

**Jonathan FENNO**

**Pindar's Streams of Song: Musical Memory and Theban Dirce**

*Ariston men hydor* (*O.*1.1). Pindar often draws water as a metaphor for his poetry. Victory thirsts after song, and epinician quenches this Musical thirst. Our poet, often boasting of his role as a foreign guest-friend, proudly brings or sends bowls of song from his native Thebes. Dirce, the Theban fountain, whether named or not, sometimes serves as Pindar's seal, his watermark, so to speak. The ancients, who had access to more of Pindar than we, certainly connected Pindar's Musical art with the waters of Theban Dirce (Paus. 9.25.3; Hor. *epist.* 1.3.7-14, *carm.* 4.2.25; Quint. 10.1.109). When distilling poetry, Pindar blends Dirce's water in differing proportions with the Muse, daughter of Memory, and with Thebe, daughter of a river.

The successful athlete stirs the streams of the Muses, the daughters of Mnemosyne or Memory (*N.*7.11-16); in response, the foreign praise-poet brings song to his friend like streams of water (*N.*7.61-63). Even if Pindar has forgotten his poetic obligation, the Muse and Aletheia or Un-Forgetfulness protect him from the charge of being a false guest-friend (*O.*10.1-6); in the end, a surging strain of songs will appear at famous Dirce (*O.*10.84-85). Pindar opens another ode with drinking imagery, preparing a wine-bowl and libation of the Muses' songs (*I.*6.1-9); in the closing lines, he reveals the source of his liquid poetry by offering his beloved host a drink from the holy water of Dirce which Memory's daughters caused to spring forth at Thebes (*I.*6.74-75). Pindar does not absentmindedly dip his ladle into just any jar!

In one Cyrenaean ode, a lengthy catalog of Theban heroes culminates in Dirce: only a dumb man does not always remember Dircaean waters, which nourished Heracles and Iphicles. (*P.*9.79-89); this is how Theban Pindar slakes his thirst for songs (*P.*9.103-104). Another Cyrenaean ode concludes with Apollo's fountain at Cyrene and a spring of ambrosial verses associated with Thebe (dat. sg.), each portrayed as the community's center of music and hospitality (*P.*4.293-299). As nurturer of Thebans and their poetry, Dirce's water is thematically connected in several Theban songs with the eponymous nymph Thebe, who not only nurtures and raises Thebans, but also serves as their metaphorical mother (*fr.* 198, *I.*7.1-19, *I.*1.1-5, 17, 29). Thebe's identity as the poet's nourishing well is reinforced by her Pindaric genealogy: she is the daughter of the river-god Asopus and the water-nymph Metope, and the sister of Aegina. Pindar drinks this maternal water as he weaves his hymn (*O.*6.84-87); and, continuing the fluid metaphor, he expects to disprove the gibe "Boeotian Sow" by sending his message from the Muses, a sweet mixing-bowl of song (*O.*6.82-91). In Aeginetan odes, Pindar exploits this liquid genealogy to enhance his own authority as Musician and to suggest a closer bond with his audience through Thebe's sister Aegina (*I.*8.16-20, *N.*3.1-11). Even Bacchylides, when lauding the heroes descended from Asopus, admits that everyone knows the nymphs Thebe and Aegina (*Ode* 9.53-65). But only a Theban like Pindar can claim a special duty and right to celebrate them with unforgettable streams of song.