

Pindar's *Pythian Eleven* at the Ismenion and Elsewhere

Pindar's *Pythian Eleven* is one of only a handful of *epinikia* that include any internal evidence of wider festival settings in which they were first performed. The song does not identify the festival precisely, but significant details are found in its opening triad, in which the chorus singing and dancing Pindar's composition calls upon a group of Theban heroines to attend its performance, specifying where and when they are to be present. Semele, Ino Leukothea, and Alkmena are invited to join the nymph Melia at the Ismenion, the most important cult center of Apollo at Thebes, "at the edge of evening" (ἄκρα σὺν ἑσπέρα, 10), allowing us to identify the time and place of the song's premiere, if not the exact festival at which it took place.

In this paper I consider *P.11* in the context of such a regularly-occurring festival and discuss some of the ways in which the song functions as both an *epinikion* and a cult song. I suggest that one of the primary differences between these two types lies in their expectations of reperformance, with cult songs restricted to the setting for which they were composed and *epinikia* more freely reperformed in various modes and venues. Within this framework, I analyze the non-mythic portions of *P.11* with respect to their spatial deixis and argue that Pindar has composed his song to employ a careful type of self-referentiality that is consistent with the circumstances of performing a cult song at its premiere at the Ismenion without conflicting with the different reperformance scenarios available to *epinikia*.

This strategy, I suggest, involves concessions to the conventions of each genre of song. I discuss lines 1-11, which have been identified as a kletic hymn (Race 1990, Finglass 2007) and show by a comparison to songs of Sappho and other passages of Pindar that they are in fact an adaptation of the form, which belongs naturally to the spatial world of cult song, to epinikian performance. To show elements of cult song in the *epinikion*, I compare Melia and the Ismenion

in this song to some of Pindar's actual cult songs for Thebes, in particular fr. 94b, the *daphnephorikon* for Agasikles, and suggest they carry a particular religious significance. Ultimately, I argue that *P.11* displays a complex rhetorical strategy by which Pindar attempts to satisfy the concerns of the multiple constituencies invested in the song's premiere – those concerned with cult and those with celebrating an athletic victor – as well as those in later settings.

Bibliography

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