



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

WRITING CIVIL AND NATURAL HISTORIES ON THE ISLAND OF AMBON

16
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2025

5.00 pm CET

GENRE AND NARRATIVE IN THE WORK OF GEORG EBERHARD RUMPHIUS (1627-1702)

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George Eberhard Rumphius is arguably the most important natural historian of the early modern Dutch colonial archipelago, whose works defined the medicinal botany of Indonesia for the following three hundred years. This talk offers an overview of his extensive writings and publications that started with histories and geographies of the East Indonesian archipelago of Maluku and ended with the posthumous publication of the *Herbarium amboinense*,

whose printing was delayed because of the censorial intervention of the Dutch East India Company. Rumphius' writings were heavily influenced by the Muslim Imam Ridjali, whose *Hikayat tanah bitu* is the only surviving local account of Maluku from the period. We examine the reasons why Rumphius decided to translate the *Hikayat tanah bitu*, and present this translation as his own, credible account of the development of

society on Ambon. It is argued that there were significant resonances between the religious and philosophical worldviews of Rumphius and the religious and philosophical worldviews of Imam Ridjali. I suggest that the seventeenth-century Indonesian archipelago saw the concurrent development of Reformed Christian thinking amongst Dutch colonisers and reformist Islamic movements within Muslim elites. Significantly, Rumphius' approach to medicinal healing was determined by these religious and philosophical considerations and debates.