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SHORTER NOTES

COUNTLESS DEEDS OF VALOUR: BACCHYLIDES 11

There was a time when the detractors of Bacchylides singled out his eleventh ode as inept even by Bacchylidean standards: it was like the unfortunate tenor who was so stupid that even the other tenors noticed.[1] The time of such criticism is gone, and the unfavourable verdict against Bacchylides' ode has nearly disappeared as well. The mythical journey in time which proceeds from the building of Artemis' altar back to the madness of Proetus' daughters and back further to the quarrel between Proetus and Acrisius is no longer seen as rambling. Instead the ode's structure has been revealed as an elegant set of concentric rings.[2] Proetus' unhappy daughters are no longer unwanted, for Bacchylides has woven images into and around their story which suggest the integration of young women into the structure of the Greek city: the girls' resistance to marriage (Hera) is overcome through the mediation of Artemis, and they are returned to their father at last fit to be wed to the men of Tiryns.[3] The entire ode has now been described as a fitting song for a city delighting in a victory gained with the aid of Artemis.[4] The ode's images have been analysed and found coherent.[5] Epithets, once scorned as too plentiful and various to bear true meaning, have now been defended.[6] And finally, for a wonder, the song has been singled out as an example of that very thing so routinely denied to Bacchylides: Pindaric style.[7] But even the most complimentary treatments of the poem seem somehow to fall short of explaining how this song serves as proper and sufficient praise for Alexidamus, the boy from Metapontum who wrestled his way to victory at the Pythian games.[8]

Victory must have seemed a long time coming for Alexidamus: two years earlier he had suffered what must have been a stinging (and what may have been an undeserved) defeat at the Olympic games.[9] His experience may have been something comparable to that envisioned by Pindar for the unfortunate opponents defeated by Aristomenes (also in a wrestling match at Delphi): even their mothers did not smile at them when

[1] One of the earliest and harshest critics was L. R. Farnell, 'Archaeological Notes on Bacchylides', *CR* 12 (1898), 343–6. But he was not the last: see E. D. Townsend, *Bacchylides and Lyric Style* (Diss., Bryn Mawr, 1956), pp. 89–90.

[2] See, for example, H. Maehler, *Die Lieder des Bakchylides: Erster Teil: Die Siegeslieder: II. Kommentar* (Leiden, 1982), pp. 202–5; and A. Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides* (Cambridge and London, 1985), pp. 109–10.

[3] See R. Seaford, 'The Eleventh Ode of Bacchylides: Hera, Artemis, and the Absence of Dionysos', *JHS* 108 (1988), 118–36.

[4] See A. Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides* (Cambridge and London, 1985), pp. 107–13.

[5] J. Stern, 'Bestial Imagery in Bacchylides *Ode 11*', *GRBS* 6 (1965), 275–82.

[6] See C. Segal, 'Bacchylides Reconsidered: Epithets and the Dynamics of Lyric Narrative', *QUCC* 22 (1976), 99–130 (for Ode 11, pp. 122–8).

[7] C. Carey, 'Bacchylides Experiments: Ode 11', *Mnemosyne* 33 (1980), 225–43.

[8] The mythical material has been found particularly relevant to Alexidamos on biographical grounds: see C. Montepaone, 'L'apologia di Alexidamos: "L'avventura del cavaliere"', *Metis* 1 (1986), 219–35. But Montepaone's biography of Alexidamus is entirely conjectural.

[9] Since Alexidamus was still sufficiently young to be in the boys' wrestling contest it seems unlikely that the defeat at Olympia could have come as much as six years earlier. See R. Jebb, *Bacchylides* (Cambridge, 1905), p. 210.

they returned in defeat, and they cowered in shame (*Pyth.* 8.83–7). At any rate, Bacchylides devoted an extraordinary amount of space in his victory ode to the description of this earlier defeat (lines 24–36). But the current triumph could hardly be declared more forcefully: of all the epinician poems to come down to us, only this one actually begins with the word victory, *Νίκα* (line 1). And Victory is here a goddess who receives her prayer and is spoken to reverently (*σοὶ* line 2 and *σέθεν* line 9). Moreover, the description of the previous defeat is carefully surrounded (and neutralized) by emphasis on the Pythian victory (*παννίκοι⟨ο⟩ πάλας*, line 21; *νίκαν ἔδωκε*, line 39).

The recent triumph, granted by Artemis (lines 37–9), heals the hurt of the Olympic defeat, and Alexidamus, thus healed, is routinely seen to resemble those remarkable creatures from the ode's myth, the daughters of Proetus. After all, they suffered miserably – if not for two years as had Alexidamus, then at least for thirteen months (lines 92–3); moreover, in the end it was Artemis who healed them (107–9).[10] Yet the comparison of the boy to the girls is surely mistaken. Whereas they were guilty of taunting Hera (lines 47–52), Alexidamus is apparently innocent of impiety. And although defeat may have made him wretchedly ashamed before the people of Metapontum, there is no suggestion that he suffered the insanity which clearly gripped the Proetides (lines 102, 109).

The figure from Bacchylides' tale whose experience parallels that of Alexidamus is Proetus himself. The loss of his daughters is his Olympic defeat. Shame would have driven him to suicide had not his men forcibly restrained him (lines 85–91). His period of pain is like that experienced by Alexidamus, and it is his prayer – not his daughters' – that Artemis answers. Even if there is some impropriety in Proetus' past quarrel with Acrisius, Bacchylides has tactfully left the matter vague (*βληχρᾶς ... ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς*, line 65) just as he has the details of Alexidamus' defeat (lines 34–6). It is much easier to imagine that Alexidamus would be flattered by the suggestion of similarity to the founding ruler of Tiryns, a man favoured by Zeus, the Cyclopes, and Artemis, than by the implication that he resembled Proetus' foolish young daughters who ran howling through the Arcadian fields. Moreover, unlike his daughters, who appear in only one episode, Proetus figures throughout the mythical narration included in the ode.

It was ten years from the time of Proetus' initial departure from Argos until his daughters began the mad events that ended in a victory parallel to that of Alexidamus (lines 59–61). The chronological detail would seem to be irrelevant (even gratuitous) information except for the fact that the precision of the figure – ten years – alerts us and helps to spin an associative thread that ties Alexidamus not only to Proetus but also to another group of men who waited long for their victory, the Greeks at Troy (lines 120–6). Bacchylides closes his ode by looking back to the time when Artemis came with the first Greek settlers to Metapontum, settlers composed of warriors who had sacked Priam's city. Bacchylides even reminds us of the long wait they had for their victory:

> *... ἐπεὶ χρόνωι*
> *βουλαῖσι θεῶν μακάρων*
> *πέρσαν πόλιν εὐκτιμέναν ...*

[10] The parallels between Alexidamus and the Proetides are adduced with varying specificity and emphasis by Burnett, op. cit., p. 113; Stern, op. cit., pp. 275–6; Carey, op. cit., pp. 236–40; and Jebb, op. cit., p. 210. Farnell, op. cit., pp. 345–6, saw no real connection at all between the victor and the myth. Others (e.g. Segal, op. cit., and Seaford, op. cit.) choose not to discuss the relevance of the myth to the victor.

> ... when at last
> through the counsels of the blessed gods
> they sacked the goodly city... (lines 120–2)

Jebb's note on χρόνῳ is 'after ten years' war', and he compares Aesch. *Ag.* 126 χρόνῳ μὲν αἱρεῖ Πριάμου πόλιν ἅδε κέλευθος. Bacchylides could use the phrase χρόνῳ just as Aeschylus would, knowing that the figure of ten years had for centuries been accepted as the period of the battle for Troy. Aeschylus' δέκατον μὲν ἔτος (*Ag.* 40) had behind it the authority of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the former, the Greeks have the prophecy that they will take Troy in the tenth year (τῷ δεκάτῳ δὲ πόλιν αἱρήσομεν εὐρυάγυιαν, *Il.* 2.329); in the latter epic we learn that that is just what they did (*Od.* 14.240–2):

> ἔνθα μὲν εἰνάετες πολεμίζομεν υἷες Ἀχαιῶν,
> τῷ δεκάτῳ δὲ πόλιν Πριάμου πέρσαντες ἔβημεν
> οἴκαδε σὺν νήεσσι, θεός δ' ἐκέδασσεν Ἀχαιούς.

Victory, Bacchylides explains, is something worth waiting for. Proetus left Argos, and after more than ten years – partly spent in extreme agony – he was granted victory by Artemis. The Atreidae (line 123) also found victory more than ten years after their departure from Argos, also having suffered greatly in the interval. And Alexidamus is in many ways like Proetus, and he is actually descended from the fighting companions of the Atreidae, victors at Troy.

Bacchylides left a closing seal in the last three words of his poem making it clear to all that his song had helped to convert male suffering and woe into male victory. The *Iliad* begins with the laying on of immense suffering for the Greeks at Troy: μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' (*Il.* 1.2). Bacchylides' final words (also about the Greeks at Troy) are μυρίας ἀλκὰς Ἀχαιῶν (line 126). Thus with the smallest imaginable change he converts the countless woes of the Achaeans into their greatest victory. Anyone with the right sense, he says, will find the countless valorous deeds of the Achaeans. Thus Bacchylides uses his song to tell Alexidamus what, happily, he has just learned: the most horrible suffering (worse even than a defeat at Olympia) can be wiped out simply and best by a single word, the word with which Bacchylides began his song, *Νίκα*.

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HERODOTUS' PROEM AND ARISTOTLE, *RHETORICA* 1409a

At Aristotle's *Rhetorica* III 9.2 (1409a), in a discussion of λέξις εἰρομένη and κατεστραμμένη, occurs the following misquotation of Herodotus' proem:

> ἡ μὲν οὖν εἰρομένη λέξις ἡ ἀρχαία ἐστίν· **Ἡροδότου Θουρίου ἥδ' ἱστορίης ἀπόδειξις**· ταύτῃ γὰρ πρότερον μὲν ἅπαντες, νῦν δὲ οὐ πολλοὶ χρῶνται. λέγω δὲ εἰρομένην, ἣ οὐδὲν ἔχει τέλος καθ' αὑτήν, ἂν μὴ τὸ πρᾶγμα λεγόμενον τελειωθῇ. ἔστι δὲ ἀηδὴς διὰ τὸ ἄπειρον· τὸ γὰρ τέλος πάντες βούλονται καθορᾶν. (Kassel)

The three deviations from the MSS. of Herodotus are (a) the ethnic Θουρίου, (b) the Attic spelling ἀπόδειξις, and (c) the transfer of ἥδε from the end of the clause to the middle. This passage has excited a great deal of scholarly interest, primarily because of the possibility it gives rise to that Herodotus styled himself in his 'title' the 'Thurian' instead of the 'Halicarnassian'.[1]

[1] It has often been observed that the first five words of Herodotus' proem resemble a title, with both author's name and the title of the work: see, e.g., J. L. Myres, *Herodotus Father of*