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LEEDS INTERNATIONAL MEDIEVAL CONGRESS 2021
CALL FOR PAPERS

Illness as Metaphor in the Latin Middle Ages

... *et sermo eorum ut cancer serpit* (2 Tim 2:17)

Susan Sontag hoped her thought-provoking essay *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) to contribute to the „elucidation (...) and liberation” from metaphors in both social attitudes to illness and its individual experience. Although we can hardly think our existence without resorting to metaphorical language, critical analysis may help to understand how and to what extent the contemporary discourse is shaped by the historical figures of disease. This seems all the more important as this imagery will certainly stay with us in the post-pandemic world.

The session seeks to provide a forum for scholars to reflect on the variation and functions of metaphors of illness in the Latin writing of the Middle Ages. We encourage papers that investigate how the imagery of *morbus*, *pestilentia*, *gangraena* etc. structured individual experience and how it shaped self-knowledge and practices of communities. We invite original contributions that critically examine the role that Latin metaphors of illness played in medieval discourse as a tool of explaining reality and as a rhetorical device used to impose specific world views.

Questions we would like to suggest include, but are not limited to:

- What was the scope of the metaphors? Which fields of individual experience and social life in the Middle Ages were particularly represented in terms of illness?
- What are the sources, prototypical examples and creative uses of the figures of disease in medieval Latin texts?
- How did the use of metaphors vary across text genres, times and space?
- To what aims did medieval Latin writers employ metaphors of illness? What was their role in persuasive writing (religious and political polemics, preaching etc.)?
- Could metaphorical discourse shape social attitudes in the Middle Ages? Which aspects of the reality did medieval metaphors highlight and which did they hide?
- How was the imagery of disease employed in explaining natural and social phenomena? What was its role in structuring individual (religious, emotional etc.) experience?

Please submit abstracts of no more than 300 words to Krzysztof Nowak (krzysztof.nowak@ijp.pan.pl) by the 10th of September 2020. Unfortunately, the project cannot cover congress fees or expenses incurred by the session participants.



Session Sponsor Project *eFontes*. *The electronic corpus of Polish medieval Latin* (<https://scriptores.pl/efontes>)



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