

## POWER AND TRUTH IN ARCHAIC GREECE – AND AFTER

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Usually, we expect, collisions between mastery of language and mastery of power, like a collision between a Smart Car and a SUV, will be likely to cause far greater damage to the former than to the latter<sup>1</sup>. After all, at least in the short term, the dependence of *logos* – the refined discourse of eloquence or wisdom – upon *kratos* – the structures of political power and social legitimacy – is far more evident than the converse; and as for the ways in which the successful exercise of power can in fact depend upon the right application of discourse, these become clear, if at all, usually only in the long term, and it requires already a considerable measure of wisdom to be able to look to that long term beyond the exigencies and distractions of the short term.

Hence it is not surprising that, despite the proverb, it has only been exceptionally that the pen really has been mightier than the sword – not only when men of poetry and men of power have interacted traumatically, when it has usually been the poets who have suffered more, but even when their encounter has been softer and more subtle, for in this case too the true nature of political power has usually been less fundamentally altered by its occasional gestures of allegiance to the intellectuals than have the aspirations of poetry or philosophy been transformed, and sometimes vitiated, by their subservience to the powers that be. For every Zeno of Elea who, having failed in his attempt at tyannicide, bit his tongue off and spat it into the tyrant's face<sup>2</sup>, there have doubtless been many more masters of discourse who have preferred after all to survive, and – well then, why not? – reap ample benefits, by coming to an accommodation with power, bending their more compliant tongues to serve its own ends.

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<sup>1</sup> The most useful recent studies of this general topic have come from the tradition of French philosophical sociology – perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the profundity and persistence of courtly structures in French society. See for example M. FOUCAULT, *Fearless speech*, ed. J. PEARSON, Los Angeles 2001; P. BOURDIEU, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique. Précédé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle*, Gênes 1972; *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, Paris 2001; *La production de l'idéologie dominante*, Paris 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The anecdote is reported with many variations (including different names for the tyrant) by a number of sources: see especially Diodorus Siculus X 18,2; also Plutarch, *Adv. Colotem* 32 (*Moralia* 1126D); Diogenes Laertius IX 26-27; Clement Alex., *Stromata* IV 57.

The delicate and often dangerous relations between modes of discourse and modes of power have always occupied the attention of theorists and practitioners of both domains. Unsurprisingly, theory has tended to focus not upon the drastic black and white alternatives, the largely unproductive limit cases consisting of the absolute subservience of eloquence to dominion or of the absolute opposition between them, but instead upon the many shades of gray between them, the more or less viable strategies of collaboration and complicity between the speaker and his ruler. Given the questionable legitimacy of many sovereigns, we can well understand a certain anxiety on their part to bolster their power by suppressing the public expression of dissent on the one hand and favoring the public expression of consent on the other, just as we have little difficulty in recognizing the likelihood that at least some poets and orators will prefer collusion to collision, the benefits of collaboration and remuneration rather than the risks of antagonism and marginalization (or worse).

So we might well expect the default situation at court to be public praise and fulsome panegyric: but in fact matters were often far more complicated, and more interesting. How much truth does the tyrant want to hear? But also: how much truth can the tyrant wish to seem to want to hear? To be sure, we expect, and the ancient Greeks expected, the anxieties of the tyrant and the instability of his power to induce him inevitably to allow those he permitted to surround him to tell him only what he wanted to hear. Doubtless this was often the case. And yet truth usually remained a value honored at least in appearance if not always in reality; and a variety of circumstantial reasons – the tyrant's personality, a shrewd political calculation, his relations to his subjects, to potential threats, and to other tyrants – could also sometimes favor not only the appearance of frankness in panegyrics but also the inclusion in them of at least some degree of genuine criticism and admonition. But the speaker of praise for the tyrant who wished to exploit the space, however narrow, thereby opened up to his apparent plain speaking, had to negotiate a tricky and risky middle ground between seeming servile and seeming presumptuous if he wished to achieve success in the eyes of men and of gods.

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Precisely these issues were among those that most occupied the theoreticians of rhetoric, literary theory, and politics in the early modern period, from the 15<sup>th</sup> century at least until Alfieri's *Della tirannide* of 1777<sup>3</sup>. From the

<sup>3</sup> See for example S. ANGLO, *The Courtier's Art: Systematic Immorality in the Renaissance*, Swansea 1983. A useful introductory anthology is provided by B.G. KOHL - R.G. WITT - E.B. WELLES (edd.), *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, Philadelphia 1978.

dark and glittering depths of the Roman Empire, Tacitus had pointed to the narrow road that could lead between self-destructive contempt for authority and self-abasing servility – *inter abruptam contumaciam et deforme obsequium pergere iter ambitione ac periculis vacuum*<sup>4</sup> – and his words were to echo throughout the century of Absolutism, Neo-Stoicism, and Tacitism, on the one hand suggesting to anxious courtiers, who had to live not only with the monarch but also with themselves, that success, and survival, were in general terms not after all entirely impossible, but on the other inconveniently quite failing to provide any detailed algorithm that might guarantee how to achieve these ends. But the central question had posed itself urgently already in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century: when and how can one safely and effectively tell the ruler not what he *wishes* to hear but what he *ought* to hear? Machiavelli reserves his discussion of “how flatterers should be avoided” to chapter 23, almost at the very end of his manual on *The Prince*. Here he demonstrates, on principle and by means of the negative example of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I of Habsburg, who had died in 1519, how great a danger flattery is unless the prince is particularly careful: the ruler must strictly ration candor and freedom of speech, for if he allows everyone to tell him the truth people will lose all respect for him; so he must confine truth-telling to secret exchanges with a few wise counselors who know he will reward them for their frankness, but otherwise he should listen to no one and should simply impose his decisions without discussion; if he is stupid but lucky he will be successful if he follows the counsels of a single wise advisor, for a while (until, that is, the counselor decides to usurp his power himself), but if he listens to more than one he will never be able to sort out their differences. Machiavelli concludes the chapter with the paradox that good counsels always come from the wisdom of the prince, and the wisdom of the prince never from good counsels, for only a wise prince will be able to recognize the value of good advice and will create those conditions under which alone it can reach him. So, we may infer, the only prince who is capable of making good use of a truth-telling advisor does not really need one at all, while the prince who would urgently need one cannot in fact make any use of him whatsoever – from which it follows, as the night does the day, that sooner or later all but the very wisest princes will be destroyed by their inability to hear, and listen to, the truth<sup>5</sup>.

Castiglione’s *The Courtier* presents an analysis of the interrelation between discourse and power which, though certainly less lapidary and drastic than

<sup>4</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* IV 20,5.

<sup>5</sup> Machiavelli also discusses the relation between the ruler and his counselor elsewhere in *The Prince*, especially in chapters 19 and 22. He does not make explicit the consequences of this paradoxical conclusion for his understanding of his own role as a counselor.

Machiavelli's (with which it was approximately contemporary), is only in appearance any more optimistic. If Machiavelli identifies in the wisdom of the ruler the only possible solution to the problem of courtly adulation, Castiglione locates it in the wisdom of the courtier; neither writer pays much attention to the possibility that both the ruler and his courtier might be wise – perhaps because if so there is no problem, more likely because the very possibility seems to them so remote. It is only after the first three books, devoted to describing in considerable detail exactly what the ruler likes to hear – above all pleasantly witty, innocuous conversation, but also music, games, dancing, and other agreeable activities – that Castiglione dares to move on in the fourth and final book to the more hazardous terrain of what the ruler ought to hear. If in book 2 Federico had defined the perfect courtier as someone who “loves and even adores the prince he serves beyond anything else” – provoking Pietro's understandable protest that what he was depicting was nothing other than “a noble adulator” – this was because at that stage of the discussion the interlocutors were still considering only how the courtier should best endorse and encourage his ruler's desires “that are reasonable and honest, i.e. those that in themselves are neither good nor evil, like playing or engaging in one activity rather than another”<sup>6</sup>. But at the beginning of book 4 Ottaviano shifts the discussion upwards to the plane of moral philosophy, redefining the courtier now as someone who must lead his ruler towards the good and dissuade him from evil and who must use the truth for this end: in this new light it turns out that the perfect courtier is the one who has obtained “to such a degree the benevolence and spirit of the prince he serves that he can tell him, and always tells him, the truth about every matter that it is appropriate for him to know, without fear or risk of displeasing him” (IV 5, p. 368). The following chapters (IV 6-10, pp. 369-375) go on to offer a detailed analysis of the risks involved in telling the ruler unpleasant truths and provide advice on how those risks can be, if not altogether eliminated, at least somewhat reduced. Yet the praise of the perfect courtier as master of truth (IV 5, pp. 368-369) and of the truth itself as the indispensable foundation of all good and of every virtue (IV 6, pp. 369-370) accords oddly if at all with the merciless analysis of the arrogance of self-delusion as an almost unavoidable component of the psychology of power (IV 7, pp. 370-372) and with the contrast between ancient princes, who sought the best counsel from the wisest philosophers, and their modern counterparts, who, shown “the horrid countenance of true virtue, ... would abhor it like an asp or make fun of it like the most worthless of things” (IV

<sup>6</sup> A. QUONDAM - N. LONGO (edd.), *Baldassar Castiglione. Il Libro del Cortegiano*, Milano 1981, book II, chapter 18, p. 144. Further quotations are taken from this edition and are indicated by book and chapter number followed by page number; all translations are my own.

8, p. 373). And when Castiglione finally brings these two separate lines of argument together into the compass of a single sentence, he simply juxtaposes them paradoxically with the bare expedient of a simple sign of punctuation, a colon or comma, without in the least explaining how they can be related cogently to one another:

Dico adunque che, poi che oggidì i principi son tanto corrotti dalle male consuetudini, e dalla ignoranza e falsa persuasione di se stessi, e che tanto è difficile il dar loro notizia della verità ed indurgli alla virtù, e che gli omini con le bugie ed adulazioni e con così viziosi modi cercano d'entrar loro in grazia<sup>7</sup>, il Cortegiano, per mezzo di quelle gentil qualità che date gli hanno il conte Ludovico e messer Federico, po facilmente e deve procurar d'acquistarsi la benivolenzia, ed adescar tanto l'animo del suo principe, che si faccia adito libero e sicuro di parlargli d'ogni cosa senza esser molesto; e se egli sarà tale come s'è detto, con poca fatica gli verrà fatto, e così potrà aprirgli sempre la verità di tutte le cose con destrezza... (IV 9, pp. 373-374)

The sentence that begins with a baleful analysis of hopelessly corrupt present circumstances suddenly and astonishingly goes off after the word “grazia” in a completely different direction, beginning with the words “il Cortegiano,” into a eulogy of the perfect courtier who, somehow, can alone entirely redeem them. The point at which these two half-sentences make contact, the sign of punctuation between the two phrases cited, does not really unite them into a single coherent conceptual structure but instead creates a logical anacoluthon that implicitly asserts the fundamental incompatibility between the real and the ideal. What place is there then for truth at court?

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Machiavelli and Castiglione, typical humanists in this regard too, imagined that matters were much better in antiquity than in their own times and did not hesitate to castigate their contemporaries by appeal to the example of the ancients. But in fact, the unambiguous lesson of antiquity is that most Greeks and Romans recognized acutely and dispassionately the very same problems and paradoxes as their Renaissance successors did. After all, Greek literature

<sup>7</sup> In the edition of Quondam and Longo, this punctuation sign appears as a comma; in other modern editions a colon is used. I have not checked the 16<sup>th</sup> century editions, nor does it seem to me indispensable to do so. For it does not much matter just what sign was used in them: in the Renaissance the usage of such punctuation signs was not standardized as it is nowadays, when a colon signifies that the material that follows explicates the material that precedes; in the Renaissance this was only one use of the colon, which otherwise could indicate a pause of any sort stronger than a comma and weaker than a period. No sign of punctuation, by itself, could possibly resolve this logical discrepancy; if anything, Castiglione should have written not “poi che” at the beginning of this sentence but instead “ben che” or “sebbene.”

begins with a scene in which an irascible and incompetent leader, Agamemnon, not only demonstrates that he is quite incapable of accepting good advice but instead is driven by the wise advice of sage counselors into an even greater fury<sup>8</sup>. And Herodotus shows various scenes of power incapable of learning from wisdom: Croesus gives the visiting Solon an easy opportunity, well prepared by a visit to inspect the royal treasuries, to answer the classic panegyric question, who is the happiest man he has ever seen, and the king becomes first perplexed and then infuriated at his visitor's unaccountable inability to give the obvious answer, namely Croesus himself (Croesus sends him off contemptuously as a fool, and the gods later destroy Croesus for his presumption in supposing himself the happiest of men, I 30-34); again, when Xerxes proposes to invade Greece, the canny courtier Mardonius knows exactly how to win his favor, by beginning his speech, in which he enthusiastically supports the Great King's foolhardy plan, with the words, "Of all Persians who have ever lived, and of all who are yet to be born, you, my lord, are the greatest. Every word you have spoken is true and excellent..." (VII 9), while Artabanus, who alone, as Xerxes' uncle, dares to disagree with him, meets with contempt and abuse (VII 11); later, when it occurs to Xerxes to actually ask a Greek, Demaratus, about Greece, the canny Greek begins by asking, "My lord, is it a true answer you would like, or merely an agreeable one?" and Xerxes assures him he will not suffer if he tells the truth – but then responds to his realistic and prophetic assessment by laughing at him and ignoring it (VII 101-105).

For the rest of antiquity, historians will continue to tell of good advice not taken, with disastrous consequences; moralists like Plutarch will provide well meant but evidently largely futile tips on how to tell a flatterer from a friend<sup>9</sup>; rhetoricians like Menander Rhetor will compile much more useful handbooks on how to compose successful epideictic speeches<sup>10</sup>; and orators like Dio Chrysostom will begin their adulatory speeches for an imperial patron by flatteringly assuring him, "I, most noble Prince, have been in your company and am perhaps as well acquainted with your character as anyone, and know that you delight in truth and frankness rather than in flattery and guile"<sup>11</sup>. Plato's celebrated claim that his ideal city will only come into existence when the philosopher and the king are one and the same person<sup>12</sup> can be inverted and interpreted not only as a wan utopian hope but also as the clear-eyed statement of a permanent problem: given that the philosopher and the king will in reality always be two different persons, in Sicily as elsewhere,

<sup>8</sup> Homer, *Iliad* I 24ff.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* (*Moralia* 48E-74E).

<sup>10</sup> D.A. RUSSELL - N.G. WILSON (edd.), *Menander Rhetor*, Oxford 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Dio Chrys., *Oratio* III 2.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Republic* V 473C-D.

*logos* and *kratos* will never come to coincide in the real city, and their collision is inevitable – then as now.

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Epinician poetry was for archaic Greece what a panegyric speech was for the Roman Empire: an opportunity, bestowed by success, to gratify power by a ceremony of public praise<sup>13</sup>. Since the man who had won the prize at a (usually) athletic competition was paying for the poet to compose an ode that would be sung in his honor (presumably by a chorus) in a public commemoration of his victory at his home town (or, more rarely, at the site of his victory), he is likely to have expected, and to have received, a poetic composition celebrating his merits, athletic and otherwise, in no uncertain terms. Numerous anecdotes transmitted by ancient authors report – probably unreliably for the exact details, but doubtless significantly for the general social situation involved – the various kinds of unpleasantness that could come about if the patron's expectations were not fulfilled<sup>14</sup>; and Pindar for one makes no secret of the facts that his poetry is being paid for (*Isthm.* II 1-13) and that the victor has other means available to celebrate his triumph besides paying for such poems, for example commissioning a statue (Pindar, for one, proclaims that his poems achieve the same purpose but far more effectively: *Nem.* V 1-7). So there is no doubt that, in a certain sense and to a certain degree, epinician poetry is simply one particular species among others of the larger genus of praise discourse, differing for example from panegyric orations by being composed and performed in sung verse rather than spoken prose, from hymns by praising men rather than gods, from threnodies by praising the living rather than the dead, from encomia by praising an athletic victory, and so forth.

To say that epinician poetry praises its patrons is not news; but it is one thing to say that the general purpose of an epinician poem is to praise its patron and quite another to say that this is the only or essential purpose of an epinician poem and that this is the purpose not only of the poem as a whole but of every single aspect and component of it. And yet precisely these latter were the claims Elmore Bundy made in 1962 when he asserted "...one master principle: there is no passage in Pindar and Bakkhulides that is not in its primary intent enkomiasitic – that is, designed to enhance the glory of a particular patron" and declared, "it should be evident that the Epinikion must adhere to

<sup>13</sup> In terms of the questions posed here, it would be useful to compare epinician poetry with inscriptions in honor of athletic victors. See for example the material collected in L. ROBERT, *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec*, Paris 1940; J. EBERT, *Griechische Epigramme auf Sieger an gymnischen und hippischen Agonen*, Berlin 1972.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., on Simonides: Cicero, *De oratore* II 86; Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* XI 2,11-16.

those principles that have governed enkomia from Homer to Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*..."<sup>15</sup>. Progress in scholarship, doubtless, is often achieved by the enunciation of provocatively one-sided, reductive theses; but it does not require much reflection to see that it is a *non sequitur* to infer from the assertion that a genre has the finality of praise the consequences that this must be its only finality and that of all its elements. It is, after all, the purpose of an automobile, be it a Smart Car or a SUV, to get its driver and passengers safely, quickly, and economically to their destination; but is that the sole purpose of every single part of an automobile, including its styling, its color, its chrome, and the small mirror on the back of the front passenger's windshield visor?

In fact, there were many constraints upon epinician poetry that limited and modified the degree and the kinds of praise it was able to express. For one thing, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>16</sup>, the epinician situation confronted poets like Pindar and Bacchylides with two different, indeed almost contradictory tasks, which we can call *individualization* and *integration*. The institutionally public character of choral lyric meant that epinician poems, as distinguished from the somewhat more restrictedly accessible monodic lyric, had to satisfy not only the victor and his family but also his polis – one superficial but infallible proof of this is the praise for the victor's city which epinicians almost always link with the praise for the victor himself. But these two different addressees, the victor and his city, confronted the poet with two very different challenges. On the one hand he had to celebrate the victor in the fullness of his triumph – after all, it was the victor who had paid for the poem, and he certainly expected the poet to praise him so that he seemed better than all other men and worthy of his victory. But on the other hand the poet also had to take account of the expectations and needs of the victor's fellow-citizens, if they were not to reject the victor as arrogant and dangerous to the community. That is why the epinician poets sing not only of the victor's great felicity and brilliant success, but also of the insuperable limits of human possibility, and why they not only magnify the victor's unique lot but also warn him at the same time to exercise self-control and moderation – thereby of course further praising the victor, for such a warning has little sense applied to the anonymous masses. The epinician poet's success in dealing with this complex and delicate situation can only be achieved by running along the razor's edge, the *kairos*, on both sides of which lurk serious dangers for his enterprise: if the poet exaggerates integration at the cost of individualization, the patron will be

<sup>15</sup> E. BUNDY, *Studia Pindarica*, I, Berkeley 1962, 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Poet and Public: Communicative Strategies in Pindar and Bacchylides*, in P. AGOCS - C. CAREY - R. RAWLES (edd.), *Receiving the Komos*, London 2011 (forthcoming). See also e.g. K. CROTTY, *Song and Action. The Victory Odes of Pindar*, Baltimore 1982; L. KURKE, *The Traffic in Praise. Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy*, Ithaca - London 1991.



angry with him; but if he exaggerates individualization at the cost of integration, then the patron's fellow-citizens will be angry with the patron.

That is why most epinician poems do their best to preserve a careful balance between celebration and admonition, between outright praise for the victor and his achievement on the one hand and reminders on the other hand that human success is always limited and impermanent and lies in the hands of the gods. No epinician poet names a successful mortal without insisting upon his mortality and his dependence for his success upon divine favor; and just behind the constantly emphasized jealousy of the gods, which is always possible, lurks the envy of men, which is absolutely certain. Sometimes indeed the poet can only manage to hit the golden middle of the *kairos* by swinging back and forth repeatedly between the two extremes on either side of it. A passage in Pindar's Tenth Pythian, composed for Hippocleas of Thessaly, winner in the boys' *diaulos* in 498 B.C.E., illustrates this tendency with particular clarity – no doubt not so much because it is Pindar's earliest dated poem, as rather because it is addressed to a very young victor and the poet can therefore permit himself to adopt a tone even more didactic than is his wont. The numbers in parentheses are intended to help articulate this passage logically, along the lines explained immediately after the citation:

- (1) τί κομπέω παρὰ καιρόν; (2) ἀλλά με Πυθῶ  
 τε καὶ τὸ Πελοποννησίον ἀπύει  
 Ἄλεῦα τε παῖδες, Ἴπποκλέα θέλοντες  
 ἀγαγεῖν ἐπικομίαν ἀνδρῶν κλυτὰν ὄπα.  
 γέυεται γὰρ ἀέθλων·  
 στρατῶ τ' ἀμφικτιόνων ὁ Παρνασσίος αὐτὸν μυχὸς  
 διαυλοδρομῶν ἕπατον παίδων ἀνέειπεν.
- (3) Ἄπολλον, γλυκὺ δ' ἀνθρώπων τέλος ἀρχά  
 τε δαίμονος ὀρνύντος αὔξειται·  
 ὁ μὲν που τεοῖς τε μῆδεσι τοῦτ' ἔπραξεν,  
 (4) τὸ δὲ συγγενὲς ἐμβέβακεν ἴχνησιν πατρός  
 Ὀλυμπιονίκα δις ἐν πολεμαδόκοις  
 Ἄρεος ὄπλοισ·  
 ἔθηκε καὶ βαθυλείμων ὑπὸ Κίρρας πετρᾶν  
 ἀγῶν κρατησίποδα Φρικίαν.
- (5) ἔπιτο μοῖρα καὶ ὑστέραισιν  
 ἐν ἀμέραις ἀγάνορα πλοῦτον ἀνθεῖν σφίσιν·  
 τῶν δ' ἐν Ἑλλάδι τερπνῶν  
 λαχόντες οὐκ ὀλίγαν δόσιν, μὴ φθονεραῖς ἐκ θεῶν  
 μετατροπίαῖς ἐπικύρσαιεν. θεὸς εἶη  
 ἀπήμων κέαρ· (6) εὐδαίμων δὲ καὶ ἕμνη-  
 τὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ γίνεταί σοφοῖς,

ὅς ἂν χερσὶν ἢ ποδῶν ἀρετᾶ κρατήσῃς  
 τὰ μέγιστ' ἀέθλων ἔλη τόλμα τε καὶ σθένει,  
 καὶ ζῶων ἔτι νεαρόν  
 κατ' αἴσαν υἷον ἴδη τυχόντα στεφάνων Πυθίων.  
 (7) ὁ χάλκεος οὐρανὸς οὐ ποτ' ἀμβατὸς αὐτῶ·  
 (8) ὅσαις δὲ βροτὸν ἔθνος ἀγλαΐαις ἀ-  
     πτόμεσθα, περαίνει πρὸς ἔσχατον  
 πλόον· (9) ναυσὶ δ' οὔτε πεζὸς ἰών <κεν> εὐροῖς  
 ἐς Ἵπερβορέων ἀγῶνα θαυμαστὰν ὁδόν.  
 (10) παρ' οἷς ποτε Περσεὺς ἐδαΐσατο λαγέτας... (*Pyth.* X 4-31)

(1) Why am I vaunting inappropriately? (2) Rather, Pytho [i.e., the site of the victory] and Pelinna [i.e., the victor's town] are calling upon me, and Aleuas' sons [i.e., the victor's family], who are eager to bring to Hippokleas men's glorious voices in revelry, for he competes in the games, and the valley of Parnassos proclaimed him to the host of neighboring people the best of the boys who ran the diaulos. (3) Apollo, sweet waxes the end and the beginning for men when a god is prompting. He achieved this, I believe, through your designs, (4) but by inherited ability he has trod in the footsteps of his father, twice an Olympic victor in Ares' armor that bears the shock of war; the contest in the deep meadow beneath Kirrha's cliff [i.e., at Pytho] also made Phrikias [probably Hippocleas' father rather than his father's horse] a victorious runner. (5) May destiny attend them as well in coming days to make lordly wealth blossom for them. And having been granted no small share of delightful successes in Hellas, may they encounter from the gods no envious reversals. May the god not be pained in heart. (6) But blessed and a worthy subject for song in wise men's eyes is that man, who conquers with his hands or the excellence of his feet and wins the greatest prizes with courage and strength, and while still living sees his young son duly win Pythian crowns. (7) The bronze heaven is never his to scale, (8) but as for all the glories which our mortal race attains, he completes the furthest voyage. (9) And traveling neither by ships nor on foot could you find the marvelous way to the assembly of the Hyperboreans. (10) With them Perseus, the leader of people, once feasted...<sup>17</sup>

A brief analysis of this passage, sentence by sentence, shows clearly how Pindar oscillates here from one side of the *kairos* to the other. (1) The poet begins by pretending that his praise of Hippocleas might be in violation of right measure, the *kairos* (*para kairos*). (2) But he immediately sets matters straight: he is obliged to praise him by the fact of the boy's victory and the pressure of both his family's expectations and his town's. (3) And yet the true merit for the victory belongs not to Hippocleas himself but rather to the god Apollo. (4) But not only to the god: for the boy has inherited his athletic ability from his human family, and in passing Pindar slips in some praise for the past victories of Hip-

<sup>17</sup> I quote the translation of W.H. RACE (ed.), *Pindar. Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes*, Cambridge, MA - London, 1997, 359-361.

poctas' father. (5) So far the gods have indeed shown favor to this family, but there is no certainty that they will continue to do so and we can only hope that they will. (6) And yet the success the members of this one family have already achieved, victory in the games for oneself and one's son, is already an enormous accomplishment and well worthy of praise. (7) And yet the heavens, the domain reserved for the gods, remain forever beyond their reach. (8) But they have attained the farthest limit to which human felicity can aspire. (9) But beyond that limit lies the land of the mythical Hyperboreans, which no man can reach by sailing the sea or traveling on land. (10) And yet the legendary Perseus did get there, in a way neither Hippocleas nor his family nor any of Pindar's listeners ever will be able to imitate, namely by flying through the air – and with that Pindar himself flies off into a lengthy narrative of the Hyperboreans' easy life and Perseus' heroic exploits. We can well imagine that young Hippocleas, if he even bothered to pay any attention to the details of Pindar's poetic text, will have felt somewhat confused by them – but both he and his father, and Thorax, the head of the local Thessalian political dynasty, who seems to have paid for the poem, as well as those of their fellow-citizens who attended its performance, will doubtless have been sufficiently pleased by a general if somewhat vague impression of poetic grandeur, of lofty if not completely novel thought, and of noble if not fully pellucid expression, to have felt that whatever money had been paid for the commission had been very well spent indeed.

So the epinician poet's praise for the victor must always be confined within carefully defined limits if it is to be effective. But beyond this general constraint, which applies to all epinician poems by virtue of their generic situation of performance, other factors that derive from the specific circumstances of the individual victory operate to influence the poetic expression of praise. For even if the general epinician situation is constituted by the necessary co-presence of both contradictory aspects, individuation and integration, nonetheless the exact balance between them is up to the poet, who is free to place the emphasis in any single case wherever the specific character of the individual situation seems to him to require it. Thus, for example, on the one hand Pindar praises the city more emphatically when the victor comes from Athens (*Pyth.* VII), Corinth (*Ol.* XIII) or Thebes (*Isthm.* VII) than in other cases, doubtless because a strong sense of civic pride seems especially to have characterized these towns and would have made it imperative for the victor's sake to reintegrate him into the social tissue; and so too, it is evidently felt to be impossible for a poet to celebrate the victory of any Aeginetan athlete adequately without appealing to the legends of the Aeacids, in which all Aeginetans evidently felt they had a personal stake<sup>18</sup>. On the other

<sup>18</sup> See most recently A. PIPPIN BURNETT, *Pindar's Songs for Young Athletes of Aegina*, Oxford 2005; S. HORNBLLOWER, 'Dolphins in the Sea' (*Isthmian* 9.7): *Pindar and the Aeginetans*, in S. HORNBLLOWER - C.

hand, Pindar's songs for victors from Cyrene or Sicily, who by and large were kings, tyrants, or their close friends and relatives, tend much more to emphasize their own achievements as powerful and successful individuals, and to allude if at all to the glory of the hometown only so as to enhance even further the celebration of its ruler's power and success<sup>19</sup>.

The poems for Sicilian victors in particular raise the question whether the special circumstances that governed epinician odes composed to be performed at a tyrant's court might in some way have been reflected in the detailed rhetorical strategies deployed in them. To be sure, none of the patrons for whom Pindar's or Bacchylides' poems were composed was a total nobody; but it would after all not be very surprising if it turned out upon inspection that the kinds of praise that could be bestowed upon an ordinary, albeit wealthy and athletically inclined, citizen of a typical Greek polis differed in quantity and quality from that which could be expected to please a Sicilian tyrant or his henchmen. A century later, Xenophon took Hieron of Syracuse as the paradigm of a ruler to whom no other kind of discourse was ever directed at court than flattery; and although Xenophon was writing in his dialogue *Hieron* as a moralist and not as a historian, his expectations for what life was like at a tyrant's court are likely to have been widely shared by other Greeks and hence not to have been very far off the mark regarding conditions in Sicily or elsewhere. In Xenophon's dialogue, the praise poet Simonides, thinking to flatter Hieron, tells him, "Praise, the sweetest of all sounds, is never lacking, for all your courtiers praise everything you do and every word you utter. Abuse, on the contrary, that most offensive of sounds, is never in your ears, for no one likes to speak evil of a despot in his presence"<sup>20</sup>. But Hieron's response reveals the disadvantages of this seemingly idyllic situation: "And what pleasure comes, do you suppose, of this shrinking from evil words, when one knows full well that all harbor evil thoughts against the despot, in spite of their silence? Or what pleasure comes of this praise, do you think, when the praises sound suspiciously like flattery?" (15). Praising a victorious tyrant who was bored and suspicious of flattery must have posed special challenges for a professional technician of praise. For at least some poets, this challenge may itself have been very attractive indeed, and may have made the financial allures involved in such an undertaking even more appealing than they would already have been on their own account.

MORGAN (edd.), *Pindar's Poetry, Patrons, and Festivals. From Archaic Greece to the Roman Empire*, Oxford 2007, 287-308.

<sup>19</sup> See most recently A.D. MORRISON, *Performances and Audiences in Pindar's Sicilian Victory Odes*, London 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Xenophon, *Hieron* 14. Here and below I quote the translation of E.C. MARCHANT (ed.), *Xenophon in Seven Volumes. VII. Scripta Minora*, Cambridge, MA 1968, 7.

Let us start with Bacchylides, a simpler and less voluminously transmitted poet than Pindar, and ask how, with regard to his tactics of praise, his poems for Sicilian tyrants differ from his other productions. As it happens, we possess three epinicia of Bacchylides addressed to Hieron of Syracuse; his other surviving poems celebrate victors, from Ceos and other parts of Greece, who were successful athletically but unremarkable politically. At least four striking features that are interesting in this connection are found prominently and repeatedly in these three poems of Bacchylides for Hieron but are attested far more rarely, if at all, in his other extant poems:

1. the poet's explicit citation of what other people are saying, be it praise or blame (III 9-10; 63-71; 96-98);
2. his asseveration that he himself at any rate is telling the truth about the victor (III 96; V 187-190);
3. his emphasis upon his sincere personal eagerness to praise the victor (IV 9-10; V 14-16; 195-197);
4. and his lavish praise for the victor's intelligence (III 85; V 3-6).

Now none of these features would be particularly surprising on its own in a poem of praise for any athletic victor; but it seems unlikely to be due merely to the accidents of transmission that they are not found in Bacchylides' other poems in such concentration or so conspicuously. Surely it makes more sense to interpret them as symptoms of the particular discursive conditions less typical of ordinary upper-class Greek households than of Hieron's court, where we would expect to find: (1) a situation requiring a heightened and constantly wary attentiveness to what other people were saying and vigilant evaluation of the possible motivations behind utterances; (2) the insistence that, whatever fulsome or abusive lies other people have been telling, the speaker himself is now telling the truth in his gratifying discourses to the ruler; (3) the guarantee provided for the speaker's claimed veracity by his profession of ardent friendship and sincere benevolence; and (4) the explicit praise for the tyrant's perspicacity, his ability to see through other people's deceptions and appreciate what this speaker claims to be his own genuine candor.

If this is so, it will not surprise us to find that precisely the same four features are found repeatedly in Pindar's odes for tyrants and kings as well:

1. the poet's explicit citation of what other people are saying, be it praise or blame (*Pyth.* I 51-52; 81-84; II 71-73; 81-82; 86-88; 89-92; V 107-108; *Nem.* I 24-25);
2. his asseveration that he himself at any rate is telling the truth about the victor (*Ol.* II 90-95; *Pyth.* II 83-85; V 107-108; *Nem.* I 18-19);
3. his emphasis upon his sincere personal eagerness to praise the victor (*Ol.* I 3-6; 103-105; 108-111; III 38-41; *Pyth.* I 42-45; III 1-3; cf. Fr. 118 Sn.-M.);
4. and his lavish praise for the victor's intelligence (*Ol.* II 83-85; *Pyth.* II 57-58; 72; 73-74; III 80-82; V 17-19; VI 47-49; *Isthm.* II 12).

To be sure, more of Pindar's epinician poems are preserved than of Bacchylides', and Pindar is the more complex of the two poets, so that it is possible to find a few more such passages in Pindar's poems written for victors other than tyrants and kings than is the case with Bacchylides; but even if the contrast between the poems written for the two kinds of dedicatee, which was fairly stark with Bacchylides, does become very slightly murkier with Pindar, still the contrast between these two types of epinicians certainly seems to hold for both poets.

There are also, as we would expect, not only striking similarities between the ways in which each of the two poets deals with the discursive exigencies at the tyrant's court but also various differences. Above all, Pindar, unlike Bacchylides, does not hesitate on occasion to give the appearance of admonishing sternly his powerful client and he dispenses various kinds of sober advice to him (*Pyth.* I 85-94; II 72; IV 270-278; cf. Fr. 126 Sn.-M.)<sup>21</sup>. In so doing the poet seems to wish to demonstrate not only his own rectitude, independence, and candor – the *parrhêsia* which for an Athenian would be an essentially political value, closely linked to the ideology and identity of the city and its citizens, seems in Pindar's case to be more a reflection of his special poetic and religious status, guaranteed by the Muses – but also the ruler's love of free speech and his ability to accept good advice, especially when it is well meant and carefully phrased. To be sure, the tyrant's real power over a distinguished foreign poet like Pindar must have had its limits; but if the poet wished to receive future commissions from the same patron, as Pindar often suggests (e.g., *Ol.* I 115-117; *Pyth.* II 96), he will have been well advised to do his best to understand the delicate situation at court and to adapt himself to it appropriately – and, what is more, if he hoped to receive future commissions from patrons elsewhere in the Greek world (who might not necessarily have been great admirers of the Sicilian tyrants), he will have been well advised to make sure that he could be thought of not simply as Hieron's toady but as someone who could speak frankly to the ruler's face (and doubtless this too would redound to Hieron's credit)<sup>22</sup>.

As so often in panegyric, the poet who insists that his patron should act in some particular virtuous way, so far from implying that that patron has ever acted otherwise in the past and must now stand abashed and corrected, is in fact intimating that he has always followed the path of this virtue anyway and does not in the least need this encouragement in order to continue doing what comes naturally to him. Public praise, if administered shrewdly and tactfully, could not only tolerate a bit of admonition, but could even be enhanced by it – at least back then.

<sup>21</sup> For a different view of such passages, see B. GENTILI, *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica. Da Omero al V secolo*, Bari 1984, 141-151.

<sup>22</sup> For a similar argument about Simonides' poem for Scopas, see my *Simonides' Ode to Scopas in Contexts*, in J.P. SULLIVAN - I.J.F. DE JONG (edd.), *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1994, 127-152.