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Islamic Literature: An Attempt at A Historical Overview

İslam Edebiyatı: Tarihsel Bir Genel Bakış Denemesi

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Abstract

This study aims to provide an overview of the development of Islamic literature, particularly in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages, from the birth of Islam to the 20th century. It will encompass four main historical periods: The early Islamic period (7th-10th centuries), the middle Islamic period (11th-15th centuries), the 16th-18th century dynasties, and the modern period. The study describes the main literary genres, themes, trends, figures, and works that emerged in Islamic communities, explores the motives and outcomes of interactions with various Eastern and Western traditions in different periods, and draws attention to the significant shifts in Islamic literature during the modern era. Available compact studies in Islamic literature predominantly deal with a specific language area or undertake thematic research. The present study, which demonstrates the historical course of the literature of Islamic communities in three widespread languages, helps to pinpoint the general trends of continuity, transformation, and interaction among these traditions. For instance, it brings out the key role Arabic literature played in defining the main poetic forms of Islamic literature, such as *ghazal*, *qasida*, *mathnawi*, and promoting the literary prose, *adab*, which were subsequently elaborated and transformed within other linguistic traditions. Again, it shows how the dissolution of the Abbasid political power impacted the revival of Persian literature, which later took the lead in establishing mystic philosophy as a major vein in general Islamic literature. Another common experience of Islamic literatures that stands out in this survey is the transformation of formal and thematic features due to the expanding Western influence and stimulus of modernization in the 19th century.

Key Terms: Islam, literature, poetry, prose, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, modernization.

Öz

Bu çalışma, İslam'ın doğuşundan 20. yüzyıla kadar İslam edebiyatının özellikle Arapça, Farsça ve Türkçedeki gelişimine genel bir bakış sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Dört ana tarihi dönem kapsayacaktır: Erken İslami dönem (7.-10. yüzyıllar), orta İslami dönem (11.-15. yüzyıllar), 16.-18. yüzyıl hanedanları dönemi ve modern dönem. Çalışma, İslam toplumlarında ortaya çıkan ana edebi türleri, temaları, eğilimleri, şahsiyetleri ve eserleri tanıtmakta, farklı dönemlerde çeşitli Doğu ve Batı gelenekleriyle etkileşimin neden ve sonuçlarını araştırmakta ve modern dönemde İslam edebiyatında meydana gelen ortak değişimlere dikkat çekmektedir. İslam edebiyatı üzerine mevcut kompakt çalışmalar, ağırlıklı olarak belirli bir dil alanını ele almakta veya tematik araştırmalara yönelmektedir. İslam toplumlarının üç yaygın dilde ürettiği edebiyatın tarihsel seyrini ortaya koyan bu çalışma, bu gelenekler arasındaki süreklilik, dönüşüm ve etkileşim trendlerini saptamaya da yardımcı

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olmaktadır. Örneğin, daha sonra başka dillerde geliştirilip dönüştürülen gazel, kaside, mesnevi gibi İslam edebiyatının ana şiir formlarını tesis etmede ve edebi nesri tanıtımda Arap edebiyatının üstlendiği anahtar rolün altını çizmektedir. Yine, Abbasi siyasi iktidarının çözülmesinin, Fars edebiyatının yeniden canlanmasına nasıl etki ettiğini ve bu edebiyatın, sonrasında mistik felsefenin genel İslam edebiyatında önemli bir damar olarak yerleşmesine nasıl öncülük ettiğini göstermektedir. İslam edebiyatlarının bu araştırmada öne çıkan bir diğer ortak deneyimi, 19. yüzyılda genişleyen Batı etkisi ve modernleşme ihtiyacı nedeniyle biçimsel ve tematik özelliklerinin dönüşüme uğramış olmasıdır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İslam, edebiyat, şiir, nesir, Arapça, Farsça, Türkçe, modernleşme.

Introduction

The Islamic world is composed of different nations speaking various languages, and located in a vast geography from Central Asia and the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, from Africa to the Volga River. These nations under the rule of Islam have contributed to the development of world civilization in many fields such as literature, theology, philosophy, architecture, science, and geography.

Arab conquests after the birth of Islam in the 7th century defined the cultural development that followed. The conquerors contacted diverse peoples and their cultures, such as Greek, Syriac, and Persian, and appropriated their achievements by including and excluding new information and materials. It resulted in a unique civilization serving Islamic purposes. Islam, as a religion encompassing all aspects of human life, occupied a central place in the creation of this civilization. Hence, literature came under the influence of Islam too. In this study, the literature of Islamic civilization designates works produced by people belonging to Muslim nations, whether or not they upheld Islamic values. (Kritzeck, 1964, p. 15.) Termed "Islamic literature", it included poetry, artistic prose, and "belles lettres". It was produced mainly in three languages: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. While many non-Arab poets and writers from India, Persia, and Afghanistan composed their works in Arabic, some among the Turks and Indians used Persian.

Pre-Islamic Arab literature relied heavily on oral poetic tradition. An artistically and linguistically highly developed body of poetry existed in 6th-century Arabia. God's revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Mohammad and its being committed to writing stimulated the development of a written culture and prose literature among Muslims. (Holt et al., 1970, p. 660) The Qur'an was conveyed in a distinctive prose genre with rhythmical patterns and dramatic features of its own. The study of the Qur'an, on the other hand, generated a variety of literary themes, utterances, narratives, citations, and modes of expression that have been a continual inspiration for literature. For instance, the stories of prophets Solomon, David, and Joseph, the concept of the Holy struggle (*jihad*), and judgment day. (Kuiper, 2010, p. 54-55)

The literature in the Islamic world can be surveyed in four major historical periods: The early Islamic period (7th-10th centuries), the middle Islamic period (11th-15th centuries), the 16th-18th century dynasties, and the modern period.

1. The Literature of the Early Islamic Period

The early Islamic period roughly covers the 7th to 10th centuries. As the Islamic empire expanded, its civilization flourished beyond Damascus, Baghdad, and Samarra, and reached other lands in Asia, North Africa, and Spain in this period.

In pre-Islamic society, non-literate Arabs believed that the poets' words possessed special power and they were gifted with intuition. The poets often used their talent to remind the warriors of the honor and the courage of the tribe, and to satirize the enemy, as well as to express sorrows, failures, and separations. (Rosenthal, 1974, p. 330; Khouri,

1983, p. 19; Badawi, 1993, p. 51) They also sang of the magnificence of the sky, the desert, the horses, and the camels. Religious sentiments played little part. The poets sang poems with or without a musical instrument. An early form of the Arab verse is the *qasida*. It is an ode usually composed for the celebration of the life and values of the tribe, or, under noble patronage, for praising and defending a ruler or a master. The form emerged in this century and persisted for ages in Islamic lands. Imru'l-Qays was a master of Arabic verse and the *qasida* in pre-Islamic Arab literature with his salient similes, vivid descriptions, and strong rhythms.

At the time of the Prophet Mohammad and the four Caliphs, poetic activity experienced a temporary eclipse since poetry had a background of propagating pre-Islamic beliefs and ways of life. (Savory, 1976, p. 64; Kuiper, 2010, p. 61) Arabic poetry continued to grow at the time of the Umayyads (661-750) as the predominant literary art. Poetry was an effective tool to endorse an authority or to defy the enemy, similar to the mass media today. Many poets were panegyrists, writing *qasidas* praising the caliphs, as well as satirists. The celebrated Jarir and al-Farazdaq were such poets, all active in Damascus. By the 10th century, an aspiring poet's training involved memorizing the poetry of the ancients, learning grammar, rhyme, and meter, figures of speech, along with familiarizing himself with the predecessors.

The *ghazal* emerged as an independent genre of love poetry in the Umayyad period. (Khouri, 1983, p. 25) It was of two kinds: Either sensuous, joyous, and technically simple love poetry, or, poetry describing the pains of more idealized, hopeless, and tragic love, as in the narrative of Majnun and Layla, where Qays' desperate love for Layla costs him his reason and he becomes a madman (*majnun*). (Holt et al., 1970, p. 661) The latter had a great influence on later romances in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu, as well as on Western writers. The theme of complete surrender to the force of love became commonplace in both secular and religious mystic poetry for ages. *Dove's Necklace* composed by the theologian Ibn Hazm from Muslim Spain deals with a psychological, anatomical, and philosophical analysis of pure love. It is a romantic prose work mingled with poetry and involves autobiographical elements.

The new caliphal capital Baghdad quickly became a remarkable cultural center under the Abbasids. A major poet of the period who found favor at the court of the Caliph was Abu Nuwas (d. 815). He had a playful personality and an unrivaled command of language and imagery. Besides satire, elegies, and songs, he composed witty, cynical wine poems about pleasurable living and the life of the tavern, which caused him troubles. (Savory, 1976, p. 65; Khouri, 1983, p. 32; Allen, 2000, p. 113) Much of such poetic production was not only iconoclastic, challenging the behavioral and cultural norms of the time, but it also broke away from normative expectations of poetic language. Al-Ma'arri was another poet suspicious of orthodoxy in Muslim society. His rhymed prose work *Epistle of Forgiveness* which describes an imaginary tour of the afterworld, a visit to Heaven and Hell, questions established beliefs about sinners and believers, and resorts to God's mercy (Savory, 1976, p. 67).

Encounters with ancient civilizations encouraged a rigorous translation activity from Hellenistic, Indian, and Persian traditions into Arabic in the early years of the Abbasid period. A great deal of the literary prose in Arabic included translated foreign texts under the Abbasids. (Vernoit, 2005, p. 256) *Kalila wa Dimna*, Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation of the Persian version of the *Panjantra*, is a significant example. The work is a series of originally Indian fables about wise ruling. These fables provided Islamic culture and literature a great source of tales throughout the ages and inspired such works as La Fontaine's *Fables* too. (Khouri, 1983, p. 28) A popular frame story of Indo-Persian origin,

the *Thousand and One Nights* (or *The Arabian Nights*) is one of the most well-known of the tales from the Islamic world. King Shahryar, betrayed by his wife, marries and kills a new girl each day to revenge all womankind. The vizier's daughter Shahrazad has a plan and wants to marry the King. She tells an entertaining story to the King each night without finishing it and promising to complete it the following night so she escapes execution. Day after day, her plan works and the King changes his mind about the revenge. *Thousand and One Nights* tales were circulating among the folk and were compiled and translated into Arabic with additions of local anecdotes at different periods of early Islamic history.

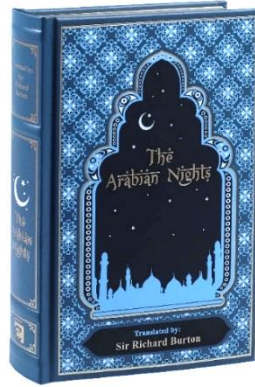


Figure 1.1. A translation of *Thousand and One Nights* by Richard Burton.
Source: canterburyclassicsbooks.com

The Arabic prose literature continued to develop with a body of quasi-literary writings with philosophical, scientific, artistic, religious, or historical content manifesting a high degree of literary skill called *adab* or belles-lettres that emerged in the Muslim lands. Al-Jahiz was a famous *adib* (a scholar of *adab*) of the 9th century with such artistic use of the Arabic language in anecdotes, essays, debates, and anthologies, on top of his contributions to the compilation genre. (*The Book of Animals*, *The Book of Misers*, etc.). He was active in the capital cities of Baghdad and Samarra under the Abbasids and is acknowledged as the master of classical Arabic prose. (Savory, 1976, p. 68; Khouri, 1983, p. 28; Allen, 2000, pp. 141-42) In the 10th century, a style of belletristic prose called *maqamat* ("assemblies") came into being. It is a series of independent short stories about the adventures of a hero, written in combination with rhyming prose and poetry. Al-Hamadhani's *Maqamat* is regarded as the model of this style of fictional narrative, though his successors like Al-Hariri gave the best examples. (Allen, 2000, p. 162-64; Vernoit, 2005, p. 263)

In the first three centuries of Islamic civilization, two types of historical literature developed: The chronicle and the biographical dictionary. The chronicles' central theme is the life of the Prophet Mohammad and the deeds of the Islamic community (*umma*) but they often incorporated such elements as sagas of the pre-Islamic Arab tribes and Persian myths. A classical example is the chronicle of al-Tabari (d. 923). A biographical dictionary, on the other hand, is a genre original in Islamic literature. The earliest examples are collections that provide information on the lives of the Companions of the Prophet.

2. The Literature of the Middle Islamic Period

2.1 Arabic Literature

The Arabic language was the only prestige language of literature in the Islamic world until about 900 among Persians and other non-Arab converts. Yet, the Islamic world appeared culturally and linguistically split roughly into Persian-speaking East and Arabic-speaking West following the disintegration of political power in the 10th century.

(Holt et al., 1970, p. 665) Dynasties independent from the Caliphal authority emerged in Islamic lands. While Persianate culture started to rise from 900 onward, Arabic literature suffered a period of decline, particularly between the 13th-19th centuries. Arabic prose continued to live among non-Arabs, partially due to the status of the Qur'anic language but poetry began to be written less in Arabic. Among powerful Arabic verses created at the time is *Qasidat al-burda* ode written by the Egyptian poet al-Busiri (d. 1297) in praise of the Prophet Mohammad. It is one of the most recited poems in the Muslim world.

Islamic Spain (al-Andalus) housed the main literary activity in Arabic in the middle Islamic period. Muslim conquests continued westward in North African territory, and arrived in the Iberian Peninsula in 711, staying there until the 15th century. Islamic culture gradually spread across Andalusia. It generated intellectual achievements in the fields of philosophy, science, and mysticism, and numerous masters of poetry such as Ibn Zaydun. Uniquely Hispano-Arabic forms of strophic poetry called *muwashshah* and *zajal* developed, and possibly advised Medieval European songs of love and chivalry. (Khouri, 1983, p. 37) The themes and images of the *muwashshah* followed the conventions of courtly love poetry. Andalusian poets standardized the form through elaborations and improvements in rhyme and expression. *Zajal* was typically created through improvisation by the bards and it employed popular speech. (Savory, 1976, p. 69) Ibn Quzman's (d. 1160) compositions of *zajal* and use of it as a popular medium was an innovation in Arabic poetry. Much of poetry in Islamic Spain was nostalgic, wistful, and restless, parallel to the instabilities in political life. (Holt et al., 1970, p. 666)

A major figure of medieval Hispano-Arabic thought, Ibn Tufayl, composed the famous philosophical tale *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (Alive Son of Awake). The story is about a man living alone on a deserted island since infancy. He reaches an understanding of the world and divinity by experimentation and speculation in his maturity, appreciating the rational nature of the cosmos. (Allen, 2000, p. 161) The work incited later elaborations in European literature.

Travel accounts of Andalusian and Maghribi (Northwest African) scholars called the *rihla* appeared as a new genre of Arabic literature in this period. Such journeys to the Eastern lands were frequently undertaken in search of scholarly knowledge for furthering one's education. Ibn Jubayr's (d. 1217) and Ibn Battuta's (d. 1377) travelogues combined this search with adventure. (Allen, 2000, p. 157) They stand out with their vivid descriptions of places and unusual information provided about the history, geography, peoples, and cultures of these places, mixed with personal thoughts or anecdotes.

Belles-lettres practice grew. Usamah ibn Munqidh's *Kitab al-I'tibar* in the form of autobiography/memoirs exemplified an uncommon literary genre in Arabic. The book describes the author's life as a soldier, statesman, and man of letters in 12th-century Syria. It provides insights into the cultural and political background of his time, with interesting details about wars with the Crusaders, hunting, medicine, and so on.

2.2 Persian Literature

Persian literature was reborn under the Samanids in northeastern Persia (present-day Uzbekistan) and eventually reached to Indian subcontinent, and Anatolia. The acknowledged founder of Persian poetry is the blind bard Rudaki. (Holt et al., 1970, p. 672) His poetry imposed the rules of Arabic prosody on the Persian language. The Ghaznavids inherited the Samanid legacy in supporting arts and scholarship. Ghazna became a center of learning and literary activity. Many men of letters and poets assembled at the court, and Persian literary production grew under the patronage of the sultans. Islam was introduced to India in this period. Intellectual riches of the Indian culture were

revealed to Muslims in Khurasan, Persia, and the Arab world, while the Persian language and literature developed and transformed in the Indian sphere. The domination of Persian language and literature expanded westward to the Near East under the Seljuqs.

Persian literature excelled particularly in epic, lyrical, and mystical poetry. Poetry in Persian almost monopolized all classical Islamic literature in this period.

Persians developed the *mathnawi*, an originally Arabic form of poetry, into a distinctively Persian form. Based on the rhyming couplet, the mathnawi form was primarily used for longer narratives and coherent discourses, with romantic or didactic content. Firdawsî's (d. 1020) *Shahnama* versified the *Book of Kings* compiled in the Sasanian times, in the mathnawi form. It narrates the tales and legends of pre-Islamic Iranian kings and warrior heroes. It can hardly be categorized as part of Islamic culture but as a literary masterpiece, it set up an example of epic poetry for Islamic literature. (Rosenthal, 1974, p. 333) Nizami was a prominent master of the mathnawi form. His *Khamasa* (Five Treasures) contained outstanding epic narratives (Iskandar-nama) and epic romances (Layla and Majnun and Khusraw and Shirin).

Ruba'î (quatrain) form, employed for epigrammatic expressions, is a novelty of Persian poetry as well. It became popular with Omar Khayyam (d.1131), a scientist and a poet. His *Rubaiyyat* expressed spiritual concerns of human beings in search of truth and answers to life and death. Qasida form, which had dominated poetry until then, continued to develop at the courts of the Ghaznavids and the Seljuqs in the 11th and 12th centuries. Anvari's panegyrics in Persian, and particularly his "Tears of Khorasan" poem lamenting the passing of Seljuq glory, are acclaimed examples of the qasida of the period. Yet, the form *ghazal* better represents the essence of Persian poetry after the 13th century. This intimate, intense love-lyric of five to twelve lines provides the poet the liberty to choose his themes, express more personal and ecstatic forms of devotion or be satirical, and keep it all abstract and unclear at the same time with wordplay and allegory. The three giant names of Persian lyrical poetry are Sa'di of Shiraz, Jalal al-Din Rumi, and Hafez, who were mystic poets. (Holt et al., 1970, pp. 677-78)

Mysticism influenced all Islamic literature but fully dominated and became an integral part of Persian poetry as of the 12th century. Sufism as a mystic philosophy distrusted reason and looked to the inspiration of the heart to discover the unknown. The basic principle of Divine Love as the way to the truth found a large following in Persia. (Holt et al., 1970, p. 678) The increase in the influence of Sufism on the populace, and on other levels of society in Islamic lands, generated an immense body of works from legendary tales of Sufi masters to devotional and scholarly texts, and poetry. Mystics employed poetry to communicate their thoughts and ways of spiritual experience in an allegorical fashion.

Islamic lands were under Mongol invasion during the 13th century. The Abbasid caliphate ended, and much of cultural heritage was devastated. The great classical age of Islam went into decline. Nevertheless, great works of Islamic literature appeared in this period, such as the Persian mystical narratives *Mantiq al-tayr* (Conference of the Birds) by Farid al-Din Attar, *Bustan* by Sa'di of Shiraz, and *Mathnawi* by Jalal al-Din Rumi.



Figure 2.2.1. From an illustrated copy of *Mantiq al-tayr*. The peacock, having been banished from the joys of Paradise due to his pride, explains to the leader of the birds that he is not able to join the group because he is consumed by an overwhelming desire to return to his former celestial abode.

Source: British Library [Add.7753, f. 30v](https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/persian.html) (<https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/persian.html>)

Attar was a prolific writer and a practitioner of medicine at the same time. *Mantiq al-tayr* mathnawi tells the story of a group of birds on a journey to find their spiritual king Simorgh; an allegory to the mystical journey of the human soul toward God. Thirty of the birds who handled all the hardships of the path reach Simorgh but what they confront is their own identity. They realize that Simorgh (“thirty birds” in Persian) is themselves. Sa’di’s *Bustan* is a didactic/ethical poem presenting tales and anecdotes. His lyric poetry is considered above all written before him, in terms of its charming language use and imagery, as well as delightful melody. The supreme monument of mystical thought, theories, and images is the six-volume *Mathnawi* of Rumi (“Anatolian”). He also composed vibrant, heartfelt ghazals uniquely absorbed in passion, which give the impression that they were written under inspiration. His blending of mystical and romantic feelings is typical of Persian literature. These poems collected in his *Diwan-e Kebir* are originally in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Greek languages, and occasionally come close to popular language and issues. Hafez of the 14th century represents the zenith of the ghazal form with the perfect beauty and rhythm of his lyrics, and the sophisticated imagery in *Diwan*. The lively period of Persian literature ended with the last of the classical poets Jami (d.1492).

Story about the person who knocked on the door of his beloved, who asked him from inside, 'Who is it?' He replied 'It is I!' She responded, 'Since you are you, I won't open the door: I don't know any friend who is "I" -go away!'

A man knocked on his lover's door one day,
 'Who is it?' he heard his beloved say.
 He said, 'It's me.' She answered, 'Leave at once!
 There isn't room for such raw arrogance.'
 Raw meat's cooked just by separation's flame-
 What else can cure hypocrisy's deep shame?
 He wandered off in pain as his heart burnt,
 In exile from the one for whom he yearned,
 Matured before then going back once more
 And walking to and fro outside her door.
 He tapped the door, now suffering nerves inside,
 Not to let slip a wrong word how he tried!
 His sweetheart then responded, asking who
 Was at the door -he said, 'None, love, but you.'
 'Now you are I, please enter in this place
 Because for two I's here there isn't space.'

The poem conveys that salvation from non-existence is only possible through the elevation of the human soul to its original place by way of love.

Source: Jalal al-Din Rumi. (2004). *The Mathnawi*, Book I (J. Mojaddedi, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

2.3. Turkish Literature

Islam arrived to the Turks by way of Persia. Their literary language was Eastern Turkish from the 11th to the 19th century, excluding western Turkic lands. The classical or court literature in Turkish shared with Persian mainly the same literary conventions and terminology and utilized the vocabulary of Turkish, Persian, and Arabic languages. (Savory, 1976, p. 79) The earliest Turkish work of the Islamic period, *Kutadgu bilig* (The Knowledge that gives happiness), appeared in 1069-70 under the Karakhanids. It was written by Yusuf Khass Hajib in Eastern (Karakhanid) Turkish, and presented to the sultan in Kashghar. A didactic-allegorical treatise in verse, the work is formed by dialogues between four characters: The Ruler, the principal minister, the minister's son as a statesman, and the minister's cousin and friend, representing Justice, Fortune, Wisdom, and Man's Final Destiny, respectively. *Kutadgu bilig* provides guidance to the ruler on Islamic ideals of statecraft and government conduct, so he becomes successful. This type of literature is called "Mirrors for Princes". It constitutes an important portion of the prose belles-lettres in the middle Islamic period, which comprised religious-inspirational and theoretical literature as well. Among well-known examples of the genre written in Arabic and Persian are *Al-Madina al-Fadila* and *Qabusnama*.

An early Turkish mystic and saint of the 12th century, Ahmad Yasavi, was a propagator of Islam among the Turks in Central Asia. His collected poems of wisdom on religious-personal ethics titled *Diwan-e Hikmat* is the oldest monument of Turkish Sufi literature. Employing plain Turkish, national poetic forms, and popular syllabic meter, the work appealed to the needs and the tastes of the newly converted Turkish folk. (Köprülü, 2006, p. 127, 171)

A rich body of religious literature marks this period. *Qisas al-anbiya* (Stories of the Prophets, 1310), and *Nahj al-Faradis* (1360) in the Forty *Hadith* category, are not only

pioneering texts in these specific genres in (Khwarazm) Turkish but also significant with their enduring popularity for centuries.

Eastern Turkish literature of the 15th century employing Chaghatay Turkish had a golden era at the court of the Herat sultan. 'Ali Shir Nava'i was the greatest representative of this literature with his mathnawis, ghazals, biographical collections of poets and mystics, and other prose works. He applied Perso-Arabic prosody to Turkish and advocated the superiority of Turkish to Persian for the richness of expression and phonetic characteristics. (Holt et al., 1970, pp. 685-86) Chaghatay eventually gained acceptance over a large territory in the region of Turkestan and India as a literary medium in the face of Persian, the prestige language among the educated. (Savory, 1976, p. 81)

The first examples of written Turkish Islamic literature in Western Asia appeared in the 13th century after the break-up of the Seljuk state. It is because the language of scholarship and government for the Anatolian Seljuk (Oghuz) Turks who Islamized the area was not Turkish but Persian and Arabic. They patronized Persian literature. Western Turkish emerged as a literary language in Anatolia after the Seljuks and Turkish literature grew in the courts of the successor principalities.

13th-14th century Turkish literature in Anatolia is predominantly religio-mystic. Yunus Emre (d. 1320), an ardent mystic poet, is recognized as the founder of Turkish literature proper in Anatolia. His moving, rich poetry put to use the language of the folk, together with the local syllable-counting meter, in the finest, straightforward manner. A leading representative of Sufism in Anatolia after Rumi, Yunus's hymns gained sympathy for mysticism among people, and they have been sung in mystic lodges (*tekke*) since then. Hundreds of mathnawis were composed in this period but Süleyman Chelebi's *Wasilat al-Najat* (*Mevlid*, 1409) about the birth and the life of the Prophet Mohammad was loved most. It is still chanted at gatherings and religious occasions in Turkey. (Kuiper, 2010, p. 85) (Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG1ZrThc4cI> to listen to a recital of *Mevlid*, the division on The Birth of the Prophet.)

Nasimi is a big name in non-Sunni mystic poetry in Azari Turkish. His unorthodox beliefs associated with *hurufism* (letter-symbolism), which enraged religious authorities, cost him his life. Nasimi's work exemplifies the early phase in the formation of Ottoman Turkish *diwan* (court) poetry that followed classical Persian literary forms and patterns.

An impressive collection of religious epics and legends in Turkish came into being in Anatolia in the middle Islamic period, which facilitated the consolidation of people's religious sentiments. *Battalnama* and *Daneshmandnama* are semihistorical narratives depicting Muslim heroes' battles with unbelievers in the Balkans, Anatolia, and Central Asia. They are largely compiled from tales circulating among the folk and the *ghazis* (Muslim warriors). Similarly, *manakebnamas* are hagiographical narratives of Muslim saints and their miraculous deeds.

As of the middle of the 15th century, Turkish literature followed three different channels: Ottoman court literature intended for the elite, *tekke* (popular mystical) literature, and folk literature.

3. The Literature of the 16th-18th Century Dynasties

The 16th century marks an important chapter in the history of the Islamic world. Mughal Empire was founded in India by Babur, the Safavid rule with Shi'ite convictions of Islam was established in Iran, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of dramatic expansion and emerged as a world power, and Granada was reconquered from the

Muslims, ending their rule in the Iberian peninsula. Thus, three dynasties emerged in the Islamic world, which were culturally interacting with each other.

Persian literature of this period was mainly produced in India and the Ottoman Empire. It mainly continued the classical patterns of the medieval period. In Iran, religious works of propaganda with Shi'ite content proliferated. Some artists from Iran sought and found favor under the Mughals when patronage weakened at the Safavid court. The migration of poets and support by Mughal emperors and nobles brought about an Indian style of Persian poetry called *sabk-e hindi*. Indian, Iranian, Afghan, and Turkish poets were attracted to it. It used conventional poetic forms but the originality and complexity of the poetic imagery, unfamiliar meters, and elaborate rhyme patterns were its newly invented distinctive features. The most gifted poets of this style in Persian were Saib of Tabriz and Bedil. (Vernoit, 2005, p. 275)

Mystic dervishes in the provincial Sufi centers in the subcontinent used an early form of Urdu in their popular writings to convert non-Muslims and to educate their disciples. Miranji Shams al-'Ushshaq of the 15th century is a towering figure who helped Urdu to be recognized as a medium of Sufi poetry. In the 18th century, Urdu gained prominence as a literary language in the Mughal Empire, gradually replacing Persian. Persian poetry as a courtly production had become repetitive in general and moved further away from its people in terms of comprehensibility by the 19th century. (Savory, 1976, p. 76)

Historical writing was well represented in Mughal prose, in addition to a number of biographies. Babur's record of his autobiography, *Baburnama*, exemplifies a lively and captivating Mughal prose narrative in Chaghatay Turkish. Babur (d. 1530) was a competent poet and a literary critic as well. Brilliant poets emerged after him in the Mughal dynasty who wrote in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. (Kuiper, 2010, p. 97)

One of the most renowned poets of the Turkic literary world in the 18th century was Makhdum-kuli. His social, political, and spiritual lyrics employing folk language, forms, and motifs marked a turning point for the evolution of Turkmen literature.

The capture of Istanbul by the Ottoman Turks set the scene for the emergence of sophisticated and elaborate court literature in Turkish in this new capital. (Holt et al., 1970, pp. 688-90) Later the conquest of Egypt in 1516 and the growth of the Ottoman Empire shifted the attention in Islamic literature from Arabic to Turkish in the region. The Arabic language was largely employed in such fields as philosophy, biography, and theology in these three centuries. India considerably contributed to Arabic literature in prose and poetry, particularly in southern provinces. An example is Azad Bilgrami (d. 1786), an Indian scholar and poet, who has a book of poems (*diwan*) in Arabic. His panegyrics for the Prophet Mohammad composed in Arabic became more famous than his works in Persian.

By the 16th century, Western Turkish literature acquired its classical form in the Ottoman courts under the influence of Persian and Arabic literary traditions. An elaborate style of Turkish developed in verse and prose in the hands of the educated higher classes, which was largely detached from the language of the folk. Sophisticated images and rhetoric, adopted Arabic-Persian prosody, vocabulary, and forms such as the qasida and the ghazal, characterized Ottoman Turkish court (*diwan*) literature. Its most outstanding poets were Mihri, Fuzuli, Baqi, Nef'i, Nabi, Nedim and Sheikh Ghalib.

Fuzuli (d. 1556) lived in Baghdad and wrote in his native Azari Turkish, as well as in Persian and Arabic. The popular *Layla and Majnun* mathnawi is associated with his name as he recreated the romance in his unique, genuine style. Particularly his ghazals

demonstrate his poetic power in describing human emotions in a beautiful and seemingly simple way. (Savory, 1976, p. 83) Fuzuli is widely known and read across Muslim lands. Baqi, on the other hand, is recognized for his mastery of the technique of court poetry, as he skillfully blended in his poetry Arabic, Turkish, and Persian elements and used sophisticated word plays. His poetry reflected the glory of the time of Suleiman the Magnificent and spoke of love, nature, and the pleasure of living. The sultan recognized Baqi's gift and bestowed upon him favors. Baqi is famous for his moving elegy he composed on the death of Sultan Suleiman. Sheikh Ghalib (d. 1799), a follower of Rumi's school of mysticism, and the poet of *Beauty and Love*, is the last great representative of Ottoman Turkish court poetry. The romance of *Beauty and Love* presents a multi-level allegory to a journey in search of the loved one. At one level of the allegory, it is the mystical journey of the Sufi disciple toward God.



Figure 3.1. A late-16th-century illustration of *Layla and Majnun* mathnawi. The lovers faint when they see each other.

Source: wikipedia.org

Tekke (religious order) poetry embraced mysticism, some presenting a challenge to the orthodox doctrines of Islam and posing political opposition too. (Halman, 2011, p. 26-27) Pir Sultan Abdal's (16th c.) popular mystical verses in the Alawite-Bakhtashi tradition are representative of non-Sunni tekke literature in Turkish.

During the classical period of Western Turkish, prose works came to the fore in the fields of history, biography, geography, and travel. They were written in pure, middle, or ornamented prose so Arabo-Persian examples did not dictate the field as in poetry. In his monumental work *Sayahatnama* (The Book of Travel), Ewliya Chelebi accounted his travels all over the Ottoman lands in pure, attractive prose. The work is a great source of information on all aspects of life in Ottoman society. Many of the official correspondence, memorials, works on politics and ethics, as well as chronicles used educated middle prose, neither high nor informal Turkish. Yirmisekiz Mehmed Chelebi's *Safaratnama*, and Naima's history, a much-resorted source for the 17th-century Ottoman history, present examples of vivid, unpretentious middle prose in written Turkish of the period. Some

letters, biographical dictionaries, and history works were designed as works of literary art and employed ornamented, rhymed prose distinct from spoken Turkish, to demonstrate the writer's skill. (Holt et al., 1970, p. 693)

The populace lacked the education to understand classical poetry or prose in general. The minstrels, such as the great Karajaoghlan, sang poetry of epic, pastoral, lyrical, and satirical kinds in folk language and the syllabic meter, wandering around Anatolia and Rumelia. Hence, folk poetry tradition, still alive in Turkey today, followed ancient Turkic, rather than Islamic cultural patterns in literature.

4. The Literature of the Modern Period: Neoclassicism and Western Influence

The need for development and reform in Islamic societies encouraged two different but interconnected currents, characterizing their literature in terms of content and form in the modern era. Rediscovery of the literary heritage and interest in native classical models in the early 19th century worked towards revitalizing literature from within. In this period, Islamic peoples also came in close contact with the West through travels, emigration, education, translations, trade, diplomacy, as well as occupation and colonialism. Modernization efforts inspired by these contacts and stimulated by the need for internal reform gave way to the assimilation of Western culture and literary models in the form of translations, adaptations, and acquisition of English and French liberal thought. The spread of education and expansion of public press and printing created a new middle-class reading and writing public, which pushed for the simplification of diction, as well as the cultivation of new and renewed genres, such as essays, short stories, novels, and dramatic literature.

4.1. Arabic Literature

Modern Arabic literature was born as an outcome of a combination of factors. The Arab world witnessed a cultural renaissance (*al-nahda*) in the early 19th century following Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798. It marked a new era for Arabic literature. The revival of classical Arabic and its literary genres in this period merged with mounting literary influences from the West, as well as the awakening of nationalistic consciousness. A new Arab world has risen following WWII, and Arabic literature came forth as the literature of specific people again.

Most Arab writers in the early period of the Arabic literary renaissance used a neoclassical style, employing a highly ornate language in their translations and adaptations, which displayed a tendency towards recuperating indigenous heritage. Muhammad 'Uthman Jalal's (d. 1898) translation of *Paul et Virginie*, a reproduction of the novel in the rhymed prose style of *the maqamat*, is an example of this attitude.

Al-Tahtawi (d. 1873), his students in Egypt, and a community of Lebanese intellectuals undertook an activity of publishing from Western languages. In the 1870s and 1880s in Egypt, a growing number of newspapers and journals published serialized novels, both as translations and original contributions, bringing about the early examples of modern fiction in Arabic. While al-Bustani's writings paved the way for modern Arabic expository prose, Jurji Zaydan introduced the historical novel to the Arabic population in a series where he narrated events from the history of Islam and the Arabs in an accessible language. Their works helped forge an Arab identity by creating a consciousness of the Arab culture and the Arab past. (Allen, 2000, p. 178)

The first modern short stories in Arabic were published around the turn of the century. Al-Manfaluti (d. 1924), the acknowledged master of modern Arabic prose,

translated and adapted short stories, novels, and plays from French writers with characters and conditions genuinely transformed into an Arab setting. He wrote short stories, as well as essays, in the finest style, to address pressing social issues. (Allen, 2000, p. 179) Mohammed Taymur and Tawfiq 'Awwad are deemed to be great short story writers in Arabic. The genre developed highly in Arabic and arguably achieved the same degree of perfection as the best European short stories. (Ullah, 1963, pp. 178-79)

The 20th-century literary scene in Arabic was dominated for decades by Taha Hussain (d. 1973). He is most noted for his autobiographical masterpiece, *al-Ayyam* (The Days). (Holt et al., 1970, p. 669) M. H. Haykal's novel *Zaynab* novel (1913), using local characters and vernacular Arabic, became a landmark in the birth of the modern Arabic novel. The most renowned Arabic novelist was Najib Mahfuz with more than thirty novels and a Nobel Prize in Literature (1988). His novel and short story characters often depicted the challenges of social change and disparity faced by the Egyptian people, as well as the circumstances of political transformations. (Khouri, 1983, p. 43; Allen, 2000, p. 186) In the field of dramatic literature, Tawfiq al-Hakim (d. 1987) distinguished himself as the founder and the master of the genre in the 20th century. (Allen, 2000, p. 201)



Figure 4.1.1. Najib Mahfuz (d. 2006)

Source: nobelprize.org

“At last! Here I am, walking, with my small bag, across the bridge. A bridge no longer than a few meters of wood and thirty years of exile.

How was this piece of dark wood able to distance a whole nation from its dreams? To prevent entire generations from taking their coffee in homes that were theirs? How did it deliver us to all this patience and all that death? How was it able to scatter us among exiles, and tents, and political parties, and frightened whispers?

...

Fayruz calls it the Bridge of Return. The Jordanians call it the King Hussein Bridge. The Palestinian Authority calls it al-Karama Crossing. The common people and the bus and taxi drivers call it the Allenby Bridge. My mother, and before her my grandmother and my father and my uncle's wife, Umm Talal, call it simply: the Bridge.

Now I cross it for the first time since thirty summers. The summer of 1966, and immediately after, no slowing down, the summer of 1996.

...

A distant childhood. The faces of friends and enemies. I am the person coming from the continents of others, from their languages and their borders. The person with spectacles on his eyes and a small bag on his shoulder. And these are the planks of the bridge. These are my steps on them. Here I am walking toward the land of the poem. A visitor? A refugee? A citizen? A guest? I do not know.

Is this a political moment? Or an emotional one? Or social? A practical moment? A surreal one? A moment of the body? Or of the mind? The wood creaks. What has passed of life is shrouded in a mist that both hides and reveals. Why do I wish I could get rid of this bag? There is very little water under the bridge. Water without water. As though the water

apologized for its presence on this boundary between two histories, two faiths, two tragedies. The scene is of rock. Chalk. Military. Desert. Painful as a toothache."

From *I Saw Ramallah*, an autobiographical novel by the Palestinian poet and writer Mourid Barghouti. The work received the Najib Mahfuz Medal for Literature in 1997.

Source: Barghouti, M. (2003). *I Saw Ramallah* (pp. 10-11). (A. Soueif, Trans.). Anchor Books.

4.1.1. Poetry

Modern Arabic poetry, while addressing contemporary themes, initially upheld the classical forms of pre-Islamic Arabia and of the golden age of the Abbasids, such as the *qasida*. The poetry of Ahmad Shawqi, the most brilliant Revivalist poet, exemplifies the neoclassical trend in poetry. It seeks its models in the tradition while demonstrating interest in the concerns of the present; such as the fall of Adrianople or the extinction of the Caliphate. (Ullah, 1963, p. 175; Holt et al., 1970, p. 670)

Arabic poetry found its new inspiration in European Romanticism later on in the thirties, which presented a reaction to earlier classicism. Its earliest examples were to be found among the poets of the Arab émigré (*mahjar*) communities. (Allen, 2000, pp. 123-24) The works of those Arab intellectuals and writers who emigrated to Europe, the United States, and Brazil for political and economic reasons made up a great deal of modern Arabic literature. Most coming from Lebanese Christian backgrounds, such as the poet and the artist Khalil Gibran (d. 1931), these émigré communities generated a new school in Arabic literature introducing the techniques of modern fiction and free verse.

The Free Verse movement instigated change in the formal aspects of poetry such as traditional metrics and rhyme, and provided it with an alternative rhythm and organic unity through the use of language in innovative ways. It was the most radical transformation in the history of Arabic poetry. Nazik al-Malaika (d. 2007) from Iraq, a female voice with fresh insights into love and gender relationships, was a pioneer and a successful practitioner of free verse in modern Arabic literature. (Holt et al., 1970, p. 671; Allen, 2000, p. 110, 130)

4.2 Persian Literature

The fall of the Mughal dynasty and the British control in India weakened the support for the Persian language and literature, and it lost ground to Urdu in the region. Persian literature received patronage under the Qajars in Persia. Persian literary renaissance in the 19th century cultivated classicism, which sought a return to the unpretentious style of the great Khurasanian masters. The most prolific poet of this period was Qaani of Shiraz. Court patronage ended due to political changes and the increasing interest of the authors in the realities of the people.

The impact of Western literary techniques and models arrived by way of translations of literary and scientific texts from European languages. The development of journalism also played a major role in publicizing simple, colloquial Persian among the people of letters. Literature marked with simplicity and expressing social concerns became a vehicle of modernization at the turn of the century. Mohammad-Taqi Bahar's (d. 1951) poetry in highly classical form dealt with contemporary problems and became very influential reaching a wide audience. Particularly the historical novel communicating nationalistic sentiments and the short story gained popularity in Persian literature of the period. Sadiq Hidayat and Mohammad 'Ali Jamalzadeh's works exemplified this new Persian prose. (Ostle, 2017, p. 54, pp. 136-38)

Muhammad Iqbal, the most influential Muslim intellectual and poet of the 20th century- India wrote in both Persian and Urdu. His poetry, guided by Rumi and admired

for its spirit, dealt with the theme of unity with God, the role of the Self in relation to society, and the Islamic revival. (Ullah, 1963, p. 363; Kuiper, 2010, p. 113)

4.3 Turkish Literature

The first phase of modern Turkish literature is called the *Tanzimat* literature. It is named after the "Reorganization" (1839) movement in the Ottoman Empire which intended modernizing reforms in political and administrative affairs. Tanzimat literature pointed toward a change in the function and the forms of Turkish literature in the second half of the 19th century.

The pioneering figures of the Tanzimat literature were Shinasi, Namık Kemal, and Ziya Pasha. They published the first private newspapers (the 1860s), produced the first novels, plays, essays, and poetry after Western models, and introduced ideals and concepts of the French Revolution into Turkish, such as liberty (*hürriyet*) and fatherland (*vatan*), through translations and original contributions. The first generation of Tanzimat literati was interested in politics and the survival of the state; so, much of their intellectual and literary work reflected aspirations for Ottoman nationalism, constitutionalism, justice, and modern conventions. It is noteworthy that the first modern play of Turkish Islamic literature known as *Şair Evlenmesi* (The Wedding of a Poet, 1859), and the first novel, *Taaşuk-ı Talat ve Fitnat* (The Romance of Talat and Fitnat, 1872), treated the custom of arranged marriages and its negative consequences. The emerging public press, employing simpler prose, has played a key role in educating the public on new ideas, and in shaping the new literature. (Savory, 1976, p. 85) As to poetry, Abdülhak Hamid revolutionized Turkish verse by introducing themes from daily life and forms from Western literature. (Ullah, 1963, p. 404) The taste for diwan (court) literature gradually changed.

The growing number of commercial press and serial publications as well as the expansion of literacy in later decades helped the popularization of the new genres. The first true male and female novelists rose in this period, such as Ahmet Mithat and Fatma Aliye. Late Ottoman authors were predominantly concerned with the issue of how to modernize society without compromising Islamic and native cultural identity.

At the end of the century, a group of young poets and authors gathered around the avant-garde literary magazine *Servet-i Fünun* (The Wealth of Arts) promoting the principle of "art for art's sake". They perfected the use of Western forms and avoided political matters owing to the stiff political atmosphere. Writing in highly stylized forms, Khalid Ziya of this circle produced masterpieces of the modern Turkish novel, such as *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love).

4.3.1. The Republican Period

Turkish nationalism inspired writers at the beginning of the 20th century. Prominent figures of this period, Halide Edib, Mehmed Akif, and Ömer Seyfeddin, were concerned with the salvation of the nation and so their work was committed to the cause of liberation from the political and cultural invasion of European powers. Mehmed Akif was a towering Islamist poet and he is the creator of the lyrics of the Turkish National Anthem. Halide Edib, on the other hand, is an internationally acclaimed, powerful narrator of the Turkish National Struggle (1919-1922) with a series of novels, stories, and memoirs. Her memoirs of the Turkish National Struggle, *The Turkish Ordeal*, was published in English in 1928.

From “**For the Martyrs at the Dardanelles**”

Soldier, for these hallowed lands, now on this land you lie dead.
 Your forebears may well lean from Heaven to kiss your forehead.
 How mighty you are, you safeguard our True Faith with your blood;
 Your glory is shared by the braves of the Prophet of God.
 Who could dig the grave that will not be too narrow for you?
 If we should bury you in history, you would break through.
 That book cannot hold your epochs with all their rampages:
 You could only be contained by everlasting ages.

Mehmet Akif Ersoy (Trans. by Talat S. Halman)

Source: Silay, K. (Ed.). (1996). *An anthology of Turkish literature* (p. 267). Indiana University Turkish Studies.

Latinization of the Turkish script in 1928 in the Republican period was a significant point in breaking ties with Arabo-Persian Islamic tradition. (Ullah, 1963, p. 409) Native Turkish words were called in from other Turkic languages to replace borrowings from Persian and Arabic. In poetry, the classical quantitative meter (*aruz*) was abandoned and the traditional Turkish syllabic meter was favored. Nazım Hikmet soon introduced free rhythmical patterns, as well as socialist revolutionary content, to Turkish poetry, leaving a deep mark on later generations of poets. His contemporary Necip Fazıl (d. 1983) is another giant name in Turkish literature, whose poetry and prose related the effects of a sociocultural and intellectual break from the Islamic heritage. He maintained that upholding the Islamic belief is the way to surmount crises for Muslims who are faced with Kemalist, capitalist, and communist ideologies.

Modern Turkish prose was dominated by a new trend from the 1950s to the 1970s: The “village novel”. Writers born in the countryside and belonging to the underprivileged classes gained a reputation through their work offering firsthand knowledge of the village life and of the realities of the masses. Yaşar Kemal treated the topic in a more universal context. His *İnce Memed* (Memed, My Hawk) represents the zenith of this literature with its stark realism and magical descriptions. (Ostle, 2017, p. 177)

The publication of modernist and postmodern works in Turkey in the 1970s and 80s indicated a critique of realist and politically engaged literary tradition in Turkish, which merged with a revival in historical novels at the end of the millennium. (Kuru, 2002, p. 517) The Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk (2006) deals with the tensions between East and West, Turkish modernization, and the Ottoman past, since his first book *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* (Cevdet Bey and His Sons, 1982).



Figure 4.3.1.1. Orhan Pamuk
Source: nobelprize.org (Photo: U. Montan)

Summary and Conclusion

During the early Islamic period, Arabic literature flourished as the Islamic empire expanded its influence beyond Damascus, Baghdad, and Samarra. An early form of Arabic poetry, the *qasida*, persisted in Islamic lands, and the *ghazal* emerged as an independent genre of love poetry. As Baghdad became a cultural center under the Abbasids, translation of texts from ancient Indian, Persian, and Hellenistic traditions stimulated the growth of Arabic prose literature with frame-stories and belles-lettres. Additionally, historical literature, relating information on the life of the Prophet Mohammad and the Islamic community began to take shape in this period.

After the break-up of the universal Caliphate from the 10th century onwards, the Islamic world appeared culturally and linguistically divided into two roughly. In the Western lands, Islamic Spain came to be the main home to Arabic literary activity as Muslim conquests continued westward. In the Eastern Islamic world, the Persian language re-emerged as a literary vehicle in the Muslim orbit, with verse sagas and historical prose carrying the memory of a proud past. Persian literature grew in strength in provincial dynasties in Iran, Northern India, and Central Asia, at the court of the Samanids and the Ghaznavids. Mysticism exerted its influence on all Islamic literature but it was in Persian poetry that it truly flourished. It resulted in a vast body of literary works from allegoric poetry to scholarly texts.

Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman dynasties were the major powers in the Islamic world in the 16th century. Indian style of Persian poetry attracted Muslim poets of Indian, Iranian, Afghan, and Turkish origins. Mughal Empire became home to great literary figures who wrote in Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Urdu. On the other hand, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire shifted the attention from Arabic to Turkish in the Western Islamic world. Ottoman Turkish classical literature developed under the influence of Arabo-Persian traditions, the most celebrated poets of which were Fuzuli, Baqi, Nedim, and Sheikh Ghalib.

The modern literature of the Islamic world has two main currents: the revival of native classical heritage and an orientation toward Western literary culture. In the 19th century, Arabic literature underwent a renaissance called *al-nahda*, reviving classical styles and indigenous forms. Concurrently, interaction with the West introduced Western literary genres like novels, short stories, and plays, addressing societal issues. The works of Arab émigré (*mahjar*) communities in Europe and America made up a big part of modern Arabic literature. Likewise, 19th-century Persian literature aimed to rejuvenate its traditions, while translations from Western languages altered literary techniques and content. Modernization efforts similarly impacted Turkish literature, changing its function and forms. Social and political ideals were pronounced through essays, plays, and stories, by Ottoman intellectuals in the pages of serial publications. The early Republican period literature in Turkey saw a focus on nationalism and the adoption of Latin script, breaking ties with Arabo-Persian Islamic tradition.

A survey of the historical development of Islamic literature as exemplified here displays certain patterns of continuity, change, and interaction. One example is the significant influence of Arabic literature in shaping the primary genres of Islamic literature in the early period. *Ghazal*, *qasida*, *mathnawi*, and *adab* were initially established within Arabic literature and later evolved across other cultural and linguistic traditions, acquiring varied forms and functions. From Hafez's unrivaled Persian ghazals of the 14th century to Nef'i's celebrated *qasidas* composed in Turkish in the 17th century, these forms achieved widespread integration within Islamic literature.

The present study also illustrates how Persian literature, patronized by Islamic dynasties of various ethnic origins, played a pivotal role in the flourishing of Sufi doctrine within literary expression. Sufism is a mystical philosophy within Islam that prioritizes heart over reason in the quest for the truth, that is the knowledge of the unknown. Mystics employed poetry to articulate their teachings as well as spiritual experiences. It steadily garnered influence among people. Mystic poetry came to occupy a central place in the literature produced in Persian in the middle Islamic period. It generated great names, and timeless masterpieces, such as Farid al-Din Attar's *Mantiq al-tayr* (Conference of the Birds) and Jalal al-Din Rumi's *Mathnawi*, serving as inspiration, and imprinting an indelible legacy, for the mystic literature to come in various geographies and languages.

Another shared experience among Islamic literatures highlighted in this investigation is the increasing impact of Western influence in the 19th century. The assimilation of European literary models and ideals of modernization marked the beginning of a new period in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literatures, as explained above. Thus, the modern period meant not only a transformative shift in the formal aspects of literature but also greater attention to ongoing political and social changes and the concerns of the masses.

Lastly, I believe that poetry with an unorthodox and iconoclastic attitude in Islamic literary tradition mentioned here from the time of the Abbasids to the Ottomans is an intriguing topic deserving a separate, scholarly investigation.

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