



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

INSTITUTIO SANTORIANA
FONDAZIONE COMEL



YALE UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences



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**UNIVERSITÄT
WÜRZBURG**



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PARMA



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

CSMBR
ONLINE
EVENTS

DISTILLING BODIES

11
MARCH
2025
5.00 pm CET

LEONHARDT THURNEISSER'S ALCHEMY OF URINE AND THE «HOMO ALEMBICUS»

TILLMANN TAAPE • Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

How do you look inside your patients to see what ails them? For the alchemist Leonhard Thurneisser, the answer lay in distilling his patients' urine. The long-standing tradition of uroscopy provided precedent for seeing a patient's state of health reflected in their urine. Paracelsian and other "chemical" approaches emerging in the sixteenth century offered new concepts and techniques for understanding the materiality of health and disease. Thurneisser built

on these approaches to develop a vessel for distilling urine that, in his view, mapped onto the human body and made visible its internal processes. This talk shows how Thurneisser's analogy between bodily and technical processes offered a new and lucrative diagnostic technique that changed the agencies of patients and practitioners. I also explore how distillation shaped Thurneisser's understanding of human health in terms of

matter and its transformations, and of the human body's place in the material world.