

In my paper I want to show how the ancient commentators dealt with the problem of occasional vs. inspired poetry when interpreting Pindar's victory odes.

It is a well known feeling of uneasiness that causes modern readers to see a deep gulf between occasional poetry and poetry as a product of art. While the latter can be appreciated and enjoyed by means of literary taste and criticism, it seems that the former is only to be measured by standards of pure craftsmanship and appropriateness to the occasion.

Some of Pindar's ancient readers were quite eager to find allusions to specific circumstances of commission, composition and performance almost everywhere in the epinician odes; they even 'invented' historical backgrounds in order to explain specific details. But we have examples of an appreciation of Pindar as an inspired poet, too.

If a modern classicist is interested in how his ancient predecessors dealt with this issue he is facing a problem: None of the ancient commentaries on Pindar has survived. But in late antiquity a somewhat enhanced version of the Pindar commentary by Didymus (in itself a composite work) was condensed and rearranged to an *epitome*. This extract formed the basis of what we now call the *scholia vetera*. In the following centuries scholiasts compiled what they found interesting or illuminating for their reading of Pindar. So while all the commentaries themselves are lost, we still have valuable material extracted from them, albeit in a sometimes distorted fashion.

Nevertheless, the commentators' (and scholiasts') way of looking at the problem of occasional vs. inspired poetry can open up a surprisingly balanced perspective on Pindar. My aim is not to propose a 'scholiastic turn' that results in an unreflected mixture of biographical, historical and literary critical approaches. But, by looking at the relevant scholia, I would like to highlight one important element of their method: The ancient commentators adopt certain elements of epideictic oratory in an intentional but undogmatic way in order to cope with the occasional and at the same time poetical nature of Pindar's odes. To fully appreciate their method, I will compare it to other ancient approaches to Pindar, namely to rhetorical theory.