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Project Description

The Meaning and Function of Combat and War Metaphors in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus

Early Christian monasticism is essentially shaped by the idea of a spiritual struggle, on the basis of which monastic cultures were able to successfully establish themselves and constitute monastic identities in a meaningful way. Combat and war metaphors are used in different (cultural) contexts and with different motivations. The transfer of idealized military virtues to a disciplined way of life is for example encountered by Plato, Hellenistic Judaism, the Cynics or the Stoa. This pictorial language, which is already ubiquitous in the New Testament, is taken up in large numbers within the martyrological, monastic and hagiographic literature.

The aim of the dissertation project is to analyze the meaning and functions of combat and war metaphors using the example of the writings of Evagrius Ponticus (345-399) and their reception. Evagrius created an extensive and essential concept of spiritual struggle in processes of appropriation and demarcation of central authors such as Origen, Athanasius of Alexandria or Pachomius, which strongly influenced both the Byzantine East and the Roman West. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (KMT), selected writings of Evagrius are examined to systematically represent the concept of spiritual struggle established by him. Fundamental functions of the combat and war metaphors can thereby be discussed, which are expressed, for example, in the structuring of experience, the constitution of reality, the promotion of ethical obligations or the discursive negotiation of body and gender concepts. In addition to the great aftermath of Evagrius in Syria, the question of a possible reception of certain aspects of the spiritual struggle is above all pursued with a view to the Latin West and authors such as John Cassian or Gregory the Great.