

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

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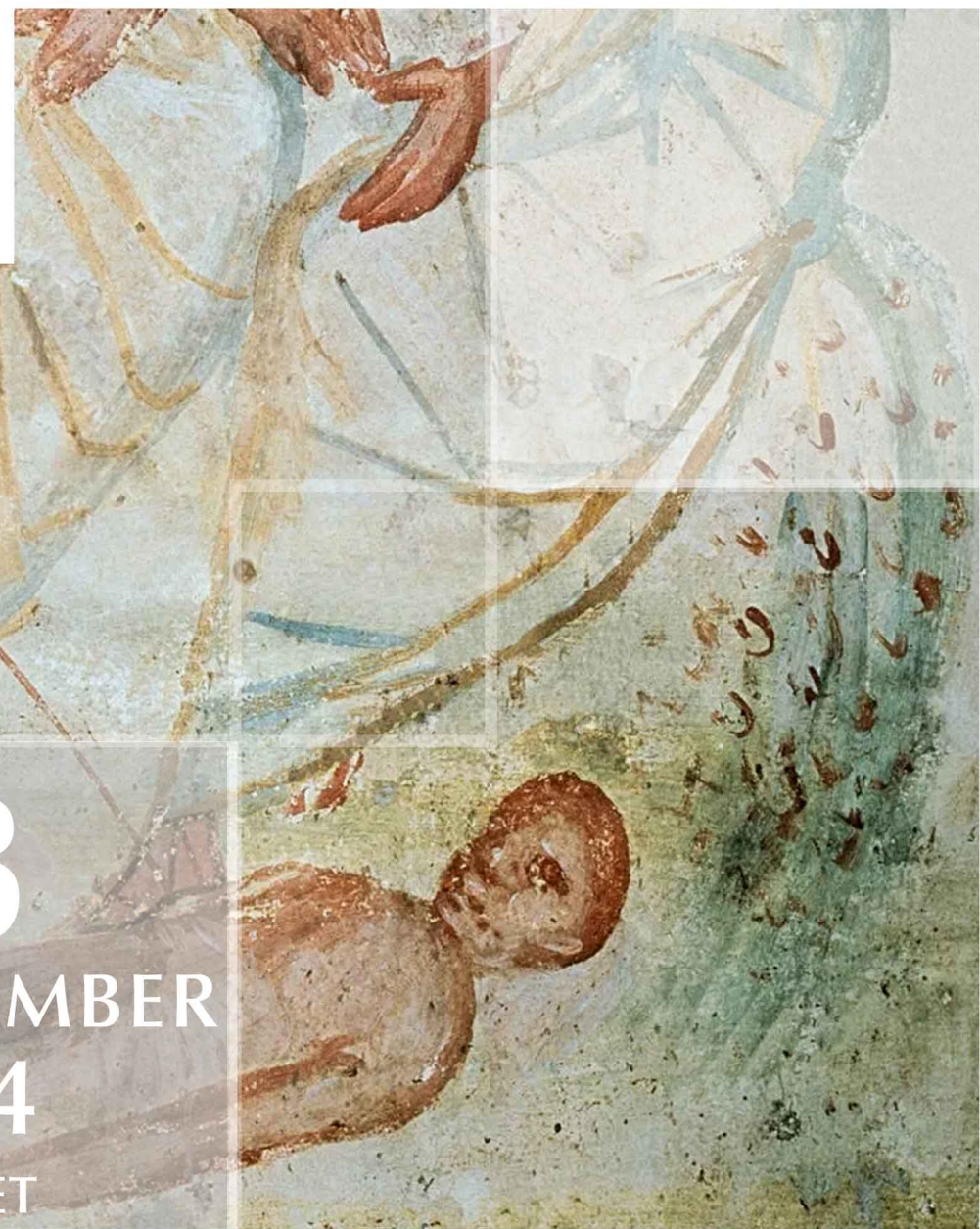


UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PARMA



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

CSMBR
ONLINE
EVENTS



GALEN ON CONTAGION AND MATERIAL IMAGINATION

18
NOVEMBER
2024
5.00 pm CET

A READING OF «ON PROBLEMATIC MOVEMENTS»

BROOKE HOLMES • Princeton University

The concept of contagion in the learned Greek medical tradition has long been recognized as having an ambiguous status due to the challenges it poses to established aetiological strategies. One mark of this status is the referral of several paradigmatic infectious diseases to the primarily Peripatetic genre of “physical problems,” where they appear as cases of “sympathy” (*sumpatheia*). In this paper, I analyze a moment from Galen’s *On Problematic*

Movements (*Peri tōn aporōn kinēseōn*) where this discourse of contagious sympathy attracts Galen’s attention as he tries to make sense of bodily movements that trouble the boundary between what is voluntary and what is involuntary. I argue that Galen translates a concept of sympathy between bodies (that is, contagion) into a concept of sympathy between the mind and the body in order to bring it under the control of his own

explanatory model in the treatise. Galen’s strategic move sheds light on how concepts of sympathy from the early Hellenistic period generated ideas about “chains” of contagious affect that traveled both between bodies and within ensouled bodies. It also sets Galen up to give an account of how the imagination participates in our experiences of pain and disease that will be of interest to early modern physicians such as Francisco Vallés.