

ERC-KNOW: POLYMATHY AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN PREMODERN ISLAMIC EPISTEMIC CULTURES

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HOW TO HANDLE HASHISH? PREMODERN INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN ACTION

The Project

KNOW is the first comprehensive study of polymathy and interdisciplinarity in premodern Islam. The project sets out to write a history of knowledge that takes the interaction between disciplines as its primary subject. The post-formative period, 1200-1800 CE, saw the rise of new institutions of learning, the proliferation of libraries, the formation and integration of disciplines and curricular texts, and an increase in academic travel, facilitating interdisciplinary cooperation, competition and conflict. Despite its significance, our knowledge of this period remains rudimentary. The project promises to transform our understanding of the intellectual dynamics of this period by applying the lens of polymathy and interdisciplinarity.



The project focuses on epistemic processes and practices rather than products and artefacts. The interdisciplinary methodology draws on the history of science, interdisciplinary studies and polymathy studies. The project examines dynamism of premodern Islamic epistemic cultures through the lens of polymathy and interdisciplinarity.

The PI is supported by an interdisciplinary team of researchers covering, together, the intersections between philology, theology, exegesis, law, medicine, logic, algebra, and geometry in premodern Islamic epistemic cultures. Know will make significant contributions to interdisciplinarity and polymathy studies, as well as the emergent field of the history of knowledge.

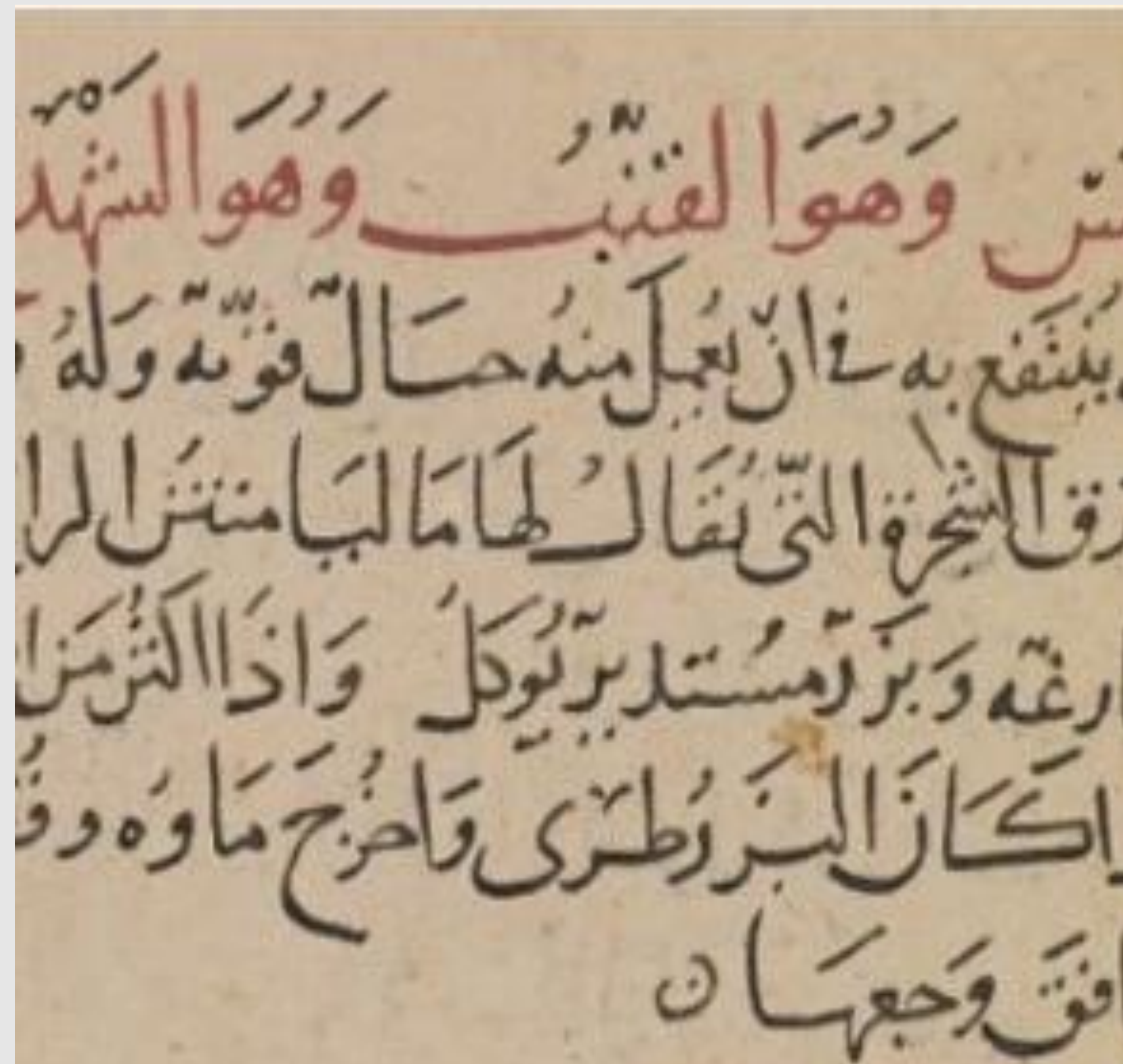
Research Questions

How do post-formative disciplinary interaction and integration indicate intellectual vibrancy?

How did madrasa education and hospital culture create a space of interdisciplinary learning and research?

How did the interaction between disciplines create a common scholarly language?

Intoxication, languor or corruption?



Case Study: Intoxication

The Qur'ān forbids wine (*khamr*) but does not mention other substances. Legal scholars discussed the grounds (*'illa*) on which wine is forbidden (intoxication, *iskāh*) and transferred it to other intoxicating substances through analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). Besides legal science, knowledge from botany, medicine and linguistics was combined to argue for or against the permissibility of hashish and tobacco, among other intoxicants.

Source Analysis

Intoxication in philology:

Terminological dictionaries such as the 18th-century *Kashshāf al-funūn* provide a definition of intoxication and summarise the issue.

Intoxication in legal sources:

The definition of the state of "drunkenness" has featured in the earliest Islamic legal sources since the classical period. However, the spread of hashish in urban centers like Cairo in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries prompted the development of novel utilizations of casuistry that synthesized medical, logical, and legal arguments to tackle the definition of intoxication and corruption (Like al-Qarāfī's thirteenth-century work *al-Furūq*).

Intoxication in pharmacological and botanical sources:

Botanical and pharmacological descriptions of the cannabis plant were integral in the legal debates on defining intoxication and its legal consequences.

Encyclopaedic works such as Ibn al-Bayṭār's thirteenth-century *Kitāb al-Jāmi'* were referenced, along with the Arabic translations of earlier Greek works such as Dioscorides' first-century *De materia medica*.

