

Arab Poets' Panegyric Odes to Ottoman Sovereigns

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the rich tradition of panegyric odes composed by Arab poets in honor of Ottoman sovereigns, highlighting the historical, cultural, and political context that gave rise to this distinctive form of literary expression. The paper seeks to explore the reciprocal relationship between Arab poets and the Ottoman Empire, shedding light on how these poets paid tribute to the imperial majesty, conveyed the sultans' might, and helped to legitimize their rule. By focusing on a diverse range of panegyric odes from the later periods of the Ottoman Empire, the research encompasses the evolving dynamics of power, patronage, and poetic expression that underpinned this unique interaction between Arab poets and the Ottoman court. The primary purpose of the study is to offer a comprehensive analysis of the thematic and stylistic features of these panegyric odes, elucidating the creative strategies employed by Arab poets to extol the virtues of the Ottoman sultans and to articulate their own political, social, and religious allegiances. The paper utilizes historical, literary, and textual analysis, to examine panegyric poetry's role in fostering cultural exchange and diplomatic communication between the Arab and Ottoman worlds, and its function in bolstering imperial ideology and projecting the Ottoman state's image. This paper further delves into the critical intersections of politics, religion, and artistic expression within these odes, illuminating how the poets navigated these spheres to construct a nuanced portrait of Ottoman rule. By interpreting the subtexts, allegories, and metaphors employed within these poems, the research uncovers the profound philosophical, spiritual, and cultural paradigms that underscored the political landscapes of the time. Through this lens, the panegyric odes emerge as invaluable literary artifacts that bear testimony to the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire and the intricate socio-political relationships that existed between the Arab poets and the Ottoman court.

Keywords

Arabic Language and Literature, Arabic Poetry, Panegyric, Ottoman Empire, Ottoman Sovereigns

Highlights

- The study contends that panegyric odes by Arab poets were key in enhancing cultural and political ties between the Arab and Ottoman worlds.
- The study offers an in-depth analysis of the rich tradition of panegyric odes dedicated to Ottoman sultans by Arab poets.
- The research demonstrates how these panegyric odes played a significant role in conveying the might of the Ottoman sultans and legitimizing their rule.

- It provides a comprehensive exploration of the evolving dynamics of power, patronage, and poetic expression between Arab poets and the Ottoman court.
- The paper elucidates the poets' praise of Ottoman sultans and their articulation of personal allegiances in their works.

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Arap Şairlerin Osmanlı Hükümdarlarına Övgü Şiirleri

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Öz

Bu çalışma, Arap şairler tarafından Osmanlı hükümdarları onuruna yazılan zengin kaside geleneğini incelemeyi ve bu kendine özgü edebî ifade biçimini ortaya çıkaran tarihsel, kültürel ve siyasî bağlamı vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale, Arap şairler ile Osmanlı İmparatorluğu arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkiyi keşfetmeyi amaçlamakta ve bu şairlerin imparatorluğun ihtişamına saygı gösterme, sultanların kudretini betimleme ve yönetimlerini meşrulaştırmaya yardımcı olma yollarına ışık tutmaktadır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son dönemlerine ait çeşitli kasidelerle odaklanan araştırma, Arap şairler ile Osmanlı sarayı arasındaki etkileşimin temelini oluşturan güç, himaye ve şiirsel ifadenin değişen dinamiklerini kapsamaktadır. Çalışmanın temel amacı, Arap şairlerin Osmanlı sultanlarının erdemlerini yüceltmek ve kendi siyasî, sosyal ve dinî bağlılıklarını ifade etmek için kullandıkları stratejileri aydınlatarak, bu methiyelerin tematik ve üslup özelliklerinin kapsamlı bir analizini sunmaktır. Tarihsel, edebî ve metinsel analizlerden faydalanan makale, methiye şiirinin Arap ve Osmanlı dünyası arasındaki kültürel alışverişi ve diplomatik iletişimi teşvik etmedeki rolünü ve imparatorluk tasavvurunu destekleme ve Osmanlı devletinin imajını yansıtırma işlevini incelemektedir. Bu makale ayrıca bahse konu olan kasidelerde siyaset, din ve sanatsal ifadenin kritik kesişim noktalarını inceleyerek şairlerin Osmanlı yönetiminin incelikli bir portresini oluşturmak için bu alanlarda nasıl hareket ettiklerini aydınlatmaktadır. Yapılan araştırma, bu şiirlerde kullanılan alt metinleri, alegorileri ve metaforları yorumlayarak, dönemin siyasî manzarasını gözler önüne seren derin felsefi, manevi ve kültürel paradigmaları ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Bu çerçevede mezkûr kasideler, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ihtişamına ve Arap şairler ile Osmanlı sarayı arasında var olan girift sosyo-politik ilişkilere tanıklık eden kıymetli edebî eserler olarak tezahür etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Arap Dili ve Edebiyatı, Arap Şiiri, Methiye, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Osmanlı Hükümdarları

Öne Çıkanlar

- Çalışma, Arap şairlerin methiyelerinin Arap ve Osmanlı dünyaları arasındaki kültürel ve siyasî bağları güçlendirmede kilit rol oynadığını öne sürmektedir.
- Bu çalışma, Arap şairler tarafından Osmanlı sultanlarına ithaf edilen zengin kaside geleneğinin derinlemesine bir analizini sunmaktadır.
- Araştırma, bu kasidelerin Osmanlı sultanlarının kudretini aktarmada ve yönetimlerini meşrulaştırmada nasıl önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir.
- Arap şairler ile Osmanlı sarayı arasında gelişen güç, himaye ve şiirsel ifade dinamiklerinin kapsamlı bir incelemesi sunulmaktadır.
- Bu makale, şairlerin Osmanlı sultanlarını övmelerini ve eserlerinde kişisel bağlılıklarını ifade etmelerini açıklığa kavuşturmaktadır.

Atıf Bilgisi

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest among scholars in the intricate relationships between the Ottoman Empire and the Arab world, particularly in the realms of literature, politics, and culture. Among the many aspects of this fascinating relationship, the tradition of panegyric odes composed by Arab poets in honor of Ottoman sovereigns holds a unique position. In these poems, the poets extol the virtues of the Ottoman sultans, celebrate their achievements, and pay tribute to their imperial majesty. The present paper, entitled “Glorifying the Crescent: Arab Poets’ Panegyric Odes to Ottoman Sovereigns”, aims to contribute to the existing body of scholarship by offering a comprehensive analysis of this rich and multifaceted literary tradition.

The panegyric odes under examination in this study not only provide a valuable insight into the historical, cultural, and political contexts that gave rise to this distinctive form of literary expression but also serve as a testament to the enduring influence of the Ottoman Empire on the Arab world. These poems, which were composed during the later periods of the empire, reflect the evolving dynamics of power, patronage, and poetic expression that underpinned the unique interaction between Arab poets and the Ottoman court. Through a close reading of a diverse range of panegyric odes, this paper seeks to explore the reciprocal relationship between Arab poets and the Ottoman Empire and to shed light on the ways in which these poets helped to legitimize the rule of the sultans, convey their might, and pay tribute to their imperial majesty.

In order to achieve its objectives, this study employs a combination of historical, literary, and textual analysis. The primary focus of the research is on the thematic and stylistic features of the panegyric odes, elucidating the creative strategies employed by Arab poets to extol the virtues of the Ottoman sultans and to articulate their own political, social, and religious allegiances. Additionally, this paper investigates the role of panegyric poetry as a medium of cultural exchange and diplomatic communication between the Arab and Ottoman worlds, as well as its function as a means of reinforcing the imperial ideology and projecting the image of the Ottoman state.

The significance of this study lies not only in its contribution to the understanding of the cultural and political interactions between the Ottoman Empire and the Arab world but also in the broader implications of its findings for the study of panegyric poetry as a genre. By examining the rich tradition of Arab poets’ panegyric odes to Ottoman sovereigns, this paper not only enriches the existing scholarship on this important subject but also opens up new avenues for future research in the fields of Ottoman studies, Arabic literature, and comparative literary studies.

1. Arab Poets’ Tributes to Ottoman Sultans and Their Underlying Reasons

Throughout history, the Ottomans and Arabs have shared a deep and enduring connection, marked by a mutual exchange of cultural, religious, and social aspects.¹ This

¹ See Muḥammad Ḥarb, *al-Uthmāniyyūn fī al-tārīkh wa al-ḥadāra* (Cairo: Al-Markaz al-Miṣrī li-l-Dirāsāt al-Uthmāniyya wa Buḥūth al-‘Ālam al-Turkī, 1414/1994), 315-320; Mesut Uyar, “Ottoman Arab Officers between Nationalism and Loyalty during the First World War”, *War in History* 20/4 (2013), 526-544; Şükran Fazlıoğlu, *Arap Romanında Türkler* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2015), 77-81.

close relationship has contributed to a rich and diverse shared heritage, as these two groups have lived together, interacted, and influenced each other in various ways. As key players in the complex and vibrant history of the Middle East and its surrounding regions, the Ottomans and Arabs have coexisted for centuries, with their paths often intertwined. This coexistence has naturally led to significant interactions and exchanges between these two culturally and historically rich societies, creating a lasting impact on each other's customs, traditions, and values.

The mutual influence between the Ottomans and Arabs can be observed in numerous aspects of their respective cultures, such as language, literature, arts, architecture, and cuisine.² This blending of cultural elements has resulted in a unique and diverse tapestry that continues to captivate the imagination of scholars and enthusiasts alike. Their shared experiences and interactions have fostered an atmosphere of mutual respect, admiration, and understanding. This has allowed the Ottomans and Arabs to learn from one another, enriching their collective heritage and leaving an indelible mark on the history of the region. The historical coexistence of the Ottomans and Arabs has resulted in a dynamic and intricate relationship that transcends geographic, political, and cultural boundaries. The mutual influence and exchange between these two groups have shaped their identities and contributed to the rich and diverse legacy that continues to inspire generations today.³

Throughout history, Arab poets have demonstrated a deep appreciation and admiration for Ottoman rulers, which has manifested in the form of eulogies and panegyric poetry. These literary works were a means for Arab poets to express their respect, gratitude, and loyalty to the Ottoman sovereigns who played an essential role in the Islamic world and the region. One of the motivations behind Arab poets writing eulogies to Ottoman rulers was the recognition of the Ottoman Empire's significance in the Islamic world. As the caliphs and leaders of the Muslim ummah, the Ottomans not only provided political stability but also upheld the tenets of Islam and ensured its propagation. In writing eulogies, Arab poets sought to acknowledge the contributions of the Ottoman sultans to the Muslim community and celebrate their achievements.

Another motivation for Arab poets to write eulogies in praise of the Ottoman rulers was to express their loyalty and allegiance. The Ottoman Empire had a diverse demographic composition, encompassing various ethnic and religious groups. Arab poets, as part of this multicultural fabric, sought to demonstrate their commitment to the empire and its rulers, emphasizing the unity of the Islamic world under the Ottoman banner. Furthermore, Arab poets were also motivated by the prospect of patronage

² An in-depth analysis of scholarly works that focus on the quotidian experiences within the Arab territories under the Ottoman governance is instrumental in enhancing comprehension regarding the degree of affinity shared between these two cultures. See Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, "An Uneasy Historiography: The Legacy of Ottoman Architecture in the Former Arab Provinces", *Muqarnas* 24 (2007), 27-43; Jane Hathaway - Karl Barbir, *The Arab Lands Under Ottoman Rule 1516-1800* (London - New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 114-186.

³ See Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj, "The Social Uses of the Past: Recent Arab Historiography of Ottoman Rule", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14/2 (1982), 185-201.

and support from the Ottoman court. By composing eulogies that extolled the virtues of the sultans, Arab poets could potentially gain the favor of the Ottoman rulers, leading to material support, social prestige, and enhanced opportunities for their artistic and intellectual pursuits.

In addition to these motivations, Arab poets were inspired by the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the Ottoman Empire. The empire's achievements in the realms of art, architecture, and literature provided ample material for Arab poets to draw upon in their eulogies, showcasing their admiration for the sophistication and refinement of the Ottoman civilization. Arab poets were motivated to write eulogies for Ottoman rulers due to a variety of factors, including the recognition of the empire's importance in the Islamic world, the expression of loyalty and allegiance, the prospect of patronage, and the appreciation for the cultural and artistic achievements of the Ottomans. Through their eulogies, Arab poets played a crucial role in perpetuating the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and fostering a sense of unity and pride among the diverse communities under its rule.

In the sphere of Arabic literature, it is essential to recognize certain poets who admired the Ottoman rulers. One such prominent figure is Aḥmad Shawqī (d. 1940), who is known for composing both politically infused and panegyric poems about the Turks. Shawqī's oeuvre consists of numerous odes, among which twenty-eight of varying lengths are specifically dedicated to Turkey and the Turks. A considerable number of these odes encompass political themes. The encomiastic verses he crafted for the Ottoman sultans are deemed an integral part of his political poetry, primarily because they were dedicated to figures actively engaged in politics. Shawqī's admiration for the Ottoman rulers was based not on their physical attributes but on their political identities and objectives.⁴

Shawqī consistently portrayed Turkey and the Turks in a favorable light throughout his poetry. His support for the caliphate and Muslim identity likely intensified his respect for the Ottoman rulers. The political environment of his time likely played a role in emphasizing this particular aspect of his identity. Shawqī argued that the precarious situation facing Islamic nations, under the threat of invasion from Western powers such as the British occupation of Egypt, necessitated the fortification of the caliphate bond between Islamic countries and Turkey. In his assessment, the Ottoman Empire was the only force capable of resisting the colonial European powers, particularly England. Consequently, in line with numerous other intellectuals such as 'Abdullah Nadīm and Shaykh 'Alī Yūsuf, Shawqī considered rallying under the Ottomans as the most logical course of action to counter the European threat, and he composed his poetry with this mindset as a guiding principle.⁵

Sulaymān Pasha al-Bārūnī (d. 1940), an Arab poet, demonstrated a strong affinity for the Ottoman administration. He rose to prominence in Libya during the time when the Ottoman Empire was experiencing disintegration. al-Bārūnī traveled to Egypt,

⁴ Ahmet Kâzım Ürün, *1868-1932 Mısır'da Türk Bir Şair: Ahmet Şevki* (İstanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2002), 79-81.

⁵ Hüseyin Yazıcı, "Mısırlı Bir Arap Şairi Ahmed Şevki ve Şiirlerinde Sultan II. Abdülhamid", *İlmî Araştırmalar* 4 (1997), 179-192. Ürün, *1868-1932 Mısır'da Türk Bir Şair*, 79-81.

where he founded his own printing press and published a newspaper urging Muslims to rally around the Ottoman State. As Italy began its invasion of Libya, he took on a more active role, engaging in battles on multiple fronts. He was elected as a representative to both the Ottoman Parliament (Majlis-i Mab'ūthān) and the Senate (Majlis-i A'yān). Throughout Turkey's National Struggle, al-Bārūnī championed the cause of unity and solidarity. His poetry reflects his deep yearning for the Ottoman administration, as well as his love for his homeland and the quest for freedom.⁶ For an extended period, al-Bārūnī pursued the establishment of an autonomous Berber-administered entity within the vilayet of Tripolitania. Despite being elected as a representative for the Jebel of Fassatu in 1908, his relationship with Turkey had been tumultuous. al-Bārūnī had been imprisoned three times for asserting that Libya had the right to liberate itself from Ottoman rule and establish an independent republic. He astutely recognized that the Arabo-Turks were unlikely to successfully repel the Italian forces. However, al-Bārūnī also understood that by actively managing the conflict alongside the Turks at a high level, he could potentially leverage the war's conclusion to negotiate with the Italians for the autonomy that he had been unable to obtain from the Sublime Porte.⁷

Aḥmad Dhū al-Fiqār b. 'Umar al-Kāshif (d. 1367/1948), an Egyptian poet of Circasian descent with ancestral connections to the Caucasus, displayed a strong affinity for the Ottoman Empire. His prowess in crafting political poetry was evident in his work. al-Kāshif found himself confronting allegations that he favored a caliphate governed by Arab leaders.⁸ He contended that Islam, an unwavering opponent of racism, did not allocate the caliphate to a particular nation, and he refuted the claims leveled against him. al-Kāshif argued that all individuals who adhered to Islam were equal and that the most qualified person to assume the caliphate was the one who could defend it most effectively. In his odes, he professed that the Ottoman rulers were deserving of the caliphal title and that this status was divinely bestowed upon them.⁹ al-Kāshif aligned himself with Pan-Islamic advocates and declared his loyalty to the Ottoman caliphs. His poetry candidly conveyed his admiration for the Ottoman sultan holding the caliphate position. Additionally, he composed verses critiquing the alliance between the Khedive and the British, advocating for continued allegiance to the Ottoman authorities.¹⁰

Ḥafiz Ibrāhīm (d. 1932), a distinguished poet, is renowned for his panegyrics dedicated to the Ottomans. While engaging with the full range of classical Arabic poetry themes, he excelled beyond his peers in infusing his works with social and political significance. Nonetheless, despite his general accomplishments in classical themes,

⁶ Ahmet Kâzım Ürün, *Modern Arap Edebiyatı* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi Yayınları, 2015), 53-54.

⁷ Angelo Del Boca, *Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya*, trans. Anthony Shugaar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 34.

⁸ Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 2002), 1/124

⁹ Abdelkarim Amin Mohamed Soliman, "Rithā' al-Khilāfa al-'Uthmāniyya fi al-Shi'r al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth", *Bayburt Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 10 (2019), 44.

¹⁰ Mounah A. Khouri, *Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 104.

some argue that he did not succeed in the panegyric genre. This assertion stems from the suggestion that his pursuit of this type of poetry was driven by a desire for employment rather than a reflection of his authentic sentiments. In contrast, when he crafted panegyrics from the heart, they were regarded as genuine masterpieces.¹¹ Within Ḥafız İbrâhîm's poetry, one can discern both patriotic fervor and devotion to Islamic principles. By adopting a stance against racism, he positioned himself as an advocate for the Turks. He lauded the Ottoman caliph, critiqued divisions among Muslims, and expressed congratulations to the community following the constitution's adoption in 1908. Additionally, he extolled the exceptional qualities of 'Abd al-Ḥamid II in his poetry, attributing these traits to the latter's endurance in the face of adversity. His loyalty extended not only to Egypt but also to the caliph, who symbolized Muslim unity, and to the Ottoman State. During his era, poets such as Mustafâ Fahmî (d. 1914) and Nûbar Pasha (d. 1899) criticized the Ottoman State, while poets like Ḥafız İbrâhîm embraced the Turks' caliphate and incorporated this theme into their poetry.¹²

Panegyrics in Arabic literature that serve to glorify the Ottoman dynasty can be regarded as a substantial and enduring tradition. These eulogies, written in honor of various rulers, are the product of a longstanding custom that can be traced back to the pre-Islamic period. The tradition of panegyrics composed for Ottoman sultans has firmly established its roots within this literary practice. As the culmination of this steadfast tradition, these works celebrate rulers from past epochs, irrespective of their Turkic or Arab origins. Yûsuf b. Abî al-Fatḥ al-Suqayfî (d. 1646) adopted the techniques of his forebears who extolled earlier poets while he himself praised Ottoman Sultan 'Uthmân II. In this regard, al-Suqayfî elucidates that once under the protection of the Ottoman sultan, there is no cause for concern regarding potential adversities. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the Ottoman ruler surpasses all other monarchs, making it unnecessary to invoke the names of even the most illustrious historical emperors, such as Alexander the Great, in his presence.¹³

Throughout the reign of the Ottoman sultans, their esteemed position as the caliphs was consistently emphasized. As the protectors of the Muslim faith, these sultans played a critical role in preserving the religious and political unity of the Islamic world. They dispatched envoys to various countries across the Islamic realm, likely with the intent of amplifying their renown as caliphs. Their efforts resonated with thoughtful Muslims, particularly those concerned about the growing influence of European powers on the internal affairs of the Islamic world. The Ottoman Empire was recognized as the sole remaining independent Muslim power with a significant role in the civilized world. This sentiment was also reflected in Arabic poetry, which highlighted the

¹¹ Hüseyin Yazıcı, "Ḥafız İbrâhîm", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1997), 15/91-92.

¹² Ahmet Yıldız, "Ḥafız İbrahim'in Şiirlerinde Türk İmajı", *Türk İslam Medeniyeti Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 13/25 (2018), 200.

¹³ İbrahim Ethem Polat, "Arap Edebiyatı Üzerinden Türk Tarihine Bir Bakış", 38. *Uluslararası Asya ve Kuzey Afrika Çalışmaları Kongresi*, ed. Zeki Dilek et al. (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları, 2009), 329.

caliph's mandate as the ruler of Muslims and the representative of God's Messenger. During the era of the Ottoman sultans, Arabic literature contributed to the portrayal of this critical responsibility. Poetry played a substantial role in emphasizing their religious and political supremacy. In the verses, the dual authorities of the sultan and the caliph were depicted as inseparable twins, emphasizing the unity and importance of their roles in the Islamic world.¹⁴

2. Examining the Thematic Landscape of Arab Poetry Celebrating Ottoman Sovereigns

In the vast corpus of poetic works composed by Arab poets in honor of the Ottoman rulers, a range of specific themes can be observed, reflecting the deep reverence and admiration held towards these eminent figures. In the following discussion, we will examine these recurring themes in greater detail and explore their significance in the context of the cultural, religious, and political landscapes of the time. One salient theme often employed by Arab poets when celebrating the accomplishments and virtues of Ottoman rulers was the exaltation of their genealogical lineage. By accentuating the prestigious ancestry of the sultans and highlighting the illustrious predecessors that graced their familial past, the poets effectively connected the Ottoman rulers to a revered historical legacy. This strategy served not only to elevate the status of the sovereigns but also to anchor their rule in a sense of continuity and tradition, thereby reinforcing their authority and legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects. The prominence of the Ottoman rulers within the broader Islamic world was another recurrent theme in the poetry of this period. Poets sought to emphasize the significance of the sultans within this wider context, both in terms of their political influence and their religious authority. In doing so, they often expressed the deep satisfaction and reverence felt by the Muslim population towards the Ottoman leadership. This emphasis on the rulers' importance served to strengthen their image as esteemed and influential figures and reinforced the notion that their rule was divinely ordained and sanctioned by the Muslim community at large. In their panegyrics, Arab poets consistently underscored the degree to which the Ottoman sovereigns were deserving of praise and admiration. They lauded the rulers' exceptional qualities, emphasizing their courage, wisdom, and piety, and extolling their many accomplishments. At times, the poets even suggested that no wordsmith, regardless of their skill or talent, could adequately capture the full measure of the sultans' praiseworthy attributes. This rhetorical strategy not only served to aggrandize the subjects of their praise but also underscored the extraordinary nature of the Ottoman rulers, further elevating their status and esteem.¹⁵

The caliphate status of the Ottoman ruler was another central theme in the poetry of this period. Poets portrayed the sultan as the preeminent spiritual and temporal leader of the Muslim community, the imam who guided the faithful and executed vital

¹⁴ Turki Mugheid, *Sultan Abdulhamid II. im Spiegel der arabischen Dichtung: Eine Studie zu Literatur und Politik in der Spätperiode des Osmanischen Reiches* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1987), 124.

¹⁵ Aḥmad Shawqī, *al-Shawqiyāt* (Windsor: Hindawi, 2020), 287-291.

responsibilities on their behalf. This depiction of the ruler as the ultimate authority in the Islamic world served to reinforce their position and showcase the crucial role they played in the lives of the Muslim populace. Ottoman rulers were also frequently lauded through various Islamic references, which served to further bolster their religious credentials and solidify their connection to the divine. Poets frequently extolled the sultan's wisdom, erudition, and piety, emphasizing their adherence to the tenets of Islam and their unwavering devotion to the faith. This focus on the rulers' spiritual qualities underscored their legitimacy as religious leaders and reinforced the notion that they were divinely chosen to guide the Muslim community. Additionally, the rulers' mission of providing aid to the poor, the orphans, and the downtrodden was often emphasized in the poetry of this period. By depicting the sultans as compassionate and benevolent figures, the poets highlighted their commitment to social justice and underscored their role as the protectors and guardians of the vulnerable. This portrayal served not only to humanize the rulers but also to underscore the moral and ethical dimensions of their rule, further legitimizing their authority in the eyes of their subjects. In their verses, Arab poets often depicted the Ottoman sovereigns as individuals who brought prosperity, peace, and abundance to their people and the Islamic world at large. By emphasizing the beneficial impact of their rule on the material and spiritual well-being of the populace, the poets effectively cast the sultans as benevolent and transformative figures, instrumental in ushering in an era of growth, stability, and harmony across their vast domains. This portrayal served to enhance the image of the Ottoman rulers as wise and effective leaders, responsible for ushering in a golden age of cultural, economic, and political flourishing.¹⁶

Moreover, Arab poets often narrated the achievements of the caliphs in unifying the diverse demographic landscape that constituted the expansive Ottoman territories. By emphasizing the ruler's ability to bring together various ethnic and cultural groups under a single, harmonious political system, the poets showcased the sultan's skill in diplomacy and governance. This theme highlighted the ruler's capacity to prevent ethnic disputes and maintain social cohesion, further solidifying their reputation as effective and just leaders. In this context, the poets also underscored the voluntary submission of other nations to the Ottoman rule, emphasizing the widespread recognition of their authority and the peaceful environment that their governance engendered. By focusing on the establishment of peace and stability throughout the region, the poets not only lauded the political prowess of the Ottoman rulers but also portrayed them as agents of peace and order, fostering a sense of collective security and well-being for all those who lived under their rule. In the panegyrics they composed, Arab poets often accentuated their own modest status in relation to the majestic and awe-inspiring figure of the Ottoman ruler. By adopting a humble and deferential tone, they effectively demonstrated their deep respect and admiration for the sovereign, positioning themselves as supplicants seeking the ruler's favor and patronage. By doing so, they not only reinforced the hierarchical relationship between the ruler and

¹⁶ Shawqī, *al-Shawqīyyāt*, 287-291.

the ruled but also highlighted the honor and prestige associated with gaining the attention and favor of such a powerful and revered figure. For the poets themselves, earning the favor and esteem of the Ottoman rulers was considered a significant accomplishment, a testament to their own talent and worth. The poets often openly expressed their profound love and devotion towards the sultans in their verses, revealing the depth of their emotional connection to these exalted figures. Through their passionate declarations of admiration and loyalty, the poets sought to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to the cause of the Ottoman Empire and to the individuals who embodied its ideals and aspirations.¹⁷

In conclusion, the themes employed by Arab poets in their panegyrics to the Ottoman rulers were multifaceted, encompassing various aspects of the sovereigns' political, religious, and personal attributes. By exalting the rulers' genealogy, emphasizing their importance in the Islamic world, and celebrating their numerous virtues and accomplishments, the poets effectively crafted a powerful and compelling image of the Ottoman sovereigns as wise, benevolent, and divinely-ordained leaders. Through their skillful use of language and imagery, the poets not only immortalized the sultans in verse but also contributed to the construction of a lasting and influential legacy that would resonate throughout history.

3. An In-Depth Look at an Arabic Poem Celebrating Ottoman Glory

On the 26th of January, 1906, during a gathering held at a hotel, the esteemed poet Hāfiḫ Ibrāhīm crafted a composition extolling the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire and the preeminence of its sovereigns. This poem, comprising twenty-six verses, exemplifies a commendable instance of panegyric in the realm of literature:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. "أَبْخَصِي مَعَانِيكَ الْقَرِيضُ الْمُهْدَبُ | عَلَى أَنْ صَدَرَ الشِّعْرُ لِيَمْدُجَ أَرْحَبُ" |
| 2. لَقَدْ مَكَّنَ الرَّحْمَنُ فِي الْأَرْضِ دَوْلَةً | لِعُمُتْمَانٍ لَا تَعْفُو وَلَا تَتَشَعَّبُ |
| 3. بَنَاهَا فَظَلَّتْهَا الدَّرَارِي مَنَارِلًا | لِبَدْرِ الدُّجَى تُبْنِي وَلِلسَّعْدِ تُنْصَبُ |
| 4. وَقَامَ رِجَالٌ بِالْإِمَامَةِ بَعْدَهُ | فَزَادُوا عَلَى ذَلِكَ الْبِنَاءِ وَظَنَّبُوا |
| 5. وَرَدُّوا عَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ عَهْدَ شَبَابِهِ | وَمَدُّوا لَهُ جَاهًا يُرْجَى وَيُرْهَبُ |
| 6. أُسْوَدَ عَلَى الْبُسْفُورِ تَحِييَ عَرِينَتِهَا | وَتَرَعَى نِيَامَ الشَّرْقِ وَالْعَرْبِ يَرْقُبُ |
| 7. لَهَا وَتَبَاتٌ تَحْتَ ظِلِّ هِلَالِهَا | كَمَا مَرَّ سَهْمٌ أَوْ كَمَا انْقَضَ كَوْكَبُ |
| 8. إِذَا رَاعَهَا مَسُّ مِنَ الضَّمِيمِ خِلْتَهَا | كَمَنْ رَاعَهُ بِالْمَسِّ سِلْكُ مَكْهَرَبُ |
| 9. وَإِنْ هَرَّهَا ذَلِكَ الْهَلَالُ لِحَادِثٍ | رَأَيْتَ قَضَاءَ اللَّهِ يَمْشِي وَيَرْكَبُ |
| 10. إِذَا صَاءَتِ الْأَحْسَابُ يَوْمًا لِمُعْرِقٍ | فَعُمُتْمَانُ حَيْرٌ الْقَاتِحِينَ لَهُمْ أَبُ |
| 11. وَإِنْ تَوَّاهَ بِالْأُبْنَاءِ وَالْبِائِسِ وَالِدُ | فَأَوْلَى الْوَرَى بِالنِّيَةِ ذَلِكَ الْمُعْصَبُ |
| 12. فَهَذَا سُلَيْمَانٌ وَقَثَائُونٌ عَدْلِيهِ | عَلَى صَفْحَاتِ الدَّهْرِ بِالنَّيْرِ يُكْتَبُ |
| 13. وَذَلِكَ الَّذِي أُجْرَى السَّغِينِ عَلَى النَّيْرِ | وَسَارَلَهُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ مَرْكَبُ |
| 14. عَلَى بَابِهِ الْعَالِي هُنَاكَ تَأَلَّقَتْ | سُطُورٌ لِأَقْلَامِ الْجَلَالَةِ تُنْسَبُ |
| 15. هُنَا، فَاحْفَظُوا الْأَبْصَارَ، عَرِشُ مُحَمَّدٍ | هُنَا الْفَاتِحِ الْعَازِي الْكَبِيِّ الْمُدْرَبُ |

¹⁷ Shawqī, *al-Shawqiyiyyāt*, 287-291.

- بِأَكْنَافِهِ كَوْشُوطٌ وَالْحَظْبُ عَيْهَبٌ
 حَيَاتِي وَأَمَّا صَارِمِي فَمُشَطَّبٌ
 وَإِنْ كَانَتْ الْأُخْرَى فُشِدُوا وَجَرُّوا
 وَأَعْدَاؤُهُمْ فِي الْعَرَبِ تَشَقَّى وَتُنْكَبُ
 وَأُمْسَى لَهُمْ فِي الشَّرْقِ مَسْرَى وَمَسْرُبٌ
 فَأَصْحَى امْتِيَازَ الْقَوْمِ وَالشَّرْقِ مَغْرِبٌ
 وَأَيُّ مَكَانٍ لَيْسَ فِيهِ تَعَصُّبٌ؟
 فَفِيهِ مِنَ الصَّهْبَاءِ طَبْعٌ مُدَوَّبٌ
 وَخَفَّ ضَعْفَهَا فِي الْكَأْسِ وَالْكَاسُ تُظْرِبُ
 وَيَطْوِيهِ تَيَّارُ الْقَضَاءِ قَيْرَسُبٌ
 عَلَى كُلِّ عَرْشٍ مِنْ عُرُوشِكَ أَشْعَبٌ
16. وَمَا كَانَ مِنْ عَبْدٍ الْمَجِيدِ إِذِ احْتَمَى
 17. يُنَادِيهِمْ: أَمَا تَزِيلِي فِدْوَتَهُ
 18. فَإِنَّ كَانَتْ الْحُسْنَى قِيَامِي سَمَاؤَهَا
 19. كَذَلِكَ كَانُوا يَسْتَقِرُّونَ فِي الدَّرَا
 20. فَكَمْ طَلَبُوا مِنْهُمْ أَمَانًا فَأَمَّنُوا
 21. فَكَانَ أَمَانَ الْقَوْمِ وَالشَّرْقِ مَشْرِقٌ
 22. يَقُولُونَ: فِي هَذِي الرُّبُوعِ تَعَصُّبٌ
 23. فَسَيَا شَرْقُ إِنَّ الْعَرَبَ إِنْ لَانَ أَوْ قَسَا
 24. فَخَفَّ بِأَسْفَافِ الرَّأْسِ وَالرَّأْسِ يَصْطَلِي
 25. وَيَا عَرَبُ إِنَّ الدَّهْرَ يَطْمَعُ بِأَهْلِهِ
 26. أَرَاكَ مَقَرَّ الظَّامِعِينَ كَأَنَّمَا

“1. Can the refined verse truly encompass your meanings, although the essence of poetry is more welcoming to praise?

2. The Merciful (God) granted ‘Uthmān a state on earth that neither perishes nor fragments.

3. He built it, and the constellations assumed it to be a dwelling for the full moon to be built and for the fortunate stars to be erected.

4. Men took up leadership after him, and they added to that construction and reinforced it.

5. They restored Islam to its youthful vigor, and extended for it a prestige that is both sought and feared.

6. Lions on the Bosphorus protect their den and shepherd the nations of the East, while the West watches.

7. Under the shade of its crescent, it has a steadfastness like that of an arrow in flight or a swooping comet.

8. When a touch of injustice alarms it, it reacts like one who has been shocked by an electrified wire.

9. And if that crescent is shaken by an incident, you see the decree of God in motion, whether on foot or horseback. [i.e. Infantry and cavalry set in motion to establish order.]

10. One day, if the lineage information of the nobles comes to light, ‘Uthmān is the best of the conquerors and their ancestor.

11. If a father boasts of his sons and power, the one most worthy of pride among all beings is this noble.

12. That is Sulaymān and his just law, inscribed on the pages of time with golden dust.

13. That is the one who made the ship sail on land. The one for whom the ship traveled on both land and sea.

14. On his lofty door, there shone lines attributed to the pens of majesty.

15. Here, lower your gaze: the throne of Muḥammad, the Conqueror, the Warrior, the brave, and the wise.

16. What had 'Abd al-Majīd done? When the conditions were dark, [Lajos] Kossuth took refuge under his protection.

17. He addresses them in this manner: "As for my guest, I would sacrifice my life for him. As for my sharp sword, there are lines upon it."

18. If it's about friendship, I am its sky. If it's about another situation, unsheathe your swords and test me!

19. Thus, they ascended to the peaks, while their enemies in the West suffered and were disgraced.

20. How many times they [i.e. their enemies] asked for mercy from them and were granted it, and in the East they had both an escape route and a path.

21. When the East was a sunrise, it provided security for the [European] people; and when the East was a sunset, it became a distinction for the people.

22. They say that in these lands there is fanaticism, and which place is without fanaticism?

23. O East! Whether the West softens or hardens, there is a nature melted from red wine within it.

24. When its head gets heated, fear the power in its head. When the bowl is stirred, fear its weakness in the bowl.

25. O West! Fate elevates its people, the current of destiny folds them, and it lowers them.

26. I see you as the headquarters of the covetous, as if there is an Ash'ab on every throne of yours."¹⁸

In this laudatory poem, the author celebrates the merits and achievements of the Ottoman Empire, highlighting its divine origins, celestial connections, steadfast leadership, and formidable military prowess. The poem emphasizes the empire's role in reinvigorating Islam, protecting the nations of the East, and exerting a profound impact on the global stage. In the opening verse, Ḥafīz İbrāhīm employs a rhetorical question to query if the nature of poetry can genuinely encompass the essence of the esteemed Ottoman dynasty that it endeavors to extol. The rationale behind this approach is to convey the notion that the esteemed virtues of the Ottoman dynasty's members are so numerous that even an artfully composed poem would prove inadequate in capturing their true value. The second verse sets the divine foundation of the empire by attributing its inception to God's mercy. The poet asserts that God endowed 'Uthmān, the progenitor of the Ottoman dynasty, with an earthly state characterized by endurance and unity, thus emphasizing its resilience and permanence.

In the third verse, the empire is metaphorically compared to an astral edifice, with constellations considering it as an abode for the full moon and propitious stars. This celestial metaphor accentuates the empire's prominence and its position within the cosmic hierarchy. The fourth verse acknowledges the lineage of leaders succeeding 'Uthmān, who contributed to the growth and fortification of the empire. This verse

¹⁸ Ḥafīz İbrāhīm, *Dīwān Ḥafīz İbrāhīm*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn et al. (s.l.: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma lil'l-Kutub, 1987), 331-333.

underscores the continuity of the dynasty and its perpetual evolution under diverse rulers. In the fifth verse, the poet lauds the empire's role in rejuvenating Islam, attributing to it a prestige that evokes both admiration and trepidation. This implies the empire's capacity to elicit awe and reverence among its contemporaries. The sixth verse utilizes the metaphor of lions safeguarding their den on the Bosphorus, depicting the empire's custodianship of the nations of the East while the West monitors from afar. This imagery emphasizes the empire's might and its status as a bastion against external adversaries.

In the seventh verse, the poet draws a parallel between the empire's steadfastness and the trajectory of an arrow in flight or a swooping comet. This analogy underscores the empire's unwavering determination and its capacity to leave a lasting impression on the world. The eighth verse delineates the empire's response to injustice, accentuating its prompt reaction, comparable to that of an individual shocked by an electrified wire. This metaphor communicates the empire's dedication to upholding justice and redressing wrongdoing. In the ninth verse, the poem further examines the empire's role in preserving order, observing that when the crescent—a symbol of the empire—is disturbed by an incident, one can witness God's decree in motion, whether through infantry or cavalry. This verse emphasizes the empire's ability to enforce order and reestablish stability. In the tenth verse, the poet envisages a day when the distinguished lineage of world leaders is unveiled, proclaiming 'Uthmān as the preeminent among conquerors and their forebear. This verse serves to accentuate the illustrious ancestry and the achievements of the empire's founding figure, thereby declaring the Ottoman dynasty as the most noble of all dynasties.

In the eleventh verse, the poet subtly alludes to the accomplishments of 'Uthmān's progeny, which evoke a sense of pride in their forefather. Indeed, the poet posits that 'Uthmān is the patriarch most deserving of admiration. Classical Arabic literature typically anticipates those who extol their lineage to emphasize their paternal ancestry rather than their offspring, as this serves as an indication of their noble heritage. However, the context of panegyrist Ḥāfiẓ in this poem markedly differs from that of poets from the classical era. Ḥāfiẓ understands that his obligation is not to gratify 'Uthmān, who passed away centuries prior, but rather to appease the contemporary Ottoman sovereign. In this light, the poet creates a narrative in which 'Uthmān, a figure from a distant past, takes pride in his descendants, thereby praising both the forbears of the Ottoman rulers and the current governing figures. This adept utilization of panegyric poetry serves as a testament to the exceptional prowess of Ḥāfiẓ İbrāhīm.

In the twelfth verse, the poet commences the commemoration of the most eminent sultans throughout the Ottoman Empire's history. Within this framework, the twelfth verse is devoted to lauding Sulaymān the Magnificent. The poet maintains that Sulaymān has etched his name in history in golden letters, particularly due to the legislation he instituted. The thirteenth verse is dedicated to extolling Mehmed the Conqueror. The poet seeks to accentuate Mehmed's international fame, which he attained by conquering Constantinople—a metropolis deemed impervious for centuries—and transforming it into an Islamic city subsequently known as Istanbul. In this regard, the poet

alludes to a pivotal military strategy employed during the conquest, venerating the innovative and ingenious tactic of transporting ships overland, a maneuver that contributed to the siege's successful outcome. In the fourteenth verse, it is insinuated that Mehmed the Conqueror seized the Byzantine imperial authority by conquering the city. The poet likely aims to assert that, as a result of this achievement, the Ottoman emperors have reached a level of esteem analogous to the resplendent rulers of Ancient Rome. In the fifteenth couplet, the poet articulates the concluding eulogistic lines for Mehmed the Conqueror. Within this context, he pays homage to Mehmed's distinguished throne, his martial prowess, his bravery, and his sagacity.

In the sixteenth verse, the poet extols Sultan 'Abd al-Majid I, shedding light on the Sultan's benevolence, as exemplified by his approval of Lajos Kossuth's asylum request. In 1849, Kossuth, journeying toward the Turkish border, arrived in the border town of Orsova and penned a letter to Sultan 'Abd al-Majid, beseeching sanctuary within the Ottoman Empire. The asylum seekers included an array of ministers, high-ranking military officers, and civilian officials from both Hungary and Poland, with Hungarian leader Lajos Kossuth among them. The Ottoman Turks received these displaced individuals with assurances of friendship, as articulated by Kossuth himself. The act of humanitarian protection extended to the Hungarians and Poles by Sultan 'Abd al-Majid I and his fellow Ottoman statesmen is indelibly inscribed in history. As anticipated, the influx of refugees into the Ottoman Empire precipitated a diplomatic crisis. On August 14, 1849, Austrian Ambassador Stürmer presented a note to the Ottoman Empire, demanding the repatriation of the refugees. Subsequently, two days post-Austria's note, Russian Ambassador Titof submitted a parallel note, echoing identical requests. The Ottoman Empire's response to both notes was negative. The empire's refusal to heed its allies' admonitions incited their ire and enmity, escalating the situation into an international crisis. Consequently, the Hungarian refugee predicament imposed considerable strain on the Ottoman Empire for an extended period.¹⁹

Upon underscoring the benevolence of the Ottoman Sultan, Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm articulates in the seventeenth verse that the Sultan is willing to lay down his life in defense of those seeking his protection and, if required, will unhesitatingly wield his sword. In the eighteenth verse, the poet proceeds to recount the Ottoman Sultan's words, declaring his utmost benevolence in matters of friendship. In this context, the poet also alludes to the Sultan's pronouncements, expressing his readiness to confront his adversaries in battle when necessary.

In the nineteenth verse, Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm delineates the ascent of Ottoman rulers to their apex, attributing their elevation to the successes displayed throughout their history. He accentuates the steadfastness of their position at the summit while concurrently acknowledging the adversities encountered by their Western antagonists and the subsequent erosion of their prestige. In the twentieth verse, the poet poses a rhetorical inquiry regarding the number of instances in history when the Ottomans' adversaries have implored their mercy. The poet's intention is to underscore the

¹⁹ Alev Duran – İsmail Köse, "Lajos Kossuth ve Macar Mülteciler", *Selçuk Üniversitesi Selçuklu Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6 (2017), 302-303.

magnanimity of the Ottoman rulers, who hearken to the entreaties of their persistent foes. The twenty-first verse alludes to the security historically extended by the Ottoman Empire to Europeans. However, the poet elucidates that this privilege has metamorphosed into a prerogative due to shifting political exigencies. The ambiguity in the twenty-second verse renders it challenging to discern the poet's exact intention, yet it appears plausible that he is addressing critics who contest his defense of the Ottoman dynasty. This interpretation is substantiated by subsequent verses wherein the poet cautions Eastern populations against the machinations of the West.

The twenty-third verse inaugurates a concluding segment in which the poet addresses the East directly, exhorting his compatriots to exercise vigilance against the multifarious aspects of the West. The narrative is sustained in the twenty-fourth verse. In the twenty-fifth verse, the poet, employing a style reminiscent of classical Arabic poetry, warns the West about the capricious nature of fate, reminding them that those who ascend with the aid of fate will inevitably descend once more. In the twenty-sixth and final verse, which culminates the poem, the poet characterizes European imperialists as the embodiment of avarice. Drawing upon the wealth of classical Arabic literature, he posits that Ash'ab-renowned for his covetousness-appears to be seated on all European thrones. Ash'ab, a man hailing from Medina's populace, serves as the muse for the famed proverb "more covetous than Ash'ab" [*aṭma' min Ash'ab*], utilized to depict rapacious individuals.²⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, this comprehensive examination of the significant tradition of Arabic poetry has provided a thorough understanding of the multifaceted ways in which Arab poets sought to exalt the Ottoman sultans, particularly emphasizing their role as caliphs. The study has delved into the various techniques employed by these poets in their artistry, using their creative prowess to express loyalty, admiration, and support for the Ottoman rulers as the protectors of Islam and the leaders of the Muslim world. Furthermore, the analysis has unveiled the intricate motivations and inspirations behind the poets' panegyric works, which often originated from their profound desire to emphasize the unity of the Muslim world under the Ottoman caliphate and counteract the burgeoning influence of European powers. Additionally, the paper has brought to light the pivotal role played by the Ottoman sultans in nurturing and promoting these poetic expressions, consequently solidifying their status as both influential political figures and esteemed religious leaders. The in-depth exploration of this subject matter has shed light on the importance of the relationship between the Arab poets and the Ottoman sultans, illustrating how their mutual respect and admiration served to strengthen their alliance.

In light of this extensive exploration, it is unequivocally evident that the panegyric odes composed by Arab poets in praise of the Ottoman sultans played an indispensable role in reinforcing the political and religious legitimacy of the Ottoman caliphate.

²⁰ İbrâhîm, *Dîwân Hâfîz İbrâhîm*, 331-333.

These poetic works not only extolled the myriad achievements and virtues of the Ottoman rulers but also served as a testament to the enduring connection between the Arab and Ottoman worlds. By examining this rich tradition of Arabic poetry, the study has contributed to a more profound understanding of the cultural, political, and religious dynamics that shaped the relationship between the Arab and Ottoman worlds during the zenith of the Ottoman Empire. This enhanced understanding has the potential to inspire further scholarly inquiry into the complex interactions between these two civilizations and the lasting impact they have had on the development of the broader Islamic world.

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