BACCHYLIDES 16:
A DITHYRAMB FOR DELPHI

The meaning of Bacchylides 16 is intimately dependent upon the context of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, not only in the narrative section of the ode, which inhabits one specific moment of the tragic plot, but also in the fragmentary description of the occasion of its performance. Following Battezzato's approach (2013), who explores the connection between dithyramb and tragic stasima, a comparison of Bacchylides 16 with the first stasimon of the *Trachiniae* reveals similar techniques used by both poets in terms of strophic construction. More strikingly, both odes feature bovine symbolism: the πόρτις ἐρήμα, "helpless calf" in Sophocles (530); and the sacrificial victim ἄζυγα ὑψικέραν βοῦν, "unyoked, high-horned ox" in Bacchylides (20-2). In each poem the symbol serves to focalize Deianeira's point of view.

The examination of narrative patterns in the story of Deianeira, Heracles, and the centaur Nessus reveals several problems. March (1987) articulates these and traces development of the narrative from fragments of pseudo-Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*, and depictions of the Nessus scene in proto-Attic and Attic vase paintings from the 7th-5th centuries BCE. She cites Dio Chrysostom's criticism of Sophocles' and Archilochus' versions of the story. Bacchylides avoids these problems by introducing the *daemon* (23, 35) who weaves its destructive plan in the mind of Deianeira.

Attempts to define the performance context of Bacchylides 16 tend to fall short due to the fragmentary state of the strophe. Maehler (1997) interprets verses 1-11 as a cletic hymn to Pythian Apollo, summoning the sun god back from the north. Burnett (1985) calls it a winter paean, reluctant to call it dithyramb without an address to Dionysus. Another choral song in the *Trachiniae* (205-224) indicates paean yet also suggests dithyramb. Bacchylides 16 might be this kind of song: dithyrambic performance which imitates or accomplishes the celebratory singing of paean.

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