

PINDAR'S *PYTHIAN* 12:
WHEN MORTALS TRIUMPH, THE GODS WEEP

by

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I maintain that the adjective *δυσπενθέϊ* in line 10 of Pindar's *Pythian* 12 possibly alludes to Perseus' future murderer Megapenthes, suggesting thus that triumph might eventually lead to disaster, an idea that the Theban poet probably borrowed from the *Odyssey*. This allusion better explains certain parts of the poem and defines what the *laudandus*' instrument, the *aulos*, has come to symbolise. Nevertheless, Pindar does not confine himself to pointing out the dangers underlying any great achievement, but also proposes, in an implicit way, his own solution to this problem, namely the harmonious integration of the gifted individual into his civic setting, which has the capacity to serve as a protective confinement for him.

Pythian 12 was composed by Pindar in 490 BCE in honour of the piper Midas from Acragas. Its structure falls into three distinct parts: in the first one (1–6) the poet entreats the victor's city to receive him favourably, in the second (6–21) he narrates the myth of the instrument's invention¹, while in the third (22–32) he mentions the implications of this invention for humanity in general. The common denominator of these parts is of course Midas' instrument, the *aulos*². It has long been acknowledged by numerous scholars that through Pindar's elaboration of the Perseus myth this instrument has come to hypostatise the contiguity of opposites, as the hero's cry of triumph is inextricably connected with the Gorgons' shrill lament³. This argument is largely dependent on the assumption that by the

¹ GREENGARD (1980) rightly points out that the narration of the myth opens and closes with two words that derive from the same root (cf. *ἐφεῦρε* [7] with *εὔρεν* [22]) and with a repeated reference to the goddess. PÖHLMANN (2020: 37–46) considers the possibility that Midas' performance consisted of two presentations, an optional prelude (exploring the theme of Athena's invention of the instrument) and the obligatory Apollonian Pythian *nomos*, something which is highly probable considering the main mythological theme that Pindar has chosen to elaborate in this particular *epinikion*.

² On the technical aspects of this instrument, see GENTILI, LUISI 1995.

³ See SCHLESINGER (1968: 283), who maintains that the pain and death of the Gorgon are the victory and glory of Perseus, both things being the result of the same event; CROTTY (1982: