



CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF
MEDICINE AND THE BODY
IN THE RENAISSANCE

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Julius-Maximilians-
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PSMEMM
Palgrave Studies in Medieval & Early Modern Medicine

CSMBR
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EVENTS

MEDICAL ALCHEMY IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

13
APRIL
2022
5.00 pm CET

TRANSFORMING MATERIALS AT PALAZZO VECCHIO & THE CASINO DI SAN MARCO

GEORGIANA HEDESAN • University of Oxford

This lecture will revolve around a painting of an alchemical laboratory created by Johannes Stradanus (1523-1605), a Flemish-born artist settled in Florence. In 1570, Stradanus, who was at the time part of the workshop of Giorgio Vasari, was commissioned for two paintings meant to adorn the Studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici (1541-1587). The best one is known as The Alchemist's Laboratory, and was a depiction of the distillation works in

in Palazzo Vecchio. I will be discussing what this image and connected information might tell us about the Palazzo Vecchio laboratory and princely alchemy at the Medici court. The laboratory was set up by Cosimo I (1519-1574), the first Grand Duke of Tuscany; he was known to dabble into alchemy himself. His son Francesco was even more enthusiastic: Stradanus's painting portrays the prince working on

the premises amongst other artisans. It seems that the primary purpose of the laboratory was focussed toward making practical medicines. Yet the laboratory was relatively short lived. Just as Stradanus was painting The Alchemist's Laboratory, Francesco was commissioning a new palace in the Giardino di San Marco. Once the Casino di San Marco was finished in 1575, Francesco relocated the majority of the alchemical works there, hence creating one of the first purpose-built scientific institutions in the world. A large number of documents from this laboratory survive, and my talk will end with a later depiction of it.