

Call for Papers | Upcoming Conference

POETRY AND KNOWLEDGE

The Production and Transmission of
Knowledge in Arabic Verse (1100-1800)

Deadline:
June 1, 2025

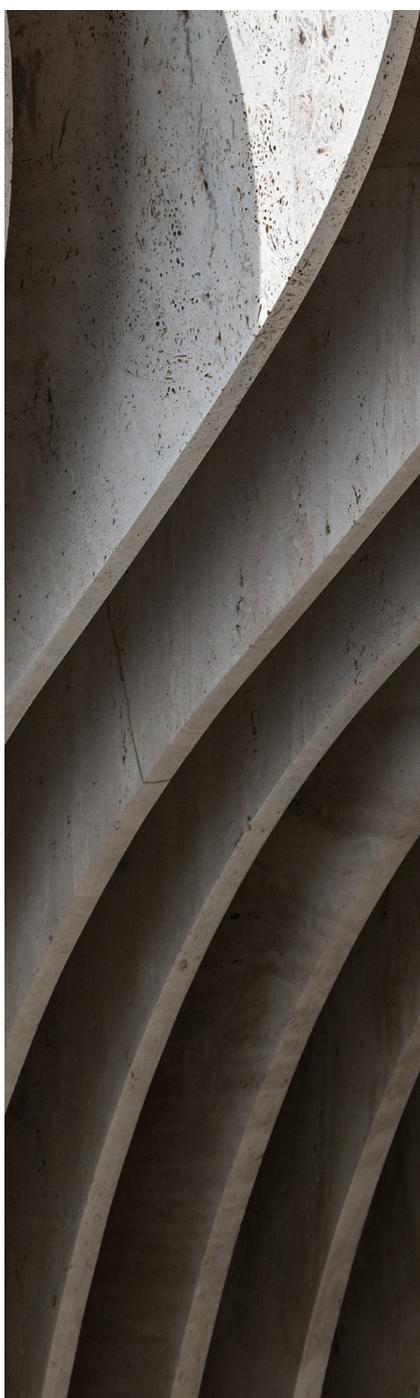
University of Münster | November 20-22, 2025

Call for Papers

Poetry and Knowledge

The Production and Transmission of Knowledge in Arabic Verse (1100-1800)

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In premodern Islamic societies, poetry was one of the central literary forms for transmitting and disseminating knowledge. Poetry can be found in almost all fields of knowledge, from Qur'anic sciences, jurisprudence, grammar, rhetoric, and theology to algebra, alchemy, astronomy, astrology, agriculture, cooking, history, geography, logic, and many other fields of knowledge. Thousands of copies of famous poems in Arabic that served or were used to impart knowledge can be found in libraries around the world. Only a few of these poems have been studied in detail; many more are completely unknown to us today.

Despite the very limited research, a number of general assumptions have been made about the poems regularly referred to today as "didactic poems": They are often written in *rajaz* meter, have a clear purpose of imparting a fixed body of knowledge, are aimed at facilitating memorization, and have little to no literary merit. Some scholars suggest that a reduced literary quality may have been deliberately chosen in order to focus on content. Some include a wide thematic range of poetry (Khulūṣī 1990), while others advocate a narrow definition and strive to distinguish between "didactic" and "true" poetry (van Gelder 1995, 2007, 2011). Previous research has therefore focused primarily on the formal and genre-related aspects of poetry, which conveys primarily non-literary knowledge. Less attention has been paid to the processes by which knowledge is produced, transmitted, and disseminated in poetry.

This is the starting point of our conference: We aim to explore the diverse strategies used to produce, convey, and disseminate knowledge through poetry. This may include, for example, the composition and structure of the poem, the choice of meter, stylistic devices, sonic and performative aspects, and the use of a specific technical lexicon. We hope this shift in perspective will allow us to move beyond viewing such poems as "poetry without literary pretensions" and instead enable a comprehensive analysis of their stylistic, structural, and functional features.



Hence, we would like to discuss the following topics and questions:

- **Knowledge transmission:** What kinds of knowledge are transmitted in poetic form, and what strategies do authors use to structure and convey this knowledge?
- **Bodies of knowledge:** How, if at all, does the knowledge to be conveyed change through its transformation into poetry? What is the relationship between the transformation of prose into poetry and the body of knowledge?
- **Authors and contexts:** Who writes these poems, for whom are they intended, and in what contexts are they written, read, recited, or commented upon?
- **Formal and stylistic aspects:** How are these poems structured, what meters, stylistic devices, and sonic elements are used? What is the role of performance and reception? How do emotions relate to the rationality of knowledge?
- **Function and purpose:** What are the functions of these poems? How do we know that their purpose is to impart knowledge, and what other purposes might they serve?
- **Theoretical reflection:** What ideas about the function and effect of poetry in the transmission of knowledge can be derived from the texts themselves or from accompanying sources?

We invite contributions that deal with any kind of poetry that serves to impart knowledge or has been used as a source for the extraction of knowledge, and we understand knowledge in its broadest sense.

We aim to select contributions on poetry from a wide range of disciplines. The selection will be based on a clear reference to one or more of the above topics, and a precise indication of the fields of knowledge covered and the poems and/or source texts examined. In addition, other aspects may be addressed if they seem relevant to the theme of the conference. The participants will be invited to contribute to an edited volume.

Limited funding is available to cover accommodation and travel costs. Please indicate if you require such funding when submitting your abstract.

If you are interested in participating in the conference, please send your abstract (max. 500 words) together with a short CV (max. 300 words) as a single file to Natalie Kraneiß (n.kraneiss@uni-muenster.de) by June 1, 2025. Notification of acceptance will be sent by the end of June 2025.

Organization:

Natalie Kraneiß (n.kraneiss@uni-muenster.de)

Syrinx von Hees (syrinx.hees@uni-muenster.de)