

Praise of Phylakidas and Pytheas in Pindar's *Isthmian* 5

Pindar composed *Isthmian* 5 for the second pankratic victory of Phylakidas of Aigina, probably in 478 BCE. It is the third poem that Pindar wrote in praise of Lampon's sons, after *Nemean* 5 for the earlier pankratic victory of Pytheas, Phylakidas' brother, and *Isthmian* 6 for the earlier pankratic victory of Phylakidas himself.

Scholars have regarded the praise of Lampon's sons in *Isthmian* 5 as problematic (17–20 and 54–63). In the initial praise the listing of the victories is stated so ambiguously that Thomas Cole has argued that it was meant to mislead the listener into thinking that the brothers possessed more victories than they actually did (1987, 560; cf. Thummer, 1968, 88; Hamilton, 1974, 106). Moreover, the brothers are so tightly linked in both laudatory passages that Richard Hamilton has concluded that the poem was not written to celebrate a particular victory of Phylakidas, but to honor all of the victories of the brothers (1974, 106). Nigel Nicholson has explained the unusual emphasis on Pytheas, the victor's brother, in the second passage (54–63) by the hypothesis that Pindar represents Pytheas as his victorious brother's trainer (2005, 172–73).

Michael Silk, however, has argued that not only is the initial praise of the brothers' victories addressed to Phylakidas, the current victor (18), but that the concluding praise of the brothers is as well (59–64). He prints the vocative, Φυλακίδα (60)—the reading of manuscript B—instead of Φυλακίδᾱ, the dative of interest, an emendation and the reading of all modern editors (1998, 68–70). Silk notes that, although the poem is written for Phylakidas' victory, he and his brother, Pytheas, are tightly linked by what he calls “the associative principle.” “Phylakidas . . . gains stature by association with his senior,” Pytheas (1998, 68). And Silk argues that Pytheas is praised last in the poem (59–63) because he is Phylakidas' “elder,” and “it

is one of Pindar's established practices to close an ode with praise of a distinguished older relative" (1998, 65).

I agree with Silk's analysis, as far as it goes. I accept the reading of manuscript B, the vocative, Φυλακίδα (60), which Silk has usefully brought to Pindarists' attention. And I agree that the current victory of Phylakidas gains luster from association with Pytheas' prior victory at Nemea. But I argue further that another factor at work in both passages is the disparity in the brothers' achievements: Phylakidas has just won his *third* pankratic victory, while Pytheas has only one. Pindar binds the two brothers together so tightly in his praise precisely, as Silk has noted, because he wants to blur their achievements together. That blurring obscures the disparity in the number of their victories. In the first victor-praise Pindar pairs the fraternal victories: Phylakidas' two Isthmian victories are paired, as are two Nemean victories, one each of Phylakidas and Pytheas (17–20). Attention on Phylakidas' total of three is muted, and Pytheas' lone victory is essential to the existence of a double pairing. This strategy of characterizing an individual's single victory as integral to an impressive cumulative whole is paralleled by the praise of three brothers at *Nemean* 6.34–44 and on the monument of Daochos at Delphi (Cummins 2009, 322–26, 328–34). In the second victor-praise of *Isthmian* 5, Pindar describes in detail the event in which the victor's brother won (59–64) and, because both the current victor and his brother won in the same event, this descriptive elaboration indirectly praises the current victor as well. The brother is the object of elaborate praise precisely because his achievement is lesser, while the *laudandus*, whose athletic achievement is markedly greater, receives indirect praise. This strategy of balanced praise is paralleled in the description of the four-horse chariot victories of two brothers at *Olympian* 2.48–51 (Cummins 2010, 326–30). The identification of parallels to other Pindaric poems and to a monument explicates the strategies of praise in these

notoriously difficult passages of *Isthmian* 5, and suggests that these strategies may even be conventional.

Bibliography

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