

The Art and Space of Anatomy (Bologna, 17–18 Nov 23)

Archiginnasio, Piazza Galvani, 1, 40124 Bologna, Italia, Nov 17–18, 2023

Deadline: Jun 15, 2023

Chiara Ianeselli, Trento

The Art and Space of Anatomy: Origins, History and Functions of Anatomical Theatres.

The Italian Society for the History of Medicine (S.I.S.M.) is pleased to present the first conference dedicated to the study of anatomical theatres 'The Art and Space of Anatomy: Origins, History and Functions of Anatomical Theatres'.

The meeting will be held in Bologna, Italy, on 17 and 18 November 2023, at Aula delle Adunanze of Medical and Surgical Society of Bologna, set in the historical Archiginnasio complex. The event has the patronage of the Italian Society of Anatomy and Histology, and the Medical and Surgical Society of Bologna.

Organised by the Section on Anatomical Theatres of the S.I.S.M. (Project THESA - THEatre Science Anatomy), the international conference focuses on the history of anatomical theatres, shedding light on their role in science, on the interdisciplinary nature of the activities they have hosted, on their architectural and stylistic evolution, and on their contemporary life. The surviving anatomical theatres constitute a unique historical heritage within cities, representing the meeting place between scientific research and artistic creation, which took place in a continuous dialogue with contextual social and religious changes.

The aim of the conference is to collect the fragmentary existing information on the construction of anatomical theatres, their design and architecture, and the functioning and organisation of anatomy lessons. Various researchers have been conducted on the individual constructions, but a unified and multidisciplinary perspective on the subject is lacking to date. A further aim, therefore, is to create a supranational network of researchers committed to demonstrating the relevance of anatomical theatres in the history of medicine and art, as well as within society.

Between the XVI and XIX centuries, temporary and permanent kinds of structures purposely dedicated to the exploration of the animal and human body were erected throughout Europe, ranging from the historical theatres of Padua, Bologna, Pisa, Leiden, and Uppsala to the modern architecture of Berlin, Paris, and Pavia, amongst other locations. The rising complexity of the anatomical dissection, the proliferation of findings and the introduction of innovative instruments led doctors to transform anatomy lessons from a public, almost folkloric event to a progressively scientific investigation with a highly defined structure and procedures. Based on the tight ties between physicians, architects, and artists, as well as the exchange of educational materials, one could argue that these theatres shared a common European development horizon. Non-European realities also played a role in the development of dissection and, consequently, of anatomical theatre architecture: in the XIX century, anatomy theatres were built in the United States, including those

in Maryland and Virginia. The architect Benjamin Latrobe used the Parisian plans to build the Pennsylvania Medical Hall in 1804.

Call for papers

Researchers from various fields are encouraged to submit papers and case studies examining the interaction between society and anatomical theatres throughout history, highlighting instances of both local and global significance regarding the growth of the structures as well as the activities they have hosted. As a result, contributions are welcomed, which may concentrate on the following subjects but are not restricted to them:

1) The Architecture of Anatomy Theatres: In what way and where were these structures designed? What were their guidelines and distinguishing features? How did their shape and structure change over time? What characteristics did they have in common with modern performance theatres, and how did they share concepts and styles? What characteristics of anatomical theatres are shared by surgical theatres dating back to the XVIII century and ancient veterinary anatomical theatres?

2) Artists and Anatomy Theatres: the artistic dimension (anatomical drawing, ceroplastic, etc.) has significantly advanced the knowledge of the human body. How intense was the exchange between artists and the progress of anatomy knowledge, and how did this close relation manifest itself? Before the invention of photography, how did academics, painters and sculptors, and physicians interact?

3) Anatomy between Social and Cultural Aspects: What connections existed between anatomical theatres and the urban setting? Where were these buildings located and how did they relate to universities and hospitals? What laws, customs and habits influenced their operation, the availability of bodies, the composition of the audience?

4) History and Evolution of Anatomical Dissection: How has anatomy dissection changed over time? How has its evolution allowed for better cognitive outcomes in the areas of anatomical and medical-surgical research? How does anatomy dissection affect medical education? How did the tools, furniture, and items used in dissection training evolve?

What subspecialties (topological anatomy, pathological anatomy, forensic medicine, different surgical specialties, etc.) developed within anatomical theatres?

5) Theatre as a museum space, perspectives, and case studies: Historical anatomy theatres are currently not used for scholarly research, but there is interest in their use in culture and for artistic, performative activities. What events have they held to promote their past, and how do they operate in new roles? What possible scenarios could be envisaged for their future use and exploitation?

Those interested in proposing a paper are kindly requested to send by 15 June 2023 the title, the authors' names and a short abstract in Italian or English (max 300 words) of the presentation to the following e-mail address: abstract.thesa2023@gmail.com

All applicants are also requested to attach a short CV, their affiliation (if any) and contact information (address, telephone number, e-mail). Notification of acceptance of selected papers will take place by 15 July 2023. The official languages accepted for the conference are Italian and English.

The conference proceedings will be published in the Nuova Rivista di Storia della Medicina, an open access journal, official organ of the Italian Society for the History of Medicine.

Speaker registration

Participation in the initiative requires a contribution of € 75.00 per participant.

Registration by 1 September 2023 will be reduced to € 60.00.

It is possible to register for a single day with a contribution of € 35.00.

Registration entitles participants to coffee breaks and lunch in addition to participation in the proceedings. Participants will receive a certificate of attendance.

Public registration

For students and listeners participation is free of charge, excluding lunch. A contribution of € 35.00 will be made in advance for students and auditors to attend lunch.

Registration fees can be paid by bank transfer to the Italian Society of History of Medicine, IBAN:

Italian Society for the History of Medicine

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Object: Contribution for the Conference Anatomical Theatres 2023.

It will not be possible to pay at the conference.

For any information, please contact

info.thesa2023@gmail.com

Organising Committee:

Emanuele Armocida, MD

Chiara Ianeselli, Ph.D.

Chiara Mascardi, Ph.D.

Marcello Trucas, MD

Reference:

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