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Born to Fight: The Virtues of Pankratiasts within Pindar's Nemean Odes

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to examine three of Pindar's Nemean odes dedicated to victors of the pankration. I examine how Pindar constructs the athletes of pankration and the role that the sport plays in each ode. Pindar connects the past with the present by placing his athletes within the mythological timeline. He follows the Homeric tradition of epic poetry but adapts it to fit the context of lyric poetry. He transfers the qualities of Homeric heroes onto his athletes, introducing them as divine heroes in his own time. Pindar presents the pankratiasts as natural-born fighters who possess both physical and mental traits that mirror the Homeric warriors. These virtues include courage, moderation, inherent strength, longevity, and honor. These virtues provide an outline for how the ideal pankratiast should act both in and outside of the sport. This study examines specific passages from Nemean 2, 3, and 5 that pertain to the sport of pankration. I explain how each of these passages defines the sport of pankration and identify the virtues he associates with the winners.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 564 B.C., the greatest pankratiast of the ancient world, Arrhichion of Phigalia, stepped into the ring to defend his title. He had previously been crowned champion at the 52nd and 53rd Olympiad and was now set to defend his title against an unknown competitor at the 54th. When the match began, his competitor grabbed him around the neck, strangling him. In an attempt to escape this position, Arrhichion broke the athlete's toe. Upon feeling the pain in his toe, the unknown athlete submitted to Arrhichion. At the same time, however, Arrhichion perished from suffocation in his opponent's hold. Since Arrhichion's opponent had verbally submitted before Arrhichion's death was revealed, the judges awarded the victory to Arrhichion's corpse.[1]

This story, written by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*, might be filled with inaccuracies, yet paints a certain image of these pankratiasts for his readers. The pure insanity of this story suggests that these men were not like other athletes and that they would willingly face adversity and often life-threatening scenarios to achieve victory. Other descriptions of pankratiasts highlight the unique nature of their art. Philostratus, a Greek sophist in the 2nd and 3rd century AD, wrote, "And what about the wrestling? The pankratiasts, my boy, practice a dangerous brand of wrestling. They have to endure black eyes which are not safe for the wrestler

1 "Pausanias, *Description Of Greece* | Loeb Classical Library". 2020. *Loeb Classical Library*. Accessed February 23 2020. https://www.loebclassics.com/view/pausanias-description_greece/1918/pb_LCL297.101.xml?rskey=xAzmDJ&result=1&mainRsKey=1hiDiT.

and learn holds by which one who has fallen can still win, and they must be skillful in various ways of strangulation. They bend ankles and twist arms and throw punches and jump on their opponents. All such practices are permitted in the pankration…" (Philostratus, *Pictures in a Gallery*). The sheer violence of the sport is a common topic of interest among ancient writers, who seek to depict pankratiasts differently than athletes of other sports. To truly understand the violent nature of the sport, one must have a certain familiarity with the history of pankration and the rules under which athletes would compete.

The pankration was first introduced to the Olympic Games in the year 648 BCE. It was the last of the combat sports to be added to the games, as wrestling was introduced in 708 BCE and boxing in 688 BCE. The dating of pankration's development is unclear, though the consensus is that it gained popularity in the early 7th century BCE. Indeed, scholars are divided on the emergence of pankration, with some believing it grew out of a desire for a more violent contest[2], while others believed it had already been practiced for many centuries before its implementation in the Olympic Games. The rules of pankration allowed for a less restricted contest which represented the true raw strength and skill of an athlete. Pankration became one of the earliest martial arts and was regularly practiced by the Greek soldiers. This was especially true for the Spartans, who practiced pankration to develop skills in unarmed fighting. The sport gained popularity throughout the Mediterranean and eventually made its way into the Roman games by the early 1st century CE.

While pankration was added well after the start of the Olympic Games, its origins can be traced back to heroes in Greek mythology. The ancient heroes Theseus and Heracles invented the

[2] Poliakoff, Michael B. *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence and Culture*. Yale University Press, 1995.

sport of pankration during their battles with legendary creatures, both the Minotaur and the Nemean Lion respectively. These heroes used a combination of boxing and wrestling techniques to subdue their foes. The blend of these skills became known as the pankration. Boxing and wrestling were both common martial arts that were practiced long before pankration. In boxing, opponents would use hand strikes to batter their opponent until one of them physically or verbally submitted. Athletes would wear *himantes,* which were thongs of ox hide worn around the hands and knuckles to protect the bones of the wearer. No grabbing or eye-gouging was allowed. In wrestling, there were more rules. Wrestlers scored points by forcing their opponent onto their back, hip, or shoulder. There was no intentional hitting or kicking. To win, three points must be scored by one of the wrestlers. Evidence of these two sports can be seen in Book 23 of the *Iliad*, where the Greek soldiers engage in contests at Patroclus' funeral. There is no mention of the pankration in the *Iliad*, so it is safe to assume that the sport was developed later.

Pankration was by far one the most violent and complex sports in the Panhellenic Games, rivaled only by boxing for its hand-to-hand violence. The rules of pankration were, in essence, very simple. Athletes could not gouge eyes or throw strikes at the groin. Biting an opponent was also illegal, though some regions, like Sparta, allowed it. The complexity of the sport lay in the techniques used by fighters as well as the various ways one could achieve victory. As stated before, the techniques used in pankration were a blend of boxing and wrestling techniques. Bouts would begin with both fighters facing each other, often in an upright stance turned slightly sideways with arms up to defend, much like in boxing. The fighters would then engage in hand-

to-hand combat as well as grappling. Matches would be monitored by referees who would carry rods to enforce the rules of the sport.[3]

Victory in the pankration could be achieved in a variety of ways. The first method was to knock the opponent out. This process entailed hurting the opponent until they were unconscious or could not physically fight anymore. If an athlete were knocked out, the match would instantly be over and the opponent would be crowned the victor. The second method of attaining victory was by submission from various wrestling techniques. Athletes would submit their opponent using a wide variety of chokes, locks, and holds. Chokes such as the rear-naked choke involved squeezing the neck of an opponent from behind until the athlete lost consciousness or verbally submitted. A choking technique can be seen in Pausanias' story of Arrhichion, where the challenger had his arm(s) around the neck of Arrhichion.[4] Locking techniques such as the armbar could result in the breaking of an opponent's arm which would render them unable to continue, thus they would have to submit before the lock was finished.[5]

Submission could also occur from sustaining too many strikes. This would occur if an athlete felt that they had taken too many strikes and could not defend themselves any longer. The process of submission for the defeated athlete involved raising their index finger. This act would be recognized by the referee who would then intervene to stop the fight. The final method of determining the victor was by a decision of the judges. Each match would be monitored by judges who could stop the match at any time and declare a winner. Judges could also determine a winner once the fighters had exhausted themselves and could not continue.[6] The brutal nature of

[3] Poliakoff, Michael B. *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence and Culture*.
[4] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*
[5] Poliakoff, Michael B. *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence and Culture*. Yale University Press, 1995.
[6] Ibid.

the sport provided an entertaining spectacle for viewers, as matches were unpredictable in their outcome.

Pankration still exists today, as many organizations hold competitions under the ancient Greek rules. Most of these, however, are local contests and not professionally sanctioned. Pankration is still practiced as a form of martial arts, although the techniques have evolved from what they were in antiquity. The true legacy of pankration primarily lives on through the modern sport of mixed martial arts, or MMA. The modern sport of MMA is more than just a blend of boxing and wrestling. Athletes will now compete using a variety of different martial arts, such as taekwondo, karate, jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, boxing, wrestling, etc. Fighters also wear gloves and in some instances, shoes. This is a major difference from the ancient Greek pankratiasts, who fought bare-fisted. Pankratiasts also fought without any clothing, as all athletes did in the ancient games.

The logistics of pankration are very interesting and undoubtedly produce an image in one's mind of these unique athletes. For this study, I have chosen to look closer at the reception of these fighters, particularly in a period where sources were more limited. Thus, I have chosen to examine victory odes written in the early 5th century BCE by the lyric poet Pindar. These odes, called *epinika*, were written to honor the winners of athletic contests in the Panhellenic Games. Pindar, perhaps the most well-known composer of these poems, wrote eight odes for winners of the pankration across four sets of poems. These sets were grouped by the Games in which the victors competed, namely the Olympic, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games. I have chosen to analyze three of Pindar's Nemean odes which give praise to the winners of the pankration.

There is a long history that precedes Pindar and his poetics. From around 1000 to 750 BCE, the primary way of transmitting poetry and mythology was by oral tradition. Around mid-

8th century BCE, the Greeks began to use an adopted alphabet to write and record stories or information. This included the early epics such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, attributed to Homer, which are some of the earliest written works from the Greek world. Homer is particularly important in understanding the poetic style of Pindar and the purpose of his odes. Pindar seeks to mimic the Homeric tradition of treating the athletes as "divine" beings. He emphasizes the role of predetermined greatness, which is commonly found among the descriptions of warriors in the Homeric epics. Further information regarding Pindar and the Homeric tradition will be provided in chapter 2.

Around the 7th century BCE, Greek poetry began to shift towards more personal and introspective topics. Called lyric poetry, these poems contained many of the mythological elements of the preclassical style but explored topics such as love and questions about human existence. Poets like Archilochus (680-645 BCE) and Sappho (630-570 BCE) often wrote narratives about their own lives and experiences. For example, Archilochus wrote poetry detailing his experiences as a rogue. His personality was very visible in his work, and he often stated controversial opinions which have angered readers both ancient and modern.[7] Lyric poetry got its name from the fact that the lyrics were often accompanied by a stringed instrument of some kind, such as the cithara or lyre. Some poems, however, were accompanied by the flute or a reed instrument. Some were even unaccompanied and performed by either solo or group recitation.

It would be remiss to begin this study without acknowledging Pindar's significance to ancient Greek literature. Pindar, a poet of the lyric age, produced a vast corpus of poems, ranging

[7] Kivilo, Maarit. "ARCHILOCHUS." In Early Greek Poets' Lives: The Shaping of the Tradition, 87-120. LEIDEN; BOSTON: Brill, 2010. Accessed March 7, 2020. doi:10.1163/j.ctv4cbgkd.8.

from hymns to processionals. Despite this vast corpus of poetry, his fame rests primarily in his victory odes which honored the victors of athletic competitions in the Panhellenic festivals. These *epinikia* were meant to be performed in front of large crowds of people, which differed from the poetry of many of his contemporaries. He popularized the genre of the victory ode, which became an integral part of Greek society. His *epinikia* are the only works that survive in their complete form, thus becoming the most preserved work by any of the lyric poets. His other works are lost except for fragments. These odes have proven to be an invaluable source of ancient Greek culture, as scholars have examined the social and political functions of the victor within each ode.

As I have given background information on both Pindar and the pankration in this introduction, Chapter 2 will serve as a review of previous scholarship surrounding this study. I will discuss how each study was significant and how certain theories have contributed to the examination of pankration within Pindar's odes. Chapter 3 will begin my textual analysis focusing first on Pindar's Nemean 2, an ode to Timodemus of Acharnae, winner of the pancratium in 485 B.C. Chapter 4 will be an examination of Nemean 3, an ode to Aristocleides of Aegina, winner in 475 B.C. Chapter 5 will contain a close reading of Nemean 5, which features the final victor of the pankration, Pytheas of Aegina.

As I demonstrate in the following chapters, Pindar presents the pankratiasts as naturally gifted warriors who possess both raw strength and physicality as well as mental fortitude and intelligence. Pindar uses both mythological ties and family heritage to establish the greatness which these athletes possess at birth. He does, however, admit that natural gifts are not enough to achieve victory in the pankration. Athletes must also undergo extensive training, especially in their youth, which Pindar states in Nemean 5. Pindar presents these fighters similarly to how

Homer presents the warriors of old, such as Achilles and Hector. Pindar establishes a connection between the powers of the divine and the athletes he praises to present them as almost god-like in nature. As a result, he creates a new age of legendary warriors who are to be praised for many centuries to come.

Chapter 2: Of Poets and Pankratiasts

This chapter will focus on the history of Pindaric scholarship. The reception of Pindar has changed drastically from the 19th century to modern times. Scholars of the 19th century debated the historical reality of Pindar as well as of his athletes. As time passed, Pindar emerged as a multi-faceted source of both history and poetry, however, much about him remains a mystery. Pindar is puzzling for numerous reasons, such as the complexity of his poetry, but the main subject of many scholars' studies is the question of his poetic tradition. Pindar indeed lived in the lyric age of poetry, but many aspects of his style mirror the traditions of former poets, such as Hesiod and Homer. This disparity has led to increased debate by scholars over the years as to how he should be classified as a poet. Is Pindar truly a lyric poet or does he present himself as a Homer-like figure in his own time? For this study, I argue that Pindar is the latter, and as a result, presents his athletes in the Homeric tradition, which focuses on predetermined greatness of his athletes, as well as the emphasis on performing his odes in front of large audiences, intended to be passed down like mythological stories. This theory has evolved slowly over two centuries, and this chapter will provide the necessary background for the ideas presented in this study.

Pindar was widely neglected as a poet and source of history until the early 19th century when August Boeckh released a translation of the Epinician odes along with *scholia.* The reasons for this neglect are unknown; however, some scholars believe it is due to the complexity of Pindar's poetic style and grammar. As a result, his work was generally misunderstood or simply

underappreciated.[8] The study by Boeckh was significant because he was the first to examine aspects of unity within Pindar's odes. He began to highlight certain themes that bound odes together. The theory of "gnomic unity" in Pindar began to gain traction in the 19th century. This theory explores the idea that Pindar's odes are bound together by certain philosophies about world order and wisdom, such as within Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

Scholars during the late 19th century and early 20th century continued to view Pindar's poetry as sources of history, both as biographical sources of the winners and also sources of information for historical events. Scholars such as Gordon Kirkwood were fascinated with what Pindar might have revealed about himself as a poet within his works. He examines select odes and evaluates the poetic style. What Kirkwood often fails to do is capture the essence of the myth within the ode, as his commentaries are focused more on the language and history.[9] Gilbert Norwood, a contemporary, similarly focuses on Pindar's poetic style, noting significance in his diction and in the symbolism Pindar presents within his odes.[10] In 1964, C.M. Bowra published a large study on Pindar. Bowra's book aimed to explore the personal beliefs of Pindar. Bowra discusses how Pindar constructs the mythology, how he delivers political commentary, and his general poetic personality.[11] These earlier studies are all rather one-dimensional in their treatment of Pindar. They look to resituate Pindar within the context of the standard Greek lyric poet, who would express their own emotions and craft personal narratives within the text. They often fail to see that Pindar is much more complicated as a poet than it might seem, and that his style mirrors the Homeric epics which were written almost three hundred years earlier.

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[8] Heath, Malcolm. "The Origins of Modern Pindaric Criticism." The Journal of Hellenic Studies 106 (1986): 85.
[9] Kirkwood, G. M., and Pindar. *Selections from Pindar: an Introduction and Commentary*. Chica, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.
[10] Norwood, Gilbert, and Pindarus. *Pindar*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Pr., 1945.
[11] Bowra, Cecil Maurice. *Pindar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.

Around the mid-20th century, scholarship on Pindar began to change. Scholars became less interested in Pindar as a source of historical information. The most significant study of this time came from classicist Elroy Bundy in 1962. His *Studia Pindarica* revolutionized the way Pindar was viewed, both as a poet and as a source of history. Bundy presented the idea that Pindar's odes were not sources of personal expression like so much of Greek lyric poetry, but rather as public statements "dedicated to the single purpose of eulogizing men and communities."[12] Bundy challenged previous scholarship by suggesting that Pindar's historical and political references are not the main goal of his odes, but rather smaller aspects that Pindar includes for personal interest. Bundy argues that Pindar's main focus is to honor athletic achievement and that Pindar should be studied form the perspective of a listening audience to truly grasp the meaning of his poetry. This study was very influential in shaping modern Pindaric scholarship, as it forces readers to examine the aspects of victory within Pindar's odes as well as its relation to his intended audience. Pindar writes for the victors and their communities, praising them extensively. To eulogize them, he presents the athletes as descendants of Homeric heroes who possess their inherited abilities. Pindar then hopes that their deeds will be remembered and passed on by future generations.

In general, attitudes toward Pindar also began to change around the mid to late 20th century. Once thought of as a difficult poet to understand, scholars began to appreciate the beauty of his odes and his poetic prowess. One such scholar was D.S Carne-Ross, who published his work on Pindar in 1985. His work serves to praise Pindar for his poetic ability and present readers with evidence of Pindar's genius. His book examines the structure of the ode and how Pindar went about praising the accomplishments of the victor in an organized manner by

[12] Bundy, Elroy L. *Studia Pindarica*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962. pp. 35

following a certain formula within his odes. Carl Ruck, an earlier scholar who published his work on Pindar in 1968, was also one to praise the poet's genius, though some scholars were critical of Ruck's attempt to discuss the poetic voice of Pindar.[13] While Pindar is a talented poet and is in some ways original, the subject material which he discusses is reflective of Greek society. Bundy was the first scholar to truly understand Pindar's goals. While the works of Carne-Ross and Ruck praise the poet for his unique poetics, they tend to focus on Pindar's poetic structure instead of how he interacts with his audience.

One of the most important theories related to my study is one explored by Gregory Nagy. His book, *Pindar's Homer*, presented a new approach to thinking about Pindar's status as a lyric poet. While many believe that the lyric age was a product of epic poetry, Nagy reverses it and argues that lyric defines epic. Nagy argues that the presentation of Pindar's athletes is very similar to Homer's presentation of the mythic heroes. Both heroes and athletes glorify the deeds of their ancestors, and Pindar presents the Homeric heroes as the ancestors of his athletes. Even though they are not their ancestors, in reality, Pindar argues that his athletes are destined for greatness upon birth because of this fabricated bloodline tied to their homeland. For this study, I expand on Nagy's ideas regarding the relationship between the Homeric heroes and Pindar's athletes. In the case of pankratiasts, fighting is in their blood. Their ancestors, such as Achilles and Ajax, were mighty warriors and thus, their traits have been passed down for generations. Pindar presents the pankratiasts as natural fighters who embody the virtues that their mythological ancestors possessed.

[13] Willcock, M. M. "Pindar Translated - Carl A. P. Ruck and William H. Matheson: Pindar, Selected Odes. Pp. 269. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968. Cloth, £3·75." *The Classical Review* 21, no. 1 (1971): 13–15.

There has also been significant work on Pindar published within the past twenty years. In 2007, Hanna Boeke published her book, *The Value of Victory in Pindar's Odes*. Her work on Pindar looks not only at what Pindar says about the victor but evaluates his role as a poet. She also focuses on the role of *gnomai*, or wisdom, in the text and how Pindar uses it as a source of cosmological reflection. She provides a close reading of many of the odes to evaluate their use of *gnomai* and how it reflects Pindar's role as a poet. Later in the study, Boeke pairs odes that express certain ideas related to *gnomai* and compares and contrasts them. She concludes that Pindar acts as a mediator of cosmology to provide different perspectives on human endeavor and victory.[14] While the theme of *gnomai* is not exactly relevant to this study, ideas of thematic commonality will be at the forefront of this study. I argue that Pindar similarly presents his pankratiasts across all three odes, with only some slight differences regarding the specifics of their fighting style and their character.

In 2013, a classics professor at Berkeley, Dr. Leslie Kurke, published her book, *Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy*. Burke analyzed the descriptions of the victors within Pindar's *epikinia* and situated the victors within their communities, family, and class. Using an approach similar to that of Elroy Bundy, Kurke recognizes the performance aspect of the odes and analyzes their social function. She argues that Pindar's odes serve to reintegrate the victorious athlete within their respective society, and looks at their return to their communities and the role that family plays in their story. Kurke analyzes many of the odes, including the Nemean odes in this study, and provides crucial insight into the lives of the victor and how Pindar constructs their image. In recent years, Kurke has published additional articles on Pindar

[14] Boeke, Hanna. *The Value of Victory in Pindars Odes: Gnomai, Cosmology and the Role of the Poet*. Brill, 2007, 197

that expand upon Pindar's social and political commentary. Her idea of reintegration can help to understand how Pindar presents the victors of pankration. The pankratiasts have honored the previous deeds of their families and mythological ancestors. Their journey home completes the cycle and outlines the success that future generations are expected to achieve.

Asya Sigelman, a professor of Greek and Latin at Bryn Mawr College, explores the role of the mythology within Pindar's *epinikia.* Her book, entitled *Pindar's Poetics of Immortality*, tackles the cosmology and mythology within Pindar's odes.[15] While previous scholars have suggested a link between the mythological past and the present life of Pindar's victors, Sigelman further analyzes this connection and argues that Pindar weaves the past and present together to create one narrative. She notes that Pindar does not use dates in his mythology to create a timeline. Mythological events in the past and events in the victor's current life and their future are forged together into one continuous story. Sigelman argues that Pindar does this to immortalize the mythological past, which is then reflected on the individual victor as a way of immortalizing his virtues and accomplishments. I argue that Pindar creates an ancestral line of warriors by connecting the war-like Homeric heroes with his violent pankratiasts. The act of creating this continuous bloodline emphasizes the significance of the warrior-like traits that the pankratiasts have inherited from their ancestors.

Much of the scholarship in the past two years has sought to redefine Pindar within the lyric age of Greek poetry. Scholars such as Henry Spelman explore how Pindar uses the performance aspect of his odes to project his ideas about fame and its role within society. His book, *Pindar and the Poetics of Permanence* explores not only the initial reaction by the

[15] Sigelman, Asya C. *Pindars Poetics of Immortality*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

audience to the odes but the reaction after their first performance by future audiences.[16] Spelman concludes that the odes serve not only to eulogize men and communities, as Bundy had previously said but also to memorialize them. Spelman analyzes many of the concluding sections of the odes to understand what Pindar wanted the audience to take from the ode upon hearing it as well as what he wished them to go forth and do with that knowledge. Spelman's ideas prove to be interesting when analyzing the odes for ideas of pankratic virtue. This idea of memorialization in the odes implies that Pindar did not just simply want the initial listeners to conjure an image of the ideal pankratiast, but rather all listeners after them, too.

The field of Pindaric scholarship is vast, but the role of the individual sport in the *epinikia* has consistently been overlooked. Studies over the past two hundred years have ranged from analyzing the historical information within Pindar's poems to the examination of his poetic persona. Scholars have identified new poetic and mythological elements within his poems that create a heightened sense of narrative surrounding the victors of athletic competition. These ideas have all been challenged and refined countless times, however, the sport of each athletic victor has been ignored. The reasons for this are unknown. Numerous Pindaric scholars have treated him as a historical source for ancient Greek culture and society, but there have been little, if any, sources solely dedicated to the sport within his odes.

Scholars of the ancient Greek sports, such as Stephen G. Miller, rarely mention the information Pindar provides on the sports, but rather just his odes as a source of honoring the victor.[17] One hypothesis for this discrepancy is that there are other and better sources than Pindar's odes for learning about Ancient Greek sports. I will not argue that this is false, as there

[16] Spelman, Henry. Pindar and the Poetics of Permanence. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
[17] Miller, Stephen. *Ancient Greek Athletics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

are numerous sculptures, paintings, and documents after the time of Pindar that provides more information on the logistics of each sport. Another hypothesis is that Pindar's commentary on the sport is difficult to understand, as there are a few components of his odes that can prove challenging upon examination.

The first challenge with this study is that Pindar was not known for his descriptions of the athletic competitions, but rather the victors themselves. He creates a narrative that recounts the victory of the athlete and ties it to the mythological past, immortalizing the victor as well as the mythic figures present in the odes. Often missing from his odes altogether is a description of how the victor achieved his newly acquired fame.[18] In many cases, the victor's heritage is mentioned and often praised, such as in *Nem. 2* where Timodemus's father, Timonoos, is said to have given his son "as an adornment of great Athens."[19] While these descriptions can often describe the virtues of the victor, Pindar rarely provides details related to the sport in which victor participated in. Pindar will usually name the sport of which the victor competed in, such as in *Nem. 2*, but often no details are given regarding the events of the competition.

This practice sets Pindar apart from some of his contemporaries, most notably Bacchylides and his *epinikia.* While both of these poets amply praise the victor for his accomplishments, Bacchylides weaves the mythology together with the present in a different manner than Pindar. In Pindar's odes, the mythological past is immortalized by the life of the victor and his deeds in the present and the future. Bacchylides, on the other hand, brings the mythology into the action of the victors, often describing the action of the sport and enhancing

[18] Hadjimichael, Theodora A. "Sports-writing: Bacchylides' Athletic Descriptions." Mnemosyne, Fourth Series, 68, no. 3 (2015): 363-92. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24522820.
[19] Pindar, and William H. Race. *Nemean Odes. Isthmian Odes. Fragments*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997., 17

the magnitude of it by tying it to a similar action done by a mythic figure. An example of such can be found in Bacchylides' famous ode 5, where Bacchylidus directly compares the speed of the horse racing of the victor Hieron of Syracuse to the speed of the god Boreas.[20] Pindar is less direct with his comparisons. In *Nem. 3,* Pindar describes the long mythological history of the island of Aegina, mentioning mythological heroes such as Achilles and their deeds.[21] Very few details are given regarding the athlete, Aristokleidas, and the specifics of his character. Pindar instead creates an image of him through the description of the mythic heroes. Aristokleidas thus embodies the virtues of Achilles because of the ancestral connection Pindar establishes between them.

The second challenge to this study is the status of Pindar's employment. Pindar wrote to eulogize athletes and their communities, however, the inspiration for his words stem from the payment of the athletes and communities themselves. This act of patronage presents the argument that Pindar did not believe the words that he wrote but rather wrote to please his patrons. I argue, however, that it is precisely the performance aspect of the ode that counters this notion. Assuming Spelman and Bundy's theories about honoring and memorializing the victors and the community to be true, the odes are meant to have longevity. Pindar wrote the odes for future audiences both after the first performance and years after the eventual deaths of the athletes. Pindar's goal was to create an everlasting image of these athletes and their virtues, thus, he would have to both influence and reflect the views of the Greek people when discussing the specific sport of the victor. If Pindar had chosen to solely reflect the self-image of his patrons, it would have been more difficult for the common Greek citizens to revere them similarly to the

[20] Bacchyl. Ep. 5, lines 46-49
[21] Pind. N. 3

Homeric heroes. If Pindar did indeed present his athletes in the manner that they wished, he does so by praising the Homeric heroes that embody the same traits.

Pindar is a puzzling poet, both for his style as well as his motives. While he seeks to idolize his athletes and their communities, his main purpose is to create works that will be passed down to future generations. This act of oral tradition is reminiscent of Homer, who presents his heroes as if they had divine powers. Pindar seeks to replicate that within the descriptions of his athletes. To do this, he connects the mythological heroes to athletes of the same homeland. He argues that inherited ability determines the outcome of all things, and these inherited abilities come from these mythological ancestors. The virtues of his athletes can thus be determined by the virtues of their ancestors. In the following chapters, I will detail the specific virtues that Pindar directly ascribes to his pankratiasts as well as the virtues that have been passed down from former heroes.

Chapter 3: The Defensive Duelist

Nemean 2, dating from around 485 B.C.E., is dedicated to Timodemus of Acharnai, winner of the pankration. The ode is shorter than most of his others, but yet Pindar creates a vivid image of his hero pankratiast. He describes Timodemus as durable, able to compete for long periods with few injuries. Additionally, he is adaptable and resourceful, able to withstand adversity and win through whatever means necessary. Timodemus is expected to win countless times in the pankration, proving his dominance as an athlete and creating longevity in his career. Pindar also emphasizes Timodemus' heritage, both in regard to his family as well as his ancestors from Acharnai. This draws a reference to Ajax of Salamis, son of Telamon, one of the famed warriors of the *Iliad,* who Pindar uses as a role model for Timodemus and all athletes of the pankration. As a result of these descriptions, Pindar produces a strong, fearless warrior, who uses his brute strength and combat intelligence to triumph over his opponents.

The ode opens with a reference to preludes, which, as Pindar mentions, is a common practice associated with the rhapsodes, or "sons of Homer," who recite the epics. A prelude is an original work by the rhapsode that serves on its own. It is not directly connected to an epic or poem, but rather precedes it. These compositions are often Homeric hymns or other odes dedicated to a certain figure in mythology, such as a god or hero. Pindar mentions the preludes but does not give one. Instead, he likens the use of a prelude before an epic to Timodemus' victory in the pankration. He states (*Nem. 2. 1-5*):

> "Just as the sons of Homer, those singers
> Of verses stitched together, most often begin
> With a prelude to Zeus, so has this man
> Received his first installment of victory
> In the sacred games at the much-hymned
> Sanctuary of Nemean Zeus."

Pindar uses the idea of a prelude before an epic to represent Timodemus' first victory in athletic competition. It is unclear if Timodemus is competing for the first time in the Nemean games, or if it is simply the first time he has won. Since the prelude represents the initial victory of Timodemus, the larger work that follows the prelude represents Timodemus' future athletic career following that first victory.

There is much to dissect within this opening verse, the most prominent aspect being connection Pindar establishes between Timodemus and Zeus. Not only does he compare Timodemus' first victory to a prelude to Zeus, but the act creates a link between the human and divine. It is important to note that Pindar does not present Timodemus as Zeus, but rather emphasizes his athlete's greatness by comparing his description of him to a prelude to Zeus. Pindar regards his athletes in a manner that is very reminiscent of the Homeric heroes. These heroes, such as Achilles, were demigods and therefore possessed physical traits and mental characteristics, unlike mortals. It is unclear if Pindar himself believed what he wrote about the athletes, as he was paid to present them as such by the athletes themselves or their communities. Regardless of his motives, Pindar establishes Timodemus as a divine hero who is present in his own time.

The second point that Pindar presents in this section is the expected longevity of Timodemus' athletic career. It is clear in this passage that Pindar values the idea of longevity in athletes. Longevity can involve many different virtues and traits, but there are two main elements to the longevity that Pindar desires in his athletes. The first is for an athlete to compete for a long time within their sport. The second, and more important, is that an athlete must dominate in that sport over an extended period. These criteria can be applied to all athletes, but the violent nature of the pankration makes the process of achieving this much harder than in a non-combat sport.

As detailed in Chapter 1, pankration is a very dangerous sport. Fighters used a wide variety of techniques to hurt their opponents, either knocking them out or rendering them unable to continue. Thus, athletes were injured very often and many of those injuries were severe. Limbs could be broken and repeated damage to the brain could shorten the life of fighters and cause rapid deterioration of their mental health. In some extreme cases, such as with Arrhichion of Phigalia, the death of a combatant could occur during a match.[22] It would have been an impressive feat to make a successful career out of such a violent sport, and to extend a career over many years, winning numerous competitions, would have been very impressive. Pankration was usually a tournament-based sport, and there are records of some tournaments consisting of hundreds of fighters.[23] To win one tournament alone would have been considered remarkable, and thus a winner of multiple tournaments would have to embody skills and traits that most humans do not possess. It is in this idea of longevity that Pindar shows similarities to Homer. The athlete would have to possess strength similar to a god to win in the pankration repeatedly

[22] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*
[23] Miller, Stephen. *Ancient Greek Athletics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

much like a warrior in Homer, such as Achilles, who would have to fight like a god to survive so many conflicts and battles.

Pindar continues to explain this virtue of longevity in the following lines (*Nem. 2.6-12*):

> "But Timonoos' son is still indebted—if indeed his life,
> while guiding him straight on the path of his fathers,
> has given him as an adornment for great Athens—
> to pluck again and again the fairest prize
> of the Isthmian festivals and to be victorious
> in the Pythian games; and it is likely
> that Orion is traveling not far behind
> the mountain Pleiades."

Pindar creates a future timeline for Timodemus within these lines. He states that Timodemus is expected to win not only the Nemean games but also the Isthmian and Pythian festivals, potentially leading him to a victory in the esteemed Olympic Games, which can be interpreted by the cosmological allusion between Orion and the Pleiades. It is in this section that Pindar defines his idea of longevity. His pankratiasts must have the ability to win repeatedly and in various festivals and games. It was expected that once a fighter won one of the games, he was to win the ones that follow, establishing him as a dominant power in the sport. While this can be said for any event, such as horse racing, its importance is heightened in the sport of pankration because of the sheer violence which it entails.

The above passage also highlights the virtues of heritage and family. Pindar mentions the father of Timodemus, called Timonoos, and says that his son is following the "path of his fathers." At this point in the ode, it is unclear what that "path" is but Pindar stresses the importance of following in the footsteps of one's family. This can be seen in Pindar's Isthmian

odes, specifically *Isth. 5* and *Isth. 6*, which honor Phylacidas of Aegina for his victory in the Aegina pankration. Pindar mentions Phylacidas' brother, Pytheas, for his victory in the Nemean pankration and praises the family for their dominance in the sport. The name of their father, Lampon, is also given. Pytheas' victory and family will be explored further in Chapter 4, as he is the subject of *Nem. 5*.

This virtue of staying true to one's heritage was not unique to Pindar's athletes. In the Homeric epics, there is a large emphasis on the parentage of certain heroes. For example, Achilles is the son of Thetis and Peleus. Thetis is a divine being and therefore makes Achilles a demi-god. Another example is Odysseus, king of Ithaca, who is the son of Laertes, the former king. Heritage largely determines the greatness of an individual. Pindar mirrors the Homeric tradition of predetermined greatness within his odes. There are no family members of Timodemus that are described as pankratiasts, so Pindar creates and emphasizes the connection between Timodemus and his ancestors from Salamis such as Ajax. I will detail this connection later in this chapter.

It is possible, however, that Pindar additionally highlights the significance of heritage relevant to pankration. This specific pankratic competition took place in 485 B.C.E. This event, therefore, falls during the midst of the Persian and Greek conflicts. The Battle of Marathon, in which the Athenians defeated the Persian fleet, occurred five years before in the year 490 B.C.E. The famous Battle of Salamis, in which the Persian fleet was once again defeated by the Athenians, took place six years later in 479 BCE. Pindar states that Timodemus has been given "as an adornment for great Athens" (*Nem. 2. 8.*). A common expectation among all athletes was to represent your city-state or hometown well within the games and also outside of competition, not too different from how modern Olympic athletes represent their countries. By winning a

prize in a competition, the athlete brings honor to their homeland and their family. Timodemus, the winner of this pankratium, is from Acharnai, a deme, or suburb, a short distance away from the city of Athens. Due to his proximity to the city of Athens, Timodemus would have associated himself with the Athenian nationality, which Pindar states in this passage. Indeed, Bundy states that the main purpose of the odes is to eulogize the men and communities and for that reason, the audience must always be taken into account when examining Pindar's words.[24] Pindar mentions Timodemus' nationality because he wants people to have a certain reaction. In this ode, a champion of a violent sport is being honored for representing his family and his Athenian nationality in a time of war. Pindar reminds the people of Athens of their might by honoring a champion who is battle-tested and comes from a long line of other strong Athenians. The praise of Athenian heritage would have surely invoked a strong reaction from the Athenian people upon its recitation. Pindar treats this ode as a form of Greek "propaganda." He praises the toughness of Timodemus and his family and presents them as warriors to inspire a sense of national pride in his audience.

The next section of the ode further enhances the comparison between Timodemus and the divine. Pindar states (*Nem. 2.12-15)*:

> And indeed Salamis is certainly capable of rearing
> a fighter. At Troy Hector heard
> from Ajax; but you, O Timodemus, the stout-hearted
> strength of the pankratium exalts.

[24] Bundy, Elroy L. *Studia Pindarica*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962. pp. 35

Pindar mentions Ajax and his fight with Hector and creates a connection between this fight and the deeds of Timodemus in the pankration. The reference to Ajax is multi-faceted, as Pindar attributes many virtues to Timodemus within this small statement. Timodemus is directly compared to a mythic hero, specifically one who was one of the most accomplished warriors. Mythic heroes possessed abilities absent in lesser mortals, primarily because many were demi-gods. They were stronger, smarter, and altogether more successful in almost any endeavor. For those who were not born of a divine being, they could be given traits temporarily by the gods themselves and could even fight them. An example of this would be Diomedes, who has his heart filled with valor and courage by Athena in Book V of the *Iliad.*[25] In Nemean 2, Pindar likens Timodemus to Ajax. While he is not a demi-god, Ajax fights Hector, who has been encouraged to victory by Zeus, thus creating a struggle between the human and divine. The fact that Ajax can contest divine powers proves that he possesses divine-like characteristics. Pindar chooses to present Timodemus similarly to Ajax. Timodemus has used his immortal powers to triumph over his foes, similar to how Ajax contested Hector in the Trojan War.

Ajax is famous for his fights against Hector and his display of strength and prowess in battle. While dueling Hector, Ajax is said to have lifted a large stone with his bare hands and hurled it at Hector, wounding him. Homer recounts the event as follows (*Iliad 7. 268*-272):

> "After him Aias in turn lifting a stone far greater
> Whirled it and threw, leaning into the cast his strength beyond measure
> And the shield broke inward under the stroke of the rock like a millstone,
> And Hektor's very knees gave, so that he sprawled backward,
> Shield beaten upon him, but at once Apollo lifted him upright."

[25] Richmond Lattimore, trans., The Iliad of Homer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 149.

He continued to duel him until the fight was determined a draw by the gods. Since Hector was known to be the best fighter among the Trojans, Ajax's perseverance and determination to bring the battle to a draw was a worthy feat of strength. In addition to his fights with Hector, Ajax contributed considerably to the destruction of the Trojans by killing many of their soldiers. There is some debate over how many soldiers he killed. Hyginus, a Latin author in the 1st century BCE, puts the number at 28[26], but according to modern estimates the number is around 18-20. This was still an impressive feat, as there were only a few warriors to surpass him.

Pindar transfers the qualities that Ajax possesses onto Timodemus through this comparison. In *The Iliad,* Ajax is described to be monstrous in the size of his figure and displays a high level of combat intelligence. In terms of brute strength, he is described as the strongest of the Greeks at Troy. On several occasions in the Iliad, he lifts large stones and uses them as weapons. Hector, in book 7, calls Ajax a "bellowing ox," but this is most likely a plain insult thrown by an enemy.[27] Ajax is also described in animal-like terms in book 11 when Zeus puts him in a frenzy. Ajax is described as a hungry lion fleeing from a horde of dogs.[28] Some scholars have taken his characterization in the Iliad to mean that Ajax was like a wild beast, possessing raw strength and considerable ferociousness but with little intelligence.[29] Pindar would not intend to reflect this idea of blind rage in Timodemus, as it would be seen as a negative trait. Pindar does, however, create a connection between the raw strength of Ajax and the pankration. The word "pankration" in Greek means, quite literally, "all power." Contests are limited by very few rules, namely no strikes to the groin or biting. Combatants have numerous techniques that they can exploit to get the better of their opponent. Ajax, in the *Iliad*, does not follow the

[26] Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 114
[27] Trapp, Richard L. "Ajax in the "Iliad"." The Classical Journal 56, no. 6 (1961): 271
[28] Lattimore, Iliad, 268
[29] Trapp, Richard L. "Ajax in the "Iliad," 271

traditional ruleset of dueling and uses unconventional ways of attacking Hector by throwing heavy stones at him. Pindar specifically mentions Ajax's encounter with Hector, stating "at Troy Hector heard from Ajax" (*Nem. 2 13-14*). Pindar transfers the image of the unconventional duel between Hector and Ajax upon Timodemus and his fighting nature. Pindar implies that Timodemus is crafty and resourceful in his ability to win the pankration, as the sport requires adaptability due to the various positions the athletes could find themselves in. Pindar constructs the pankratic hero as one who can overcome obstacles by adapting to any situation, using their ferocity and raw strength to gain whatever advantage they can acquire.

This reference to Ajax also supports the virtue of longevity as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Ajax, throughout the *Iliad,* is never wounded or significantly injured in any of the battles that occur. This absence of injury is very significant, as almost every other major warrior is injured at some point in the epic. For example, Hector is wounded by Ajax when he is hit by a stone[30], while the great Greek hero Diomedes is wounded from an arrow shot by Paris.[31] Many of the heroes on both the Greek and Trojan sides are wounded, yet Ajax remains unscathed and fights for the entirety of the epic. There are instances where he is temporarily bested, such as in his duel with Hector, but he is never injured like many other warriors. Ajax is never forced to flee due to a physical ailment.

While Ajax is certainly a competent warrior who can hold his own, his ability to avoid injury is primarily due to a defensive mindset. Not once in the *Iliad* does Ajax go on the offensive. Instead, he often covers the retreat of the Greeks while the Trojans advance. Homer, at the beginning of Book 6, describes Ajax as "the bastion of the Acheans,"[32] which emphasizes his

[30] Lattimore, Iliad, 193.
[31] Ibid., 263
[32] Lattimore, Iliad, 171.

stature and his role in the Greek defense. His *aristeia*, a scene depicting a hero's finest moment in poetry, is purely defensive. In Book 15, Hector returns to full strength after sustaining wounds from a stone hurled by Ajax.[33] He returns to the Greek camp and leads an attack upon their ships. The attack quickly turns to the Trojans' favor, as they press against the Greek defensive. It seems that hope is lost to them until Ajax, fearing their destruction, grabs a long pike and starts to hold the Trojans off almost single-handedly.[34] He moves from ship to ship, slaughtering many of the Trojans and can buy enough time for Patroclus, posing as Achilles, to return and send the Trojans back. This *aristeia* is unique because there are very few instances in the *Iliad* where the actions of just one hero are enough to change the course of a battle. Hector and Achilles both lead offensive fronts against their foes,[35] but Ajax's *aristeia* is purely defensive.

Pindar transfers many of the qualities displayed by Ajax in Book 15 onto Timodemus and his skill in the pankration. First, Ajax is depicted as a defensive fighter, which is likely why he is never injured in the epic. Pindar implies that Timodemus might have displayed similar defensive tactics in his approach to fighting by making a comparison to Ajax. In a sport as dangerous as pankration, it would be wise to never overextend one's hand and risk defeat or an injury. If Timodemus fought more defensively, he would be less likely to suffer from making an ill-advised move. Second, Timodemus embodies the bravery of Ajax as well as his defensive nature in combat. Ajax shows his bravery by holding off scores of Trojans who tried to reach the ships, and Pindar transfers that bravery and courage onto Timodemus. He describes him as "stout-hearted" (*Nem. 2. 15*) and implies that courage and bravery are required to face the tests of the pankration.

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[33] Lattimore, Iliad, 330.
[34] Ibid, 348.
[35] Ibid, Book 15 and 20

Nemean 2 constructs Timodemus as a strong, courageous, and intelligent pankratiast who fights defensively and avoids injury. Pindar opens with a prelude to Zeus which mirrors the beginning of Timodemus' athletic career. Timodemus is presented as a mythic figure, similar to those in Homer's epics, such as Ajax, and therefore possesses traits absent in other mortals. Pindar emphasizes the importance of longevity in Timodemus' career, both as a fighter and as a champion. Through comparison to Ajax, Timodemus is represented as a brave fighter who is defensive-minded. He does not overextend himself in conflict so as not to risk injury. Timodemus is resourceful and can adapt to any situation by using his intelligent mind. Additionally, he possesses raw strength which he uses to defeat his foes. Pindar uses this comparison to Ajax to present Timodemus as a mythological warrior who wields divine physical skills.

Chapter 4: An Aggressive Aegian

Nem. 3 is ultimately very different in content compared to *Nem. 2*. While Pindar presents similar virtues of the ideal pankratiast seen in *Nem. 2*, Pindar connects much more mythology to Aristokleidas than he did to Timodemus. This increased focus on the mythological past enhances the importance of predetermined greatness. Athletes possess traits inherited by their ancestors, and Pindar firmly expresses his belief that these traits are the primary factor in determining an athlete's success in the Panhellenic Games. Pindar additionally presents four virtues that pankratiasts must have to achieve victory in the Games. Pindar uses these virtues to highlight the mental traits needed to overcome the difficulties of the pankration. Pindar uses vivid descriptions of the pankration as well as comparisons to Achilles to present Aristokleidas as an aggressive fighter who takes more risks in combat. Pindar recognizes that aptitude in physical and mental aspects of pankration alone are not enough to achieve victory and so he emphasizes the importance of athletic training, especially in an athlete's youth. Aristokleidas is constructed as a modern day Achilles, who honed his skills from youth to become a reckless but effective fighter.

The ode begins with Pindar asking the Muses to lend their voices in praise of the winner from Aegina, Arisokleidas. Pindar then says (*Nem. 3. 12-18*):

"…It will be a joyous task to glorify
This land, where the Myrmidons of old
Dwelled, whose long-famed assembly place
Aristokleidas did not stain with dishonor,

> Thanks to your favor, by weakening in the mighty
> Course of the pankratium. And for his fatiguing blows
> In Nemea's deep plain he earns as a healing remedy his victory"

Just as in *Nem. 2*, Pindar establishes a connection between the winner's homeland and the mythological figures and heroes that are a product of that region. Here, Pindar mentions the Myrmidons, the famed warriors under the command of Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors in the *Iliad*. These mythic warriors aided Achilles during the Trojan War, winning numerous battles under his leadership. Aristokleidas, through his victory in the pankratium, honors the land of the Myrmidons, which creates a sense of lineage between athletes and warriors from Aigina both in the present and the mythological past. Similarly, Pindar creates a relationship between Ajax and Timodemus in *Nem. 2.* Pindar creates an expectation that an athlete should strive for victory to honor those who have come before.

Notably, Pindar describes the pankratium as "mighty," recognizing the difficult and violent nature of the sport. Pindar mentions "fatiguing blows" and how Aristokleidas' victory serves as a "healing remedy." This passage can be interpreted in one of two ways. Pindar either associates fatigue with the energy Aristokleidas exerted in his bouts, or these blows were received by Aristokleidas himself. Both of these interpretations imply certain characteristics of Aristokleidas as a pankratiast.

First, for Aristokleidas to take so many blows, he must have a durable body. He must be conditioned and trained to take countless strikes, roll with them, and not suffer irreparable damage. Compared to Timodemus in *Nem. 2*, Pindar seems to present Aristokleidas as much

more of an aggressive fighter. Timodemus is likened to Ajax,[36] who fights defensively and sustains no injuries throughout the *Iliad*. Conversely, Aristokleidas is compared earlier to the Myrmidons, warriors under the mighty hero Achilles. Achilles is presented as a more aggressive fighter in the *Iliad*, as the epic explicitly states that Achilles fights with rage.[37] Pindar implies that Aristokeidas puts himself in harm's way, takes damage, but wins despite taking so many blows.

If this passage is interpreted to mean that Aristokleidas wore himself out with his strikes, then this could suggest several traits that construct an image of what Aristokleidas was like, both in appearance and as a fighter. It could suggest that Aristokleidas is generally a larger man and wore himself out due to his size. This is common in modern combat sports, as the fighters from heavier weight classes tend to fatigue at a quicker rate than those in the lighter weight classes. This interpretation could also suggest that he is simply more aggressive in his fighting style, and instead of winning the fight with calculated blows to conserve energy, Aristokleidas threw every strike with the intent of hurting his opponent. It is fundamentally unclear what this passage means in regards to the fighting style or appearance of Aristokleidas.

Regardless of whether these blows were received or given out, this passage presents an interesting image of Aristokleidas that contrasts sharply from the image of Timodemus constructed in *Nem. 2.* Timodemus is likened to a hero-god, namely Ajax, and is presented as such throughout the ode. While the ode is much shorter than *Nem. 3*, Pindar gives ample praise to Timodemus for having the necessary qualities in which the pankration requires, such as superior strength and the ability to avoid taking damage by fighting defensively. In the above

[36] See Chapter 3 for more information on Timodemus and Ajax.
[37] *Iliad*, lines 1-5

passage of *Nem. 3*, Pindar presents Aristokleidas at a seemingly low point. While victorious in his event, it is apparent that he faced adversity. Pindar presents Aristokleidas in a more "human" manner rather than an invulnerable "hero-god." It is unclear why Pindar chooses to present Aristokleidas in this manner, but Pindar is most likely commenting on the violent and physically draining nature of the pankration.

Pindar continues (*Nem. 3. 19-23*):

"If, being fair and performing deeds to match his form,
The son of Aristophanes has embarked on utmost
Deeds of manhood, it is no easy task to go yet further
Across the untracked sea beyond the pillars of Heracles,
Which that hero-god established as famed witnesses
Of his furthermost voyage…"

Pindar uses the Greek word *kalos* to describe Aristokleidas' appearance. While *kalos* can mean virtuous or noble, Pindar uses it to describe him as beautiful. He describes him as being so beautiful that his victory in the Nemean Games matches his appearance in greatness. While Timodemus in *Nem. 2* is honored for his victory in the games, details are never given in regards to his physical appearance. Pindar then proceeds to describe Aristokleidas' actions as the pinnacle of manliness and uses Heracles' pillars as a metaphor for the greatest feats any person could achieve. This metaphorical passage is critical for understanding Pindar's characterization of his heroes. Pindar follows the Homeric tradition of ascribing predetermined greatness and inborn abilities to his athletes[38]. He mirrors the characterization of heroes such as Achilles and

[38] Nagy, Gregory. *Pindars Homer: the Lyric Possession of an Epic Past*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1994.

Ajax to present the pankratiasts as humans with divinely inspired gifts. Aristokleidas has not surpassed Heracles in greatness or even stands as his equal. Pindar pays his respect to Heracles and the heroes of old by transferring specific, virtuous qualities onto the athletes he praises. Pindar implies that Aristokleidas has achieved the limit of human excellence by winning the pankration. Pindar uses this statement to show that Aristokleidas has mirrored what Heracles did in a previous age. He has "subdued monstrous beasts" by winning in the pankration and has returned home because there is nothing more for him to accomplish in that regard. In this way, Aristokleidas has followed a similar journey to Heracles and should be honored for that reason.

After Pindar admits that he got carried away (*Nem. 3. 26*), he then begins his long mythological history of the Aeacidae, the descendants of Aeacus, king of Aegina. He begins with Peleus, the son of Aeacus, and recounts his conquest of Iolkos and his capture of Thetis (*Nem. 3. 33-37*). Pindar then continues by recounting the exploits of Telamon, the brother of Peleus. Pindar mentions Telamon's battles with the Amazons and his campaign against Troy (*Nem. 3. 37-39*). Pindar specifically mentions warriors when he creates this catalog of heroes, a feature which at many times is present within Homer's epics.[39] These warriors were all destined for greatness and had inherent abilities that allowed them to accomplish great things. Both Peleus and Telamon were sons of King Aeacus and Endais, a mountain nymph. Their nobility and divine blood set them on the path to greatness from birth.

Pindar then delivers a gnomic statement to his audience (*Nem. 3. 40-44*):

"One with inborn glory carries great weight,
But he who has mere learning is a shadowy man;
Ever changing his purpose, he never takes a precise

[39] For an example of one of Homer's catalogues, see Odyssey 11.

Step, but attempts innumerable feats with an ineffectual mind."

Here, Pindar makes his beliefs clear regarding the relationship between the inborn abilities athletes possess and their athletic training. Pindar's athletes achieve success because it is in their nature, however, it does not solely determine victory. Instead, he states that inborn glory carries "great weight" (*Nem. 4. 40*) and he recognizes the importance of training in one's athletic career. In the context of the pankration, this statement enhances the true difficulty of the sport. Pakratiasts must have the inherent strength and/or other qualities to perform well. A fighter could spend his whole life honing his abilities in the pankration only to fall short because he lacked the necessary qualities which only the winners possess. Pindar uses the catalog of Aegean heroes to express that Aristokleidas is a gifted fighter primarily because of his heritage, however, his skills must be tempered and honed by a trainer to reach the limits of his success.

The meaning of Pindar's gnomic statement is further demonstrated in the following passage. Pindar compares Aristokleidas to Achilles, who displayed incredible potential as a child. Achilles, wielding javelins in his hands, killed wild lions and boars with great efficiency (*Nem. 3. 45-47*). Achilles would train with Chiron the centaur from age 6 and on, learning how to hone his raw physical abilities (*Nem. 3. 47-48*). Pindar presents Aristokleidas as Achilles. It is implied that Aristokleidas, from birth, displayed strong physical characteristics. These traits have been passed down from his ancestors, who are the heroes that Pindar describes in his catalog. Aristokleidas inherits the greatness of Peleus, Telamon, and Achilles, however, he also recognizes that he can't achieve success without the help of a good trainer. Pindar does not provide the trainer's name, but expresses the importance of honing one's skills under a master trainer, much like Achilles did under Chiron's tutelage.

After Pindar finishes his long description of the Aiakidai, he explicitly establishes the link to Aristokleidas and his duty to honor his land (*Nem. 3 64-66*). Pindar continues (*Nem. 3 67-70*):

> "Loud acclaim is in order for victorious Aristokleidas,
> Who has linked this island to glorious praise
> And the hallowed Delegation of the Pythian god
> To splendid ambitions…"

The last part of this passage suggests that Aristokleidas is expected to go forth and win in the Pythian Games as well as the Nemean Games. As with *Nem. 2*, Pindar presents this idea of longevity within one's athletic career. In the case of pankration, it is a virtue to be able to stay healthy and not suffer an injury while competing in the games. It is also virtuous to win in multiple games and establish dominance in the pankration. The interesting part of this section is the contrast between the expected longevity of Aristokleidas and Pindar's description of his aggressiveness (*Nem. 3. 17-18*). Pindar's description implies that Aristokleidas is prone to overexertion and could be more aggressive in his fighting style. This could prove a challenge when attempting to win multiple pankration tournaments. If Aristokleidas takes more risks, it is only a matter of time before he slips up and takes a potential tournament or career-ending defeat. In the *Iliad*, fighters who were more aggressive suffered more injuries than those who fought defensively. Diomedes, one of the most aggressive Greek warriors, is injured by Paris in Book 15. Even Achilles, whose wrath is the subject of the epic, is eventually killed by Paris. A fighter who is more defensive, such as Timodemus in *Nem. 2*, could have more longevity in the pankration. Whatever Aristokleidas' fighting style may yield, Pindar has full confidence that his athlete can win in the upcoming Pythian Games.

Pindar continues (*Nem. 3. 70-76*):

"…But in the test the result
shines clear, in what ways someone proves superior,
as a child among young children, man among men, and thirdly
among elders - such is each stage that our human race
attains. Then too, our mortal life drives a team of
four virtues, and it bids us heed what is at hand.
Of these, you have no lack…"

Pindar explicitly states that there are four virtues that Aristokleidas possesses that have aided his quest for victory in the Neman Games. While Pindar does not state what these virtues are, they can be inferred from examining Pindar's other victory odes. In *Isthmian 8*, Pindar attributes four virtues to another winner of the pankration. These virtues are identified as wisdom, moderation, courage, and justice.[40] To understand what these represent concerning Aristokleidas and his victory in the Nemean Games, each virtue must be placed in the context of the pankration. It is not enough to simply possess virtue, for they must be applied to a specific action. While these virtues apply to different aspects of pankration, they are all connected, joining together to form an image of the ideal pankratiast. First, Aristokliedas must show wisdom and intelligence when competing in the pankration. As previously mentioned, the sport itself is very dangerous and so he must show his intelligence in how he prepares for each fight. Much like how a king or general would prepare strategies for battle, Aristokleidas must use his cunning to achieve victory in the pankratium. The virtue of self-control is closely linked to wisdom in the pankration, as Aristokleidas must know when to exert his energy and when to conserve it. He must also be

[40] North, Helen. "Pindar, Isthmian, 8, 24-28." The American Journal of Philology 69, no. 3 (1948): 304-08.

aware of his opponent's position and know when to advance and when to step back from the action. He must calculate and plan his attacks. Aristokleidas must also show courage in the face of opposition. The risks of competing in the pankration are very high and fear can easily grip competitors before they fight in the arena. Aristokleidas must keep his composure and have the courage to face his opponents and triumph. Finally, pankratiasts must have a sense of justice. They must show respect towards their fellow competitors and be a model representative of their homeland. It is important to note that Pindar does not provide these virtues for future pankratiasts. As Pindar stated earlier in the ode, these qualities are inborn abilities that athletes such as Aristokleidas possess. These virtues, in their most effective state, cannot be acquired by just anyone, as one's status as a warrior is predetermined.

Pindar's presentation of Aristokleidas is ultimately more "human" than his description of Timodemus in *Nem. 2*. Aristokleidas' efforts in the pankration are described as "wearying," which suggests he could have an aggressive and reckless fighting style. Pindar once again emphasizes the importance of inborn abilities, however, he mentions the athletic training which Aristokleidas would have had in his youth. The mention of this training proves that the athlete's victory is not entirely predetermined at birth, as athletes like Aristokleidas must have a good trainer, especially in a sport as difficult and multi-faceted as the pankration. Pindar explicitly states that there are 4 important virtues that pankratiasts, and possibly all athletes, must possess. Aristokleidas is not just superior to others in physical ability, but he also possesses the necessary mental qualities passed on by his ancestors.

Chapter 5: Boys, Brothers, and Bloodlines

Nemean 5 is dedicated to Pytheas of Aegina, who won the Nemean pankration in either 485 or 483 BCE. This ode is ultimately more complex than the previous two for several reasons. Most notable is that Pytheas won the pankration in the boys' category, whereas both Timodemus and Aristokleidas won as adults. Pindar is aware of Pytheas' youthfulness and avoids extensive praise towards him. Pindar praises the Aeginian heroes and presents them as Pytheas' ancestors, similar to Aristokleidas in *Nem. 3,* however, he also praises the actual family members of Pytheas. The virtues Pytheas embodies are inherited from both his extended family as well as his Homeric ancestors. The complexity of the ode is further deepened by the many themes that are present within it. The importance of brotherhood and sibling rivalry is presented in an allusion to the murder of Phocus by his half-brothers, Peleus and Telamon. Pindar acknowledges this act of murder but does not expand upon it in fear of sending the ode down a different path. He instead redirects the ode to the subject of marriage, drawing allusions to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, parents of the mighty hero Achilles. This allusion creates an interesting contrast between the violent nature of the pankration and the themes of love and union present in a marriage. At the end of the ode, Pindar concludes by praising Pytheas' uncle and grandfather, who were both champions in combat sports. Pindar also praises Pytheas' trainer, Menander, who he believes should take all credit for the victory. Pindar approaches his praise to Pytheas similarly to Aristokleidas and Timodemus, however, he presents him in the context of youthful excellence.

He emphasizes inherited ability but stresses the importance of training and honing those skills in an athlete's youth.

Pindar begins *Nem. 5* in a contrasting manner to *Nem. 3*. Instead of addressing the Muses and asking for their aid in praising the athlete, Pindar takes up that role himself. He says (*Nem. 5 1-6*):

> "I am not a sculptor, so as to fashion stationary
> statues that stand on their same base.
> Rather, on board every ship and in every boat, sweet song,
> go forth from Aegina and spread the news that
> Lampon's mighty son Pytheas
> has won the crown for the pancratium in Nemea's games,
> not yet showing on his cheeks late summer,
> the mother of the grape's soft bloom…"

Pindar expresses his issue with erecting statues, as they stay in one place and serve as a reminder of one's deeds only in the spot that it stands. His songs, however, will travel across the sea and reach every sailor along the way. Pindar proclaims himself the bearer of these words and assigns himself the task of spreading the word of Pytheas' victory in the boy's pankratium. Lines 5-6 suggests that Pytheas competed in the "beardless youths" category, as he has yet to grow facial hair being of a young age.

Similarly to Aristokleidas in *Nem. 3,* Pytheas is from Aigina. Pindar recognizes his heritage and presents him in a manner much like Aristokleidas. He starts his praise with (*Nem. 5 7-10*):

> "…and he has glorified the Aeacidae, heroic warriors

> born of Cronus and Zeus and from the golden Nereids, and his
> mother city, a land welcoming to foreigners,
> which Endais' illustrious sons and mighty prince
> Phocus, son of the goddess Psamatheia who bore him on the seashore…"

Pindar immediately establishes a connection between Pytheas and the warriors of old from Aigina. Just as he did with Aristokleidas, he mentions Peleus and Telamon and recounts the ancient line of warriors to connect it with the present day. One theme, however, that is not present in both *Nem. 2* and *Nem. 3* is the frequent mention of the maternal side of one's heritage. In the above passage, there are two women mentioned. The first is Endais, daughter of Chiron, who bore Peleus and Telamon. The second woman is Psamatheia, Nereid goddess and mother of Phocus, an Aegian prince. Both of these women raised exceptional men who left a legacy for Aegina. Endais is praised for giving birth to Peleus and Telamon, who shared exploits with Heracles and helped Jason and the Argonauts acquire the Golden Fleece. Peleus is perhaps most notable for his relationship with Thetis and for fathering the great hero Achilles. Phocus, son of Aeacus and Psamatheia, is the half-brother of both Peleus and Telamon. In Greek mythology, he is killed by his half-brothers because his father favored Phocus. The methods and exact motives behind his death are disputed, however, the Bibliotheca, dated to the first or second century CE, states that the brothers killed Phocus from jealousy over his superior athletic ability.

Pindar begins to detail the murder of Phocus and then stops himself, saying (*Nem. 5 14-18*):

> "I shrink from telling of a mighty deed, one ventured not in accord with justice
> How in fact they left the glorious island and what fortune drove the brave men
> From Oinona. I will halt, for not every exact truth
> Is better for showing its face,

And silence is often the wisest thing for a man to observe."

This passage is interesting because it raises the question of why Pindar chose to mention this "mighty deed" if he did not intend to explicitly state the details. Assuming that this ode would be performed for the community of the athlete, which in this case is Aigina, the audience would be familiar with most of the mythology that stems from the region. Thus, it can be inferred that the citizens of Aigina would understand that Pindar is referencing the murder of Phocus and that therefore he would not have to explicitly state it. Pindar does, however, seem to believe that this event is important in regards to his praise of Pytheas. Pytheas, as revealed later in the ode, is not the first of his family to win in the pankration or other combat sports. His maternal uncle and grandfather were both champions in the Panhellenic Games, but more interesting is that Pytheas has a younger brother, Phylakidas, who also trains in the pankration. Pindar wrote this ode around 485-483 BCE. Over the next few years, roughly 484-478 BCE, Phylakidas would win the Nemean pankratium once and the Isthmian pankratium twice. These sons of Lampon brought considerable fame and glory to Aigina over their years competing in the pankratium. One thing to consider about these brothers is the timeline of their victories in the pankratium. There were two main age categories in the Panhellenic Games at this time. There were the "men," who were usually 18 and older, and there were the "boys," who were younger and generally known to be "beardless." It is suggested that 12 was the minimum age for participation in the Panhellenic Games. Pytheas, the elder of Lampon's sons, won as a beardless youth, which would imply that he is anywhere between 12 and 18 years of age. If Pytheas and Phylakidas were close in age, it is plausible that they competed against each other in the same Panhellenic tournaments. There is no evidence to suggest that they fought each other, but if Pytheas was younger when he won the pankratium at the Nemean Games, it is safe to assume that he would have competed in the

following Games over the next few years before he moved to the “men's” category. Thus, Phylakidas, if only a few years younger, would have competed against his older brother.

Pindar presents the story of Phocus’s murder at the hands of his half-brothers to potentially represent a sibling rivalry that existed between Pytheas and his younger brother Phylakidas. If the story in the Bibliotheca is considered, then both Peleus and Telamon were jealous of Phocus for his superior athletic ability. While it is likely that Pytheas and Phylakidas did not despise each other, Pindar suggests that they were competitive with each other and could have used this to motivate them to succeed in the games. Since the training of athletes in ancient Greece began very early in life, the brothers most likely trained with each other and fought against each other in their early years before competing officially in the Games. Much like the disparity between the athletic ability of Phocus and his half-brothers, it appears that both Pytheas and Phylakidas had noticeable differences in their respective abilities. After Pytheas’ win in this Nemean contest, Phylakidas went on to win three combined titles in the Nemean and Isthmian Games. Pytheas never won again, proving that Phylakidas was the superior athlete between them. One possible explanation for the inclusion of this passage is that Pindar predicted that Pytheas’ win might spark a fire in the heart of his younger brother, motivating him to carry on his family’s legacy and prove himself superior to his older brother.

After Pindar expresses his disdain for the deeds of Peleus and Telamon, he decides to turn instead to another mythological story. Before he turns to this story, he makes a brief but important reflection on the sport of pankration. He says (*Nem. 5. 19-21*):

> “But if it is decided to praise happiness, strength of hands,
> Or steel-clad war, let someone dig for me
> A jumping pit far from this point,

for I have a light spring in my knees,
And eagles leap even beyond the sea."

Pindar mentions three specific things he wishes to praise, the first being happiness. This "happiness" that he refers to can be understood as the marriage between Peleus and Thetis, which he details in the next section of the text. The second thing he praises is the "strength of hands." The exact meaning of this statement is fundamentally unclear, but it could be taken as a remark on Pytheas' athletic ability or that of pankratiasts in general. If this trait is applied to Pytheas, it suggests that he relies heavily on his boxing abilities in competition rather than his wrestling. This preference for striking could reflect details of his physical appearance. Wrestling was often a common strategy for pankratiasts who either had a background predominantly in those techniques or were shorter of stature. A lower center of gravity could help shorter fighters get their opponent on the ground or prevent their opponent from using a similar tactic. A preference for striking could imply that Pytheas is of a lankier, taller build than other competitors. It could also reflect that Pytheas' preferred style of combat is hand-to-hand. Pindar chooses to describe the hands as strong, which implies that there is significant power behind the strikes thrown by pankratiasts. If this trait is again applied to Pytheas, it might suggest that Pytheas won the pankratium by forcing his opponent to submit due to strikes, either verbally or by knockout. Regardless of whether or not this is a general comment about pankration or a reference to the skills of Pytheas, Pindar believes that strong striking power is ideal for all pankratiasts.

Pindar then turns to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. Thetis, who was awarded to Peleus by Zeus, is a sea nymph and therefore a divine being. Pindar views this marriage as a high

honor, as Peleus won her over and achieved "victory" in obtaining her hand.[41] Pindar's reference to this union is multi-faceted. Marriage presents elements of love, particularly *eros*. If this ode is examined in the context of ancient Greek sexuality, then Pytheas' youthfulness is of great significance. A common practice in Ancient Greece was the pairing of older men and younger boys. This pairing was often sexual, and thus Pytheas would be seen as an object of desire by many older men.[42] Pindar hints at these unions by presenting Pytheas in the context of this mythical marriage. Younger boys were sought after, especially if they come from an honorable family such as Pytheas. Pindar, however, does not intend to present Pytheas as his sexual object of desire. Doing so could result in the loss of patronage and his social standing. Pindar instead hints at these unions so that his audience members may seek out Pytheas to create a sexual union.

This marriage serves as a transition into praise of Euthymenes, the maternal uncle of Pytheas. Just as Peleus won the goddess Thetis, Euthymenes has won favor with the goddess Victory. Years before Pytheas won in the Nemean Games, Euthymenes won two contests, possibly in Isthmus, for the glory of Aigina. Pindar says (*Nem. 5. 37-42*):

> "…Poseidon, who often goes from Aigai to the famous Dorian Isthmus,
> Where joyous crowds receive the god to the sound of the pipe
> And compete with the bold strength of their limbs.
> Inherited destiny decides the outcome
> Of all deeds. Euthymenes, twice from Aigina
> Did you fall into Victory's arms and enjoy elaborate hymns."

[41] Pindarus, and J. B. Bury. *The Nemean Odes*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1965, p. 81-82
[42] For more information on relationships pederasty in Ancient Greece, see "Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality: Penetration and the Truth of Sex" by James Davidson

Euthymenes is praised more extensively than Pytheas. As previously stated, Pytheas and other youthful boys would have been seen as an object of sexual desire by older men, thus, they were often presented with more feminine traits. The traits associated with pankration are very masculine and could make Pytheas undesirable in the eyes of older men. Pindar, therefore, uses Euthymenes as a cover to praise Pytheas and his victory in the Games.

Pindar inserts commentary on the fighting techniques used in pankration. He mentions that athletes competed at Isthmus using the "bold strength of their limbs." While the exact sport in question is not named, it could be understood that he is referring to the pankration since it is the practice of Pytheas. It is important to note that Pindar mentions the strength found in all limbs, not specifically the hands or arms, as he mentions earlier in the ode (*Nem. 5. 19*). Pindar makes the choice to acknowledge the strength also found in the legs of the athlete. One possible explanation for this is that Pindar is stressing the importance of wrestling in pankration. Given the brutal nature of the sport and the lack of restriction in techniques, it is safe to assume that most fights will make it to the ground at some point. This is where strength in the lower body can be very useful. In a clinch, where fighters are tied up with each other in close quarters, athletes can use the strength of their legs to drive their opponent to the ground. Conversely, leg strength can be used to help fighters lift themselves off the ground if they prefer to keep the fight standing. Additionally, strikes could be thrown with the legs. Fighters used knee strikes as well as kicks to incapacitate their opponents. Much like his description of a fighter's hands, Pindar implies they must display strong striking with their legs as well. Pindar stresses the importance of being well-rounded as a fighter. It is not enough to simply possess knockout power in your hands, but one must also be able to throw kicks effectively as well as wrestle both offensively and defensively.

Pindar once again states the importance of inherited ability. He says that "inherited destiny decides the outcome of all deeds" (*Nem. 5. 40-41*). Pytheas inherits the abilities of his ancestors, but his family members, too. Pindar first uses his uncle Euthymenes to attribute praise and then later uses Themistios, the maternal grandfather of Pytheas. Of Themistios, Pindar states that he "as a boxer and in the pankratium…won at Epidauros a double victory" (*Nem. 5. 52-53*). Pindar makes a description of Pytheas' athletic skills through the praise of his grandfather. Themistios won in both boxing and pankration, which suggests that he comes from a boxing background. This background and skill set implies that he has a preference to fight on the feet and avoid being taken down. Given that Pytheas inherits the skills of his ancestors, both immediate and ancient, his fighting style would mirror that of Themistios. Pindar emphasizes the importance of having skills on the ground as well as in one's striking but recognizes that Pytheas has a preference for using his boxing skill set. As a boxer, Pytheas would rely heavily on hand strikes to damage his opponents. He would also avoid having to wrestle unless his opponent was severely hurt. Pindar praises Themistios to describe the fighting style of Pytheas.

Indeed, inherited strength determines the outcome in these sports, but it is not the only determining factor. Pindar does not only attribute praise to Pytheas through his family members, but also his trainer, Menander. He states "Remember that it was truly through Menander's good fortune that you won that sweet reward for your toils" (*Nem. 5. 48*). Pindar expands on the ideas he presents in *Nem. 3* with Aristokleidas. Pytheas may possess natural strength and mental fortitude superior to those of other athletes, but without a trainer, it is directionless. His life must be guided on a certain path, and a trainer will help an athlete do that from a young age. Even in Homeric epics and Greek mythology, there is an emphasis on the importance of trainers. Chiron, perhaps the most famous trainer of all, helped to shape heroes such as Heracles, Achilles, Jason,

and Peleus by teaching them skills in medicine and athletics. Just as how Chiron guided these heroes on their path, Menander led Pytheas to similar greatness.

Pindar presents a pankratiast that is similar to those in the first two odes, however, Pytheas' age prevents Pindar from praising him directly. Pindar utilizes this fact to emphasize the importance of inherited destiny by praising Pytheas' family members who were previously victorious in the pankratium as well as other combat sports. The strength of one's limbs is a recurrent trait within this ode, and Pindar references both the strength of one's hands as well as their legs. Pindar expands upon the idea of predetermined greatness by admitting that it is not the only factor in an athlete's success. An athlete, especially in their youth like Pytheas, can only accomplish so much without a great trainer. Pytheas is presented as a hero of Aigina, much like his mythological ancestors and his family before him.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The inspiration for this study comes from my experience both as a martial artist and as a fan of mixed martial arts. Since a young age, I have had a fascination with martial arts and so I wished to apply that interest for this study. In learning about the specifics of pankration and how it was the base for modern mixed martial arts, I became interested in the social aspects of the fighters and their reception among the common people. This brought my attention to Pindar, who used his position as a poet to influence public opinion of these athletes. By using techniques similar to those of Homer, he presents these pankratiasts as epic heroes in his own time. His goal is to make future generations remember his odes and the athletes he honors. In doing so, he constructs an image of the ideal pankratiast by outlining the traits they should all possess.

Pankration is a deadly, violent, and complicated sport. Pindar shows a surprising understanding of the logistics of the sport as well as a desire to construct them as well-rounded athletes. Like those in other sports, Pindar's pankratiasts are destined for greatness. They follow the glorious path set by the ancestors of their homeland, and in the case of some athletes like Pytheas, the path set by their families. Pindar often compares his pankratiasts to warriors, many from the Homeric epics, and transfers their qualities onto his athletes. For example, in *Nem. 2*, Pindar uses Ajax as the embodiment of raw strength and transfers that quality onto the pankratiast Timodemus. Other physical traits would include durability, endurance, and strong striking from both hands and legs. Pindar uses these comparisons to present his pankratiasts as if

they were ancient warriors themselves, gifted with divine physical traits. The victories they achieve in the ring are comparable to one's victory in battle. Pindar also presents the mental characteristics which pankratiasts must embody to be successful in their event. Courage, moderation, wisdom, and justice are all needed for one's success. Aristokleidas is said to have possessed all of them, and it would have been expected of Timodemus and Pytheas as well, supported by his repetition of these virtues found in Isthmian 6.

While the Greek treatment of these pankratiasts may seem unique to its time, it is not too different from how we treat athletes today, especially those who compete in combat sports. Many famous athletes have become greater than their sport. Athletes such as Lebron James, Michael Jordan, and Tiger Woods have all become immortalized for their actions in the sport and will be remembered for many years to come. In combat sports, figures such as Muhammed Ali have brought considerable attention to boxing and have become the face of the sport. Idolizing athletes is still very common in our time, especially in American society. Pindar puts his athletes on a pedestal in a similar manner, proclaiming them ideal citizens and painting them as new "Homeric" heroes.

The question of an athlete's greatness is commonly asked today among sports fans and analysts. A popular subject of debate is the task of determining the single "greatest" athlete in any particular sport. For example, Michael Jordan is seen by many to be the greatest basketball player of all time. In mixed martial arts, Georges St. Pierre is often considered to be the greatest by fans and analysts, myself included. There are certain criteria that athletes must fulfill to be considered in this discussion. For MMA, the most dominant fighters in the history of the sport were very well-rounded as fighters. They possess excellent striking, excellent wrestling, and can mix these two skill sets to beat their opponent. They also display a high amount of intelligence

during the match, knowing when to engage their opponent and when to back off. They study their opponents' strengths and weaknesses and form a plan before the match for how to neutralize their opponent. Greatness in MMA is also determined by the longevity of one's career and how long they were able to stay at the top of their abilities.

Even though Pindar never claims one of his athletes as the greatest in the sport of pankration, he approaches the discussion of an athlete's "greatness" in a similar manner. Throughout these three Nemean odes, he outlines the necessary qualities that pankratiasts must possess. Inherent strength, mental toughness, courage, longevity, and proficiency in technique are all attributed to the ideal pankratiast according to Pindar. These virtues are surprisingly similar to the ones that are associated with modern mixed martial artists. Pindar, though he lived over two thousand years before the invention of mixed martial arts, outlined what he believes are the necessary qualities pankratiasts must embody to achieve success.

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