

## 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  
PATHOLOGY OF THE MIND  
IN WESTERN MEDICAL  
THOUGHT

*(Fifth Century BCE to Twentieth Century CE)*

CHIARA THUMIGER

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



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009241328](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009241328)

DOI: [10.1017/9781009241311](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009241311)

© Chiara Thumiger 2024

This publication is in copyright. It is subject to statutory exceptions and to the provisions  
of relevant licensing agreements; with the exception of the Creative Commons version  
the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part of this work may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

An online version of this work is published at [doi.org/10.1017/9781009241311](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009241311)  
under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 which permits  
re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes  
providing appropriate credit to the original work is given. You may not  
distribute derivative works without permission. To view a copy of this license, visit  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

All versions of this work may contain content reproduced under license from third  
parties. Permission to reproduce this third-party content must be obtained from these  
third-parties directly.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI [10.1017/9781009241311](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009241311)

First published 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Thumiger, Chiara, author.

TITLE: Phrenitis and the pathology of the mind in Western medical thought : (fifth century BCE to twentieth  
century CE) / Chiara Thumiger.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2023. | Includes bibliographical  
references and index. |

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2023018193 | ISBN 9781009241328 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009241342 (paperback) |  
ISBN 9781009241311 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Mental illness – Europe – History. | Neurology – Europe – History. |  
Psychiatry – Europe – History.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC RC450.A1 T48 2023 | DDC 616.890094–dc23/eng/20230527

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023018193>

ISBN 978-1-009-24132-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.