

## REVIEWS • RESENSIES

Hanna Boeke, *The Value of Victory in Pindar's Odes. Gnomai, Cosmology and the Role of the Poet*. Leiden, Boston, Brill 2007 (285 in the series Mnemosyne Supplementa). Pp. 230. ISBN 978 90 04 15848 1. Hardback. Price encoded.

According to Boeke the aim of this study is to investigate the cosmological context of Pindar's victory odes, and its importance for their encomiastic purpose, from two angles. Firstly, the *gnomai* which punctuate the *epinicia* at regular intervals are used as the basis for an overview of the main ideas about the gods and man's relationship to the divine, the human condition and man in society. Secondly, three *epinicia*, *Olympian* 12, *Isthmian* 4 and *Olympian* 13 are analysed to obtain a closer view of how certain aspects of the cosmology are applied to the sometimes complex circumstances of a specific victor. These analyses are complemented by an investigation into the role of the poet in mediating cosmological promises (p. 1).

The introductory chapter deals with selected aspects of Pindaric scholarship in order to establish the usefulness of an investigation into the cosmological foundation of Pindar's poetry. Boeke sets out by pointing to the fact that the attitude of many scholars towards Pindar's 'thought' – as opposed to their praise of his poetic ability – is often dismissive, if not openly disapproving, usually because it is seen as evidence of the poet's inability or unwillingness to embrace the new and superior ideas of the democratic era developing in Athens (p. 1). For her, Bundy's *Studia Pindarica* serves as a break with this tradition, since it insists that every passage in Pindar is in its primary intent encomiastic – aimed at the enhancement of the glory of a particular patron. This would seem to be in line with the pervasiveness of competition in Greek life (p. 3). Passages in the odes of Pindar often reflect the idea that superiority and victory were among the highest values of the people for whom he composed his songs, and some passages even reflect this in a negative way by pointing to the ignominy of defeat. Boeke questions this winning ideal as ultimate goal, and picks up a statement by Bundy at the end of his study of *Isthmian* 1, which neither he nor his followers pursued, namely, the qualification that praise for an individual has to stay within certain boundaries which are not determined by rhetorical convention, but by the practices and norms of society (p. 5). And although Bundy has set scholars on the road to a heightened interest in the formal elements of epinician poetry, Boeke remarks: 'Knowledge of the conventions of epinician

poetry can help explain *how* every passage contributes to the aim of praise, but an understanding of *what* that praise entails is essential if a poem is to make sense as a tribute to one man in particular' (p. 5). Form alone, she points out, cannot do justice to the complexity of poetry, and therefore a trend away from a narrowly formalist reading toward a different kind of contextualisation has recently come to light – for Boeke it is the familiarity with the cosmological assumptions made in Pindar's odes. The question of the value assigned to victory must therefore be re-examined. She points out that the purpose of an ode (praise and glorification) is not disputed, but what praise and glorification entail seems to admit of various opinions (p. 8). Pindar's odes show that glorifying a victor is 'not presented as desirable goals in themselves, but that they acquire value in relation to the broader outlook of the community regarding both the divine and the social sphere' (p. 9).

In Chapter 2 ('Gnomai as a Source of Cosmological Reflections'), Boeke contends that *gnomai* or wisdom sayings are not only a primary characteristic of Greek didactic poetry, but also of non-didactic works, like the epics of Homer, the *epinicia* of Pindar and Bacchylides, and the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Menander. In this chapter Boeke therefore examines modern and ancient views on *gnomai* in order to establish whether it would be legitimate to reconstruct a cosmology from Pindar's use of *gnomai* (p. 12). As to (i) the nature of *gnomai* according to modern scholarship, there seems to be an agreement among modern scholars that the wisdom sayings of antiquity reflect the views of ancient communities on the nature of their world, and how this world works with regard to both human and extra-human realities (p. 13). As to (ii) ancient thinking on *gnomai*, two applications of *gnomai* dating from the 4th century BC and later are of interest to commentators, namely, education through *gnomai* and the use of *gnomai* in rhetoric. Boeke consequently discusses the value of *gnomai* in education and rhetoric, and concludes that the fourth-century evidence on *gnomai* places their usefulness and practical applicability centrally, and assumes that they deal with the real world in which humans live and have to survive. The poetic *gnomai* to which educators and rhetoricians refer can therefore be regarded as a reflection of and on life as it is perceived in the society to which they belong (pp. 23–24). This brings the author to the question whether fourth-century views on the nature and use of *gnomai* can be related to Pindar's use of *gnomai*. She states that it would seem reasonable to assume that Pindar's use of *gnomai* as a didactic or rhetorical tool did not differ substantially from that described by later educators and rhetoricians (p. 25). However, the question remains whether the sayings contained in his *gnomai* can be used as basis for describing the cosmology of the society in which Pindar lived and worked, and while it is true that world view is revealed in *gnomai*, one must

also be aware of the limitations of wisdom sayings as an indication of world view in the case of Pindar's odes. The chapter is concluded by a discussion of the 'true point' of *gnomai* (in Pindar) – illustrating the value of *gnomai* as cosmology by taking *Pythian* 3.80-83 as example, and concluding that the two *gnomai* exemplify the two broad strands of any world view, description of the world as man finds it, and recommendations on how man should conduct himself in such a world (p. 27).

Chapter Three ('The Gnostic Expression of Cosmology in Pindar') forms the core of Boeke's thesis/analysis. She begins the chapter with two definitions, the metaphysical cosmology and the anthropological cosmology of Oudemans and Lardinois, accepting the latter as working basis. In this approach cosmology concerns man's relation with nature, his gods, his fellow men, life and death, order and law, and insight (p. 29). If this approach is accepted, a close connection between cosmology and morality can be expected. In this sense cosmology is described by Boeke as having a moral dimension. The classification used by Boeke to analyse Pindar's *gnomai* with a view to their cosmological content is based on a combination of the six cosmological categories of Oudemans and Lardinois and the three socio-psychological dimensions of Shimkin and Sanjuan. The two main categories are philosophical orientation and man in society.

(i) Philosophical orientation includes views on the elemental forces (fate, god and nature) and man's relation to them, as well as on the human condition (life and death, the implications of morality).

(ii) Man in society concerns the nature and obligations of different human relationships, such as with family, fellow citizens and enemies, as well as human nature as it reveals itself in a social context (p. 31). Abundant examples accompany an in-depth analysis of the Pindaric *gnomai* involving the above cosmological categories.

In Chapter Four ('Cosmology in Action: An Analysis of Selected Odes'), Boeke presents the reader with detailed literary analyses demonstrating how cosmology functions in individual odes, taking as examples *Olympian* 12, *Isthmian* 4 and *Olympian* 13.

Chapter Five ('The Poet as Mediator of Cosmology') deals with the role of the poet as mediator of cosmology, arguing that Pindar shapes the poetic persona to emphasise different aspects of the traditional world view, or to represent varying viewpoints so that he can praise each victor according to his particular circumstances. In *Olympian* 13 the poet assumes a vigorous and constructive presence right from the start and finally emerges as the positive *exemplum* for using one's inborn gifts to the full without breaching any social or divine borders (p. 191). In both *Pythian* 7 and *Isthmian* 4 the poet's role as mediator of cosmology involves changing the perspective on the circum-

stances or attributes of a victor or his family through a modification of cosmological principles (p. 192). In *Olympian* 9 the divine basis of inherited ability is stated as an absolute principle with which the poet completely identifies himself: man is and does nothing of value without god (p. 193). In *Nemean* 3 the person of superior talent – with whom the poet also associates himself – wins through because his own efforts and the role of the divine are all but completely ignored, which is quite different from the treatment of the cosmological theme of inherited ability in *Olympian* 9 (p. 193).

Chapter Six comprises the concluding remarks. In her conclusion Boeke points to the fact that Pindar's odes abundantly contain pronouncements on life issues made in addition to statements aimed obviously at the glorification of a successful athlete. *Gnomai* on aspects such as life and death, man and the gods, and man in his social environment are implemented and turned into subjects of concern to men who have achieved the highest honour in the pursuit of physical excellence (p. 195). These perspectives on cosmological ideas are communicated by the poetic persona, an important role player in most of the poems, and from the odes treated in her study it is clear that it is the part of the poet's task in the victory odes to deal with cosmological issues (p. 196). As mediator of cosmology the poetic persona in Pindar's odes provides a diversity of perspectives on human endeavour in general, and victory in particular (p. 197).

The book is concluded by an extensive bibliography, general index, an index of Greek words and an index of passages cited.

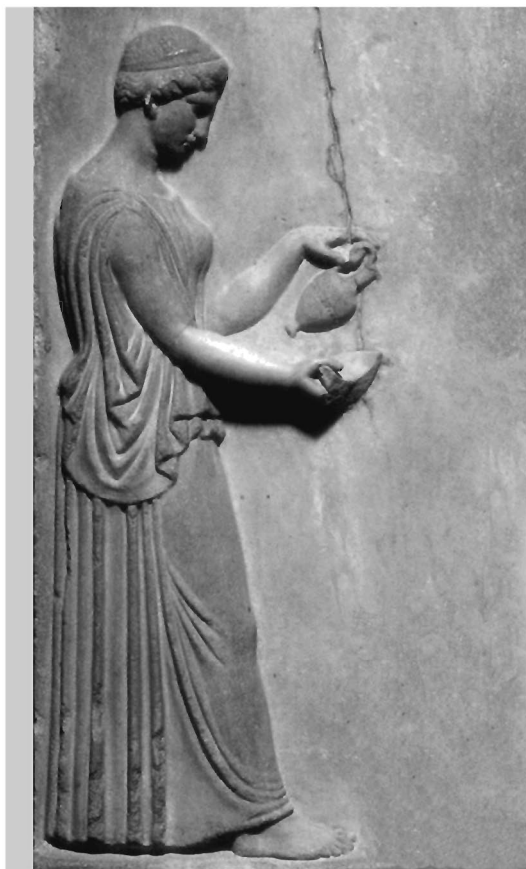
I took great pleasure in reading this highly recommended study of the value of victory in Pindar's odes. Boeke's treatment of this topic is scientifically sound, her arguments are objective and she reveals an extensive knowledge of Pindaric scholarship. By focussing on cosmology the book highlights a neglected dimension of Pindar's odes and challenges some traditional views on this poet.

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François Bredenkamp, *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus: Meditasies*. Uit die Grieks vertaal en van 'n nawoord voorsien. Pretoria, Protea Boekhuis, 2007. Pp. 196. ISBN 978-1-86919-100-9. R150.

In die 170s n.C. het die Romeinse keiser Marcus Aurelius twaalf 'boeke' van morele aforismes in Grieks neergepen. Hierdie sogenaamde *Meditasies* bied 'n uitdaging aan die vertaler weens die onewe aard van die materiaal – soms *staccato*, soms ietwat warrig; soms filosofies-teoreties, dan weer prakties.

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