

BOOK REVIEW

Pindar and the Poetics of Permanence. By HENRY. SPELMAN. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 356. Hardback, \$100.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-882127-4.

The purpose of Spelman's recently published book is to locate Pindar within archaic Greek literary culture. It is divided in two Parts: Part 1 traces Pindar's relationship to the audiences he addresses and their importance to his work; Part 2 is dedicated to the way Pindar incorporates the former lyric tradition in order to simultaneously establish his artefacts within the literary history and within the contemporary poetic world.

The first half consists of five chapters. As Spelman outlines in his detailed Introduction (7), he is primarily interested "in Pindar as a participant in the practice of literature and as a witness to its history." Chapter 1 ("Secondary Audiences") explores the secondary reception of the Pindaric odes after their first performance and the way the poet attempts to persuade the largest possible audience about his intention to provide everlasting fame. By focusing on a wide range of internal evidence, Spelman presents the extratextual factors that underline Pindar's odes as a capable instrument of memorialization. The core of Chapter 2 ("Vital Light in *Isthmian* 4") consists of the light imagery of the ode, a crucial point that recalls the survival of the poem throughout the ages. Spelman's argument is based on the distinction between fire and celestial light and declares that fire serves as a symbol of the here and now epinician event, while celestial light "typically evokes glory reaching throughout space and lasting through time" (46). Chapter 3 ("Event and Artefact: From Performance to Permanence") moves us forward to specific concluding passages of the epinician songs (see, e.g., *I. 2, O. 10, Bacch. 13*). Here, Spelman discusses Pindar's choice to invite his primary audience to imagine the circumstances of a future performance of the ode, namely, "the perspectives of future audiences" (78). Chapter 4 ("The Poetics of Permanence") examines the importance of the idea of permanence for the epinician genre as literature. Using two poems as case studies, the author explores how the tradition enriches the audience's experience of an ode and how the poet invites his primary audience and also subsequent generations to play an active role by participating in the creation of

that tradition. Additionally, the author explores sufficiently the intertextuality between the Pindaric odes and the older literature. Here the epinician is discussed in its didactic function “as a source of instruction” for Pindar’s audiences (91), while the next one concentrates on the reception of Trojan epic by Pindar in order to frame his “own authorial project” (101). The juxtaposition of the rhetoric and the realities of the epinician poetry and early inscribed epigrams helps us understand aspects of epinician communication.

Besides, monumental commemoration of a glorious deed is the common denominator between these two literary genres. Additionally, the assimilation of the odes to physical monuments and their inscriptions enables the poet to communicate both with his contemporaries and his audiences in future performances. In Chapter 5 (“Genre and Tradition”) the author broadens his examination to the survival of Pindar’s other lyric genres in archaic Greek literary culture. Firstly, he takes under consideration Pindar’s fragmentary cultic poetry, its occasions and audiences and he points out that also such lyric compositions aim coherently to activate audiences beyond the actual spatio-temporal frame of their first performance. Then, it is vehemently highlighted that the dimensions of performance and later reception might have also mattered to earlier lyric poets, but “over time the relative importance of initial performance declined as the importance of later reception rose” (173). Useful conclusions and general observations about the subject are included in the last section of the chapter.

In the second half of the book Pindar is located within the continuity of literary culture as well as within the historical moment of his present time. It is divided into three Chapters. The three sections of Chapter 6 (“The epinician Past”) are dedicated to how the beginnings of victory praise (since Ibycus and Simonides) are presented in Pindar’s corpus. The subject of Chapter 7 (“The epinician Present”) is Pindar’s references to the contemporary poetic culture that can be confirmed throughout his odes. In the last Chapter (“The lyric Past”) Spelman discusses Pindar’s relationship with the former non-epinician poetry more generally. He argues that Pindar is “acutely” aware of the fragmentary poetic forms of the past, which he often recalls in his own poems (255-260). He adduces then three eloquent examples of such allusions (*P. 2, P. 1, I. 2*) to older poets who composed a different sort of lyric (260-276). The conclusions of the discussion are in the third section (276-278).

Spelman's thought-provoking book, with a wide variety of literary evidence and the brand new perspectives he offers, is a useful work that accomplishes its alleged purpose. I therefore recommend it to all interested readers.

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