



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

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STUDIO FIRMANO
PER LA STORIA DELL'ARTE MEDICA E DELLA SCIENZA



PSMEMM
Palgrave Studies in Medieval & Early Modern Medicine

CSMBR
ONLINE
EVENTS

FROM DANGEROUS DRUG TO MIRACULOUS MEDICINE

12
SEPTEMBER
2023
5.00pm CEST

USES, ABUSES, AND MEDICAL RATIONALE OF OPIUM IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

EDOARDO PIERINI • University of Geneva

Opium was known since the antiquity for its narcotic and anodyne action, and gained an important place in the European pharmacopoeias since the time of Hippocrates. The perilous nature of the "tears of the poppy" was equally well-known to medical practitioners of the Hellenistic and Roman eras, as most of them held a strong conviction that opium was, on numerous occasions, too dangerous to be utilized as a medicinal

substance. Galen in particular placed it in the fourth category of coldness, the strongest, which reflected the danger that was then associated with its use, and advocated its use only in desperate cases when there was no alternative. The sole exception to this restricted use of opium was its incorporation in compounded drugs, such as theriac, where the addition of warm ingredients would balance the hazardous and cold qualities of opium.

In Europe this view went unchallenged until the sixteenth century, when opium underwent a theoretical change that made it more easily usable in everyday practice. Furthermore, the dissemination of treatises documenting the utilization of opiates among remote and unfamiliar cultures, including the Turks and the Indians, introduced novel observations and heightened the understanding of the effects exerted by these substances. In this talk, I will explore how, during the seventeenth century, the confluence of these factors instigated a surge in opium consumption, ultimately culminating in the manifestation of addiction.

The event is free to attend but registration is required. Info at csnbr.fondazionecomel.org