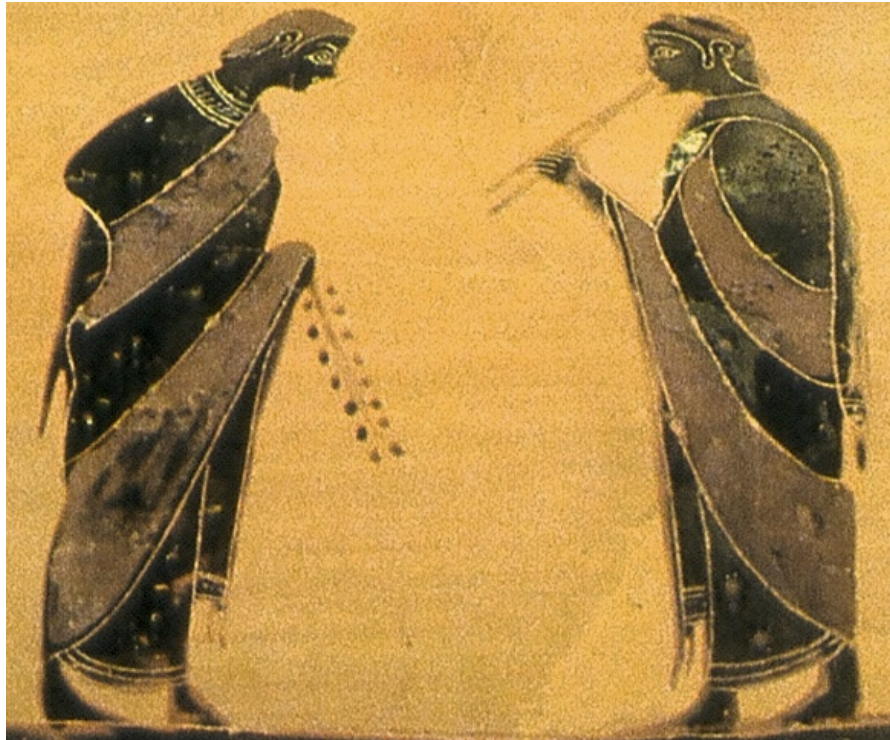


CLAS 0210

Sport in the Ancient Greek World



Class 24

Monday 22 March 2010

What happened if you won?

Part II: Victory Poetry

Epinician Poetry

From ca. 530 - 430 BC...

Hymns for an athlete's victory in the games were included in the festivities.

Composed for the occasion by a professional writer

Chanted to musical accompaniment (lyre) — by the poet himself or by a chorus of young men

The victor himself (or family and friends, or his sponsoring town) paid the expenses of commissioning a song “upon the victory” —
epi + nike [“victory”] = **epinikia** [**Epinician odes**]

Famous epinician poets

Among many famous names, the great three are:

Simonides
Bacchylides
Pindar

More of Pindar's work has chanced to survive:
The 4 books of Epinician Odes —

Olympians (14 odes)
Pythians (12 odes)
Nemean (8 odes)
Isthmian (9 odes)

Pindar

Born 518 B.C.

His poems can be dated...

from the Olympic and other victory lists

First poem: Pythian Games 498 B.C.

Last poem: Pythian Games 446 B.C. (at age 72)

... so Pindar's poems span the first half of 5th cent. B.C.

Arranged by:

- importance of each games

- importance of the event

- importance of the victor

Pindar's poems were written for the full range of events

But he does not describe victories in the manner of a sports reporter:



He does pay attention to the particular event in which the victory was won, by his choice of imagery or myth (e.g., Pelops' chariot race)

Pelops and Hippodameia



Who were the victors for whom Pindar wrote?

Were they a fair cross-section?

We know many of their names from the victors' lists

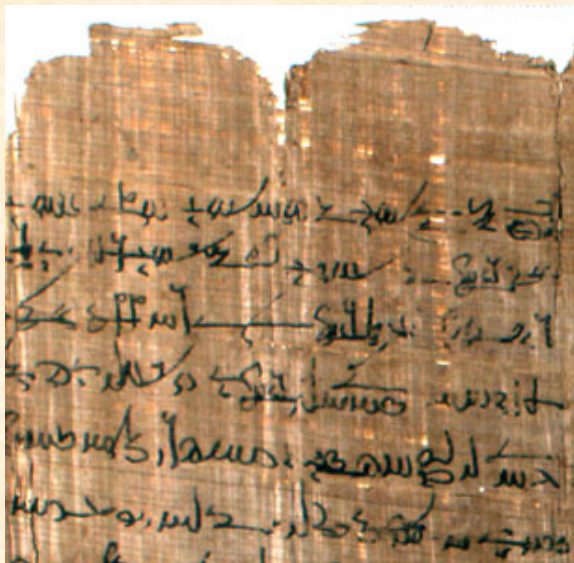
Most are from wealthy and locally influential families

From all over the Greek world, but especially (17/45)
in the Greek west (the “new world”)

Pindar portrays his relations as personal and equal

Music

Musical notation preserved on stone inscriptions or in papyrus manuscripts, like this:



To view Greek musical manuscripts and hear them:

<http://classics.uc.edu/music/yale/index.html>

Basic Constituents of an Epinician Ode

- **Proclamation of victory**, with factual details (e.g., victor's name. name of his father, place of victory, the event. [These are clearly essential if the poet is to fulfill his contract.]
- **Myth** (one or more). — either telling a story from mythology as the main ornament of the poem, or brief mythological parallels to illustrate moral points.
- **Proverbial statements** or moral maxims [*gnomes*]
- **Prayers**

Examples of Gnostic Statements

- “All achievements come from the gods.”
- “The waves of Hades break over all.”
- “Excellence without risk is not honored among men.”
- “What is anyone? What is he not? Man is the shadow of a dream.”

Examples from *Pindar's Olympian 1*:

- “It is proper for a man to speak well of the gods.”
- “A man who hopes to hide his doings from the gods is deluded.”
- “A single day's blessing is the highest good a mortal knows.”

Structure of Pindaric epinician odes

Written in triads:

strophe, antistrophe, epode
(3-5 of them; *Olympian* 1 has 4)

Flow of thought has an ABA structure to it:

e.g.,

- (1) Name and praise the victor
- (2) Comment on the victory via myth as an analogy
- (3) Final advice, praise, or some topical comment

Requirements for victory (says Pindar)

1. Natural ability
2. Hard work
3. Wealth (and the willingness to spend it)
4. Divine favor (a.k.a., “luck” or “things working out on the day”)