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EVENTS

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

MATTER PREPARED FORM RECEIVED

PHARMACOLOGICAL THEORY IN 14TH-CENTURY ITALY

MARILENA PANARELLI • University of Palermo

14 APRIL 2026
5.00 PM
CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME

How do medicines produce their effects? Late medieval physicians addressed this question by combining medical theory with concepts drawn from natural philosophy, metaphysics, and logic. Central to their explanations was the relationship between *complexio*—the quality resulting from the reciprocal interaction of the four elemental qualities—and *forma specifica*, a form not reducible to material qualities but responsible for the characteristic properties belonging to a species. In the works of two Italian physicians, the Florentine Taddeo Alderotti (c. 1215–1295) and his pupil Dino del Garbo (c. 1270–1327), this relationship becomes a key framework for explaining how remedies act on the body. Alderotti describes *complexio* as the particular disposition of the body that results from the balance of qualities such as heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. This disposition prepares bodily matter to receive the *forma specifica*. Within this framework, the action of medicaments cannot be explained solely through perceptible qualities, but also through the hidden operations connected with their *forma specifica*. A related perspective appears in the writings of Dino del Garbo, who elaborates the distinctions introduced by Alderotti and applies them to the explanation of pharmacological action. The talk shows how this conceptual framework allowed medieval physicians to connect philosophical doctrines of form and matter with practical questions concerning the action and efficacy of medicines.

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