

CAMWS 2023 Abstract Submission
Spring-Plucked Songs: Sound and Space in Pindar Fr. 75 SM

This paper offers the first sustained reading of the soundscape in Pindar Fr.75 SM. Building on Timothy Power's and R. Murray Schafer's work on sonic environments, I argue that Pindar superimposes a Delphic "soundmark" (the sonic equivalent to a landmark) onto the dithyramb's Athenian landscape (Power 2019; Schafer 1977). The effect of this is twofold: first, it offers a solution to the spatial ambiguity created by Pindar's reference to the Athenian agora as an *omphalos*—a markedly Delphic landmark (Pindar Fr.75 SM, 4). Second, it conjures an Apolline ambience, elevating Athens to a nearly Delphic status. This paper is part of a larger project that seeks to mitigate scholars' tendency to privilege visual imagery in Pindaric poetry by attending to its sonic dimensions.

This paper is divided into two sections: in the first section, I reconstruct the Delphic soundmark in the archaic Greek imaginary. Building on Power's reconstruction of the Delphic soundscape, I deploy the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, Pindar's second paean, and Bacchylides 16 to define the Delphic soundmark as a polyphonic symphony of human and non-human sonic agents. These agents mingle together to orchestrate a "space for sonic decorum, a *locus amoenus* suffused with soft, ambient sounds of nature" that is distinctive to Delphi (Power, 2019).

In the second section, I situate Pindar's Fr. 75 SM within the context of this Delphic soundmark as a solution to the poem's spatial ambiguity, namely the sense of being in both Athens and Delphi. In their illuminating study of space in Pindar, Leslie Kurke and Richard Neer contextualize Pindar's use of *omphalos* in this poem within the landscape of the Athenian agora (2019). This paper proposes a sonic rather than spatial explanation for the designation of the Athenian agora as an *omphalos*. Throughout the poem, Pindar composes a soundscape in which

the architecture and landscape of the agora sing out together with the chorus. He materializes this soundscape in his spring-plucked songs (ἔαρ-//δρόπων ἀοιδᾶν, 6). Pindar's explicit portrayal of his songs as features of the natural landscape evokes a distinctively Delphic resonance—the collective participation of human and non-human sonic agents. In doing so, Pindar superimposes the Delphic soundmark on the Athenian agora, now marked as the ambrosial land (ἄμβρόταν χθόν', 18). I argue that this elevation of the Athenian landscape to the status of Delphi accomplished through the superimposition of these Delphic sonic markers is the goal of Pindar's Fr. 75 SM. Ultimately, I hope to show that Pindar Fr. 75 SM is a productive case study for the role of sound in the Pindaric corpus and to encourage further studies grounded in this underutilized yet generative framework.

Select Bibliography

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