

Call for Papers

Exemplary Lives in the Pre-Modern Islamic World: Biography and Hagiography in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish

International Workshop Co-Organised by
the University of Bonn and the University of Münster

February 17–19, 2027, University of Bonn

Deadline for Abstract Submission: April 30, 2026

This international workshop explores laudatory and hagiographic biographies in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish in the pre-modern Islamic world. Often referred to as *manāqib/menākib* (“virtues” or “outstanding traits”), these works celebrate the merits and deeds of exemplary individuals or groups. Their subjects range from the early caliphs and Companions of the Prophet Muhammad to Shi‘i Imams and other descendants of the Prophet’s family, and from rulers, the founding figures of the Islamic legal schools, and renowned scholars to Sufi saints. *Manāqib* were also dedicated to women – especially the wives and descendants of the Prophet and female Sufis.

Such texts appear in a variety of literary forms: as stand-alone biographies, entries in biographical dictionaries, or chapters within hadith collections and Sufi manuals. Emerging from the earliest centuries of Islam, they constitute a vast corpus in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other languages, and remain a living tradition to the present day. Beyond recording the lives and deeds of individuals, *manāqib* works fulfilled a variety of functions – from shaping group identities, (re)producing genealogies and spiritual lineages, and establishing or reviving the fame of local shrines to bolstering claims in disputes between religious groups, legal schools, and Sufi orders. They could serve polemical, apologetic, didactic, edifying, or entertaining purposes.

While scholarship has mainly focused on individual works or figures, especially from the Sufi milieu, comparative studies across regions, periods, languages, and sub-genres remain underexplored. The conference aims to bring together specialists working on a variety of texts in order to facilitate comparisons across different case studies. We welcome papers on individual *manāqib* texts, on larger textual traditions surrounding a particular figure or group, and on the transformation of such texts – for instance through rewriting, abridgement, or intra-Islamic translations – and the interpretive choices these transformations entail. Contributions that situate case studies in comparative, diachronic, or trans-regional perspectives are particularly encouraged, as are papers exploring manuscript traditions.

Participants are invited to reflect on questions such as:

- Who wrote or commissioned these texts, and why? What were the historical, social, and religious contexts of their production?
- What were the authors' motivations and agendas? What structural and narrative elements characterise their works?
- How were *manāqib* texts devoted to the same figure adapted or rewritten over time?
- How, and in what contexts, were such texts read, transmitted, or translated?
- What social, political, or religious functions did *manāqib* texts serve, e.g., in establishing role models, teaching doctrines, or promoting a person, school, or Sufi order?

Building on the case studies presented by the participants, the conference seeks to trace the evolution and significance of *manāqib* traditions across time, space, and languages, to identify communalities and differences, and ultimately to ask what constitutes an exemplary life in the Islamic tradition.

Submission Guidelines and Practical Information

If you are interested in participating, please submit

- an abstract (max. 300 words)
- a short biography (max. 200 words)

as a single PDF file titled with your surname to paula.manstetten@uni-bonn.de.

Deadline: April 30, 2026

Notification of acceptance: May 2026

The conference will be held in English, beginning on February 17 at 10:00 AM and ending on February 19 after lunch. Accommodation in Bonn (three nights) will be covered. Limited travel funding is available for scholars without institutional support – please indicate if needed when submitting your abstract.

The conference will result in an edited volume. Please only apply if you are willing to submit your completed article by October 1, 2027.

Organisation

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