

**The Shaping of Psychosomatics in the Latin West:
A Study of the Twelfth-Century Medical Discourse on the Body-Soul Nexus**

Abstract

This study aims to shed light on one of the key moments in the formation of a learned discourse on the body-soul nexus in the Latin West, namely the elaboration of a detailed and comprehensive theory of the psychosomatic nature of man in twelfth-century medicine. At the heart of this dissertation stands a group of unpublished commentaries on a short introduction to medicine known as the *Isagoge Iohanitii*. Since the mid-twentieth century, these commentaries on the *Isagoge Iohanitii* have drawn historians' attention due to their theoretical orientation and the role they played in the assimilation and systematization of Greco-Arabic medicine in the Latin West. The physicians who took part in this new medical tradition have been associated with the medical school of Salerno in southern Italy, and their interpretations of the *Isagoge Iohanitii* drew on the medical translations of Constantine the African (d. before 1098-1099), a merchant or physician who organized the translation of about three dozen medical textbooks from Arabic into Latin. However, the Salernitan commentaries on the *Isagoge Iohanitii* were not exclusively medical. Drawing on a large spectrum of ancient and late antique philosophical treatises from Aristotle and Plato to Augustine and Boethius, these commentaries also reflect a profound interest in natural philosophy, cosmology, and metaphysics.

The body-soul nexus was at the heart of this emerging scholastic tradition. The various glosses by Salernitan physicians on fevers and emotions, for instance, presented the soul as an element that can influence the complexion of the body and thus as a source of certain kinds of fevers and physical changes that characterize emotions. The body-soul nexus was also the focus of the Salernitans' glosses on the Galenic notion of "powers" (*virtutes*): the natural power (*virtus naturalis*), located in the liver; the spiritual or vital power (*virtus spiritualis/vitalis*), located in the heart; and the animal power (*virtus animalis*), located in the brain. Beginning in the mid-twelfth century, the medical commentators on the *Isagoge Iohanitii* discussed these issues using a wide range of medical, philosophical, and theological notions: heat, air, spirits,

nerves and blood-vessels as well as perception, reason, will, and choice. Nonetheless, historians have hitherto rarely considered the Salernitan physicians as significant participants in the Christian discourse on the body-soul nexus.

This study seeks to highlight the contribution of Salernitan physicians to the Christian discourse on the body-soul nexus by showing how the theory of the three *virtutes* stimulated them to develop a rich and learned discourse on human psychophysiology. It shows that the Salernitan commentators developed this discourse gradually around the doctrine of the *virtus spiritualis*, the power that was responsible for the production of pulse and anger. It demonstrates how, during the second part of the twelfth century, their discussion of anger as part of the spiritual power was harnessed to extensively and meticulously explain a variety of psychosomatic phenomena. It suggests that the study of these phenomena became a privileged setting for exploring the boundaries of medical thought at the intersection of medicine, philosophy, and theology. Finally, it examines the notion that these southern Italian physicians knew the philosophical and theological writings produced at the time in the schools of northern France. Thus, beyond the question of the body-soul nexus and its multiple articulations during the twelfth century, this study aims to deepen our knowledge of the mechanisms that shaped the intellectual and professional identities of medieval physicians. It seeks to improve our understanding of the ways medieval scholars managed conflicts between scientific and religious imperatives. In doing so, it aspires to provide a missing link in the multilingual and multicultural history of the science of the soul in the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Medieval medicine, Salerno, *virtus spiritualis*, spirits, heart, brain, soul, anger, emotions, psychosomatics, moral philosophy, *Isagoge Iohanitii*