

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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1



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From Antiquity to Byzantium

Edited by

Douglas Cairns, Martin Hinterberger,
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Mohr Siebeck

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	V
------------------------	---

Introduction

<i>Douglas Cairns</i>	
A. Emotions through time?	3
<i>Douglas Cairns</i>	
B. Emotion research in Classics	35
<i>Martin Hinterberger and Aglae Pizzone</i>	
C. Research on emotions in the Byzantine world	41
<i>Douglas Cairns, Martin Hinterberger, and Aglae Pizzone</i>	
D. Chapter summaries	49

Part I: Philosophy and Religion

<i>Andrea Capra</i>	
1. Philosophy as a Chain of 'Poetic' Emotions? Plato and Beyond	59
<i>Divna Manolova</i>	
2. Wondrous Knowledge and the Emotional Responses of Late Byzantine Scholars to Its Acquisition	75
<i>Petra von Gemünden</i>	
3. Methodological Issues and Issues of Content, as Exemplified by ὀξυκολία in the <i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>	95

Part II: Rhetorical Theory and Practice

Byron MacDougall

4. Lend a Sympathetic Ear: Rhetorical Theory and Emotion
in Late Antiquity and Byzantine Homiletic 121

Aglæe Pizzone

5. Emotions and λόγος ἐνδιάθετος: Πάθη in John Sikeliotēs'
Commentary on Hermogenēs' *On Types of Style* 141

Floris Bernard

6. Emotional Communities in the Eleventh Century:
Bodily Practices and Emotional Scripts 157

Jan R. Stenger

7. 'Aren't You Afraid That You Will Suffer the Same?':
Emotive Persuasion in John Chrysostom's Preaching 179

Niels Gaul

8. Voicing and Gesturing Emotions: Remarks on Emotive Performance
from Antiquity to the Middle Byzantine Period 201

Part III: Literature

Douglas Cairns

9. Mental Conflict from Homer to Eustathius 227

Mircea Grațian Duluș

10. *Ekphrasis* and Emotional Intensity in the *Homilies* of Philagathos
of Cerami 247

Margaret Mullett

11. Tragic Emotions? The *Christos Paschon* 281

Martin Hinterberger

12. *Alazoneia* and *Aidōs/Aischunē* in Anna Komnene's and Niketas
Choniates' Histories 303

Stavroula Constantinou

13. Angry Warriors in the Byzantine *War of Troy* 339

Part IV: Art and Ritual

Vicky Manolopoulou

14. Visualizing and Enacting Emotion: The Affective Capacities of the
- Litē*
- 361

Galina Fingarova

15. Evoking Fear through the Image of the Last Judgement 383

Viktoria Rächle

16. The Terrible Power in Giving Birth: Images of Motherhood from
-
- Antiquity to Byzantium 407

David Konstan

- Afterword 433

- Bibliography 443

- Index locorum 507

- Index rerum 514

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.

Index locorum

<p><i>IQS (The Community Rule)</i> (anon.) 3:13–4:26 108</p> <p>Agathias Scholasticus</p> <p><i>Histories</i> 2.10.4 309</p> <p>Alexander (son of Numenius)</p> <p><i>On Figures</i> xii.7–14 153</p> <p>Andrew of Crete</p> <p><i>On the Dormition of Mary</i> (PG) 97.1088B 134–5</p> <p><i>Anthologia Marciana</i> 219 (B56) 403</p> <p>Aristeides, Ailios</p> <p><i>Hieros Logos</i> 5 211–12</p> <p>Aristotle</p> <p><i>Metaphysics</i> 1, 982b11–21 77–9</p> <p><i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 2, 1108a20–3 307–8 5.11, 1138b5–13 239</p> <p><i>On the Soul</i> 1.1, 403a29–403b3 354 1.4, 408b13–15 239</p> <p><i>Rhetoric</i> 2.1, 1378a20–3 433–4 2.2, 1378a30–1378b2 342 2.6, 1383b12–14 437–8</p>	<p>3, 1408a19–23 123 3.1, 1403b15–1404a8 202–3</p> <p>[Aristotle]</p> <p><i>Mechanics</i> 847a10–18 81–2</p> <p>Asterius of Amasea</p> <p><i>Homilies</i> 11.4.2–4 251–2</p> <p>Attaleiates, Michael</p> <p><i>History</i> 171.17–23 312–13</p> <p>Augustine of Hippo</p> <p><i>Confessions</i> 3.2 250</p> <p>Basil of Caesarea</p> <p><i>Regulae brevius tractatae</i> (PG) 31.1117B 310</p> <p>Basil of Seleucia</p> <p><i>Oratio XVIII in Herodiadem</i> (PG) 85.226D–236C 269</p> <p>Cedrenos/Kedrenos, George</p> <p><i>Historiarum compendium</i> 281 305</p> <p>Choniates, Niketas</p> <p><i>History</i> 35.39–36.49 314</p>
---	---

- | | | | |
|---|---------|---|--------|
| 136.58–61 | 328 | 49.36 | 186 |
| 153.26–32 | 317 | 49.135.48–50 | 190 |
| 171.52–5 | 319–20 | 49.137.43–138.12 | 191–2 |
| 204.91–5 | 315–16 | 49.139.38–46 | 192 |
| 243.24–31 | 327–8 | 49.141.4–14 | 193 |
| 252.81–253.85 | 315 | | |
| 275.12–276.19 | 329 | Clement of Alexandria | |
| 301.17–302.37 | 320–1 | <i>Paedagogus</i> | |
| 365.65–8 | 317–18 | 1.6.39.2–42.1 | 429–30 |
| 435.53–61 | 314 | <i>Commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric</i> | |
| 460.86–7 | 329–30 | (anon.) (Rabe 1896) | |
| 483.36–489.30 | 330–1 | 159.5–25 | 215–16 |
| 489.47–51 | 315 | <i>Commentary on Hermogenes</i> (anon.) | |
| 507.60–508.66 | 331–2 | (Walz 1832–6) | |
| 519.39–520.57 | 316 | vii.2.883.15–884.7 | 151–2 |
| 575.59–66 | 321 | | |
| | | Cyril of Alexandria | |
| Christopher of Mytilene | | <i>Commentary on the 12 Prophets</i> | |
| <i>Poems</i> | | 1.640.8–11 | 257 |
| 1.5–18 | 381–2 | 1.645.14–19 | 257 |
| <i>Christos Paschon</i> (anon.) | | | |
| 292–357 | 300 | Demosthenes | |
| 731–837 | 295–6 | <i>Orationes</i> | |
| 847–931 | 296–7 | 18.287–91 | 209 |
| 1427–45 | 299 | | |
| 1453–6 | 299–300 | Dionysios of Halikarnassos/Dionysius of Halicarnassus | |
| | | <i>On Demosthenes</i> | |
| Chrysostom, John | | 21.3–22.2 | 124–7 |
| <i>Catech. bapt.</i> | | 53–4 | 210–11 |
| 4.30 | 247 | | |
| <i>Homilia dicta postquam reliquiae martyrum</i> (PG) | | Dorotheos of Gaza | |
| 63.467–72 | 376 | <i>Didaskaliai</i> | |
| <i>Homilies on First Corinthians</i> (PG) | | 2.31–2 | 311 |
| 61.115.42–3 | 197 | | |
| <i>Homilies on the Gospel of John</i> (PG) | | Doxapatres, John | |
| 59.119–20 | 270 | <i>Commentary on Aphthonios' Progymnasmata</i> | |
| <i>Homilies on the Gospel of St Matthew</i> (PG) | | xiv.89.26–90.8 | 149–50 |
| 57.200–1 | 182–3 | | |
| 57.236.38–238.12 | 194–6 | Egeria | |
| <i>Homilies on the Statues</i> (PG) | | <i>Travels</i> | |
| 2.1 (PG 49.33.38–35.1) | 184–5 | 37.7 | 377–8 |
| | | | |
| 2.1 (PG 49.35.17–26) | 187–8 | | |

- Euripides
Erechtheus
 fr. 358, 359, 360a 410
Hippolytus
 565–600 296
Phoenician Women
 355–6 409
- Eustathius
Ad Iliadem
 4.391.28 239
 4.553.9–554.2 241–2
 4.583.6–13 243
 4.585.3–7 242
 4.588.16–20 242–3
 4.634.23–635.4 242
Ad Odysseam
 2.223–4 244–5
 3.222.6–15 240–1
 3.223.6–9 241
- Galen
A Method of Medicine to Glaucon
 11.62.7–11 355
On the Differences of Fevers
 8.283.7–9 354
On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato
 3.3.21–2 238
 8.4.21.23–4 353
On the Hippocratic Epidemics
 259–260.4 355
On the Preservation of Health
 6.138.6–8 352–3
- [Galen]
On Humours
 19.488.11–13 347
- Gellius, Aulus
Attic Nights
 12.1 422
- Gregoras, Nikephoros
Letters
 34.45–61 85–6
- Gregory of Nazianzos/Nazianzus
Orationes
 1.4–5 136–7
 6.18 128
 38.7 137–8
 39.1 138
 39.2.3–4 145–6
 39.7 137
 39.11 121, 138–9
 39.14 130–1
 43.67 127–8, 138
- Gregory of Nyssa
De deitate filii et spiritus sancto et In Abraham (PG)
 46.572c 255–6
- Heliodorus
Aethiopica
 2.22.4 264
 7.7.5 265
 10.13.1–3 277–8
 10.38.4 276
- Hermogenes
On Types of Style
 2.7.11–12 144
- Hero of Alexandria
Belopoeica
 71.1–73.11 82
Pneumatics (Schmidt 1976)
 1 82
- Homer
Iliad
 2.311–320 264
 9.646 354
 10.455–7 254
 13.455–9 230

- | | | | |
|--|------------|---|---------|
| 16.203 | 101 | 12.3.2–4 | 332–3 |
| 18.107–110 | 40 | 15.9.1 | 335 |
| 22.82–6 | 414 | | |
| 22.98–130 | 232–3 | Marinus of Neapolis | |
| 22.376–88 | 231–2 | <i>Vita Procli</i> | |
| <i>Odyssey</i> | | 3 | 72 |
| 9.294–306 | 229–30 | | |
| 20.5–43 | 233–6 | Mauroπους, John | |
| | | <i>Poems</i> | |
| Ignatios/Ignatius | | 54.64–7 | 170 |
| <i>Life of the Patriarch Tarasios</i> | | | |
| 57 | 365 | Maximus the Confessor | |
| 62.1–2 | 364 | <i>De caritate (PG)</i> | |
| 64.3–15 | 364–5, 382 | 90.1036B | 311 |
| | | <i>Menologium Basilianum</i> (anon.) (PG) | |
| Inscriptions (anon.) | | 117.129–30 | 371 |
| 100–1 no. 142 (Peek) | | 117.279–80 | 369 |
| | 412–13 | | |
| IG II ² 12963 | 412 | Metaphrastes, Symeon | |
| | | <i>Menologion</i> | |
| Isocrates/Isokrates | | 13–24 | 435–6 |
| <i>To Philip</i> | | | |
| 25–7 | 208–9 | Metochites, Theodore | |
| | | <i>Introduction to Astronomy</i> (Paschos and Simelidis 2017) | |
| John of Damascus | | 1.5 | 91 |
| <i>Exposition of the Orthodox Faith</i> | | <i>Orationes</i> | |
| 13.91–8 | 150–1 | 14.27.1–11 | 221 |
| | | <i>Poems</i> | |
| John of Sardis | | 5.65 | 439 |
| <i>Commentary on the Progymnasmata of Aphthonius</i> | | <i>Sententious Remarks</i> | |
| 200.18 | 127 | 13.2.1–8 | 88–9 |
| 206.26–207.3 | 126–7 | 31.1.1–5 | 86–8 |
| | | 42.1.2–2.4 | 90–1 |
| Justinian | | 43.1.1–3 | 92, 439 |
| <i>Novellae</i> | | 43.2.7 | 93 |
| 77 | 373 | 60.6.2 | 93 |
| | | | |
| Klimakos, John (PG) | | Nemesios/Nemesius of Emesa | |
| 88 | 310 | <i>On the Nature of Man</i> | |
| | | 20.81.2–3 | 346 |
| Komnene, Anna | | 21.81.19–82.3 | 326 |
| 1.13.3–4 | 334–5 | | |
| 10.10.6 | 319 | | |
| 11.12.5–6 | 318 | | |

- Neophytos the Recluse
- Panegyrike A*
6.33–5 373
- New Testament*
- John*
8:12 145–6, 377
- Matthew*
25:31–46 384–5, 393, 393, 394
- Oratio adversus Constantinum Cabalinum*
(anon.) (PG)
95.309–44 385–6
- Philagathos of Cerami
- Homilies*
6.1–16 260–8
17 270–1
22.8–9 271–3
24.6–24.11 252–5, 257–9
27 275–6
31.30–1 274–5
34 276–8
35.5 273–4
35.8 268–9
51.7 256
- Philoponus
- In Aristotelis libros De anima*
52.4–7 440
- Philostratos
- Vitae Sophistarum* (Stefec 2016)
488 212–13
509 210
519–20 213
537 212
542–3 213
569 214
614 206
- Photios/Photius
- Homilies* (Laourdas 1959)
3.1 366, 371
4.4 366
4.5 367, 370–1
8.1 135–6
- Planudes, Maximus
- Epistles*
73.112.8–23 396–7, 399, 406
- Plato
- Ion*
530b–536c 62–4
- Laws*
816b–c 61
- Meno*
79e–80c 68
- Phaedo*
94c–e 236
- Phaedrus*
267c7–d3 207
- Republic*
378e–379a 61
441b–c 237–8
605c9–d4 124, 129
- Symposium*
215a–216b 65–8
- Theaetetus*
155d1–5 77
- Pliny the Elder
- Natural History*
35.98 413–14
- Plotinus
- 1.6.4 69–70
- Plutarch
- De liberis educandis*
5 422
- Porphyrius
- Vita Plotini*
1 71
- Proclus
- In Platonis Rempublicam commentarii*
1.16.2–13 70

- Psellos, Michael
Chronographia (Reinsch 2014)
 1.35.4 323
 6a.7 166–7
Discourse Improvised to the Bestarches
Pothos
 27–45 72–3, 129, 439–40
 46–59 222–3
 308–14 215
Historia Syntomos (Aerts 1990)
 46.30.14–23 305, 311–12
Letters (Papaioannou 2019)
 43.68–72 168
 175.32–7 168–9
Orationes
 3 (Polemis 2014)
 9.5–15 217–18
 3 (Gautier 1978)
 25–7 162
 4 (Polemis 2014)
 3.10–18 163–4
 7.13–24 164–5
 7 (Fisher 1994)
 140–6 166
 8 (Polemis 2014)
 1.23–30 160–1
 3.14–23 161–2
 9 (Polemis 2014)
 3.16–21 162–3
 10 (Polemis 2014)
 26.1–4 165–6
 37 (Littlewood 1985)
 37.61–9 219
 37.147–56 219–20
 37.157–64 218
 37.274–81 220–1

 Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite
On Divine Names
 3.2, 141.4–14 131–4

 Pseudo-Gregentios
Nomoi
 285–90 376

 Pseudo-Nilus of Ancyra
Narrations
 6.1.11–12 262

 Quintilian
Institutio Oratoria
 11.3.184 211
Shepherd of Hermas (anon.)
Mandata
 3.3–4 111–12
 4.1 112
 4.3.1–2 98
 5.1.2–3 106
 5.2.2–4 102
 5.2.6–8 105, 106, 107
 6.1.2–6 104–5
 6.2.1–9 112–15, 117n209
Visiones
 1.1–9 110–11
 1.2.4 111

 Sikeliotes, John
Commentary on Hermogenes' On Types of Style (Walz 1832–6)
 vi.120.14–121.13 153–5
 vi.139.14–140.2 152–3
 vi.306.18–308.2 144–6
 vi.419.17–420.19 146–9
 vi.422.22–423.26 149

 Skylitzes, John
Synopsis historion
 400.39–44 380

 Sophocles/Sophokles
Electra
 770–1 409–10

 Stephanos Skylitzes
Commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric
 (Rabe 1896)
 309.12–25 216
 310.35–311.4 216–17

Studites, Theodore

Epistles

478.28–30 372–3

Symeon the New Theologian

Theological and Practical Chapters

1.17 171

1.32 172–3

1.85 171

3.12 172

3.21 173, 439

3.31–3 172

Hymns (Koder & Paramelle 1969)

4.1–16 175–6

Sermons (Krivochéine 1963-5)

4.586–650 175

29.218–42 174–5

Tatius, Achilles

Leukippe and Kleitophon

3.2.8 263

5.24.3 274

Theophanes Continuatus (anon.)

4.15 386–7, 438n8

Thucydides

1.23.6 23

Typikon of the Great Church (anon.)

(Mateos 1962–3)

21 369–70

78–80 372

90–3 369

130–2 370

334, 362, 374 379

War of Troy (anon.)

15–16 340

98–9 340

734–7 340

1182–3 343

1976–2013 343

2086–93 341–2

3280–3 349

6708–11 356–7

6947–53 355

9477–9485 357–8

10889 352

Index rerum

- Achilles 40, 232, 342, 344, 352, 354, 357–8
Aemilian (Emperor) 305, 311–12
affective fields 44, 362, 372n. 51
aidōs 28–9, 68n. 25, 161, 243, 303–4, 325–7, 329–38, 384n. 8; *see also* shame
Aischines 205, 206, 207–8, 209, 210
aischunē 68n. 25, 303–4, 325–9, 330, 331, 336–8, 436–8, 439; *see also* shame
alazoneia (arrogance) 303–9, 311–25, 336–8, 436
Alcestis 258–9, 391, 392
Alciphron 269, 272
Aldouinos (Baldwin of Sicily) 317–18
Andromache 258, 285, 356, 414
Andronikos I Komnenos 315, 329
angels 108, 111, 112–13, 115, 117, 438
anger 20–1, 30–1
– Christian analysis of 97, 100–4, 106–9, 117
– of God 110–11, 289, 369, 371, 372–3, 382
– of orators 181, 182, 196–7
– of warriors 40, 339–58
– philosophical analysis of 342, 343, 345, 346, 347, 349–50, 354, 434–5
– physiology of 346–7, 352–3, 354–8
Antiochos of Aigai 213–14
apatheia 161, 167, 171–2, 176, 285
apocalypse *see* eschatology
architecture, affectivity of 375, 399–402, 400, 402
Aristides (painter) 413–14
Ariston 308
Aristophanes 207, 307
Aristotle 35, 147, 239, 307–8, 437–8, 410, 433–4
– on anger 342–3, 345, 347, 349–50, 354
– on emotional persuasion 123, 125, 182, 202–3, 204
– on wonder 77–9, 81–2, 83–4, 85
arrogance *see alazoneia*
ascetics 73, 128, 138–9, 173, 179, 259, 429
Aspasius 434–5, 438
atmosphere 44, 287, 300, 362, 372, 375, 377, 379, 380
baptism 98, 107, 117, 173, 400; *see also* Epiphany
Barrett, Lisa Feldman 10–12, 14, 17, 21
Basilakes, Nikephoros 293–4
Basil of Caesarea 46, 127–8, 138, 262, 310, 354n. 51
blushing 196, 197, 332, 336
Boris I (ruler of Bulgaria) 386–7
Botaneiates, Michael 312
breastfeeding 409, 412–14, 413, 416–18, 417, 419, 421–2, 421, 423, 429, 431; *see also* Isis; Mary, Galaktotrophousa
charis (grace, elegance) 161, 162, 164, 165, 167, 169, 176
cheerfulness 107, 161–2, 163, 165, 168–9, 170
childbirth 409–10, 412, 416, 421, 424
cholē 97, 99–100, 117, 346–8, 349, 350, 351; *see also* anger
cholos 31, 40, 97, 101, 293, 346, 358; *see also* anger
Choniates, Niketas 303, 316–18, 319–22, 323–5, 327–32, 333n. 120, 336, 337
Choumnos, Nikephoros 221
Christopher of Mytilene, 169, 381–2
Chrysippus 238, 353
Chrysostom, John 46, 73, 179–99, 247, 270, 309–10, 376, 384–5, 440
Cicero 125, 126n. 18
commemoration *see* memory

- compunction 42, 146, 172–5, 176, 375, 384
 Constantine IX Monomachos 165
 constructionism, psychological 10–15
 conversion *see* repentance
 core affect 10–15
- dancing 65, 136, 268–9, 270, 272
 deliberation, phenomenology of 227–46
 delivery, rhetorical 187, 201–2, 204, 206–223; *see also* gestures; posture; voice
 demons 108, 270–1, 310, 396, 435–8, 440
 Demosthenes 124–5, 126, 206, 209–11
 desire, sexual 99, 110–11, 117, 268–73
 Devil, the 41, 108, 109, 110, 247, 310, 437; *see also* demons
 Dio Chrysostom 212–13
 Dionysius of Halicarnassus 124–7, 128, 135, 139, 210–11
 Doctrine of the Two Spirits 108–10
 dress 40, 166, 191, 212, 310, 418, 419, 420, 421
- Eirene (Empress, wife of Alexios I) 332–33
ekphrasis 128, 190, 247–79, 294
ekplēxis 66, 69–70, 92, 173, 293, 439
ekstasis (ecstasy) 66, 70, 71, 133, 136
 embodied appraisal 20–1
 emotional communities 6n. 12, 43, 157–77, 189, 198, 199, 345, 358, 362–4, 365, 371–2, 374, 382
 emotion history 3–8, 14, 19, 32–3
 emotion labels 12–13, 26–31, 157
enargeia 128, 190–1, 252, 279
entropē 325, 326–7, 330, 333, 336, 337; *see also* shame
 Epiphany (Orthodox) 130–1, 136, 138–9
 eschatology
 – Christian 43, 95, 96, 99, 108, 115–16, 117, 279, 373, 383–90, 389, 393–406, 393, 394, 398, 402, 404, 405
 – pagan 391, 392, 393
ēthopoïia 134n. 40, 205, 214, 244, 248, 259, 265–6, 293, 294
 Euphrosyne (Empress, wife of Alexios III) 315, 316, 329–31, 333
- Euripides 30–1, 258–9, 281–302, 409–10, 414
 Eustratius of Nicaea 82–3
 Evagrius of Pontos 171, 310
 eyebrows 176, 312, 315–16, 321, 322–3, 337
- facial expressions 16, 158, 163, 170, 175, 177, 183, 209, 222, 304, 342, 355–6, 396, 408; *see also* blushing; eyebrows; gaze; laughter; smiles; sullenness; tears
 fear 20–1, 22, 23, 340, 350, 384, 433–4
 – and transcendence 137–9, 146, 155, 156, 173, 278, 439
 – of God 111, 137, 367, 369–71, 372–3, 382
 – of Hell/Last Judgement 189, 195, 384–5, 386–7, 396–7, 399, 401, 403, 406
 – rhetorical arousal of 63, 137–9, 155, 182, 188, 190–2, 193–4, 199
 florilegia 46, 249, 261, 311
 funerary art
 – mothers 410–13, 411, 413, 420, 421, 421, 424, 427, 428
 – afterlife 391–3, 392, 393
- Galen 238, 346–7, 352–3, 354, 355, 356
 gall bladder 99–102, 114, 117
 gaze 316, 322, 396, 412, 419, 421, 432
 gestures 39, 190–1, 257, 262, 269, 272, 375
 – in art 38, 41, 156, 388, 390, 393, 395, 396, 409n. 8, 410, 412, 416, 419, 421, 422, 432
 – of orator 183, 204–5, 207–8, 209–11, 212–13, 214–15, 219–21, 223
 God *see* anger, of God; fear, of God; *philanthropia*; *theōsis*
 Gorgias 182
 Great Goddesses 416, 417, 424
 Gregory of Nazianzus 72–3, 127–31, 136–9, 145–6, 156, 215, 222–3, 330, 439
 Gregory of Nyssa 253, 254, 255–6, 261, 266
 grief 161, 183–9, 252–68, 293, 364–6; *see also* compunction; laments
 Guibert of Nogent 436–7

- habitus 158, 222
 heart
 – and anger 102, 111, 112, 113–15, 346, 353, 354, 355
 – cognitive-affective organ 151, 227, 234–9, 243–4, 436
 Hector 232–3, 242–3, 298, 344, 349, 351, 355–7
 Hecuba 341n.7, 414
 Heliodorus 264, 265, 269, 272–3, 276, 277–8
 Heraclitus 85
 Herakleides 206
 Hercules 391, 392, 438
 Hermogenes 141–2, 144, 146, 153, 215,
 Herod 255, 257, 268–9, 273–4
 Herodotus 309
 Holy Spirit 103–4, 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 116–17, 173
 Homer 61–4, 201, 227–46, 254, 264, 341, 347, 350, 353, 354, 358, 414
hubris 306, 307, 308–9
 humours, theory of 157, 346–7, 352–3, 355–6
hyperēphania 307, 308, 309–11, 316, 322, 323, 337

 images, emotional response to 255–6, 385–7, 396–7, 399, 403, 406;
 see also ekphrasis
 icons 251–2, 255–6, 257, 396–7, 398, 399, 403, 406
 intersubjectivity 8–9, 12–14, 15, 16, 19
 Isis 418, 427, 429, 430
 Isocrates 124–5, 126, 127, 208–9
 Ivan Alexander (Tsar of Bulgaria) 403, 405

 James, William 10, 20–1
 Job 184–5, 187
 John of Damascus 150–1, 326, 346, 354, 384n.8
 Justinian 373, 375

 Kariye Camii church (Istanbul) 401, 402
katanuxis *see* compunction
kenodoxia (vanity) 307, 309–11, 313, 337
 Kleon 207, 208

 Komnene, Anna 303, 313, 318–19, 322, 332–5, 336, 337
 Komnene, Theodora 315–16
 Komnenos, John 314
 kourotrophoi 415–19, 415, 417, 424, 430
 Kroustoulas, Ioannes 218–21

 laments 186–7, 198, 253, 257–9, 261–2, 266, 283, 284–5, 286–7, 288–90, 293, 296–7, 299–300
 language and affective processing 9–10, 12–13, 15, 27–9, 157
 Latin liturgical drama 249, 275
 Latins/Westerners 317–21, 337
 laughter 68, 161–2, 165, 169, 171;
 see also smiles
 liver 99–102, 114, 347
Livistros and Rodamne 350

 Magdalene, Mary 276–8, 291–2, 298
makrothumia 97, 103–5, 107, 108–9, 111, 113
 Manuel I Komnenos 336
 Mary, mother of God
 – and Christ child 421–2, 423, 429, 430, 432
 – emotions of 284–92, 294, 295–300, 379
 – Galaktotrophousa (Coptic) 425–6, 426, 427, 429–30, 431
 Mauropous, John 168, 169–70, 177
 Maximus the Confessor 311 385
 Medea 30–1, 238, 295–6, 297, 300
 memory
 – ritual commemoration 361, 364–7, 369–72
 – liturgical recollection 130, 190, 250, 259, 290; *see also ekphrasis*
 Menander Rhetor 186–7, 261, 262
 Menelaus 201, 343
Menologium Basilianum (anon.), 367, 368 369, 371
 Mesarites, Nicholas 294
 Mesopotamites, Konstantinos 315, 330, 331
metanoia *see* repentance
 metaphor 39–40, 61, 71, 85, 103–7, 109, 114–15, 116–17, 185, 228, 234–5, 236,

- 239, 246, 318, 336, 337, 349–51, 355–6, 429–30
- Metaphrastes, Symeon 166, 435–6, 437
- Metochites, Theodore 86–93, 94, 221, 401, 439
- metonymy 39, 117, 228, 233–4, 236, 292, 322, 337, 352
- mimesis 59, 60, 136–9, 250, 261, 294, 301
- mothers
- emotions 257–9, 261–8, 341n.7, 409–10, 412–14, 413, 416, 419, 421–2, 423, 431; *see also* Mary, mother of God, emotions
 - *ēthos* 410–12, 411, 416, 419–21, 420, 424, 431–2
- Nain, Son of the Widow of 259, 260–8
- necks 321, 322, 323–4, 337
- Nemanja, Stephen 328
- Neoplatonism 69–72, 73, 85, 439
- Nestor 201, 352
- Niobe 258–9
- objects, affectivity of 375–82
- Odysseus 201, 212, 229–30, 233–9, 240–1, 244–5, 340
- orators
- *ēthos* of 126–9, 196–7, 208–9; *see also* *ēthopoïia*; sincerity; sympathy
 - *pathē* of 123–4, 126–9, 180–1, 184–6, 196–8, 260; *see also* sincerity; sympathy
 - emotive techniques 186–8, 189–91, 194–5, 198–9; *see also* delivery, rhetorical; *ekphrasis*; *ēthopoïia*
- orgē* 31, 97, 101, 195, 236, 289, 293, 347–8; *see also* anger
- Panagia Phorbiotissa church (Asinou) 403, 404
- Panagia ton Chalkeon church (Thessaloniki) 387, 400–1, 400
- Paraspondylos, Leo 166–7
- Paschal Kanon* 42, 47
- Passion of Christ, emotions of 274–5, 275–6, 276–8, 284–94, 430–1
- patience *see makrothumia*
- Peleus 340
- Perikles 207
- phantasia* 86–8, 94, 128
- philanthrōpia* 366–7, 370, 372–3, 382
- phrenes* 227, 228, 231, 233, 239
- phrikē* 139, 292
- phthonos* 41, 206, 286, 287, 289, 292, 293, 294, 299, 308n.25, 320n.72
- physiognomy 177, 251, 408–9, 419; *see also* facial expressions; posture
- Plato 60–9, 70, 71, 73, 77, 79, 91, 124, 129, 137, 203, 207, 236, 237–9, 250, 303–4, 307, 324, 433
- Plotinus 69–70, 71, 439–40
- Plutarch 207, 308, 422
- Pluto 391, 392
- Polemo 212, 213
- Porphyrius 71
- posture 16–17, 39, 158, 170, 175–6, 177, 190–1, 204, 218, 219, 409n.8, 416, 420, 430; *see also* dancing, necks, walking
- prefocusing (priming) 131, 139, 187, 204, 213–14
- Priam 343
- pride 29–30; *see also alazoneia*; *huperēphania*
- Proserpina 391, 392
- Psellos, Michael 59, 71–3, 129, 147n.31, 159–69, 176–7, 215, 217–21, 222–3, 305, 311–12, 323, 439–40
- Ptolemy, Claudius 83, 84
- purification, emotional 98, 104, 106, 109, 137–9, 146, 173, 379; *see also* baptism
- Pyrrhus 340, 352
- Pythagoras 88
- Quintilian 204, 211, 260
- radiance 71, 73, 92, 414
- repentance (conversion) 95, 98, 107, 109, 111, 117, 366–7, 369–70, 371, 373–4, 375, 385–7, 406
- rhetoric *see* delivery, rhetorical; orators; rhetoric, Christian; sincerity, rhetorical; sympathy, rhetorical
- rhetoric, Christian
- and icons 43, 155–6, 249–52, 255–6, 257, 279, 301
 - and theatre 183, 205–6, 249–51, 259, 301–2
 - theorization of 141–56

- Roman de Troie* 339–40, 342, 343, 345, 348
 Russell, James A. 10, 11, 14, 17, 21, 23

 Salome 268–70
 Santa Maria Assunta cathedral (Torcello) 387, 388–90, 399–400, 389
 Satan *see* Devil, the
 Schnell, Rüdiger 3–8, 13n. 52, 16, 24
 scripts 7, 18n. 76, 19, 21, 22–3, 29–30, 32, 68n. 32, 157–77, 180–1, 187, 313
 Second Sophistic 205, 210–14, 221
 senses, and emotions 85–93, 190–1, 199, 253–4, 257–8, 259, 260, 262, 375–82;
see also ekphrasis, enargeia
 shame 28–9, 59, 68, 193, 194–8, 199, 273–4, 293, 296, 303–4, 325–38, 343, 433, 436–9
 Sikeliotēs, John 141–156, 440
 simile 234, 244, 264, 348, 351–2
 sincerity, rhetorical 144–6, 148–9, 155–6, 164, 209
skuthrōpos *see* sullenness
 smiles 162, 166, 168–9, 176; *see also* laughter
 Socrates 59, 60, 65–8, 69, 70, 71, 73
 Sopater 144
 Sophokles 207, 215, 409–10
 Stoics/Stoicism 143–4, 238–9, 326, 337, 353, 438
 Stylites, Symeon 374
 sullenness 163, 164–5, 166, 169, 170 175, 176
 Symeon the New Theologian 170–7, 439
 sympathy, rhetorical 62–4, 65–6, 73–4, 121–39, 181–94

 Tamar 271–3
 Tarasios, Saint 364–5, 382
 tears 63, 66, 187, 220, 255, 263, 266, 293–4, 355–6, 406
 – and compunction 42, 172–5, 176, 384
 – of orator 184, 204n. 16, 209, 222, 260
Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs 108–9
 theatre 183, 205–6, 249–50, 301
 Theodosius I 183–4, 374
 Theodosius II 369, 374
 Theophrastus 204, 308
theōria 78–84, 90–1, 133, 137–8
theōsis 136–9, 279
 Theotokos, the *see* Mary, mother of God
thumos
 – anger 31, 195, 239–40, 291, 293, 314, 46, 347–8, 349, 350–1, 358
 – cognitive-affective organ 227–36, 238–43
Trisagion 369, 374, 377, 378

 vanity *see* *kenodoxia*
 voice, of orator 183, 201, 202–3, 204–5, 207–9, 210–11, 213, 215–20

 walking 166, 176, 315, 322, 377
 wonder (τὸ θαυμάζειν) 39, 75–94, 173, 267, 78, 439–40, 441

 Xerxes 309
 Xiphilinos, Ioannes 217–18,

zēlotupia (jealousy) 30–1