



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

INSTITUTIO SANTORIANA
FONDAZIONE COMEL



YALE UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences



University
of Exeter

Julius-Maximilians-
**UNIVERSITÄT
WÜRZBURG**



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PARMA



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

CSMBR
ONLINE
EVENTS

READING THE DESTINY IN YOUR FACE

6
MAY
2025
5.00 pm CET

AVICENNA ON SIGN-BASED INFERENCE

SILVIA DI VINCENZO • “Ca’ Foscari” University of Venice

Is it possible to discern what is concealed within the human soul through what is outwardly manifest? This question has been a subject of inquiry across logical and medical traditions from antiquity to modern times. Reflection on this issue forms the foundation of a discipline with a long and complex history spanning the Greek, Arabic, Hebrew and Latin traditions: physiognomy. Physiognomy is of dual significance, encompassing both theoretical and

practical dimensions. On a theoretical level, it examines the causal relationship between external symptoms and their underlying causes. On a practical level, it seeks to apply this understanding to develop a framework that enables one to infer the invisible (character traits) from the visible (external features) and, to some extent, predict human actions and reactions. Adopting a theoretical, particularly logical, perspective, this lecture will

explore attempts to formalize the reasoning characteristic of physiognomic practices as sign-based inference within the medieval Arabic tradition. Special attention will be given to the contribution of one of the most prominent figures of this tradition, the philosopher and polymath Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, 980–1037).