

BOOK REVIEW

Reading the Victory Ode. Edited by PETER AGÓCS, CHRIS CAREY, and RICHARD RAWLES. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xxxiv + 409. Hardcover, \$114. ISBN 978-1-107-00787-1.

This volume collects the proceedings of “Epinician: An International Conference on the Victory Ode,” presented in 2006 by University College London and the University of London’s Institute of Classical Studies. It aims to “consider the epinician from different perspectives—in terms of origin and evolution, social and political environment, physical or occasional setting, performance, rhetoric and literary theory” (xxvii), but professes not to be complete, conclusive, or definitive.

Nevertheless, it is refreshing, challenging and a welcome addition to scholarship on epinician poetry. The volume is organized in three parts: “The Lost History of Epinician,” “Contexts of Performance and Re-performance,” and “Critical Approaches to the Victory Ode: Rhetoric, Imagery, and Narrative.” In the first part Richard Rawles discusses what Ibycus and Simonides can tell us about the pre-Pindaric and pre-Bacchylidean development of epinician and its social history. Giovan Battista D’Alessio surveys the papyrological evidence to argue for at least 6 missing odes from our canonical book of Pindar’s *Isthmians*. Lucia Prauscello argues that Pindar’s varied use of the Aeolian mode represents his response to the musical debates of his poetic community. These first three chapters do well to situate our extant corpus of Pindaric and Bacchylidean epinician in a larger poetic tradition, with which both poets were conversant. As Part One continues Ewen Bowie engages with Gentili, Woodbury, Kurke, and Nicholson to “re-examine the place of monetary gain in the activity of epinician poets” (83); he lucidly and helpfully differentiates their scholarly positions, but his own distinct position is unclear. The section concludes with Simon Hornblower’s chapter on the descendants of Pindar’s patrons, where he suggests that new epinician may have been composed well into the 4th century—a provocative re-conceptualization of epinician beyond its flash in the 6th/5th century pan.

Hornblower’s contribution transitions well into the book’s stimulating second part, which provides valuable reminders of epinician’s rich dynamism through its afterlife in re-performance or its variety of performance contexts, possibly even

envisioned by the poets themselves. A.D. Morrison examines secondary and tertiary solo re-performances of what he assumes were choral premieres of Pindar's epinician odes and argues for an increasingly wider audience with each re-performance. His close readings suggest that Pindar took future audiences into account as he composed his odes. Lucia Athanassaki argues that the interaction between the east frieze of the Siphnian Treasury and *Pythian 6*, *Olympian 2*, and *Isthmian 2* reflects performances in both processional and sympotic contexts. Franco Ferrari explores the permeability between epinician and cultic song, calling into question whether the ancients had a firm and distinct concept of "epinician" as such. Felix Budelmann discusses symposia, which he argues favored *encomia* over epinician; the former were directed toward the circumscribed group of the *laudandus* and his friends, whereas the latter was a sort of "super-genre" (p. 189), integrating rather than differentiating social groups. Peter Agócs examines the various aspects of *κᾶμοι*, to which epinician often refers in its self-definition, and the section concludes with Rosalind Thomas' fascinating argument that Pindar's reputed difficulty is precisely his aim, as can be inferred through comparison with similarly obscure and allusive African praise-poetry traditions. She raises the provocative possibility that, as in African praise-poems, certain difficult sections in Pindar were intended for particular individuals in the audience, whose remaining members were not meant to comprehend them.

Part Three begins with a chapter by Glenn W. Most, who compares Pindaric and Bacchylidean odes commissioned for the same occasion and concludes that the differences—often ascribed to the supposed inferiority of Bacchylides' poetry—can instead be explained by their different addressees: Pindar's focus on the victor stresses the individuation of victor and poet alike, whereas Bacchylides addresses the city and thus seeks to integrate the victor and poet with the audience. Most articulates how many of us "feel" about Pindar and Bacchylides—profound and pleasant, respectively—without invoking the supposed personalities of each poet. G.O. Hutchinson explores epinician's use of metaphor to convert the event into song and to create a poetic universe; he includes useful tables of metaphors in Pindar, Bacchylides, Ibycus, and Simonides. Claude Calame similarly discusses metaphor, specifically travel metaphors that represent poetic craft and circulation and whose dynamism interweaves the poem with its occasion, song with ritual. David Fearn examines the use of direct speech and simile in Bacchylides' myths and demonstrates the poet's use of dithyrambic strategies to repurpose epic material for his epinician agenda. Fearn, like Most, persuasively redeems Bacchylides, here by showing the underlying sophistication of his myth-making.

The collection concludes with “Reading Pindar,” Michael Silk’s “pyrotechnic finish” (xxvii)—a virtuosic piece that seamlessly blends criticism of previous scholarship with the author’s own close readings. Silk particularly takes issue with what he deems the overly formalist, reductionist, and praise-focused legacy of Bundy. His refreshing if difficult-to-summarize essay highlights the singularity of Pindar’s poetic art.

Although the contributions are consistently of high quality, there are some distracting inconsistencies. For example, some but not all the chapters provide translations for the Greek passages, and one provides English translations without the original Greek. Furthermore, apart from their general focus on epinician, the three sections seem somewhat disunited; indeed, each could have merited its own edited volume. These are minor quibbles about an overall valuable and fresh contribution to epinician studies, one that I found great benefit in reading.

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