

INTRODUCTION

1. GREEK LYRIC POETRY

The main period of lyric poetry in Greece lies roughly between those of epic and tragedy, from about 650 to 450 BC. The poems are commonly divided into two types: personal lyric of the kind composed by Sappho, Alcaeus, Anacreon; and choral lyric, more remote from modern experience, consisting of poems sung and danced by a choir for a civic and/or religious occasion. This genre is associated particularly with the names of Alcman in the seventh century, Stesichorus in the sixth (though the exceptional length of this poet's compositions, confirmed by new finds, has caused experts to question the likelihood of choral performance),¹ Simonides, most famous poet in Greece at the time of the Persian wars, his nephew Bacchylides, and, greatest of all, Pindar. Until recently, little of the voluminous works of these poets survived apart from the epinician odes of Pindar, composed to celebrate victors in the great athletic games of Greece. But finds on papyrus since the late nineteenth century have restored to us a strange and attractive partheneion by Alcman, substantial remains of Bacchylides' epinicians and dithyrambs, and parts of Pindar's book of paeans. In recent years more has been found, including enough of Stesichorus to confirm his ancient reputation for treating extended stories from mythology in lyric verse. The main gap remains Simonides, whose ancient reputation was very high; among other achievements he is believed to have established the genre of epinician poetry, and so to have been Pindar's most important predecessor in this field.

2. PINDAR'S LIFE AND WORKS

Pindar was born in 518 BC. His earliest dated poem is the Tenth Pythian of 498, written for a young man connected with the Aleuadai, a powerful family in Thessaly. The last dated poem is the Eighth Pythian of 446 for a victor from Aegina, a poem that seems reflective

¹ M. L. West in *C.Q.* 21 (1971) 307–14, C. Segal, in *The Cambridge history of classical literature* 1 (Cambridge 1985) 187.

and melancholy. By then he would be aged 72. He probably died not long after. He was born in a village close to Thebes, where he later made his home. He is said to have received training as a choral poet in Athens.

The period of his activity thus falls in the first half of the fifth century BC, a period whose history is covered for us by Herodotus and the first book of Thucydides. Relatively little is known about his life, and such anecdotes as appear in the ancient *Lives* are clearly fictitious. He seems to have been present at the Olympic games of 476 (*O.* 10.99–105), and to have visited Sicily in that same year (*O.* 1.16–17, *P.* 1.17–28). He must indeed have travelled widely in the Greek world, both to the games and to the cities of the victors. The highest concentration of his victory odes is in the 470s, including some of the finest and greatest, among them those for the Sicilian tyrants Hieron and Theron. Five of the seven poems in the present collection are dated to that decade.

When we look back in history, we judge that the most important developments from the Greek point of view in the first half of the fifth century were (a) the two Persian invasions, leading to the battles of Marathon in 490 and Salamis and Plataea in 480/479, and (b) the growth of the power of the new democratic Athens in the following years. A deep embarrassment for Pindar personally must have been the fact that his city of Thebes, proud and ancient, but fatally exposed to the invader from the north, took the Persian side in the second invasion: and, although a Theban contingent served with the small Greek force under Leonidas at Thermopylae, the city became Mardonius' headquarters during the winter of 480/479, and its forces fought bravely on the Persian side at Plataea (*Hdt.* 9.67–9). After the Greeks led by the Spartan king Pausanias had defeated the Persians, they punished Thebes by the execution of some of its leaders. These facts imply fierce tensions of divided loyalty within the city, and traumatic unhappiness for any patriot, especially one like Pindar whose horizons had expanded to include the whole of the Greek world.

It is of course dangerous to deduce the poet's personal feelings from what we read in the odes (see p. 19), but some facts are worth recording. First, he never mentions the battle of Marathon, which for him is the site of minor local games (*O.* 9.89, *O.* 13.110, *P.* 8.79). Perhaps the rest of Greece did not share the Athenian belief in the earth-shaking

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significance of what happened there. As to the second Persian attack, the Eighth Isthmian, probably for a victory in 478, seems to include a cautious reference, saying that 'we' have been released from great misery (6) and that a god has removed the stone of Tantalus from above 'our' heads (9–10). In the Fifth Isthmian of not much later he gives warm praise to the Aeginetan sailors who helped to win the battle of Salamis; and in the First Pythian of 470, with greater detachment, he speaks of Salamis and Plataea as great victories, to be credited to Athens and Sparta respectively (*P.* 1.76–8).

That however is all. Attempts by scholars such as Bowra to find hostile allusions to Athens in later poems have been shown to be erroneous (on *I.* 7, see p. 67); nor are occasional apparently political comments, about tyranny, aristocracy, democracy (*P.* 2.87–8, *P.* 11.52) to be used as evidence. While accepting that Pindar as an individual lived in the real world, we must take the odes for themselves, and not try to deduce his personal experiences and opinions from sentences that appear in them.

The Alexandrian edition of Pindar's poems produced by Aristophanes of Byzantium (p. 26) contained seventeen books: one of hymns, one of paeans, two of dithyrambs, two of prosodia, three of partheneia, two of hyporchemata, one of encomia, one of threni, and four of epinicia.² Paeans were addressed to Apollo, dithyrambs to Dionysus; prosodia were processional hymns, partheneia compositions for choirs of girls, hyporchemata a combination of dance and song. The encomia, in praise of individuals, included also skolia, or drinking songs; the threni were funeral dirges. The first six categories were addressed to gods, the last three to men. A selection made in the second century AD had the consequence that the books of epinician odes alone survived, and from that time fewer quotations are found from the other books. Before then, the epinicians were not more frequently quoted than the others. Pindar was always a deeply admired poet,³ and in addition to the direct transmission of the epinicians, over three hundred quotations from the lost material have been found in ancient authors and grammarians, some of them assigned to particular books, others of uncertain provenance. Of these fragments, three from the

² *Vita Ambrosiana*, Drachmann 1, p. 3.

³ Cf. Horace, *Odes* 4.2 *Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari*, etc.

threni appear in Appendix B, for comparison with part of the Second Olympian. In the last century, as stated above, extensive parts of the book of paeans were recovered on papyrus, and more recently additions have been made to the dithyrambs and the threni.⁴

The epinicians have come down to us almost complete. The Alexandrian editor arranged them in books according to the games where the victory had been won, the order of books following the relative importance of the games: first came the *Olympians* (fourteen odes), then the *Pythians* (twelve), the *Isthmians* (at least nine), and the *Nemeans* (eight). Three odes which did not fit into this scheme were added to the end of the *Nemeans*. At a later date the last two books were interchanged, and still later the end of the *Isthmians* was lost.

Within each book the order of poems is in general according to the importance of the event (chariot victories first), and of the victors (priority to tyrants and kings). An exception to the former principle is provided by the first poem in the collection (*O.* 1), which is for a horse race and precedes those (*O.* 2 and *O.* 3) for a chariot race. But the exception was made for an easily understood reason, that *O.* 1 begins famously with glorification of the Olympic games (the lines are quoted on pp. 21–2), and later includes as part of its myth the chariot race of Pelops and Oenomaus, which was their model in myth. Elsewhere, the desire to put together poems for the same victor, as in *P.* 1–3 and *I.* 3–4, has disturbed the strict application of the principles.

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The Greeks were as fascinated by athletics as is the modern world. An appreciation of the spirit of competition enlivens the funeral games of Patroklos in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*; these also illustrate the origin of such public competitions in funeral celebrations.⁵ From such an origin, they developed in Greece into a central feature of national culture. The successful athlete brought great glory to his home city, was widely admired, and given lasting honours.

Four national festivals had each its particular basis in religion and

⁴ *Pindarus, Pars II Fragmenta*, ed. Maehler, Leipzig 1989.

⁵ L. Malten, 'Leichenspiel und Totenkult', *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts (Römische Abteilung)* 38/9 (1923–4) 300–40.

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supposed foundation in myth. The greatest was that at Olympia in the north-west Peloponnese, believed to have been founded in 776 BC, and held every fourth year for a thousand years, until it was abolished by the emperor Theodosius in AD 393. These games played such an important role in the Greek world that their sequence was later used at Athens for chronology, and a historian would write, 'in the third year of the eightieth Olympiad', meaning the year we call 458/7 BC. The games were held in the late summer; Zeus was the presiding god, Herakles the founder, and Pelops was buried in the sanctuary. Second were those at Delphi, called the Pythian games, in honour of the god Apollo. From 582 BC they were held every four years, alternating at two-year intervals with the Olympics; according to Pindar, Neoptolemos, son of Achilles, was buried in the sanctuary there (*N.* 7.44–7). The Isthmian games, at Corinth, also began in 582, presumably a few months before the definitive establishment of the Pythian athletic festival,⁶ and took place every second year in honour of Poseidon, god of the sea. The baby Melikertes, child of Ino/Leukothea (see *O.* 2.28–30n.) had an altar there.⁷ And finally the Nemean games were held in a quiet valley of the north-east Peloponnese, the scene of Herakles' first labour, by which he won for himself the lion-skin which he wore thereafter. These games began in 573, and were biennial like the Isthmians, and in honour of Zeus like the Olympians; they were supposedly first held at the funeral of the baby Opheltes, also called Archemoros, killed by a snake as the army of the Seven passed that way on its march to Thebes.⁸

These four were the 'sacred games', where the prize was merely a wreath of leaves, but the prestige of victory colossal. The athlete who had won at all four was called a *perionikes*, like one who wins the Grand Slam in modern tennis. Among Pindar's clients (patrons), Diagoras of Rhodes, the boxer for whom the Seventh Olympian was written, had this distinction.

⁶ E. R. Gebhard, 'The evolution of a pan-Hellenic sanctuary: from archaeology towards history at Isthmia', in *Greek sanctuaries: new approaches*, ed. N. Marinatos and R. Hägg (London 1993).

⁷ Apollodorus, *Biblioth.* 3.4.3.

⁸ Apollod. *Biblioth.* 3.6.4; the story is told at some length in the fourth to sixth books of Statius' *Thebaid*.

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 Olympians 2, 7 and 11; Nemean 4; Isthmians 3, 4 and 7
 Pindar, Edited by Malcolm M. Willcock
 Excerpt
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The following table⁹ illustrates the sequence of the festivals (the Attic year began in June/July, after the summer solstice, and this marked the change from one Olympiad to the next):

Ol. 75.1	Olympia	August 480
75.2	Nemea	July 479
	Isthmus	April 478
75.3	Delphi	August 478
75.4	Nemea	July 477
	Isthmus	April 476
76.1	Olympia	August 476

In addition there were numerous local games in which these athletes also took part, where prizes of local manufacture were often on offer. We hear of these in the odes when the victor or one of his relatives has won local victories worth recording. Melissos, for whom the Fourth Isthmian was composed, had won three times at the Herakleia in Thebes; Timasarchos (*N.* 4) had won at Athens and Thebes, and his family counted an Olympic victory in the past and an Isthmian one quite recently; Diagoras (*O.* 7) had a very long list of previous successes for Pindar to record. In two cases (and possibly also in the Second Pythian) Pindar's ode is for a victory in such local games: the Ninth Nemean for one at Sikyon, the Tenth Nemean for one at Argos.

The events in the games, as we see them in the odes, are as follows: Equestrian: four-horse chariot; wagon drawn by a pair of mules; single horse.

Contact sports: boxing; wrestling; pancration.

Track events: sprints, *stadion* (about 200 metres) and *diaulos* (about 400 metres); long distance, *dolichos* (about 5,000 metres); race in armour.

Mixed: pentathlon (long jump, sprint, discus, javelin, wrestling).

Musical (at Delphi): pipe-playing.

In some events there were separate classifications for boys as well as adults; and at Nemea and the Isthmus there was an intermediate category of *ageneioi* (lit. 'beardless'). When Pindar celebrates a boy victor, he regularly introduces the name of the trainer.

The odes in the present selection are for victors in four of these

⁹ It is ultimately based on G. F. Unger in *Philologus* 37 (1877) 42.

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events, chariot race, boxing, wrestling and pancration. Pindar does not in practice describe the victory in the manner of a sports reporter (as Homer does in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*); nevertheless he pays attention to the particular discipline in which the victory was won, by his choice of imagery, and sometimes his choice of myth. It may be of interest therefore to set down some details about these four.

Chariot Race

Won by Melissos of Thebes at Nemea (*I.* 3), and probably previously at the Isthmus (*I.* 4); and by Theron of Akragas at Olympia (*O.* 2).

Whereas in most events the victor himself had borne the strain of competition, the equestrian events were rather different. The victor for whom Pindar composed the ode was normally, in modern terms, the owner, who employed a trainer and a charioteer. When Herodotos of Thebes himself drove the winning chariot, Pindar draws attention to the fact (ἀνία δ' ἄλλοτριαις οὐ χερσὶ νωμάσσαντ' *I.* 1.15). Consequently, Pindar's praise of his client cannot usually include personal athletic prowess, and he concentrates on the tremendous glory that has been won, and on the victor's wealth (necessary for keeping a stable of horses), and his willingness to spend it in a good cause (cf. p. 15).

The four-horse chariot race was the most magnificent spectacle of all. In *Iliad* 23, the chariot race comes first in the description of the funeral games of Patroklos, and it takes up more space in the narrative than all the other events put together. There the chariots are drawn by two horses each, and they race one lap, out into the country, round a turning-post, and back to the starting-point. In the Olympic chariot race, the distance was twelve laps of the hippodrome, with turning-posts at each end of the course (δωδεκαδρόμων *O.* 2.50; cf. *O.* 3.33, *O.* 6.75, *P.* 5.33).¹⁰ There is uncertainty about the length of the race, because the ancient hippodrome, which was to the south of the surviving stadium, has been totally obliterated by changes in the course of the river Alpheius during the intervening millennia. But the indications are that it was very long, perhaps nearly nine miles,¹¹ a distance

¹⁰ H. M. Lee in *A.J.P.* 107 (1986) 162–74.

¹¹ H. Schöne in *J.D.A.I.* 12 (1897) 150–60, improved by J. Ebert in *Nikephoros* 2 (1989) 89–107.

not impossible, but unheard-of nowadays, when two or three miles are normal for a horse race, with the Grand National (over hurdles) a little over four miles. The scholia to Pindar tell us that later in the ancient world the number of laps was reduced to six ($\Sigma O.$ 2.92a).

The races were dangerous, with so many horses for the drivers to control. There were frequent crashes, illustrated in the false messenger speech in Sophocles' *Electra* 698–756, the most critical moments being when the chariots rounded the turning-posts at the ends of the course (Nestor concentrates on this moment when he gives advice to his son Antilochos before the start of the *Iliad* race). Pindar tells us that Karrhotos, King Arkesilas' brother-in-law, who drove for him in 462, kept his chariot intact when forty others crashed (*P.* 5.49–51).

Boxing

Won by Hagesidamos of Epizephyrian Locri in the boys' event at Olympia (*O.* 11), and by Diagoras of Rhodes in the men's event (*O.* 7).

This was a more reputable activity than one might expect. Apollo himself was patron of boxers, and Pollux (Polydeukes), the demigod, was an expert. The poets were fond of describing his contest with Amykos, king of the Bebrycians. In the Iliadic games, the winner was a man of the people, Epeios, builder later of the wooden horse, his opponent Euryalos, one of the leaders of the contingent from Argos. The result was a clean knock-out (*Il.* 23.689–94).

The main differences from modern boxing were that there was no ring, although the space for the contestants might be restricted; and no rounds, the fight going on until one or other had won. The competitors wound leather thongs round their forearms down to their hands; these are mentioned already in the *Iliad*. Later in the ancient world, harder leather thongs were used, with a cutting edge; and still later the dreadful Roman *caestus* came into use, with metal sewn into the leather. The stance of the boxers, as shown in vase paintings, was upright, with the arms held high. It seems that they aimed at the head, body blows being less considered. There were no divisions by weight, so that the successful boxer, like Diagoras, would be a heavyweight in modern terms.

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Wrestling

Won by Timasarchos of Aegina at Nemea (*N.* 4).

This was always one of the most popular events. Indeed the palaestra, or wrestling school, was a feature of social life, the natural place of recreation for young men. The technicalities of the sport were widely known, and metaphors taken from it common in the language. There are very many representations of the art in vase painting. A wrestler lost if his back or shoulders touched the ground. Thus much of the bout would take place with the contestants on their feet, in contrast to the pancration, although they would continue the fight on the ground if neither was on his back. It is disputed whether the winner was the first to achieve three successful throws or the one who won the best of three.¹² In the *Iliad* there is a wrestling contest between the great figures Odysseus and Aias, but it is inconclusive; they fall to the ground once, with Odysseus on top and Aias on his back (*Il.* 23.727–8), but can achieve nothing further, and the result is a draw.

Pancration

Won by Strepsiadas of Thebes (*I.* 7), and by Melissos of Thebes in his younger days (*I.* 4).

This, which was more like a martial art, or unarmed combat, than either straight boxing or wrestling, was a late addition to the events at the games. It does not appear among the contests in the *Iliad*. It is sometimes described as a mixture of boxing and wrestling, but that does not give the right picture. Kicks were used, as in modern karate; and we are told that the only things forbidden were biting and gouging the eyes. The mythical model was Herakles, especially in his fight with the giant Antaios (cf. *I.* 4.52–7), and with the Nemean lion. Much of the work was done on the ground, as in judo, and the smaller contestant might very well go to ground from the beginning, to neutralise his opponent's advantage in size and weight (*I.* 4.47n.) The contest went on until one of them indicated submission by raising a hand or a finger. It was considered the supreme test of strength, skill and resolution.

¹² See LSJ under *τριάζω*.

4. THE VICTORS

Pindar's clients were from wealthy and locally influential families. In consequence we get a reflection of the society of the archaic period before the intellectual domination of Athens. The festivals where the games were held were truly Panhellenic; competitors came from all over the Greek world.

We might not have expected the western Greeks to be so strongly represented. But they were the 'new world' from the point of view of mainland Greece, and such colonial representatives naturally wished to preserve their connections with the old country. No fewer than seventeen of Pindar's forty-five odes are for western Greeks, among them seven for Syracusans and five for citizens of Akragas. Cyrene also, in North Africa, provides three major poems. At home, the largest single block is for the small island of Aegina (eleven odes, all but two of which are for victories at the relatively minor games of the Isthmus and Nemea); this was a time when that island was prosperous as a maritime trading nation and politically competitive in the Greek world. It produced wrestlers particularly. Pindar obviously favours it and has friends there. He sees it as closely allied to his own city of Thebes, from which not surprisingly four victors come, sponsoring five odes, three of them in the present selection. Nine odes are left, each for a single representative of a city. There is none for a Spartan, and only one specifically for an Athenian (*P.* 7); he however is, not surprisingly, a member of the powerful Alcmaeonid family.

Generally, though less so in the case of the young men of Aegina, it was the great men of the cities who competed for the honour particularly of Olympic or Pythian victories, and if successful commissioned Pindar to compose a victory ode. The powerful tyrants (military dictators) of the two richest cities in Sicily, Hieron of Syracuse and Theron of Akragas, each gave him opportunities to compose works of great complexity, in which the victory is certainly the occasion of the ode, and is duly glorified, but much else is included. These odes are placed at the head of the collection, the first three of the *Olympians* and the first three of the *Pythians*. Each of the two tyrants in due course won the highest prize of all, the chariot race at Olympia. The Second Olympian is for Theron's success there in 476; in Hieron's case, we have his Pythian chariot victory celebrated in *P.* 1, together with the founda-