

**THE POEMS OF
BACCHYLIDES; FROM
A PAPYRUS IN
THE BRITISH MUSEUM**

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The Poems of Bacchylides; From a Papyrus in the British Museum by Frederic G. Kenyon

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FROM A PAPYRUS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

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P R E F A C E

THE poems of Bacchylides, now for the first time published from the unique papyrus in the British Museum (Pap. DCCXXXIII), have been arranged, transcribed, and edited by Mr. F. G. Kenyon, Assistant in this Department.

An Autotype Facsimile of the whole MS. is published in a separate volume.

EDWARD SCOTT,

Keeper of MSS.

BRITISH MUSEUM,
November 18, 1897.

INTRODUCTION

IN the list of those whom the Alexandrian critics reckoned as the nine lyric poets of Greece, the last name is that of Bacchylides. He stands **Bacchylides.** last, as youngest in order of time, not necessarily as the least in merit, and until now we have had no means to form any estimate of his genius. His work, like that of all the lyric poets except Pindar, and like all Pindar's except his epinikian odes, had perished, and was known only in chance quotations, of which only two were of any substantial length. Now the fortune which presides over the discoveries made among the sands of Egypt, and which has hitherto given us, for its novelties and special prizes, not the greatest masters of Greek literature, but Hyperides, and Herodas, and a historical work of Aristotle, has given us a papyrus manuscript containing some twenty of the poems of Bacchylides, more or less complete; and his name may once more be reckoned among those of the authors whose works are alive and form part of the literary possessions of the modern world.

Of the life of Bacchylides little has been recorded¹.

¹ See (in addition to the standard histories of Greek literature) Neue, *Bacchylidis Cei Fragmenta* (Berlin, 1822), Della Giovanna, *Bacchilide* (Turin, 1888), and Michelangeli, *Della Vita di Bacchilide* (Messina, 1897).

He was a native of the island of Ceos, as ancient writers record¹ and as his own works testify², and of the town of Iulis³. **His nationality.** His father's name is given variously as Medon, Milon, and Midilus⁴, while his grandfather, who is said to have been himself an athlete, bore the same name as the poet⁵. On his father's side he thus had a tradition of athletic distinction, while on his mother's he was connected with poetry, since his mother was a sister of Simonides, who was likewise a native of Iulis⁶. It would appear that he claimed Homeric ancestry, and a connexion with the Pylians of Messenia; for in one of his poems (XI. 118-123, according to the most probable reading of the passage) he states that his ancestors, after sacking Troy, set up a shrine to Artemis in the territory of Metapontum, a city which claimed foundation by a colony of Nestor's Pylians.

The dates of his birth and death are unknown, but he is habitually spoken of as a contemporary of **His date.** Pindar (circ. 518-438 B.C.), both being junior to Simonides (circ. 556-468 B.C.), though their periods of literary activity overlapped. His works add no certain chronological data, the only poems which admit of precise determination being those which coincide in subject with some of the odes of Pindar. The general impression left by them, however, is that Bacchylides was the younger of the two and the later to enter the field of poetry. Pindar's

¹ Strabo X. 5, 6, Suidas s. v.

² See Odes II. 14, III. 98, in the present collection, and frag. 71 (Bergk 48).

³ Strabo, Suidas, ll. cc.

⁴ Suidas, l.c., an epigram published in Boeckh's *Pindar*, vol. II, p. xxxi, and *Etym. Mag.*, s.v. *Μείδυλος*.

⁵ Suidas, l.c.

⁶ Strabo, l.c.

activity begins with the twenty-second Pythiad (=498 B.C.), but there is nothing in the odes of Bacchylides which appears to go back to so early a date. Of the poems to which precise dates can be assigned (III, IV, V, XIII), the earliest (XIII) must have been written before 480 B.C., but not very long before (probably 483 or 485), and the latest (III) in 468 B.C. The poems connected with Athens (X, XVII, XVIII, XIX) would appear, in the case of the last three at least, to have been written subsequent to the Persian wars; for, though there is no direct allusion to these or any other political events, the tone in which Athens is addressed seems to imply that she had already attained that eminent position which was due to the battle of Salamis and the formation of the confederacy of Delos. The other poems afford no clue to their dates, but their literary style suggests a stage in lyric composition later than that of Pindar. The form of the ode is more conventional. The myths are introduced mechanically, with little attempt to connect them with the subject of the ode. In some cases they appear to have no special appropriateness, but to be introduced merely at the poet's pleasure. There is no originality of structure; the poet's art is shown in graceful expression, in craftsmanship rather than in invention. It is perhaps dangerous to add that in some passages there would almost seem to be imitations of Pindar, since it is only when the chronological sequence of the poets has been determined that it is possible to say which is the imitator. In this case, however, the presumption is already in favour of the conclusion to which the consideration of the stronger originality and more marked individuality of Pindar would naturally lead us; and if there be actual imitation at all, it is fairly safe to conclude that it is on the part of Bacchylides.

Taking wide margins, therefore, the poetical activity of Bacchylides would seem to have ranged between 490 (perhaps too high a limit) and 460 B.C.¹ Of his life very little is known, the principal concrete fact on record being his visit to the court of Hieron², which probably took place in 476 B.C., on the occasion of the performance of his fifth ode, the first and most elaborate of his tributes to the ruler of Syracuse. In this visit he was probably the companion of his uncle Simonides and of Pindar, though it cannot be concluded with absolute certainty that, because all three poets are said to have been guests at Hieron's court, they were all there at the same moment. It is, however, independently probable that Pindar was present during the performance of his first Olympian, which was on the same occasion as that of the fifth ode of Bacchylides.

The ancient commentators repeatedly refer to an acute rivalry between Pindar on the one hand and Simonides and Bacchylides on the other, dwelling especially on such passages as *Ol.* II. 95-97, *Pyth.* II. 52-56, *Nem.* III. 82³. It is not out of accordance with the impression which Pindar's poetry gives us of his genius, to suppose that he was conscious of his own superiority and impatient of criticism and misappreciation; but there is no adequate ground for regarding him as constantly filled with envy and jealousy against any

¹ Of the ancient chronologists, Eusebius attaches the name of Bacchylides to *Ol.* 78 (468 B.C.), and the *Chron. Pasch.* to *Ol.* 74 (484 B.C.). Syncellus, it is true, gives his name under *Ol.* 88 (428 B.C.), in agreement with a second notice in Eusebius (*Ol.* 87 = 432 B.C.); but these dates can be ignored as impossible.

² Aelian, *Var. Hist.* IV. 15.

³ Mr. Bury (*Nemean Odes of Pindar*, p. 126) sees another allusion to Bacchylides in *Nem.* VII. 105, conceiving that the term *μαψυλάκας*, the scansion of which is identical with that of *Βακχυλίδης*, is aimed at him.