Introduction: Hearts and Minds: Ordering Emotions in Europe, 1100–1800

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This collection explores how emotions were conceptualised and practised in the medieval and early modern period, and more specifically how they ordered systems of thought and practice—from philosophy and theology, to science and medicine. It does so in two specific ways. Firstly, the essays in this volume examine how emotions, as both bodily and psychic experiences, were understood to interact with more abstract intellectual capacities in producing systems of thought. Secondly, they analyse how these key frameworks of the medieval and early modern period were enacted by individuals as social and emotional practices, acts and experiences of everyday life.

Together the essays here demonstrate how systems of ordering the medieval and early modern world relied upon both the emotional realm and the more abstract intellectual component of reason; indeed, they follow a number of recent studies in insisting that such categories were not simple binaries but existed as far more intertwined connections between mind and body, and reason and emotion.¹ Hearts as well as minds were engaged in all ordering systems—in thought and practice—in the contexts studied here. This collection thus examines how they interacted in different systems of thought, in distinct and socially-specific contexts.

Moreover, this collection considers how thought was informed and shaped by the experiences of everyday life; it examines the writings of authors who were embedded in social and emotional relationships, observing those around them, their moral and social dilemmas, and the way society operated. And their observations, theories and determinations about how emotions were (or

¹ Most recently, Elena Carrera in the “Introduction” to her edited collection, Emotions and Health, 1200–1700 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 16. Similar arguments have been made in other recent works, such as Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills, eds., Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005); and Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro, eds., Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (eds.), Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) and Danijela Kambaskovic, ed., Conjunctions: Body and Mind from Plato to Descartes (New York: Springer, 2014).
should be) engaged in these aspects of life were to have a powerful impact in the contemporary world. They helped to shape moral and social values, educational, legal, spiritual and political practices, and influenced emotional realities for the sexes, the young and old, those of different races, faiths, ethnicities and social statuses—in both exceptional circumstances and on a day-to-day basis.

Following substantial anthropological work by such scholars as Robert I. Levy, Catherine A. Lutz and Geoffrey M. White, and Dewight R. Middleton, this collection understands emotions as “historically shaped sociocultural constructions more than they are personal possessions. They are processual events tied fundamentally to other domains of culture.” In this sense, the collection aims to visualise and bring forth how, in the medieval and early modern period, emotions were key to “defining and negotiating social relations of the self in a moral order”. Through the term ‘ordering emotions’, we interrogate both how emotions ordered systems of thought and how they were themselves ordered by multiple individual experiences in the world. Both aspects were active, dynamic and dialogic processes of negotiation, enacting emotional meaning and in turn producing other facets of self, identity, practices and behaviours. Through lived emotional experiences, individuals built, extended and renewed powerful systems of thought that shaped the medieval and early modern. In this context, we explore emotions, rather than affect as the latter term is understood in philosophical and critical theory scholarship, employing emotion in a broad sense, primarily analysing discursive, psychic and bodily dimensions that were social and relational as they were experienced, performed and narrated.

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