

The rise of the victory ode as a genre of Panhellenic choral lyric in the late archaic period was connected to the emergence and culture of the games themselves. These were religious festivals, occasions whose myths, ritual programs, and very language were shot through with the sacred, and which formed part of a larger constellation of cults, practices, and discourses. This connection with the festivals and (more broadly) with the sacred is essential to the self-definition and articulation of the epinician genre. It has never been neglected by critics. Religion is indeed central to the aetiology of the genre. This dimension of epinician is easily traced in the first and tenth *Olympians*, where Pindar narrates the origins of the Olympic chariot-race (*Ol.1*, 67-96), or uses (*Ol.10*, 76ff) the same aetiological construction to locate his own song in a tradition of epinician performances at Olympia which begins at the very moment of foundation:

ἀείδετο δὲ πᾶν τέμενος
τὸν ἐγκώμιον ἀμφὶ τρόπον.
ἀρχαῖς δὲ προτέραις ἐπόμενοι
... κελαθησόμεθα...

Epinician often refers to local myths and cults as well as to the Panhellenic festivals. Several recent studies have, however, re-opened the question of epinician *performance* in the context of ritual and cult. Thomas Gelzer has argued that shorter epinician odes were certainly performed at the site of the victory; and the same claim has been made for some longer poems as well. Poems have been assigned to sacred contexts on various grounds: reference to cults and rituals (*Ol. 3*; *Ol. 7*; *Ol.9*; *Isth. 4*); vaguer references to festivals and their aetiologies (*Ol. 1*; *Ol. 10*); deictic language referring to the immediate context of the utterance (*Ol. 8*; *Ol. 9*; *Pyth. 6*; *Pyth. 7*; *Pyth. 11*; *Nem. 11*); reference to theological/eschatological doctrines (*Ol.2*); information in the scholia or other ancient commentators (e.g. *Ol.13*; *Nem. 1*).

Sometimes (especially but not exclusively in proems) Pindar enacts the forms and modes of sacred speech: prayers, apostrophes to gods or heroes, or hymns. But there is little agreement on what this religious coloration meant in performance; or indeed whether we are entitled to use the tropes of hymnic enactment in epinician as evidence for an 'original' occasion or context for the text. Did epinician – as some (like Calame), would have it – belong to a monolithic category of 'ritual song'? Is cult or 'myth-and-ritual' the essence of epinician, or is it something accidental? Was epinician performed in ritual spaces or as part of a cultic liturgy? How does Pindar's manner in these 'cultic' passages of his epinicia compare with the real cult poetry which he wrote for Panhellenic and local occasions? How, in general, can we imagine the relationship of Pindar's new-composed Panhellenic odes to the older heritage of traditional or anonymous cult song? These questions are made harder by the difficulty of understanding what epinician was, and how it interacted with other choral song genres in the fifth-century song culture. So much of what we know about Pindar's ideas of genre comes from Hellenistic sources, and reflects the viewpoint and priorities of Alexandrian critics.

My paper will attempt to outline a new approach to these questions, concentrating on Pindar's mimetic use of cultic language, and his allusions to performance, beginning from Pindar's hymnic proems. Through close reading and comparison of the poet's epinician manner, diction, and voice with the 'cult' odes (the *Paeans* are of special importance in this regard), the paper will argue that Pindaric epinician's openness to the cultic sphere is one aspect of a poetic world, and that it belongs within a larger language of the genres.