

PINDAR'S *OLYMPIAN* 12:  
HOPES, REVERSALS OF FORTUNE AND TRUTH\*

Loukas PAPANIMITROPOULOS\*\*

*Résumé.* – La 12<sup>e</sup> *Olympique* peut être divisée en deux parties inégales : la première (1-12a) décrit essentiellement les travaux de Tychè, tandis que la seconde (13-19) montre comment le cas individuel représenté par Ergotélès s'inscrit dans ce plus grand ensemble. Le but de cet article est de montrer que ces deux parties sont liées non seulement en appliquant une logique déductive, mais aussi par des répétitions verbales et thématiques qui construisent cumulativement la thèse suivante : en raison de l'impossibilité de connaître le futur, les hommes, dans leur quête du pouvoir, comptent sur l'espoir, ce qui entraîne des revers de fortune qui, finalement, manifestent la vérité.

*Abstract.* – *Olympian* 12 can be divided into two uneven parts: the first one (1-12a) essentially outlines the workings of Tyche, while the second one (13-19) demonstrates how the individual case of Ergoteles fits into this greater scheme of things. The purpose of this article is to show that these two parts are connected not only through a deductive logic, but also through verbal and thematic repetitions that cumulatively build up the following thesis: due to the unknowability of the future, men, in their quest for power, rely on hopes, something which leads to reversals of fortune that, ultimately, manifest the truth.

*Mots-clés.* – Pindare, Ergotélès, espoir, revers de fortune, vérité.

*Keywords.* – Pindar, Ergoteles, hopes, reversals of fortune, truth

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\*\* University of Athens ; lpapadim@phil.uoa.gr

Pindar's *Olympian* 12 was composed for a man who was well accustomed to reversals of fortune; initially a citizen of Cnossos Ergoteles fled from his native city due to civil strife and found refuge in Himera in Sicily. Then, he went on to win victories in all of Greece's most notable athletic contests. In all probability, these victories made him a citizen with full rights in his adopted city, which granted him his own fields to cultivate. No wonder Pindar chooses to devote the ode that celebrates Ergoteles' victory in long distance running in 466 B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> to Tyche. This ode can be divided into two uneven parts: the first one (1-12a) essentially outlines the workings of Tyche, while the second one (13-19) demonstrates how the individual case of Ergoteles fits into this greater scheme of things.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to show that these two parts are connected not only through a deductive logic, but also through verbal and thematic repetitions that cumulatively build up the following thesis: due to the unknowability of the future, men, in their quest for power, rely on hopes, something which leads to reversals of fortune that, ultimately, manifest the truth.

Right from the very beginning the poet applies a "strong" term (λίσσομαι, 1); but, contrary to the majority of his epinician poems, he does not call for divine assistance in order to praise more effectively his *laudandus* or to extol him, but to pray for the destiny of an entire city. And the selection of this particular verb implies that he conceives this fate as being precarious. Although it is not stated directly, the destiny of Himera and that of Ergoteles are intertwined, since the latter can reap the benefits of his athletic victories and can continue his athletic career unobstructed only if his adopted city is safe from external dangers,<sup>3</sup> something which justifies the urgency of the situation suggested by the application of the verb "entreat". Furthermore, the ensuing reference to Zeus the Deliverer, which precedes the mention to the deity invoked,

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1. On the date of the ode see W.S. BARRETT, "Pindar's Twelfth *Olympian* and the Fall of the Deinomenidai", *JHS* 93, 1973, p. 23-35; cf. E. DRAGONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *Νίκη και Πολιτικός Βίος στον Πίνδαρο. Ολυμπόνικος 12: Έργοτέλει Ίμερταίω Δολιχοδρόμω*, Athens 2011, p. 193. On the other hand, U. v. WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORF, *Pindaros*, Berlin 1922, p. 305; C. CATENACCI, *Pindaro. Le Olimpiche*, Milan 2013, p. 288-289 and N. NICHOLSON, *The Poetics of Victory in the Greek West. Epinician, Oral Tradition, and the Deinomenid Empire*, Oxford 2016, p. 237-253 prefer to date the poem in 470 B.C.E.

2. Cf. W.H. RACE, *Style and Rhetoric in Pindar's Odes*, Atlanta 1990, p. 97. As far as the prevailing tone of each part of the poem is concerned, at the beginning (1-5) it is hymnic, then (5-12a) it becomes gnomic and, finally (13-19), it is converted into encomiastic, a structure unparalleled in the rest of Pindar's extant epinician odes.

3. Pindar often stresses in his extant work the benefits of peace (ήσυχία). In *Ol.* 4.16 he tries to reassure the citizens of Camarina that Psaumis does not aspire to become a tyrant through instigating internal strife and characterizes peace as "city-loving" (φιλόπολιν). In *Pyth.* 1.70 peace secures the cohesion of the city (σύμφωνον) and is considered as such an important goal that Pindar asks the assistance of Zeus. In *Pyth.* 4.296 the poet attempts to reconcile his *laudandus* with his former political adversary by affirming that the latter has no longer hegemonic aspirations (ήσυχία θιγέμεν). In *Pyth.* 8.1-4 peace is characterized as "kindly" (Φιλόφρον), is the daughter of Zeus himself, makes the cities great (μεγιστόπολι) and is presented as holding the keys of counsels and wars, probably because she protects the city from internal and external opponents. In *Paian* fr. 52b.22 peace is perceived as a desirable state, but is achieved through war, that aims at the assistance of one's allies. Finally, in *Hyporch.* fr. 109 peace has a bright light, is antithetical to dissension and is conceived as the opposite of poverty; that is probably why it is called "proud" (μεγαλόνοσος).

not only reveals the precise content of Pindar's petition, in which he asks for Himera's power and freedom,<sup>4</sup> but also integrates Tyche through its genealogical affiliation to a larger cosmic order regulated by the supreme god,<sup>5</sup> enhancing, thus, the validity of his following contentions which describe Tyche's attributes. However, the question arises as to how exactly Tyche can actually increase or rather "broaden" the power of Himera (εὐρουσθενέ', 2), bringing about her safety.

The answer is hinted at in the following verses, which function through a distinction between the sea and the land, a distinction that is proper to the geographic location of Himera and that develops a theme already implied through the verb of the previous sentence (ἀμφιπόλει, 2): apart from meaning "to protect" this word also carries connotations which might signify "from both sides of the city". Moreover, we must take into consideration that the three subjects of the sentence, ships, wars and assemblies, share the same verb (κυβερνῶνται, 3), urging us, therefore, to perceive them as different aspects of the same phenomenon. In fact, ships and wars are notionally connected, since they are both qualified by adjectives which mean "swift" (cf. θοαί, 3 to λαυηροί, 4),<sup>6</sup> and wars are paratactically linked with assemblies. Consequently, it seems to me that all of these three nouns essentially refer to the concept of war; the ships mentioned are in reality warships, while the task of the assemblies was primarily to decide on matters of war and peace. Thus, Himera will increase its power and will maintain its freedom, if it wins at war. The implication of the connection between this and the previous sentence, a connection established through the particle γάρ (3), appears to be that freedom and power are the outcome of war. However, this gnome does not concern exclusively Himera, but also its new citizen, Ergoteles, since he was transported to the Sicilian city by a swift ship,<sup>7</sup> since he left his native city due to internal conflict and since he probably became a citizen with full rights due to the counsel given at Himera's assembly.

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4. As far as the historical context of this invocation is concerned, C.M. BOWRA, *Pindar*, Oxford 1964, p. 123-124 notes that it might allude either to the defeat of the Carthaginians at Himera in 480 or to the expulsion of Thrasydaeus and the establishment of a free government. See also B.L. GILDERSLEEVE, *Pindar. The Olympian and Pythian Odes*, Amsterdam 1965, p. 225 and D.E. GERBER, *Euterpe. An Anthology of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac, and Iambic Poetry*, Amsterdam 1970, p. 385. W.S. BARRETT, *op. cit.*, p. 34-35 thinks that the cult of Zeus Eleutherios was most probably instituted after the fall of Thrasyboulos in 466.

5. Cf. W.J. VERDENIUS, *Commentaries on Pindar, vol. I*, Leiden 1987, p. 89 and A. VRAKAS, "Ο 12ος Ολυμπιονίκος του Πινδάρου: Ερμηνευτικός Σχολιασμός", *Πλάτων. Παράρτημα: Θέματα Μέσης Εκπαίδευσης* 8, 2013-2014, p. 99. See also W.H. RACE, "Elements of Plot and Formal Presentation in Pindar's *Olympian* 12", *CJ* 99, 2003-2004, p. 377 and 392.

6. The ancient scholia (Σ 5a) provide a different interpretation for the epithet λαυηροί which qualifies wars; they characterize them as "mindless", because they mindlessly urge the soldiers to attack one another. On the other hand, W.J. VERDENIUS, *op. cit.*, p. 92 thinks that the adjective suggests "that the rapid turns of war are difficult to control and often have an unexpected outcome", while C. CATENACCI, *op. cit.*, p. 584 maintains that here the adjective evokes the rapid rush of the combatants and the sudden character of the melee.

7. See also E. DRAKONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 94-95.

One of the main characteristics of the following sentence is the *hyperbaton* between the article and its noun (αἴ...ἐλπίδες, 5-6α), a literary device which probably aims at urging us to perceive all of the intervening content as an integral semantic part of the concept that encloses it, so to speak. Therefore, according to Pindar, hopes contain not only reversals of fortune, but also an implied eventual transition from falsehood to truth in the sense that sometimes they are fulfilled and sometimes they are belied by reality; if the figurative ship cuts through the waves of vain falsehood, then it is inevitably suggested that it will reach truth. This transition might well be considered as the result of the implied reversal in the sense that, contrary to the expectations fostered by hopes, the ship of life does not always remain upright, that success is followed by failure, that pessimism succeeds optimism. And this process of alternation is presented as something continuous, as is suggested by the adverb “again” (αὖ, 6). In addition, hopes are presented through a nautical metaphor as somewhat parallel to ships that cut through the waves,<sup>8</sup> a metaphor which incites us to connect this sentence with the previous one, which featured the reference to swift ships. This connection is reinforced by the particle γε (5). War, Pindar seems to imply, is the result of hopes in the sense that cities declare war in the hopes of augmenting their power. The reason that men rely on hopes, as the continuation of the poem makes clear, is the absence of any reliable token of what will happen from the gods and the mortals’ inability to perceive the future (7-9); this sentence is again connected to the previous one through a μέν...δέ construction and continues to build Pindar’s implicit argument. And since there is no reliable token from the gods about the future, the prayer to Tyche, with which the poem commences, is retrospectively justified.

Pindar’s justification of his initial prayer to Tyche is concluded with an elaboration of the reversals of fortune that often occur to men. Lines 10-12a are linked to lines 5-6a not only through the recurrence of the word πολλά (cf. 7 to 10), despite the fact that in the first case it is used as an adverb, while in the second it is used as an adjective, but also through the repeated nautical metaphor, since the word ζάλαις most probably refers to squalls.<sup>9</sup> Through this connection Pindar seems to maintain implicitly that reliance on hope often brings about reversals of fortune, since hopes are not always fulfilled or do not always have the anticipated outcome. And although this idea had been suggestively presented through the *hyperbaton* between the article and its noun in lines 5-6a, as we have already observed, the Theban poet adds here the element of the concomitant emotions, pleasure and grief (11). What is more, there

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8. The association of Tyche and the perils of navigation can also be found in *Hymn* fr. 40, where Tyche is characterized as “disobedient” and as “turning a double rudder”. See also *Pyth.* 1.33-35, where it is stated that for seafaring men a prosperous homecoming is secured by a favorable wind, and *Isth.* 1.32-40, where the perils of the sea are mentioned.

9. D.E. GERBER, *op. cit.*, p. 386 also stresses the re-occurrence of the nautical imagery. See also J. PÉRON, *Les images maritimes de Pindare*, Paris 1974, p. 296-297 and M. SILK, “Pindar’s Poetry as Poetry: A Literary Commentary on *Olympian* 12” in S. HORNBLLOWER, C. MORGAN eds., *Pindar’s Poetry, Patrons, and Festivals*, Oxford 2007, p. 187.

seems to be a notional connection between the verb “fell” (ἔπεσεν, 10),<sup>10</sup> which is applied to the mention of the transition from pleasure to grief, and the rather peculiar adjective “deep” (βαθύ, 12a), which qualifies the good that derives from trouble. The import of this correlation might be that both states can be precarious and might immediately switch to the opposite ones, especially if we take into consideration that these changes often occur contrary to our judgment (10).

After Pindar's views on the workings of Tyche have been exposed he proceeds to demonstrate how exactly the case of Ergoteles is relevant to his general observations. When he addresses the victor, initially he does not call him by his name but refers to his descent instead; the mention of his father's name (Φιλάνορος, 13), which literally means “he who is fond of men”, echoes the previous reference to men (ἀνδρῶν, 5) in the context of the function of hopes and is antithetical to the adjective that qualifies the civil strife that deprived the victor of his fatherland (ἀντιάνειρα, 16).<sup>11</sup> This almost certainly intentional repetition probably aims at stressing that, while internal conflict at Cnossos initially seemed to belie Ergoteles' hopes for personal distinction through a reversal of fortune, another alternation has occurred which not only fulfilled these hopes, but also revealed a truth, a truth that Pindar takes on to formulate. And this formulation is appropriately introduced by the particle ἦτοι (“truly”, 13). The truth is, of course, that had it not been for civil strife that turned Ergoteles away from Crete the fame of his swiftness would have been dissipated.

While, on the one hand, the reference to the name of the victor's father and the epithet used to qualify civil strife essentially connect, through the device of verbal repetition, the second unit of the poem to that part of the first one which deals with hopes and their attributes (5-6a), the mention of civil strife (στάσις, 16) and the adjective applied to the likening of Ergoteles, when he was participating in local athletic contests, to a cock that fights at home (ἐνδομάχας, 14) link it thematically with the part of the first unit that mentions war (3-5). This thematic connection better illuminates the metaphor of the cock that fights at home, since it suggests that Ergoteles participated in these local athletic competitions in an attempt to increase his power and freedom within the civic framework.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, the adjective that qualifies the cock implies the well-established correlation between warfare and sports

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10. A verb which C.A.M. FENNELL, *Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes*, Cambridge 1879, p. 102; B.L. GILDERSLEEVE, *op. cit.*, p. 226; D.E. GERBER, *op. cit.*, p. 386; E. DRAGONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 125-126 and A. VRAKAS, *op. cit.*, p. 109 consider as a metaphor taken from the cast of dice. On the other hand, I believe that it is more appropriate to associate it with the ups and downs of a ship traversing on a stormy sea.

11. The contrast between Φιλάνορος and ἀντιάνειρα is noted by W.J. VERDENIUS, *op. cit.*, p. 97-98.

12. On the other hand, S. KAPSOMÉNOS, “Un prétendant de la monarchie à Cnossos dans la poésie de Pindare”, *Κρητικά Χρονικά* 15-16.1, 1961-1962, p. 267-268 goes so far as suggesting that Ergoteles actually sought actively through civil war to gain the supreme power of Cnossos. However, the phrase τιμὰ...ποδῶν (15) disproves his thesis, something of which S. Kapsoménois is well aware, judging from his rather implausible attempt to propose another lectio for this verse (ἀγλεᾶ τιμὰ<ν> καταφυλλοροοῖσαν εἶδες).

and, on the other, it is adequately attested that victors in athletic contests bettered their chances at subsequently promoting a political career in their homeland and at securing a propitious marriage, two goals which were often considered as interrelated; after all, a cock usually fights for supremacy and sexual access. Moreover, the *hyperbaton* between the possessive pronoun *τεά* and the noun *τιμά* that it qualifies (13-15), parallel as it is with the *hyperbaton* between *αἶ* and *ἐλπίδες* (5-6a),<sup>13</sup> might suggest that Ergoteles was hoping to gain honor, despite the fact that all of the intervening content implies that this honor had a limited scope, since it was restricted to his homeland. Civil strife seemed initially to thwart Ergoteles' expectations and aspirations for distinction, but also prepared the way for his ensuing establishment, to which the image of the fighting cock might serve as a prolepsis,<sup>14</sup> since that animal was depicted on the coins of Himera.<sup>15</sup> Ergoteles' case then can be classified under the category previously described as a transition from troubles to success; the civil strife "that puts man against man" (*ἀντιάνειρα*, 16) was the squall that he had to face (*ἀντικύρσαντες*, 12),<sup>16</sup> as the recurrence of the prefix suggests. In fact, it was the frustration of his hope for personal distinction in his homeland that led him through a spectacular reversal of fortune to an even greater distinction; from this "squall" he emerged not simply victorious, but glorious, since he gained Panhellenic renown for his speed.

When Pindar finally mentions the name of the victor, he puts it in the context of the totality of his athletic accomplishments, which are presented in an antithetical way (*νῦν δ'*, 17) to what has been previously stated. These accomplishments, therefore, seem to exempt Ergoteles from the fate of most mortals in the sense that the importance and glory of his athletic achievements cannot possibly be negated by any kind of reversal of fortune, a contrast which is most effectively emphasized through the antithesis between the participle in the aorist tense (*στεφανωσάμενος*, 17), which states that something has already been done, and the verb *κατεφυλλορόησε(ν)* ("would have shed its leaves", 15).<sup>17</sup> Ergoteles' task has thus been

13. Those two literary devices have been observed by D.E. GERBER, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

14. G. GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. J.E. LEWIN, Ithaca-New York 1980, p. 40 designates as prolepsis "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later".

15. On the cock as a figure on the coins of Himera see C.A.M. FENNELL, *op. cit.*, p. 102; H.M. LEE, *Aspects of Pindar's Art: A Literary Study of Nemean II, Olympians XIV, XII and IV, and Pythian I*, PhD Stanford University 1972, p. 67; M. SILK, *op. cit.*, p. 188; E. DRAGONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 148-149; C. CATENACCI, *op. cit.*, p. 290 and p. 586-588 and R. Hamilton, "Olympian 12 and the Coins of Himera", *Phoenix* 38, 1984, p. 261-264, who maintains that the shift in Ergoteles' fortunes is presented in two images, that of the cock and that of the Nymphs and a bather, which reflect Himera's changing fortunes as they were successively depicted in its coins.

16. Cf. K. CROTTY, *Song and Action. The Victory Odes of Pindar*, Baltimore-London 1982, p. 10.

17. The verb, as C.M. BOWRA, *op. cit.*, p. 271 rightly points out, especially in combination with the metaphor featuring the cock, implies that Ergoteles' fame would have been restricted to his homeland. See also S.J. HOEY, "Fusion in Pindar", *HSCPh* 70, 1965, p. 248; D.E. GERBER, *op. cit.*, p. 386; G. KIRKWOOD, *Selections from Pindar. Edited with Introduction and Commentary*, Chico 1982, p. 118 and M. SILK, *op. cit.*, p. 189. E.K. BORTHWICK, "Zoologica Pindarica", *CQ* 26, 1976, p. 198-199 connects the two images by asserting that the verb refers not

accomplished, as his very name signifies:<sup>18</sup> he has won imperishable glory. And it is precisely this glory which helped him fulfill his initial goals in the framework of his new city, as the ensuing mention to the acquisition of his own fields implies.

Pindar's ode closes with a reference to the hot bath of the Nymphs (19),<sup>19</sup> which constitutes the most characteristic feature of Himera. Not only does the poet provide a ring composition to his ode, but also he connects thematically its last part with the first two verses, suggesting that the future of Ergoteles is connected to that of his city. The victor is not only associated with the local deities of his adopted city, but has been also granted the right to cultivate his own fields, something which constitutes a sure sign of his political elevation; however, he can continue to relish these privileges, only if Himera maintains its power and freedom, only if it does not experience another substantial reversal of fortune. Hence the initial prayer to Tyche. Pindar previously stated that there is no sure sign from the gods about the future; however, the mere reference to the Nymphs, which links thematically the second part of the poem with lines 7-9 through the repeated mention to deities (cf. Νυμφᾶν, 19 to θεόθεν, 8), might well serve as a suggestion that the proximity of Ergoteles' estate with these goddesses might be construed as a divine token that Himera will preserve its freedom and that his athletic victories will be continued in the future, as in fact they were.

The verbs that the Theban poet uses to refer to Ergoteles' relation with these local deities are characteristic and, in all probability, not chosen randomly. The victor literally "holds" (βαστάζεις, 19)<sup>20</sup> the hot baths of the Nymphs, an expression which might well allude to the mythological figure of Heracles.<sup>21</sup> As Diodorus Siculus informs us (4.23.1), these hot baths were sent up by the Nymphs so that the Panhellenic hero might rest after performing one of

only to the shedding of leaves, but also to the moulting of birds feathers. See also C. CATENACCI, *op. cit.*, 587. L.R. FARNELL, *Critical Commentary on the Works of Pindar*, Amsterdam 1965, p. 87, on the other hand, contrary to the ancient scholia (Σ 22a), maintains that the metaphor shows that "a good fighting-cock had a public reputation far away from its own base". On the precise significance of the verb κατεφυλλορόησε(v) F.J. NISSEICH, "The Leaves of Triumph and Mortality: Transformation of a Traditional Image in Pindar's *Olympian* 12", *TAPhA* 107, 1977, p. 260-263 notes that the imagery denotes immortality, since Ergoteles' fame has found its way into Pindar's song. Cf. M. BRIAND, *Pindare. Olympiques*, Paris 2014, p. 168. The antithesis between στεφανωσάμενος and κατεφυλλορόησε(v) is noted by E. DRAGONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 141 and A. VRAKAS, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

18. As W.H. RACE, "Elements of Plot...", p. 384-385, n. 34 notes the significance of the athlete's name ("deed-accomplisher") is relevant to its context. Cf. E. DRAGONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

19. The Nymphs do not appear in many works of Pindar. The ancient scholiast in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 2.477 informs us that Pindar says that the limit of their life equals that of a tree. The other relevant mention in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* 2.4.2 is probably an interpolation.

20. On the meaning of this verb see G. NORWOOD, "Pindarica", *CQ* 9, 1915, p. 3; G. KIRKWOOD, *op. cit.*, p. 118; M. SILK, *op. cit.*, p. 193; E. DRAGONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 181; C. CATENACCI, *op. cit.*, p. 588-589 and M. BRIAND, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

21. The comparison of Ergoteles to Heracles in this ode has already been suggested by S. KAPSOMÉNOS, *op. cit.*, p. 277; E. DRAGONAKI-KAZANTZAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 170 and C. CATENACCI, *op. cit.*, 588.

his labors.<sup>22</sup> Heracles, be it noted, was often depicted holding the sky in his quest for the apples of the Hesperides; therefore, the application of this particular verb to Ergoteles' case might serve to associate him suggestively with the hero who was considered to be the very founder of the Olympic games, a connection which could also be encouraged by the fact that Pindar's *laudandus* has already displayed more than average capacities by winning multiple athletic contests (17-18).<sup>23</sup> Like Heracles, Ergoteles can be rejuvenated at the hot baths, while preparing himself to continue his achievements. Thus, through his victories and their concomitant fame Ergoteles exalts the hot baths of the Nymphs; but he does so because he derives his strength from them, as the participle ὀμλέων ("consorting with", 19) suggests. Mortals who enjoy the privilege of the company of deities can only benefit from them.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, through the combination of the specific verb and the particular participle it might be implied that there is an interaction between the mortal victor and the consorting deities and that both parties benefit through this relation. If this is the case, then the Nymphs surely helped Ergoteles win more victories after the composition of this ode.

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22. See also the ancient scholia (Σ 27 a), D.E. GERBER, *op. cit.*, p. 386 and A. VRAKAS, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

23. On the other hand, N. NICHOLSON, *op. cit.*, p. 260 suggests that "Ergoteles stands in opposition to the hero, representing the established community against the zones of expansion, the Greek areas against the indigenous ones, and the civilized center against the wild borderlands".

24. However, we must not forget that the adjective νυμφόληπτος ("frenzied by the Nymphs") had negative undertones in ancient Greece. Nevertheless, the intention of Pindar, who was noted for his piety, was probably not to insult either the deities or his *laudandus*.