

Emotions through Time

Edited by
Douglas Cairns, Martin Hinterberger,
Aglae Pizzone, and Matteo Zaccarini



Emotions in Antiquity 1

Mohr Siebeck

Emotions in Antiquity (EmAnt)

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From Antiquity to Byzantium

Edited by

Douglas Cairns, Martin Hinterberger,
Aglæ Pizzone, and Matteo Zaccarini

Mohr Siebeck

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Introduction

A.

Emotions through time?

Douglas Cairns

This volume (one of the outcomes of a two-year International Research Network project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust) constitutes a first step in the project of exploring the complex interactions between the emotional worlds of ancient Greece and Byzantium. The Byzantine world shaped the reception of ancient Greece for the modern; and the appropriation and reconfiguration of ancient Greek sources helped, at each historical stage and in each cultural context, to define the Byzantine world.¹ This volume's goal is thus, on the one hand, to shed new light on the Byzantine emotional universe and its impact on Medieval and early modern culture and, on the other, to illuminate ancient Greek concepts, theories, and representations of emotion by investigating their reception in Byzantium. With all due allowance for the availability of scholars and their expertise, and for the vicissitudes of the sometimes tortuous process that has led us from preliminary workshops to summative conference and thence to final publication, we have tried not to limit ourselves only to textual evidence, but to explore additional areas such as visual and material culture, performance, ritual, and the creation of affective environments.

We build on the progress that has been made to date in the investigation of the emotions in our two main disciplines, Classics and Ancient History and Byzantine studies (see Introduction B and C below). More generally, we see our work as a contribution to the growing field of emotion history, now a mature sub-discipline in which the original landmark studies have, over the past forty years, inspired a steady stream of monographs, edited collections, and articles. This is a field that has in recent years been consolidated further by the now standard proliferation of companions and handbooks and achieved a new level of institutional respectability through the establishment of dedicated research centres.² In venturing a contribution to this field we (clearly) believe that the

¹ For stimulating remarks, see Jeffreys (2014).

² The landmark studies are generally seen as Stearns and Stearns (1985), together with subsequent publications, such as Stearns and Stearns (1986) and Stearns (1989); Reddy (2001); Rosenwein (2006). Overviews of the field first began to appear in article form, e.g. Hitzer (2011), Matt (2011), followed by book-length surveys, such as Matt and Stearns (2014); Plamper (2015); Boddice (2018); Rosenwein and Cristiani (2018); Barclay (2020); Barclay, Crozier-de Rosa, and

history of emotions is not just a possible but also a valuable enterprise. This is not a wholly uncontroversial position, and even among those who would accept the general possibility and utility of emotion history the subject still requires a degree of definition and justification.

Scepticism regarding the possibility of emotion history is at its most forthright and extensive in Rüdiger Schnell's highly polemical (and very enjoyable) 1,052-page monograph, *Haben Gefühle eine Geschichte? Aporien einer History of Emotions*, published in 2015. Schnell has two main problems with the 'history of emotions' as an enterprise: first, it does not deliver what it promises, given that its true focus is not the inner life of subjective psychological experience, but merely the representation of such experience in the form of evaluations, classifications, concepts, standards of behaviour, or expressions – what Schnell calls 'signs' (*Zeichen*) of emotions.³ It is these that are subject to historical change, Schnell argues, not 'the emotions themselves'.⁴ Interest in the latter, Schnell argues, reflects a movement that has its roots in a contemporary and media-driven fascination (since the 1980s) with the inner life of others, with how people 'really feel'.⁵ Yet subjective psychological experience, he alleges, is properly the stuff of psychology and neuroscience. Those disciplines study emotion, and need to know what it is that they are studying. We who study only representations of emotion need no such knowledge.⁶ Which is fortunate, because Schnell believes that historians of emotion have set themselves the impossible task of studying not only something that cannot be accessed through the methods of historical research, but also a subject that has not been satisfactorily defined, one whose defining features are in fact constituted differently by the various disciplines that purport to study it.⁷ This in effect means that historians cannot in fact decide

Stearns (2020). Research projects and centres include *Les émotions au Moyen Age (EMMA)*, at Aix-Marseille and Québec; *History of Emotions*, at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin; the Centre for the History of Emotions, Queen Mary University of London; and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, with member institutions throughout Australia, and a journal, *Emotions: History, Culture, Society*. The Australian Centre has also given rise to a Routledge *History of Emotions in Europe* (Broomhall and Lynch (2019)) and a six-volume Bloomsbury series, *A Cultural History of the Emotions* (2019). Monograph series include Oxford University Press's *Emotions of the Past* (which includes titles in Classics) and *Emotions in History* (which so far has not), as well as Bloomsbury's *History of Emotions*. Specifically in Classics, the Mohr Siebeck series to which this title belongs is joined by the De Gruyter Trends in Classics sub-series on Ancient Emotions and by the Franz Steiner series, *Unveiling Emotions*.

³ Schnell (2015) 17–20 and often.

⁴ References to 'Gefühle an sich', 'die Gefühle selbst' (etc.) recur: e.g. Schnell (2015) 405, 456, 762, 788, 805. See, for instance, 773–4: 'Die geschichtswissenschaftliche Emotionsforschung ... sieht in der Analyse von "emotion words" einen Schwerpunkt ihrer Tätigkeit. Denn sie glaubt in und mit den Worten die Emotionen selbst zu fassen.'

⁵ Schnell (2015) 15–18.

⁶ Schnell (2015) 20.

⁷ Schnell (2015) 31; cf. 985.

what precisely it is that they profess to study.⁸ ‘Emotion history’ means different things to different people.⁹

As a research project, therefore, ‘Geschichte der Gefühle’ or ‘history of emotions’ is to be abandoned, since *feelings* as such, i. e. subjective psychological experiences, remain inaccessible to the text-based approaches that historical disciplines must adopt. As he states in the book’s conclusion (p. 967):

Das geschichtswissenschaftliche Projekt ‘Geschichte der Gefühle’ ist aufzugeben, ebenso das Projekt einer ‘History of emotions’, sofern darunter die Geschichte von Gefühlen als subjektiven Erfahrungen bzw. als eine Geschichte des inneren Erlebens verstanden wird. Für diese Entscheidung sprechen zwei Einsichten dieses Buches. Wir kommen, erstens, an die ‘tatsächlichen’ Gefühle nicht heran, auch wenn dies immer wieder versucht worden ist. Noch viel weniger sind wir, zweitens, imstande, eine Geschichte dieser nicht fassbaren Gefühle zu schreiben. In einigen Studien der historischen Emotionsforschung wird offen eingeräumt, dass wir, genauso wenig wie wir wüssten, was unsere Mitmenschen – oder gar was wir selbst – fühlten, keine Auskunft geben könnten über die Gefühle unserer Vorfahren ...

Historical research, on Schnell’s view, would be liberated were it to dispense with the focus on inner feelings and concentrate instead on externally observable phenomena.¹⁰ According to him, this would still leave a great deal in the domain of emotion that we *can* study historically:

Geschichte der emotionsrelevanten Handlungen, Gesten, Praktiken, sozialen Interaktionen (II), die Geschichte der verbalen Emotionsäußerungen (III), die Geschichte der Diskurse über Emotionen (IV), die Geschichte der Darstellungen von Emotionen und deren Funktionen (V u. VI), schließlich die Beschreibung der Veränderungen in diesen Bereichen und die Frage nach den Gründen für diese Veränderungen (VII).¹¹

Schnell’s vigorous polemic misses the mark in many ways. But his critique is nonetheless useful for that, as criticism almost always is. Even if it rested on no more than misapprehension it would require a more thorough justification for the enterprise of emotion history than is normally offered, and so may help clarify the aims and character of that enterprise. Schnell does, moreover, as his argument proceeds, make a number of valid points against some of the sweeping generalizations, the unsubstantiated theories of change and development, the monolithic models by which whole periods and societies are assigned a particular emotional character, and the tendency to reinvent the wheel by giving an affective inflection to quite familiar (grand) narratives of social, cultural, and intellectual history. A great deal of emotion history *is* broad-brush, overschematic, and reductive, especially in the often undefended application of social

⁸ Schnell (2015) 405.

⁹ E. g. Schnell (2015) 808.

¹⁰ Schnell (2015) 967–73. Cf. above, n. 3.

¹¹ Schnell (2015) 971–2; Roman numerals refer to the earlier chapters of the book.

constructionist premises that Schnell so doggedly assails. Yet his argument is at its most interesting, and the attempt to refute it most productive, where it in fact agrees with the suppositions of those who do believe in the history of emotions. In both these ways, answering Schnell also entails a critical examination of some of the working assumptions of the ‘history of emotions’ movement.

Schnell and his targets do not in fact differ greatly on the question of which aspects of affectivity or emotion lend themselves to historical study. The externally observable signs, representations, constructions, and conceptions of emotion that Schnell proposes as legitimate objects of historical enquiry are precisely what those who profess to write the history of emotions *do* focus on.¹² There is a superficial issue here, about what we mean by ‘history’ (and to some extent even about what we mean by ‘of’), but also a crucially important one, about what we mean by ‘emotion’. To take the superficial issue first: the history of phenomenon *x* is by no means confined to changes in the phenomenon itself. A history of influenza (or of Covid-19) would not focus only on the biology of viruses and their genetic mutations,¹³ but would encompass also the social, political, cultural, and scientific contexts in which viruses spread and are treated, as well as the social, political, cultural, and scientific consequences of their spread and treatment. A history of Ben Nevis would not be limited to geological and other physical changes. A history of beer would not just be about hops, malted barley, and water, how beer matures or goes sour, or how it is physically processed by those who drink it. A history of the River Clyde would be more than a monotonous tale of flowing H₂O, with growing admixtures of other substances over the years. A *history* of these things would include all kinds of contextual material, from the uses of beer in a wide range of societies and social contexts to the role of the Clyde in Glasgow’s development as a centre for the importation of tobacco from Virginia and as the ‘workshop’ of the British Empire.¹⁴

The clue is in the word *history* – the history of *x* is a narrative of human interactions with *x*. A ‘history of’ a phenomenon will never depend simply on access to phenomena as such, because, in the relevant sense, there are no phenomena as such – all phenomena must appear (*φαίνεσθαι*), under some aspect, to someone. History is about the record of human interaction *with* phenomena in so far as they are cognized by human beings, and so also about the social, political, and cultural implications and consequences *of* these cognized phenomena. It is precisely a matter of representations and traces. It involves a narrative of events and phenomena that is largely based on earlier narratives about those events

¹² To take only the most prominent examples, the Stearnses’ ‘emotionology’, Reddy’s ‘emotional regimes’, and Rosenwein’s ‘emotional communities’ focus precisely on emotion norms and emotion concepts as negotiated and accommodated in the pragmatics of social interaction.

¹³ See e.g. Spinney (2017), one of many works on the ‘Spanish flu’ of 1918–19; cf. Honigsbaum (2020) on that and subsequent pandemics.

¹⁴ See Unger (2007) on beer; Riddell (2000) on the River Clyde.

and phenomena, as well as on the traces that those events and phenomena have left in a variety of sources and media. It is not just the emotions of the past that are gone; past events are gone too – we generally have only representations, accounts, reconstructions, and external signs. But we do not conclude on that basis that history as such is impossible. History deals not with events ‘as such’, but with the evidence for events. We also have evidence for emotions. Schnell clearly thinks that we can study such evidence; and to do so is largely what the targets of his criticism mean by doing emotion history. If emotion were indeed the subjective, internal, private thing that Schnell claims, historians would be acting wholly within the remit of their profession in seeking to study how people in different societies and at different times have tried to come to terms with it.

This takes us to the more substantive issue. Emotions are also events – they have an action- or event-structure of their own (one that is often described in terms of ‘scripts’);¹⁵ and both emotion events themselves and the place of those events in larger event-structures lend themselves to representation in narrative terms.¹⁶ This is true because emotions are not private, internal, subjective experiences, but physically embodied, manifested in behaviour, socially and contextually situated, and embedded in the conceptual categories of particular linguistic communities. The evidence of emotion events that survives in the historical record is evidence of emotion as such, in the true sense of the term, not of phenomena that are in some way derivative of or secondary to emotion.

An oddity of Schnell’s polemic is that, though few have pursued the point with quite his tenacity, a great many of those whom he attacks do in fact agree with him that a history of emotions as such is an impossibility. A leading figure in Classical emotions research, Angelos Chaniotis, writes that ‘the ancient historian cannot study what people really felt’, but only ‘the external stimuli that generated emotions as well as the cultural and social parameters that determined when and how emotions were represented in texts and images’.¹⁷ A number of our contributors in the present volume are, not unreasonably, attracted by similar formulations. Schnell acknowledges that such views are widespread in

¹⁵ See Schank and Abelson (1977); Abelson (1981); Fehr and Russell (1984) 482; Mandler (1984); Shaver et al. (1987); Tomkins (1987); Fischer (1991); Russell (1991a) 442–4, (1991b) 39, (2003) 150–2, 160–6; in *Classics*, see Kaster (2005), esp. 63; cf. Cairns (2008). As Russell writes ((1991a) 443 = (1991b) 39): ‘A script is to an event what a prototype is to an object’, and so script theory is a species of the prototype approach to categorization pioneered by Wittgenstein (2009) §§ 66–7, and developed in particular by E. Rosch (e.g. Rosch (1978)) and G. Lakoff (esp. Lakoff (1987)). See also below.

¹⁶ See De Sousa (1987) 183, (1990) 438; Goldie (1999), (2012), esp. 56–75; Nussbaum (2001) 236; Voss (2004) 181–224; Mendonça (2019) 679–84. A trail was blazed in this direction by Bruner (1986); cf. Bruner (1991).

¹⁷ Chaniotis (2012b) 94–5. See also Chaniotis and Ducrey (2013) 11. The point is virtually a founding principle of the ‘history of emotions’ movement: see Stearns and Stearns (1985), esp. 825–6; Matt (2014) 44.

the ‘history of emotions’ community, but still tasks those who make these concessions with the mistaken conviction that they are able, nonetheless, to get to ‘the emotions themselves’.¹⁸ Though such people are, on the whole (according to Schnell), social constructionists who do not generally accept that emotions are private, internal, historically invariant subjective experiences, nevertheless they are driven to accept that there are indeed inner feelings independent of language and culture and persistently fail to distinguish signs (concepts, expressions, etc.) of emotion from emotions themselves.¹⁹ These scholars, according to Schnell, promise to do emotion history, but in fact do only the history of emotional discourse. Literary scholars who deal with emotions in the literary artefacts of the past similarly deal only with representations, not with the emotions themselves,²⁰ and their task is further complicated (Schnell alleges) by the possibility that emotions represented in literary texts may bear little relation to those of everyday life.²¹

A further oddity, therefore, is that Schnell regards his opponents’ research as fatally compromised by the fact that emotions do not represent a single and easily definable category, yet his own critique is underpinned by a narrow and rigid sense of what emotions ‘really’ are – private, internal, historically invariant subjective experiences, present only in the moment, only in real-time interaction, and irrecoverable once that moment is gone. A partial explanation for this approach perhaps lies in a particular aspect of emotion history that many readers will have lived through, namely the gradual replacement of *Gefühl* by *Emotion* as the default German term for ‘emotion’.²² ‘Feelings’ may sound more private, more internal, than ‘emotions’.²³ But though many do distinguish between feelings and emotions (or between affect and emotion),²⁴ and though talking about ‘feelings’ rather than ‘emotions’ perhaps raises more immediate issues regarding conceptualization, labelling, and communicability, not even the distinction between feeling and emotion makes for a private, internal world of purely subjective experience.

We should probably concede that first-person experience rests, at least to some extent, on processes that are not accessible to others. In some cases, indeed, there are aspects of these processes that are not phenomenally present to us in experience. Equally, however, many aspects of first-person experience and

¹⁸ Schnell (2015) 20–3 and *passim* (e.g. 365–6, 368, 371, 395).

¹⁹ Schnell (2015) 23–9 and often, e.g. 364–74, 403, 405, 685, 687, 788.

²⁰ Schnell (2015) 711–17, 731, 737, 745–6.

²¹ Schnell (2015), e.g. 692–3, 710–17.

²² Schnell (2015) 59–64 and 685–6 n. 55 discusses differences between *Gefühl* and *Emotion*, but charges historians with effacing distinctions drawn in other disciplines, while insisting that both *Gefühle* and *Emotionen* are private, internal, subjective experiences.

²³ See Schnell (2015) 59–61.

²⁴ See e.g. Damasio (1994). Cf. below on ‘core affect’ vs ‘emotion’.

the processes that underpin it are intersubjectively constituted by conceptual knowledge, language, and culture. Visual perception, for example, is not just a matter of passive sensory input, but to a substantial extent also involves top-down processes such as active prediction and the application of conceptual and experiential knowledge. It may appear to us that we receive, passively, a complete and objective picture of a given visual scene, but any number of well-known experiments, common illusions, and phenomena such as change blindness and inattention blindness indicate that, to a very large extent, what we see is what we expect to see in the light of predictions made on the basis of experience and in the light of our own subjective aims and concerns.²⁵ Similarly, what one sees is influenced by the conceptual structure of one's native language.²⁶ The performance of Russian speakers vis-à-vis English speakers, for example, in simple colour discrimination tasks is influenced by the fact that Russian has two linguistic categories for the range that English speakers call blue.²⁷ These hues appear together in Russian representations of the rainbow.²⁸ Users of English can translate the Russian terms easily, and both Russian and English speakers can see and distinguish the same hues, but the experimental evidence shows that English speakers do not process those hues precisely as Russian speakers do – reaction times differ in a way that suggests that linguistic categories influence attention, and thus that the hues in question mean something slightly different for members of the two linguistic communities. Language, on this evidence, influences the top-down aspect of vision as a rich perceptual process. As language influences perception, so it influences thought: in languages which have the relevant feature, for example, grammatical gender conditions the way that speakers think and talk about inanimate objects.²⁹ Though they distance themselves from earlier, more sweeping and deterministic versions of the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis', many linguists now contend that language permeates and influences thought in multiple ways.³⁰ Just as the mechanisms by which we perceive the external world are thoroughly permeated by the concepts and categories given by our experience as social and cultural beings and as users of language, so too are those by which we make sense of our own subjective experiences. A substantial body of work suggests that affect and emotion can be experienced dif-

²⁵ See e.g. Simons and Chabris (1999); Hansen et al. (2006); Zhang and Lin (2013); Vetter and Newen (2014); Barrett (2017) 59–61. Cf. Noë (2004) 49–57; Troscianko (2014) 50–3. For a recent set of essays on the cognitive penetrability of perception in general, see Zeimbekis and Raftopoulos (2015).

²⁶ See in general Lupyan et al. (2020).

²⁷ Winawer et al. (2007).

²⁸ Barrett (2017) 145.

²⁹ Boroditsky, Schmidt, and Phillips (2003).

³⁰ See Casasanto (2008); Deutscher (2010); Boroditsky (2012); Casasanto (2016), (2017); cf. (on Homeric psychology) Russo (2012) 25–8. For the relevance of Whorfian linguistic relativism to the psychological constructionist view of emotion, see Barrett (2006a) 37.

ferently when speakers of more than one language (or late versus early bilinguals) do not use their mother tongue,³¹ indicating that use of the native language involves forms of affective processing that second and further languages do not. These indications of the influence of language on first-person experience suggest that differences in the conceptualization of emotion – e. g. where a single concept in language A maps on to more than one in language B – represent, at least to some extent, different ways both of seeing the world and of understanding oneself as an experiencer of the world.³²

As thinkers from ‘Longinus’ in the first century to William James in the nineteenth have recognized,³³ emotions do not come in distinct, pre-labelled packages – all human beings are at all times in some affective state or another.³⁴ Every action we undertake, every state we are in feels a certain way, even if that feeling seems to us to involve a relative absence of affect. The episodes that we, in contemporary English, describe as ‘emotions’ are merely the peaks and troughs in this affective continuum.³⁵ This is what the constructionist psychologists James A. Russell and Lisa Feldman Barrett call ‘core affect’.³⁶ As Lindquist and Barrett put it, ‘Core affect is an ongoing, ever-changing, psychologically primitive state that has both hedonic and arousal-based properties’;³⁷ that is states of core affect

³¹ See e. g. Keysar, Hayakawa, and An (2012); Pavlenko (2012); Costa et al. (2014); Hayakawa et al. (2016); Ivaz, Costa, and Duñabeitia (2016); Shin and Kim (2017).

³² See further below.

³³ As Longinus has it, *On the Sublime* 22.1: ‘There is an indefinite multiplicity of emotions (πάθη) and no one can even say how many there are.’ For the same point, see James (1890) ii.485:

[I]f one should seek to name each particular one [of the emotions] of which the human heart is the seat, it is plain that the limit to their number would lie in the introspective vocabulary of the seeker, each race of men having found names for some shade of feeling which other races have left indiscriminated. If then we should seek to break the emotions, thus enumerated, into groups, according to their affinities, it is again plain that all sorts of groupings would be possible, according as we chose this character or that as a basis, and that all groupings would be equally real and true. The only question would be, does this grouping or that suit our purpose best?

Cf. James (1890) ii.454:

Now the moment the genesis of an emotion is accounted for, as the arousal by an object of a lot of reflex acts which are forthwith felt, *we immediately see why there is no limit to the number of possible different emotions which may exist, and why the emotions of different individuals may vary indefinitely*, both as to their constitution and as to objects which call them forth.

For James as a believer in ‘core affect’ *avant la lettre*, see Barrett (2006a) 38–40.

³⁴ Russell and Barrett (1999) 806; Lindquist and Barrett (2008) 902; Russell and Barrett (2009) 104; Russell (2009) 1265.

³⁵ Cf. Barrett (2006a) 36: ‘the experience of an emotion will pop out as a separate event from the ebb and flow in ongoing core affect’. Cf. Cairns (2008) 50–1; Cairns and Nelis (2017) 12.

³⁶ See Russell and Barrett (1999); Russell (2003); Barrett (2004); Russell (2005); Barrett (2006a), (2006b); Russell (2009); Russell and Barrett (2009); Barrett (2017) 72–7.

³⁷ Lindquist and Barrett (2008) 898; cf. Russell (2003) 148; Barrett (2006a) 30; Russell (2009) 1264.

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