

Cultural And Literary Perspectives Of Selected Divan Poems During The Ottoman Empire Era

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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji makna budaya dan sastra dari puisi-puisi Divan pilihan pada masa Kekaisaran Ottoman dengan menganalisis struktur formal, fungsi sosial, dan dimensi mistiknya. Berada dalam tradisi sastra Islam awal yang lebih luas, puisi Divan Ottoman merupakan sintesis canggih antara unsur Arab, Persia, dan Turki yang terbentuk melalui pertukaran budaya selama berabad-abad. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif berbasis analisis teks secara mendalam, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tiga aspek yang saling terkait: fitur estetika dan teknis bentuk ghazal serta qasida, termasuk sistem metrum 'arūd yang ketat dan metafora konvensional; representasi hierarki sosial, patronase istana, dan legitimasi politik; serta tema-tema tasawuf yang dominan dalam mengartikulasikan kerinduan spiritual dan pembentukan identitas keagamaan Ottoman yang khas. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa puisi-puisi tersebut tidak dapat direduksi sekadar sebagai hiburan sastra. Sebaliknya, puisi Divan berfungsi sebagai artefak budaya yang kompleks yang sekaligus mencerminkan dan membentuk kecanggihan intelektual, tatanan sosial hierarkis, serta sensitivitas mistik masyarakat istana Ottoman. Dengan mengintegrasikan perspektif formal, sosiologis, dan mistik, studi ini memberikan kontribusi bagi pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang bagaimana puisi berperan sebagai medium negosiasi kekuasaan, identitas, dan spiritualitas dalam sejarah sastra dunia Islam awal.

Kata Kunci: Puisi Divan, Kekaisaran Ottoman, ghazal, tasawuf, patronase

Abstract

This article examines the cultural and literary significance of selected Divan poems from the Ottoman Empire by analysing their formal structures, social functions, and mystical dimensions. Situated within the broader tradition of early Islamic literature, Ottoman Divan poetry represents a sophisticated synthesis of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish elements that emerged through centuries of cultural exchange. Using a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in close textual analysis, the study investigates three interrelated aspects: the aesthetic and technical features of the ghazal and qasida forms, including the rigorous system of 'arūd metre and conventional metaphors; the representation of social hierarchy, court patronage, and political legitimisation; and the pervasive Sufi themes that articulate spiritual longing and the construction of a distinctive Ottoman Islamic identity. The analysis demonstrates that these poems cannot be reduced to mere literary entertainment. Instead, they function as complex cultural artifacts that simultaneously reflect and shape the intellectual sophistication, hierarchical social order, and mystical sensibilities of Ottoman court society. By integrating formal, sociological, and mystical perspectives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how poetry served as a medium for negotiating power, identity, and spirituality within the early modern Islamic world.

Keywords: Divan poetry, Ottoman Empire, ghazal, Sufism, patronage

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INTRODUCTION

The literary tradition known as Divan poetry emerged as one of the most refined expressions of Islamic high culture in the Ottoman Empire, representing a complex synthesis of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish elements forged over several centuries (Gibb, 1900, p. 15). Its origins lie in the poetic practices of the early Islamic world. In the pre-Islamic Arabian context, the *qasida* served as a primary vehicle for tribal praise, elegy, and social commentary. Following the rise of Islam, this form was adapted for religious purposes, as seen in the panegyric poetry of Ḥassān ibn Thābit, who composed verses in defense of the Prophet Muḥammad. During the Abbasid period, Persian cultural and literary influence intensified, giving rise to new genres such as the *ghazal*, which foregrounded themes of love, separation, and mystical longing. These developments were transmitted to Anatolia through the Seljuk Turks and reached their mature form in the Ottoman courts from the fourteenth century onward. Ottoman poets composed in a highly Persianized register of Turkish, employing quantitative metre (*‘arūd*), monorhyme structures, and a conventional yet layered symbolic vocabulary, most famously the rose (*göl*) and nightingale (*bölöl*), that carried both erotic and divine connotations. Court patronage under sultans such as Mehmed II and Süleymān the Magnificent elevated poetry to a central position within elite cultural life, making the *divan* not merely a personal anthology but an institutional product of imperial power and intellectual prestige (Andrews, 1985).

Because this institutionalized prestige was built upon centuries of inherited Islamic traditions, this historical trajectory demonstrates that Divan poetry cannot be understood in isolation from the broader processes of cultural translation and adaptation that characterized Islamic civilization. Arabic provided the foundational prosodic and rhetorical frameworks, Persian supplied the dominant aesthetic models and mystical imagery, and Turkish furnished the linguistic medium through which these traditions were localized and reinterpreted within the multi-ethnic Ottoman polity. The result was a highly codified yet semantically rich poetic language that required extensive *madrassa* training in Arabic grammar, Persian literature, and Islamic theology. Consequently, the study of selected Divan poems offers a privileged window into the intellectual and aesthetic synthesis that defined Ottoman elite identity.

Beyond its formal achievements, Divan poetry merits examination as a cultural artifact that actively recorded and shaped the social and spiritual realities of the Ottoman dynasty. Far from being an autonomous aesthetic domain, these poems participated in the negotiation of power, hierarchy, and religious meaning. As Walter G. Andrews has argued, Ottoman lyric poetry functioned as “society’s song,” articulating the relationships between poets and patrons, the ideals of rulership, and the emotional economy of the court (Andrews, 1985, p. 3). The *ghazal*’s conventional lover-beloved dynamic frequently mirrored the hierarchical bond between subject and sultan, while *qasidas* composed for imperial occasions served to legitimize dynastic authority through hyperbolic praise that linked the ruler to Islamic ideals of justice and cosmic order. At the same time, the pervasive Sufi imagery, particularly the rose and nightingale motif, encoded spiritual aspirations and the tension between worldly attachment and divine union, reflecting the deep integration of mystical thought into Ottoman cultural life. Victoria Holbrook’s analysis of the “unreadable shores of love” further underscores how these texts resisted straightforward interpretation precisely because they operated simultaneously on profane and mystical registers, thereby preserving a distinctive Ottoman Islamic sensibility that blended Persianate mysticism with local Anatolian and Turkic elements (Holbrook, 1994).

The significance of approaching Divan poetry through this dual lens, literary structure and cultural record, lies in its capacity to reveal how aesthetic form itself became a vehicle for ideological and social expression. Previous scholarship has established the formal conventions of the tradition with precision; what remains necessary is a sustained argument that connects these conventions directly to

the lived realities of the Ottoman court and the spiritual landscape of early modern Islamic society. By treating the poems not as transparent reflections of historical events but as active participants in the construction of meaning, this study contributes to a thicker understanding of how literature mediated between individual creativity and collective identity in the Ottoman context.

This article therefore advances the argument that a critical dissection of the literary structures and embedded cultural values in selected Divan poems, focusing on representative ghazals and qasidas, illuminates the ways in which these works simultaneously achieved aesthetic sophistication and functioned as documents of social hierarchy, political legitimization, and mystical experience. Such an approach moves beyond purely formalist description to demonstrate that the very constraints of metre, rhyme, and metaphor were instrumental in articulating the complexities of Ottoman Islamic culture.

To achieve this objective, the present study adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology centered on close textual analysis. Selected poems are examined through careful attention to their formal features (metre, rhyme patterns, and figurative language) in conjunction with their thematic content and historical-cultural positioning. This method allows for an interpretive reading that remains grounded in the texts while situating them within the broader scholarly conversations on Ottoman literary and cultural history.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design grounded in critical textual analysis. The approach is particularly suited to literary and cultural inquiry because it allows for in-depth interpretation of poetic texts while situating them within their historical, social, and religious contexts (Moleong, 2018). Rather than seeking to quantify linguistic features or test hypotheses, the research aims to generate nuanced understanding of how selected Divan poems function simultaneously as aesthetic objects, social documents, and vehicles of spiritual meaning.

The primary data consist of representative ghazals and qasidas drawn from the works of major Ottoman poets, including Fuzûlî, Bâkî, and Şeyh Gâlib. These poems were selected on the basis of their canonical status, thematic richness, and capacity to illustrate the three core dimensions under investigation: formal and aesthetic structure, representations of social hierarchy and court patronage, and Sufi mystical elements. The analysis relies on established scholarly English translations, particularly those compiled in *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology* (Andrews, Black, & Kalpaklı, 2006), while cross-referencing key terms and imagery with the original Ottoman Turkish where necessary to preserve semantic nuance.

Data analysis proceeds through a multi-layered process of close reading. Each poem is first examined at the formal level, focusing on metre (*‘arûd*), rhyme patterns, *radîf*, and conventional metaphors (*mazmûn*). The texts are then read against their socio-historical context to identify representations of court life, patron–client relationships, and political legitimisation. Finally, the poems are interpreted through a mystical lens, tracing how Sufi concepts of divine love, separation, and union are encoded within the same imagery. This tripartite analytical framework is applied argumentatively: formal observations are linked to social functions, which are in turn connected to religious and cultural meanings. The interpretive process is iterative and reflexive, allowing patterns identified in one dimension to inform readings in the others.

By combining descriptive textual analysis with critical argumentation, the study seeks to move beyond surface description toward a synthetic understanding of Divan poetry as a complex cultural artifact. This methodological orientation ensures that the aesthetic, social, and spiritual dimensions of the poems are examined not in isolation but as interdependent aspects of Ottoman Islamic literary culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Form, Metre, and Aesthetics: A Literary Perspective of Selected Divan Poems

The formal architecture of Ottoman Divan poetry, particularly the ghazal and qasida, served as a crucible for creativity rather than mere technical ornament. While constrained by the rigorous quantitative metre (‘arūd) and monorhyme schemes (qāfiya) inherited from Arabic and Persian traditions, court poets utilized these strict structures to demonstrate exceptional intellectual virtuosity (Andrews, 1985). The aesthetic brilliance of this era lies precisely in how poets manipulated the original syntax to fit foreign metric templates while embedding layered metaphors (mazmūn).

To understand how this semantic compression operates within structural constraints, it is imperative to analyze the original texts directly rather than solely relying on translations. A foundational illustration of this formal mastery is found in the work of Sultan Süleymān the Magnificent, writing under the pen name Muhibbi. His most celebrated matla (opening couplet) demonstrates profound philosophical depth achieved through structural repetition and exact metre:

Original Text:

Halk içinde muteber bir nesne yok devlet gibi, Olmaya devlet cihanda bir nefes sıhhat gibi.

Translation:

"There is no esteemed object among the people like the state [devlet], There is no state in the world like a breath of health." (Andrews, 1985, p. 68).

By examining the original text, the aesthetic impact becomes immediately apparent. Muhibbi relies heavily on the radīf (the repeated refrain following the rhyme) with the word "gibi" (like/as) anchoring the end of both lines. Furthermore, the aesthetic impact pivots on the dual meaning of the word devlet, which signifies both political empire and personal fortune. The repetition of the word creates a structural chiasmus that balances the temporal authority of the sultan against the universal vulnerability of the human condition. From a literary perspective, the declarative simplicity of the original Turkish phrasing contrasts sharply with the ornate, Persianized vocabulary typical of the era, proving that strict poetic form could serve as a vehicle for timeless reflection.

Central to the technical and intellectual demands of both forms is the system of ‘arūd, the quantitative metre inherited from Arabic prosody and adapted, via Persian intermediaries, into Ottoman Turkish. Unlike the stress-based metres of many European traditions, ‘arūd organises lines according to patterns of long and short syllables, generating a repertoire of feet (tafīla) such as fa‘ilātun fa‘ilātun fa‘ilun or mafā‘ilun mafā‘ilun fa‘ūlun. Ottoman poets were required to fit the phonetic realities of Turkish vocabulary, often heavily Arabised and Persianised, into these foreign rhythmic templates, frequently necessitating artificial word order, morphological adjustments, or the strategic deployment of Arabic and Persian loanwords. Mastery of ‘arūd therefore presupposed extensive training in the Islamic sciences of grammar, rhetoric, and prosody, typically acquired through madrasa education. This technical proficiency constituted visible proof of the poet’s membership in the learned elite. The very difficulty of composing fluent and semantically rich verse under such constraints elevated Divan poetry from mere courtly entertainment to a sophisticated performance of intellectual and cultural authority. As E. J. W. Gibb notes in his foundational survey, the Ottoman poet’s command of ‘arūd represented “the highest test of literary skill” within a tradition that prized erudition as highly as inspiration (Gibb, 1900, Vol. I, p. 78).

Equally central to the aesthetic economy of Divan poetry is the deployment of conventional metaphors, or mazmūn, whose surface romanticism consistently yields deeper Sufistic or philosophical resonances. The most ubiquitous of these is the pair gül ve bülbül, the rose and the nightingale. On the literal plane, the rose embodies the beloved’s beauty and cruelty, while the nightingale figures the suffering lover whose song is both lament and tribute. Yet the same imagery simultaneously encodes the Sufi quest: the rose becomes the Divine Beauty or the Prophet, the nightingale the yearning soul or

the perfect lover (*‘āshiq*) consumed by separation (*hijr*) and seeking union (*wiṣāl*). Parallel dualities appear in the imagery of wine (*mey*), which signifies both worldly intoxication and the ecstatic annihilation (*fanā’*) of the mystic, and in the figure of the cruel or indifferent beloved, who may represent either an earthly tyrant or the transcendent God whose apparent aloofness tests and purifies the seeker. These layered *mazmūn* are not decorative clichés but semantic engines that permit the poem to operate simultaneously on erotic, ethical, and mystical registers. Victoria Holbrook has demonstrated that this polysemy renders much Divan poetry deliberately “unreadable” on any single level, thereby preserving the tradition’s capacity to speak to both courtly and dervish audiences (Holbrook, 1994, pp. 112–115).

To demonstrate the semantic compression demanded by these structural constraints, one must examine the specific application of metre and metaphor across different poetic voices. A foundational illustration appears in the work of the sixteenth-century master Fuzûlî (d. 1556), whose verse exemplifies the fusion of formal discipline and aesthetic depth. Consider the following couplet from one of his most celebrated ghazals:

"The nightingale weeps blood upon the rose's thorns, My heart burns in the fire of separation from your face." (Andrews, Black, & Kalpaklı, 2006, p. 142)

In this couplet, the ghazal's rigid monorhyme and structural brevity frame the conventional rose-nightingale (*gül ve bülbül*) *mazmūn*. However, the aesthetic achievement lies in the phonetic harmony and the multi-layered emotional intensity. The "blood" wept by the nightingale and the "fire" consuming the heart operate simultaneously on multiple planes: they describe the visceral pain of unrequited human romance while simultaneously evoking the purifying suffering inherent in the mystic's path. The strict *‘arūd* metre dictates the rhythm of the lament, turning a chaotic emotional state into a perfectly measured aesthetic performance. Such compression of meaning within the tightest formal constraints constitutes the distinctive hallmark of Fuzûlî's literary architecture.

The intellectual rigor of Divan prosody is further exemplified by the deployment of the *radîf* (the repeated word or phrase following the rhyme). The *radîf* anchors the poem phonetically and thematically, forcing the poet to continually return to a central motif without succumbing to redundancy. This is masterfully executed by Bâkî (d. 1600), famously known as the "Sultan of Poets" (*Sultânü’ş-şuarâ*). In his panegyric ghazals, the aesthetic beauty is heavily reliant on the structural interplay between the rhyme and the *radîf*:

"The morning breeze bows down before the cypress of your stature, The rose tears its collar in envy of your blooming cheek." (Gibb, 1900, p. 165).

Here, Bâkî utilizes the classical *failātun failātun failātun failun* metre. The aesthetic brilliance of this couplet stems from its personification of nature (the breeze and the rose) submitting to the idealized beauty of the beloved. From a formal perspective, Bâkî's ability to fit Turkish syntax into the rigid Persianate metrical foot without sounding artificial demonstrates the peak of Ottoman linguistic engineering. The couplet does not merely describe beauty; it enacts it through symmetrical phrasing and perfectly balanced internal rhythms, proving that the constraints of the form were precisely what generated its aesthetic power.

Furthermore, the formal constraints of Divan poetry were utilized to deliver profound philosophical axioms masked as simple lyrical observations. Sultan Süleymân the Magnificent, writing under the pen name Muhibbi, produced one of the most structurally perfect and culturally enduring couplets in the Ottoman corpus, relying heavily on internal structural repetition:

"There is no esteemed object among the people like the state [*devlet*], There is no state in the world like a breath of health." (Andrews, 1985, p. 68).

This couplet, functioning as the opening (*matla*) of a ghazal, pivots on the dual meaning of the word *devlet*, which signifies both political power/empire and personal fortune. The repetition of the

word creates a structural chiasmus that balances the temporal authority of the sultan against the universal vulnerability of the human condition. From a literary perspective, the aesthetic impact of Muhibbi's verse relies on its declarative simplicity, which contrasts sharply with the ornate, Persianized vocabulary typical of the era. The metre supports the didactic tone, transforming a strict poetic form into a vehicle for timeless philosophical reflection.

In sum, the interplay of ghazal forms, the exacting requirements of *'arūd*, and the polysemous *mazmūn* did not merely decorate Ottoman court poetry; they constituted its intellectual and cultural substance. By submitting to these inherited structures, poets such as Fuzûlî, Bâkî, and Muhibbi transformed apparent limitation into a demonstration of mastery. The three poems analyzed above reveal that the rigid architecture of Divan literature was not an impediment to creativity, but rather the essential framework that allowed Ottoman aesthetic philosophy to reach its zenith.

Social Hierarchy and Court Life in Ottoman Literary Representations

Ottoman Divan poetry did not exist in an aesthetic vacuum; it was deeply embedded in the hierarchical structures and patronage networks of the imperial court. The selected poems analysed in this study demonstrate how literary form and content actively participated in the construction and reinforcement of social order. Rather than serving as passive reflections of court life, ghazals and qasidas functioned as instruments through which poets negotiated their position within the bureaucracy, expressed loyalty to the sultan, and contributed to the ideological legitimisation of dynastic power. This section argues that the representation of hierarchy and patronage in Divan poetry reveals the extent to which literary production was inseparable from the political and social economy of the Ottoman state.

The sultan appears in these poems not merely as a political sovereign but as the apex of a cosmic and social hierarchy. In qasidas composed for imperial occasions, rulers such as Süleymân the Magnificent are portrayed as the shadow of God on earth, the dispenser of justice, and the embodiment of generosity. This idealised image draws upon established Islamic concepts of kingship while adapting them to the specific needs of Ottoman legitimacy. The poet, by contrast, occupies the position of the humble supplicant whose skill and devotion merit reward. The conventional lover-beloved dynamic of the ghazal frequently maps onto this relationship: the distant, powerful, and occasionally cruel beloved mirrors the sultan, while the suffering lover represents the poet or courtier seeking favour. Such metaphorical transference was not accidental; it naturalised hierarchy as an aesthetic and emotional necessity. As Walter G. Andrews has demonstrated, Ottoman lyric poetry operated as "society's song," encoding the asymmetrical bonds between patron and client that structured elite life (Andrews, 1985, p. 112).

The system of literary patronage further illustrates this intertwining of aesthetics and power. Poets frequently dedicated entire *divans* or individual qasidas to the sultan, grand viziers, or high-ranking officials in the hope of securing appointments, stipends, or land grants within the Ottoman bureaucracy. Bâkî, for example, rose through the ranks of the *ulema* partly through the excellence of his panegyric verse. The act of dedication itself constituted a public performance of loyalty that reinforced the patron's authority while advancing the poet's career. In this context, poetic composition became a form of cultural capital convertible into social and economic advancement. The rigidity of Divan forms, monorhyme, *radîf*, and *'arūd*, added to the value of this capital: only those with extensive madrasa training could produce verse worthy of imperial attention. Thus, mastery of the tradition simultaneously demonstrated intellectual merit and signalled acceptance of the existing social order.

Beyond individual career advancement, Divan poetry served as a broader instrument of political legitimisation. Qasidas celebrating military victories or imperial accessions linked the sultan's temporal power to divine sanction and Islamic ideals of justice. By embedding these claims within highly sophisticated poetic structures, poets transformed political propaganda into enduring cultural artefacts. The aesthetic excellence of the verse lent credibility to the ideological content; a poorly crafted

panegyric would have failed both aesthetically and politically. In this sense, the formal constraints discussed in the previous section were not merely technical but ideological: they compelled poets to work within a tradition that already privileged hierarchy, order, and loyalty. The resulting texts therefore functioned simultaneously as displays of literary virtuosity and affirmations of the legitimacy of Ottoman rule.

The sociological dimension of this literary practice finds illuminating parallels in recent Indonesian scholarship on Ottoman-era Turkish poetry. Rahmawati and Sakinah (2022), employing a sociological approach to literature, analyses how the ideology of the author in the poetry of Pir Sultan Abdal encodes the social and political conditions of the Ottoman period. Although Pir Sultan Abdal's work belongs primarily to the *âşık* tradition, their demonstration that poetic texts actively mediate between individual agency and structural power relations applies with equal force to the courtly Divan productions. Both traditions reveal poetry as a site where social hierarchy is not only represented but actively negotiated and reproduced. The framework developed by Rahmawati and Sakinah thus supports the argument that Divan poetry, far from being detached courtly entertainment, constituted a sophisticated medium for expressing and reinforcing cultural loyalty to the Ottoman Islamic order.

This loyalty was expressed not only through explicit praise but also through the poets' participation in a shared Persianate-Islamic cultural idiom. By composing in a language saturated with Arabic and Persian vocabulary and forms, Ottoman poets affirmed their membership in a transregional elite culture whose prestige bolstered the empire's claim to be the pre-eminent Islamic power. The very act of writing Divan poetry therefore performed a dual function: it secured personal advancement within the bureaucratic hierarchy while contributing to the collective representation of Ottoman sovereignty as culturally and spiritually legitimate.

In conclusion, the selected Divan poems analysed here reveal social hierarchy and court life not as background context but as constitutive elements of the poetic enterprise itself. Through the idealisation of the sultan, the mechanics of patronage, and the aesthetic encoding of loyalty, these works operated as both mirrors and instruments of power. The sociological insights offered by Indonesian scholarship on Ottoman literary ideology confirm that such dynamics were integral to the broader cultural production of the period. Far from being ornamental, the representation of hierarchy in Divan poetry was central to the maintenance of the Ottoman political and cultural order.

Religious and Mystical Dimensions: Cultural Identity of Early Islamic World

The religious and mystical dimensions of Ottoman Divan poetry constitute one of the most profound expressions of cultural identity in the early modern Islamic world. Far from being a peripheral ornament, Sufi thought permeated the tradition at every level, transforming conventional poetic imagery into vehicles for spiritual aspiration while simultaneously forging a distinctive Ottoman synthesis of Persianate high culture, Islamic orthodoxy, and local Turkish sensibilities. This section argues that the intense presence of *tasawuf* in selected Divan poems did not merely reflect existing religious attitudes but actively participated in the construction of a hybrid cultural identity that was at once cosmopolitan, deeply mystical, and rooted in the Anatolian context of the Ottoman Empire.

Sufi themes and imagery dominate the semantic field of Divan poetry. The central metaphor of the rose (*gül*) and nightingale (*bülbül*), already discussed in its formal and social dimensions, acquires its richest significance within a mystical framework. On one level, the nightingale's ceaseless song to the rose represents the lover's torment and devotion; on a deeper plane, it enacts the Sufi quest for divine beauty and the pain of separation from the Divine Beloved. The rose becomes a symbol of God's *jamāl* (beauty), while its thorns signify the trials of the path (*ṭarīqa*) and the demands of *sharī'a*. Wine (*mey*), another recurrent *mazmūn*, shifts from literal intoxication to the ecstatic state of *fanā'* (annihilation of the self in God) and the wine of divine love served by the *sāqī* (cupbearer), often identified with the

spiritual guide or the Prophet himself. These layered meanings allowed the same couplet to speak simultaneously to the courtly audience and to initiate the Sufi path. As Annemarie Schimmel has shown in her magisterial study of Islamic mysticism, such polysemy is characteristic of Persianate Sufi poetry and reached its Ottoman culmination in works that balanced erotic suggestion with rigorous spiritual discipline (Schimmel, 1975, pp. 287–310).

The integration of Sufism into Divan poetry was institutional as well as thematic. Many prominent poets belonged to or were deeply influenced by major *ṭarīqas*, most notably the Mevlevī order founded by the followers of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. Şeyh Gālib (1757–1799), whose *Hüsni ü Aşk* remains one of the masterpieces of the tradition, was himself a Mevlevī sheikh. His verse exemplifies the fusion of sophisticated Divan form with explicit mystical doctrine, transforming the conventional ghazal into a narrative of the soul's journey toward union with the Divine. Even poets not formally affiliated with a order, such as Fuzûlî and Bâkî, employed Sufi vocabulary and concepts so extensively that their works cannot be fully understood without reference to the mystical tradition. This pervasive presence indicates that tasawuf was not an esoteric addendum, but a constitutive element of the cultural grammar shared by the Ottoman learned elite.

Equally significant is the way this Sufi sensibility merged with local Turkish and Anatolian elements to produce a distinctive religious identity. While the formal and imagistic repertoire remained heavily indebted to Persian models, the emotional tone and occasional lexical choices in later Divan poetry reflect a more direct, sometimes more passionate engagement with the divine that scholars have associated with the popular mystical currents of Anatolia. The synthesis of high Persianate Sufism with the more vernacular, emotionally immediate expressions found in Turkish folk and *âşık* traditions created a cultural space in which orthodox Sunni identity coexisted with intense mystical devotion. This hybridity allowed Ottoman poetry to serve both the centralising, legalistic tendencies of the state and the decentralised, experiential piety of the dervish lodges. The result was a religious-cultural identity that was recognisably Islamic yet unmistakably Ottoman: cosmopolitan in its literary language, mystical in its dominant emotional register, and adaptive in its capacity to absorb local spiritual sensibilities without surrendering to heterodoxy.

Indonesian scholarship on early Islamic literary production offers foundational support for understanding this synthesis. As Hanifah and Sakinah (2025) demonstrate in their cultural analysis of the Rashidun Caliphate era, early Islamic poets such as Al-Khansa and Hassan ibn Thabit utilized poetry not merely as aesthetic expression, but as an ideological archive to mediate the cultural transition from pre-Islamic tribal norms to Islamic spiritual values. Hanifah and Sakinah emphasize that Hassan ibn Thabit actively repurposed classical poetic structures, such as *qafiyah* (rhyme) and *wazan* (metre), to construct a counter-narrative against Jahiliyyah values, effectively transforming literature into an instrument of religious truth and cultural Islamicization. This early dynamic provides a crucial *longue-durée* perspective for understanding the Ottoman context. The Divan tradition appears as a later, highly sophisticated continuation of this exact same process. Just as the earliest Islamic poets synthesized older cultural forms with new spiritual paradigms to build a collective identity, Ottoman poets absorbed rigorous Persianate structures and Sufi mysticism to articulate their own distinctive imperial Islamic identity. The religious and mystical dimensions of Divan poetry thus completed the portrait of Ottoman cultural achievement sketched in the preceding sections. The formal mastery analysed in Sub-bab A and the social functions examined in Sub-bab B acquired their fullest meaning when read through the lens of tasawuf. The same couplet that displayed technical virtuosity and reinforced courtly hierarchy simultaneously articulated the soul's longing for the Divine. In this tripartite integration of aesthetic sophistication, social utility, and spiritual depth, Ottoman Divan poetry articulated a uniquely Ottoman Islamic cultural identity, one that remained firmly within the broader continuum of the early Islamic world while developing its own distinctive voice.

CONCLUSION

The examination of selected Divan poems in this study reveals that Ottoman court poetry functioned as a complex and multi-dimensional cultural artifact rather than a body of texts intended solely for aesthetic pleasure or linguistic display. Through close analysis of form, metre, and conventional imagery, the first section demonstrated how the strict conventions of the ghazal and qasida, together with the demanding system of 'arūd, served as both constraints and creative challenges that attested to the high intellectual culture of the Ottoman elite. These formal features were not ends in themselves but mechanisms through which poets could achieve semantic density and performative virtuosity within a shared transregional Islamic literary tradition.

The second section showed that the same poems actively participated in the social and political economy of the court. Representations of the sultan as ideal ruler and generous patron, the metaphorical mapping of lover-beloved dynamics onto hierarchical relationships, and the practice of literary patronage collectively illustrate how Divan poetry operated as an instrument of political legitimisation and cultural loyalty. Far from being detached from power, these works reinforced the existing social order while providing poets with a recognised avenue for advancement within the Ottoman bureaucracy.

The third section established that Sufi thought constituted the deepest semantic layer of the tradition. The persistent use of mystical mazmūn, particularly the rose and nightingale as symbols of divine love and the quest for union, together with the institutional influence of orders such as the Mevleviyye, transformed conventional poetic language into a vehicle for spiritual aspiration. At the same time, the blending of Persianate Sufi models with local Turkish and Anatolian sensibilities produced a distinctive Ottoman Islamic cultural identity that was at once cosmopolitan, orthodox in its political orientation, and experientially mystical in its emotional register.

Taken together, these three interconnected dimensions confirm that the selected Divan poems cannot be reduced to mere entertainment or ornamental courtly art. They constitute eloquent records of the social hierarchies, political ideologies, and spiritual aspirations that defined the Ottoman Empire within the longer history of Islamic literary culture. By synthesising formal analysis with sociological and mystical perspectives, this study sought to demonstrate that Divan poetry was simultaneously a product of its historical moment and an active participant in the construction of Ottoman cultural identity. In this respect, the poems examined here stand as significant contributions to the broader constellation of early Islamic world literature, offering enduring insight into the ways in which aesthetic form, social structure, and religious experience could be unified within a single literary tradition.

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