

BOOK REVIEWS

Pindar and the Cult of Heroes. By BRUNO CURRIE. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. xv + 501. Cloth, \$125.00. ISBN 0-19-927724-9.

Bruno Currie's primary goal in this book is to investigate whether "a literary motivation for the numerous allusions to hero cult in Pindar's odes [is] to be found in the prospect of heroic honours for the addressee" (p. vii). The intended audience for the volume includes both Pindar scholars and specialists in Greek religion. The arguments, presented as three parts subdivided into fifteen chapters, are incremental and too detailed to summarize fully here; the conclusion in favor of heroic honors for the addressees of the odes rests on the cumulative force of these arguments. Even if one does not find the thesis convincing, the study provides a fresh and original perspective on Pindar, and raises interesting questions about heroic cult as well.

In Part I (Chs. 1-5), "Some Themes in Hero Cult: Homer and Pindar," C. first considers and compares perceptions of death and mortality in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and Pindar's extant works. Especially in the *Iliad*, Homer is found to express an "austere, minimalist" view of death and the afterlife, not because this was the only view when the poems were composed, but because more robust and optimistic popular views, later recognizable in Pindar, were suppressed in epic. Further, the boundaries between immortal and mortal status are more permeable in Pindar (who recognizes a special status in the afterlife for Achilles, Diomedes and others) than in the *Iliad*, where mention of heroic cult is avoided. The career of the hero, so often following a pattern in which trials and tests are rewarded with immortality and/or cult, can be viewed as a paradigm for the *laudandus* in Pindar's odes.

Chapter 6 introduces a key theme in the book, the distinction between "inclusive" and "exclusive" concepts of immortality. The latter, characteristic of the *Iliad*, makes renown in song (*kleos*) the only vehicle for (a clearly metaphorical) immortality. The "inclusive" concept of immortality, which C. attributes to Pindar, recognizes two paths to immortality: the *kleos* of song, and the *timê* of cult. In order to argue that Pindar's concept of immortality is "inclusive," C. must first explain the many Pindaric *gnômai* that seem to contradict this view (e.g., *N.* 11.15; *I.* 5.16 "mortal aims befit mortals") and reminders that song is the only means of continued existence after death (e.g. *N.* 7.14-16; *P.* 1.92-4). The *gnômai* are rhetorical gambits, C. argues, and "generalizations which permit contradiction" as the thought of the ode develops. Furthermore, insistence on human mortality does not conflict with "immortality" through heroic cult, for most recipients of cult have died.

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In Part II, "Heroization in the Fifth Century BC," C.'s goal is to demonstrate that heroization was a more widespread practice than has been recognized, in order to establish a 5th-century context in which Pindar's clients might reasonably expect to become cult heroes. He identifies three categories of neglected heroes: the war dead, athletes, and persons whose cults commenced while they were still alive. In the case of the war dead (Ch. 7), the only securely attested contemporary cult is that of Plataia (Th. 3.58.4), although early cults of the Marathon dead and the Persian War dead of Megara are probable. C. assimilates "institutionalized cults of the war dead" (p. 95) to heroic cult, based on the scale of their honors, the sponsorship of the city and deliberate archaisms in the ritual. But as he recognizes, the war dead are not called "heroes" in extant Greek texts until the Roman period. Furthermore, the collective nature of most honors paid to the war dead sets them apart from other heroes. The evidence seems to point not to routine heroization, but to an *ad hoc* practice, more common in some cities than others, which gradually expanded over the centuries.

The heroization of athletes (Ch. 8) is better attested and more directly relevant to C.'s project, for the popularity of hero-athletes increased dramatically during the 5th century. C. argues convincingly that the heroization of athletes had to do directly with their status as athletes, and was not primarily due to local politics or other factors. He makes a case for a quasi-cultic atmosphere around certain athletes, but falls short of demonstrating that Olympic or other victors were routinely heroized. One argument concerns the dedication of the victor's statue in a sanctuary or the agora, which C. wishes to regard as tantamount to heroization. Although statues seem to play an important role in athlete cults, the dedication of a statue in itself is not diagnostic of heroic cult in the same way a tomb located in a sanctuary or the agora is.

C. next establishes (Ch. 9) that there is no *a priori* obstacle to hero cult for living persons, by showing that while the term *hêrôs* usually refers to "a dead human invested with special power," it can also be applied to "a supernatural being subordinate to the gods" (p. 161). Although this is technically correct, C. underplays the significance of death as part of the cult hero's story. Most cultures attribute uncanny powers to the dead, powers the living do not possess. Of the men C. cites as living recipients of cult, almost all received their honors in political contexts after the Peloponnesian war (e.g., Lysandros, Dion of Syracuse, Demetrios Poliorketes), by which time it is reasonable to assume that many traditional expectations about cults and their relations to the city had been irrevocably transformed. The slightly earlier case of Hagnon (Th. 5.11.1) is controversial, leaving the cult of Euthymos of Lokroi as the only example contemporary with Pindar.

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C. also holds that popular adulation could, under certain circumstances, be tantamount to religious worship. For me, one low point of the book is C.'s suggestion that in formulations such as *Od.* 8.170–3, "they regard him *hōs theos* when he goes about the town," we should translate "as a god" and understand the lines literally, not metaphorically.

In general, there are too many strained arguments of this type. In order to maintain his thesis, C. must explain away many contrary indications in the evidence, and uses far too much Hellenistic material, implicitly projecting 4th- and 3rd-century attitudes back into the early 5th century. Sustained analysis of the social and political forces at work in the development of Greek cults between Pindar's day and the 4th century is lacking. Yet, in the end, C.'s thorough and painstakingly assembled body of evidence does show that anomalies in the traditional scholarly construct of Classical heroic cult are more common than we usually recognize. Furthermore, at various places throughout the book (pp. 187, 193, 406–7) he raises important questions about the anachronistic distinction many scholars still make between "religious" and "secular." C. himself does not, however, pursue this line of inquiry fully, as his own distinction (Ch. 5) between "religious" and "nonreligious" uses of the word *hērōs* in Pindar demonstrates.

In Part III, "Five Odes of Pindar," C. reads Pindar in the light of the arguments above, provides fresh interpretations of selected odes and engages some longstanding Pindaric debates. Beginning with *Isthmian* 7 (Ch. 10), C. argues that the *laudandus'* uncle Strepsiades, who died in battle, has been heroized. The elder Strepsiades is compared to Meleager, Hektor and Amphiaraios (l. 7.31–5), all of whom died "amid the throng of fighters in the front rank." This selection of heroes has resisted scholarly explanation. C. suggests that the common denominator is heroic cult, and that the effect of the whole is to suggest the potential heroization of the younger Strepsiades. One weakness here is that, in contrast to his cogent arguments for the Theban connections of Hektor and Amphiaraios, C. fails to show why the Aitolian cult of Meleager would be of interest (or even known) to a Theban audience.

Pythian 5 lauds the achievements of Arkesilas IV of Kyrene. In his discussion of this ode (Ch. 11), C. argues that not only Battos but also the other Battiad kings of Kyrene were heroized. Therefore, Arkesilas too could expect to be heroized after death. This is a reasonable hypothesis, yet even if Arkesilas expected such honors, they would come to him as a result of his royal status, not because of his athletic victories. Therefore, this example does not provide strong support for C.'s thesis as it pertains to athletes, the majority of those praised in the odes. Never one to shun controversy, C. next dives into the contentious debate over "sacred prostitution" in *Pythian* 2 (Ch. 12).

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He argues that *P.* 2.15–20 refers to the Lokrians' famous vow to prostitute their virgin daughters if they were victorious against Rhegion. C. is aware that the existence of "sacred prostitution" in Lokroi is controversial, but does not address the methodological arguments set forward by its most vigorous critics.¹ C.'s analysis of *Nemean* 7 (Ch. 13) marshals excellent arguments against the view that the poem is a revision of *Pae.* 6.100–20. Instead, he argues, its encomiastic function is sufficient motivation for the inclusion of Neoptolemos, who serves as a model for the *laudandus* Sogenes. In his discussion of *Pythian* 3 (Ch. 14), C. returns to the distinction between "inclusive" and "exclusive" concepts of immortality, and makes the important observation that Hieron's apparent eschatological expectations (as a priest of a mystery cult of Demeter and Kore, and possibly as a "hero in waiting") clash with any interpretation of the ode that rejects a blessed afterlife in favor of immortality through song alone.

C.'s book raises an interesting question: did people in the Classical period, such as Hieron, seek heroization to guarantee themselves an afterlife? A more orthodox view of heroic cult addressed to contemporaries sees it as a spontaneous response to the perception of superhuman power in an individual, not, as C. would have it, as a method for *conferring* that status with its expectation of life after death. In the end, one comes away from this book asking new questions about hero cult in the 5th century and its intersection with Pindar's work, particularly with respect to tyrants and kings such as Arkesilas IV, Hieron, Theron and Gelon. Currie's case for anticipated heroization is most successful when applied to these men, who received, or had reasonable expectations of receiving, cult honors after their deaths. This book will surely stimulate further study of the impact such expectations had upon the poetry of praise in Classical Greece.

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¹ In addition to the sources C. cites on p. 277 n. 96, see J.G. Westenholz, "Tamar, Qedesa, Qadistu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *HThR* 82 (1989) 245–65; J. Assante, "From Whores to Hierodules: The Historiographic Invention of Mesopotamian Female Sex Professionals," in A.A. Donohue and M.D. Fullerton, eds., *Ancient Art and Its Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003) 13–47.