



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  
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EVENTS



# LIVELY CREATURES

25  
MARCH  
2025  
5.00 pm CET

ANIMALS AND THE RECIPE TRADITION OF EARLY MODERN ITALY

MADELEINE SHEAHAN • Yale University

The staggering number and variety of animal ingredients recorded in early modern medical recipes across Europe attest to the believed healing virtues of bodily matter. These writings were filled with graphic descriptions of procuring, producing, and using bodily materials towards the aim of preserving human life. Recipe writers in particular emphasized the necessity of using live animals in the making of medicines, instructing readers

how and when an animal ought to be taken and killed to preserve its maximum medical efficacy. More shockingly, practitioners described ways to torture, agitate, and infuriate animals in order to stimulate their essential vitality and thus capture it. Investigating this purported extractive process in the making of medicines, my paper provides an analysis of animal treatment and killing techniques recommended in a series of sixteenth

-century Italian manuscripts recipes predominantly authored by elite domestic practitioners. In highlighting the interconnected issues of potency, efficacy, and vitality, it illuminates a domestic perspective on the utility of animals, as well as unveils a system of beliefs regarding the ways in which the emotional and embodied experiences of living creatures were understood to deeply and directly impact the power of medicines.

The event is free to attend but registration is required. Info at [csnbr.fondazionecomel.org](http://csnbr.fondazionecomel.org)