

# ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

VOL. XLVI

HELSINKI 2012

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**BACCHYLIDES BEHIND HIS *METAMORPHOSES*:  
THE POETIC IDENTITY OF A LYRIC NARRATOR  
IN THE LATE 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BC<sup>1</sup>**

MARGARITA P. SOTIRIOU

**Introduction**

Since Homer and Hesiod's time comparing men with animals or birds is within the cultural and literary tradition of Greeks in general. Himerius' paraphrase about a song of Alcaeus shows clearly that the specific birds next to a poet like Alcaeus sing in a very special way (48,125 = Alc. 307,1c Voigt):

[...] ᾄδουσι μὲν ἀηδόνες αὐτῷ ὅποιον εἰκὸς ᾄσαι παρ' Ἀλκαίῳ τὰς ὄρνιθας· ᾄδουσι δὲ καὶ χελιδόνες καὶ τέττιγες, οὐ τὴν ἑαυτῶν τύχην τὴν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀγγέλλουσαι, ἀλλὰ πάντα τὰ μέλη κατὰ θεοῦ φθεγγόμεναι· [...]

[...] Nightingales sing to the god, as birds are likely to sing in Alcaeus. Also swallows and cicadas sing, not reporting the fortune that was theirs among human beings, but making the god the subject of all their songs' [...]

(transl. by Penella, 2007)

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<sup>1</sup> The following text is a revised version of the paper I firstly presented at the *Classical Association Annual Conference 2011* organized by the Department of Classics and Ancient History of Durham University, UK (15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> April 2011). Extreme gratitude goes to Prof. Lucia Athanassaki for her continuing guidance and moral support. I am indebted to Dr. Sophia Kapetanaki for the many important linguistic improvements she suggested for my text. Citations of Greek authors and their works follow the method of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford 1996<sup>3</sup>.

In 1998 René Nünlist ingeniously pointed out that the choice of a specific animal in Greek literary texts belongs to the cardinal stylistic elements of each creator and that it is mainly a "mask" for a specific human type.<sup>2</sup> Concerning Bacchylides' poetry, one could pay attention to four passages, out of his fourteen epinician Odes, where Bacchylides is hiding himself behind an image of a bird. The first three of these Odes had been composed to honor the great athletic triumphs of Hieron, King of Syracuse. In Ode 3 the poet refers to himself as a "Kean nightingale", in Ode 4 as "Urania's cock", in Ode 5 as "Zeus' eagle" and in Ode 10 as an "island bee". The majority of the interpreters and commentators, since R. Jebb 1905, A. P. Burnett 1985 and, more recently, H. Maehler 2004, have noticed the point, but none has ever tried to explain Bacchylides' choice of these specific birds or to clarify the main function of such self-referential similes in his epinician poetry.

Definitely, the above mentioned passages deserve closer scrutiny. Here I shall suggest that in every case the choice of a specific bird as "speaking subject" is intentional, in order to evoke to the listeners specific points of the performative context in which the image occurs. I shall also attempt to show that these self-references belong to a symbolic system, which provides us with information about Bacchylides' artistic identity, his professional role as a "primary narrator" and, eventually, the confidence he feels about the quality and superiority of his art against his "rivals".<sup>3</sup> My aim is, then, to reveal the relationship between intention and expression, and particularly some aspects of Bacchylides' poetic art, concerning his style and language. The function of these images as an integral issue of the structure in each Ode is, finally, to be comprehended.

### **Bacchylides as a Kean Nightingale (*Ode 3*)**

Bacchylides composed his *Third Epinician Ode* in order to praise Hieron's single chariot victory at Olympia (468 BC) one year before the tyrant's death. In the concluding triad of the poem (ll. 92–98) and after a series of general statements illustrating the light of Hieron's excellence which lasts forever, Bacchylides firstly

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<sup>2</sup> Nünlist (1998) 39.

<sup>3</sup> Pfeijffer (2004) 216–19.



ture of the nightingale that led Bacchylides to choosing especially this bird? Does the nightingale function as a special symbol in Greek literature in general? And if that happens, how does Bacchylides use or eventually reassess this tradition?

It is widely accepted that nightingales are famous among other birds for their nice, sweet, however, deeply sad singing. Well known from the myth of Tyreus and Pandion's daughters, Philomela and Procne, the nightingale expresses traditionally the lament and dirge.<sup>7</sup> The bird also appears as a messenger of spring, while its song, especially at this time of the year, is louder and repetitive;<sup>8</sup> the nightingale remains sleepless and sings day and night.<sup>9</sup> From Hesiod to the later poetic tradition, nightingales are generally connected with the poets.<sup>10</sup> Though Bacchylides might have been aware of the former literary production, his way of presenting the bird in such epinician context is no more conventional. It rather indicates something completely new, especially by using the compound *μελίγλωστος* (l. 97) as an attribute of the bird.<sup>11</sup> The adjective means "with a voice sweet like honey" and varies definitely the homeric *μελίγηρυς*.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noticing that both, *μελίγλωστος* and *μελίγηρυς*, are exclusively connected with hymnic songs.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Hymn. Hom. Pan.* 17–8, *Thgn.* 939–42, *Aesch. Supp.* 60–4, *Ag.* 1146, *Soph. El.* 149, 1075–7, *Trach.* 962, *OC* 672–6, *Eur. Hel.* 1108–12, *TGF* 773,23–6, *Ar. Av.* 228, 659–60, 1379–81, *Apollod.* 3,14,8. The myth of Philomela and Procne is alluded in *Od.* 19,516–22 (see below n. 9).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Od.* 19,516–20: *κεῖμαι ἐνὶ λέκτρῳ, πυκινὰ δέ μοι ἄμφ' ἄδινόν κῆρ ὄξειται μελεδῶναι ὀδυρομένην ἐρέθουσιν. ὡς δ' ὅτε Πανδάρου κούρη, χλωρηῖς ἀηδών, καλὸν ἀείδησιν ἔαρος νέον ἰσταμένοιο, δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι καθεζομένη πυκνιοῖσιν.* Concerning the phrase *χλωρηῖς ἀηδών*, please notice the explanations offered by ancient lexicographers, as, e.g., *Apoll., Lex. Hom.* 168,15: *χρώματος, καθὸ μελάχρουν τινὰ λέγομεν, τὸν ἡσυχῆ. ἢ τὸ ἀπὸ τῶν χλωρῶν συναγόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν μελισσῶν. Χλωρηῖς ἀηδών ἀπὸ τοῦ χρώματος, ἢ διὰ τὸ ἐν χλωροῖς δένδροις διάγειν* and *Etym. Magn.* 813,5: *Χλωρὸν δέος: Χλωροποιόν. Σημαίνει δὲ καὶ τὸ νέον. Χλωρηῖς ἀηδών: ἀπὸ τοῦ χρώματος ἢ διότι ἐν ἔαρι φαίνεται ὅτε πάντα χλωρά· οἱ δὲ, τὴν χλωροῖς ἠδομένην.* Cf. also *LSJ*, s.v. "pale green, brown green".

<sup>9</sup> *Hes. fr.* 312 M–W, *Op.* 202–8, *Sapph.* 30,136 Voigt, *Simon. PMG* 586, *Ibyc. PMG* 303b,1, *Arist. Hist. an.* 632b.

<sup>10</sup> *Hes. Op.* 202–8, *Alc. PMG* 10,6–7 et.al.

<sup>11</sup> With a clear conceptual link to the beginning of the Ode (l. 3: *γλυκύδωρε Κλεοῖ* = "Kleio, giver of sweetness").

<sup>12</sup> Used also by *Pind. Ol.* 11,4 and *Alcm. PMGF* 26,1.

<sup>13</sup> *Hom. Hymn. Dem.* 519 (= *Hymn. Hom. Pan.* 18).

On the other hand, in the majority of literary sources the nightingale is determined as λιγεία, λιγύφθογγος or ὀξύφωνος.<sup>14</sup> Such adjectives, though used in different ways,<sup>15</sup> are inappropriate for the epinician context, mainly because they indicate a "clear", "sweet" but rather "shrill" and "piercing" sound.<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, the use of μελίγλωσσος here connotes more precisely the nightingale's sweetness in singing emphasizing on a visualized aspect of its acoustic qualities (cf. the first part of the epithet μελί-). Therefore, μελίγλωσσος, as an attribute of the nightingale, demonstrates here a direct connection with the sweetness of the poetic mouth. Following the predetermined patterns of his predecessors, Bacchylides isolates creatively an aspect of the bird's way of singing, reassesses it by the use of μελίγλωσσος and embodies it in his epinician context in order to describe his art from another perspective.

The nightingale's continuous day and night song could only refer to Bacchylides and his poetry for one more reason: the repetition in bird singing symbolizes Bacchylides' song in the perspective of its repetition in the future. Through this self-referential simile, the poet provides his audience with the necessary associations between the repetitive song of the nightingale and a second (or a third) performance of the epinician hymnus.<sup>17</sup> The repetitive, melodious singing of the nightingale visualizes once again the desire Bacchylides expresses concerning the reperformance of his song in the future. In such a context, repetition means

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., the texts above in n. 7.

<sup>15</sup> In connection with Nestor (*Il.* 1,247–8), the wind (*Il.* 14,17), phorminx (*Od.* 8,67; 4,357) or with the path of the poetry (*Pind. Ol.* 9,47).

<sup>16</sup> Notice especially the comments of Arist. [*De audib.*] 804a,23: καὶ μάλιστα διὰ τὴν ὑγρότητα τοῦ σώματος, λιγυραὶ δ' εἰσὶ τῶν φωνῶν αἱ λεπταὶ καὶ πυκναί, καθάπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τεττίγων καὶ τῶν ἀκρίδων καὶ αἱ τῶν ἀηδόνων, καὶ ὅλως ὅσαις λεπταῖς οὐσαις μηθεῖς ἀλλότριος ἦχος παρακολουθεῖ. ὅλως γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν οὔτ' ἐν ὄγκῳ φωνῆς τὸ λιγυρόν, οὔτ' ἐν τόνοις ἀνιεμένοις καὶ βαρέσιν, οὔτ' ἐν ταῖς τῶν φθόγγων ἀφαῖς, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὀξύτητι καὶ λεπτότητι καὶ ἀκριβείᾳ. διὸ καὶ τῶν ὀργάνων τὰ λεπτὰ καὶ σύντονα καὶ μὴ ἔχοντα κέρας τὰς φωνὰς ἔχει λιγυρωτέρας and Eust. *Il.* Ξ 14: οὕτω γὰρ καὶ οἱ κήρυκες λιγαίνειν λέγονται καὶ λιγύφθογγοι καλοῦνται, ὡς καὶ ἡ ἀηδὼν. λέγεται δὲ καὶ μᾶστιγξ λιγυρὰ καὶ ἡχὴ λιγύθροος καὶ ἄνεμοι λιγέες. ὀξυνομένου δὲ τοῦ λιγύς ἐπὶ τοῦ ὀξέος τὸ Λίγυς κύριον καὶ τὸ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἐθνικὸν βαρύνεται πρὸς διαστολὴν τούτου. ἰστέον δὲ καὶ ὅτι, εἰ καὶ ἰσοδυναμεῖ τὸ λιγύς τῷ ὀξύς, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν λιγύς μόνης ἐστὶν ἐπίθετον φωνῆς, τὸ δὲ ὀξύ καὶ ἐπὶ βελῶν καὶ οἴνου καὶ ἐτέρων πολλῶν λέγεται.

<sup>17</sup> About the reperformance of the victory Odes of Pindar and Bacchylides see the important analysis of Currie (2004) 49–69 (in favor of a local reperformance), and Hubbard (2004) 71–93 (in favor of a panhellenic reperformance); each of them reach the same conclusion from a different point of view.

not only length but also duration in time. The sweet like honey singing of the nightingale is, finally, "the poet's subjective qualification for bestowing praise".<sup>18</sup>

### Bacchylides as Urania's Cock (*Ode 4*)

Another case of Bacchylides' poetic metamorphose occurs in his *Fourth Epinician Ode*. The poem praises Hieron's chariot victory at Delphi (470 BC).<sup>19</sup> This short composition of twenty verses must have been performed at Delphi, immediately after the contest, unlike Pindar's longer *First Pythian*, which, although it celebrated the same victory, was performed during a public feast in the city of Aitna in Sicily.<sup>20</sup> After Apollo's devotion to Syracuse and to Hieron personally (ll. 1–3) and the reference to the present victory (ll. 4–6), Bacchylides refers to himself demonstrating by that his willingness to praise Hieron's athletic triumph (ll. 7–9):

[...] ἄδυεπῆς ἀ[να-  
ξιδόρ]μιγγοσ Οὐρ[αν]ίας ἀλέκτωρ  
.....]εν· ἀλλ' ἐκ[όν]τι νόφ  
.....ο]υς ἐπέσεισεν ὕμνους.

[...] the sweet voiced cock of Urania, master of phorminx [...] with willing spirit showered the victor with victory hymns [...]

The mask of the cock presents us with some difficulties. Why does Bacchylides use this image to describe his epinician task? Why does he choose ἄδυεπῆς to characterize the cock? Is the "sweet song" of the domestic cock, perhaps, the most typical of all the features of the bird, which facilitates the poet to draw a parallel between him and that bird? And, perhaps the most important of all: why does the cock here "belong" especially to Urania?

In order to answer these questions let us briefly display some of the main points in the description of the cock in Greek literature. Though Theognis was

<sup>18</sup> Hubbard (1985) 149.

<sup>19</sup> Hieron's chariot victory of 470 BC was his third triumph at the Pythian Games. About the athletic victories of Hieron see Maehler (2004) 100–11.

<sup>20</sup> For different types of epinician Odes of Pindar and Bacchylides in general see Gelzer (1985).

the first to refer to the cock and its role as a herald of the dawn, the habit of the cock crowing just before the daybreak is also attested by other literary sources.<sup>21</sup> Ἄδυεπής ἀλέκτωρ reminds a phrase from Simonides (*PMG* 583 = *Ath.* 9,374d: ἡμερόφων' ἀλέκτωρ); it is rather an odd characterization, mostly because the cock's crow is often identified as "cuckoo", a plain sound without any charm or sweetness.<sup>22</sup> In the former epic poetry, the Hymns and Pindar, ἄδυεπής is often (although not exclusively) connected with the Muses,<sup>23</sup> while Urania is one of Bacchylides' most favorite Muse.<sup>24</sup> Her cardinal role in the epinician context is easy to be explained, if we trust the Lexicon of *Suda* (Λ 568. 2), where it is mentioned that Linos, the son of Apollo and Terpsichore, for others the son of Urania and Amphimarus, is "the first master of lyric poetry": Λίνος, Χαλκιδεύς, Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ Τερψιχόρης, οἱ δὲ Ἀμφιμάρου καὶ Οὐρανίας, οἱ δὲ Ἑρμοῦ καὶ Οὐρανίας. λέγεται δὲ πρῶτος οὗτος ἀπὸ Φοινίκης γράμματα εἰς Ἑλληνας ἀγαγεῖν, γενέσθαι δὲ καὶ Ἡρακλέους διδάσκαλος γραμμάτων καὶ τῆς λυρικῆς μούσης πρῶτος γενέσθαι ἡγεμών. Instead of a direct characterization of the Muse herself as "sweet voiced", Bacchylides transfers the adjective to the cock, thus indicating the strong bond between him and Urania.

Let us return to our first question about the cock's epinician role. Concerning the place of the Ode's performance, as noticed above, and keeping in mind Gelzer's comment that such short Odes at the place of the athletic Games serve primarily as documents of the victory, we are confronted with the following conclusion: here the mask of the cock offers Bacchylides an alternative way of describing, once again in visual terms, his role as a messenger throughout the epinician procedure. As the cock traditionally announces to the people the arrival of the new day,<sup>25</sup> so does Bacchylides: he sends to the whole world the message

<sup>21</sup> Thgn. 864, *Batrach.* 191–2 and Pl. *Symp.* 223c. Aristophanes (*Av.* 485) referred to the cock it as "Persian Bird", apparently because the farmyard cock has come to Greece via Persia in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BC. while Pindar (*Ol.* 12,14) and Aeschylus (*Ag.* 1671) mentioned cock's pugnacity. For more information about the description of the cock in further literary sources, cf. Arnott (2007) 10–1; Pollard (1977) 88.

<sup>22</sup> Theoc. 7,123–4 and later Eustathius' argumentation in *Od.* δ 10–2.

<sup>23</sup> Hes. *Theog.* 965,1021, fr. 1,1 M–W, *Hymn. Hom. Lun.* 1–2 but also in connection with Nestor (*Il.* 1,248), the singers and their songs (Pind. *Nem.* 7,21; 1,4) and the lyre (Pind. *Ol.* 10,93–4).

<sup>24</sup> Bacchyl. *Ode* 5,13; 6,10–1, *Dith.* 2,2–4.

<sup>25</sup> See the etymological analysis of the word provided by ancient lexicographers (*Suda* H 201,4; Hsch. H 336,3, *Etym. Magn.* 425,36).

of Hieron's new victory. Thus, the cock serves to symbolize the function of the Ode as a "document of the victory" and the role of the poet as messenger of such a glorious athletic event.<sup>26</sup>

### Bacchylides as Zeus' Eagle (*Ode 5*)

Bacchylides wears the mask of the eagle in his *Fifth Epinician Ode*, honoring Hieron's victory with his racehorse Pherenicus in the Olympic Games of 476 BC, the same victory celebrated in Pindar's *Olympian One*.<sup>27</sup> The prooimion of the Ode includes the famous but rather ambiguous eagle simile. Although in 1994 Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer published a paper, where the issue "Eagle" in Pindar and Bacchylides had been thoroughly examined, the Dutch scholar devoted more than half of the article to Pindar's part, apparently because Pindar uses the image of the eagle more often than Bacchylides, where it occurs once. The description of the divine bird is inserted between two conventional themes of epinician poetry (ll. 9–16 "the willingness' theme" and ll. 30–33 "the facility theme"). In both passages Bacchylides describes his task to praise Hieron in every possible way:

ἦ σὺν Χαρίτεσσι βαθυζώνοις ὑφάνας  
 ὕμνον ἀπὸ ζαθέας  
 νάσου ξένος ὑμετέραν  
 ἐς κλυτὰν πέμπει πόλιν,  
 χρυσάμπυκος Οὐρανίας  
 κλεινὸς θεράπων· ἐθέλει δὲ  
 γάρυν ἐκ στηθέων χέων  
 αἰνεῖν Ἰέρωνα. Βαθὺν  
 δ' αἰθέρα ξουθαῖσι τάμνων  
 ὑψοῦ πτερύγεσσι ταχεί-  
 αῖς αἰετὸς εὐρυάνακτος ἄγγελος  
 Ζηνὸς ἐρισφαράγου  
 θαρσεῖ κρατερᾶι πίσυνος  
 ἰσχύϊ, πτάσσοντι δ' ὄρνι-  
 χες λιγύφθογγοι φόβωι·  
 οὐ νιν κορυφαὶ μεγάλας ἴσχουσι γαίης,  
 οὐδ' ἄλὸς ἀκαμάτας

<sup>26</sup> Gelzer (1985) 101.

<sup>27</sup> Maehler (2004) 79, 106–7.

δυσπαίπαλα κύματα· νω-  
 μᾶ δ' ἐν ἀτρύτῳ χᾶει  
 λεπτότριχα σὺν ζεφύρου πνοι-  
 αῖσιν ἔθειραν ἀρίγνω-  
 τος {μετ'} ἀνθρώποις ἰδεῖν·  
 τῶς νῦν καὶ <ἐ>μοὶ μυρία πάντα κέλευθος  
 ὑμετέραν ἀρετὰν  
 ὑμνεῖν,

[...] Having woven a song of praise with the help of the deep-girdled  
 Graces, a guest-friend sends it from a holy island to your famous city, a  
 renowned servant of Urania with her golden snood. He wishes to pour  
 his voice from his breast and praise Hieron. Cutting through the deep  
 sky with brown swift wings on high the eagle, messenger of wide-  
 ruling, loud-roaring Zeus, is bold, trusting in his mighty strength, and  
 shrill-voiced birds cower with terror. The peaks of the great earth do  
 not hold him back, nor the hard-jolting waves of the untiring sea. He  
 plies his fine-haired coat in the boundless chaos with the blasts of the  
 West Wind, conspicuous for men to see. Even so I, too, have a myriad  
 of paths in every direction to praise your prowess [...]

(transl. by Cairns / Howie, 2010)

The image of the bird is divided in two main parts (ll. 16–23, ll. 24–30). In both  
 sections the poet provides us with information concerning the eagle's place of  
 living, its physical appearance with reference about its "swift tawny wings" (ll.  
 16–29) and its role as a "messenger of wide-ruling, loud-thundering Zeus" (ll.  
 19–20). Bacchylides closes his eagle description mentioning the confidence the  
 bird feels due to its mighty strength (ll. 21–22). Then, he exemplifies his thought  
 in the way the small birds react: in view of the impressive bird, they crouch down  
 in fear (ll. 22–23). The later part (ll. 24–30) follows the description of the former  
 in a more specific way. Now we hear about the eagle's advantage to fly in every  
 direction, from earth to sea and once again to the sky (ll. 24–26). We are also in-  
 formed about its "fine haired coat" (ll. 28–29) and then about the reaction of all  
 the people, who recognize immediately the divine bird by far (ll. 29–30).

Some key words of Bacchylides' description will help us give an answer  
 concerning his poetic identity behind the *mask* of the bird. First comes the no-  
 tion that the bird is the messenger of Zeus (ll. 19–20). Eagle is a reliable guide

about God's will, a good and favorable omen to the humans, as always in epic poetry.<sup>28</sup> Ἄγγελος is also Bacchylides, because he sends the glorious message of Hieron's triumph to the city of Syracuse. In that sense we are confronted with the conventional "aggelia motif".<sup>29</sup> As the eagle covers vast distances (in geographical space) flying with its golden swift wings, so does Bacchylides (in temporal space) with the wings of his poetry: through the digressions of the mythological narration he gives his object of praise further perspective. Last come the sweet voiced small birds (ll. 22–23), evidently the well-known domestic cocks.<sup>30</sup> Although the description of the eagle hunting small birds is proverbial,<sup>31</sup> the attribute λιγύφθογγοι indicates intention. Λιγύφθογγοι in Homer are always the heralds.<sup>32</sup> Because Bacchylides' rivals remain unidentified, the connection of the small birds with the Homeric heralds provides the audience the necessary associations between the rivals of the divine bird and the rivals of the poet underlying that both must have a common attitude against them.<sup>33</sup>

The real meaning of the passage is that great deeds must be praised only by great poets. Visualizing his professional superiority<sup>34</sup> right from the beginning of the Ode is an accurate literal way of Bacchylides to declare in public the quality of his artistic achievement and to confirm in public his special relation with Zeus.<sup>35</sup>

### Bacchylides as an Island Bee (*Ode 10*)

Bacchylides' *Tenth Epinician Ode* is a poem composed in honor of Aglaos from the city of Athens, winner in a foot race at Isthmus. This time Bacchylides wears

<sup>28</sup> E.g. *Il.* 13,821–3; 12,218–21; 24,314–5.

<sup>29</sup> Bacchyl. 2,1–3: Ἄϊξον, ᾧ σεμνοδότειρα Φήμα, ἐς Κέον ἱερὰν, χαριτώνυμον φέρουσ' ἀγγελίαν [...].

<sup>30</sup> Arnott (above n. 22) s.v.

<sup>31</sup> In the Homeric battle scenes the image is used metaphorically (*Il.* 15,688–92; 17,673–6).

<sup>32</sup> *Il.* 2,50,442; 9,10, *Od.* 2,6 etc.

<sup>33</sup> Lefkowitz (1969) 54–5. A similar image occurs in Pindar twice (*Ol.* 2,86–8, *Nem.* 3,80–2). In favor of a conventional use of the epithet here see Kaimio (1977) 143.

<sup>34</sup> See also Hadjimichael (2011) 105.

<sup>35</sup> The iconography of this period always associates eagles with immortality. Cf. Wuilleumier (1930) 127.

the mask of a bee which passes everyone the message of the athlete's prowess (ll. 9–14).

Ἀγλάωι καὶ νῦν κασιγνήτας ἀκοίτας  
 νασιῶτιν ἐκίνησεν λιγύφθογγον μέλισσαν,  
 ἐ[γ]χειρὲς ἴν' ἀθάνατον Μουσῶν ἄγαλμα  
 ξυνὸν ἀνθρώποισιν εἴη  
 χάρμα, τεὰν ἀρετὰν  
 μανῶον ἐπιχθονίοισιν

[...] and now for Aglaos his sister's husband has prompted the clear voiced island bee, to create an immortal ornament of the Muses, a joy in common to (all) men, to inform mortals of your prowess [...]

Nünlist has already pointed out that the bee as producer (and not as collector) of honey belongs undeniably to the archaic as well as to the classical tradition of Greece.<sup>36</sup> Quite often bees are standing for the poets themselves. Like bees, which dart from one flower to another, collecting only the best part of it, so do the poets, who "jump" hastening from one theme to another, using only what is necessary or essential for their poems and move then to another.<sup>37</sup>

Bacchylides' attitude is quite different. The geographical attribute νασιῶτιν is undoubtedly referred to Bacchylides' hometown, Keos. Furthermore, the adjective λιγύφθογγος is used to describe the qualities of his compositions, the clarity, the sweetness and the accuracy of his words.<sup>38</sup> But the question still exists! Is there any specific reason, which justifies the choice of the bee image in the context of this Ode?

Pfeijffer explains that "the concern of ποικιλία which the bee stands for [...] and which is indeed quintessential to Pindar's compositional principles, is strikingly absent from Bacchylides' Ode 10".<sup>39</sup> Bacchylides' main concern is, then, to praise the victor. But, if our poet is interested in the fame of his client rather than on emphasizing the poetic charm of his Odes, how does the island bee function here?

<sup>36</sup> Nünlist (1998) 60–3.

<sup>37</sup> Pind. *Pyth.* 6,52–4; 10,54–5, *mel. adesp.* 979 (= *SH* 1001).

<sup>38</sup> See above the double meaning of the word. Furthermore, cf. Kaimio (above n. 34) 141.

<sup>39</sup> Pfeijffer (1999) 58.

Aristaios, one of the most ambiguous figures of Greek folk religion, is also the main hero of Kean mythological tradition. Pindar narrates his myth in the *Nineth Pythian Ode* (ll. 59–65). Son of Apollo and the nymph Kyrene, Aristaios was born in Africa, at his mother's palace in Libya. Gaia and Hores made him immortal by nourishing him with nectar and ambrosia. From Africa, Aristaios came to Keos, where he taught the local population the art of apiculture.<sup>40</sup> That's why he is widely considered as the founder of that art. The figure of Aristaios and the bee became since then the official symbols of Kean coins. This mythological digression makes it clear that the bee is an everyday symbol for Bacchylides, since his hometown has a long tradition in thyme honey production. In other words, the image of the bee belongs to Bacchylides' cultural background. The point becomes clearer, if we keep in mind that also Aglaos, the addressee of the Ode, came from Athens, a region that in ancient times was renowned for the quality of its thyme honey. Wearing the bee mask Bacchylides stresses an aspect of the heritage he shares with his patron. He clearly aims to connect his patron with the local folklore, the tradition and the legends of his own hometown.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

Bacchylides is indeed "a less visible primary narrator" than Pindar, who prefers to speak about himself "in emphatic first person statements".<sup>42</sup> His choice to wear masks is neither spontaneous nor accidental. The above mentioned "masks" create a visual frame of the epinician procedure, which demonstrates intimacy. They also presuppose his audience's knowledge and understanding, emphasizing the personal ties between poet and victor, "a poetic device for the equation of subject and object".<sup>43</sup> Each case of such poetic metamorphose is linked with the factual data of the epinician procedure. In that sense, poetic metamorphoses describe the communicative context in which every single Ode was performed. In each case Bacchylides emphasizes on a different aspect of the performance and on him personally as compositor and performer (e.g. the cock as victory announcer) accord-

<sup>40</sup> Ap. Rhod. 4,1132–33, Schol. in Ap. Rhod. 2,498a–c Wendel, Schol. in Pind. *Pyth.* 9,104,115a–b Dr., Schol. in Ar. *Eq.* 894a–c Koster, Athenagoras, *Leg.* 14,1,7, Phylarch. fr. 16,9, Nonnus, *Dion.* 19,242, Schol. in Arist. fr. 511 Rose.

<sup>41</sup> On the treatment of the subject see the exhaustive analysis of Gentili (1988) 115–54.

<sup>42</sup> Pfeijffer (2004) 217; Morrison (2007) 99 with further literature.

<sup>43</sup> Hubbard (1985) 149.

ing to the specific performative needs of each Ode or eventually the expectations of his patron.

In this way Bacchylides wants to present himself as professional. Undeniably, his artistic force builds the core of all the above mentioned poetic transformations. Bird masks are appropriate for such metamorphoses, because birds can easily be associated with the elements of flight and wings, metaphors so familiar in epinician poetry.<sup>44</sup> Bacchylides' poetry is like these creatures (except perhaps for the cock); it flies above the earth in the sky, providing a limitless praise of his addressee's deeds, which last forever. Moreover, bird wings and the wings of the poetry recall possibly the Homeric "winged words", which means "words that fly to those who can understand" (ἔπεα πτερόεντα in contrast to ἄπτερος μῦθος), a phrase that indicates the words as sound from the speaker's mouth to his addressee.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Pind. *Pyth.* 8,23, *Nem.* 7,22, *Isth.* 5,33, *Pae.* 7B,13.

<sup>45</sup> Concerning the same metaphors in Pindar, cf. Patten (2009) 198–9.

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