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**PINDAR: THE HYMNOGRAPHER OF SPORTS EDUCATION IN ANCIENT TIMES  
AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GODS, HEROES  
AND TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY**

**Key words:** Pindar, gods, heroes, body culture, sports education.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to demonstrate the relationship between athletics and religion in the poetic works of the great lyric Theban poet, Pindar; his religiousness can be found at the roots of his poetry and all his perceptions about the human physique and sports have been deliberately developed from a religious perspective. The study establishes that Pindar does not question the gods' existence at all and does not attempt to raise such an issue either. His devotion to the gods and traditional theology is very strong and is reflected in his work from the beginning to the end. According to Pindar, the clergy consisted mainly of intelligent and cultivated people, trying to adjust the gods' image to the demands of their era. The heroes were the incarnation of heroic mankind, brave and adventurous people and the noble model of athletic life. Pindar's traditional theology is placed right within the theology of his era. He has always been trying to purify the concept of the godly element based on reason and the moral sentiment. According to him, exercising is a very amiable custom for the gods and they are pleased when the mortals honour them with athletic games. The athlete-winner is blessed by God because his victory is achieved thanks to God's blessing and help. This view expresses the poet's strict religiousness. In Pindar's work, the connection and the identification achieved between sports and the ancient gods, especially with traditional theology, were indeed important. The pedagogical importance of this identification enhanced the prestige of sports education by symmetrically cultivating the athletic spirit, vigour and beauty.

INTRODUCTION

Pindar is the most important representative of the Greek choral poetry, which flourished during the archaic period, and the par excellence poet of the victory during the games and athletic virtue. By means of his work, the *Victory Odes* (the so-called "*Epinikia*" in Greek), rescued in one piece, he finally formed the athletic ideal, according to his belief that the games are the continuity of the heroic

past and the athlete-winner is the genuine representative of the highest of all virtues-athletic virtue.

Pindar was born in Boeotia (Cynos Cephalae) and is considered to be the greatest ancient lyric poet as well as one of the greatest religious poets of mankind. In politics, he was a conservative, attached to the old aristocracy but with a certain concealed admiration for the Athenian democracy, in which he spent part of his

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life [39]. He was dedicated to his ancestors' religious tradition, devoted more than half of his poems to the gods and only wanted to talk about their kindness. He was dedicated to Homer's and Hesiod's old theological system, however, with a lot of variations which will not be discussed here extensively. He stayed in Aegina for long periods of time but had mainly acquired fame among the Sicilian governors, Hieron of Syracuse and Theron of Acragas. Later on, his fame reached Cyrene, where he dedicated the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Pythian Ode to King Arcesilaos. He dealt with all kinds of choral poetry and only four most important books were saved from the Alexandrian collection of the seventeen books; they make a reference to the Victory Odes for victory celebrations following the athletic games. They are a total of 44 hymns for athletic triumphs, divided in the Olympian Odes (14), the Pythian Odes (12), the Nemean Odes (11) and the Isthmian Odes (17) and refer to the 4 big Pan-Hellenic athletic festivals, the Olympic Games, the Pythian Games, the Nemean Games and the Isthmian Games. The work of the Victory Odes as a whole is governed by the confidence that the athletic games and poetry provide human life with these elementary, beautiful values, which make a human being exist; otherwise, that being would be as nonexistent as a dream. By means of the Pindaric poetry, the experience of this reality gives man the freedom to overcome his mortality and achieve something which is a divine present or advantage and which would otherwise be unattainable [26].

He does not question the gods' existence and does not think of raising such an issue either. However, he believes that he is free to think about the gods, introduce innovative ideas and correct old myths, aiming neither to question nor to overthrow the established faith but to improve the gods' image and the myths dedicated to them, in order to come up to the new requirements of the cultivated spirits. He was greatly encouraged by the fact that the ancient Greek religion was not governed in an absolute way either by the sacred books or an authoritarian clergy who would decide accurately which belief was to be kept as orthodox and which was to be removed as heretical and disrespectful or which was to be corrected as incorrect.

Pindar believed that poets and athletes are born to be what they are; however, great effort is needed in order to gain reputation. According to the poet, natural beauty, vigour and intelligence are gifts from the immortal gods. Victory has an

eminent position in the Pindaric philosophy. According to Pindar, the athlete never wins or loses a bit; he just wins or loses a lot [28].

Victory at the games, along with the values of the divine [73] and the inherent [42], has an important position in the poet's spiritual world. What is important is the expression of the beauty surrounding his life and this exactly is the poet's value; he recognises the presence of the divine in the simple, which he regards as the most valuable [40], nevertheless, he recognises it in the beautiful and excellent things surrounding him [41].

The issues stressed in this research, such as the gods and the clergy, piety towards the gods, the heroes and the criticism of traditional theology, have been selected among many others referring to the great poet and his work. Moreover, no solutions are offered to the problems to which a reference is made and which are being discussed. In some cases, opinions are expressed and interpretations are offered, whereas in others, questions are formed and expressed. The poet lauded all Greek athletes, regardless of the state and social contrasts of the ancient world at that time, fulfilling his sacred duty exactly, that is, the glorification of what is worth praising, inspired by the most excellent thing that every man has to show.

#### GODS AND THE CLERGY IN PINDAR'S WORK

Man, his gods, destiny and achievements have been an inexhaustible thematic source for Greek poetry since Homer's era and throughout the centuries. Virtually, Greek poetry is the most important expression of an anthropocentric view towards life, which cannot be explained or stem from anywhere else and which breaks through every Greek poetic sense, act and thought [26].

As we have already mentioned, Pindar does not question the gods' existence and does not think of raising such an issue either. He believed that the clergy was composed of brilliant and cultivated people who tried hesitantly to clear the field of faith and improve or better adjust the gods' image to the requirements of their era. His conservative point of view makes him ignore the Ionian philosophers who tried to found the beginning of beings not in something supernatural but in a natural element such as water, air or in some origin, like infinity. They regarded everything as divine [7]. He goes by the normal ones with a contemptuous phrase:

“δρέπουσιν οἱ τελέηεντες καρπὸν σοφίας”, that is the fools reap the fruit of wisdom [64]. What he means is that on this tree, the Ionian philosophy, based on empirical observation and reason and not on mystical revelation, one should not expect to find fruits suitable for the humans’ deepest hunger. Only in religion can we find mature and perfect wisdom. It is given to mortals and especially to inspired poets by the gods. Pindar regards and calls himself “σοφὸν καὶ σοφιστὴν”, that is a wise man and a sophist, whereas he sometimes uses the term “σοφία” (“wisdom”) to describe his poetry [25]. Homer was regarded as wise for his deep knowledge of both the divine and the earthly matters as well as for their exquisite depiction with his skill [14]. Moreover, Hesiod was regarded as a wise man for similar reasons [13]. Plato calls Timonides, a poet like Pindar, “σοφὸν καὶ θεῖον ἄνδρα” (“a wise and divine man”) [85].

But how does Pindar understand wisdom? The poet’s wisdom is symbolised several times in Pindar’s work by Zeus’ divine bird, which is visible in the sky, just like the poet distinguishes himself with his inherent virtues from the others in the game [50]. According to the poet, there is a part of knowledge that the human mind is never going to approach and by that he means the gods’ thoughts and decisions [68]. However, when the gods wish it, they communicate some of those inaccessible parts of knowledge to the wise men, that is to say, the poets. We must first of all include Zeus among the gods offering knowledge but also Apollo who shines in a special way in Pindar’s poems. The privilege to inform the poets is also granted to the Muses and Mnemosyne [54] who know everything regarding mortals and gods [66]. The poet’s wisdom is not simple knowledge but rather a revelation of knowledge.

It comes from the gods and is given only to humans they favour. The revelation of knowledge has a divine character and its contents are but holy. Judging from the poet’s works that reached us, first of all, it concerns the gods’ history, the knowledge of their power and jurisdictions and the meaning of action inside the world [7]. Judging by his work, we must include in the concept of wisdom, apart from the gifts that the poet receives through revelation, the maturation leading to the deeper understanding of human destiny and to the formation of proposals capable of setting humans at ease when faced with the embarrassment of the inevitable end with death.

According to Plato [72], every poet without exception enjoys that kind of knowledge based only on their ecstatic relationship with the gods and not at all on the spirit. The philosopher does not despise the knowledge coming from the gods. The Platonic philosopher’s knowledge is also intuitive and secret, but is acquired by other means and is different. After a long journey to the divine place of ideas, where the archetypes are placed, the soul as a whole guided by the mind, watches the ideas, the essences of everything and remembers those it already knew from its previous incarnations. Wisdom in its divine and secret essence is nothing but a memory. One does not acquire it after an inexplicable glimpse of the gods but after a continuous and serious preparation with philosophical practice and learning. This is the reason why Plato was somehow suspicious though erotically attached to the poets, even if he honoured them and regarded them as sacred [7].

We can realise that Pindar did not think of the knowledge that the gods give as something fleeting and as a momentary inspiration in the following quotation “ἐκ θεῶν γὰρ μαχαναὶ πάσαι βροτέαις ἀρεταῖς, καὶ σοφοὶ καὶ χερσὶ βιαταὶ περίγλωσσοὶ τ’ ἔφυν”, that is the gods give us everything, the people’s virtues, mind, speech and vigour [74]. “Ἐφυν” (“nature”) shows that the poetic talent, physical strength and eloquence are gifts that one receives as presents with one’s birth and keeps and develops through hard work. “Φυά” (“nature”) is the fixed capital that does not abandon the poet and, along with wisdom, as Pindar understands it, gives the significant works. “Ἐφυν” (“nature”) allows us to approach a remarkable point of view by Pindar. Pindar mentions in the second Olympian Ode: “Σοφὸς ὁ πολλὰ εἰδὼς φυάμαθόντες δε λάβροὶ παγγλωσσία κόρακες ὡς ἀκραντα γαρύετον Διὸς πρὸς ὄρνιχα θεῖον”, that is, a wise man is the one who knows by nature; let the others, who allegedly learnt quickly and thoughtlessly, scream in vain, in front of Zeus’ divine eagle [49]. In the aforementioned lines, Pindar is sarcastic towards Simonides and Bacchylides.

So, there are two kinds of knowledge. The first one, the superior, does not come from outside. It is in the human being’s nature as a sperm giving fruit. Such a privileged person “knows” from his nature (“εἰδὼς φυά”). The gods made him like this. The other kind of knowledge, the lower one, is obtained through learning and infertile accumu-

lation of knowledge [67]. One can compare here Heraclitus' disdain of accumulated knowledge which is not real wisdom [88]. Does it mean that Pindar disregards learning? One would claim that he thought it was necessary for real poets, as he himself had learnt a lot from mythology, as well as Heraclitus who regarded erudition as necessary for real philosophers [89].

### THE DEVOTION TO THE GODS IN PINDAR'S WORK

Maybe, the leading characteristic of the Pindaric world of values is the exploration of the divine. According to Pindar, the athlete-winner, like the poet, is blessed by God because his victory is achieved, like every other work as a matter of fact, thanks to Gods' blessing and help. This view expresses the poet's strict religiousness, which embraces all manifestations of life and is maybe the most defining element of his poetic work [86]. The devotion penetrates the poet's work from the beginning to the end. The gods appear in every poem that we have in our hands today, even in those meant for humans, the praises and the "hyporchemata", that is, the songs to support dancing [59]. Of course, at the "epinikia", the victory celebrations, the presence of the gods was something that the nature of the big games dedicated to Zeus, Apollo and Poseidon demanded; they were the gods to whom they made devotions and sacrifices [5]. However, in Pindar's Victory Odes they are more than just present; the divine element dominates. It has a unique extent and importance. This shows the deep religious importance that he found in athletic games. This view expressed by him was undoubtedly consistent with the clergy's aspirations. Pindar, without doubt one of the most prominent religious poets of mankind, was more devoted than the clever and "flexible" priests who were more interested in earthly than in heavenly issues. He believed in the things he wrote about, even if they were consistent with the priests' aspirations [7].

The poet's religious expression is characterised by equivalent depth, beauty and magnificence. Pindar's gods have an unrivalled beauty and grandeur. The poet's intensely religious nature is seeking the noble, the beautiful and the great; he always remains a loyal supporter of harmony, order and rules and follows a tradition which at the same

time he tries to expurgate. He believes in the conquest of happiness and glory- with the gods' help – whereas he sets *virtue* as an inviolable prerequisite for human happiness. The poet – whose work reflects [4], the genuine quality of the Greek spirit – comes and goes between the world of religion and the world of the myth [10, 11], by using the fictitious representations in such a way that they will create a mental picture, thus giving a new character to a classical theme [2].

In Pindar's poems, one can find all the basic gods of the Greek pantheon. Of course, Zeus and Apollo stand out as they take part in the games, and then comes Hercules, the most significant symbol of athletic vigour who became a god and was regarded as the patron of the games. The most important attribute of the deities was the superiority displayed mainly by means of power, beauty and knowledge. The gods possess the natural beings' qualities to the highest degree and thus are superior to every other being [76]. Their power is so big that they are capable of affecting the laws of nature and turning the night into day and vice versa [70]. Only the gods can achieve everything they have in mind [75]. Gods show the path of happiness to humans [69]. Mortals owe everything to gods [63]. Gods are synonymous with the concept of everything [62]. Zeus is the first one in the hierarchy of gods, "he who rules everything" [18]. His power is huge [36]. He is the one who defines people's destiny and leads them to success and happiness [20] that is why the mortals honour him more than any other god [21].

Even though Pindar respects Zeus deeply, the god he truly has in his heart is Apollo, the god of Delphi and Delos and patron of the athletic games held in those places, the Pythian and the Delian Games. Delphi cast a spell on the poet's soul [84]. He says that he goes down to Apollo's forest obeying the impulse of his heart, like a child running towards his mother. One can see here the feelings that the great god's presence, to whom he was completely devoted, brings about to the poet [56]. Moreover, another great god that Pindar respected was Poseidon. The poet speaks of his great power [24]. He says that along with Zeus they sank Earth (Gaia) to Hades. He depicts him appearing in front of Pelops who asked for his help in order to win the chariot race [46].

Apart from Apollo, the religion of Delphi offers other important gods too, such as Dionysus, to whom the poet can be devoted. In Pindar's time,

the foreign god is not regarded as a foreigner anymore. In Delphi, he shares the honours with Apollo. Pindar mentions him eagerly as the glory of his birth belongs to Thebes [8]. Dionysus' presence is of course dominant in the dithyrambs, a poetic variety that played a major role in the evolution of Greek poetry and talked about the myths about that great god. Likewise, we come across a ferocious and unrestrained ecstatic mood which preludes Euripides' songs "Bacchae" [60]. Pindar, as a prophet who knows the meaning of the gods' actions, provides us with a description of the crucial role of Dionysus' ecstatic spirit in the creation and recreation of life [90].

### THE HEROES IN PINDAR'S WORK

The hero of the Homeric era distinguishes himself for five basic virtues: bravery, beauty, vigour, prudence and nobleness. The Homeric hero is a good athlete and a very brave warrior, who loves distinction, glory and supremacy whether it comes from the games or from the battlefield. Natural beauty and physical strength are prerequisites for him. By natural features we mean strong and muscular legs, a broad and strong chest and enormous "divine" shoulders [27].

As shown by the sources, there was no special treatment for the athletes described in Homer's epics, as winners and losers were awarded a prize for their participation. Every participant in the games was competing for his own glory and his family's glory. The good athletic record would bring the much desired glory ("kleos" is the ancient Greek word for "glory") and honour to the athlete. The aristocrats prevailed in sports from the archaic to the Hellenistic era and it is highly possible that the lower social classes did not participate in the athletic games [12].

Consequently, in Homer's epics, an aristocratic and heroic at the same time society is presented, which, in the poet's opinion, is much superior to his. The main characteristic of athletics of that aristocratic society was individuality, based on the Homeric hero's effort and action for honour, distinction and eternal glory [28]. The Homeric hero's emblem at the games described in the Iliad during the short breaks of the war or even during the funeral ceremonies for Patroclus is "αἰέν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων" that is "always be excellent and superior to the others"

[16], a phrase summarising the heroic aristocratic belief of the Homeric era [26].

Hercules holds a special place in Pindar's poetry. He is a hero-god [31], a mortal elevated to god thanks to his great bravery and all the sufferings and pain he had in his life. He was accepted in Olympus and married Hebe, the goddess of youth [38]. Pindar mentions respectfully for him "κωφός ἀνὴρ τις, ὅς Ἡρακλεῖ στόμα μὴ περιβάλλει", that is only a mute man does not laud Hercules [82]. There are a lot of serious reasons for his respect and devotion to Hercules. This hero, regarded as the most important symbol of bravery and athletic capability, was related to the Olympic Games and was also considered to be their organiser and mythic founder [47]. However, his role was equally important in other games too, where one could find his statue [58]. The poet admires his daring spirit "Ἔστα δὲ θάμβει δυσφύρω τερπνῶ τε μυχθεῖς. Οἶδε γὰρ ἐκνόμιον λήμα τε καὶ δύναμιν υἱοῦ", that is he stood totally and deeply confused, with fear mixed with astonishment because he saw his son's courage and his great vigour [30]. With his courage and unbelievable power, he cleared the earth of monsters, explored seas far away killing sea-monsters and reached the frontiers of earth [37]. He possesses wonderful virtues and there is a very important quotation proving that "Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἡρακλέος ἀντέχομαι προφρόνως ἐν κορυφαῖς ἀρετᾶν μεγάλαις", meaning "But, I admire Hercules from the bottom of my heart for his great, top-ranking bravery" [29]. He is the incarnation of the heroic man, the ultimate model for every adventurous and brave man, the high model of athletic life [32].

Moreover, some other heroes have divine powers and virtues – to a smaller extent, though. In Pindar's work, the word "hero" is used to describe someone who after having been extremely brave in his life, was honoured posthumously with religious ceremonies [9] and was considered to be capable of helping people. Such heroes are Aeacus, Peleus, Telamon and Achilles [83], Cadmus [48] and on the Isles of the Blessed, along with Peleus and Achilles, Pelops, Kastor and Polydeuces [35]. The latter supervise the games in Sparta [34]. In their second existence, these heroes, most of whom are closely related to athletics, help mortals gain glory [1]. They are considered to be closer to humans than gods and understand the humans' ambitions better than them. Moreover, the fact that there have been humans who managed to overcome their

human existence with their efforts, courage and power makes them the ideal model that every other human should look up [2].

#### THE CRITICISM OF TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY IN PINDAR'S WORK

As the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC starts to “shake” with economic and political upheavals, a laxity of some traditional principles can be noticed. New principles claimed a place on the Greek territory. Some of them can easily harmonise, whereas some others have difficulty doing so or are even opposed to the old principles. Naturally, those things do not happen in society as a whole [7]. In Magna Graecia, Xenophanes questions the value of athletics and tries to shake the model of the athlete and athletic life that dominated in Greece till then by promoting the model of the wise man and philosophic life that will be imposed on many consciences later on. The new spirit questions traditional mythology- the main carrier of traditional theology. That happens because the new principles, especially the new moral demands from society appear in the divine area, as well. The legend presented gods possessed by all human passions, which led them to fights, theft, deceits, greed, voluptuousness and excessive performance in love affairs, with adultery and random attacks to mortals etc. as a result. This means that the gods, apart from the divine characteristics, also had all the qualities of the arbitrary, gourmand and inclined to pleasures noblemen. Besides, the aristocrats were the base for the formation of the old divine models. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century and maybe even earlier than that these earthly models went under pitiless criticism. The tyrants threw out the aristocrats. In the Sicily of the tyrants one could also perceive the criticism against the traditional models [7].

A radical disposition, according to which the world and the morale of the gods are genuinely given by the old poets, would have ended up rejecting the old world as a whole and would perhaps lead to atheism. However, Xenophanes took the other path, that of criticizing those who attributed weaknesses, passions and human qualities to the gods. This attitude by Xenophanes was the motive for the re- examination of traditional theology and its adjustment to the new principles and demands which were mainly moral [6].

It is not possible to imagine that the clergy were indifferent and untouched by the new demands of the era. They are also interested in enhancing the myths about the gods, without of course resulting in some schemes which will form an “orthodox dogma”. Sometimes it is impossible to amend the old narrations according to the new demands. Why is that? The reason is that they are completely based on an act or a decision of the gods and, according to the new point of view that started to prevail, this decision is immoral. How is it possible to “amend” adultery and rape in the gods’ world, when it was accepted that a lot of famous mortal heroes were born as a result of adultery and rapes of strong women? If one sticks to his principles, one is obliged to reject the greatest part of traditional theology. However, a lot of rejections create confusion and doubts among common believers, who do not understand the point of these amendments and alterations that could finally stir religion itself. All these thoughts and calculations should have kept the priests busy [7].

Pindar often criticises the old tales about gods and heroes in the myths that he narrates and which constitute an important part of his poetry. He disapproves of the stories about the fights between Hercules and the gods. A crazy and disrespectful person wrote those stories, not a devoted one [51]. He believes that war, battles and assaults do not go together with gods [52]. In Tantalus’ myth, the goddess Demeter is depicted eating a mortal man’s shoulder, of course without being aware of it. The poet does not accept that a god can be greedy [44]. Pindar’s intention can be described in these terms: the poet tries to rescue the gods’ dignity and self-esteem. However, dignity and self-respect are moral concepts. Their analysis provides us with moral terms and their basis is mainly moral. Nobody claims that Pindar presents gods as models of moral behaviour or as guarantors of morality in the world. However, he is interested in not overwhelming them with moral flaws [7].

According to the English researcher Bowra (has a different opinion) [3], Pindar is hardly interested in the god’s kindness or malice “in any moral concept”. He doesn’t claim that it would be shameful for Demeter to eat Pelops’ shoulder or for Hercules to compete against Apollo, Poseidon and Hades. This kind of behaviour is completely strange to them, not because it is wrong, but because it is not consistent with their divine dignity. Gods are not humans, so they do not abide by the same rules

as them. However, if one analyses the meaning of dignity, one will end up with immoral conclusions. Let's examine Pindar's argument that it would not be shameful for Demeter to eat Pelops' shoulder; that is what the poet supports and he is absolute about it. Demeter would be accused of greed. Calling someone greedy is a kind of shame. He wants to exempt Demeter from that moral censure. Likewise, it is well-known that Pindar despised war and internal controversies and approved of peaceful life [71]. So, do we have to accept that when he disapproves of the fights between gods and heroes and does not accept that they took place, he does it only to save their dignity? Let's accept that this is the reason. But why would their dignity "suffer" if it were not morally blameworthy and shameful to fight with each other [2, 3]? So, it is condemned because it is wrong and mistaken and not for some other incomprehensible reason.

From the standpoint of the new ethics of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the widespread idea that gods have sexual relationships with mortals creates incomparable problems. This is the reason why it was believed that exceptional men and women were born from this kind of connections. Almost every noble family of Greece as well as a lot of athletes declared that they came from such a couple [23]. This perception helped religion as the noblemen came out for religion and depended on it. Xenophanes in the Sicily of the tyrants could accuse Homer and Hesiod who attributed all the shameful acts for people such as thefts, adultery and deceptions to the gods [87].

Pindar who was an aristocrat and also well-disposed towards the clergy would easily agree regarding the thefts and deceptions, but it would not be possible to agree for adultery too, since this was supposedly the way heroes and their descendants, the aristocrats, were born. Pindar decided not to regard the gods' adultery as immoral and not to condemn it. Therefore, he did not blame the poets who mentioned it [7]. How could he not have done something then to present it as less repulsive? He did more than one would expect. He idealised this relationship to the highest degree. When describing the love of Apollo for Cyrene [79], he gave us the incomparable model of this relationship. He described only the delicacy, the admiration, the love and the modesty [76]. There is a big difference between this description and Homer's corresponding descriptions, where the voluptuousness is obvious.

The abandonment of the mistress and her children is something that shows moral insensitivity and is disapproved of every conscience, new or ancient; this is why Pindar wishes to relieve the gods of such guilt. He depicts them as caring for their mistresses [81], especially for their children and so on [57]. Regarding Peleus and Telamon, who killed their brother, Phocus and were banished from their homeland, the poet says that he fails to remit the facts because he is ashamed; he also says that the silence is often wise [33]. Therefore, Pindar does not exactly bury the facts that every Greek knows, but prefers to just imply them. His moral feeling prevents him from narrating them evidently. Silence is often the greatest wisdom. Awful deeds are better to remain in silence [2]. The poet also shows his repulsion towards Bellerophon's disrespect when he tried to reach the gods with Pegasus. He talks about this Corinthian hero in a Victory Ode written for a Corinthian winner and mentions that he will hold back his death [55]. However, in another Victory Ode written at a time that Boeotia was under the Athenian occupation, when he wanted to stress the moral law that arrogance abolishes, he does not hold back the arrogant hero's death but describes it [22].

Pindar tried to relieve Tantalus of the very important accusation of infanticide. He does not accept that this king slaughtered his child. He says that the dinner he offered to the gods was honourable [43]. Tantalus was punished for another, less repulsive reason. He is said to have shared the ambrosia and nectar that the gods gave him with his mortal companions [45]. However, the allegation that he once did not do the awful deeds he is said to have done does not abolish the moral criterion.

Likewise, Pindar does not care only for the moral aspect of the gods' image. There are other aspects that bother him, especially wisdom. It is natural to insist on Apollo's omniscience. Hesiod [61] tells a story about Koronis who was not loyal to Apollo. A crow told Apollo about her infidelity. This detail is normal for Hesiod's mentality. He who saw to create an information system is also wise and conversant with situations. Even if Zeus himself sees everything [92], he has placed among humans a lot of guardians who denounce injustices [91]. These things seem unacceptable to Pindar, because according to him they limit the concept of wisdom. The god of wisdom knows everything by means of the power of his mind. He does not need to be informed by anybody [77]. In the story of

Cyrene which also came from Hesiod [15], Apollo was asking information from Centaur Chiron about the beautiful mortal with whom he fell in love. This too was unacceptable for Pindar. If the god asked the Centaur, he did that because he was in a playful and deceitful mood [80].

The gods are also well-known for their evident pride and sensibility on issues of honour. They are merciless when the mortals offend them. They punish hubris very harshly. This is the reason why humans should comply with them and not violate the divine law. They should be alert in order to avoid leading themselves to Hubris, the mother of Corus [53]. Pindar's gods are luminous and enveloped in glory. However, some of them emit an intense radiance. We can mention the example of Theia in order to prove this. The divine form of Theia was not invented by Pindar. Hesiod in his *Theogony* (135) refers to her as a Titan and names her "mother of Sun, Selene and Io" in a shining image. Pindar in a wisely-structured luminous image presents her like the primary power of light and as a divine reason for Chrysus, Zeus' child [65] and as a symbol of heavenly radiance and eternal glory [17]. Primarily, the same goddess makes the great athletes' radiance and glory obvious [19].

Pindar's theology is correctly placed within the theology of his era that tried to purify the god's concept based on reason and the moral feeling. Generally speaking, the gods are models of power and wisdom. Without being guarantors of morality in the world, they are flawless, exempted from passions, luminous and life-givers. They care for people, favour them, especially the aristocrats who are descended from them and are friendly towards the just [7].

Athletics is a very dear occupation for them. Numerous gods are athletes themselves and therefore really pleased when humans honour them with athletic games. Their children also like it. From this standpoint, the gods are pretty much like humans. Regarding the human flaws, they especially punish arrogance, hubris, the danger threatening every athlete. Their earthly children do not seem to have inherited their parents' code of ethics. A lot of them had reprehensible flaws or performed awful deeds. Therefore, the moral distance between gods and humans is getting bigger [7]. From this point of view, we are far enough from Homer's theology and closer to Plato's theology – a forerunner of Christianity.

## CONCLUSION

As it can be ensued from the aforementioned study, the clergy of that era found Pindar- the best and most dynamic theoretical advocate and supporter, the greatest lyrical poet in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and maybe the greatest religious poet of all mankind- to impose the religion's point of view and dominate over athletics, a sector of human activity much more essential and fundamental than today. Pindar was a defender of athletics; his religious feeling lies in the root of his poems and all his beliefs about the human physique and athletics are placed within a religious framework. According to Pindar, the athlete-winner, like the poet, is blessed by God because his victory is achieved thanks to God's blessing and help. This view expresses the poet's strict religiousness and is probably the most defining element of his poetic work. Pindar believed that poets and athletes are born to be what they are; however, great effort is needed in order to gain reputation. According to the poet, natural beauty, vigour and intelligence are gifts from the immortal gods. Victory has an eminent position in the Pindaric philosophy. According to Pindar, the athlete never wins or loses a bit; he just wins or loses a lot. The poet lauded all Greek athletes, regardless of the state and social contrasts of the ancient world at that time, that is he lauded what was worth praising, inspired by the most excellent thing that every man has to show.

Pindar does not at all question the gods' existence and does not think of ever posing such a problem either. He does believe though, that he is free to cogitate upon gods, introduce innovations and correct old myths, not aiming at the disputing and the overthrowing of the established faith, but at the improvement of the gods' image and the myths concerning them, so that he would meet the demands of the intellectuals. Pindar's gods have an unrivalled beauty and grandeur. The poet's intensely religious nature is seeking the noble, the beautiful and the great; he always remains a loyal supporter of harmony, order and rules and believes in the conquest of happiness and glory – with the gods' help – whereas he sets virtue as an inviolable prerequisite for human happiness.

Gods are the absolute sovereign in Pindar's Victory Odes. They have a unique extent and importance. This indicates the deep religious significance they had during the athletic events. This attitude by him was consistent with the



clergy's pursuits. The Homeric hero was a good athlete and a very brave warrior, who loved distinction, glory and supremacy whether it came from the games or from the battlefield. Natural beauty and physical strength are prerequisites for the Homeric hero. Pindar singled out Hercules among the heroes of old times. This hero, the greatest model of valour and athletic vigour, was also closely connected with the Olympic Games and reputed to be their mythic founder or organiser.

Pindar claims that one can find the mature and "τελέαν" ("perfect") knowledge only in religion. The gods transmit this kind of knowledge to mortals and most particularly to the inspired poets. He considers and calls himself "σοφόν και σοφιστήν" ("a wise man and sophist"), whereas he sometimes uses the term "wisdom" as a synonym with his poetry.

There are two kinds of knowledge according to Pindar. The first, the highest knowledge resides in people's nature. This knowledge is brought by the gods. The other knowledge, the lower one, is obtained by means of learning. Despite the fact that the poet underestimates the second type of knowledge, since he regards it as sterile accumulation of knowledge, he considers it indispensable for the real poets, just like Heraclitus regarded erudition as indispensable for genuine philosophers.

The poet does not want to accept that the gods commit illegal or unlawful acts (sexual relationships with mortals etc). He tries to rescue their dignity and self-respect. He did not present them as examples of morality and virtue since they were not. He tried not to overwhelm them with moral flaws. However, he is definitely interested in the gods' morality without this being his primary concern. He did not commit himself to the improvement of the divine image towards ethics. When he finds something that morally annoys him, he corrects it. There is moral interest but not a persistent moral analysis and above all there is no moral fanaticism.

In spite of the fact that some philosophers, such as Xenophon, questioned the value of athletics, the connection and the concurrence achieved between athletics and the ancient gods, especially with the traditional theology in Pindar's work, has been really great and this is exclusively attributed to Pindar's ingenuity. The pedagogical importance of this concurrence and its role has strengthened the importance of sports education from a moral point of view. Thus, physical edu-

cation was cultivated and the athletic spirit, vigour and callus were symmetrically honoured.

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