

PHRENITIS AND THE PATHOLOGY OF THE MIND
IN WESTERN MEDICAL THOUGHT

Phrenitis is ubiquitous in ancient medicine and philosophy. Galen mentions the disease innumerable times, patristic authors take it as a favourite allegory of human flaws, and no ancient doctor fails to diagnose it and attempt its cure. Yet the nature of this once famous disease has not been understood properly by scholars. This book provides the first full history of *phrenitis*. In doing so, it surveys ancient ideas about the interactions between body and soul, both in health and in disease. It also addresses ancient ideas about bodily health, mental soundness and moral 'goodness', and their heritage in contemporary psychiatric ideas. Readers will encounter an exciting narrative about health, illness and care as embedded in ancient 'life', but will also be forced to reflect critically on our contemporary ideas of what it means to be 'insane'. This title is also available as open access on Cambridge Core.

CHIARA THUMIGER is a researcher in the Cluster of Excellence Roots, Christian-Albrechts Universität zu Kiel, Germany. She focuses on ancient Greek and Roman thought and literature, the history of ancient medicine and the history of psychiatry, as well as on comparative approaches to the anthropology of medicine and body history. She is the author of *A History of the Mind and Mental Health in Classical Greek Medical Thought* (Cambridge, 2017).

‘A comprehensive account of the history of the concept of *phrenitis* has long been awaited. This monograph by Chiara Thumiger, a leading expert in the study of the history of mental health and illness, admirably fills this major gap.’

Philip van der Eijk, Humboldt University Berlin

‘Chiara Thumiger’s monumental study of *phrenitis* is not only an astonishingly erudite and refreshingly sophisticated guide to the ancient, post-classical, and even modern evidence for this perplexing, obsolete, but central medical term for mental illness. It never forgets the human patients, in their distress and anxiety, and the human doctors who do their best to understand and help them.’

Glenn Most, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, and University of Chicago

‘Chiara Thumiger’s extraordinary book examines the history of the disease *phrenitis* from the fifth century BCE to its progressive disappearance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries CE. Its *longue-durée* approach and its breadth bring to mind Owsei Temkin’s *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*. The work draws upon a huge array of sources, both medical and non-medical, and deals sympathetically with the suffering of humans and non-human animals.’

Laurence Totelin, Cardiff University

PHRENITIS AND THE
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(Fifth Century BCE to Twentieth Century CE)

CHIARA THUMIGER

Cluster of Excellence Roots, Christian-Albrechts Universität zu Kiel, Germany



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