

Myth, Locality, and Identity in Pindar's Sicilian Odes

- Background:** Studies of Greek poetry often focus on Athens because many of the best-preserved sources were written almost exclusively by and for Athenians. However, Greek lyric poetry, which also was hugely influential in the fifth century, offers an important counterbalance to the dominant Athenian perspective. When celebrating Sicilian victors, the Theban poet Pindar adapted his poetic project to regional needs in Sicily where the cities were populated in large part by immigrants.
- Hypothesis:** Pindar's Sicilian poems emphasize features of the natural landscape and weave traditional Greek myths into descriptions of local physical spaces to create a sense of civic identity for mixed populations. In the odes for Akragas, the local river and myths surrounding it became a central figure in Pindaric poetry and in other manifestations of civic ideology during the 480s-460s BCE, which may be a result of the rise to power of the Emmenid rulers.
- Results:** The River Akragas became a dominant civic symbol for the city of Akragas during this period. Unlike civic imagery in Syracuse (the other major Sicilian Greek power), however, the river and the crab that represents it (Fig. 2) lack a traceable connection to broader Greek narratives. Instead they represent a greater degree of civic continuity with the city's earlier period before populations had reorganized. In his poetry, Pindar emphasizes connections with the wider Greek world in Akragas through references to scenes from Greek mythology reproduced in the city's architecture, particularly in the massive temple to Olympian Zeus (Fig. 3). This project shows that while Pindar linked Panhellenic myths to the local landscape in poems for Syracuse, in poems for Akragas he emphasized the preservation of these myths by the citizens and their rulers through man-made structures.
- Future Research:** The larger goal of the project is to consider how localized mythology and poetic performance created a sense of shared identity for mobile populations in Greek Sicily in the first half of the fifth century BCE. This phase has shown that cities adopted different strategies, and the next step will be to consider poetry and material object from the cities of Himera and Kamarina.



Fig. 1 Map of 5th century BCE Sicily

Pindar, *Pythian* 12.1-6 for Midas of Akragas:

Αἰτέω σε, φιλάγλαε, καλλίστα βροτεῶν πόλιων,
 Φερσεφόνας ἔδος, ἅ τ' ὄχθαις ἔπι μηλοβότου
 ναίεις Ἀκράγαντος εὐδμάτων κολώναν, ὧ ἄνα,
 ἴλαος ἀθανάτων ἀνδρῶν τε σὺν εὐμενίᾳ
 δέξαι στεφάνωμα τόδ' ἐκ Πυθῶνος εὐδόξω Μίδα
 αὐτόν τε νιν Ἑλλάδα νικάσαντα τέχνα,

I beseech you, lover of splendor, loveliest of mortals' cities,
 abode of Persephone, you who dwell upon the well-built height
 above the banks of the Akragas, where sheep graze, O queen,
 along with the good will of gods and men graciously
 receive this crown from Pytho offered by famous Midas
 (trans. William Race)



Fig. 2 Silver Didrachm from Akragas, c. 550-472 BCE
 Obverse (left): AKPA with the eagle of Zeus
 Reverse (right): the crab of Akragas,



Fig. 3 Model of the temple of Olympian Zeus, Akragas.
 Temple construction began c. 480 BCE. Each of the Atlantes (male-figure columns) stood at 7.5 meters, confirming that the temple itself was massive in size.



Fig. 4 Silver tetradrachm from Syracuse, 485 BCE
 Obverse (left) head of the river god, Alpheos.
 Reverse (right) barley grains, representing Demeter and Persephone.