



YCCSA Seminar Series Spring 2018

An interdisciplinary seminar series hosted by the York Cross-disciplinary Centre for System Analysis aimed at researchers from all disciplines

Lettuce, poppy seeds and woman's milk: sleep remedies in seventeenth-century English receipt books

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Ron Cooke Hub, RCH/204 at 13:30

Abstract:

Sleep in general in the early modern period is a fascinating and understudied subject, on the cusp of the magic of earlier times and the development of modern scientific methods. Roger Ekirch's ground-breaking research into the history of night suggested that people experienced sleep differently before the development of modern street lighting, expecting to wake up for an hour or two in the middle of the night before falling in to a second sleep. This does not mean, however, that insomnia was not perceived as a problem in the early modern period. The wealth and variety of sleeping potions and herbal remedies suggests that combatting insomnia was as much a concern in early modern society as it is today.

This paper analyses sleep remedies contained in seventeenth-century receipt collections held in the archives of the Wellcome Trust, the British Library and the Folger Shakespeare Library. Looking back to Anglo-Saxon herb charms, and forward to contemporary debates about sleeping drugs, it places early modern remedies in the context of the history of sleep medicine as a whole. Such an approach will give us further insight into how early modern people thought about, and experienced, sleep.

The seminar includes a refreshment break to fuel interdisciplinary discussion

***Ron Cooke Hub is on Heslington East Campus – accessible by free bus services
Nos. 66 and UB1 running at frequent intervals from Heslington West.
The YCCSA Seminar room is on the second floor***