

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

Classics Faculty Works

Classics

---

2006

### Review Of "Thucydides And Pindar: Historical Narrative And The World Of Epinikian Poetry" By S. Hornblower

Rosaria Vignolo Munson

*Swarthmore College*, [rmunson1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:rmunson1@swarthmore.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-classics>



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Rosaria Vignolo Munson. (2006). "Review Of "Thucydides And Pindar: Historical Narrative And The World Of Epinikian Poetry" By S. Hornblower". *Journal Of Hellenic Studies*. Volume 126, 171-172.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-classics/8>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classics Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

argument: his writings have always privileged construction of proofs over mere evocation of the past.

But let there be no mistake. The subject-matter here is just as much Persian history as attempts to decode the Apadana, the *Daiva* inscription, or the *qanats* of the Western Desert, and the future of Achaemenid studies needs the accumulated wisdom of classical scholarship as well as the temptation of Assyriologists or Egyptologists into unfashionably late periods. For Achaemenid specialists from a classical background, non-Greek material has an exotic allure – and a greater potential for producing genuinely new evidence. But critical understanding of the comparatively familiar can be just as challenging, and C. is a master of that art.

CHRISTOPHER TUPLIN  
*University of Liverpool*

ROMILLY (J. de) **L'Élan démocratique dans l'Athènes ancienne.** Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 2005. Pp. 156. €16. 2877065561.

De Romilly has been writing on Greek history and literature for some sixty years. Her latest book is addressed to readers to whom she apologizes for using the occasional Greek word and giving the occasional specific reference to a Greek text. After a short introduction on the appearance of *isegoria* and *demokratia* in Athens, she provides three main chapters. The first is devoted to decision-making by an assembly in which all citizens could speak and vote (and R. points out to those who complain of the exclusion of women that, when she was young, women still could not vote in France). The dangers of government by mass meeting stimulate thought about political issues; Thucydides and Euripides show us the height to which debating had risen by the end of the fifth century. In ch.2 R. passes from the assembly to the lawcourts, where there was not the free-for-all of the assembly but a pair of timed and opposed speeches, and she sees the influence of the judicial model in Thucydides and Euripides, in their own speeches and in the way in which they seek to establish causes and responsibilities. Ch.3 is concerned specifically with tragedy, and in it R. argues that the tragedians increasingly left the exotic and monstrous elements of myth out of their plays (except in the comments of the choruses) and focused on the human problems arising out of the stories, whereas recent French literature dealing with the myths is once more interested in the exotic and monstrous. R. has already insisted that Classical Athens offers us principles, not models to follow. In her conclusion she asks what lessons can be learned by today's France, increasingly alienated from political involvement and feelings of community; and she commends two organizations with which she has been involved, *L'élan nouveau des citoyens*, which seeks to encourage manifestations of communal spirit at grass-roots level, and *Sauvegarde des enseignements littéraires*, which champions the study of classical literature for its moral and intellectual effects.

I am not well placed to estimate the impact of this book on the French readers for whom it is intended; but R. writes with *élan*, with eloquence and with a deep love of the subject, and gives an attractive account of some of the achievements of fifth-century Athens. (Sadly, she holds to the old view of the fourth century as a time of decline.) On a few small details she might be corrected, but to pursue them would be to read the book in the wrong spirit. It is a little more disturbing that, although she seems to regard Thucydides' speeches as his own creation rather than to any extent as an attempt to report what was said, she accepts (for instance) his distinction between Pericles and later politicians in a way which even to a reader of my generation seems somewhat innocent.

Beyond that, readers of *JHS* will know that I have misgivings about the tendency to regard everything that is attested for democratic Athens as specifically a product of the Athenian democracy (see *JHS* 123 (2003) 104-19). R. accepts that what she has focused on in Athens in the second half of the fifth century can be found *in embryo* in earlier, including non-Athenian, literature, but she attributes specifically to the Athenian democracy the kind of argument which she has praised in her second chapter and the use of myth which she has praised in her third. Of course Thucydides and Euripides were Athenian, and Athens had councils, assemblies and lawcourts in which rational arguments were deployed – but many of the sophists were not Athenians; other states, too, had councils, assemblies and lawcourts, if not organized on the same basis as in Athens; and Thucydides represents Greeks from many cities as arguing in very much the same way. We have virtually no literature of the late fifth century from outside Athens (there is Gorgias' *Helen*, which R. mentions), but I wonder how far the intellectual achievement of the generation of Thucydides and Euripides, attractively described in this book, was in fact distinctively Athenian and democratic.

P.J. RHODES  
*University of Durham*

HORNBLOWER (S.) **Thucydides and Pindar. Historical Narrative and the World of Epinician Poetry.** Oxford UP, 2004. Pp. xv + 454, illus. £60. 0199249199.

None of the honorands of epinician poetry or their relations appear in Thucydides. Nevertheless, Hornblower argues that Thucydides and Pindar are heirs to the same cultural and literary traditions, share similar values, and even employ comparable narrative techniques. The book is divided into two parts, treating respectively historical parallels and intertextual connections. In Part I, the introductory chapter begins by discussing the religious and political significance of athletic games, as well as the origins and attested beginnings of epinician poetry. After discussing the possibility of whether Thucydides may have known Pindar's work directly in

ch.2 (evidence for epinician poetry in Thucydides is only indirect), H. examines a number of non-athletic Pindaric topics that also occur in Thucydides' narrative or speeches (ch.3). These include *hesychia* (i.e. 'peace', in public discourse), (royal) power, and medicine or medical metaphors applied to political circumstances (see the medical theme in *Pythian* 4, both in the myth and in the culminating exhortation to Arcesilas of Cyrene to restore the exiled Damophilos). Other common themes are hope and ambition, leading to *stasis* or exile. Ch.4 considers the mythical element: here Thucydides and Pindar intersect very little, except when it comes to colonization, since Thucydides is remarkably interested in the origins of Greek Mediterranean settlements and Pindar's athletes are often also oikists. So, for example, H. sets Pindar's narrative of Tlepolemos' colonization of Rhodes in *Olympian* 7 side by side with Thucydides' unusually poetic account of how Alcmaeon came to settle at the mouth of the Achelous in Acarnania after the murder of his mother (2.105.5).

Ch.5, which concludes Part I and is the longest of the book (144 pages), surveys in geographical order cities and individuals celebrated or mentioned in Pindar's (and Bacchylides') epinician and other poetry. The connections with Thucydides that this prosopographical *tour de force* reveals are few and far between.

The most striking is represented by the family of Diagoras of Rhodes, the honorand of *Olympian* 7, whose son, Dorieus, plays a rather prominent rôle in Thucydides' narrative (3.81, 8.44). There is little else at this specific factual level, though Pindar and Thucydides evidently belonged to the same social milieu. Other parts of this chapter are designed to help us contextualize Pindar politically, as when it explores the possible reasons for the prominence of Aegina in Pindar's epinician poetry. H. consistently argues against modern notions of an anti-Ionian or anti-democratic bias in Pindar, but he shows that, on the one hand, Pindar celebrates Aegina as a dynamic naval city and, on the other hand, he does not represent Athens as an imperial superpower. Pindar, in other words, takes the allied viewpoint and creates a complementary image to that of the historical circumstances subsequently depicted by Thucydides.

If Part I explores the historical and cultural connections between the prose of Thucydides and the poetry of Pindar, Part II is about their 'intertextuality', defined in the introductory ch.6 as the literary relationship between texts. Ch.7 is then devoted to Thucydides' detailed narrative of the Olympic games of 420 BC, with which H. opens his book and which he here calls, in the chapter's title, 'The clearest example of Thucydides *Pindaricus*'. Shifting the focus from narrative to authorial statements on method (ch.8), H. finds Thucydides and Pindar equally self-conscious about their craft, polemical toward their predecessors, selective with their material, and concerned with truth, though in other respects Pindar has more in common with Homer and Herodotus than Thucydides. The

chapter in fact ends with a digression on Herodotus' narrative about Dorieus in Book 5, where the linear historical progress is derailed by 'honour-conscious ... elite individuals'. The latter represent a Pindaric category that includes, among others, the Thucydidean Alcibiades.

In ch.9, on 'Antiquarian "excursuses"', H. shows that some of Thucydides' digressions (e.g. on the Peisistratids at 6.54-9) are as daring and elusive as Pindaric myths or equally paradigmatic. Similarly, in spite of the fact that Pindar and Thucydides use direct speeches (ch.10) in remarkably different ways, both authors like to contrast action and thought (or speech) and give their speakers a tendency to generalize. Thucydidean speeches, moreover, are the most likely places where we find metaphor, which is of course a pervasive phenomenon in both Pindar and Bacchylides.

Ch.11 begins as a study of narrative (as opposed to the previously examined narratorial interventions and speeches) from a *narratological* viewpoint, including an interesting point about the focalization of Thucydides' account of the last battle in the harbour of Syracuse. The rest of the discussion, however, mainly singles out certain sections in Thucydides that are Pindaric in subject-matter or vocabulary, especially in the Sicilian books. The last chapter (ch.12) considers the judgement of ancient critics who, unlike most modern ones, have explicitly drawn parallels between Thucydides and Pindar by virtue of their similarly elevated language (Marcellinus) or 'austere style' (Dionysius of Halicarnassus). The appearance of this evidence is a nice surprise, which in itself does much to justify H.'s project.

The summary I have given oversimplifies the seemingly spontaneous twists and turns of H.'s exposition. This is not an easy book to read; it is in fact, in the words of a colleague, 'as difficult as a Pindaric ode'. Parentheses and digressions abound, and the subdivision into parts and chapters is asymmetrical and permeable. Some of the parallels are stretched and either overwhelmed by the differences or, as they straddle different levels, not entirely convincing. But the accumulation of learned details is astounding and really casts a new light on both authors. *Gutta cavat lapidem*: by the time the reader reaches the end, s/he is likely to surrender to the author's overarching thesis (37) that 'two hearts beat in Thucydides' breast and that the prose chronicler of warfare had some of Pindar the poet in him'.

ROSARIA V. MUNSON  
Swarthmore College