

Emotions in memory. A historical inquiry into ancient and medieval theories of cognition.

In this paper, I ask about the role that emotions played in ancient and medieval rhetoric. What was the cognitive work emotions were supposed to do? I argue that the art of rhetoric and especially the *ars memoriae* constituted veritable theories of cognition in antiquity and the middle ages, and I propose to create a dialogue between modern and premodern theories of cognition to see how they may enrich each other.

In ancient rhetoric, emotion-filled imagining (Lat. *imaginatio* and Gr. *phantasia*) was understood to act powerfully on the memory and on the mind. Aristotle saw the emotions as central to persuasion, stating in Book II of *Rhetoric* that emotions (*pathe*) cause people to make up their minds and change their opinions. Roman rhetoricians, such as Cicero and Quintilian, relied heavily on emotion and emotionally “coloured” images to recall and keep the mind from wandering. Far from diminishing in importance in the medieval period, the affective functions of rhetoric and memory training became even more vital as they entered into the monasteries and monastic practices of reading, writing, praying, and meditation.

Deriving examples from a variety of late antique and medieval sources (such as *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux), with excursions into modern cognitive science, this talk emphasizes the essential role of emotion-laden memory work in processes of imagination and attention. To ancient and medieval rhetoric, memory was affective: without emotion, no remembering, and thus no attention and no imagination.