

# Poetry and Knowledge: The Production and Transmission of Knowledge in Arabic Verse (1100–1800)

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## List of Abstracts

*Leonie Böttiger (Berlin)*

### **Rhyming Recipes: Poetic Transmissions of Practical Knowledge**

Versified recipes can be considered an almost “double-didactic” genre in that both the recipe and the didactic poem are inherently concerned with the transmission of (usually practical) knowledge. As such, they present an intriguing lens through which to approach the poetic adaptation and dissemination of knowledge.

In the premodern Islamicate world, recipes of all kinds usually occurred in dedicated recipe collections, or as part of broader works combining e.g., descriptive and prescriptive aspects of an area of knowledge such as cookery, medicine, or artisanship. Additionally, in a theme much less explored by modern scholarship, recipes were also versified to make them easier to teach, memorise, and transmit. Previous research, where it has been completed, has mostly focused on culinary, medical, and alchemical recipes in verse form (Kuhne 1998, van Gelder 2014, Forster 2021, Forster 2022).

Building on these studies, my paper will investigate what kinds of recipes were versified, how this versification occurred, and what we can say about the relationship between prose recipes and poetic ones. I will present case studies from a pre-17th century CE *urğūza* (a didactic poem written in *rağaz* metre) containing several craft recipes to discuss the author’s strategies of conveying knowledge and the stylistic and formal devices he chooses to do so. In doing so, I aim to offer an example of how the generic and didactic requirements of both recipe and poem come together to convey and reproduce practical knowledge.

Navid Chizari (Istanbul)

## Theological Unity through Poetry: *al-Qaṣīda al-Nūniyya* by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī

*O my companion, the creed of al-Nu'mān*

*and al-Ash'arī is the true essence of certainty*

This line of a didactic poem started a new literary genre on theological differences between Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs. The present paper examines *al-Qaṣīda al-Nūniyya* by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771 AH) which, despite its influence, received little attention in Western scholarship. This might be due to lasting Orientalist assumptions, such as those expressed by Ignaz Goldziher, who said: "Es lohnte sich nicht, auf die kleinlichen Unterschiede dieser beiden eng verwandten Lehrmeinungen einzugehen." In contrast, Muslim scholars from the 8th century AH onward wrote numerous poems and treatises on these differences. Subkī's poem appears to be one of the earliest in this emerging genre of theological *ikhtilāf* literature.

Composed in a historical context marked by attempts to unify the Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools, Subkī seems to respond to a criticism from a Ḥanafī scholar who accused Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī of doctrinal errors, advising students to approach his works only after knowing those errors. Subkī, after carefully studying the books of the Ḥanafī/Māturīdī tradition, came to the conclusion that the differences between the schools are minor and do not justify accusations of innovation (*tabdī'*) or disbelief (*takfīr*). So, he took the initiative to write a poem to unify the ranks of the two schools. The poem comprises several sections: The creed of the *salaf*, praise of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, a summary of the beliefs of *ahl al-ḥaqq*, a brief comparison between Ash'arī and Abū Ḥanīfa, areas of theological disagreement, and differences within the Ash'arī school. Although the content seems broad, the general theme of the whole poem is aimed at the unification project of the *ahl al-sunna* for which the various topics had to be dealt with.

This paper focuses on the poem's section dealing with *ikhtilāf*, alongside an overlooked commentary on that particular section by Nūr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 758 AH), a student of Subkī. This commentary is particularly valuable for its dual attention to the theological substance and the rhetorical strategies of the poem.

## **Ibn al-Ḥayyāṭ's "*Lāmiyya* on the Warrior Saturn"**

Ibn al-Ḥayyāṭ (d. Toledo, ca. 1056) was an astrologer serving Sulaymān Ibn al-Ḥakam (r. 1010 and 1013-1016), the fifth Umayyad caliph of the Caliphate of Cordoba, and, later on, al-Ma'mūn Ibn Dī l-Nūn (r. 1043–1075), ruler of taifa kingdom of Toledo.

He is the author of a poem rhymed in the Arabic letter *lām* (/l/), so known as *lāmiyya*. Some verses of the *lāmiyya* of Ibn al-Ḥayyāṭ appear in the work of al-Baqqār (ca. 1418), a latter astrologer of Fez; it was believed that that partial *lāmiyya* was the single record extant, but, recently, we found a complete *lāmiyya* in the Islamic Ms. 795,14, University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Research Center) Ann Arbor. Here, the *lāmiyya* is entitled "Wa li Ibn al-Ḥayyāṭ fi tarḥīl al-muqātil 'alā al-bur[ū]ḡ al-iṭnay 'ašara" ("and by Ibn al-Ḥayyāṭ: on the movement of the Warrior through the twelve zodiacal signs"), hereafter, "*Lāmiyya* on the Warrior Saturn".

This body of knowledge on astrology outlined information about the seven planets: their natures, benefic and malefic planets, and their indications as to human qualities and activities. Medieval manuals on astrology had extensive listings of the indications of planets, although limited to the relevant element associated to each planet: "Saturn indicates agriculture, rivers, journeys, pride, inheritances, slaves...". After consulting such texts, the meaningful understanding was brought by the astrologer interpreting a good or bad prognostication for one of these elements on the basis of a horoscope.

In Ibn al-Ḥayyāṭ's *Lāmiyya* on the Warrior Saturn, the movement of Saturn through a zodiacal sign ("if Saturn moves through Cancer, ...") is a sign of something to come ("seeds and fruits are abundant, ..."); similarly, in Abū l-Riḡāl (or Ibn Abī l-Riḡāl) al-Andalusī's *Urḡūza* on Thunder, the occurrence of the thunder in a solar month is a sign of something to come, too. So, we can say that astrological knowledge, through its transformation into poetry, turned into a literature of signs in which the interpretation by an astrologer is not needed. This could have a second implication: that the *lāmiyya* might have been read by practitioners or readers who had not mastered the rules of astronomy-astrology (the only requirement of which was knowing that Saturn takes two and a half years to move through one zodiacal sign and pass to the next— a parameter shown by an astronomical table of planetary movements). The *lāmiyya* was also of interest in an academic context, as al-Baqqār exemplified his work with the teaching of some of its verses. An awkward point is that several verses in al-Baqqār's copy differ substantially from those in the *lāmiyya* in the University of Michigan Library. This phenomenon of finding unequal verses in copies of the same poem also happens in the *Urḡūza* on Thunder. We develop these and other issues in our paper on Ibn al-Ḥayyāṭ's *Lāmiyya* on the Warrior Saturn, following the topics of concern for the conference Poetry and Knowledge.

## **Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī's *al-Qaṣīda al-Nūniyya*: A Poetic Rendering of the Concept of *Tahqīq***

This paper aims to examine the poetic articulation of *tahqīq*—a central concept within the Sabʿīnī tradition—through *al-Qaṣīdat al-Nūniyya* composed by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī (d. 668/1269). Al-Shushtarī, a prominent Andalusī-Maghribī figure, is recognized as both a disciple (*tilmīdh*) and successor (*khalīfa*) of Ibn Sabʿīn (d. 669/1270), who is well known for his views on *waḥda* (unity). In his major work *Budd al-ʿĀrif* and other treatises, Ibn Sabʿīn discusses a specific epistemic approach he terms *tahqīq*. According to his formulation, *tahqīq* represents a holistic and ultimate apprehension of truth, in contrast to the fragmented insights offered by other disciplines.

Al-Shushtarī poetically conveys his teacher's epistemological vision in *al-Qaṣīdat al-Nūniyya*, structuring it around a conceptual analysis of the intellect (*ʿaql*). The poem, composed in three parts, addresses in the first two sections the signs of the intellect, its function in the pursuit of truth, and its relation to both perfection and inadequacy. In the final part, al-Shushtarī turns to the symbolic representation of various figures from both the philosophical and mystical traditions, exploring how reason functions in their respective quests for truth.

Within this framework, he discusses figures such as Hermes, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Dhū al-Qarnayn, linking their philosophical positions to the concept of intellect. He then outlines a chronological sequence of Sufis from various historical periods who share a common concern on *waḥda*, examining their engagements with intellect. This lineage begins with early figures such as al-Ḥallāj and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (4th/10th century), and continues through later Sufis primarily active in the Andalusī-Maghribī milieu during the 6th–7th/12th–13th centuries, including Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shūdhī, Ibn Qasī, and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Harrālī, ultimately reaching to Ibn Sabʿīn himself.

In addition to these Sufi figures, al-Shushtarī also refers to several Islamic philosophers—namely Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd—as well as al-Suhrawardī, the founder of Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) philosophy. His treatment of reason and philosophy closely parallels Ibn Sabʿīn's critical stance toward disciplines external to Sufism and *tahqīq*. Al-Shushtarī critiques reason and philosophy for their entanglement in multiplicity and categorical limitations. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that reason, as a tool that moves from sensory data to abstract meaning, can serve a provisional role; and that philosophers, particularly in their work on logic, may offer valid insights. Yet, their epistemological approaches remain partial and limited when compared to those of the *muḥaqqiq*.

Accordingly, like Ibn Sabʿīn, al-Shushtarī situates Sufism and *taḥqīq* at the highest rank of the hierarchy of truth. While he concedes that various traditions may represent particular aspects of truth, it is the muḥaqqiq-Sufi who integrates these diverse approaches under the unifying principle of *waḥda*. Through this exploration, the paper seeks to demonstrate how al-Shushtarī's poetic discourse serves as a medium for articulating the epistemological dimensions of *taḥqīq* within the Sabʿīnī tradition.

*Nadine El-Hussein (Berlin)*

## **Political Poetry in al-Andalus and the Maghreb during the Almohad Period**

Al-Andalus and the Maghreb were ruled by the Almohads from the mid 6th/12th until the mid-7th/13th century. The establishment of the Almohad caliphate was accompanied by a restructuration of the political, religious and intellectual landscape. It was within this restructuration that the Almohads introduced their own religious and intellectual elite: The *ṭalaba* were at the ruler's disposal and the Almohad caliphs commissioned them with the production of poems.

This paper focuses on poems composed by the Almohad intellectual elite and proposes to consider their poem production against the backdrop of both external and internal religious and political challenges to Almohad rule. On the one hand, the Almohads had to deal with the "Reconquista" of the Iberian Peninsula pursued by the Christian kingdoms Castile, Aragón and Portugal. On the other hand, the poems served the ambitions of the Almohad caliphs and their intellectual elite to define and disseminate knowledge also vis-à-vis the scholars, who did not bind themselves to the Almohad movement.

This paper examines the poems from a historical perspective and presents a contextual reading by placing the authors into their intellectual and social contexts. Thus, the following questions will be addressed: Who were the authors? What were the contexts of these productions? What are the topics of their poems? What kind of knowledge did they convey with their poems? What conclusions might be drawn regarding the positions from different groups from the intellectual elite to each other?

Taking the religious and political challenges in the Western Mediterranean into account, this paper aims to shed light on the political implications of poems produced in al-Andalus and the Maghreb during the Almohad period.

Claire Gallien (Cambridge)

## **The Epistemic Function of Literature in the Genre of *Tartīb al-‘Ulūm***

This presentation studies the representations and functions ascribed to literature, including poetry, in works of classification of the sciences (*tartīb al-‘ulūm*) in Islam from the classical to the early-modern periods. My presentation traces the presence of literature *as science* in major texts in the genre written in Arabic by al-Fārābī, Ibn Faghīrūn, al-Khwārizmī, al-‘Āmirī, Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Tawhīdī, al-Miskaway, Ibn Sina, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Ghazālī, Naṣr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī and Ibn Khaldūn for the medieval period, and by al-Yūsī and Sājaqlī-zādah for the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century period.

Therefore, the presentation will not be discussing the presence of poetry in Islamic sciences and its didactic and aesthetic dimensions, rather it enquires into the role of poetry *as science* in works of classification of the sciences. The theoretical nature of the genre permits the deduction of invariables concerning the type of knowledge to be gleaned and nurtured through and in poetry. In addition, the large timespan considered in the present study, as well as its diachronic sensitivity to evolutions, shall offer occasions to reflect on the changes occurring in the presentation and function ascribed to poetry in the genre.

Given that the mastery of linguistic and literary skills was considered an essential part in the formation of any established scholar in Islam, we ask: is *adab* mere refinement in the scholarly formation of these individuals, or is there something epistemically and theologically essential in the presence and cultivation of literature, literary expertise, and imagination in Islam? What types of clues does the *tartīb al-‘ulūm* corpus offer with regard to these questions?

Serkan Ince (Tübingen)

## **Poetry as Argument: The *Kalāmī* Method in al-Nābulusī’s *al-‘Iqd al-naẓīm***

This paper explores the intersection of poetic rhetoric and Islamic theology (*kalām*) in the Arabic treatise *al-‘Iqd al-naẓīm fī l-qadr al-‘aẓīm* (“The Arranged Necklace of the Sublime Rank”) by ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731). The work was composed in response to a high-ranking judge’s request for a theological interpretation of a verse from al-Būṣīrī’s famous *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*, a verse suggesting that the mere name of the Prophet Muḥammad could revive the dead if his miracles were commensurate with his true rank.

Al-Nābulusī uses this request to clarify the theological implications of the verse. He also demonstrates how poetic form can function as a medium of theological argumentation.

The study situates al-Nābulusī's work within the tradition of *madḥiyya* (panegyric) poetry and postclassical Arabic rhetoric, emphasizing its didactic and epistemological dimensions. I argue that *al-ʿIqd al-naẓīm* represents a specific mode of knowledge transmission in which poetry, logic, and theology intersect. Within the framework of the *madhhab kalāmī*, al-Nābulusī combines persuasive syllogisms, Qur'anic analogies, and rhetorical figures.

The *madhhab kalāmī* refers to a rhetorical strategy in which the speaker employs argumentation, rational reasoning, logic, or evidence to persuade an audience or to refute opposing views. For rhetorical effect, such arguments may be intentionally elaborate, exaggerated, or confrontational, incorporating repetition, distorted logic, or surprising associations. Originally, this term referred, often satirically, to the ornate and technical style of theologians when imitated in poetry. In later scholastic rhetoric, however, it came to signify the use of theological and dialectical reasoning as distinct from philosophical or apodictic argumentation. Al-Nābulusī reads al-Būṣīrī's verse not as a blasphemous exaggeration but as a carefully crafted rhetorical strategy that affirms the Prophet's incommensurable greatness while safeguarding theological boundaries.

The paper investigates how poetic devices such as counterfactual conditionals, analogical reasoning, and hyperbolic praise function within kalām-based reasoning. Drawing on al-Nābulusī's commentary and his references to earlier authorities such as al-Taftāzānī and ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarāyīnī, I analyze the epistemic roles of *dalīl* (proof), *ḥujja* (argument), and *mashhūrāt* (commonly accepted premises) in his reading of *al-Burda*. Poetry here emerges not only as a vehicle for praise but as an instrument of structured theological reflection designed to educate readers in doctrinal matters.

Moreover, the study shows that al-Nābulusī's rhetorical theology serves as a critique of superficial miracle-competition among prophets. By stressing that the Prophet Muḥammad's rank surpasses even the miracle of reviving the dead, he formulates a theological epistemology of restraint grounded in divine wisdom and belief in the unseen (*ghayb*). In doing so, he positions poetic praise within a framework of knowledge that is simultaneously affective and speculative, performative and didactic.

This case study contributes to a deeper understanding of Arabic poetry between 1100 and 1800 as a site of intellectual engagement. Rather than marginalizing didactic verse as lacking literary or theological value, the paper advocates recognizing its role in preserving and shaping epistemic authority. Al-Nābulusī's treatise illustrates how poetry can transmit content. It also conveys hermeneutical methods, theological nuance, and spiritual ethics.

Andreas Knöll (Münster)

### **Techniques of *Jadal* as Techniques of Poetry**

Arabic poetry as well as its theoretical reflection have long represented a discourse that was influenced by a wide range of knowledge fields. One of these fields, as the envisaged paper aims to demonstrate, was the practice of disputation (*jadal*). This becomes clear from the fact that among the stylistic devices of poetry (*badī'*) several figures can be found that on a theoretical level are explained with terms and techniques of disputation, such as *al-madhhab al-kalāmī* or *al-qawl bi-l-mūjib*.

The paper aims to trace the historical genesis of those stylistic devices by examining the theoretical discussions as well as the examples provided for them in works on Arabic poetics and rhetoric. Special attention will be paid to texts from the 13th to 19th centuries, such as commentaries on al-Qazwīnī's *Talkhīṣ* or on important *badī' iyyāt*. In particular, the following questions will be discussed: In what ways did certain poetic practices induce explanations with terms and techniques from disputation? How were these forms of knowledge adapted to poetry? Did this change the practical use of such figures? To what extent did poetry and the study of stylistic devices also impart (practical) knowledge about argumentative techniques?

In the context of the panel, the paper will therefore set out how poetry and its theoretical reflection transformed and popularized forms of knowledge about disputation techniques.

Natalie Kraneiß (Münster)

### **Versifying a Scholarly Discourse, Seeking the Love of the *Ahl al-Bayt*: A Poem on 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) from the 18th-Century Maghrib**

In the early modern period, descent from the Prophet Muḥammad gained increasing importance across the Islamic world. The sultans of the Ottoman Empire and the Western Maghrib launched extensive campaigns to counter the increasing number of impostors. In the Western Maghrib, this development led to the production of numerous genealogical treatises, including *al-Durr al-sanī* by the renowned genealogist 'Abd al-Salām al-Qādirī (d. 1110/1698). This work, which documents the prophetic descendants in Fez, includes several mnemonic poems designed to consolidate genealogical knowledge about specific family branches, make it easier to memorize, and facilitate its dissemination—a classic example of didactic poetry.

This paper focuses on another example, the much longer and multi-purposed Rajaz poem *Ighāthat al-lahfān wa-salwat al-aḥzān li-l-qādiriyyīn* by ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Fāsī (d. 1213/1799). In 359 verses, al-Fāsī documents the lineage of the Sufi saint ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166) and his descendants in the Maghrib in verse. The poem engages with contemporary discourse about al-Jīlānī and the Qādiriyyūn, among whom ‘Abd al-Salām al-Qādirī held a prominent role.

I examine how al-Fāsī utilizes the versification of genealogical knowledge to promote its dissemination while simultaneously pursuing aesthetic, emotional, and devotional goals. I will show that the poem encapsulates a complex scholarly discourse, making “certain knowledge” both accessible and memorable through appealing language and emotional resonance, thereby contributing to the popularization of genealogical knowledge. At the same time, it fulfills a devotional function by invoking the Prophet and al-Jīlānī, revered as the greatest of saints. Finally, the poem reinforces the status of al-Jīlānī’s descendants, with whom the author consciously seeks to align himself.

*Paula Manstetten (Bonn)*

### **From Biographical Dictionary to Didactic Poem in the Mamluk period: Al-Ṣafadī’s (d. 1363) *Urjūza* on the Rulers and Governors of Damascus**

History was among the many subjects transformed into Arabic verse in the pre-modern Middle East, a practice that began in the ninth century (if not earlier) and flourished in particular in Mamluk Egypt and Syria. Such poems typically take the form of a chronological enumeration of caliphs, governors, or qadis in an easily memorisable format, sometimes incorporating the dates of their tenure or brief comments on their rule. Their purpose was not necessarily to serve as an introduction to the subject, but rather to be an *aide-mémoire* for scholars already familiar with the field (see, e.g., van Gelder, “Arabic Didactic Verse”, 1995; Guo, “Mamluk Historical Rajaz Poetry”, 2010; Munt, “Versifying History in Abbasid Iraq”, 2022).

This paper studies versified histories composed during the Mamluk period, focusing in particular on the case of the prolific author al-Ṣafadī (d. 1363) and his *Tuḥfat dhawī l-albāb fī-man ḥakama bi-Dimashq min al-khulafā’ wa-l-mulūk wa-l-nuwwāb*, a poem (*urjūza*) on the rulers of Damascus from the Muslim conquest up to the author’s own time. Al-Ṣafadī first compiled a collection of short prose biographies of the governors of Damascus in alphabetical order; for the period up to the twelfth century, he drew heavily – sometimes verbatim, sometimes paraphrasing – from Ibn ‘Asākir’s (d. 1176) monumental biographical dictionary *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*.

Al-Ṣafadī then versified these biographies in a chronologically arranged poem, to which he later also added a historical commentary (*sharḥ*). These texts survive in manuscripts in Cairo and Paris and have been edited, with the exception of the *sharḥ*, by al-Munajjid (as al-Ṣafadī, *Umarāʾ Dimashq fī l-Islām*, 1983, 2nd ed.).

The present study examines the relationship between these four texts – Ibn ʿAsākir’s original biographies of governors, al-Ṣafadī’s prose biographies, his versification, and his commentary. It seeks to uncover al-Ṣafadī’s authorial strategies as well as the diverse aims, whether didactic or otherwise, that he may have pursued through these texts. His efforts will be further contextualised within, and compared to, other Mamluk-era historical poems, such as Ibn Dāniyāl’s (d. 1310/11) *urjūza* on the judges of Egypt and al-Suyūṭī’s (d. 1505) didactic poem on the caliphs.

*Dahir Lawan Muʿaz (Kano)*

### **From Cairo to Sokoto: Abdullahi Dan Fodio’s Didactic Renditions of al-Suyuti’s *al-Itqān* and *al-Nuqāya* in 19th-Century West Africa**

This paper explores the transformation of Qur’anic sciences from prose to verse through a comparative study of Abdullahi Dan Fodio’s *Miftah al-Tafsir* (composed in 1209 AH / 1795 CE) and *Sulalat al-Miftah* (1210 AH / 1796 CE)—two didactic poems rooted in the works of the Egyptian polymath Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH / 1505 CE), of *al-Itqān fī ʿUlum al-Qurʾān* and *al-Nuqāya*. *Miftah al-Tafsir*, a thousand-verse *Alfiyya*, faithfully reorganizes and versifies the encyclopedic knowledge of *al-Itqān*, while *Sulalat al-Miftah* offers a simplified version tailored to pedagogical contexts.

Abdullahi Dan Fodio (d. 1828), younger brother and vizier of Usman dan Fodio, was a leading scholar and statesman of the Sokoto Caliphate, whose prolific literary production spanned Arabic writings in law, theology, ethics, grammar, and education. Alongside other Jihad leaders, he contributed to a major revival of Islamic intellectual life in 19th-century West Africa, where poetry was employed not only for aesthetic purposes but as a core method of instruction and reform.

This paper closely compares the contents and structure of al-Suyuti’s *al-Itqān* with Abdullahi’s *Miftah al-Tafsir* to assess the scope, depth, and creativity of Abdullahi’s poetic transformation. It highlights how he preserved key elements of Suyuti’s classification of Qur’anic sciences while selectively adapting and condensing others to meet the needs of students and scholars in his context. By situating these poems within the literary and didactic landscape of the early Sokoto Caliphate, the study shows how classical Islamic knowledge was localized and transmitted through verse, bridging the scholarly worlds of Cairo and Sokoto during a formative moment in West African history.

Enes F. Ömeroğlu (Istanbul)

## Islamic Legal Theory and Poetic Reconfiguration: A Study on al-Suyūṭī's *al-Kawkab al-Sāṭi'*

This study focuses on *al-Kawkab al-Sāṭi'*, a didactic poem composed by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), one of the prominent scholars of the Mamlūk period, and examines how classical legal texts are restructured through poetic form in the Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) literature. *Al-Kawkab al-Sāṭi'* is a poetic rendering of *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), itself a condensed synthesis of nearly one hundred earlier treatises in Islamic legal theory. Although some modern academic perspectives question the originality of poetic and other secondary works rooted in canonical texts, this study argues that these compositions should be understood as creative and meaningful attempts to reframe and reconstruct knowledge.

*al-Kawkab al-Sāṭi'* is composed in the *rajaz* meter and classified as an *urjūza*, consisting of 1,450 lines. *Urjūzas*, which trace their origins back to pre-Islamic poetry, are known for their ease of memorization and held a central place in classical madrasa curricula. Al-Suyūṭī emphasizes that the poem was composed with educational aims, highlighting its memorability and fluency (*uzūba*). He further notes that the text avoids redundancy (*takrīr*), complexity (*ta'qīd*), verbosity (*tatwīl*), and superfluous phrasing (*hashw*), favoring instead a concise and eloquent language. In versifying the content of *Jam' al-Jawāmi'*, al-Suyūṭī reshapes the work by adding new issues, foregrounding overlooked topics, and reorganizing its structure. By placing alternative—even opposing—opinions alongside the main positions, he broadens the scope of discussion and deepens the interpretive engagement with the text. Moreover, he omits certain parts of *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* that he finds problematic, choosing not to include them in his poem. These stylistic and structural features transform *al-Kawkab al-Sāṭi'* into a refined literary work that goes beyond a pedagogical purpose, reflecting al-Suyūṭī's conscious effort to balance clarity and elegance. When considered together, they reveal that versification serves as a dynamic medium through which knowledge is both transmitted and transformed, constituting an intellectual endeavor that enables the re-evaluation and reconfiguration of inherited knowledge.

This study investigates the reasons behind al-Suyūṭī's decision to versify such a sophisticated work of legal theory while also uncovering the intellectual motivations underlying this choice. Versifying such a comprehensive and ambitious text as *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* not only provides valuable insights into how classical texts were interpreted within a culture that valued ambiguity and polysemy but also demonstrates that secondary literature in Islamic legal theory does not represent stagnation or repetition.

On the contrary, it stands as evidence of original and creative re-engagements with the intellectual tradition. In this context, recognizing the epistemological function of didactic poetry allows for a more accurate understanding of the classical Islamic intellectual world.

*Nefeli Papoutsakis (Münster)*

### **‘Alī an-Naḥlah’s (fl. late 10th/16th cent.) encyclopaedic *zajal*: Didactic poetry in an early-Ottoman Arabic shadow play**

‘*Alam wa-Ta’ādīr* is an early-Ottoman Arabic shadow play about the passionate love of a Muslim Turk for the daughter of a Christian monk (sic). Ta’ādīr, the lovelorn protagonist of the play, at some point lands in a mental hospital, where a doctor challenges him to prove that he is sane. Starting by enumerating the days of the week and the names of the months in three different calendars, Ta’ādīr goes on to display his knowledge of various disciplines: the fundamentals of religion and religious obligations, the Quran, quranic recitation and exegesis, hadith, the earlier prophets and their books, Islamic law and its schools, Arabic grammar, time-keeping, inheritance law, mathematics and philosophy, poetry and prosody, alchemy, astronomy, geomancy, music and medicine. The 50-strophe long *zajal* that recounts Ta’ādīr’s exchange with the doctor survives in several collections of *zajal* poetry independently from the shadow play (i.e. apart from the manuscripts preserving the poems and songs belonging to it), which fact attests to its popularity. In Ta’ādīr’s exposition, the treatment of the various disciplines is rather elementary, suggesting that the poem was probably meant to serve as a recap or memory assistance. Yet several details such as book titles, names, and wordplays with specialist terms in a poem that was delivered orally in front of a low-brow audience are all the more remarkable and challenge common assumptions about the literacy of the general public in that era.

*Betty Rosen (London)*

### **Versifying (‘ilm) *al-badī’*: Al-Suyūṭī’s ‘*Uqūd al-jumān***

Among the works of the prolific Egyptian polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) are several that concern rhetoric (*balāgha*) and, more specifically, the poetic *badī’*, a term typically taken to name collectively a set of rhetorical tropes and figures of speech famously prevalent in first Abbasid and subsequently Mamluk-era poetry and literary prose. Among these texts is a *badī’iyya*—a genre of Prophetic praise poem in which each line performs at least one of these forms of *al-badī’*, and one that scholars have tended to evoke as “didactic” poetry slightly elevated by a dose of mystical spirituality.

In the lengthy auto-commentary al-Suyūṭī appends to his *badī'iyya*, he elucidates the tropes and figures performed by his verses by drawing on classifications and theories of *al-badī'* derived from poetics works that predate and/or lie outside the by-then standard textual canon for *'ilm al-balāgha* as a *madrassa* discipline. He scarcely mentions the core text of that discipline—the *Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī (d. 738/1338)—and ignores its widely-accepted division of the forms of *al-badī'* into *lafẓī* (phonetic) and *ma'nawī* (semantic). Perhaps, a reader of the *badī'iyya* might imagine, al-Suyūṭī was not very familiar with al-Qazwīnī's classification and theorization of *al-badī'*, or did not find it useful, or even actively disagreed with it.

But this assumption, as well as the association of al-Suyūṭī's *badī'iyya* with "didactic" poetics, must be called into question by another text in the polymath's corpus: his *'Uqūd al-jumān fī 'ilm al-ma'ānī wa al-bayān*, which our author immediately declares to be "a poem in the meter *rajaz*... in which I have summarized that which is contained in [al-Qazwīnī's] *Talkhīṣ*" [*urjūzatun... lakhkhaṣṭu fihā mā ḥawā al-talkhīṣ*]." This *urjūza* does indeed closely follow the order, structure, and ideas put forth by al-Qazwīnī; in it, al-Suyūṭī diverges from and sometimes even seems to contradict aspects of his approach in the *badī'iyya* commentary.

In this paper, I read the section of *'Uqūd al-jumān* devoted to *'ilm al-badī'* with an eye to how it compares to al-Suyūṭī's theorization and deployment of *al-badī'* in his *Naẓm al-badī' fī madḥ kahyr al-shaḥī'* (*badī'iyya* poem and commentary). I ask, on one hand, how noting contrasts between these two works—in formal construction, tone, and conceptual structure—might help us understand the *badī'iyya* as something entirely different from a so-called "didactic versification" of *badī'* theory. On the other hand, I take the *urjūza* seriously as a work that has much to offer us both aesthetically and intellectually. I then ask how we might read and indeed hear these two poems as working together to shed light on the complex, sophisticated, and affectively-charged approach to *al-badī'* developed across al-Suyūṭī's oeuvre and, in so doing, complicate questions of "theory versus practice" or "creative versus didactic" altogether.

*Tuba Nur Saraçoğlu (Mardin)*

## **From *Riwāya* to Poetry: How Has *Sīra* Narration Changed? The Case of al-'Irāqī's *Alfiyya***

It is known that poetry was used in *sīra* writing from the very beginning. In early *sīra* texts poetry employed sources of knowledge, especially in Ibn Hishām's work. Over time, it is seen that *sīra* was also written in verse. This study will examine Zayn ad-Dīn Irāqī's (d. 806/1404) *Alfiyya*, which is in Arabic and an important example of the *Alfiyya* literature, also known as *al-Durar al-saniyya fī (naẓm) al-sīra al-zakiyya (fī naẓm al-sīra al-nabawiyya)*.

The work, extant in numerous manuscript copies, had a wide circulation. The author is known to have composed didactic poetry in other disciplines as well, indicating that he adopted verse as a deliberate method of knowledge transmission. First, the author's life and scholarly background will be discussed. The place of this work within the *Alfiyya* literature will be evaluated. In addition, the author's purpose and intended audience will also be explored.

In classical *sīra* literature, information is transmitted through *riwaya* (narrative), which consist of *isnād* (chains of transmission) and texts. In *Alfiyya*, however, we see the same information presented in poetic form. Apart from this structural change, it is important to determine whether there is any difference in the content of the *sīra* narrative.

The text will be analyzed using a tagging-based approach. This *sīra* text in poetic form will be analyzed by converting it into data using five main tags. These tags include source tags, thematic tags, name tags, place names, and dates tags. Those tags previously applied by the researcher on the *sīra* texts of Ibn Hishām and Ibn Saʿd. In this study, the data obtained from a *sīra* text in poetic form will be compared with the data from classical texts.

The main aim of this study is to determine how much the *sīra* narrative changes when it is transformed into verse form. At this point, the names, place names, dates, and themes found in both groups of texts will be compared to identify similarities and differences between them. Additionally, this research aims to identify which *sīra* topics are emphasized in the *Alfiyya*, which can be described as a didactic text, and how the information transformed from *riwaya* to poetry is reformulated.

*Tobias Sick (Münster)*

### **“So That They Need Neither Skilled Swimmers nor Shell Divers to Reach its Pearls”: Tracing Knowledge Transfer in a Didactic Arabic Verse Translation**

Early modern knowledge transfer through literary translation between the major languages of Islam – Arabic, Persian, and Turkish – has not formed a main focus of research until recently; this is the case especially regarding translations of poetic formats from Persian into Arabic.

A particularly intriguing example in this regard is a work by the poet-translator Aḥmad Rāshid al-Anṣārī al-Khalwatī (d. after 1255/1839–40): an Arabic verse rendering of the popular Persian advice treatise *Pandnāma-yi ʿAṭṭār* (*ʿAṭṭār's Book of Wise Counsel*), a *maṣnavī* classic of spurious origin that was utilised in educational contexts across the Islamic world during the early modern period – often accompanied by translations and commentaries.

The translation of al-Khalwatī seeks to provide, as per the translator's preface, an Arabic verse rendering of the original that is to resemble the "speech of the commoners" and be "free of empty eloquence", intended to instruct those seeking the morally edifying value of Persian literature and to silence those doubting it. Already conceptualised for didactic use, this translation employs several techniques to both provide in clear Arabic the admonishing contents of the original and, at the same time, render intelligible the Persian text itself by employing an interlinear format that juxtaposes the two. Given its educational utility, the translation was put into print roughly 30 years later and used as a textbook for Persian in schools during the period of Khedival rule in Egypt. While the production and usage of this work thus extend beyond the main period of the workshop at hand, its composition, in terms of both content and style, remains closely connected to the previous poetic, translational, and didactic practices.

The proposed paper will discuss this verse translation with respect to three dimensions that all play an important role in understanding properly the knowledge transfer at hand: First, the production and dissemination of this work are contextualised against the backdrop of the influence of Ottoman culture and the purview of Persian linguistic instruction in pre-modern Egypt. Then, its paratextual elements, such as the translator's preface and editors' notes, are discussed to further investigate the presentation, translation approach, and intent behind the production and, later, printing of the work. As for the main discussion, the paper offers an evaluative analysis of the work's contents and poetic style, also taking into consideration its specific character as a translation of a morally instructive work belonging to the 'Persian classics'. This entails a qualification of the Arabic verse itself as well as a comparative perspective discussing the work vis-à-vis the Persian source text in order to make explicit the concrete methodology behind the rendering of the Persian *maṣnavī* form, the internal content structure, and the overall didactic style of the admonishing treatise that is the *Pandnāma-yi 'Aṭṭār*. Ultimately, this is to serve an improved understanding of the transmission of knowledge through Arabic verse as instantiated in translations from Persian poetic works of advice literature in Egypt during the end of the early modern period.

Isabel Toral (Berlin)

### **Edible Eloquence: Gastronomic Poetry and Culinary Knowledge in Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq's *Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh* (10th century CE)**

The present paper will investigate the role of gastronomic poetry in *Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh* (The Book of Dishes) by Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq, a seminal 10th-century Arabic cookbook and one of the earliest comprehensive culinary texts in the Islamic world. The poetic verses that are interwoven throughout the manuscript are not merely embellishments of a literary nature; rather, they serve a functional purpose, namely to provide a vehicle for the instruction on culinary and dietary matters. Al-Warrāq's strategic employment of verse, a hallmark of pre-modern Arabic didactic literature, exemplifies the function of poetry as a mnemonic and epistemological instrument. These verses frequently offer concise summaries of intricate culinary preparations, underscoring the significance of quality ingredients and imparting health-related insights grounded in Galenic medicine. Moreover, they furnish information regarding fishing and hunting techniques. The following questions should be addressed in this study on the basis of several examples: what was the structure of these poems? Which meters, stylistic devices and sonic elements were employed? The present study seeks to establish a correlation between emotions and the senses, and the rationality of knowledge.

Sahal Varwani (Berkeley)

### **With Rhyme and Reason: Imām 'Umar al-Kharbūtī's Logical, Rhetorical, and Dialectical Reading of Imām al-Būṣīrī's *Burdah***

As a mover of souls, the poet imbues subtle meanings into measured forms to produce a sense of wonder and awe in the listener. Both rhyme and reason contribute to poetic beauty and allow poets to captivate souls. The logic permeating various levels of the poem leads the audience down a path of cognitive discovery that produces wonder. In *'Aṣīdat al-shuhdah*, Ottoman scholar Imām 'Umar al-Kharbūtī (d. 1299/1882) analyzes Imām Sharaf al-Dīn al-Būṣīrī's *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* through the rational sciences (*'aqliyyāt*) to demonstrate the didactic value of a transdisciplinary study of poetry. Since the commentary is a unique expression of al-Kharbūtī's experience with *the Burdah*, I analyze his work through the lens of wonder to shed light on the multifaceted nature of argumentation in the *qaṣīdah*. This thesis studies al-Kharbūtī's logical, rhetorical, and dialectical analyses of *the Burdah* to demonstrate that the power of poetry lies in both rhyme and reason.