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**The Poetics and Politics of Fear in Old English Literary Tradition – abstract for general public**

Is it possible to reconstruct the way emotions were experienced and recorded in the past? Can we find evidence of doctrines and strategies towards emotional states in Old English literature from more than a thousand years ago? What can we learn from the way emotions were manifested and approached in the past? What, why, and when were the early English afraid of, and was fear exclusively a negative form of experience? Finally, is it possible for fear to be understood as a path towards wisdom? These are several from among the questions that the study devoted to the poetics and politics of fear in Old English literary tradition intends to address.

Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, the early English Middle Ages, known as the Old English or Anglo-Saxon period, saw the production of an unprecedented number of texts, many of which were poems, recorded in the early English language. This was at least partly caused by a sequence of turbulent events and processes, including Viking raids and settlement, and it coincided with the tenth-century socio-political developments and transformations in the monastic tradition. Unsurprisingly, among other issues, all these changes, were signalled and addressed by homiletic and philosophical writings of the time and they left their direct and indirect marks on the poetry of the period. Within it, we may find instances of highly emotional literature, such love or existential poems, as well as the poetry prescribing specific types of behaviour, and thus also specific approaches towards emotional states.

The aim of the proposed research project is an analysis of the instances of fear in Old English literature in order to argue for its central emotional position in the culture of the period and its key place in the Christian pursuit of wisdom. While this may seem paradoxical, especially in the contexts of the early Middle Ages typically associated with heroic narratives of bravery, I will propose to locate Old English approaches to fear in the contexts of Christian philosophy and mysticism. It is there that fear is understood as an opportunity to become aware of the positive consequences of the limitations of one's own knowledge. I shall argue that, even though fear may not always be immediately visible in Old English poetry, it nonetheless influences it more than any other of the basic emotions and it becomes a causative and creative force.

The project's approach will rely on the literary uses of the history of emotions combined with selected aspects of social sciences. The concept of fear in Old English literature itself has not yet received a longer comprehensive and comparative study devoted solely to it. The project aims to redress this, as well as discuss Old English attitudes to fear as a form of prescribed emotional participation. This is how the "politics" of fear in the project's title should be understood, while the titular "poetics" refers to affective uses and occurrences of the motif of fear as a type of poetic device. The project will determine the roles and impact of fear in scriptural, philosophical, and homiletic writing; it will establish an Old English typology of fear; and it will delineate the roles of fear within Old English poetic corpus and across different genres of Old English poetry. It will also attempt to determine the Old English correlations between fear, shame, and trauma.

Overall, the argument of the project is that of poetically creative, motivational, wisdom- and experience-directed functions of the depictions of fear in Old English poetic corpus. The results of the project are expected to cast new light on the more holistic understanding of Old English literary emotions, situating them within the scriptural and philosophical perspectives of the period. The findings of the project will be published as a tier-II monograph and as articles in ERIH-listed, open-access journals.