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

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Thucydides and Pindar. Historical Narrative and the World of Epinikian Poetry by S. Hornblower
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argu-ment: 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 unashionably 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
dedicated 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
grounds level, and Sauvegarde des enseignements littéraires, which champions the study of classical liter-
ature 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' speech-
es 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 gen-
eration 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 prod-
uct 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, lit-
erature, 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 out-
side Athens (there is Gorgias' Helen, which R. men-
tions), but I wonder how far the intellectual achieve-
ment of the generation of Thucydides and Euripides,
attracively described in this book, was in fact distinct-
ively Athenian and democratic.

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HORNBLOWER (S.) Thucydides and Pindar.
Historical Narrative and the World of Epinikian
0199249199.

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 '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 Alcmeon came to settle at the mouth of the Acheulon 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 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 ‘interextuality’, 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 Alebiades.

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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