

PHREN AND PLANNING: PINDAR, NEMEAN 1.27

Phrēn is a prominent psychic entity in early Greek literature. The terms φρήν and φρένες occur in over three hundred passages of Homer and the *Homeric Hymns*¹. They are found in twenty-one passages of Hesiod². They occur also in a large number of the Greek lyric and elegiac poets as well as in Pindar and Bacchylides³. This paper will discuss one instance of *phrēn* that appears in Pindar, *Nemean* 1.27. There Pindar sums up the essence of *phrēn* as “functioning in counsels” (βουλαί). How traditional is Pindar in making this claim for *phrēn*? How are we to understand the term *phrēn* in this passage?

Let us first see what can be said of *phrēn* and *phrenes* in general. Like other psychic entities they act both as agents that think, feel, and will. They designate also the thoughts, feelings, and intentions that are formed⁴. In the largest number of passages people act in, by, or with *phrenes* to perform various psychological activities. These activities are often complex in nature, combining intellectual, emotional, and volitional aspects commonly separated out in modern terminology. But, in other instances, one or another of these aspects seems clearly to predominate. Thus *phrenes* may be connected with intellectual activities such as pondering, deliberating, devising, and knowing, or with emotional ones such as rejoicing, fearing, being angry, or being sorrowful. As we look at any reference to *phrēn* or *phrenes*, it is important to remember that aspects of both agent and function are likely to be present. In relation to intellectual activities, for example, *phrēn* is the “mind” that thinks,

¹ On φρένες in Homer see B. Snell, *Φρένες-φρόνησις*, “Glotta” 55, 1977, 34-64 = *Der Weg zum Denken und zur Wahrheit* (Göttingen 1978), ‘Hypomnemata’ 57; S.M. Darcus, *A Person's Relation to φρήν in Homer, Hesiod, and the Greek Lyric Poets*, “Glotta” 57, 1979, 159-166; A. Cheyns, *La notion de φρένες dans l'Iliade et l'Odyssée*, I, “Cah. Inst. Ling. Louvain” 6, 1980, 121-202; M. Biraud, *La conception psychologique à l'époque d'Homère: les 'organes mentaux'*, “Cratyle” n.s. 2, 1984, 17-23; S.D. Sullivan, *Psychological Activity in Homer, A Study of Phrēn* (Ottawa 1988) with bibliography.

² See my article *Phrenes in Hesiod*, “RBPh” 67, 1989, 5-17.

³ On the meaning of *phrēn* in the lyric poets see the following: E. Lobel, *Ἀλκαίου Μέλη* (Oxford 1927) xxxvi; R.B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge 1954²) 36-38; M. Treu, *Von Homer zur Lyrik* (Munich 1955), ‘Zetemata’ 12, 195-203; V.N. Jarcho, *Zum Menschenbild der nachhomerischen Dichtung*, “Philologus” 112, 1968, 166-172; S.M. Darcus, *Noos Precedes Phrēn in Greek Lyric Poetry*, “AC” 46, 1977, 41-51; Darcus (note 1) 166-173; S.D. Sullivan, *Love Influences Phrenes in Greek Lyric Poetry*, “SO” 58, 1983, 15-22; *An Analysis of φρένες in the Greek Lyric and Elegiac Poets (excluding Pindar and Bacchylides)*, “Glotta” 67, 1989, 148-189.

⁴ On this feature of psychic entities see Sullivan, *Psychological Activity* (note 1), Chapter One.

the “thinking” itself, and the “thought” expressed.

It is on the intellectual activities of *phrēn* that this paper will focus. In Homer *phrenes* are associated with a wide range of such activities. People in or with *phrenes* “ponder”⁵. They “deliberate” (φράζομαι)⁶. They “perceive” (νοέω), “contrive” (μήδομαι), “devise” (μερμηρίζω), and “recognise” (γινώσκω)⁷. They “know counsels” (οἶδα μήδεα) in *phrenes*.⁸ They “place” (βάλλω) things in *phrenes* for consideration⁹. We also see an intellectual aspect of *phrenes* when they “forget”¹⁰. This is true too when *phrenes* are associated with speech. They can be a source of speech¹¹, as a location where words are to be considered¹², and as an entity affected by speech itself¹³. In expressions with the verb οἶδα *phrenes* act as a seat of a person's moral character. Someone “knows” things “just”, “suitable”, or “fitting” in *phrenes*¹⁴.

We find a similar broad range of intellectual functions associated with *phrenes* in Hesiod, the lyric and elegiac poets, and Pindar. Hesiod tells Perses to “consider” (φράζομαι) the advice he gives about the dangers of sailing (*W.&D.* 688). Similarly, in fr. 283.1, the activity of “considering” (φράζομαι) is to take place with “wise *phrenes*” (πευκάλιμος)¹⁵. In *Theogony* 488 Kronos fails to “perceive” (νοέω) with his *phrenes* that he has left Zeus alive and well. Twice Perses is urged to “place” (βάλλω) things in his *phrenes* for consideration (*W.&D.* 107, 274). Once too Hesiod mentions “knowing counsels” (οἶδα μήδεα) in *phrenes*.

In the lyric and elegiac poets *phrenes* likewise are connected with intellectual activities¹⁶. Twice people are described as “thinking” (νοέω) certain

⁵ See, e.g., *Il.* 10.4, 16.435, 17.106; *Od.* 5.424, 24.128; *H. Mer.* 66.

⁶ This verb, cognate with φρήν, has a broad meaning that includes observing, thinking, pondering, and planning. See *Il.* 9.423, 15.163, 20.115, and *Od.* 1.294.

⁷ See, e.g., *Il.* 9.600, 15.81; *Od.* 1.322, 3.26 (νοέω); *Il.* 21.19, 23.176; *Od.* 3.132, 11.474 (μήδομαι); *Il.* 5.671, 8.169; *Od.* 10.438, 20.41 (μερμηρίζω); *Il.* 1.333, 8.446; *H. Apoll.* 375.

⁸ *Il.* 17.325; *Od.* 11.445. Cf. also *Il.* 24.282, 24.674 and *Od.* 19.353 for “counsels” (μήδεα) in *phrenes*.

⁹ See, e.g. *Il.* 1.297, 4.39; *Od.* 11.454, 16.299.

¹⁰ See *Il.* 6.252, 15.61; *Od.* 10.557.

¹¹ See, e.g., *Il.* 1.407, 7.360; *Od.* 2.243.

¹² See, e.g., *Il.* 2.213; *Od.* 15.445; *H. Apoll.* 544.

¹³ See, e.g., *Il.* 5.493; *Od.* 4.77; *H. Mer.* 421.

¹⁴ See, e.g., *Il.* 5.326; *Od.* 5.9; *H. Mer.* 164.

¹⁵ This adjective occurs four times with *phrenes* in Homer: *Il.* 8.366, 14.165, 15.81, and 20.35.

¹⁶ Fragments of the lyric and elegiac poets are numbered according to M.L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* (Oxford, vol. 1, 1989²; vol. 2, 1971) = W. Translations are my own.

thoughts in *phrenes* (Sem. 7.27 W., Theog. 1008). Once Theognis urges Kyrnos to “place” (βάλλω) advice in his *thumos* and *phrenes* (1050). At 135 he tells Kyrnos that no one “knows” (οἶδα) in *phrenes* whether work is for good or for ill. But Theognis affirms that the person who has “practical wisdom” (γνώμη) in *phrenes* is blessed (1173). In one other passage of these poets we hear of a person “pondering” (ὀρμαίνω) many things in *phrēn*, sleepless at night¹⁷.

In Pindar we find certain instances of intellectual activity associated with *phrēn* or *phrenes*¹⁸. In *Pae.* 9.37 Pindar says that he has been gifted to compose a song “by the counsels (μῆδεα) of his *phrēn*”. Here, as in Homer and Hesiod, we find “counsels” present in *phrēn*. At *Nem.* 4.8 Pindar mentions a word “which a tongue draws forth from a deep *phrēn*”. At *Ol.* 8.24 he says that for variable situations “it is difficult to decide with an upright *phrēn*, not contrary to the fitting time”. Pindar uses here the verb διακρίνω, which suggests the activity of “discerning” or “deciding”. In fr. 61 he says that it is not possible for a person “to trace out (ἐρευνάω) the plans of the gods with a mortal *phrēn*”. Pindar thus suggests limits to the capacity of *phrēn* to discover what lies outside its range. At *Nem.* 7.60 Pindar says that Moira “does not harm the understanding (σύνεσις) of *phrenes*” in Thearion. In this reference we see “intelligence” or “understanding” centred in *phrenes*.

Above we have mentioned that in Homer people “know counsels” (μῆδεα) in *phrenes*. Pindar too at *Pae.* 9.37 mentions “counsels” (μῆδεα) of *phrēn*. These references suggest in particular an association of *phrēn* and *phrenes* with planning. This connection occurs elsewhere as well. In *Od.* 1.444 Telemachus “plans” (βουλεύω) a journey. In *Od.* 4.676 the suitors “plan” (βυσσοδομεύω) words. Likewise, Hephaestus, with the same verb, “plans” evils at *Od.* 8.273. So do the suitors “plan” evils against Telemachus at *Od.* 17.66. “Planning” also occurs in *phrenes* at *Od.* 4.739 where Penelope says that Laertes may “somehow weave (ὀφθαίνω) a design in his *phrenes*” to prevent the suitors from doing harm.

In the lyric and elegiac poets we likewise hear of *phrēn* and *phrenes* associated with planning. At 4.2 W. Solon says of Athens: “Our city will never perish according to the dispensation of Zeus and the *phrenes* of the blessed, immortal gods”. *Phrenes* in this passage have usually been translated as

¹⁷ Pap. Oxy. 3538, fr. 1.15 = Iby. See M.L. West, *New Fragments of Ibycus' Love Songs*, “ZPE” 57, 1984, 23-32. This passage, in particular, recalls the picture of Agamemnon “pondering” (μερμηρίζω) in *phrenes* at night with worry (see *Il.* 2.1-4).

¹⁸ The text of Pindar is *Pindaric Carmina cum Fragmentis*, post B.Snell, ed. H. Maehler (Leipzig 1987, repr. 1997). The translations of Pindar are my own.

“purpose”¹⁹, “will”²⁰, or “intentions”²¹. *Phrenes* are clearly associated with what the gods have in mind for Athens. In another poem (33 W.) Solon associates *phrēn* with planning when he ironically refers to himself as an οὐκ... βαθύφρων οὐδὲ βουλήεις ἀνὴρ. Someone with a “deep *phrēn*” would also be, it appears, a person “of counsel”.

Phocylides (7 W.) describes the nature of *phrēn* at night: “make plans (βουλεύω) at night. At night in truth *phrēn* is sharper for men. Quiet is good for the person seeking excellence”. Phocylides explicitly relates the activity of “planning” with *phrēn*. It can carry on this activity best in a quiet setting.

Theognis at 1051-1054 mentions *phrēn* with planning. He tells Kynos: “never, being pressed upon, do evil, but with your deep *phrēn* and good *noos* take counsel (βουλεύω). For the *thumos* and *noos* of those who are maddened flutter about, but counsel (βουλή) leads even the noble *noos* to good”. In these lines three psychic entities appear, all involved in intellectual activity. All three are said to function better if someone makes a measured use of them. Such a use will lead to good rather than to evil actions. Kynos is urged, therefore, to “plan” with his *phrēn* and *noos*.

In another passage Theognis relates *phrenes* with planning. In lines 161-164 he suggests that people's *daimōn*, whether good or bad, is more important in determining whether they do well or not than the nature of their *phrenes*. He contrasts people having “wretched *phrenes*” with those “who labour with good counsel” (βουλή). The latter probably have “good” *phrenes* but it matters not if *daimōn* is “wretched”. In these lines the activity of *phrenes* seems chiefly summed up in their ability to make plans.

Let us look now at *Nemean* 1.27²². This ode, written in honour of

¹⁹ See D.A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry. A Selection* (London 1967) 240; D.E. Gerber, *Euterpe: An Anthology of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac and Iambic Poetry* (Amsterdam 1970) 132; A.M. Miller, *Greek Lyric* (Indianapolis 1996) 65.

²⁰ See W.J. Henderson, *The Nature and Function of Solon's Poetry: Fr. 3 Diehl, 4 West, “ACI”* 25, 1982, 27.

²¹ See A.W.H. Adkins, *Poetic Craft in the Early Greek Elegists* (Chicago 1985) 109 and D.E. Gerber, *Greek Elegiac Poetry* (Cambridge MA 1999) 113. See too H. Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums* (Munich 1962²) 263: “Fügung”. See also D. Mulroy, *Early Greek Lyric Poetry* (Ann Arbor 1992) 68: “whim”.

²² On *Nemean* 1 in general see B.K. Braswell, *A Commentary on Nemean One* (Fribourg 1992) with very full bibliography; J.B. Bury, *The Nemean Odes of Pindar* (London 1890); C. Carey, *A Commentary on Five Odes of Pindar* (New York 1981); H. Ersbe, *Über Pindars Umgang mit dem Mythos, “Hermes”* 127, 1999, 13-32; L.R. Farnell, *The Work of Pindar* (London 1932, repr. Amsterdam 1965), vol. 2; C.A.M. Fennell, *Pindar: the Nemean and Isthmian Odes* (Cambridge 1899); G. Kirkwood, *Selections from Pindar* (Chico CA 1982); F. Mezger, *Pindars Siegeslieder* (Leipzig 1880); I.N. Perysinakis, *Pindar's Imagery of Poetry: The Nemean Odes, “Dodone”* (philol.) 26, 1997, 100-106; W.H. Race, *Pindar, Nemean Odes*,

Chromios, the general of Hieron, speaks first of Chromios' abilities and then of the glories of Sicily (1-18) ²³. Pindar proceeds to praise Chromios as a generous host and as one who brings together good men to quench the "smoke" of detractors (19-25). Pindar, using a gnomic statement, describes how human beings can achieve excellence (25-28). He applies this gnomic statement to Chromios (29-30). At line 31, introducing another gnomic statement about the use of wealth, Pindar makes a transition to the myth of Heracles (31-33). This myth then continues to the end of the ode (72).

Lines 25-30 of this ode are as follows:

25 τέχναι δ' ἐτέρων ἕτεραι·
 χρὴ δ' ἐν εὐθείαις ὁδοῖς στείχοντα μάρνασθαι φυᾶ.
 πράσσει γὰρ ἔργῳ μὲν σθένος,
 βουλαῖσι δὲ φρήν, ἐσσόμενον προιδεῖν
 συγγένες οἷς ἔπεται.
 Ἀγησιδάμου παῖ, σέο δ' ἀμφὶ τρόπῳ
 30 τῶν τε καὶ τῶν χρήσιες.

"Different skills belong to different people. It is necessary for the person going on straight paths to strive with innate talent.

For strength functions in deed, and *phrēn*, in counsels, for those whom an inborn ability of foreseeing the future attends.

Son of Hagesidemos, by virtue of your character, you have the uses of both of them."

Pindar says that people are endowed with different skills (τέχναι). What is required is for someone, "going on straight paths", to exert all energy with "innate talent" (φυᾶ). Pindar then describes two forms of this "innate talent": physical and intellectual. The "strength" of these people manifests itself in "deed". Their *phrēn* "functions in plans". Pindar enlarges upon the description of "*phrēn* in counsels" by adding: "for those whom an inborn ability of foreseeing the future attends". Part of the process of making plans involves

Isthmian Odes, Fragments (Cambridge MA 1997); S.L. Radt, *Pindars erste Nemeische Ode: Versuch einer Interpretation*, "Mnemosyne" 119, 1966, 148-174; P.W. Rose, *The Myth of Pindar's First Nemean: Sportsman, Poetry, and Paideia*, "HSPH" 78, 1974, 145-175; T.G. Rosenmeyer, *The Rookie: A Reading of Pindar, Nemean 1*, "CSCA" 2, 1969, 233-246; C. Segal, *Time and the Hero: The Myth of Nemean 1*, "RhM" 117, 1974, 29-39; W.J. Slater, *Nemean One: The Victor's Return in Poetry and Politics*, in: *Greek Poetry and Philosophy, Studies Woodbury*, ed. D.E. Gerber (Chico CA 1984) 241-264.

²³ For the summary of this ode see Braswell (note 22) 29-32, Carey (note 22) 130-132, and Race (note 22).

anticipating correctly what the future may bring²⁴. Chromios is blessed in sharing in both these features: σθένοϛ and φρήν.

The focus of this paper is Pindar's mention of *phrēn* in *Nem.* 1.27 and his association of it with planning. Our survey of earlier and contemporary uses of *phrēn* and *phrenes* showed that this psychic entity was very often associated with intellectual activities. In some instances it was specifically connected with "planning". We can say, therefore, that Pindar makes a 'traditional' reference in relating *phrēn* with "plans".

Various translations of *phrēn* in *Nem.* 1.27 have been suggested. Sandy: "might of mind by counsel"²⁵. Lattimore: "mind in council"²⁶. Conway: "the mind nurtures her harvest of wise counsels"²⁷. Nisetich: "stratagem the way of council"²⁸. Braswell: "mind in counsels"²⁹. Race: "wisdom through the counsels of those attended by inborn ability to foresee what will happen"³⁰.

How can we best understand *phrēn* in *Nem.* 1.27? As suggested above, we see Pindar referring to this psychic entity in a traditional way. In this reference we may see *phrēn* as an agent: rightly then we would translate it as "mind". We may see *phrēn* as an activity: we would correctly translate it as "thinking". We may see *phrēn* as a result of activity: we would appropriately translate it as "thought" or "wisdom". In this ode Pindar describes *phrēn* as a part of "innate talent" (φύά). *Sthenos* is one part of *phua*, being physical strength. *Phrēn* is the second part, being intellectual ability. Pindar ascribes to *phrēn* a crucial activity. It functions in forming plans. It is endowed with the skill of anticipating the future correctly. The person, having this *phrēn*, is truly fortunate. This paper has discussed the rich background of the meaning of *phrēn*. It is hoped that an awareness of this background may add to our understanding of *Nemean* 1.27.

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²⁴ I follow here the interpretation of these lines as given in Braswell (note 22) 49-52 and in W.H. Race, *Style and Rhetoric in Pindar's Odes* (Atlanta 1990) 172. Contrast Carey (note 22) 114-116, who suggests a priamel of three characteristics σθένοϛ, φρήν, and μαντεία. The μέν... δέ construction, however, suggests that two things are being praised, σθένοϛ and φρήν.

²⁵ See J. Sandys, *The Odes of Pindar* (Cambridge MA 1915) 319.

²⁶ R. Lattimore, *The Odes of Pindar* (Chicago 1947) 96.

²⁷ G. Conway, *The Odes of Pindar* (London 1972) 171.

²⁸ F.J. Nisetich, *Pindar's Victory Songs* (Baltimore 1980) 234.

²⁹ Braswell (note 22) 17.

³⁰ Race (note 22) 7.