

Servants of Peitho: Pindar fr.122 S.

Anne Pippin Burnett

TO ILLUSTRATE THE PART played by Corinthian prostitutes in that city's worship of Aphrodite, Athenaeus long ago set down bits of a song that he seems to have found in Chamaeleon's *On Pindar* (Athen. 13.573B–574B).¹ This fragment (Pindar fr.122 S.) has gained a certain recent notoriety, for it is regularly cited as evidence for or against the existence of “temple prostitution” in classical Greece.² Nevertheless, the song itself has been almost unanimously dismissed as the clumsy work of a poet embarrassed by his assigned subject. It is time to give these few lines a close reading, taking them as Pindaric and meant to please a particular small audience in early fifth-century Corinth.

¹ Chamaeleon is explicitly cited only for a Corinthian custom of inviting prostitutes to join in civic prayers to Aphrodite (573C), but he was most probably the source of the lines from Pindar and he seems to have identified the favor received from the goddess as the Olympic victory celebrated in Pindar's *Ol.* 13 (Athen. 573F) though nothing within fr.122 S. fixes this as fact. On Chamaeleon's general accuracy, see F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles*² IX (Basel/Stuttgart 1957) 82–83.

² The most recent and extensive treatment is that of S. Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge 2008) 112–152, an earlier version of which appeared in C. Faraone and L. McClure (eds.), *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World* (Madison 2006) 84–86. Many of Budin's arguments were predicted by L. Kurke, “Pindar and the Prostitutes,” *Arion* SER. III 4 (1996) 49–75. See also V. Pirenne-Delforge, “‘Something to Do with Aphrodite’: *Ta Aphrodisia* and the Sacred,” in D. Ogden (ed.), *Companion to Greek Religion* (Oxford 2007) 311–323.

Πολύξεναι νεάνιδες, ἀμφίπολοι
 Πειθοῦς ἐν ἀφνειῷ Κορίνθῳ,
 αἶ τε τᾶς χλωρᾶς λιβάνου ξανθὰ δάκρη
 θυμιᾶτε, πολλάκι ματέρ' ἐρώτων
 οὐρανίαν πτάμεναι
 νοήματι πρὸς Ἀφροδίταν, 5

ὑμῖν ἄνευθ' ἐπαγορίας ἔπορεν,
 ὦ παῖδες, ἐρατειναῖς <έν> εὐναῖς
 μαλθακᾶς ὥρας ἀπὸ καρπὸν δρέπεσθαι.
 σὺν δ' ἀνάγκᾳ πᾶν καλόν

...

... 10

...

...

ἀλλὰ θαυμάζω, τί με λέξοντι Ἴσθμοῦ
 δεσπότηι τοιάνδε μελίφρονος ἀρχᾶν
 εὐρόμενον σκολίου
 ξυνάορον ξυναῖς γυναιξίν. 15

διδάξαμεν χρυσὸν καθαρᾶ βασάνῳ

...

ὦ Κύπρου δέσποινα, τεὸν δευτ' ἐς ἄλσος
 φορβάδων κορᾶν ἀγέλαν ἐκατόγγυ-
 ον Ξενοφῶν τελέαις
 ἐπάγαγ' εὐχολαῖς ἰανθείς. 20

You girls who welcome many guests as
 servants of Peitho in sumptuous Corinth,
 you who burn the pale tears of green incense while
 often in thought you fly
 up towards the mother of
 loves, Aphrodite Ourania – 5
 to you she grants that, free of reproach
 and, o children, in couches of pleasure,
 you are to harvest the fruit of soft youth! All things are
 fine that comply with necessity.

[the last lines of this stanza are missing] 10

as are the first two of the next]

But I do wonder, what will the lords of the Isthmos say
as I contrive a beginning like this for my

honey-sweet *skolion*,
partner of women common to all? 15

Gold we will prove on a touchstone that's clean

[one line is missing]

O Lady of Cyprus, here to your grove

Xenophon leads grazing girls, a

hundred-limbed herd,
gladdened by prayers fulfilled! 20

At its close, this song announces its occasion: it means to commemorate the action of a certain Xenophon (probably the victor of Pindar's *Ol.* 3) who, in response to her happy fulfillment of his prayers, now brings a group of young women to Aphrodite (18–20). It should be noted that, though they are addressed, these women are not necessarily present, any more than is the goddess who is also apostrophized.³ The actual audience is identified at the middle of the third stanza when the performer interrupts himself to consider the response of the “lords of the Isthmos” (13), while the song-type is named in the following line—what these men are hearing is a *skolion*. Corinna was later said to have made pieces of this sort, but this is the first appearance of the term that came to be applied to a short drinking song that imitated the impromptu, one that was “skewed” because singers performed such pieces in any order, while listeners were often provoked by a twist of sense.⁴ Here

³ The girls are brought “here to your glade or precinct” but this could mean simply “here to Corinth”; cf. Pind. *Ol.* 8.51 where *deure* means “here to Aegina.” See n.25 below.

⁴ Pollux 6.108 described *skolia* as “crooked” because the myrtle crown and lyre were taken by anyone, not the next man in order. See V. Liapis, “Double entendres in *skolia*,” *Eranos* 94 (1996) 111–122, who notes the “originally ludic nature of the *skolion*” (118 n.46) with sexually suggestive songs being “most characteristic” (121). D. Collins, *Master of the Game. Competition and Performance in Greek Poetry* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2004) 91, recognizes, as his type 2, short compositions of Aeolic flavor sharing char-

the twist is manifest as the women Xenophon brings, first proposed as perfumed creatures who fulfill a divine imperative, are reintroduced in the final stanza as a herd of cattle. What is more, this “bent” revision is marked at line 14 by a favorite Pindaric trick, the posing of a meta-poetical question that pretends to self-doubt so as to emphasize an effect just achieved. (Compare the “Does some wind blow me off course?” at *Pyth.* 11.39–40). In sum, then, this is a drinking-song made for performance among a group of Corinthian gentlemen to celebrate a deed done by one of themselves—one that stops, halfway through, to ask in effect, “So, how do you like what you’ve heard so far—not just what you expected, perhaps?”

Evidently the opening (ἀρχὰν 14) of the piece is meant to be provocative, and it must be considered in detail. With his first words, the singer makes the women that Xenophon brings both “hospitable” (πολύξενοι 1) and young (νεάνιδες 1, παῖδες 7, κορᾶν 19). Some have heard an echo of the sacrificed Polyxena in the first term,⁵ but since Pindar applies the same epithet to the hospitable island of Aegina (*Nem.* 3.2) and also in superlative form to the altar of Zeus at Olympia (*Ol.* 1.93), the immediate sense is positive—these girls graciously receive their many “guests.” Next he identifies them as servants of Peitho, a minor goddess of seduction whose special concern was the amorous persuasion of the young and inexperienced (Pind. *Pyth.* 9.39–41).⁶ Peitho had a place in the sanctuary of Aphrodite Pandemos on the southwest slope of the Acropolis at Athens (Paus. 1.22.3), but since she represented the ideal mode

acteristics with improvised songs, and notes that “deliberate goading and provocation through mockery informed the general atmosphere of symposia” (96). He does not, however, consider fr.122 S. to be a drinking song, but takes it as Athenaeus presents it (84).

⁵ Kurke, *Arion* SER. III 4 (1996) 60.

⁶ See V. Pirenne-Delforge, “Le culte de la Persuasion,” *RHR* 209 (1991) 396–413. At Megara a statue of Peitho stood in the temple of Aphrodite *Praxis* (of intercourse), along with one of Paregoros (Soothing Appeasement); see L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States* II (Oxford 1896) 733 n.15.

for a loss of sexual innocence, male or female, she was also associated with Artemis, and at Argos the two shared a temple (Paus. 2.21.1). The scholiast at Pindar's *Nemean* 4.35 (56a) made her the mother of Iunx, erotic persuasion in its irresistible, magical form (closely associated with "the whip of Peitho" that goaded both Medea and the young Jason at Pind. *Pyth.* 4.215–219), but her power to overcome timidity may also be exercised through more ordinary equipment: it was she who decked out Pandora with necklaces and bracelets (Hes. *Erga* 78) and she herself is often pictured wearing jewels, adjusting her clothing, holding a jar of perfume, or looking into a mirror, much like a prostitute (see *LIMC* VII s.v. "Peitho" no. 50).⁷ Vase-paintings show her at work with Himeros, Desire (*LIMC* no. 50), and with Hebe (no. 6), and it is she who gives close support to Aphrodite in the seduction of a boyish Adonis on an early fourth century pyxis (no. 8). She is thus strongly associated with a boy's first experience of heterosexual activity, an inauguration that—here in Corinth, as in the rest of the Greek world—could properly take place only in a brothel.

The young women's "service" of Peitho is first described as work with their hands—an ecstatic act of warming "pale tears-drops" of frankincense⁸ while their thoughts soar up towards Ourania. This use of incense has suggested the idea of sacrifice to some (see n.16 below), but perfumed smoke was essential in cults of Aphrodite and Eros; Sappho mentions it at the entrance of the newly married Hector and Andromache into Troy (fr.44.30 L.-P.) and it was frequent in marriage ceremonies, erotic magic, and brothels, as encouragement to lovers who should likewise burn and rise.⁹ On an Attic vase of about

⁷ Athenaeus knew of a prostitute named Peitho, and at Men. *Epitrep.* 555–556 a flute-girl prays to Peitho as *symmachos*, asking aid in verbal persuasion.

⁸ Theophrastus *HP* 9.4.7 reports that the golden drops of gum were the most fragrant, and Pliny *HN* 12.61 notes that incense that forms itself into tears is called "male" and by some is thought to resemble testicles.

⁹ At Alciphron 4.13.5 *hetairai* offer *libanos* to Aphrodite; at Xen. *Symp.* 2.3 a new bride is said to anoint herself with myrrh. M. Detienne, *The Gardens of*

410 B.C. Peitho holds what seems to be an incense-burner (*LIMC* no. 31) much like those that appear in household scenes where the seduction of the young Adonis is celebrated.¹⁰

Having wrapped Peitho's attendants in scents that overcome reluctance and bring on desire, the singer closes his first stanza with the august name of the divinity who rules their gestures and thoughts. In the next, he announces a particular task that Aphrodite Ourania assigns to the young women, as if it were a privilege or power (the verb in 6, ἔπορευ, is the same by which Athena confers the persuasive power of the bit upon Bellerophon at Pind. *Ol.* 13.77). Placed upon "couches of desire" (7; compare the "myrrh-scented soft beds" where desire is satisfied at Sappho fr.94.18–22, and the "sweet couchings" that Peitho and Aphrodite arrange for Apollo and Cyrene at Pind. *Pyth.* 9.12), they are to pluck the perfection of tender youth, explicitly doing so without incurring blame (6). For Pindar, Hora is the "herald of Aphrodite" (*Ném.* 8.1) and her "fruit" ripens as a girl becomes shapely or as the down on the cheek of an 18-year-old male grows stiff. It was his embodiment of such fruition that gave Ganymede immortality (*Ol.* 104–105); Jason made his appearance at Iolkos, hair still uncut but the flower of his youth "already swelling" (*Pyth.* 4.158). In the flower of his growth, his chin newly darkened, Pelops thought of taking a princess and asked Poseidon to recognize love-favors enjoyed in the past (*Ol.* 1.67–69), for this is the moment at which a young male shifts from passive to active sexuality. Hora's fruit must be taken in season, and the Pindaric verb for such action is (ἀπο)δρέπω, (ἀπο)δρέπομαι, "pick, pluck, take for oneself, nibble," whether active or middle in form (LSJ lists no passive until Philstr. *VA* 8.7.5). A youth as he fulfills the final moments of boyhood may himself be said to cull the pleasures of that status (so Thrasyboulos, at Pind. *Pyth.* 6.48), but such work is

Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology (Atlantic Highlands 1977) 128, notes that "aromatic substances" were thought to bring unlike persons together and to provoke precocious sexuality in adolescents.

¹⁰ Detienne, *Gardens* 114–115.

ordinarily done by a sexual partner who is (like the suitors of a young princess at *Pyth.* 9.109–110) eager to “pluck away Hebe’s fruit.”

The singer of Xenophon’s drinking song chooses to remind his audience that the new servants of Peitho will, among their other activities, relieve the youths of Corinth of their sexual ripeness. If performed by women of citizen status, this work would be blameworthy but for these imported professionals it is a divinely imposed duty, and it is given extreme emphasis as the verb ἀποδρέπασθαι marks the end of both sung line and sentence (8),¹¹ to be capped by an evaluating gnome. Adolescence must come to an end as boys become men, and therefore the task of Peitho’s agents is honorable: “Under necessity all things are fine” (9).¹² In Pindaric practice a general truth of this sort usually marks a transition, often by way of a recall to the actual occasion, and such is the case here. The three lines that follow are lost¹³ but in their course the sensual

¹¹ Kurke, *Arion* SER. III 4 (1996) 51, translates “to have the fruit of your soft bloom plucked,” as if the verb were passive and the women were virgins; cf. B. MacLachlan, “Sacred Prostitution and Aphrodite,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 21 (1992) 145–162, at 160, where the girls’ “hora ... is fruit which will be culled.” Budin, *Myth* 51, first translates “the right to cull the fruit of soft beauty,” then alters this to a passive, “to have plucked the fruit of soft beauty” (112) and goes on to speak of these “passive prostitutes” (130).

¹² Compare Philemon fr.3.6, where youths are driven towards prostitutes by the “necessity” of their nature.

¹³ The sense of line 16 remains hopelessly obscure; H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (New York 1973) 470, heard the gold of Pindar’s friendship with Xenophon being tried on the touchstone of a demand for a song about prostitutes. Kurke, *Arion* SER. III 4 (1996) 57 n.18, identified the gold more specifically as “Xenophon’s fine aristocratic mettle,” the stone as the present song, made by a poet concerned to establish “the milieu of gift exchange.” But perhaps the song is the gold, tried on the ears of the Corinthian lords; or the listeners themselves may be gold, to which the song’s rough touchstone is now applied, cf. *Pyth.* 10.67–68, where an “upright mind” is tested in friendly actions, like gold on a touchstone. Or finally, since the word χρυσός was often employed as a pun for *kysthos*,

illusion of drops of golden liquid, perfumed smoke, and luxurious beds dissolves entirely. When the text resumes the song's performer speaks out in the first person, claims his own function, and tosses a direct challenge to his audience.¹⁴ "You don't quite like my picture of these ladies at work, do you?" he says in effect, and then he explains. They were expecting him to serve like a pimp, recommending "women common to all" (*ξυνάορον ξυνάως γυναιξίν* 15),¹⁵ and instead he has sung of exalted delights offered, not to the "lords of the Isthmos," but to youths just coming of age—pleasures of a sort his listeners can hardly remember, prepared for boys they will no longer hail as *kalos*.

As if to make amends, the singer at once proposes a kind of appeasement. Taking a second look at Xenophon's gift to the Cyprian, he now reports that what enters her "grove" is a "hundred-limbed herd of grazing girls" (19).¹⁶ The word he

female sexual parts, the singer might here suggest that the women will meet the touchstone of fully mature partners.

¹⁴ This question is usually said to express the poet's "embarrassment" at having to treat an "improper" subject; see, among many, B. Gentili, *Poetry and its Public* (Baltimore 1988) 134, where the poet has to "extricate himself from the scandalous nature of his topic." S. G. Pembroke, "Prostitution, Sacred," *OCD* ³ (1996) 1264, reports that the song "explicitly anticipates a degree of moral opprobrium and seeks to forestall this with a coy invocation to 'necessity.'"

¹⁵ The words at line 15 led M. Beard and J. Henderson, "With This Body I Thee Worship," *Gender and History* 9 (1997) 496–503, at 496, to report Pindar's "chorus" (!) as saying that "Corinth provides the men of its community with wives who are as good in bed as the priciest call-girls." The phrase is in fact a close parallel to Philemon's *γυναικας κοινάς* (fr.3.8–9) of the women in the "Solonic" brothels of Athens.

¹⁶ The number 100 denotes multiplicity, cf. the hundred-headed monster Typhon (Pind. *Pyth.* 8.6) and the hundred-handed child of Hekabe (*Pa.* 8a.21). With an opposite response Kurke, *Arion* SER. III 4 (1996) 58–60, argued that Pindar here "evokes a Homeric hecatomb" and so underlines a sense of sacrifice. But the introduction of "limbs" and the necessity of dividing either by two or by four undermines any suggestion of solemnity; compare the arithmetical play at *Nem.* 4.28–30.

chooses for the members of this “herd” (*φορβάδων*) is one that was commonly applied to prostitutes¹⁷ because they, like animals “put out to grass,” were easily accessible and also ready to use their mouths, both as pipe-players and as (blameless) specialists in *fellatio*.¹⁸ (The bridle worn by an *aulos*-girl to support her instrument was called a *φορβεία*.) The metaphor puts the women on all fours, which incidentally means that their number is most probably 25, though the sense may be simply “a multitude.” This posture is associated with females giving oral sex,¹⁹ and more significantly for the song it demands a shift of listener-focus—from skilled hands to a shamble of bestial limbs. Fingers that prepare incense have given way to hooves and muzzles of nibbling animals as with this final image Pindar assures the men of Corinth that of course the young women whom their friend supplies to Aphrodite are not limited to service among 18-year-olds. The lords of the Isthmus will also be welcomed by Peitho’s new servants, though their visits will not be heavily scented with myrrh, but will carry a whiff of the stable instead.

Pindar’s *skolion* reminds Xenophon’s company that the new prostitutes, like all of their kind, will frequently receive among their “guests” boys who are passing from adolescence into adulthood. It brings to its audience a momentary memory of transforming pleasures that they will not know again, of a youth that cannot be revived. Nevertheless, since their shared exclusion from such an experience is proof of their own mature masculinity, the gentlemen of Corinth can continue to empty their cups with wry satisfaction. The song has fulfilled its commissioned purpose of marking Xenophon’s happy response to an answered prayer, and it thus seems to leave the goddess, the

¹⁷ Soph. fr.720 = Eustath. *Il.* 1088.35; Poll. 7.203.

¹⁸ Ar. *Vesp.* 582 and schol.; see H. Herter, “Soziologie der antiken Prostituten,” *JAC* 3 (1960) 70–101; J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse*² (New York 1991) 51–52.

¹⁹ Henderson, *Maculate Muse* 183, no. 380.

patron, and the audience content. However, when it is drawn into today's debate over the existence or non-existence of Corinthian "temple prostitution," it gives much less satisfaction.

The *skolion*, in this reading, strengthens neither camp in that debate. It does not locate its "servants of Peitho" in the temple of Ourania, but neither does it lend itself to Stephanie Budin's attempt to enclose them in the dining hall where the song is performed. Leslie Kurke had heard a reference to Polyxena in line 1, which, combined with the *ἐκατόγγυιον* of line 19, suggested to her that Xenophon's "herd" is described as a secular hecatomb.²⁰ She saw a post-sacrificial banquet where the women were actively present, and building on these notions, Budin imagines a symposium where an uncomfortable singer is forced to hail a troupe of virginal (!) whores—girls dedicated by Xenophon to his guests and at this moment sacrificing themselves to drinking men who are in this way deified.²¹ This vision, however, rests on blatant misreadings: first, an overt distortion of line 3, so that "the 'fresh young' things sacrificed would be the prostitutes themselves,"²² then the mistranslation of line 8, so that virgin girls are passively "plucked" (see n.11 above). The resulting song presumably enhances its patron by helping him to treat his guests as if they were gods, but it packs twenty-five extra bodies into what, even in sumptuous Corinth, would have been a limited space, while it robs Aphrodite of an honor explicitly announced (it turns out that her *alsos* was "most likely a euphemism" for the men's hall).²³ By this read-

²⁰ Kurke, *Arion* SER. III 4 (1996) 60: "This single figure, then, unites the poem's opening (the hierodules as 'young women') and its close (the hierodules as sacrificial 'herd')."

²¹ Budin, *Myth* 125–126; 138, "the prostitutes were 'sacrificial victims' to the erotic desires of the semidivine Masters of the Isthmos."

²² Budin, *Myth* 122, where a genitive singular adjective (*χλωρᾶς*) is treated as an accusative plural substantive so as to make it "the prostitutes themselves" who are "sacrificed" (though the verb is *θυμᾶτε*).

²³ Budin, *Myth* 125.

ing, the women remain as Xenophon's property, so that the song becomes, in effect, a celebration of his new status as whoremaster.

The *skolion* itself does not place the new prostitutes among the present guests, but neither does it make them "temple functionaries" who "practice the art of sex," as others have described them.²⁴ In fact, the song is in no detail appropriate to Athenaeus' description of its occasion as a sacrificial ceremony (*θυσία*, Athen. 13.573F) in which Xenophon was joined by the women who were being offered. A *skolion* would have no place in such surroundings and Pindar's words contain no reference to sacrifice, formal dedication, or temple. Their mood is not ceremonial but sympotic and their couches seem to float in a luxurious non-space that listeners must supply from their own memories. True, the girls have been "led into Aphrodite's grove or precinct" (18), but this could mean simply that they have been brought to Corinth, since the goddess was generally present throughout the city that her temple overlooked.²⁵

For these reasons some scholars have supposed that Athenaeus misunderstood his source. It is their belief that Chamaeleon had cited the fragment, not in connection with prostitutes dedicated to temple service, but instead as exemplary of the Corinthian custom Athenaeus has just mentioned (573C–D), that of involving "as many prostitutes as possible" in public and private supplications and petitions.²⁶ According to this school, the song treats of the girls who have been brought to Aphrodite, not as a gift, but simply that they might enhance the force of Xenophon's prayers of thanks. The hypothesis seems reasonable, but in the end it greatly reduces the weight

²⁴ M. Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London 2002) 200.

²⁵ See n.3 above. For Aphrodite's pervasive presence in Corinth see E. Will, *Korinthiaka* (Paris 1955) 223–233, who notes her many precincts in the area.

²⁶ H. Conzelmann, "Korinth und die Mädchen der Aphrodite," *NAG* 8 (1967) 247–261; H. D. Saffrey, "Aphrodite à Corinthe," *RBibl* 92 (1985) 359–374; and most recently Pirenne-Delforge, in *Companion* 321.

of Xenophon's action. According to the song itself, he would celebrate a gesture of which he is proud, one that should bring joy to the goddess as she has brought joy to him. Would the simple observance of an ordinary local practice inspire him to boast of it among his peers?

Separated from the late and digressive testimony of the Dinnertime Philosopher, Pindar's *skolion* establishes only the already notorious fact that Corinth provided luxurious whorehouses. Nevertheless a few practical conclusions can be drawn from this overworked fragment. The women who are described as receiving both youth and men of maturity must have been housed in an accessible place, which the small temple on the peak of Acrocorinth was not.²⁷ Their station was more probably located in the city below, where they would have worked under professional direction in a well-supervised house. However, since Aphrodite is directly congratulated upon their arrival, while Xenophon's gesture is defined as his response to a joy she has granted, it is reasonable to suppose that, wherever their soft couches were placed, the wages of Peitho's girls, like their incense-laden thoughts, were to rise at least in part to Ourania—that is to say, to her treasury.²⁸ Their work is done in the city, for its citizens, but as slaves they are the property of the goddess.

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Kingston
annepippinburnett@yahoo.ca

²⁷ For the temple see C. W. Blegen, "Excavations at the Summit," in *Corinth III.1* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1930) 3–28, esp. 4; cf. J. B. Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth* (Oxford 1984) 399 n.3, who supposes the women would have worked in "some other place less exhausting to reach."

²⁸ Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth* 398–399, concluded that there were in Corinth both "private brothels" and "houses of Aphrodite."