

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

INSTITUTIO SANTORIANA
FONDAZIONE COMEL



YALE UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences



University
of Exeter

Julius-Maximilians-
**UNIVERSITÄT
WÜRZBURG**

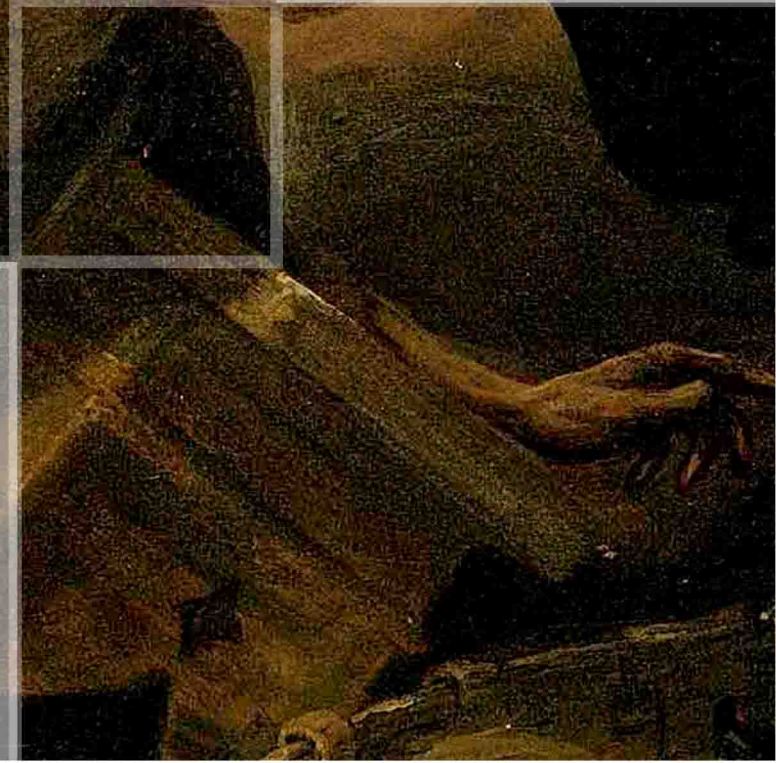
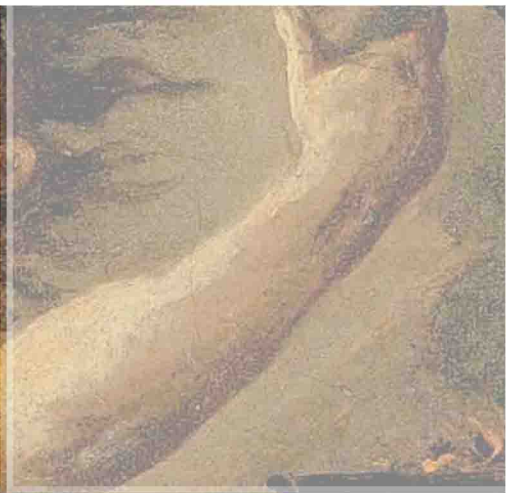


UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PARMA



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

CSMBR
ONLINE
EVENTS



DEMONS IMAGINATION AND MENTAL ILLNESS

17
DECEMBER
2024
5.00 pm CET

MEDICAL DISPUTATIONS ON «PHANTASIA» IN WITTENBERG (1593-1643)

MANUEL HUTH • Julius Maximilians Universität Würzburg

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, and particularly in its final years, the University of Wittenberg witnessed a surge in disputations concerning ostensibly supernatural mental states, like lycanthropy, ecstasy, and witchcraft. In their analyses, contemporaries attributed such phenomena to the influence of demons, to a disorder of the *imaginatio/phantasia*, or a combination of both. This meant, for example, that people engaged in debates about whether a

demon could actually separate a human soul from its body, or whether this was mere imagination, or whether it was an imagination induced by a demon, who affected the human *phantasia*. In this context, the role of *phantasia* was repeatedly discussed at the medical faculty in Wittenberg. A pertinent quote from Daniel Sennert, who wrote in his *Institutiones medicinae* that mental illnesses were almost always accompanied by a disorder

of *phantasia*, demonstrates the crucial importance ascribed to this concept. The reception of this concept was shaped by a multitude of factors, including Aristotle's theory of the soul, the writings of Johann Weyer, who dismissed witchcraft as pure fantasy, and Protestant anatomy in Wittenberg, which had focused on the connection between body and soul since its founding by Philipp Melancthon. The lecture aims to show the development of the *phantasia* discourse and how its reception could lead to a rationalization of seemingly supernatural mental states.