PINDAR'S SECOND ISTHMIAN ODE

A COMMENTARY

BY

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Date

The past tense of lines 37 ff. shows that the poem has been composed after the death of Xenocrates (about 472). It seems to have been commissioned by his son Thrasybulus for some memorial celebration of his father's victories, and such a celebration is most likely to have taken place not too long after the victor’s death. See further below, on 43 ἐπίδες.

Metro

The dactyloepitrites do not present special problems. At the end of 14 etc. we find a choriambus after epitrites, a fact which supports the view of those critics who accept the correspondence of these metres.

Commentary 1)

1: Ὀρασώνιος. Son of Xenocrates of Agrigentum. A. Kambylis, Anredeformen bei Pindar, in Χάρις K. I. Boureβέρη (Athens 1964) [95-199], 181 n. 3, points out that this is the only Pindaric poem in which a human being is addressed in the first line. The exception seems to me to be connected with the fact that the poem, although it is a real victory ode (see below, n. 34), has a strongly personal character (see below, on 12 σοφός and 48 ἡθανατον).

1: φῶτες. Thummer writes: "Während ἄνηρ die allgemeine Bezeichnung für Mann, Mensch ist, meint das Wort φῶς bei Pindar vornehmlich den grossen Menschen, der im Schutze der Götter bedeutende Taten vollbringt". But the first example quoted by him is O. 1, 81 ἀνάλοχον ἡμίν. Cf. also Hom. 8 247-8 φωτὶ... δέκτῃ, ζ

1) Editions of the text, commentaries and translations will be quoted by author’s name only. See further the list of abbreviations at the end of the commentary.
187 οὖτε κακῷ οὕτ' ἄρφον φωτὶ θοικάς, Α. Αγ. 398 φῶτ' ἄδικον. Even if the word originally meant 'prominent man', it distinguishes itself from ἀνήρ mainly by its archaic ring 2).

1: χρυσαμπότων. Omitted by Nisetich, perhaps for poetic reasons, but in my opinion a translator should never sacrifice content to form. Cf. Hes. Θη. 976 Μοῖσα χρυσάμπωσις. The mention of the hair-band (cf. West on Θη. 578) does not seem to have a special significance: χρυσάμπως is also said of the Horae (H. Hom. 6, 5), Lachesis (Pind. O. 7, 64), Urania (Bacch. 5, 13), and Artemis is said to have χρυσάμων ἄμπωσα (E. Hec. 465) 3). Gold is a symbol of radiance and imperishability (cf. fr. 222 Δίως ταῖς ὁ χρυσός· κεῖνον οὐ κῆ λεθή κίς διπτερεῖ), and therefore is characteristic of the possessions of the gods (cf. O. 1, 41, O. 3, 19, O. 14, 10, P. 1, 1, P. 3, 94, N. 10, 88) 4) and even of the gods themselves (see below, on 26 χρυσάμως). Simpson (472) thinks that Pindar contrasts a golden age of poetry with a more recent silver age (8 ἀργυρωθεῖσα), just as Hesiod contrasted the golden age and the silver age of mankind, but the text does not suggest such a qualitative difference: on the contrary, the epithets γλυκέη, μελίφθυγγο, μαλακόφωνοι (7-8) denote the highest poetical qualities. It cannot be maintained either that there is "a preference felt throughout the poem for a past now lost when ideal poetry flourished" (Simpson, ibid.). See further below, on 46 ἐλυνόσουντας.

2: διφρόν. The image of the Muses' chariot seems to have been created by Pindar (P. 10, 65, etc.) by combining two ideas, viz. the epic tradition of the gods driving chariots and the metaphor of the victory ode as a chariot (O. 6, 21-4, N. 1, 7, Dornseiff, P.S., 58) 5).

2) It appears from Hom. Θ 217-8 that it was sometimes used merely for the sake of variation.
3) M. S. Silk, Interaction in Poetic Imagery (Cambridge 1974), 154, thinks that 2 διφρόν is "prepared by χρυσαμπότων, via the association of -αμπότων with horses". But άμπως is only once (by Quint. Smyrn.) used with reference to horses, and neither O. 13, 15 χρυσάμπως χαλύνον nor O. 5, 7 μακάμπως warrants the assumption of a special association of -αμπότων with horses.
4) See further H. L. Lorimer, Gold and Ivory in Greek Mythology, in Greek Poetry and Life (Oxford 1936), 30 ff., Duchemin, 193 ff., Dodds on E. Ba. 553.
5) See further Wilamowitz on E. H. F. 779, Becker, 71, F. Schwenn, Der