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

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Review by: Rosaria V. Munson
Published by: The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/30033431
Accessed: 09/03/2014 15:20

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argue: his writings have always privileged construc-
tion 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.

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ROMILLY (J. de) L’Élan démocratique dans
l’Athènes ancienne. Paris: Éditions de Fallois,

De Romilly has been writing on Greek history and lit-
erature 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 intro-
duction 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 com-
ments of the choruses) and focused on the human prob-
lems arising out of the stories, whereas recent French
literature dealing with the myths is once more interest-
ed 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
green-level, and Sauvegarde des enseignements
littéraires, which champions the study of classical liter-
ature for its moral and intellectual effects.

HORNBLOWER (S.) Thucydides and Pindar.
Historical Narrative and the World of Epinikan
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None of the honorands of epinikian poetry or their rela-
tions 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 his-
torical parallels and intertextual connections. In Part I,
the introductory chapter begins by discussing the reli-
gious and political significance of athletic games, as
well as the origins and attested beginnings of epinikian
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 hyscchia (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 Acheleous in Acamania 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 Diogoras 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’.

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