

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

INSTITUTIO SANTORIANA  
FONDAZIONE COMEL



YALE UNIVERSITY  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences



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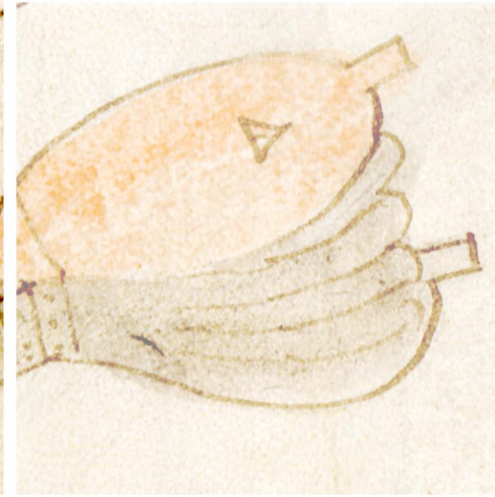
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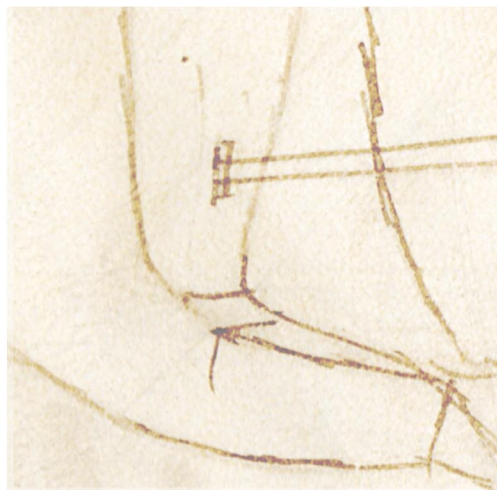
**STUDIO FIRMANO**  
PER LA STORIA DELL'ARTE MEDICA E DELLA SCIENZA



**PSMEMM**  
Palgrave Studies in Medieval & Early Modern Medicine



CSMBR  
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EVENTS



**20**  
JUNE  
**2023**  
5.00pm CEST



# DELAYING DEATH

THE ROLE OF ALCHEMY IN ROGER BACON'S MEDICAL WORKS

MEAGAN ALLEN • Science History Institute Philadelphia

In a small fragment of a work now called the *Liber sex scientiarum*, the English Franciscan Roger Bacon explained that the human body had the potential to be immortal. If Adam had remained in the Garden of Eden, he would have been able to live forever, sustained by the fruit produced by the Tree of Life. But even though mankind had sinned, Bacon understood the Bible to teach that all humans would eventually reach the ideal

state of immortality, albeit only after the resurrection. At the moment of the resurrection, each person would receive an incorruptible, and therefore immortal body, which would be subject to neither disease, decay, nor aging. Despite mankind's fall, Bacon said, wise men could learn how to make approximations of these bodies, so that their own lives would be greatly lengthened. Though no one could live forever before the

resurrection, wise men might be able to extend their lives by decades, even centuries, through the *prolongatio vitae*—the extreme prolongation of life. My talk examines Bacon's alchemical theories and explains how he believed that the key to extending life lay not in the curricula as taught in the medical faculties of the universities, but in the study of alchemy.