

Conference&Volume

Complexio. Across Times and Disciplines

Center for the History of Philosophy and Science
Radboud University, Nijmegen (The Netherlands)

On-line conference - February 25-26, 2021

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CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF
PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE
RADBOD UNIVERSITY NIJMEGEN

CONFERENCE & VOLUME PAPERS (alphabetical order)

Tommaso Alpina (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany) - “A Plant in Itself, a Medicament for us. Temperament Interactions in Avicenna’s Botany”.

Chiara Beneduce (Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands) - “*Complexio* in the Latin Late Medieval *De animalibus*. A Preliminary Survey”.

Fabrizio Bigotti (Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, Germany & University of Exeter, UK) - “*Gradus Dimetiri*. Classification, Combination and Intensity of Complexions in Scholastic Medicine”.

Véronique Decaix (Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, France) - “Is Memory a Matter of Complexion?”.

Joël Chandelier (Université Paris 8, France) - “Complexion of the Members, Complexion of the Body in 14th Century Scholastic Medicine”.

Danielle Jacquart (École Pratique des Hautes Études, France) - “La complexion chez Thomas d’Aquin”.

Giouli Korobili (Utrecht University, The Netherlands) - “*Eukrasia* (Good Mixture) or *Egkrateia* (Temperance)? The Origin and Semantic Development of *Krasis* in Greek and Roman Antiquity”.

Lukáš Lička (Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic) - “The Noblest Complexion: Semi-materialist Tendencies in a Late Medieval Bohemian Reading of John Wyclif”.

Craig Martin (Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, Italy) - “Temperament as Substantial Form in Da Monte’s Pharmacological Writings”.

Evelina Miteva (Università del Salento, Italy) - “*Climata et temperamenta*: The Influence of Climate and Environment on Human Complexion in XIIIth and XIVth centuries”.

Elisabeth Moreau (FNRS – Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium) - “The Temperament of Drugs in Late Renaissance Medicine”.

Marilena Panarelli (Università del Salento, Italy) - “The Role of the *formae complexionales* in Plants according to Albert the Great”.

Elisa Rubino (Università del Salento, Italy) - “*Complexio* in the Geomantic Treatise Attributed to William of Moerbeke”.

Christoph Sander (Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, Italy) - “Tempering Occult Qualities. Magnetism and *complexio* in Early Modern Medical Thought” (volume).

Maaïke Van der Lugt (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France) - “Radical Complexion, Identity and Change in Medieval Medicine and Natural Philosophy” (volume).

Joseph Ziegler (University of Haifa, Israel) - “*Complexio* and the Transformation of Learned Physiognomy c. 1200 - c. 1500”.

Gabriella Zuccolin (Università di Pavia, Italy) - “Are There Identical Complexions? A Theoretical Question in Medieval Medical Thought”.

RATIONALE

Complexio. Across Times and Disciplines

Today, the word ‘complexion’ bears the meaning of ‘skin tone’ or, more broadly, of ‘bodily appearance’, sometimes shifting to the moral connotation of ‘attitude’ or to the broader nuance of ‘general character of something’. Historians of Philosophy and Science know however that the notion of ‘complexion’ went through a long semantic and conceptual journey, with a core moment in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when the word *complexio* was widely used in texts.

‘*Complexio*’ was a central notion of Medieval and Renaissance thought, originating from the Galenic concept of ‘κρᾶσις’ (often translated as ‘balanced mixture’ in modern English). The history of how the concept of ‘κρᾶσις’ became the concept of ‘complexion’ (sometimes referred to also as ‘*temperamentum*’) is not at all a linear one. At the same time, also the way *complexio* became our current notion of ‘complexion’ is intricate and intriguing enough to invite historians to reflect on it. Moreover, there is not a unique definition of the concept of ‘complexion’ emerging from Medieval and Renaissance texts. Generally, ‘complexion’ was described as the blend of the primary qualities (hot, cold, wet, and dry) resulting from the mixture of the primary elements (earth, air, water, and fire). Due to its Galenic origin, the notion of ‘complexion’ primarily appears within medical topics and discussions. In fact, in Medieval and Renaissance times, the concept of ‘complexion’ was also often defined as the blend of the four humors, i.e., blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. For this reason, the concept of ‘complexion’ is at the very basis of the pre-modern idea of ‘health’ as a balanced state of the humors, and thus played an important role both in medical theory and medical practice. However, and scholarship has scarcely focused on it, the notion of ‘complexion’ also appeared in several other fields than medicine (theology, natural philosophy, and alchemy, as main examples) and in a plurality of textual traditions (medical handbooks, works in theoretical medicine, commentaries on Aristotle, a variety of commentaries on non-Aristotelian works, and independent treatises).

The aim of this conference is twofold.

First, we wish to better retrace the history of the concept of ‘complexion’ in its changing meanings over the centuries. Although the conference will be mostly focused on the Late Medieval and Renaissance uses of the concept of ‘complexion’, we welcomed papers able to show the *longue durée* of the concept of ‘complexion’, from its roots in Antiquity to its presence in Early Modern philosophy and science.

Second, we aim to map the use of the concept of ‘complexion’ in different fields of Medieval and Renaissance thought. We of course welcomed papers showing the uses of the notion of ‘complexion’ in medicine, but we especially encouraged papers discussing the role played by complexion in – and at the crossroads of – other epistemological contexts. We hope to arrive at a better understanding of how the concept of ‘complexion’ spread from medicine to several other fields of knowledge and how similarly or differently it was used in disparate contexts. We finally

aim at investigating the impression that the notion of ‘complexion’ was placed at the intersection of several domains, i.e., point out the apparent cross-disciplinary nature of the notion of ‘complexion’. In the end, we could even venture a description of ‘complexion’ in terms of ‘a pre-modern passe-partout concept’ used for interpreting reality.

* For further information on the conference and for the list of abstracts, please contact c.beneduce@ftr.ru.nl.

** A limited number of participants can be admitted to the on-line conference as audience. If interested, please contact c.beneduce@ftr.ru.nl by February 1st, 2021.

*** The conference, originally planned to take place at Radboud University, Nijmegen, was moved on-line due to the Covid-19 crisis.

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