Emotional Translation. Conceptual History beyond Language

Lecture by Prof. Dr. Margrit Pernau and M.A. Imke Rajamani

Conceptual history is a wonderful tool for writing the history of emotions. Analyzing how a community used emotion words at certain times and in certain places allows an understanding of specific emotion knowledge without being trapped by universalism. But conceptual history is also an inadequate tool for writing the history of emotions. Its focus on language fails to capture meanings that can be derived from emotional expressions in other media, such as paintings, music, architecture or film. The lecture suggests expanding conceptual history beyond language by including the body and the senses as epistemic categories. It invites to focus on two processes of emotional translation: first, how emotions emerge through and contribute to the translation between reality and its interpretation. And second, how translation processes between different media shape and change the meanings of emotion concepts. The approach will be exemplified by looking at translations of the monsoon season into emotional experiences of love, longing and romance.

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