Pindar: Isthmian 2

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This ode was written for Thrasyboulos, in honor of the victories of his deceased father, Xenocrates. So while still an ode of praise, it is not strictly speaking an epinician. It was apparently included in the epinicians because of the Isthmian victory mentioned in line 13. The meter is dactylo-epitrite — using the notation of Maas (as modified by West):

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<th>Anti/strophe</th>
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<td>1. $-D \cong E$</td>
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<td>2. $E e - D$</td>
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<td>4. $D \cong e -$</td>
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For the text I have used Bowra’s 1935 OCT Pindari Carmina cum Fragmentis, Snell and Maehler’s 1987 Teubner and Sandys’ 1937 The Odes of Pindar including the Principal Fragments with an Introduction and an English Translation via Perseus.

I have dwelt on literary and interpretive questions a bit more than is usual for Aoidoi commentaries. Misunderstanding seemed very likely, especially for the opening lines, without some additional comments. For that I have relied heavily on the work of both W.J. Verdenius and Leonard Woodbury,¹ though they are perhaps uneasy company.

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στρ. οἱ μὲν πάλαι, ὡς Θρασύβουλος, φωτεῖς, οἱ χρυσαμπύκων ἐξ δήλου Μοῖσαν ἐβαίνων κλυτὰ φόρμιγυι συναντόμενοι, ἰμίρα παιδείους ἑτούμενοι μελιγάρυας ὠμοιος, ὡς ἐὰν καλὸς ἐχεν Ἀφροδίτας.

5 εὐθρόνου μνάστεραν ἀδίσταν ὄπωραν.

ἀντ. ἀ Μοῖσαι γὰρ ὁ φιλοκερδῆς πῶ τότ’ ἦν οὐδ’ ἐργάτις; οὐδ’ ἑτεός ὑπερναντο γλυκεῖαι μελιγάρυας αἰωνίαι. νῦν δ’ ἐφίητι <τὸ> τῷργείου φυλάξαι

10 ῥῆμ’ ἀλαθείας <ἐτάς> ἀγχίστα βαίνον, 8. ἀργυρωθεῖσαι πρόσωπα: Critics have let their imaginations run free interpreting this phrase. Cosmetics or jewelry signifying a prostitute are commonly read into it, but the basic sense appears simply to be “paid for, bought.” Verdenius observes that πρόσωπα can also mean the façade of a building, which dovetails neatly with a common Pindaric trope comparing an ode to a building, || 9. τῷργείοιο: A scholium says “The Argive (man)” is Aristodemus, a Spartan.

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1οἱ μὲν in contrast with νῦν δ’ in 1.9. πάλαι in/since ancient times. φῶς φωτός ο’ man; ὁ πάλαι φωτεῖς the men (i.e., poets) of old. χρυσαμπύκων ὠμοιος ὡς having golden headbands.

2δίπορος ὁ chariot-board, where the driver and fighter stood on a chariot. Μοῖσαν gen.pl. Μοῖσαι, Aeolic for Μοῦσαι, Muses. βαίνω here mount, step (apon). κλυτὸς ο’ ὁ famous, glorious; splendid. φόρμιγγις γγος ὡς. συν-άντωμαι meet; be accompanied by + dat.

3ἰμίρα swiftly, lightly. παιδείοιον of/for youths. τοξεύω shoot with a bow. μελίτηρος ὕμοι ο’ sweet-voiced. ἔμοιος ὡς hymn, ode, song.

4ὦτις = παίς, as though the adjective παιδείουs were a genitive noun, an occasional license in poetic syntax. ἔιων pres.part. εἰμί. καλὸς ο’ ὡς good, noble, brave, beautiful, handsome. ἕχω impf. have. Ἀφροδίτας g.sg. (of) Aphrodite.

5εὐθρόνοσ ο’ having a beautiful throne. μνήστειρα (fem. adj.) mindful of, reminding of + gen. ἡδύς εἰα ὡς sweet, lovely, dear; ἀδίκειαν = ἡδίκης, superlative. ὀπώρα ὡς late summer, here metaphorical for the prime of youthful life; the word can also mean ripe fruit.

6ἀ = ἡ. φιλοκερδῆς ὡς loving gain, greedy. οὐ ... πῶ τότε not yet then. ἐργάτις ὡς working for hire.

7πέρνημι 3.pl.pass.impf. to sell. γλυκός εἰα ὡς sweet, lovely, kind. Agrees with l.8 αἰωνίαι. μελιφθόγγος ο’ honey-voiced; agrees with Τερψιχόρας. ποτί = πρός, here with gen. at the hands of, by. Τερψιχόρη gen.sg. Terpsichore, the Muse of dance.

8ἀργυρωμόν aor.pass.part. nom.pl.f. cover with silver. πρὸσωπον τὸ face; likeness, look, appearance; acc. of respect, “with silvered appearance.” μελιτέριονον ο’ soft-voiced. ἀοιδή ὡς song.

9ἐφ-τείμι Dor. pres.act. 3sg. send to; give up; give a command or request. The subject is Terpsichore. τὸ τοῦ Ἀργείου ῥῆμα φυλάξαι τῷργείοιον = τὸ κ’ Ἀργείου. Ἀργείος ο’ ον from Argos, Argive. φυλάσσω φυλάσσω εἰμιλάβα aor.act.inf. keep watch over; pay attention to.

10ῥῆμα ματος τὸ word; saying. ἀλήθεια ὡς truth. ἑτεός ο’ ὡς true, genuine, here contracted gen.sg.f. ἀγχίστων ο’ (sup. of ἀγχίστα) + gen. nearest. βαίνον pres.act.part. acc.sg.neut. of βαίνω. ... ῥῆμα βαίνον ἀγχίστα <ἐτάς> ἀλήθειας
ἐπ. “χρήματα, χρήματ’ ἀνήρ,” ὃς φᾶ κτεάνων θ’ ἀμα λειψθείς καὶ φίλων.
ἔσσι γὰρ  ὄν κατοχός, οὐκ ἄγυνω’  ἀείδω
Ἱσθίμαι ὤποισι νίκαιν,
tάν Ξενοκράτει Ποσειδάων ὀπάσαις,
15 Δωρίων αὐτῷ στεφάνωμα κόμα
πέμπων ἀναθειόθαι σελίνων,

11. χρήματα, χρήματ’ ἀνήρ: “Money! Money makes the man.” ὃς: could either be relative, where the prose order would be φᾶ ὃς, or a demonstrative (Smyth §338b). || 12. ἵσσι γὰρ ὄν κατοχός: In dialog, when answering a question a speaker may start off with γὰρ to give the reason for the answer, leaving the actual answer implied. In this line Pindar is implying something like, “but I’ll say no more of this, since…” σοφός: “Wise” is the usual translation of this but in Pindar it signifies both poetic skill and sophisticated appreciation of that skill. Pindar is flattering Thrasyboulos’ good taste.

στρ. εὐάρματον ἄνδρα γεραῖς, Ἀκραγαντίνων φάος.
ἐν Κρίσα δ’ εὐρυθένης εἶδ’ Ἀπόλλων νιν πόρε τ’ ἄγλαῖν
καὶ τόθι κλειναῖς τὸν Κρίσα ἐσσὶ ἠρεχθείδαιν χαρίτεσσιν ἀραρίσκω
20 ταῖς λιπαράις ἐν Ἀθήναις, οὐκ ἐμεμφὴθη

12 ἄγνωτ’ Bowra, Snell: ἄγνωτ’ mss.
ῥυσίδιφρον χείρα ἡλαξίπποι φωτός,

ἀντ. τάν Νικόμαχος κατὰ καίρον νεῖμ’ ἀπάσαις ἁνίαις·
ὁν τε καὶ κάρυκες ὥραν ἀνέγγειλες, σπονδοφόροι Κρονίδα
Ζηνός Άλειοι, παθόντες πού τι φιλόξενον ἔργον·
25 ἀδυνάτῳ τέ νιν ἀσπαζόντο φωνῆ χρυσέας ἐν γούνασιν πίτνον τίνα Νίκας

ἐπ. γαίαν ἀνὰ σφετέρον, τάν ὁ Όλυμπίος Διὸς ἅλος; ἵν’ ἂθανάτοις Ἀἰνησίδαμοι
παθόντες πού τι φιλόξενον ἔργον· ἡδύπνοος τόν ἔργον τόν 
20 χρυσέας ἐν γούνασιν πίτνον Νίκας γαῖαν ἀνὰ σφετέραν, τάν δὴ καλέοισιν Ὀλυμπίου Διὸς ἅλος; ἵν’ ἂθανάτοις Ἀἰνησίδαμοι
παθόντες πού τι φιλόξενον ἔργον· ἡδύπνοος τόν ἔργον τόν .
30 οὐ γὰρ οὐκ ἀγνώστης ἄθανάτοις Ἀἰνησίδαμοι, ἔργον τόν ἔργον τόν .

στρ. οὐ γὰρ πάγος, οὐδὲ ἱπποτήνης ἁ ἀπελευθὺς γίνεται,
ἐν τις εὐδόξων ἐς ἄνδρῶν ἄγοι τιμᾶς Ἑλικωνιάδων.
35 μακρὰ δισκήσιας ἀκοντίσσαιμι τοσοῦθ᾽, ὅσον ὅργαν
ζεινοκράτης ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπων γλυκεῖαν
ἐσχέν. αἰδοῖος μὲν ἦν ἀστός ὁμιλεῖν,

ἀντ. ἵπποτροφίας τε νομίζων ἐν Πανελλάνων νόμων·
καὶ θεῶν δαίς προσεπτυκτο πάσας· οὐδὲ ποτε ἔζειναν

οὗρος ἐμπνεύσαις ἤπεστειλ᾽ ἴστον ἀμφὶ τράπεζα·
ἀκοντίζεται ἄκοντίζει ἄκοντίζει·

ἔτη. μὴ νυν, ὅτι φθονερὰς θνητῶν φρένας ἄμφικρέμαται ἐλπίδες,

39–42. Pindar often uses nautical metaphor. Here he says that Xenocrates’ hospitality (ἱστίον) was never drawn in (οὐδὲ ποτε... ὑπέστειλ᾽) even when many guests (οὗρος) arrived. Various interpretations are offered for sailing to Phasis in summer and the Nile in winter. Within the nautical metaphor Pindar has constructed a merism — defining a totality by naming contrasting parts — with these distant locations and opposite seasons. It seems safest simply to take lines 41–42 to mean that his hospitality was granted “at all times and in all circumstances”

ἐπ. μὴ νυν, ὅτι φθονεραὶ θνητῶν φρένας ἄμφικρέμαται ἐλπίδες,
μήτ’ ἀρετάν ποτε σιγάτω πατρώαν,
μηδὲ τούδ’ ἡμῶν· ἐπεί τοι
οὐκ ἐλινύοντας αὐτοὺς εἰργασάμαν.
ταῦτα, Νικάσιππ’, ἀπόνειμον, οὖν
ζεῖνον ἐμὸν ἡθαῖον ἐλθης.

45 μήτε continuing, not cancelling, l.43 μή, ἀρετή η excellence, virtue. σιγάω pres.act.imp. 3sg. be silent; keep silent; based on πατρώαν, the subject of the 3rd person imperative is taken to be “the son” or the like. πατρῷος η of one’s father; hereditary.
45 τοῖς as so often, could either be a particle or the 2sg. dative, “for you.”
46 ἐλινύω fut.act.part. acc.pl.m. take a holiday, rest, stand idle; fut.part. indicating purpose. ἐργάζομαι ἐργάσομαι εἰργασάμην aor.mid.1sg. work, make, do.
47 ταῦτα i.e., the words of this ode. Νικάσιππος unknown person who evidently delivered the poem to Thrasyboulos, perhaps also supervising the performance. ἀπονέμω aor.act.imp. 2sg. assign, impart.
48 ζεῖνος ὁ a guest-friend. ἡθαῖος α of one trusted, honored; Verdenius believes the word also contains the suggestion of affection. ἐλθης aor.act.subj. 2sg. here reach with acc.