This book is a revised version of the author’s 2003 dissertation. Although it still betrays some features of the full and compendious exposition one expects in dissertations, the work is nevertheless one that will be useful not only to Bacchylides specialists, but also to Pindarists and other scholars interested in either the literary deployment of gnomic wisdom or the social function of literary forms in ancient Greece. The author’s principal contention is that, contrary to previous dismissals of Bacchylides’ gnomes, they are in fact just as deeply embedded in the structure of odes as Pindar’s and function as a form of ‘argumentation’ designed to steer the thoughts of the audience in a certain direction, often with political or ideological significance.

The first chapter surveys both Greco-Roman rhetorical theory on gnomic utterances and the practical manipulation of gnomes in various genres of Greek literature, including epic, tragedy, didactic poetry, and anecdotes about the Seven Sages (as preserved in Herodotus or Plutarch). The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the social setting and function of epinician poetry, with particular emphasis on how the gnomic portions of a poem fit into this context. For Stenger, the gnomes interact with the myth and other elements of the poem to give the victor’s momentary achievement an eternal duration by connecting it with broader truths; gnomic wisdom also confers upon the poet greater credibility and authority, as well as solidarity with the traditional values of the poem’s intended public.

St. posits four possible contexts for epinician performance, each with a distinctive audience: (1) a procession to a temple, witnessed by the entire population of the victor’s city, (2) a komos proceeding to the victor’s house, again witnessed by the entire city, (3) a symposium at the victor’s house, attended by a more select circle of social equals who share the values of the victor and his class, or (4) the athletic festival at which the victory was obtained, witnessed by a pan-Hellenic audience, mostly men of the upper class who were wealthy enough to travel. The author envisions (4) as principally short poems like Bach. 2 and 4, composed on the spot and preceding celebrations at home. However, I have argued in an article that appeared about the same time as St.’s book that a pan-Hellenic audience is assumed in virtually every epinician poem: it is therefore likely that many odes which may have made their debut in a local venue were reperformed at the next meeting of the pan-Hellenic festival at which the victory had been achieved.¹ As such, we cannot identify one specific audience for a given ode; most odes must have been destined from the beginning for multiple performances with diverse audiences, both pan-Hellenic and epichoric.

The second chapter, which accounts for well over half of the book’s length, proceeds to demonstrate in detail how gnomic passages contribute to the «Sinnstruktur» (‘structure of meaning’) of several Bacchylidean epinicia. This chapter will mainly be of interest to scholars specializing in Bacchylides, but others can obtain a quick overview of the results by reading the summaries (usually 3–5 pages) at the end of the section on each ode. The two most familiar

epinicia, Bacch. 3 and 5, receive especially detailed readings (50–60 pages each); somewhat shorter discussions are devoted to Bacch. 1, 10, 13, and 14. St.’s central insight is that each gnome within a given ode does not function in isolation, but interacts with surrounding passages and with the poem’s other gnomes, which together constitute a network of meaning exploring different facets of key concepts such as ἔξοψις, ἐναέρια, or ὀρετά. Sometimes, as his exposition of Bacch. 1 suggests, a sequence of gnomes may interrelate antithetically.

One of this chapter’s most interesting observations concerns the polyphonic possibilities of many gnomes in Bacchylides: for example, the poet leaves it ambiguous whether Bacch. 3.83–84, exhorting the listener to take pleasure in doing righteous acts, is still part of Apollo’s dicta to Admetus (like the preceding vv. 78–82) or the poet’s own address to Hieron (like the following vv. 85–98). The ambiguity helps apply the example of Admetus to Hieron’s situation and gives the poet a voice of prophetic authority comparable to Apollo’s. However, the ambiguity helps avoid any impression of impoliteness that might be involved in addressing advice to Hieron directly. Similarly, μοναχοματίς-declarations like Bacch. 3.10–14 or 5.50–55 can be imagined either as utterances of the crowd watching the victory (as implied by the preceding lines, 3.9 θυσίαν δὲ λάτος, 5.49–50 νεώντοιν νίκην) or as assertions by the poet himself. The ambiguity serves to reinforce our sense that the poet speaks for consensus values of the community, inasmuch as his words may in fact have been those of the audience. This indeterminacy of voice is analogous to the ambiguity in gnomic and metaphorical reference I have frequently observed in Pindar, who also loves to play with passages that have one application when viewed with the preceding lines and another when grouped together with the lines that follow.¹

There are, of course, details of interpretation where I sometimes differ with St.’s conclusions. For instance, he believes that the allusion to the opening of Pindar’s O.1 in Bacch. 3.85–87 will immediately call Hieron back to the audience’s mind after the anecdote about Apollo and Admetus. He does not note that the half-line (v. 85 ἐρώτατα συνέργεται γιόγαντο) immediately preceding the allusion to O. 1 evokes another ode from the same year, specifically O. 2.83–88. However, O. 2 is not an ode for Hieron, but his sometime rival Theron of Acragas. Hence the point of the allusions seems to me polemical or parodic, rather than functioning as a leitmotiv announcing Hieron’s reentry into the ode.

I am also not persuaded that the catalogue of human pursuits in Bacch. 10.39–43 necessarily alludes to Solon, fr. 14.43–62 W. We also find such pimpls of human endeavors in conspicuous texts such as Hesiod’s praise of the Good Eris (‘Works and Days’ 21–26) and the Ode to Man in the ‘Antigone’ (332–60), which suggests to me that it was a common poetic topos. We possess such a small percentage of the lyric and elegiac poetry that Bacchylides would have known in his own time that we must be very cautious in identifying parallels as allusions to a specific text, unless we can demonstrate a clear contextual connection (as between Bacch. 3 and Pindar’s odes for the Sicilian tyrants in the same year).

The third chapter is in many ways the most interesting and original section of the book, as it examines the ethical and political programs behind epinician poetry and its communication of gnomic wisdom. These differed in accordance with the diverse political needs of each patron. St. criticizes the pseudo-anthropological approach of Leslie Kurke’s The Traffic in Praise (Ithaca 1991)

for applying a procrustean model that fails to note the particular historical circumstances of specific patrons and cities. Nevertheless, he does take over from Kurke (and the earlier work of Kevin Crotty, Song and Action. Baltimore 1982, 108–38) the concept, derived from initiation theory, that epinicia serve to ‘reintegrate’ the returning athlete with his city. However, even this framework seems to me fundamentally based on a false premise that victorious athletes were regularly alienated from their communities: Crotty (and derivatively, Kurke) point to the legends about Cleomedes of Astypalaea, Euthycles of Locri, and Oebotas of Dyme, but these are all stories derived from late sources with no real pretense to historical accuracy. They were provocative tales precisely because they contravened customary practice and expectations, by which victorious athletes were honored and treated as exemplary citizens for others to emulate. To use these anecdotes as a basis for interpreting the social function of epinicia within the specific historical context of the late sixth- to early fifth-centuries (the only period in which this poetic form appears to have flourished) is to erect a tower of cards on a foundation of sand at a windy beach.¹

Fortunately, this concept is not so essential to St.’s work as to invalidate most of what he says. His analysis of poems’ audiences and political contexts city by city is illuminating and offers a model for what needs to be done with the Pindaric corpus as well. For instance, he notes that the odes for Hieron devote little attention to the city of Syracuse or its myths, and concludes that their target audience was pan-Hellenic rather than local. Indeed, these chariot entries and their celebration were part of a pan-Hellenic campaign of propaganda on Hieron’s behalf, along with gestures such as commissioning a second performance of Aeschylus’ ‘Persians’ and dedicating magnificent golden tripods at Delphi, inscribed with an epigram of Simonides. With this observation I strongly agree, and would add that the campaign was in part a response to Athenian criticism of the Deinomenids (consider the anecdote about Themistocles’ denunciation of Hieron at Olympia, attributed to Theophrastus by Plutarch, Themist. 25.1) and was aimed especially at the Dorian states whom he regarded as natural allies and from whose population he recruited new settlers (Diod. Sic. 11.49.1).²

However, I do not agree with St.’s view that Hieron was haughtily indifferent to what the Syracusans thought of him: tyrants from the time of Peisistratus to our own day depend on a popular cult of personality to reinforce their authority. That Hieron felt a need to create the new city of Aetna as a loyalist redoubt indicates an awareness of just how fragile his hold on power in Syracuse was. Within this context, gnomic assertions about his prosperity as a divine dispensation or the need to be aware of mortal limitations might have a domestic propaganda value as well. The inclusion of such gnomic wisdom helps position Hieron not only as a patron of the arts, but as an open-minded and accessible friend of Hipparchus.

¹ For a sceptical critique of the over-application of assumed initiation paradigms to Greek literary texts, see the essays in D. B. Dodd and C. A. Faraone (Hrsgg.), Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives, London 2003.

sented himself to the Athenian public as the author of similar gnomic aphorisms, inscribed on herms throughout Attica (Plato, Hipparchus 228C–229B). For a poet to frame the tyrant’s reign as part of a divine plan and order not only subjects the ruler to certain implied or expressed limitations, but more importantly, encourages the kind of quiescence he surely desires in his populace.

In contrast to Syracuse, St. presents Aegina as a state ruled by an aristocracy whose wealth was based on maritime trade, but whose position was threatened by ongoing factional strife between the classes (cf. Hdt. 6.91–92). Accordingly, an Aeginetan ode like Bacch. 13 is oriented to praise of the entire city and its celebration of the elite victor; as such, it is designed to encourage the entire population’s solidarity with the island’s ruling elite, whose virtue is acknowledged by its attainment of athletic triumphs that redound to Aegina’s collective credit. This is even more important in a genuinely democratic state like Athens: St. argues that Bacch. 10 limits its praise for the aristocratic victor by merely offering him δοξα among his fellow citizens rather than promising a poetic immortality that would set him apart. In a similar vein, the list of occupations in Bacch. 10.35–51, rather than focussing on the superiority of the athlete’s vocation as a climactic term, presents all undertakings as of equal value, with the best reward (being good at what one does and therefore much admired) open to all. With all of these observations I agree, but again, just as the author may neglect the epichoric significance of Hieron’s odes, he says little about the pan-Hellenic value of encomiastic poems for Aegina and Athens, surely at issue in a time when Athens was promoting itself as a natural leader of the Greek states and Aegina was under threat of losing its independence to this powerful neighbor.

The fourth chapter treats the contribution of Bacchylides’ gnomic statements on the powers of poetry to our understanding of his ‘immanent poetics’. In some respects Bacchylides differs from Pindar: he regards poetic skill as more teachable (see Bacch., fr. 5) and accords the inspiration of the Muses a larger role in his conception of poetry. The problem both epinician poets faced was to avoid the widespread suspicion that commissioned poetry like theirs was merely insincere flattery. They devised a number of strategies for doing so: by presenting themselves as intermediaries between men and gods, the poets could claim an authority and moral wisdom that put them on an equal footing with the patron. Similarly, by speaking to the patron as a φίλος and εἰρήνος and giving him frank advice, they not only styled themselves as equals in a non-dependent position, but they lent more credibility to the purely encomiastic portions of their poem as well.

I have learned much from this erudite and well-documented study, which is for the most part admirably up-to-date with the most recent scholarship on relevant issues, both historical and literary. I commend it to all scholars with a serious interest in the epinician genre and especially recommend the last two chapters to all who wish to study the political and social functions of Greek poetry.

Austin

Thomas K. Hubbard