EMOTIONS AND MEMORY IN EGO-DOCUMENTS: FROM CORRESPONDENCE TO ORAL HISTORY
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Abstract
Ego-documents (self-narratives or genres of testimony), such as diaries, memoirs, private correspondence, autobiographies, have been traditionally considered as sources providing direct access to the emotions of persons in the past, as sources where the authentic selves speak about authentic emotional experiences. The aim of this paper is to problematize this belief, historically constructed itself, and, drawing on the findings of other fields, above all oral history and cognitive psychology, to argue for a re-evaluation of ego-documents in modern emotional history research. While the first part of the paper focuses on the concept of the self, the second part is dedicated to the process of memory and remembering, central to many personal narrative genres, with an emphasis on the discussions about remembering emotions. The article is accompanied by four case-studies representing various forms of self-narrative genres, particularly private correspondence, diaries and oral narrative accounts. Finally, the importance of oral history accounts for the history of emotions is highlighted as the genre that binds most explicitly the mind and the body and allows to analyze a reconstructive nature of emotions.