

Swanson, Roy A. (editor and translator, with a forward by Kimon Friar), *Pindar's Odes*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc, 1974. Pp. lvii, 358. Annotations, bibliography, photographs.

The Greek Poet Pindar (518-438 B.C.) has long been held in high esteem by Classical scholars. His poetry has been subjected to innumerable studies, analyses, interpretations and translations. Pedantic and ponderous manuscripts have appeared in prestigious periodicals on all manner of things Pin-

daric, ranging from metaphors to metrics, from mythology to music. Yet relatively few of these learned commentators have attempted to deal with this sometimes frustratingly abstruse poet within the context upon which all Pindaric criticism should be based: sports. For when we peel away the conventionally held views of Pindar the poet, Pindar the mythographer, Pindar the prosodist ad inf., we can perhaps begin to understand Pindar for what he really was: a sports PR man. He made his way in the world by chronicling (for pay!) the glories of athletes victorious in the ancient Greek crown festivals: the Olympian, Pythian, Nemean and Isthmian Games.

Although first published some nine years ago, Swanson's *Pindar's Odes* remains one of the finest translations of Pindar available, a timeless volume with a content appealing both to the specialist and the general reader. It is laudable for a great variety of reasons, not the least of which is the careful attention to the athletic aspect of the *Odes*, a topic all but ignored in most translations that both predate it and postdate it. Indeed, the sport historian warms to this volume immediately upon opening it, for there, even before the Table of Contents, appears the famous Lombardian aphorism "Winning is not a sometime thing, it is an all-time thing", a sentiment with which the ancient Greek athletic establishment would have heartily concurred.

The rather lengthy introduction is by itself practically worth the cost of the book. In it, Swanson devotes a great deal of attention to Pindar's life, the metrical and thematic aspects of his poetry, and several chronological issues. Of particular interest to the sport historian, however, is the clear and concise discussion of the history, chronology and events of the crown festivals.

Some 45 of Pindar's epinician (victory) odes have been preserved down through the ages, and Swanson has included translations for all of them, as well as English versions of some of the longer fragments. The translations are elegantly and skillfully crafted; Swanson has been true to the time-honored adage familiar to legions of Latin and Greek students: "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." Some examples:

Free of pressure, few can know the joy of winning, the light in life that compensates for all exertion.

(The Tenth *Olympian*).

If a man is pleased with cost and effort and achieves an excellence informed by deity and his fate implants in him the seeds of handsome fame, he, divinely honored, drops his anchor in the depths of happiness.

(The Sixth *Isthmian*).

The eagle is swift among the birds and, stalking from high distance suddenly stabs and takes its prey with talons; chattering crows fly low and scrounge.

(The Third *Nemean*).

Absent in Swanson's translations are the circumlocutions and archaisms often found in other translations of Pindar, and which, one suspects, are in some measure responsible for Pindar's reputation for abstruseness.

Swanson has also done a highly commendable job of annotating his renditions of *Odes*. Brief explanatory footnotes appear at the bottom of many pages, and yet they do not dominate any page. Clearly, the intent is to avoid drowning the reader in a sea of scholia, thus distracting him/her from the poem itself. A more detailed running commentary for the reader who so desires is available in the back of the book.

The volume concludes with an appendix, but what an appendix it is! No mere brief afterthought, nor obligatory acquiescence with some vaguely defined literary convention, it covers more than 140 pages and contains the following entries: Pindaric imitations, the detailed commentaries (see above), an extensive and useful bibliography of secondary scholarship and a glossary of names (both of people and places) that occur in the *Odes*.

In his preface, Swanson states that his translation is designed for three kinds of readers: (1) the reader who knows no Greek, (2) the beginning Greek student, and (3) teachers and students of Pindar in translation. The only criticism that I would offer of the entire volume is that a fourth category of reader should be included here: the sport historian who wishes to initiate or expand his/her knowledge of one of our chief primary sources on ancient athletics, the epinician poet Pindar.

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