Pindar Mythologus and Theologus

> It is hazardous, in dealing with the tangle of ancient polytheism, to pronounce with absolute dogmatism about any not insane hypothesis . . .
>
> —Lewis Farnell[1]

1.1 Epinician Theology

The Greek gods were real: to begin with. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the argument I am going to relate.[2] Real is a dangerous word, of course, applied to gods of any era, and, while there has been more than a little scholarly chauvinism in the out-of-hand rejection of the existence of Zeus, etc., by those who continue to worship their own gods in their own way, the question of objective existence is beyond the scope of scholarly investigation.[3] What I mean by the slippery word 'real' is something else: that, as perceived by the individuals and communities of the ancient Greek world, the divine was a present and powerful force.[4] The corollary of this conclusion is double: first, that when we encounter ancient Greek depictions of the divine, we must ask what existing realities were brought to bear in the process of their creation; second, we must also ask how the new representation contributes to those available realities.

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[1] Farnell 1907, 135.

[2] With apologies and credit to Charles Dickens (and Jacob Marley), *A Christmas Carol*.

[3] On this issue v. Henrichs 2010, "What is a Greek God," esp. the comments at 28–29 on the personal monotheism that is predominant among scholars and the firmly etic perspective thus established toward the polytheism of the Greeks.

[4] We might use the term belief here, though without the valence of 'elective adoption of a particular credo' that is often implied when we speak of belief in monotheistic contexts. For hesitations about the term, v. Giordano-Zecharya 2005, esp. 343–347; for a discussion of its importance and complexities in thinking about ancient Greek religion(s): Harrison 2015; Johnston 2019, 18–19.

Pindar's victory odes teem with divinity. The gods are the patrons of the athletic contests where victories are sought and won; the source of assistance and punishment in the odes' mythical narratives; the inhuman interlocutors of human aspiration. "Do not seek to become Zeus!," one victor is warned, "you have everything if a portion of this excellence reaches you!" (μὴ μάτευε Ζεὺς γενέσθαι· πάντ' ἔχεις,/ εἴ σε τούτων μοῖρ' ἐφίκοιτο καλῶν).[5] Despite the prominence of the gods in the epinician corpus, Pindar's victory odes have been insufficiently recognized as theological interventions into the lived religious realities of his fifth-century world. My dissatisfaction with this state of affairs was the impetus for this book.

When I characterize the odes as theological, I mean that they actively, purposefully, and self-consciously conceptualize and negotiate the nature of the divine and its implications for human actions and self-conceptions.[6] While Pindaric scholarship has always recognized the prominence of religious motifs in the epinician corpus, those motifs have been understood in ways that undervalue the coherent and sustained project that motivates them. In earlier scholarship, under the influence of biographical and historicizing approaches, depictions of the gods and expressions of piety were often taken as simply reflecting contemporary religious thought, either as a reflection of Pindar's own beliefs or those of his patrons, or even as the desperate efforts of an already-outmoded mind to cling to conservative beliefs in the face of a changing world.[7] More recent work on Pindar, from the camps of cultural historians and formalists alike, has consistently included those same depictions of the gods and expressions of piety among the generic markers of epinician and regarded the gods as part of the apparatus of victory, but has continued to miss Pindar's agency as a theological thinker and the corollary implications for the nature and function of the genre.[8]

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[5] *Isth.* 5.14–15.   [6] Cf. Eidinow et al. 2016; Larson 2016, 12–13.

[7] Thus, e.g., Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1922, 461–463; Coppola 1931, xv: "In Pindaro, mito e gnome sono non solo stilisticamente affini, ma le seconda è commossa sintesi di un mondo politico-religioso, ossia etico ..." [In Pindar, myth and gnomic statement are not only stylistically similar, but the second is the moving synthesis of a politico-religious world, or rather, an ethical one ...]; Finley 1955, 6–8; Bowra 1964, 83: "[Pindar's] handling of the gods is traditional and anticipates very few of the intellectual reforms which were already at work on theology in his age." Norwood 1945, 62, is particularly dubious about the significance of Pindar's religious interventions: "My ungrateful and invidious task, of exhibiting a great poet's incoherence and irrationality in theological and moral doctrine, can now be closed ..."

[8] For example, Bundy 1962; Young 1968; Kurke 1993; Instone 1996; Mackie 2003, 77–106; Burnett 2008.

Pindar's theological project is rooted in and inseparable from the contexts in which his songs were created and consumed. The victory odes, as they are preserved for us, cannot communicate the rhythm of the musical accompaniment, the movements of the chorus, the mood of the gathered community, or the reason for their presence.[9] Nor can they articulate the contemporary concerns and experiences that framed their consumption. Composed to resonate within the experiences of a certain place and time, Pindar's victory songs have become disoriented.[10] An awareness of this dislocation has characterized a strand of Pindaric scholarship stretching back to Wilamowitz and has spurred efforts to reconstruct the odes' historical/political as well as cultural and social contexts.[11] More recent developments in scholarship look to contemporary religious landscapes as well, taking account of the political dynamics of rituals, festivals, and cult.[12] These investigations, however, have primarily confined themselves to the sphere of human experience; even those that contemplate the cultic role of the odes emphasize them as a platform for the self-expression of poet, victor, or worshipping community.[13] These contextualizing approaches are interested in how the odes intervene in what we might call a 'horizontal axis,' that is, in the interactions and relationships between humans, whether at the level of the individual or the community.

In contrast, I recontextualize Pindar's epinician odes within the lived religious landscapes of the fifth century in order to understand how the odes intervene in a corresponding 'vertical axis,' that is, in the relationships

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[9] An illustration: Simon and Garfunkel's "Sound of Silence" has been anthologized in poetry collections where it holds its own. But think of how those words on the page pale in comparison to the same lines sung in 1981 into the mid-September, New York City night in Central Park for 500,000 fans. The comparison is not perfect, of course – the Central Park concert was an occasion for the reperformance of familiar songs that had not been composed for particular patrons to celebrate particular achievements, as Pindar's were. Nevertheless, the sense of New York and its culture and a certain moment in time shaped the evening; the songs were heard by that audience on that night in a context that rendered them something other than they were before or after.

[10] Subsequent reperformance would, of course, have shifted these contexts, but this does not diminish the importance of the premiere and its audience. On reperformance scenarios v. Currie 2004; Carey 2007, 209–210; Morrison 2007; cf. Spelman 2018, who emphasizes the accessibility of the odes to secondary audiences.

[11] Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1922. The counterweight to these contextualizing efforts is the approach that sees the odes as vehicles only of praise and explains all their constituent elements as more or less formulaic components in support of that end: Schadewaldt 1928; Bundy 1962; Thummer 1968–1969. More recently Sigelman 2016 has deemphasized the ode's external contexts in order to interrogate how each ode performs and constructs its own enduring existence.

[12] Krummen 1990; Kowalzig 2007; Lewis 2019.

[13] A notable exception is Currie 2005, to whose work on immortality in Pindar I return below.

that obtain between humans and gods.[14] I adduce the presence of a world surrounding and superseding mundane human experience as a definitive context for Pindar's compositions in order to ask how they orient the *laudandus* and his community in relation to the divine. This perspective simultaneously expands the scope of the world that we can perceive in Pindar's compositions and reveals a consistent epinician interest in theorizing and modeling the nature of humans and gods and the interaction between them – in other words, an epinician theology.

1.2 Revivifying Mortality

If you know one thing about Pindar's epinician odes, that thing is probably that "water is best." If you know a second thing, it is that these songs of victory are shot through with stark reminders of the victor's mortality. "Remember," one ode advises, "that the last clothing you will put on your limbs is dirt."[15] The motif of human limitation develops throughout the corpus in counterpoint to the immortality of the gods, crafting a dichotomy that is universally recognized as a through-line of the victory songs.[16] The importance of that dichotomy for our understanding of Pindar's epinician project, however, has been obscured by readings that flatten the real and complex presence of immortality in the world inhabited by Pindar and his patrons.

Three main interpretative approaches have emerged in response to Pindar's juxtaposition of mortality and immortality as an essential feature of victory celebration. One view flattens the importance of this theme for the work done by an epinician ode, viewing reminders of mortality as toothlessly 'traditional' or 'pious' and exerting little influence over the rest of the ode.[17] A second interpretation, which I will call the 'literary' reading, understands the evocation of the victor's personal mortality as a foil for the poetic immortality that his victory achieves by virtue of Pindar's

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[14] Cf. Graf 2012, 41–42, on Vernant's model of sacrifice: "Since this act of communication takes part in a group, it has not only a vertical axis that leads up to the gods, but also a horizontal one between the human members of the group . . ." Related: Hubert and Mauss 1964, 48.

[15] *Nem.* 11.15–16.

[16] For example, Bowra 1964, ch. 2: 'Gods, Heroes, and Men' (esp. 94–98); Boeke 2007, esp. 54–72.

[17] For example, Norwood 1945, 44–71, v. esp. 69: "His maxims deserve serious attention only when considered each for the moment in its special context . . . But even if we appraise them in isolation, we must not attribute to them remarkable potency."

poetic efforts.[18] A third approach argues that reminders of mortality serve a social function: the victor's potentially dangerous exaltation has to be defused by reminding him of his ultimate likeness to his human community.[19]

By reading the victory odes back into the lived religious landscapes that shaped their creation and consumption, I offer a new interpretation of Pindar's epinician constructions of mortality and immortality, one that constitutes a rejection of the first position, an expansion of the second, and a complement to the third. In making this case I am also responding to the work of Bruno Currie, who takes Pindar's representations of immortality seriously, but interprets them as offering the victor, at least in select cases, a chance for what he terms 'literal' immortality (through heroization) as well as 'literary' immortality.[20] This interpretation, too, I will argue, flattens the complexities of immortality as constructed in Pindar's fifth-century world and in his songs.

Rather than disregarding depictions of human transience and divine eternity as two-dimensional embellishments or even as reflexive echoes of an established religious sensibility, I understand them as sites for the active negotiation of contemporary religious experience and belief. This theological reading does not negate the value of the social reading, but seeks to complicate it by emphasizing the importance of the victor's orientation on the vertical as well as the horizontal axis. Nor does my 'theological' reading precisely challenge the importance of the 'literary' position; rather, I argue that the value of the 'literary' immortality on offer in Pindar's odes is conditioned by their depiction and negotiation of mortality and immortality as ways of being in the world. Pindar's victory songs develop a model for understanding the relationship between mortality and immortality in conversation with the other available models, not in a vacuum, and then use that model to establish the victor's humanity as an indispensable qualification for his epinician exaltation. The epinician encounters between mortal and immortal natures assert that humans, because of their transience, have a capacity for exaltation realized through the immortality of song and memory that is utterly foreign to the distinct capacity for

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[18] See Currie 2005, 74–75 for a summary of this position (with which Currie vehemently disagrees) and nn. 14–16 for bibliography, inter alia Cannatà Fera 1990, 31; Robbins 1997, 258; cf. Boeke 2007, 72.

[19] Crotty 1982, esp. 104–138; cf. Kurke 1991, 6–12 and passim.

[20] Currie 2005; for an earlier objection to the assimilation of modes of immortality v. Bremer 2008, 12–17.

exaltation enjoyed by the immortal gods.[21] This is the fundamental theological claim that Pindar makes about mortality in his epinician songs.

While this single, coherent thesis motivates the odes' interventions into mortality and immortality, Pindar's theological program, like the odes themselves, is complex and ramifying.[22] In order to foreground and interrogate that complexity, I refer throughout the book to Pindar's theologies of mortality, emphasizing by the plural formulation the impossibility of collapsing the modeling in any one ode into simple coherence with the modeling in another. Esther Eidinow and her co-authors have theorized a spectrum of theology, encompassing a range of activities from anything classifiable as 'talking about the gods' (the weak end) to "an explicit, systematic, and generalized theory about the divine or, conversely, explicit and abstracted speculations about divinity which may be either systematically doctrinal or open-ended and aporetic to different extents . . ." (the strong end).[23] My reading of the odes orients the work that they do toward the strong end of this spectrum, but decidedly in the 'open-ended' camp, approaching their theological work as an exploration and elaboration of the central concern with a uniquely human exaltation that resonates and rhymes within itself but does not aspire to strict internal consistency or straightforward exposition.

Within the rich ecosystem of the epinician odes exists a set of figures whose identities challenge the sharp distinction between mortality and immortality. Herakles is born mortal and experiences apotheosis; the Dioskouroi (the twin brothers Kastor and Polydeukes) alternate between states; Amphiaraos (the Argive seer) is swallowed alive by the Theban earth; Asklepios is transfixed by Zeus' lightning. Each of these figures, I will argue, is enlisted in the epinician negotiation of mortality and immortality because their multiple modes of existence challenge the validity of those categories by blurring the dividing line between them. Pindar manipulates their ambiguous positions between the worlds of gods and humans by first foregrounding their extraordinary status and then developing the surrounding material of the ode to respond to the anomaly in a way which reasserts the categorical distinction between mortality and

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[21] Cf. Crotty 1982, 56: "Anyone who seeks some form of immortality must have recourse to his fellows. Only within the community can one enjoy an undying *kleos*. The person's name can live so long as there are people to hear it. *Kleos* is the immortality which community makes possible."

[22] On 'theologies' v. the edited volume of Eidinow, Kindt, and Osborne 2016. In the introduction to this volume, the importance of the plural refers both to the "multiplicity of stories" (2) in play as well as the flexibility of the term 'theology' itself.

[23] Eidinow et al. 2016, 3–4.

immortality. Pindar's depiction of these figures depends on an engagement with the identity of each figure in the lived experiences of his audiences and results in a contribution to – or even an alteration of – those shared conceptions. Through a series of case studies focused on these figures, I will demonstrate the theological work managed by the odes and the inextricability of this work from the effectiveness of Pindar's epinician praise.

First, though, in the remainder of this introduction, I turn to some issues of methodology and terminology, including the small questions of how we can access lived religion, how we should think about the nature and function of Pindar's epinician myths, and whether we can really talk about an opposition between mortality and immortality in the first place.

1.3 Lived Religious Landscapes: A Methodology

Gertrude Stein once said of her own writing: "And then there is using everything."[24] This is, perhaps, the most concise articulation of what I have tried to do in recontextualizing Pindar's victory songs in the lived religious experiences of the fifth century and, not coincidentally, what I argue Pindar was doing when he composed the odes in the first place.

My understanding of lived religious landscapes builds on the model of Greek religion as 'embedded,' that is, the notion that religious experience permeated daily life and was inextricable from other areas of endeavor.[25] I employ the language of 'lived' religion to foreground the implications of the embedded religion model: that every experience, from walking down the street, to washing, to attending a choral performance, took place in physical and conceptual spaces permeated with religious meaning that could be activated for and by different people at different times depending on particular confluences of perspectives and stimuli. The emphasis I place on the adjective 'lived' is informed by the theory of lived ancient religion pioneered by Jörg Rüpke and the research cluster he led at Erfurt, but not identical with that approach, which explicitly endeavors to move away from an emphasis on civic cult and to foreground the role of individual agency in interpreting, maintaining, and subverting religious practices and norms.[26] In this study, my goal is rather different: not primarily to assign religious agency, but to call attention to the vibrant landscapes of religious

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[24] Stein 1926.   [25] Parker 1986; Bremmer 1994, 2–4; Price 1999, 89; Gordon 2010.
[26] Rüpke 2016; Gasparini et al. 2020; applied to Greek literature: Bierl 2016; for 'lived religion' (non-ancient): McGuire 2008.

experience inhabited by Pindar, his patrons, and their communities, and to demonstrate that they constitute indispensable contexts for interpreting the victory songs.

With as much care taken as possible for problems of dissemination (in space and time) and an awareness of the inescapable truth that the majority of our sources for thinking about any topic in Greek religion distinctly postdate Pindar, I have attempted to draw on the many contexts and modes of expression that contributed to contemporary thinking about the divine and shaped the composition and consumption of the odes.[27] I deal with these two frameworks, first, contexts and, second, modes of expression, sequentially here in order to highlight their status as mutually implicated but nonidentical lenses for thinking about contemporary religious experience.

First, then, to contexts. In some instances, as Eveline Krummen has demonstrated, these are reflected in the language of the ode itself and tell us something about the physical performance of the ode (as, for instance, in *Isthmian* 4, where the poet highlights the importance of a Theban festival in honor of Herakles).[28] In the majority of cases, though, the textual allusions are brief or absent. Moreover, the contexts of physical performance, beyond the fact that they are often impossible to reconstruct, are not the only point of reference that the audience brought to a choral performance.[29]

The athletic contests provide an obvious point of reference shared by poet, victor, and community. The crown games (Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian) occurred in conjunction with festivals in honor of Zeus, Apollo, Zeus (again), and Poseidon, respectively; references to the power of these gods in celebrations of victories won at their precincts is neither incidental nor merely traditional. Participation in athletic contests, in addition to being a way to assert and increase one's social standing, was a

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[27] All while attempting to avoid the effect described by Fehr 1936, 8–9: "Wie leicht widerfährt es uns, dass wir – ganz unbewusst – spätere Zutaten, Umgestaltungen, oder Versionen bei der Lektüre früherer, prägnanter Fassungen hineindenken, dass wir den Stoffen oder Motiven Tendenzen beilegen, die dem frühen Dichter noch völlig fern lagen ... Gerade die deutschen Philologen seit A Boeckh haben oft Dinge hineingeheimnist, die nur einem Gelehrtenkopf, nicht aber einem Dichter zuzutrauen sind." [How easily it happens to us that we – all unawares – bring later elements, reorganizations, and variations to bear on our reading of earlier, more concise versions; that we attribute tendencies to the content and subject matter, which were as yet entirely remote from the early poet ... Just in this way, German philologists since A. Boeckh have often read things in[to their texts] that only a scholar would be capable of, not a poet.] Cf. Bernardini 1983, 86–87.

[28] Krummen 1990.

[29] Cf. Gentili 1988; Bernardini 1983. See now Neer and Kurke 2019, esp. 45–122.

mode of worship.[30] The divine patron, in turn, was felt to extend favor to the victorious athletes. Pindar's odes reflect and extend this reciprocal interaction: the odes glorify the victor by emphasizing the favor of the gods and the ode itself, commissioned by the victor or a family member, becomes a sort of votive set up as a thank-you to the god.[31] In this sense – as Pindar himself notes, and scholars have further articulated – an epinician composition is like the victor statues that were set up in the divine precincts: expressions simultaneously of human glory and divine power.[32]

Local religious environments add another context, in conjunction with that of the Panhellenic festivals, for the consumption and comprehension of the odes. They were sometimes commissioned for performance at another festival in the victor's hometown, and even those that were for private consumption (at a symposium for intimates, for example) reflect the influence of epichoric pantheons.[33] The landscapes of a polis were punctuated and defined by the presence of structures expressing the existence of the gods, from monumental temples to simple shrines. These sacred spaces must have marked the daily physical experience of the city in the same way that the cycle of holidays marked the experience of time. In contrast to the single contexts of the crown games shared by a geographically diverse crowd of competitors, these local contexts varied widely and constructed distinct points of reference for, say, a victor from Opuntian Lokris as opposed to one from Epizephyrian Lokri.[34]

In addition to the synchronic contexts of local and inter-polis religious practices, the diachronic traditions of aristocratic families – and sometimes communities as a whole – constructed further parameters for thinking

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[30] Burkert 1985, 105–107: "... the sporting event is no profane festival." (106) Sansone 1988, 110: "We sometimes lose sight of the fact that the athletic competitions in ancient Greece that were organized on a regular basis were in fact part of a religious festival. Brelich 1958, 89 n. 81, is aggravated by the insufficient attention granted to the religious import of the games even by historians of religion – and the associated unwillingness to take heroization of athletes seriously. Cf. Nagy 1990, 137–145, for a different ritual ideology that sees the athletic contests as compensation for the death of a cult hero and the epinician as compensation for the athletic ordeal.

[31] On the inherently hymnal aspect of epinician v. Bremer 2008, who argues that divine favor contributes to and cooperates with human excellence, "they are two ways of indicating the same reality, like the wave and particle in modern quantum mechanics" (16). Cf. Crotty 1982, 1–40, on divine and human effort combining in human victory; Heath 1988, 189–190, on the requests for reception by the gods (valid even if one does not credit his anti-choral argument).

[32] Relevance of victor statues: Smith 2007, 96–97, 116–117 (and passim for their developing significance in the early fifth century); Rausa 1994, 39, 86–96. Cf. O'Sullivan 2003 on Pindar's agonistic relationship to sculptural commemoration.

[33] Carey 2007, in his discussion of performance contexts, indicates that "all civic locations need not have been exclusively religious" (202) – his use of 'exclusively' gets at the overlapping spheres of experience that integrated religious experience into diverse areas of endeavor.

[34] Cf. Fearn 2017, esp. 105–132.

about and responding to the gods. The traditions of divine and heroic descent could express political history and the relationships between communities, but these valences should not mask the potential significance of a perceived closeness between the divine or heroic ancestor and the present-day population.[35]

Our second framework, modes of communicating about the divine, operates within these interwoven and overlapping contexts. Pindar's contemporaries talked about the gods using a dizzying array of media with an equally diverse range of goals: from vase paintings to tragedies, coins to law cases, metopes to hymns. In (a) religious system(s) untrammeled by a single scripture or hieratic authority, no single representation or version could be considered the 'standard' one against which deviations could be measured and every representation – verbal, visual, performative, etc. – of the divine/heroic/monstrous world was always framed in contexts that motivated certain emphases and guided the selection of events and people depicted.[36] Rather than trying to attribute final authority to particular modes of communicating about (and often with) the divine, then, I begin from the premise that every representation of an extra-mundane figure in an individual's prior experience contributed to a sum of associations clustered to articulate a conception of that figure's nature.[37]

This approach asserts the irrelevance of terms like 'seriousness' in conceptualizing modes of communication about the divine and the dangers of making claims about what kinds of sources provide insight into 'real' religious experience. In 1994, Scott Scullion articulated what he saw as a corrective to the over-privileging of literary-poetic depictions of the gods: "The vision of the Greek pantheon offered in Homer, the Hymns, and the handbooks is not privileged and does not set a standard or, more accurately, does so only in literary terms; it should not be allowed to *distort our perception* of the world of *actual* cult and cultic legend, which, in religious terms, is a larger *and more complex and serious* world."[38] This is an important call to recognize the complexity of the world of religious experience and to include the practices of cult, but it undervalues the

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[35] For heroic traditions as sites for the articulation of political and historical realities v., e.g., Hall 1997; Shapiro 2012.

[36] Parker 2011, 20–34. Noyes 2016, 142–155, offers a model for thinking about the salience of these contexts.

[37] Cf. Johnston 2019 156–161; building on the work of narratologist Shane Denson; Parker 2011, 65–70, on the potential individualities and collectivities of the gods and when these aspects are expressed.

[38] Scullion 1994, 117–118. The italics are mine.

contribution of 'literary' representations to that complexity. Thomas Harrison, among others, has subsequently reasserted the role of texts we would call 'literary' in the construction and negotiation of contemporary religious experience.[39] In order to reconstruct the religious experiences and expectations of Pindar and his contemporaries, I challenge the validity of the categorizations and hierarchies that have been imposed on articulations of the divine and interpret all available sources as elements of a flexible matrix whose component parts could be drawn into focus or deemphasized by subsequent representations.

In order to re-read Pindar's victory odes back into their contemporary religious landscapes, then, I ask how the odes themselves activate, reject, and rework the multifarious traditions within which they were composed and consumed.

1.4   Epinician Myths

Pindar's epinician myths, I argue, are indispensable to and inseparable from his engagement with contemporary religious experience. The myths are woven into the odes, sometimes as extended narratives and sometimes as brief allusions to traditions latently available in the expectations of victor and audience.[40] Their representations of gods and heroes burst the boundaries of the myth itself and operate in conversation with the surrounding material of the ode – gnomic statements, divine invocation, passages of praise – as well as with the layered experiences and expectations of Pindar's audiences. As a mythmaker, moreover, Pindar draws on existing representations of gods and heroes but he does not merely reflect them back to his audience unchanged. Through their narrative power to reflect and reform tradition and by virtue of their interpermeability with other modes of communicating about the gods, Pindar's epinician myths power the theological work undertaken by the odes.[41]

Central to my understanding of Pindar's epinician myths, and of a piece with the methodologies of lived religion outlined in the preceding section, is the premise that 'figures of myth' are not separable from 'figures of cult.'

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[39] Harrison 2015, 24; Harrison 2007, 374: "One might even go further ... and declare that the various imaginary worlds of Greek literature themselves *constitute* Greek religious experience." Thus also Gagné 2015, 86 and passim. Cf. Johnston 2019, 8. For tragedy v. Sourvinou-Inwood 1997; Parker 1997.

[40] Attempts have sometimes been made to starkly distinguish these categories. For example, Fehr 1936; Hamilton 1974.

[41] Cf. Larson 2016, 67.

To take Dionysos as an example, this approach recognizes that the terrifyingly jocular figure who appears in Euripides *Bakchai*, the god invoked on the funerary gold leaves to intervene on behalf of the deceased, and the nearly-abstract depictions composed of a mask-and-stick that appear on the (so-called) Lenaia vases, all express potentially available facets of Dionysos. These facets do not come pre-sorted into the categories of 'mythical Dionysos' and 'cultic Dionysos,' each of which becomes relevant at different and separate times, but are all – or at least as many as are known to any individual – available for activation and interpretation at all times, though their salience may vary. Gabrielle Pironti and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge suggest that the metaphor of a network can be of use in thinking about the gods in this way: within 'a god network' aspects of a god's identity cluster flexibly and dynamically around the name of the god, not all equally or always salient, but all available, and not pre-categorized for application to a god in myth as opposed to a god in cult.[42] Thus,

> in a local cult, the god's name with a cult epithet is one aspect of the deity seen in close-up, not the expression of a completely different deity. In this respect myths and rituals are not unrelated bodies of evidence, but specific languages, which resonate inside the mental frame of poets who narrated tales, of painters who decorated Attic vases, and of worshippers who performed rituals.[43]

The critical implication of this approach for my work is that the inseparability of myth and cult applies to the boundary-blurring figures at the heart of this study as well. When an Aiginetan prayed to Herakles for assistance, the mythical narratives of Herakles' deeds during his human life contributed to the "Herakles network" being addressed; the narrative of Asklepios' close encounter with the lightning bolt did not belong to some other conceptual universe that was foreclosed as soon as a worshipper entered the precinct at Epidauros. Pindar's myths play within these networks, sometimes activating one facet and suppressing another, sometimes inviting tension between a prominent local feature and the emphasis in the epinician narrative, but always elaborating on and intervening in the conceptions of the figure at work in the world.

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[42] Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2015. Contrast this position, as they do, with Henk Versnel's argument (Versnel 2011, 85–86) that people held two religious realities in tension – the gods as objects of piety vs. the gods as mythical actors – and shifted between them as needed. That model, in turn, is Versnel's response to Paul Veyne (Veyne 1967, 571) who posits a mental chasm (abîme mental) between the conception of the gods as mythical figures and cultic interlocutors.

[43] Pirenne-Delforge and Pironti 2015, 42.

My focus on Pindar's myths as sites of theological intervention dovetails with recent work on the theological power of narrative more broadly and mythical narrative specifically. Esther Eidinow, proposing a new way of thinking about embedded religion, concludes, "it was, at least in part, by means of relationships, consisting of stories, narratives, and other forms of discursive communication, that ancient Greek religious culture was experienced and manipulated, transmitted and shaped by all those involved."[44] Julia Kindt has recently argued that Greek theology "was, to a significant extent, the theology of the story," and Sarah Iles Johnston makes the case that Greek myths, through their accretive and episodic nature, and their self-referential rootedness in a story world that was continually in the process of being created, promote and sustain beliefs in gods and heroes.[45] The myths woven into Pindar's odes are busy at their own theological work, articulating the nature of the divine and modeling relationships between the divine and human worlds.

My approach to Pindar's myths builds on the understanding, developed over the last century, that epinician myths function as multifaceted, highly pregnant utterances framed by nested contexts within and beyond the boundaries of their own odes. These approaches mark a shift away from earlier models that saw epinician myths as self-contained narratives inserted into an ode, interpreting the myths as either only loosely thematically relevant to the ode as a whole, or relevant historically or biographically to the victor but not much engaged with the surrounding poetic contexts. These approaches found new life in Bundy's highly influential reading, which saw myth as a formulaic element of an 'epinician grammar' whose content was always subordinated to the overarching project of praise. In the shift away from these 'plug and play' models, Adolf Köhnken took the critical step of interpreting the variations in Pindar's myths as artistic choices that created a myth cut to the needs of each poem.[46] Paola Bernardini, following Bruno Gentili's lead in reorienting conversations about choral poetry to considerations of performance and audience, emphasized the complexity of mythical relevance by moving the conversation about the significance of myth beyond the binary relationship between victor/patron and poet.[47] For her, the poet's task is to rhetorically

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[44] Eidinow 2015, 79.   [45] Kindt 2016, 32. Johnston 2019, v. esp. chs. 3–5.

[46] Köhnken 1971. As a reaction to historicizing/biographical readings, though, he deemphasized too much the usefulness of looking to Pindar's sources and influences as a way of understanding his mythical production.

[47] Bernardini 1983.

draw the audience into sympathy with the victor's praise, a goal which she argues is achieved by adducing heroes as positive or negative exempla.[48] A wealth of scholarship in the last decades has embraced the role of Pindar's myths in rooting the ode within the contexts of its community and thus shaping community identities and managing communal tensions.[49]

Over the last decades, the interpretation of cultic and ritual contexts for the interpretation of Pindar's myths has also become more prominent. Eveline Krummen, who focuses on odes for which she thinks she can identify a specific ritual setting, argues that references to gods and heroes interact symbiotically with the performative context and the poetic representation of the victor and his family, and thus constitute an indispensable framework for understanding the victory songs.[50] Barbara Kowalzig focuses on the interplay of myth and cult in epinician as a matrix within which a polis can assert its status and define its relationships with its neighbors.[51] Virginia Lewis analyzes the interplay of myth and landscape, demonstrating that Pindar's Syracusan odes weave themselves into the cultic and political contexts of Sicily and, in so doing, construct new identities for Sicilian communities.[52] Nigel Nicholson, likewise focusing on Sicily, takes a rather different attitude toward the interplay of myth and cult, arguing that Pindar's odes for the Deinomenids enter into an agonistic relationship with the contemporary contexts of hero cult in order to define the Deinomenid sphere.[53]

My work expands our understanding of Pindar's myths by arguing that contemporary religious experience constitutes an indispensable external

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[48] Bernardini 1983, 40: "Quella dell'epinicio è invece una struttura in cui, come vedremo meglio in seguito, ogni elemento – 'attualità', racconto mitico, affermazioni gnomiche, interventi in prima persona, formule d'interruzione – si inserisce in una composizione architettonica saldamente construita che affonda le radici in una realtà in cui sono avvertite tutte le esigenze della parola parlata, nel senso che la parola del poeta è volta sì ad elogiare, ma attraverso il consenso e il coinvolgimento del committente e dell'uditorio." [The structure of epinician, in contrast, is one in which, as we will see better shortly, every element – 'current events', mythical narrative, gnomic statements, first-person speech, break-off formulae – is integrated in a solidly-built architectural composition which roots itself in a reality in which all the requirements of the spoken word are perceived, in the sense that the poet's speech is directed, yes, toward praise, but through the support and participation of the patron and the audience.]

[49] Calame 1997, 2003; Cole 1992; Fearn 2011; Kurke 1991; Stehle 1997.

[50] For example, she takes *Ol.* 1 as reflecting/responding to an initiatory aspects of cult and interprets the myth of Pelops as a projection of this experience. Without the dependence on the physical performance context, Carne-Ross 1985, 18: "The general purpose of myth in Pindar's odes as in almost all high Greek poetry and in the archaic poetry of other times and places, is to set the particular, nonrecurrent event – here a victory in the games – in relation to an event in the permanent, paradigmatic world of the gods and heroes which makes it understandable."

[51] Kowalzig 2007.   [52] Lewis 2019.   [53] Nicholson 2016.

context for their interpretation because they are, in addition to and in cooperation with their countless other functions, theological. Pindar's epinician myths articulate the nature of the divine and model relationships between the divine and human worlds, theological interventions that advance the project of epinician praise by bringing those larger conversations into the boundaries of the ode and framing them in terms that highlight the particularly human glory of the victor. This approach to epinician myths should, I believe, open the way to new avenues of Pindaric interpretation, but my focus here is on Pindar's theologies of mortality and the set of 'in-between' figures who, I will argue, are deputized in support of that program.

1.5   Theologies of Mortality

Through the five case studies that constitute the body of this monograph, I will argue that Pindar represents Amphiaraos, Asklepios, Herakles, and the Dioskouroi in ways that highlight their extraordinary existence between mortality and immortality. Within Pindar's epinician corpus, as I will demonstrate, the boundary-blurring potential of these figures is consistently marked as anomalous by the surrounding material of the odes, with the result that their presence ultimately serves to reconfirm the fundamental distinction between humans and gods and to root that distinction in their respective relationships to death. In order to understand the implications of this move for the efficacy of the odes, it is necessary to consider what validity a strict division between mortality and immortality enjoyed in the complicated tangle of contemporary religious practices and beliefs. Or, to put the question another way, was Pindar's binary distinction between men and gods a reflection of contemporary thought or the imposition of strict categories onto a spectrum of existential modes?

The answer, as I demonstrate in this section, is that it is both. Within the victory songs Pindar develops a particularly epinician model of mortality and immortality and imposes it onto a complex and changing landscape in which a stark distinction between the nature of gods and humans was a longstanding principle, but one that was increasingly in flux and subject to reinterpretation. One major site of change for thinking about human mortality in the fifth century was the increasing popularity of mystery cults, which offered the possibility of electing one's own afterlife destiny, maintaining one's own identity after death, and continuing to participate post mortem in reciprocal relationships with

the gods.[54] These shifting conceptions of afterlife experience suggest that the changing parameters of mortality, its possibilities and limits, constituted a salient context for the odes.[55] Another development, however, is even more immediately relevant for contemporary negotiations of the boundary between humans and gods: this is the complex set of phenomena that we optimistically cluster under the heading of 'hero cult.' The complexity of dealing with hero cult derives in large part from the variety of figures it encompassed, ranging from someone like Aias, with his epic CV, to a certain Thorikos, associated with the eponymous Attic deme, and even an entity like Taraxippos (the horse-frightener!) who was worshiped near the Olympian racetrack.[56]

While the heterogeneity of cultic figures that could be referred to by the designation 'hero' (*heros*) by the Greeks themselves makes it difficult to articulate a usefully concise, yet sufficiently capacious, definition of the category, the extraordinary participation of the hero in both mortal and immortal experience is a key characteristic. Two nonidentical, but complementary, definitions and one visualization give a sense of the range that this single word encompasses. Robert Parker settled on a single (short!) sentence in his attempt at definition: "Heroes are biographically dead mortals, functionally minor gods."[57] David Boehringer proposes that, at least in the fifth century, a cultic hero is "a dead person, furnished with power, who is honored in cult" ("eine tote, mit Macht versehene Person, die kultisch verehrt wird").[58] Gunnel Ekroth has proposed a visualization that expresses heroic identity as a graduated middle ground between 'the dead' and 'the gods' (Figure 1.1):[59] On this model, there are purely immortal beings (god/god), purely mortal beings (deceased/deceased), and a range of heroic figures between them who participate in mortality and immortality to varying degrees.

Each of these definitions expresses the orientation of the cultic hero between humans and gods while suggesting different ways of thinking

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[54] For an overview v. Burkert 1987; Cosmopoulos 2003; Edmonds 2014 (collected essays on the "Orphic" tablets).

[55] Changing conceptions of the afterlife: Bremmer 2002, esp. 1–26; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995. Cf. Edmonds 2015, who emphasizes that these should not be treated as late or eccentric developments. Work on *Olympian* 2 has been much concerned with the presence, nature, and salience of mystery cult, a worthy avenue for further theological reading, though one that falls outside this study's focus on boundary-blurring figures.

[56] For example, Aias: Hdt. 5.66; Thorikos: appearing (as the recipient of a sheep) in a sacred law (*NGSL* 1.18); Taraxippos: Paus. 6.20.15–19.

[57] Parker 2011, 110; he attributes the gist of the position to Kearns 1989.

[58] Boehringer 2001, 25.   [59] Ekroth 2002, 330.

> God / God
>
> God / Hero
>
> Hero / Hero
>
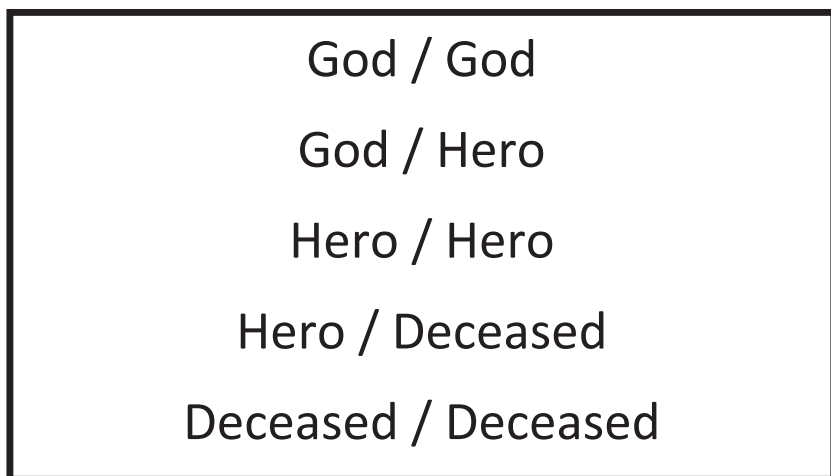> Hero / Deceased
>
> Deceased / Deceased

Fig. 1.1   Visualizing Heroes, from Ekroth 2002. Reproduced with the kind permission of the author

about this betweenness.[60] Boehringer's phrasing suggests that a hero should be oriented in the middle of a spectrum that arcs from humanity at one end to divinity on the other: more powerful than the rest of the dead by virtue of their particular power, but still drawn to the pole of human experience by virtue of their mortality. Parker's definition nods to the potential opposition between the mortal and immortal facets of heroic identity by juxtaposing a hero's mortal biography with their function as a 'minor god.' Ekroth's model reflects her work on the sacrificial rituals of hero cult which, she demonstrates, are frequently indistinguishable from those offered to the gods, a finding that could suggest either that there was little practical differentiation between heroes and gods in Greek thought or that their mortal facets were expressed in non-sacrificial aspects of their cult.[61]

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[60] Cf. Bremmer 2006, who makes the in-between nature decisive (but argues that it does not exist before the late sixth century); Rodríguez Moreno 2000, who, investigates heroes as intermediate figures in philosophical thought; Johnston 2019, 244–260, demonstrates that the narrative qualities of hero myth evoke their orientation between humanity and divinity.

[61] Ekroth 2002. Cf. Graf 2006, who notes shared sacrificial practices between heroes and gods, but also highlights the orientation of some forms of heroic cult toward worship of the dead or "generally inter-human social rites."

By the early fifth century, hero cult had been part of the Greek religious landscape for 200 years or more, but the practice of heroization was, if you will excuse the phrase, taking on new life.[62] Long enjoyed by figures from the distant (mythical) past, hero cult was increasingly becoming an available afterlife perk for certain categories of contemporary humans as well. The first of these categories, and the one best attested before the fifth century, is that of oikist, or founder. As Irad Malkin has demonstrated, the granting of hero cult to an oikist was so well-established by the time that Herodotus was writing, that the historian could refer to the phenomenon without further explanation.[63] Malkin tentatively traces the origin of oikist heroization to the contexts of colonization, emphasizing the heroization of the founder as a means of polis self-definition.[64] Pindar pretty clearly depicts this type of heroization in *Pythian* 5 when he describes Battos, founder of Cyrene, lying in death in the agora – a burial site not available to the ordinary dead – as a hero honored by his people.[65] Diodorus tells us that Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse and one of Pindar's frequent patrons, founded Aitna in the hope of attaining heroization through his status as oikist.[66] Beyond epinician and later in the century, Brasidas, the Spartan general, was awarded the status of heroized oikist at Amphipolis – despite the fact that he had in no way actually acted as founder – after dying in its defense.[67]

In the first half of the fifth century there was also a burst of heroizing activities around athletes, including both figures who had lived a century or more earlier and those who were actively competing at this period.[68]

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[62] The majority opinion dates the existence of practices recognizable as hero cult back to at least the eighth century. Its origins are still much debated. On one line of thought, the diffusion of the Homeric epics precipitated a reinterpretation of newly encountered Mycenaean graves and the establishment of cult at those sites: Farnell 1921, 280–285; Coldstream 1976 (though both recognize the possibility of a continuity of earlier cult as well). Another theory sees the reflexes of hero cult that emerge in the eighth century as a revival of long-practiced ancestor worship: Rohde 1925, 116–125; Nagy 1990, 144, partially following Rohde, sees the archaic concept of ancestors branching into "two distinct categories: on the one hand there are the heroes, stylized remote ancestors, who are defined both by their cult in any given individual polis and by their being recognized as heroes by citizens of any other given polis, and on the other hand there are the immediate ancestors, who can be kept within the confines of the polis in the restricted context of families and extended families." Cf. also Nagy 1979, 114–115. Snodgrass 1982 emphasizes the utility of hero cult in the changing social and economic circumstances of the eighth century. Antonaccio 1994 differentiates tomb cult (the reuse of Mycenaean tombs) and hero cult: "Tomb cult is a type of ancestor cult which, however, in returning to Bronze Age tombs, creates ancestors by the adoption of ancient dead unrelated by linear descent and unacknowledged for centuries" (400).

[63] Malkin 1987, 190 (referring to Hdt. 6.38.1).   [64] Malkin 1987, 265–266.

[65] Pind. *Pyth.* 5.93–95.   [66] Diod. Sic. 11.49.2.   [67] Thuc. 5.10–11.

[68] For an overview of these figures v. Currie 2005, 120–129. For analysis of the phenomenon v. also Fontenrose 1968; Bohringer 1979; Kurke 1993; Boehringer 1996; Bentz and Mann 2001; Nicholson 2016, 39–41.

In many of these cases, both of long-dead figures and recent contemporaries, athlete heroization is presented as the solution to a problem deriving from some sort of honor-imbalance arising from the athlete's mistreatment by his community or from his own misdeeds.[69] In the case of Theagenes, a fifth-century athlete from Thasos, the hero cult – according to Pausanias – arose after Theagenes' death, in response to a kerfuffle with Theagenes' victor statue. A certain man would regularly visit and beat the statue, which, understandably, fell on him and killed him; the statue was duly tried and exiled, whereupon famine came to Thasos. A consultation with the oracle at Delphi revealed that the cause of the famine was Theagenes' anger and that the institution of a cult to him would solve the problem and end the plague.[70] This narrative type suggests, as Bohringer and others have argued, that the heroization of athletes was a way of managing sites of conflict in the polis through the medium of cultic restitution. That social utility, however, should not obscure the real change in cultic practice and its potential implications for the afterlife expectations of athletes at this period.[71]

To this point I have attempted to show, first, that the religious landscapes of the fifth century are filled with figures who complicate the idea of a simple binary distinction between mortality and immortality and, second, that access to the ranks of those figures was expanding in ways that put post-mortem heroization within reach of select categories of fifth-century humans. These are the contexts, I argue, upon which Pindar's theologies of mortality depend and to which they respond by redrawing the epinician boundaries between mortality and immortality.

In his 2005 monograph, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes*, Bruno Currie argued that in view of the changing parameters of cultic practice and new avenues to heroization, Pindar's odes should be read as reflecting and promoting the awareness of select patrons that heroization could be within their reach and, further, that this interpretative lens should radically rewrite our understanding of immortality in the epinician corpus. If heroization was on offer, he argued, then Pindar holds out the hope of 'literal immortality' and not only the 'poetic immortality' that earlier interpreters have long recognized.[72] The difficulty with this line of argument is that it undervalues the distinction between heroes and gods, flattening out the many wrinkles in the notion of hero cult and collapsing

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[69] Boehringer 1996, 45–46; Kurke 1993, 149–153.   [70] Paus. 6.11.6–9.
[71] Management of political crisis: Bohringer 1979; Kurke 1993, 153.
[72] Currie 2005. See, esp. his objection about the divergent readings of *Pyth.* 3 and *Ol.* 2, 387–405.

the spectrum arcing from gods to humans on which hero cult exists and on which its significance depends. The result of this approach is the reification of the notion of 'literal' immortality as a monolithic concept, a single mode of eternal existence. That reframing, in turn, undermines the complexity of theological thinking about immortality within and beyond the epinician corpus.

I argue, instead, that Pindar's epinician program looks to the complex spectrum that arcs from human to divine existence and draws across it a stark line dividing the cultic immortality available to heroized humans from the immutable immortality of the gods. This is a theological move, an active intervention into contemporary conceptions of hero cult and their implications for the aspirations of the victor. Pindar's epinician modeling of hero cult takes the promise of cultic immortality utterly seriously while simultaneously reorienting heroization to the part of the spectrum that encompasses mortal experience. This epinician reorientation is achieved by emphasizing the dependence of the hero's worship on (1) the actions and identities that defined their own mortal life and (2) the ritual contexts established and maintained by their original or adopted human communities. Through these programmatic emphases, the immortality effected by cult is rendered complementary to the poetic, or literary, immortality that the odes themselves offer. Both cultic and poetic immortality are extraordinary modes of survival, available only to those who have earned an exceptional status. But they are, at the same time, the extension of the humbler survivals in memory enjoyed for a time by all humans on a smaller scale: the burial rites and grave offerings from one's family, the fond (or not) memories kept alive for at least a few generations. None of these modes of survival is meaningful to someone who enjoys the immutable immortality of the gods, a state nicely characterized by the frequent epithet pair 'ageless and ever-existing': for such a being, the promise of survival is moot.[73] On Pindar's epinician model, then, the immortality offered by heroization, like the immortality assured by epinician commemoration, is rendered meaningful by the innate mortality of its recipients.

The theologies of mortality articulated by Pindar's odes establish the knowledge of inevitable death as constitutive for the self-definition of the victorious athletes and their communities. Change and uncertainty, the inexorable passage of time, the struggle that precedes achievement:

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[73] Cf. Burkert 1985, 188: "However much the gods may rage or even suffer, all their stir lacks the true seriousness which comes in mankind from the possibility of destruction." Vernant 1991, 33–41.

these are the necessary frameworks for the exaltation that victory brings. By foregrounding mortality as a defining feature of human achievement, Pindar's theological program develops earlier strands of Greek thought that emphasize the distinction between humans and gods, including the influential model of mortal heroism as defined by human limitation and subjectivity to fate articulated by the *Iliad*.[74] In contrast to the Iliadic model, however, Pindar does not hold up the immortality of the gods as an ideal but unattainable state. Sarpedon's perfect willingness to leave battle behind if he could suddenly attain to the immortality of the gods is not the perspective articulated by Pindar's epinician program.[75] Instead, Pindar's theologies of mortality valorize the human condition in contrast to the unchanging nature of the gods by celebrating the unique susceptibility to exaltation and commemoration created by the reality of mortal transience. This is, without question, a pragmatic move for an epinician poet who traffics in the promise of immortality in song, but it is also a profound engagement with and contribution to contemporary thinking about the orientation of gods and humans in the world.

1.6   Why Pelops Isn't in This Book: A Counterexample

In the epinician corpus, Herakles, the Dioskouroi, Amphiaraos, and Asklepios are framed in a way that highlights their distance from human *and* divine experience, establishing them in an ambiguous middle ground which brings the immortalities of cult and memory into tension with the innate immortality of the gods. As a prelude to discussing the exceptional experiences of Pindar's boundary-blurring figures, I offer here, as a sort of control, a brief excursion into the epinician representation of a figure who exemplifies the modes of immortality available to an exceptional human and, as such, functions as an exemplum for the victor. Pelops as depicted by Pindar in the first *Olympian*, composed for Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse, offers a sterling example. Like the in-between figures of the following case studies, Pelops was, in the fifth century, the subject of well-known mythical traditions and the recipient of cultic worship; unlike those figures, his mortality is foregrounded in Pindar's epinician representation as the indispensable context for his achievements and the necessary precondition for his cult.

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[74] Cf. Griffin 1977, 42–43, which emphasizes the contrast between the Iliadic perspective and that of the poems of the cycle.

[75] Hom. *Il.* 12.322–328; with thanks to Kathryn Morgan for this example of differentiation.

Pelops' status as a cult hero at Olympia is archaeologically attested beginning around 600 BCE and had, by the fifth century, become an important element of the games and festival.[76] Pelops' enduring cultic identity in the world frames his presence in *Olympian* 1. He appears first as a long-ago founder – the possibility of heroization is available but latent – whose glorious settlement constitutes the setting for Hieron's Olympian fame,[77] while his final appearance foregrounds the splendor of the cultic worship he receives in the sanctuary at Olympia:

> νῦν δ᾽ ἐν αἱμακουρίαις
> ἀγλααῖσι μέμικται,
> Ἀλφεοῦ πόρῳ κλιθείς,
> τύμβον ἀμφίπολον ἔχων πολυξενω-
>   τάτῳ παρὰ βωμῷ·
>   *Ol.* 1.90–93[78]

> And now he is mingled
> with splendid blood-libations
> as he reclines on the banks of the Alpheos,
> possessor of a much-visited tomb near the altar that welcomes many strangers.

With the witness of the archaeological material and other literary sources we can see that Pindar's depiction of Pelops' cult draws on contemporary ritual practice. The epinician implications of that cult, however, and its orientation to the parameters of mortal experience, can only be understood in conversation with the myth of Pelops which fills the center of the ode and bridges the two cultic depictions.

The myth of *Olympian* 1 redefines the epinician significance of Pelops' cult by suggesting and then rejecting other models of immortality. At first the myth invites Pelops himself into a boundary-blurring status when Poseidon, who has seen Pelops and desired him, brings him to Olympos to serve as his cup-bearer.[79] Pindar emphasizes that this is the same role that Ganymede would later play for Zeus, a reference to extra-epinician tradition that saw Ganymede preserved in eternal youth among the gods forever.[80] Pelops' Olympian sojourn is one component of Pindar's

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[76] Ekroth 2012.

[77] *Ol.* 1.23–24: λάμπει δέ οἱ κλέος / ἐν εὐάνορι Λυδοῦ Πέλοπος ἀποικίᾳ [his glory shines in Lydian Pelops' colony of brave men].

[78] Text of the odes is drawn from Snell-Maehler's edition; any changes are noted. Translations are my own.

[79] *Ol.* 1.25–26, 40–45.

[80] Hom. *Il.* 20.232–235; *Hom. Hymn Aph.* 202–217; cf. Paus. 5.24.5 (a sculpture of Zeus and Ganymede near the Pelopeion!).

corrective to the earlier tradition that Pelops' father, Tantalos, had served up his son to the gods at an impious feast. On Pindar's telling that tradition is nothing but the wrongheaded rumors of jealous neighbors; instead, the feast was an orderly and pious meal at the end of which Poseidon swept Pelops up to Olympos with him. The convivial atmosphere, it seems, was part of an ongoing privileged status that Tantalos enjoyed vis-à-vis the gods.

But even as Pindar introduces this privilege he depicts the moment when it shatters: "If ever the guardians of Olympos honored any mortal, this man was Tantalos – but he was not able to digest his great fortune."[81] Tantalos, in this new myth, stole the nectar and ambrosia of the gods and shared them with his drinking buddies, a pretty clear infraction of human privilege and agency. The twist is that those substances had, in fact, been granted to him – Pindar describes them as 'the ones with which the gods made him imperishable (ἄφθιτον, 63) – but that the license to share them with other mortals had not. The epinician myth of Tantalos and Pelops, then, establishes father and son alike in extraordinary positions that challenge the boundaries of mortality, then snaps them back into human existence as a result of Tantalos' theft. In addition to Tantalos' personal punishment, Pelops' Olympian eternity is revoked and he is re-deposited in the human world, to become once more a member of his short-lived native race (τοὔνεκα {οἱ} προῆκαν υἱὸν ἀθάνατοί <οἱ> πάλιν/ μετὰ τὸ ταχύποτμον αὖτις ἀνέρων ἔθνος, 65–66).

Pelops' return to earth, and to the stark temporal limitations of human existence, is a direct consequence of Tantalos' infraction, but what could have been framed as punishment becomes the précis of a successful human life marked by the extraordinary achievement of athletic victory. After his return, Pindar tells us, Pelops entered adolescence, grew his first beard, and began to think of marriage. The woman who caught his eye was Hippodameia, daughter of Oinomaos, King of Elis, but she was no easy catch. Her father had decreed that the only way to win her hand was to beat him in a chariot race; the cost of defeat was death. Invoking his earlier relationship with Poseidon, Pelops calls on the god for support, foregrounding in his prayer not only his awareness of his own mortality but also his embrace of that mortality as a catalyst for exceptional achievement.

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[81] *Ol.* 1.54–6: εἰ δὲ δή τιν' ἄνδρα θνατὸν Ὀλύμπου σκοποί / ἐτίμασαν, ἦν Τάνταλος οὗτος. ἀλλὰ γὰρ καταπέψαι / μέγαν ὄλβον οὐκ ἐδυνάσθη.

> ὁ μέγας δὲ κίν-
> δυνος ἄναλκιν οὐ φῶτα λαμβάνει.
> θανεῖν δ' οἷσιν ἀνάγκα, τά κέ τις ἀνώνυμον
> γῆρας ἐν σκότῳ καθήμενος ἕψοι μάταν,
> ἁπάντων καλῶν ἄμμορος; ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ
>   μὲν οὗτος ἄεθλος
> ὑποκείσεται·
>   *Ol.* 1.81–85

Great danger does not seize a powerless man.
But, among those who must die, why would anyone sit in the darkness
seething away a nameless old age in vain,
without a share in any excellence? But for me –
this contest lies before me.

Having seen the human condition from both sides, Pelops articulates the drive to victory and the meaning of achievement in terms of human transience but not as an escape from it. In his appeal to Poseidon, Pelops does not seek divinity for himself, nor does he lament the proximity to divinity that he has lost; rather, he seeks divine assistance in the pursuit of mortal excellence. Though his relationship to Poseidon is rather less mediated than was the case (presumably) for contemporary athletes, his prayers for assistance, speed, and victory echo those of fifth-century competitors who sought the patronage of the gods and who competed as an expression of their worship. After the extended address to Poseidon and the granting of the desired assistance, the myth ends succinctly, with Pelops marrying Hippodameia, who bears him six sons, "leaders of the people and eager for excellence" (89). In this, too, Pelops' experience is exemplary for contemporary victors: the exaltation of victory, though it will mark him throughout his life, gives way to the resumed rhythms of human existence. With the notice of Pelops' sons, the ode zooms ahead to the depiction of his cult at Olympia, where he reclines near his tomb; the tableau renders his intervening death not only a corollary of his reclaimed humanity but also a prerequisite for his enduring worship.

From the focus on Pelops, the ode shifts to a universalizing description of a victor's lot which recapitulates the coexistence of the exaltation of victory and the continued participation in human existence.

> τὸ δὲ κλέος
> τηλόθεν δέδορκε τᾶν Ὀλυμπιάδων ἐν δρόμοις
> Πέλοπος, ἵνα ταχυτὰς ποδῶν ἐρίζεται
> ἀκμαί τ' ἰσχύος θρασύπονοι·
> ὁ νικῶν δὲ λοιπὸν ἀμφὶ βίοτον

ἔχει μελιτόεσσαν εὐδίαν
ἀέθλων γ᾽ ἕνεκεν. τὸ δ᾽ αἰεὶ παράμερον ἐσλόν
ὕπατον ἔρχεται παντὶ βροτῶν.
Ol. 1.93–100

The fame
of the Olympian contests shines far-off in the race-courses of Pelops,
where swiftness of feet and brash peaks of strength are contested.
The victor for the rest of his life
has clear weather, honey-sweet,
by virtue of the contests. But always each day's excellence
comes as the most glorious to every mortal.

While the fame of victory (τὸ δὲ κλέος) endures, immortalizing the victor's achievement and rendering it forever a facet of the Olympian sanctuary, the victor himself (ὁ νικῶν δὲ) is reminded of his continued susceptibility to time through the reference to the remainder of his life (λοιπὸν ἀμφὶ βίοτον), an unknown but inevitably finite period.

The ode concludes with praise of the *laudandus*, Hieron of Syracuse, a man who enjoyed extraordinary power while he lived as tyrant, founder, and athletic competitor, and who received hero cult after his death. Hieron's direct praise foregrounds the exaltation of his current victory and his other exceptional characteristics, but simultaneously insists on his mortality and his human dependence on the favor of the gods.

ἐμὲ δὲ στεφανῶσαι
κεῖνον ἱππίῳ νόμῳ
Αἰοληΐδι μολπᾷ
χρή· πέποιθα δὲ ξένον
μή τιν᾽ ἀμφότερα καλῶν τε ἴδριν †ἅ-
μα καὶ δύναμιν κυριώτερον
τῶν γε νῦν κλυταῖσι δαιδαλωσέμεν ὕμνων πτυχαῖς.
θεὸς ἐπίτροπος ἐὼν τεαῖσι μήδεται
ἔχων τοῦτο κᾶδος, Ἱέρων,
μερίμναισιν·
Ol. 1.100–108

It is right for me to crown him
with the equestrian song
in the Aeolian rhythm:
I am persuaded that I will decorate
no other host, both experienced in noble deeds and more lordly in power
of those living now at least, with the famous folds of song.
A god favorable to your concerns takes counsel for you, Hieron,
having this care . . .

Hieron's excellence is compared to the other living men of his own time, a subtle reminder that his extraordinary status does not excuse him from the passing of the generations. Similarly, the assertion that a favorable god is at work on his behalf, itself an expression of Hieron's privilege, is also a reminder of his human status and, within the parameters of the ode, a glance back to Pelops' dependence on Poseidon's assistance. The final address to Hieron, a few lines later, touches once more on the inextricability of human exaltation from the knowledge of human transience, with a wish that Hieron's exaltation may continue throughout his life (εἴη σέ τε τοῦτον ὑψοῦ χρόνον πατεῖν, 115). The language of mortality is once again gentle but definitive here. The temporal phrase, *touton chronon*, reminds Hieron that his existence is temporally bounded; the exemplarity of Pelops assures him that this is not a detraction from his epinician glory, but its precondition. Pelops' status as exemplum for a figure like Hieron, moreover, underscores the consistent emphasis on a victor's mortality throughout the epinician corpus: the reminder of death and transience was not only for victors without better eschatological options.

This has been a rather hasty overview of Pelops' presence in one of Pindar's most interpreted odes and it does not do justice to the many readings that fall outside my narrow focus.[82] For my purposes the discussion will suffice if it has established a sort of control, an instance in which a figure who received cult and whose story was recorded and disseminated in a variety of media is assimilated by Pindar's poetic constructions to the mortal camp and established as a model for Hieron and his community. Pindar's Pelops recognizes and embraces the limitations of his own mortality. His actions during his lifetime render him a figure worthy of enduring fame and commemoration and that potential is activated with his death. He does not occupy a space between mortality and immortality as do the figures in the following pages; instead his decisive mortality is the corollary of his achievement.

1.7 Structure and Scope

Every discussion of the victory odes has to find a balance between a synthetic approach that engages with issues across the corpus and a contextualizing one that takes each ode on its own terms. Since I am agitating here for a reading of the odes within the contexts of

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[82] Or, for that matter, readings that do relate. Among these Segal 1964, esp. 212–228, Krummen 1990, 155–211.

contemporary religious experience, I have privileged a deep reading of individual odes over a more comprehensive survey taking account of every appearance of Herakles, the Dioskouroi, Amphiaraos, and Asklepios across the corpus. The study as a whole makes the case that the odes' interventions into conceptions of immortality are at once tantalizingly straightforward in their consistent imposition of a boundary between humans and the gods and endlessly variable and complex within themselves.

Each chapter is framed as the case study of a single figure – or two figures, in the case of the Dioskouroi, – with the exception of Chapter 3, which examines the effect of the juxtaposition of Herakles and the Dioskouroi in a single ode. Within each chapter, each ode is analyzed on its own terms in order to demonstrate the congruencies and divergences that characterize Pindar's representations of the same figure within multiple contexts. The analysis of each individual ode looks to the others to create a conversation that supersedes the individual contexts without obscuring the internal coherence and individuality of each composition. The distinct developments of each figure, set against the continuities across the odes, underscore Pindar's play in engaging with and rejecting traditions to evoke contrasts and resonances with both the created world of the ode and the surrounding world, with its layered contexts, to which that ode responds.

The structure of the monograph reflects the division of the case studies into two groupings. Chapters 2–4 focus on Herakles and the Dioskouroi, figures whose biographies divide starkly into periods of mortality and immortality, whether as a one-time change (Herakles) or on a cyclical basis (the Dioskouroi). Chapters 5 and 6 turn to Amphiaraos and Asklepios, figures whose orientation to immortality is less readily defined and whose epinician depictions tend, as I will argue, toward ambiguity rather than exaltation. Within this structure, each chapter foregrounds distinct strategies and effects at work in Pindar's theologies of mortality; the accumulation of these facets across the study makes a case for the openness and intricacy of Pindar's theological project.

Chapter 2, "Herakles Looks Back at the World," argues that in *Isthmian* 4 and *Nemeans* 3 and 4 Pindar deploys Herakles' biography as a framework for theological modeling by foregrounding the apotheosis as a salient feature of Herakles' epinician identity. In each of these odes, the motif of the pillars of Herakles informs the significance of the apotheosis, characterizing Herakles' unparalleled passage from mortality to immortality as a break within the arc of his life, rather than as a reward analogous to the praise and exaltation enjoyed by the victor. This modeling emphasizes

that the victor's epinician exaltation belongs to the world of human experience, defined by mortality, a world that Herakles leaves behind with the apotheosis. In this chapter, I emphasize how that theological modeling plays on the tensions and congruencies that develop between the depictions of Herakles within an ode and those already in play in the local landscape, demonstrating the distinct resonances evoked by the matrix of pillars and apotheosis at Thebes (*Isth.* 4) and at Aigina (*Nems.* 3 and 4).

With the shift to the Dioskouroi in Chapter 3, "The Dioskouroi in Existential Crisis," I focus on a single ode, *Nemean* 10 and its extended mythical narrative, an aitiology of the entry of Kastor and Polydeukes into immortality, framed as a choice made by Polydeukes between claiming immortality for himself or sharing both mortality and immortality with his brother. I argue that Pindar's epinician aitiology intervenes in and revalues enduring ambiguities surrounding the relationship of the Dioskouroi to mortality and immortality by valorizing Polyedeukes' perspective, which privileges the parameters of mortal experience. This case study emphasizes the resonances evoked by the structure of the ode itself between the disorientation of the Dioskouroi from mortal experience and from the surrounding contexts of the ode.

Chapter 4, "Exaltation at Akragas: Herakles, the Dioskouroi, and Theron," argues that in *Olympian* 3 Pindar's theological modeling brings Herakles and the Dioskouri together with the victor, Theron, tyrant of Akragas, into an intricate network of divine and mortal relationships. Theron's place within this network, as established and celebrated by the ode, praises him for his exceptional privilege and his corresponding achievement in bathing his city in piety and exaltation. This is a differently flavored theology of mortality, cut to the needs of one of the most powerful men of the Greek world, but it ultimately articulates the same distinction between Theron's mortality and the immortality of his patrons by demonstrating that his privileged closeness to Herakles and the Dioskouroi is only exceptional, and thus meaningful, in light of his mortality.

With Chapters 5 and 6, the monograph moves to its second section, led off by a transition, "Sites of Ambiguity," which briefly traces the developing congruities between Amphiaraos and Asklepios in the religious landscapes of the fifth century and posits that their complex and changing positions between immortality and mortality made them catnip for Pindar's theological project. In Chapter 5, "The Isolation of Amphiaraos," I show how Pindar generated tensions between Amphiaraos' contemporary status as a Theban oracle and his identity as

the noble Argive seer portrayed in epic and tragedy, in order to establish Amphiaraos as a site of contestation between modes of human and divine exaltation. I argue that in *Nemean* 9, Pindar contrasts Amphiaraos as underdetermined oracle with two figures defined by types of immortality also potentially available to the victor: Adrastos, who enjoys immortality in cult and Hektor, who enjoys poetic immortality in epic song. In *Pythian* 8, Pindar localizes this modeling more explicitly in the exaltation of epinician praise by first setting up Amphiaraos as a disoriented oracular voice, removed from the reciprocal systems of epinician exaltation, then reestablishing his right to participate in those systems by assimilating him to the contemporary model of the Aiginetan *pater laudandi*, thus reorienting him to his humanity.

The final case study, Chapter 6, "Asklepios and the Limits of the Possible," interrogates Asklepios' presence in *Pythian* 3 through the lens of interwoven generic frameworks, arguing that these function as a critical lens for the depiction of Asklepios' changing cultic status and its activation within Pindar's theological project. I focus on the ode's extended Asklepian myths, arguing that they alternate between depicting Asklepios as an embodiment of failed human overreach and as a superhuman healer by oscillating between the structures of negative epinician exemplum and cult hymn. These interwoven Asklepian identities, I argue, require the ode's recipient, an ailing Hieron of Syracuse, to understand his own aspirations and limitations in light of Asklepios' identities, divided into mortal and immortal strands by Pindar's modeling. The ode encourages Hieron, as mortal worshipper, to seek Asklepios' healing, while himself aspiring, as epinician victor, to immortality in song.

Finally, a brief conclusion analyzes *Nemean* 6, demonstrating how my theological approach to epinician can be applied even when no boundary-blurring figures are present, and encouraging others to try it for themselves.