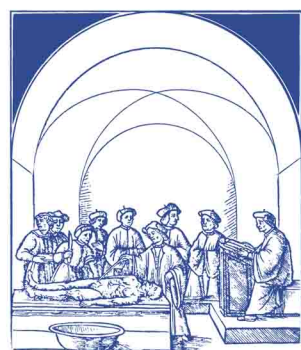


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CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF
MEDICINE AND THE BODY
IN THE RENAISSANCE

BETWEEN TEXT AND IMAGE

DIAGRAMS OF THE (VENTRICLES OF THE) BRAIN IN THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMICATE TRADITION

SHAHRZAD IRANNEJAD • Avicenna Study Center — Ruhr University Bochum

19
FEBRUARY
2026
5.00 PM

CENTRAL EUROPEAN TIME

In this lecture, I will discuss the very few, yet thought-provoking, visual representations of the brain and its ventricles in the medieval Islamicate tradition. Some illustrations of the brain show up in the Avicennan tradition, while numerous mini diagrams of the ventricles of the brain show up in the *Kitāb al-Manẓūr fī al-Ḥayy* by al-Rāzī (865–925 CE) — a concise yet comprehensive and influential encyclopedia of medicine. In several manuscript

witnesses of this work numerous anatomical diagrams can be seen of the ventricles of the brain. These diagrams were not necessarily meant to copy reality or precise anatomy, and were most probably executed by the scribe/copyist of the text. What is particularly intriguing is the variation in the visual representation of these anatomical structures. In other words, these diagrams qua “imagetexts” were subject

to mouvance, i.e. accidental or deliberate changes, just like the text that was hand-copied from one manuscript to the other. In this lecture, I argue that certain philological questions can be posed to these diagrams; for instance, questions pertaining to the familial relationship of the manuscript witnesses. Finally, I ask to what extent the establishment of anatomical truth and reconstructing the archetype needs to be the focus, versus exploration of the dynamism of visual representation as a result of scribal practices across time and space.

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