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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 COLD FEMALE BODY IN OLIVA SABUCO

MOTHERHOOD, SEMEN, AND MILK

JIL MULLER • Paderborn University

**7
OCTOBER
2026**

5.00 PM

CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME

This presentation examines the understanding of the female body in the work of Oliva Sabuco, focusing on her theories of procreation and breastfeeding within the intellectual framework of early modern medicine and natural philosophy. Particular attention will be given to Sabuco's reinterpretation of the "cold" female body, a notion traditionally associated in Galenic medicine with weakness, passivity, and reproductive inferiority. Rather than rejecting

inherited medical doctrines, Sabuco reworks classical and medieval authorities, drawing on Galenic, Hippocratic, and Avicennian traditions to articulate a more active role for women in the processes of generation and nurture. Central to this analysis is Sabuco's adoption of the two-seeds model of generation, according to which conception requires the active participation of both male and female semen. Female semen, under-

stood as transformed chilo and characterized by the qualities of coldness and humidity, is presented as an indispensable generative substance. By emphasizing the formative power of maternal milk, Sabuco places mothers at the centre of both physiological and moral development. More broadly, the paper argues that Sabuco's account challenges conventional assumptions about female corporeality while remaining firmly embedded within the medical and philosophical traditions of her time.

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