



Poetry, Power, Literacy, and the Emergence of Vernacular Literatures

International Workshop

16 June 2025

Radcliffe Humanities Building, Oxford and online

An activity of the TORCH Network

Poetry in the Medieval World

The 2025 workshop of the TORCH Network *Poetry in the Medieval World* investigates how literature changes and how emerging written languages, styles, and narratives arise across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. Through the example of poetry, the workshop seeks to uncover shared patterns and distinct trajectories in the development of vernacular literatures. It considers how authors drew on, translated, or adapted models from local and transregional literary traditions to engage with discourses of power and authority and to shape emerging ways of producing literature.

The first aim is to determine when, why, and how a language comes to be regarded as a literary language, through its interaction with and/or displacement of what was previously considered the prestige language or variety. We also explore the circumstances under which such processes were halted or reversed. We ask how courtly patronage, religious movements, and shifting modes of education and performance shaped the production, circulation, and reception of poetry. The workshop examines how metres, forms, and methods of structuring content reveal relationships between different traditions and reconfigure these traditions to suit new linguistic and social environments, often resulting in works that were both locally rooted and transregional in appeal. Through a focus on vernacular poetry, our workshop aims to a critical reassessment of the power dynamics embedded in adopting, accepting, and transmitting literature. The emergence of new canons of vernacular poetry is examined as the culmination of such a process.

Secondly, we compare how our various disciplines have conceptualised the emergence of vernacular literatures. We seek to identify and critique the narratives surrounding such cultural processes, and, in doing so, to examine concepts such as oral/written, classical/popular, and elite/common, whose influence on scholarship often continues to hinder the appreciation of available sources, albeit in different ways across disciplines. Our dialogue inhabits the shifting terrains where diverse literary practices—whether shaped through institutions, everyday life, ritual, or resistance—interact in tension and mutual transformation. We seek local examples of languages and poetic traditions that effect significant and commensurable transformations, leading to a complex and multifaceted interplay of influence, interaction, and substitution with concurrent prestige languages.

The event will include space for discussion and interdisciplinary reflection, enabling participants to engage with wider questions concerning the study of poetry. It invites a conversation about how literary prestige is constructed and contested, and how poetry—across languages and traditions—mediates literary taste, power, and memory.

Date: 16th June 2025, 9 am – 6:30 pm

Venue: Radcliffe Humanities Building, Seminar Room (Oxford OX2 6GG) & online

Convenors: Ugo Mondini and Michael Angerer

The workshop is part of the activities of the TORCH Network *Poetry in the Medieval World*.

[Register via Eventbrite for online attendance.](#)

Monday, 16th June 2025

9:00 a.m. **Registration**

9:15 a.m. **Welcoming address**

Introduction

Ugo Mondini (Exeter College – Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages)

Michael Angerer (Corpus Christi College – Faculty of English)

9:45 a.m. **First Session**

Chair: Dirk Meyer (The Queen's College – Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)

Entanglements: Latin, German and English Biblical Epic from Late Antiquity to the Eleventh Century

Elizabeth Tyler (University of York)

Can we fix the vernacular triumphalism of our literary histories? Reflections from early and contemporary East Asia

Wiebke Denecke (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

10:45 a.m. Coffee break

11:00 a.m. **Second Session**

Chair: Ida Toth (Wolfson College – Faculties of Classics and History)

Latin and Greek; Or, Two Stories about Medieval French

Jane Gilbert (University College London)

Falling in translated love. Jason, Medea and the 'Greek Version' of Le Roman de Troie

Alberto Ravani (Princeton University)

12:00 p.m. Lunch

2:00 p.m. **Third Session**

Chair: Jim Mallinson (Balliol College – Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)

Gender and the rise of vernaculars in northern India

Imre Bangha (Wolfson College – Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)

Defective vernaculars: Meaning making in the lyric traditions of Eastern South Asia, 15th-19th AD

Thibaut d'Hubert (University of Chicago)

3:00 p.m. Coffee break



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3:15 p.m. **Fourth Session**

Chair: Theo Maarten van Lint (Pembroke College – Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)

Minor metres and literary prestige in the poetry of Hadraawi and Gaarriye
Martin Orwin (Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale)

Ajam, Arab, and Iran: the identity poetics of the early New Persian lyric
Dominic Brookshaw (Wadham College – Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)

4:15 p.m. Coffee Break

4:30 p.m. **Roundtable** with refreshments

5:15 p.m. **Concluding remarks and discussion** followed by drinks