

OLYMPIAN XIII

For

XENOPHON OF CORINTH

Winner of the Short Foot-Race and the Pentathlon

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from The Odes of Pindar,  
Narr. G. Conway  
(London: Duck, 1972)

THE date of this double Olympian victory of Xenophon was 464 B.C. This Ode, in addition to celebrating Xenophon's unusual feat, is in fact a panegyric in praise of the innumerable athletic victories won by members of Xenophon's clan, the Oligachidae, and does not omit also to include the praises of the city of Corinth. The structure of the Ode is simple. The first triad sings the glories of Corinth; the second those of Xenophon for his present successes at Olympia, and for his previous victories at the Isthmian and Nemean Games, and commemorates victories won by his father and other near relatives. The third triad turns again to Corinth, and tells of her notable legendary figures, Sisyphus and Medea, and of Glaucus, the leader of the Corinthians of Lycia in Asia Minor, who had settled there in earlier years.

The mention of Glaucus affords the opportunity for the introduction, in epode 3, of the story of his grandfather Bellerophon and the winged horse Pegasus. Bellerophon of Corinth, because of murders he had committed, fled as a suppliant to Proetus king of Tiryns. Proetus' wife Anteia accused him falsely of trying to seduce her. Proetus, enraged, but not willing to commit the sacrilege of killing a suppliant, sent Bellerophon to his wife's father Iobates, king of Lycia, with a secret note asking him to destroy Bellerophon for having tried to violate Anteia. Iobates, unwilling to put to death a guest of royal blood, asked Bellerophon to do him the service of destroying the Chimera, the fire-breathing dragon. Bellerophon consulted the seer Polydeus on how he should achieve this, and was advised to catch the winged horse Pegasus. How he achieved this, with the help of Pallas Athene, near the Corinthian fountain of Peirene, is described in this Ode (ep. 3—ep. 4). Bellerophon killed the Chimera by flying above her and ridding her with arrows. Iobates then asked Bellerophon to undertake the further task of defeating his enemies the Solymi and their allies the Amazons, the race of feminine warriors. This Bellerophon again achieved by adopting the same tactics. Eventually Iobates was persuaded of Bellerophon's innocence of the offence against Anteia, gave him

his daughter in marriage and made him heir to the Lycian throne. Bellerophon at the height of his good fortune was presumptuous enough to try to fly up to heaven on Pegasus. Zeus however sent a gad-fly to sting Pegasus, so that he threw off Bellerophon, who fell to earth. Pegasus continued his flight to heaven, where Zeus kept him, using him as a carrier of thunderbolts. Bellerophon fell into a thorn-bush, and lame, blind, lonely and accursed wandered over the earth until death overtook him.

The fifth triad returns to the athletic feats of other members of the Oligæthid clan, and the Ode ends with a short prayer to Zeus for the family's continued good fortune.

str. 1 Three times victorious at Olympia

Is the house that I praise; the trusted friend  
Of fellow-citizens, and to her guests

A generous host. Herein is mirrored  
Corinth the happy city, the proud portal  
Of Isthmian Poseidon, and the nurse  
Of glorious youth. Here dwells

Eunomia and that unsullied fountain  
Justice, her sister, sure support of cities;  
And Peace of the same kin, who are the stewards  
Of wealth for all mankind.—  
Three glorious daughters of wise-counselled Themis.

ant. 1 Far from their path they hold proud Insolence,

Fierce-hearted mother of full-fed Disdain,  
Fair words have I to say, and a bold heart

Calls to my tongue to speak them frankly;  
No man can hide what nature breeds within him.  
But to you, sons of Aletes, how often  
The Hours, decked in their wreaths,

Have given the glory of the victor's triumph  
For supreme valour in the sacred Games,  
All rivals far surpassing, and how often  
For men of your own kin,  
Have they implanted in their hearts the skills

str. 1

*Three times*: the two victories of Xenophon won on the same day, which this Ode celebrates, and one gained forty years previously by Xenophon's father Thersites, in 504 B.C., referred to in ant. 2.

*Eunomia*: the personified spirit of Lawfulness.

*Themis*: the goddess of Right.

ant. 1

*Aletes*: an early king of Corinth.

ep. 1 Of ancient times? The inventor's craft

Makes every work of man.

Whence came the graceful dithyramb  
Of Dionysus with its prize of oxen?

Who first with harness tamed the horse's power?

Or on the temples of the gods

First set the double image of the eagle?

The sweet breath of the Muse adorns your city,

And your young warriors with their deadened spears  
To Ares pay full honour.

str. 2 O sovereign lord, who rules Olympia,

Grant, father Zeus, your blessing for all time  
Upon my songs, and let no mischief touch

This people; and for Xenophon

Grant to his lot the fair breeze of good fortune.

And pray accept for him this chant of triumph

For the crowns that he brings

From Pisa's plain, where first he won the prize

In the Pentathlon contest, then again

Crowned victor in the foot-race of the stade.

Never before this day

Has one man thus achieved this double glory.

ep. 1

*Dithyramb*: the invention or development of the dithyramb is attributed to Arion of Corinth in the seventh century B.C., although elsewhere Pindar attributes its invention to the island of Naos or to Thebes. It was a form of poetry and music associated especially with festive occasions, and with the god Dionysus.

*Prize of oxen*: the meaning of this phrase is uncertain. It may refer to the prize given to the victor in a dithyramb competition, or possibly it relates to the symbolical identification of Dionysus with a bull.

*First with harness*: this does not refer to the invention of the bit, the story of which is told later in this Ode, but to the improved methods of controlling horses which Pindar attributes to the Corinthians.

*The double image of the eagle*: this seems to mean that the Corinthians were the first to place two eagles as 'finials' on their temples, one on each gable.

*Ares*: the god of war.

str. 2

*Pisa's plain*: Olympia.  
*The Pentathlon*: a contest made up of five events, the foot-race, the long-jump, hurling the discus, hurling the javelin, and the wrestling match.

*The stade*: the single stade was a race of about 200 yards, the short foot-race: the double stade one of twice that length.

ant. 2 Twice too the wreath of parsley on his brow  
Declared him victor at the Isthmian Games,  
Nor can Nemea tell a different story.

And by the banks of Alpheus' river,  
The lightning speed of foot of Thessalus,  
His father, is inscribed in glory's roll.

In the foot-race at Pytho,  
Both for the single and the double stade,  
In one brief day he took the prize of honour;  
And the same month in Athens rock-built city

A day of sparkling feet  
Set on his locks three times the crown of splendour.

ep. 2 Seven crowns Hellothia's feast presented;  
And where Poseidon guards

Between two seas the rules of contest,  
Too long 'twould be to sing of Proiodorus,  
His grandfather, or tell of Terpsias

And Erinimus, And your triumphs  
On Delphi's field, or on the Lion's plain,  
I would defy a host of men to match;  
As easy would it be for me to number  
The pebbles of the ocean.

str. 3 But for all things there is a measure set:

To know the due time, therein lies true skill,  
Now I, one man charged with a common purpose,  
Whether I sing the ancient wisdom,  
Or of the wars and the heroic valour  
Of Corinth and her ancestors, no falsehood  
Shall dwell upon my tongue—

ep. 2 *Hellonia's feast*: a festival held at Corinth in honour of the goddess

Athene.  
*Between two seas*: the Isthmian Games, sacred to Poseidon.  
*Terpsias, Erinimus*: members of Xenophon's family, whose exact  
relationship to him we do not know, probably uncles or near relatives.  
*Your triumphs*: victories won by members of his clan.

*Delphi's field*: the Pythian Games.  
*The Lion's plain*: the Nemean Games. The killing of the Nemean Lion  
was one of Heracles' well-known exploits.

fr. 3

*To know the due time*: Pindar frequently points to the importance of  
the right timing of deeds or words, particularly in reference to poetic  
composition. Here he seems to imply that although he could continue  
at still greater length the enumeration of the many victories of Xeno-  
phon's relatives, this would not be consistent with the proper planning of  
this Ode.

Sisyphus, with a craftsman's hand of genius  
Like to a god: Medea who defied  
Her father's word, and took of her own will  
The husband of her choice,  
And saved the Argo and her warrior crew:

ant. 3 Or again in the heroic strife of old

Beneath the walls of Troy, your valiant sons  
Were deemed to sway the battle on either side,  
Some faithful to the sons of Atreus,  
Striving to rescue Helen, others resisting  
With all their warrior might. For when there came  
Glaucus from Lycia,

The Danaans' hearts were chill with deadly fear,  
Hearing him boast that in Peirene's city  
His own forbear once held the sovereign power,  
And the great heritage  
Of kingly palace and wide patrimony:

ep. 3 That grandsire who once strove in vain

Beside Peirene's spring,  
And suffered much, seeking to yoke  
The snake-head Gorgon's offspring, Pegasus.

*Sisyphus*: the legendary founder of Corinth. For his various misdeeds,  
he was condemned by *Jenus* to eternal punishment—to roll a gigantic  
stone up to the brow of a hill and topple it down the farther slope. But  
just as he reaches the summit the stone falls back again to the bottom.

*Medea*: some traditions, which Pindar follows here, allow Medea, the  
famous sorceress, to have had her origins in Corinth. The usual story  
makes her the daughter of Aëtes, king of Colchis, on the Black Sea  
coast. Medea fell in love with Jason, the leader of the Argonauts, and  
helped him by her magic to obtain the Golden Fleece, in spite of the  
herce obstructions of Aëtes. When the Argonauts made their escape,  
Medea accompanied them as Jason's bride.

ant. 3

*On either side*: the Lycians of Asia Minor were descendants of emi-  
grants from Corinth. In the Trojan war they were allies of Troy, while  
the Corinthian forces fought with the Greeks under Agamemnon.  
*Glaucus*: the Lycian leader whose meeting on the battlefield with  
Dionede, the famous Greek warrior, is told in the sixth book of Homer's  
*Iliad*.

*Peirene's city*: Corinth. Peirene was the name of a fountain on Acro-  
corinthus, the high rock citadel of Corinth.  
*His own forbear*: Bellerophon, the grandfather of Glaucus.  
*Pegasus*: the winged horse, the offspring of Poseidon and Medusa  
before she was turned into the snake-headed Gorgon.

ep. 3

Till Pallas, goddess maid, brought him the bridle  
 And golden headband, and behold  
 A dream was truth. 'Sleep not, Aeolid king,  
 Said she, 'but take this charm of steeds, and offer  
 The Horse-Tamer, your sire, a snow-white bull,  
 And show to him this bridle.'

str. 4 Such words, as he lay slumbering in the dark,  
 It seemed the maiden of the shadowy aegis  
 Spoke unto him, and he leapt to his feet

And seized the magic bit, that lay  
 Beside him on the ground; and went with joy  
 To find the prophet of his country's people

The son of Koiranus,  
 And he made known to him the whole issue  
 Of this strange matter—how that he had lain  
 The whole night through upon the goddess' altar,  
 As the seer had foretold him,  
 And how the child of Zeus, whose sword is lightning,

ant. 4 In her own hands brought him the golden charm  
 That tames the savage spirit. And the prophet  
 Bade him obey at once the magic vision,  
 And to Poseidon, the earth-holder,  
 To sacrifice the strong-limbed bull. Then too  
 That he should build an altar with all speed  
 To Athene, queen of steeds.  
 Yet the gods' power can lightly bring to pass  
 Such things as will deny both the sworn word  
 And all the hopes of men. Thus with all zeal  
 Mighty Bellerophon  
 Seized the winged steed, setting between his jaws

*Aeolid king*: Bellerophon was descended from Aeolus, god of the winds.  
*The Horse-Tamer, your sire*: 'sire' means ancestor. The Horse-Tamer is Poseidon, who was the reputed father of Aeolus.  
 str. 4 *The shadowy aegis*: the traditional shield carried by Pallas Athene. The origin of the name was a goat-skin, worn as a protection; hence its stock epithet 'dark' or 'shadowy'.  
*The son of Koiranus*: Polydeus of Corinth, a noted seer.  
 ant. 4 *Queen of steeds*: the goddess Athene was often associated with horses

ep. 4 The soothing charm, and mounting him,  
 In his bronze panoply  
 Played him in sport, to try his pace.  
 And once, with him, he smote the Amazons,  
 From the chill bosom of the lonely air,  
 That archered host of women-kind;  
 And felled Chimera breathing fire, and slew  
 The Solymi. His fate—'twere best unspoken.  
 But Pegasus dwells in the ancient stalls  
 Of Zeus upon Olympus.

str. 5 But for my words, like whirling javelins  
 Sped on their course, let not my eager strength  
 Launch such a shower of darts wide of the mark.

For I come with intent to honour  
 The Muses on their glorious thrones, and pay  
 Like service to the Oligæthidae.

No more than a brief word  
 Must tell their thronging triumphs at the Isthmus,  
 And at Nemea; but the trusty herald,  
 Chanting his welcome cry at either contest  
 Attestis with me the truth  
 Of sixty victories won by this clan.

ant. 5 And of their prizes at Olympia  
 My song has told already. If more shall come,  
 Then should I ring their praises loud and clear.  
 Now I must hope; yet will the issue  
 Lie in the hands of heaven. But if the genius  
 Of their inheritance plays its true part,  
 Then shall we trust in this  
 To Zeus and Ares for the accomplishment.  
 Six crowns they won beneath Parnassus' brow,  
 More at Argos and Thebes; in Arcady,  
 There will the sovereign altar  
 Of Zeus Lycaeus testify their deeds.

ep. 4 *The Amazons, etc.*: see foreword for the incidents mentioned in this epode.  
 str. 5 *The Oligæthidae*: the clan to which Xenophon belonged.  
 ant. 5 *Parnassus' brow*: i.e. at the Pythian Games. Mount Parnassus overlooks Delphi.  
*Zeus Lycaeus*: Parthasia, city of Arcadia, held its Games near the temple of Zeus which stood near Mount Lycaeon.

ep. 5

Pellene too, and Sicyon  
 And Megara saw them victors,  
 And the Aeacid strong-built precinct;  
 Eleusis too and Marathon's fair plain,  
 And the rich cities by the soaring height  
 Of Aetna; from Euboea and all  
 Hellas, a search would find more than the eye  
 Could see. Now on light feet, we say farewell,  
 Zeus, who brings all to pass, pray grant them honour,  
 And fortune's dearest joys.

ep. 5 *The Aeacid precinct*: the island of Aegina. Aeacus was the first legendary king of Aegina.  
*On light feet*: in compliment to the racing feet of Xenophon.

*For*

## ASOPICHUS OF ORCHOMENUS

Winner of the Boys' Foot-Race

**O**RCHOMENUS was an ancient city of Boeotia, the home of the Minyan race in Mycenaean times. The city maintained the old cult of the three Graces, and the present Ode is as much a eulogy of the Graces as of the boy Asopichus for whose Olympian victory it was written. The date of the victory and of this Ode is uncertain but was probably 488 B.C., when Pindar was thirty years old. If so, it is the earliest of Pindar's Olympian Odes.

str. 1

Whose haunts are by Kephissus' river,  
 You queens beloved of poets' song,  
 Ruling Orchomenus, that smilt city  
 And land of lovely steeds,  
 Watch and ward of the ancient Minyan race,  
 Hear now my prayer, you Graces three.  
 For in your gift are all our mortal joys,  
 And every sweet thing, be it wisdom, beauty  
 Or glory, that makes rich the soul of man.  
 Nor even can the immortal gods  
 Order at their behest the dance and festivals,  
 Lacking the Graces' aid;

str. 1

*Kephissus' river*: a river near Orchomenus in Boeotia.  
*Minyan race*: the Minyans were a people of early origin who inhabited Eastern Thessaly and Boeotia. They were the Vikings of Greek legend.  
*The Graces*: a cult of the three Graces was prominent at Orchomenus. Their names are variously given in different ancient writers. Pindar follows the pattern of names given in the second strophe, associated with the qualities mentioned in the first strophe: Euphrosyne, wisdom or talent, particularly poetic talent; Thalia, beauty; Aglaia, glory.