De novis libris iudicia


This is a well researched and elegantly written book, which attempts to provide an overall study of Pindar’s Aiginetan odes (*N*. 5, *I*. 6, *I*. 5, *I*. 8, *N*. 4, *N*. 3, *N*. 6, *N*. 8, *N*. 7, *O*. 8, *P*. 8). As Burnett (hereafter B.) declares in the Introduction, her aim is not to explore Pindar’s style, beliefs, and ideology, but to offer a close reading of his songs for the victors of Aigina, in order “to discover the pleasures taken and the influences felt as a particular audience watched each performance” (p. 5). From the outset B. draws attention to the formal and thematic homogeneity of this group of odes, stressing that their audience must have also cherished common values and beliefs. One of her basic arguments is that all Aiginetan odes “celebrate victors who have not yet reached manhood” (p. 5). To be sure, the ancient scholia identify *N*. 4, *N*. 6, *N*. 7 and *O*. 8 as celebrating boy athletes, but scholars have in the past expanded the list to include *I*. 8 and *P*. 8, which contain internal references to youths, and *N*. 5, *I*. 5 and *I*. 6, due to the references they make to trainers. B. claims a similar status for *N*. 8 based on its opening invocation to *Hora*, as well as for *N*. 3, an ode normally taken to celebrate an old athlete at the end of his athletic career. As she convincingly points out, the ode’s performance by a chorus of adolescents and its focus on the education of the young Achilles in the mythical section make more sense if we assume that the song was composed for a young boy. B. also makes similar observations about the chorus, suggesting that all Aiginetan songs were performed “by troupes of singing male dancers, amateurs who were, like the victors, not yet 18 years old” (p. 8).

The book is divided into two parts. Part I, which is entitled “The Audience”, is attentive to the history of Aigina and to the odes’ intended audience, the Aiginetan aristocracy. Part II, “The Performances”, consists of eleven individual studies, one for each ode. Each study opens with the ancient text accompanied by a translation whose aim, according to B., is to “reproduce, as nearly as possible, not the rhythms . . ., but at any rate the verbal design of the originals” (pp. 9-10).

Chapter 1, “Aigina and the Aiakids”, sets off to investigate the origins of the myth of Aiakos and his clan. In contrast to West (West, M.L. 1985. *Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford), 163-4), who considers Aiakos, Psamathe, and Pho-
cos to be borrowings from Thessalian lore, B. argues that Aiakos was a primeval local hero, son of Zeus and the nymph Oinona, who after the dissemination of the *Iliad* was identified with Aiakos, son of Zeus and the Asopid Aigina and father of Peleus. Aias must have been drawn into the genealogy as brother of Peleus during the same period, and both incorporations were probably standardized by the end of the sixth century. As B. suggests, this genealogical appropriation or “mythic patchwork”, as she calls it, needs to be related with the attempt of the noble families of Aigina to lend themselves a distinguishing identity and a glorious ancestry.

Chapter 2, “The Pediments of the Aphaia Temple”, focuses attention on the temple of Aphaia, built around 490 BC and situated to the northeast of Aigina. Although our knowledge about Aphaia is regrettably scarce, B. argues for her association with initiation ceremonies, noting that she must have “dominated the rites in which young aristocrats marked their advance from boy, to beardless..., and then to man” (p. 31). Initially the West and East pediments of the temple were decorated by representations of the rape of Aigina by Zeus and the battle of Herakles and Telamon against the Amazons. These pedimental sculptures, however, were taken down just before the completion of the project and replaced by two different groups which seem to have represented the two campaigns against Troy. The replacement of the pediments is usually interpreted as politically motivated and as an act of ‘propaganda’ against Athens, with which Aigina was in conflict at the time. B. prefers to see this act as the aristocracy’s attempt to enhance its identity and status. As she remarks, the “sculptured ‘message’ must have been meant essentially for local eyes and ears. It was, in other words, to themselves and their sons that the lords of Aigina offered the revised self-description carried by the second set of pediments” (p. 44).

Chapter 3, “Contest and Coming of Age”, considers the role that athletics may have played in the education of young boys in Aigina. B. asserts that competition was a significant part of their education and that it “was patterned like a rite of passage” (p. 46). Victory in the athletic games was a kind of initiation which would enable a boy’s transformation and new status. The young victor would now be the embodiment of his age group and would also come closer to the members of his family. It is this transition that the epinician ode is called to mark and commemorate. In view of this, B. argues that the myths of the Aiakids narrated in the odes have no moral, decorative, or political connotations, but serve instead “to revive a specific moment of Aiakid action... like esoteric symbols displayed in an initiation, they cause the celebrating youth to recognize his victory as a link to a further and peculiarly Aiginetan splendour” (pp. 49-50).

In Chapters 4-11, B. tries to support her thesis laid down in Part I by close examination of the Aiakid narratives. As she points out, with the exception of Aias in *N.* 8, in all the other odes the Aiakids “are youthful, just beyond boyhood