

## International Partner Investigators Piroska Nagy



The ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions is committed to creating and enhancing international collaboration. Partner Investigators are researchers whose work focuses on emotions in Europe in the time period 1100-1800, and who are based at institutions outside Australia.

Piroska Nagy is a professor of medieval history at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). She will become a Partner Investigator in 2015, and will continue to work with the Centre until 2017.

Piroska has previously taught at the Université Paris I, the Université des Antilles et de la Guyane, Université de Rouen and the Central European University. She is author of *Le don des larmes au Moyen Âge. Un instrument spirituel en quête d'institution, Ve-XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000); and co-author, with Damien Boquet, of *Sensible Moyen Âge. Une histoire culturelle des émotions et de la vie affective dans l'Occident médiéval*, (Paris: Seuil, forthcoming in 2015). Together with Damien Boquet in 2006, Nagy launched the first French research project on the history of emotions: EMMA (Emotions in the Middle Ages). Other works include *Émotions médiévales* (2007), co-edited with D. Boquet; *Le sujet des émotions au Moyen Âge* (2009); *Politiques des émotions au Moyen Âge* (2010); and *La chair des émotions au Moyen Âge* (2011). Her current research centres on the relation between collective religious emotions in the medieval West and historical change.

Piroska visited Australia at the end of October 2014, and spent approximately four weeks working with members of the Centre, across three different nodes. She reflects on her time with the Centre below, highlighting the benefits and outcomes of such international collaboration.

I had the great pleasure to spend a month across three different nodes of the CHE – Perth, Melbourne, and Sydney – which allowed me to explore the richness of the research conducted in the Centre. My 'primary node' was the University of Melbourne, where I was hosted marvellously by Prof. Charles Zika for two weeks, following which I went to Perth for a week, and then to Sydney. My stay was great from beginning to end; professionally and

intellectually speaking, it was both stimulating and rewarding, and a very pleasant and uplifting experience of human sharing. I sensed that my European (or non-Anglo-Saxon) approach to the history of emotions – strongly marked both by French historiography and by historical anthropology – brought a different perspective, which seemed to be appreciated by the different audiences of researchers and students.

During my visit I presented 7 lectures and seminar papers, some of which touched on my new research project – on which I will be working with CHE as part of the partnership scheme – temporarily entitled *Emotional action and historical change: Collective religious emotion in the medieval West (11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century)*. The main subject of my research and presentations, however, concerned the embodiment of emotions at Christmas 1223 in the town of Greccio. This project was greatly nourished by the questions and discussions of CHE colleagues and students in Perth (The University of Western Australia) and Melbourne (both at the University of Melbourne and Monash University), which helped me both to enlarge the scope of the documents investigated and sharpen my view of certain questions (such as the role of Saint Francis *versus* the celebration of Christmas). This material will become an article that I intend to submit in the next few months to a peer-reviewed journal.

Another project on which I worked during my stay centred on the development of epistemological and methodological reflections on the keynote lecture I presented at a CHE-organised workshop, “Emotions Work in the Historical Past” (13 Nov.), entitled *Medieval Emotions and Historical Change*. I have finished an article born from this research, which is will be submitted to a Swedish volume in honour of Prof. Olle Ferm.

Though in different ways, both of these papers are part of my above-mentioned new project. The story of Greccio is, in this perspective, a first case-study, while the keynote lecture is a synthesis of my present position on a series of questions concerning the ways to think about emotions and change. In this respect, my reflections concern, besides emotions ‘lost and found’, emerging and disappearing, or getting transformed through ages, mostly the level of *microstoria*, as demonstrated in the keynote lecture by the cases of two contemporary mystic women, Angela of Foligno and Lukardis of Oberweimar. However, the case of Greccio, I hope, may lead to further reflections on how changes in the use of emotion in religious practice on the micro-level may influence transformations on other levels of society.

Two other lectures concerned the mystic women mentioned above. Angela of Foligno was the focus of the lecture given at the Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne, on the invitation of Prof. C. Mews; and Lukardis of Oberweimar was the subject of the seminar given at the CHE node in Sydney. These lectures gave me the occasion to revisit and refine, in view of the aforementioned article on emotion and change, some of my previous works: two articles published on Lukardis (2009, 2014) and one on Angela (2010, with D. Boquet). The last of my presentations, in Perth, was concerned with the subject and main ideas of the book co-authored with Damien Boquet which is to be published in 2015 by the Editions du Seuil, Paris (coll. Univers Historique).

My meetings and discussions with researchers of the Centre – the Chief Investigators Andrew Lynch, Charles Zika, Susan Broomhall, Yasmin Haskell, Stephanie Trigg and Juanita

Ruys; but also with the post-doc fellows Stephanie Downes, Kimberley Knight, Sarah Randles, Rebecca McNamara and Ross Knecht – gave me a good idea of the research conducted in the Centre. (I particularly regret not having met David Lemmings, the director of the research-program ‘Change’, Jacqueline Van Gent, and Penelope Woods.) On the other hand, I had the pleasure of sharing time with people navigating around the CHE, like Constant Mews, Andrea Rizzi, and Clare Monagle in Sydney, as well as the students of Prof. Zika and Prof. Mews in Melbourne.

Besides the pleasure of discussing, writing, and thinking about emotions in medieval times, one of the main benefits to my research of my stay at the CHE was to see how far the questions we put to ourselves when working with the history of emotions are common, linked as they are to the state of the research, at this moment in a disciplinary field. The history of emotions has now achieved the admitted status of a specific field; in epistemological terms, it has become a category of investigation in historical evidence rather than a topic or theme. In this sense, quite a strong cultural constructivist position seems to be shared by most of the researchers today, which necessitates different reflections about interdisciplinarity from the ones we had 10 years ago. Problems of emotional change and sharing, which are the focus of my research project and which constitute one of the research programs of the CHE (see ‘Change’), seem today fundamental for many researchers. Questions of how far what we can learn about emotions in a given situation is limited or determined by the literary genre and historical context of our documentation, seem to be primary for many of us. Questions about experience, emotional contagion, and the language in which emotions of the past are transcribed or described are also common to us.

A few important collaborations have arisen from my stay, and I hope more will follow:

- The most important and concrete is certainly cooperation with Sue Broomhall in co-editing a volume of *Introduction to Medieval Emotions* with Routledge. I shall most probably contribute in one way or another to a second volume - a *Research Companion to Medieval Emotions* that Sue is working on with Ashgate.
- Andrew Lynch and I have started to discuss the possibility of collaborating on a project centred on medieval weeping and/or communal emotions.
- I remain in contact with Penelope Woods regarding the cooperative project she started just after my departure on “emotional contagion”.

Last but not least, my stay made me realize how important, stimulating, and pleasant it was for me to have the chance to share my work in a Centre where researchers are all working on emotions, thinking about emotions, and sharing their work regularly. In the framework of my affiliation to the CHE as a Partner Investigator for the three years to come, I will be happy to share the results and methods of my project with the researchers of the Centre, as well as, if possible, to stay for a longer period and conduct further research. Such opportunities are rare and immeasurably valuable, nourishing as they do both reflection and research.