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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



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

THE TISSUE OF THE WORLD

THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF SYMPATHY

BROOKE HOLMES • Princeton University

28

JANUARY
2026
5.00 PM

CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME

In this talk, I present the main arguments of the book I am completing that develops the first comprehensive history of the ancient concept of *sumpatheia*, from the emergence of the language of sympathy in fourth-century BCE Greek texts to the theory of cosmic sympathy developed by Plotinus in the third century CE. I show how authors working within the “inquiry into nature” and its later reception began to identify different sites identified as

“sympathy” at different scales: in living beings (e.g., between the body and the soul); between natural and especially living beings (e.g., between members of the same kind); between the celestial and terrestrial realms and within the cosmos as a whole. I emphasize the importance of sympathy as a point of contact between different cultural traditions of cosmo-anthropology in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Developing the idea

of a “perceptual-conceptual” field of ancient sympathy, I aim to trace how the emergence of different strands of sympathy transformed the way people in ancient Afro-Eurasia thought about the nature of community and Nature itself as a cause of community.

The event is free to attend but registration is required. Info at csmb.fondazionecomel.org