

Nabati poetry

Before you read

A) Work in groups and discuss the following question:

What do you know about Nabati poetry?

[a/w – a photo of someone standing up and reciting poetry]

B) Now read the text and check your ideas.

Nabati poetry has been part of life on the Arabian Peninsula since the 16th century and, in the past, served as a way of recording historical events. Nabati poetry is often known as 'the people's poetry' and 'Bedouin poetry.' It is regarded as the richest form of popular literature and can be seen to reflect the reality of everyday life. One of the attractions of Nabati poetry is its unique place in the culture and heritage of the Arabian Peninsula. The recitation of Nabati verse is a mark of people's respect for this heritage.

There are several theories about where the name Nabati poetry came from. One suggestion is that this style of poetry originated in a place near Medina called Nabat. Another theory is that when Arabs first began to meet other cultures and nationalities people started speaking a slightly different form of Arabic, and people who spoke this style were said to be speaking 'Nabati,' meaning 'foreign.'

A more popular theory is that Nabati poetry came from an ancient Arabic tribe called the Nabateans, who, between 200 BCE and 600 CE, founded a vast empire with Petra, in modern-day Jordan, as its capital.

However, the most likely theory is that the term 'Nabati' comes from the Arabic word 'nabat,' meaning 'to derive from' or 'to obtain the sense of one word from another word.' When the Arabian nomadic tribes moved from their native lands, their language also changed. It changed from classical Arabic to become a tribal dialect. Naturally, their poetry adopted this changed dialect and today it is known as Nabati poetry.

Nabati poets weave beautiful poems that are characterised by description and narrative and can contain proverbs and riddles. Their subject matter includes chivalry, eulogy, pride, advice and wisdom. Probably the most famous current Nabati poet is Sheikh Mohammed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.

Reading comprehension

Skim each paragraph and decide whether these sentences are true (T), false (F) or not given (NG).

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|--|------------|
| 1) Nabati poetry is a very recent form of poetry. | T / F / NG |
| 2) Some people refer to Nabati poetry as 'Bedouin poetry.' | T / F / NG |
| 3) The main theme of Nabati poems is respect. | T / F / NG |
| 4) It is clear where the term 'Nabati poetry' originated. | T / F / NG |

- 5) One meaning of the word 'Nabati' is 'foreign.' T / F / NG
- 6) The Nabateans were an ancient Arabic tribe who lived in what is now modern-day Jordan. T / F / NG
- 7) One topic of some Nabati poems is the way Arabic has changed over the centuries. T / F / NG
- 8) Many Nabati poems include proverbs. T / F / NG
- 9) Sheikh Mohammed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, likes reading Nabati poetry. T / F / NG

Vocabulary

Choose the correct word (A, B or C) for each definition.

- 1) The art, buildings, traditions and beliefs that are an important part of a society's history and identity.
A) ancient B) dialect C) heritage
- 2) The act of saying a poem or story that you have learned to an audience.
A) dialect B) recitation C) verse
- 3) Very old, or relating to a period of history a long time ago.
A) ancient B) heritage C) nomadic
- 4) To create something by twisting things together.
A) dialect B) verse C) weave
- 5) An idea that explains how or why something happened that people believe is true.
A) heritage B) nomadic C) theory
- 6) A group of words that form the section or part of a poem.
A) dialect B) recitation C) verse
- 7) Very big.
A) nomadic B) vast C) verse
- 8) A way of speaking a language that is only used in a particular area or by a particular group of people.
A) dialect B) recitation C) verse
- 9) To move from place to place and not live in one place for a long time.
A) ancient B) nomadic C) weave

Grammar

Are these sentences correct or incorrect? You may find it useful to read the sentence aloud to discover where the mistake is if there is one.

Correct the sentences that are wrong and write out the sentence correctly. An example has been done for you.

0) This kind of poetry often called 'the people's poetry.'

Incorrect – This kind of poetry is often called 'the people's poetry.'

1) It is regard as an important part of Arabian literary tradition.

2) Nabati poetry can be seen as a way of showing respect to our heritage.

3) Nabati poetry is know for its use of riddles and proverbs.

4) People whose Arabic changed because of interacting with foreigners were said to be speaking Nabati.

5) Often these poems characterized by beautiful descriptions and stories.

6) The exact origins of Nabati poetry are not known, but there are a number of different theories.

Critical thinking

In the text the possible origins of the word Nabati are discussed. A number of possibilities are put forward, including:

- The poetry originally came from the town of Nabat near Medina.
- When Arabs first started meeting people from other cultures they changed the way they spoke Arabic and spoke like a foreigner.
- The poetry originally came from the Nabateans, an ancient Arabic tribe.
- The word comes from 'nabat,' meaning 'to derive from' or 'to obtain the sense of one word from another word.'

In groups discuss the following questions:

- 1) Why do you think the origins of the word 'Nabati' is not clear?
- 2) Which of these theories do you think might be true? Explain your ideas.

Writing

- 1) What is your opinion of poetry? Do you like it? Why or why not?
- 2) Are all poems the same length?
- 3) Do you know the names of different types of poems?
- 4) Is there a particular kind of poetry you like?

Write a short text giving your answers to these questions.

Extension

Carry out some research and try to find a few examples of Nabati poetry. Recite one of the poems, paying particular attention to the pronunciation, intonation and rhythm of the poem. In groups, have a discussion about your opinion of the poems you recited.