninterested in history. Bundy read Pindar for ancient encomiastic devices that were accessible only through scholarly reconstruction.[10] In the two most methodologically important monographs on Pindar published since Bundy's, Eveline Krummen demonstrated how intricately the apparently "secular" genre of Pindar's victory ode was related to the cult practices of particular Greek poleis, and Leslie Kurke reconstructed the social context of Pindar's victory ode, emphasizing evolving patterns of aristocratic behavior and symbolism on the threshold of the Classical age.[11] More recently, the works of Giambattista D'Alessio, Bruno Currie, Gregory Nagy, and Ian Rutherford, among many others, have further contributed to our understanding of Pindar's texts as products of and participants in the cultural practices of his time.

These scholarly advances make it possible to reclaim the Pindaric corpus for a new kind of literary-historical inquiry, which would return to the questions of textual poetics in full knowledge of the period's "cultural poetics." One question such an inquiry might ask is, to cite Andrew Ford, "how a culture recognized distinct poetic and non-poetic discourses and how these forms were thought to be interrelated."[12] There is, however, a more particular and formidable challenge in studying Archaic Greek poetry, deriving from the fact that Archaic Greece witnessed a tectonic paradigm shift, from a preliterary to a literary culture, which was only tangentially linked to the shift from orality to literacy.[13] This transformation of discourse had long-term, global implications for verbal art and its cultural significance. For this reason, the inquiry into the creation

[10] Bundy's parallels, ranging from Sappho to Themistius, are viewed as instances of the same rhetorical device used in Pindar. Since Bundy never poses the problems of diachronic development or genre specificity within encomiastic rhetoric, he effectively dehistoricizes it. For more on Bundy's method, see Chapter 4, Section 1.

[11] Krummen (1990); Kurke (1991). [12] Ford (2006: 283).

[13] A helpful overview of the evidence on the shift from orality to literacy can be found in Thomas (1992), who emphasizes the incremental nature of the changes.

of a literary culture in Archaic Greece must, ideally, be attentive to the broadest mode of contextualization.

One way of bestowing this kind of attention on the Pindaric corpus is suggested by its long history of study and reception. Instead of a preconceived synchronic definition of Pindaric epinikion, one could discern the different aspects of Pindaric poetics that became visible or were occluded at different historical moments. To adapt a congenial turn of phrase, Pindar, like any major poet, is ἄλλοτε ἄλλος – one thing to one age, and another to another. As long as his readership was not limited to professional classicists, he was an exorbitant genius careless about the strictures of poetic form. In the wake of Bundy's work, he became a master of age-old rhetorical devices and motifs. To most scholars today, he is a strategist who places his poetic skills at the service of a demanding and diverse clientele. For their part, the modern students of Pindaric reception often see in Pindar a daring poetic experimenter whose verse retained its power for more than two millennia of Western lyric, evoking responses from Horace, Cowley, Goethe, and Mandel'shtam.[14] Each of these visions reflects a facet of the Pindaric corpus and reveals different aspects of its historical relevance. This book takes its inspiration, in part, from reading Pindar's texts in this way, calibrating different lenses and angles of vision afforded by the earlier tradition. The overarching literary-historical framework I propose is, nevertheless, founded not on a historical aesthetics of reception but on a theory of literary forms.

Ironically, one hundred years after the question "how can Pindar be anything to us?" was posed, it suggests a response that is fundamentally in agreement with Wilamowitz's historicist premise. The achievement of great poets consists not in manifesting poetry's putatively unchanging nature as a timeless mode of engaging with the world, but in the forcefulness and inventiveness with which they articulate their own historical moment using poetic means.[15] Such an answer need not, however, lead us to adopt an antiquarian position that takes an interest in the past for the past's sake. Both in its practice and in its reception, art ties together chronologically distinct "periods" and "epochs." Indeed, its capacity to persist in time demands that we make the past part of our own experience.

[14] Fitzgerald (1987); Ponzi (1999); Scodel (2001); Sverdlov (2002); Vöhler (2005); Revard (2009); and contributions to Agócs, Carey, and Rawles (2012b). On modern approaches to the study of Pindaric reception, see Chapter 1, Section 1.

[15] Cf. Veselovsky (1967 [1870]: 35).

Literature in particular educates a "historical sense" that, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence."[16] In this light, a historical insight into the Pindaric moment assumes a particular significance, since that moment marks a transformation of verbal art as such, when "literature" became, in many ways, what we now understand it to be. Pindar's genius consisted in his ability to remold the inherited age-old preliterary forms that were still available to him in ways that would prove compelling to a wide spectrum of audiences, both contemporaneous and far removed in time. The "social energy" that Pindar's poetry has retained for centuries and millennia stems from the diversity and depth of the strata of meaning and experience that his poetics succeeded in capturing.

Pindar's poetics and its historical resonance can only be appreciated if we see in Pindar a poet who is not "unambiguously backward-looking and irretrievably archaic," but instead poised at a moment of transition: rooted in the past, yet anticipating future literary forms.[17] It is not incidental that Pindar may be approached both from the perspective of comparative ethnopoetics and with the standards applied to poets who make ample use of written sources.[18] In his lectures on historical method, Jacob Burckhardt observed, using the language of Hegelian philosophy of history, that Pindar "might be taken as the dividing line" marking "the transition of poetry from necessity to choice, from the general to the individual, from the economy of types to infinite diversity."[19] This is but one, albeit particularly eloquent, way of defining the momentous shift from traditional verbal art to literary creativity that Pindaric poetics instantiates.

The rest of this Introduction considers the notion of "archaeology of literature" in the two meanings it has in this book. In Section 2, "From folklore to literature," I present some initial considerations that justify the task of uncovering incipient forms of the literary in Archaic Greek poetry.

[16] Eliot (1961 [1917]: 14).

[17] The quotation comes from Rose (1992: 142); instead, according to Rose, he is "fully enmeshed in the intellectual, social, artistic, and political developments of the first half of the fifth century" – a thesis few Pindarists would dispute today. In his Marxist, narrowly historicist reading of Pindar, Rose is particularly interested in the ways in which Pindar represents the interests of the aristocracy at his time (1992: 141–84).

[18] On Pindar in the light of ethnopoetics, see Wells (2009); Thomas (2011); on Pindar as a "man of letters," West (2011). On Pindar's retention of typologically widespread folkloric motifs in his myths, see Grant (1968). On Pindar and writing, see Patten (2009: 217–33).

[19] Burckhardt (1979 [1871]: 111).

Section 3, "A stratigraphic poetics," proposes the method of reading that this particular task calls for, one that stratifies a literary work into diachronically distinct elements. Both interpretive moves – one pertaining to the history of literary praxis and the other to the interpretation of a particular text – owe much to Historical Poetics, an approach to literature that reaches back to Alexander Veselovsky, who coined the term "historical poetics" in the 1880s, and that builds on the insights of theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Hans Robert Jauss, Hans Blumenberg, and Fredric Jameson.[20]

In sum, in response both to the challenges of Pindaric interpretation and to current debates in literary studies, this book offers an exercise in theoretically informed philology that strives to avoid the pitfalls of both "normative historicism" and literary-critical aestheticism.[21] Those two positions rest on the notion of literature as a self-evident datum, ever-present in history (hence aestheticism) and invariably determined by its immediate context of production (hence "normative historicism"). Instead, I conceive of the literary as a historically constituted phenomenon that possesses intrinsic, enduring characteristics. The hypothesis advanced in this book is that some of these characteristics emerged in Archaic and early Classical Greece. And it is this process that Pindar's poetry will be called upon to illuminate.

2 From folklore to literature

"Literature" is a notably ill-defined category. In modern parlance, it can refer to the socially valorized body of texts, in contradistinction to *paralittérature* or lowbrow fiction; to texts originally composed in writing, rather than as part of an oral tradition; or to any kind of text, including popular lore, that displays verbal art in the broadest sense by virtue of a putative aesthetic quality. Defining the category of literature is particularly challenging at a time when literary culture itself is in flux. The expansion of literary studies into cultural history in the late twentieth century is but one symptom of a crisis in the notion of literature as it crystallized in European Modernism. The ideal of autotelic literary texture that is

[20] See the work collected in Kliger and Maslov (2015b), as well as *Historical Poetics*: *An online resource*: http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/historicalpoetics/.

[21] I adopt the term "normative historicism," which refers to the current dominance of under-theorized contextualist work on literature, from Hayot (2012).

conjured into being by professionals was made possible by the autonomization of the aesthetic realm in the second half of the nineteenth century. That ideal has been increasingly marginalized throughout the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries due in large part to the ongoing media revolution.[22]

Looking back a century, the new discipline of literary studies that emerged in the 1910–20s placed the quest for criteria of *literariness* at the center of a polemic with philology, which had put the study of languages and texts at the service of historical research. Literary theory was in many ways a by-product of Modernism, a relationship evident in the histories of Russian Formalism, Czech Structuralism, and American New Criticism. Whether or not twentieth-century literary scholars openly subscribed to the Modernist cause, they put the autotelic modalities characteristic of Modernist literature at the center of their work. In the 1910s and 1920s, Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, both close to the Futurist movement, would elevate the self-reflexive qualities of verbal art – "device" (*priem*), "defamiliarization" (*ostranenie*), "the poetic function" – into chief criteria of literariness (*literaturnost'*).[23] In Western Europe and the United States, the Modernist privileging of literary allusion, irony, ambiguity, and intertextuality led to the corresponding emphases in literary studies which crucially informed what Fredric Jameson has described as structuralism's "ideology of the text."[24] Our historical moment no longer permits us to take these assumptions for granted, and this book undertakes to reconsider theoretical work on literary form that predates, contests, or nuances a dogmatic version of formalism.[25]

Most importantly, I depart from the synchronistic vision characterizing much of twentieth-century literary scholarship in that I approach the literary as a historical problem. Rather than asserting that certain qualities of text represent universals of verbal art, I provisionally limit the definition of "literature" to the "Western" tradition of refined, individually crafted, and recorded discourse, and inquire into the emergence of that tradition in

[22] On historical variation in the concept of literature in general, cf. Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow (2014: 278–83). On the autonomization of art in the nineteenth century, see Bourdieu (1996 [1992]); Williams (1977: 45–54), who points out that in the eighteenth century *literature* encompassed all printed works; on the meaning of this term in the Renaissance, see Greenblatt (1997). On transformation of the media, see, e.g., Ong (1991 [1982]); its impact on literature is discussed in Benedetti (2005).

[23] Shklovsky (2012 [1917]); Jakobson (1987 [1960], 2011).

[24] Jameson (1975–6).

[25] It is a mistake, in particular, to equate Russian Formalism and New Criticism as implying similarly "text-bound" (Ong 1991 [1982]: 162) hermeneutic modalities. For a view of Russian Formalism as a participant in the Veselovskian tradition of Historical Poetics, see Chapter 1, Section 1.