

The Meter of Bacchylides 2 and 6¹

On two occasions that we know of, Bacchylides wrote a pair of epinicians for a single victory by a Cean athlete.² For the victory of Argeios, son of Pantheides, in the boys' boxing (or perhaps the pankration) at the Isthmus some time between 460 and 452, we have an elaborate production in dactyloepitrites (B.1, 184 lines) and a much smaller, mythless ode in iambic meter with Priapean clausulae (B.2, 14 lines). For the victory of Lachon, son of Aristomenes, in the boys' foot race at Olympia in 452, we have two small odes, one again in dactyloepitrites (B.7, probably 22 lines), and the other in aeolic (B.6, 16 lines). In part 1 of this paper, I point out a significant metrical peculiarity of the smaller odes in these pairs, Bacchylides 2 and 6: although metrical analyses typically disguise the fact, they appear to have been written in a simple triple meter throughout. In part 2, I consider whether it is possible that the anomaly can be purely fortuitous, and conclude that this is extraordinarily unlikely. In part 3, which is more speculative, I consider implications of the metrical anomaly for the performance of the poems. Finally, part 4 briefly examines the difficult theoretical question of just how this meter should be described, ending with a *non liquet*.

1

If we examine the metrical diagrams in Maehler's edition, they seem ordinary enough.³ I will reproduce them here for convenience, slightly compressed but otherwise

¹ Editors referred to by surname are R. C. Jebb (*Bacchylides, the Odes and Fragments*, Cambridge 1905) and H. Maehler (*Die Lieder des Bakchylides, Erster Teil, Die Siegeslieder*, 2 volumes, Leiden 1982). Maehler's revision of B. Snell's Teubner text of Bacchylides (Leipzig, 1970¹⁰) will be referred to as Snell-Maehler. To avoid confusion between poem numbers and line numbers, I will refer to the poems of Bacchylides as B.2, B.6, and so on.

² Details in Maehler, 2.1-4 (Argeios) and 2.125-27 (Lachon).

³ It is surely significant that they are not mentioned in P. Maas, *Greek Metre* (translated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Oxford 1962) or in the index of M. L. West, *Greek Metre* (Oxford 1982), which includes all those poems which "represent notable singularities". Wilamowitz discusses them in adjacent paragraphs (*Griechische Verskunst*, Berlin 1921, 262-63), and finds nothing very unusual in either.

unaltered.⁴ Maehler characterizes the meter of the strophe of B.2 as «iambi et priapea clausula»:

1:	U-U- -UU- U- -	ia cho ba
2:	-UU- -UU-	2 cho
3:	U-U- -UU-	ia cho
4-5:	UU U-UU-U- -U-UU- -	priap

The epode is similar:

1:	U-U- -UU-	ia cho
2:	U-U- -UU-	ia cho
3-4:	U- -UU- U- - - -UU- -	priap

Maehler characterizes the meter of B.6 as «aeolicum»:

1-2:	U-U-U- - UU-U-U- -	ia ba anacl
3-4:	-UU- -UU-U- - U-UU-U	2 cho ba ^pher
5:	-U-U-U-	lec
6-8:	U- -UU-U- -U-UU-U- - UU-U- -	gl hipp ^pher

This is straightforward enough, but a bit miscellaneous: we have eleven metra, of eight different kinds, and this seems excessive for such a short poem.⁵ R. Führer's analysis is similar, except that he omits the unnecessary period-end after line 4 and takes most of the ode as consisting of variations on the glyconic.⁶

⁴ Maehler's metrical analyses of B.2 and B.6 are identical to those in Snell-Maehler: no doubt they go back to Snell or beyond.

⁵ Maehler's analysis of 6 rather reminds me of Quintilian's *dictum: nihil, quod est prosa scriptum, non redigi possit in quaedam uersiculorum genera* (I.O. 9.4.52). On the other hand, the poem does not seem particularly prosaic when read aloud, a fact which suggests that the analysis may be faulty. In this connection, it may be worth mentioning how I first noticed the anomalous nature of the meter of Bacchylides 2 and 6. I have a habit of tapping my fingers while reading Greek lyrics for the first time, to make sure that the the longs and shorts have their proper 2 : 1 ratio. When I first read these two some years ago, I could not help noticing that they went rather more smoothly and regularly than others I had read.

⁶ R. Führer, «Metrische Analyse von Bacch. C. 6», «ZPE» 49 (1982) 6. He also points out various repetitions and correspondences in the metrical pattern.

However, a closer look shows that Bacchylides 2 and 6 share a significant, though unobtrusive, metrical anomaly: B.6 is written in a simple triple meter throughout, and the meter of B.2 is an only slightly more complicated version of the same scheme. I will begin with B.6 as the simpler case. If we start from Maehler's analysis, quoted above, omit (with Führer) the period-end after line 4, and rearrange the syllables in pairs, we see that the metrical scheme of Bacchylides 6 is nothing but a more or less random ordering of –U and U– elements, with shorter lengths at the end of each period (UU or – except for U in line 2):

1-2: U– U– U– –U U– U– U– U ||
 3-5: –U U– –U U– U– –U –U U– U– U– UU ||
 6-8: U– –U U– U– –U –U U– U– –U U– U– – ||

The metrical analyses of Maehler and Führer disguise the crucial fact: that the poem is in a triple meter, with a rest, equivalent to a single short (two shorts in line 2) at each period-end. Furthermore, the ratio of the lengths of the three periods is surely too neat to be fortuitous: 8 : 12 : 12, or, reduced to lowest terms, 2 : 3 : 3.⁷ Führer in fact gives the shape of the poem as ABB.

Bacchylides 2 provides a similar case, and the triple nature of the meter is fairly obvious even in Maehler's diagram. If we again start from Maehler's analyses (Führer does not deal with this ode) and rearrange the syllables as before, we see that the strophe of B.2 follows precisely the same sort of pattern as B.6, except that UUU is found along with U– and –U,⁸ and that the ratio (6 : 16 or, in lowest terms, 3 : 8) is not so simple as in B.6:

1: U– U– –U U– U– U |

⁷ In my diagrams, I have used spacing to group the iambs and trochees in pairs for easy counting and to make the proportions clearer. Since some of my readers have misconstrued this, I should emphasize that I do not in any way mean to imply that I use choriamb, antispasts, or any other four-unit foot in my analysis. The basic units here are the single iamb (U–) and trochee (–U) rather than the more familiar iambic and trochaic metra (U–U– and –U–U).

⁸ There may be an instance of UUU in 2 as well, depending on how we scan *ἱεράν* in line 2. If, with Maehler, we assume synizesis of the first two syllables, then we have complete responsion between strophe and antistrophe. On the other hand, the word is trisyllabic elsewhere in Bacchylides. If it is trisyllabic here, we have –UUUU in the strophe corresponding to –UU– in the antistrophe. The former is a poor excuse for a choriamb, but would be quite acceptable in my metrical analysis. It all depends on whether we find synizesis or lack of responsion more offensive.

2-5: -U U- -U U- U- U- -U U- UUU -U U- U- -U -U U- - |

The epode of B.2 is again slightly more complicated than the strophe, in that the meter shifts in the last four feet — or musical bars, if I may be so bold as to call them that:

1-4: U- U- -U U- U- U- -U U- U- -U U- U- - - - UU-U |||

Here we have either 16 feet (or bars) of triple meter, with the last four ‘tied across the bar lines’, or 8 bars of sextuple meter, with the first 6 divided 3 + 3, while the last 2 are divided 2 + 2 + 2. It makes no difference which analysis is used, as long as the shift at the end of the epode is noticed: the victor’s patronymic (Πανθείδα φίλον υἰόν) occurs at the point at which the meter shifts, which is also the last line of the ode. The strophe of B.2 might just as easily be described as 3 + 8 bars of sextuple meter, with each bar divided 3 + 3. In either case, the ratio of the periods in the entire poem is 3 + 8 : 3 + 8 : 8, which again seems too neat to be fortuitous.⁹

2

The next point to consider is whether the triple meter of these two poems could possibly have occurred fortuitously. I do not believe that it is. A poet writing iambic or aeolic meter (with or without priapean clausulae) with no regard to strict musical barlines would be very unlikely to fall into triple meter inadvertently for very long. Indeed, the likelihood of doing so over the course of an entire strophe of even moderate length would seem to be infinitesimal. Casual examination of the other poems which Maehler classifies as aeolic and iambic (principally B.4 and B.18) shows that they do not in fact fall into such patterns.¹⁰ Furthermore, even if a poem were somehow to fall into triple meter without the knowledge of the poet, it would be most unlikely to fall purely by chance into the neat

⁹ Not that a 3 : 8 ratio is particularly neat, but the fact that the second period of the strophe is equal in length to the single period of the epode seems less than random.

¹⁰ Maehler 1.22-23. The contrast with B.18 is particularly striking. Snell-Maehler divide it into 20 metra, 14 of them glyconics: the others are 3 bacchics, 2 lecythia, and 1 iambic. The fact that the metra are far less assorted than those of B.6 is what makes the aeolic nature of B.18 absolutely clear. It is also worth noting that three of the glyconics and one of the lecythia include anceps syllables, and that these are entirely incompatible with strict division into equal musical bars. B.2 and B.6 have no anceps syllables except at period-end. Like Sherlock Holmes’ dog that did not bark, this fact is itself highly significant.

ratios mentioned above (8 : 12 : 12 and 3 + 8 : 3 + 8 : 8). Consequently, it seems to me quite certain that the triple meter of these two poems was consciously intended by the poet, and the next point to consider is why he would have written them this way.

3

This brings us to the question of the performance of the odes. Even if, by some extraordinary combination of unlikely chances, two epinicians were to fall into triple meter fortuitously, there is no reason why they should be precisely the two which are the smaller members of pairs of odes for the same victory, and the two which provide textual evidence suggesting (though admittedly not proving) amateur performance. Although the relationship of the smaller to the larger ode in each pair is a matter of dispute, one plausible hypothesis is that B.2 and B.6 were each written for a preliminary celebration on a smaller scale, as a kind of down payment for the full-scale celebration, weeks or months later, when B.1 and B.7 would have been sung and danced by by a chorus trained and conducted by the poet himself.¹¹ Jebb (189) goes into some detail, though tentatively, about the performance of B.2:

«The last four verses suggest that the ode may have been sung, to an accompaniment of flutes, as a welcome to Argeius when he landed in Ceos on his return.»

He is more specific, though hardly less tentative, when he comes to 6 (203):

«This short ode was sung before the house of Aristomenes, Lachon's father, in Ceos (v. 14). Like the little song to Argeius (Ode II), — a similar greeting to the victor on his return, — it alludes to previous Cean successes at the same festival. That trait would have a special point if we

¹¹ See, for instance, A. P. Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides*, Cambridge, MA 1985, particularly Chapter 3, "The Epinician Burden", pp. 38-47. Of course, B.1 and B.7 may have been sung by the poet himself. No doubt he spent some time on Ceos when not travelling around the Greek world tending to his poetic business. This is an extremely controversial subject, but it does seem probable that at least some epinicians were monodic rather than choral, as M. Lefkowitz has argued for Pindar («Who Sang Pindar's Victory Odes?», «AJPh» 109 [1988], 1-11, reprinted as Chapter 9 of *First-Person Fictions, Pindar's Poetic 'I'*, Oxford, 1991). However, this would only refute my argument if, as Lefkowitz tentatively suggests, "all victory odes were essentially monodic". She admits that we cannot know this, and I would just as tentatively suggest that the metrical anomaly of B.2 and B.6 is itself evidence that they are likely to be choral, even if none of the others are.

might suppose that, on each occasion, former victors in the games were among those who welcomed the young athlete.»

Although Maehler is more cautious,¹² and Carey has recently reminded us of the «general paucity of information» about the performance of the odes,¹³ there seems to be no real alternative position except one degree or another of agnosticism.

If these odes were in fact written for greeting the victor on his arrival in Ceos, there would presumably have been constraints on the time available for the poet to write the words and music, and for the performers to learn both.¹⁴ If the performers were amateurs (whether friends and family, previous Cean victors, or both) there would also have been constraints on the intricacy of the music they could reasonably be expected to learn in the time available. We are not, of course, in a position to tell whether the melodies of these odes were any simpler than usual, but I hope I have demonstrated that the rhythms are quite simple. Indeed, the simple and regular meter of Bacchylides 2 and 6 seems to me to make Jebb's hypotheses on their performance, though still far from certain, rather more plausible. A straightforward ternary rhythm is just what a group of hastily trained friends, relatives, and retired athletes would need if they were to be expected to perform an original musical and poetic composition in public on short notice.¹⁵

¹² Maehler agrees with Jebb on the production of B.2 (Maehler 2.10, 2.30 on 11 Μοῦσ' ἀθιγενίης) and B.6 (Maehler 2.127-28), though he puts B.7 before rather than after B.6. So little is left of B.7 that it is difficult to be sure. I would only argue that the fact that B.6 comes before B.7 in the manuscript is a small piece of evidence in favor of its having been performed first, since Bacchylides' first editor probably had more information than we do on the performances, and would surely have preferred to put them in temporal order, unless there was good reason not to. (It is clear that B.1 comes before B.2 in the manuscript for the same reason that they both come before the odes to Hieron, B.3 through B.5: so that the poem which includes the Cean foundation-myth will head the collection of the Cean poet's works.) If Maehler is right, the hypothesis set out in this paper will have to be modified slightly, but not necessarily abandoned. For instance, it is conceivable that B.7 was presented right at the Olympic festival, perhaps by Bacchylides himself (see previous note), and B.6 on Lachon's arrival in Ceos.

¹³ Christopher Carey, «The Performance of the Victory Ode», «AJPh» 110 (1989), 545-65, at 557.

¹⁴ I assume that both Argeios and Lachon, particularly as they are boys, would have returned home soon after the games ended, the better to enjoy the adulation of their fellow citizens and any family members who were unable to make the trip to the games.

¹⁵ A quadruple (dactylic or anapestic) rhythm would surely have been just as easy to learn. Consequently, we might take the non-quadruple meter of these two poems as evidence that the chorus was either stationary or (conceivably) dancing while it sang, but in any case not marching in procession. The fact that the shorter (*Ol.* 11) of Pindar's pair of odes for a single victory (*Ol.* 10 and 11) is in dactyloepitrites suggests that it may indeed have been sung by the poet himself, as the wording (κελαδήσω, 14) suggests

4

The final point to consider is the theoretical question of how the meter of these two poems should be described. The more modest hypothesis would explain it as just a little trick Bacchylides uses when he and his singers are pressed for time: at the cost of some looseness in classification — the miscellaneous assortment of feet noted in part 1 — the poet gains a considerable increase in ease of singing and with it a reduction in rehearsal time. We might then call the meter of B.2 «loose iambic meter», and that of B.6 «loose aeolic meter», adding in each case «with metrical smoothing». The bolder hypothesis would describe the meter of these poems as belonging to a fundamentally different species from other lyric meters, a species in the same genus as marching anapests. Both this meter and marching anapests have fixed barlines, with a severely limited choice of contents for each bar. In each of the two, the contents of a foot (or bar) may be either a rising or a falling metron, though Bacchylides 2 and 6 in fact have more iambs than trochees, just as marching anapests, in accordance with their name, tend to have more anapests than dactyls.¹⁶ In each, the sequence of feet is more or less randomly ordered, and each period ends with a rest of standard length.¹⁷ We might then call the meter of B.2 and B.6 «lockstep iambotrochaics» or something along those lines.

In order to decide between these two hypotheses, we must ask which of the two metrical analyses given above, Maehler's or mine, is more fundamental. I naturally prefer my own analysis and the bolder hypothesis, partly because I suspect that readers will be more willing to provide objections than supporting arguments, and partly because hypotheses can be tested most easily by pushing them as far as they will go. However, the main reason why the bolder hypothesis seems preferable is that it provides a more economical explanation of the phenomena observed. The metrical analyses of Maehler and Führer can be derived from mine, but not mine from theirs. That is, randomly ordered

(argued most recently by W. J. Verdenius, *Commentaries on Pindar II*, Leiden, 1988, 87 and 92, with bibliography).

¹⁶ Of course, marching anapests also contain spondees, so the meter of B.2 and B.6 is even simpler, since there are only two choices rather than three to fill a foot.

¹⁷ The one exception to this rule is that in each poem the first period ends with a rest equivalent to two shorts rather than one.

sequences of U– and –U will inevitably form many choriambic and iambic metra, with occasional lecythia and priapeans, and bacchics or cretics at period-end. In fact, although I have not worked out all the permutations, I am fairly certain that any sequence whatsoever of U– and –U over some minimum size could be analyzed into the nine different metra Maehler uses to describe B.2 and B.6. Such a sequence would also be likely to provide a sufficient number of repeated patterns to allow Führer’s type of analysis to work. On the other hand, my description cannot be derived from theirs. As I have argued in part 2, the chance that a poet writing iambic or aeolic meter with no regard to strict musical barlines would fall into triple meter inadvertently is essentially infinitesimal. Consequently, it seems to me that the triple meter was most certainly consciously intended by the poet, though that still leaves open the question of whether he is writing ‘lockstep iambotrochaics’ or ‘loose iambs/aeolics with metrical smoothing’.

I append one final observation. As M. L. West has put it, «German scholarship in the last century devoted much effort to the rhythmical interpretation of asymmetrical cola on the erroneous premise that they must be divided into equal bars.»¹⁸ No doubt one of those misguided Germans would have noticed the metrical peculiarity of Bacchylides 2 and 6, if the poems had not then still been buried in the sands of Egypt.¹⁹

¹⁸ West (note 3 above), 24.

¹⁹ Then again, perhaps not, since Jebb did not. His metrical analysis of B.2 (Jebb, 100) divides the poem into bars equivalent to three, six, and, in one case, four shorts, while his analysis of B.6 (Jebb, 104) includes two unnecessary trisemes, as well as some unequal bar-lengths. Since some who have read this paper have not understood this point, I should emphasize that I am not in any way attempting to overthrow modern metrical theory and return to the nineteenth century, simply to propose a new classification, not much different from anapests, for these two poems, while admitting that nineteenth-century theory would have worked rather well on them — as indeed it does on anapests.