

Making Saints and Exemplars in Islamic Hagiographic Texts – Pre-modern *Manāqib* Works in Arabic and Persian

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Pre-modern biographies have been central to my research for many years. My BA thesis explored hagiographical depictions of the 12th-century “patron saint” of Damascus in pre-modern Arabic sources; my MA thesis was concerned with the portrayal of Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), known as the first chief justice in Islam, in biographical dictionaries and *adab* works. For my PhD, I studied the largest biographical dictionary in Arabic produced in the medieval period, Ibn ‘Asākir’s 12th-century “History of Damascus” which contains more than 10,000 biographies. Between 2018 and 2021, I researched the biography of a Syrian Christian from Damascus, Solomon Negri, who worked as an Arabic teacher, translator, and librarian in a variety of European cities around 1700. Using his Latin autobiography and the letters he addressed to European recipients, I explored in particular how he adapted his self-fashioning in order to navigate between Catholic and Protestant employers in Europe.

My current project is tentatively entitled “Making Saints and Exemplars in Islamic Hagiographic Texts – Pre-modern *Manāqib* Works in Arabic and Persian”. The project focuses on texts that celebrate the virtues and deeds of a single person or group of people; these are often called *manāqib* (“virtues, outstanding traits”) but can also be found under a myriad of other titles. Such works were dedicated to figures ranging from early Islamic caliphs and companions of the Prophet Muhammad to Shī‘ī imams and descendants of the Prophet’s family, from the founding figures of the *madhhabs* to trans-regional and local Sufi saints, including women. Taking the form of often lengthy stand-alone biographies, as well as entries in biographical dictionaries, hadith collections, and Sufi manuals, they constitute an extremely large and important text corpus. *Manāqib* works continue to be written until today in a variety of languages all over the Islamic world. The importance of these texts goes far beyond the mere recording of the life and meritorious or miraculous acts of a person: many of the key debates that shaped Muslim societies over time crystalize themselves in *manāqib* works. Such texts served to bolster claims, be they sectarian, regarding legitimate leadership, between legal and theological schools, or between competing Sufi orders. Often, hagiographies of the same person were rewritten over the centuries to adapt them to changed socio-religious and ideological needs. *Manāqib* works could have polemic, apologetic, subversive, educational, edifying, and entertaining functions. My aim for the next few years is to apply for a research grant and establish a network of early career researchers and established scholars working on *manāqib* and related topics, in order to be able to study a broad range of such works from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective.

Short Biography: Paula Manstetten is a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute for Oriental Studies at Bamberg University, Germany. Her research focuses on pre-modern Arabic biography and hagiography, Islamic religious education in the 10th-13th century, as well as the trajectories of Arab Christians in early modern Europe. She studied Arabic and Islamic studies and literature in Münster, Berlin, Damascus, and London and completed her PhD on Ibn ‘Asākir’s twelfth-century biographical dictionary “History of Damascus” at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, in 2018.