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Poetry as a Religiously Based Political Propaganda Tool: The Divans of the Ottoman Sultans

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Abstract

Poetry, the bearer of collective memory in the Turkish state tradition, has been used as an art and administrative tool for generations in the Ottoman dynasty. The fact that 27 of the 36 Ottoman sultans wrote poetry and 10 sultans owned a “divan” (poetry book) suggests that this art served a political function for the dynasty. This study aims to investigate whether the sultan poets used poetry as a religiously based political propaganda tool to appear pious and artistic and to reinforce the legitimacy of their reign. Because the poems in these works are noteworthy as texts that promote the image of the sultan as a just, pious, and powerful ruler, legitimise Islamic expansionist policy (jihad), and aim to perpetuate cultural superiority. The study includes an analysis of relevant examples selected from the poems of ten Ottoman sultans (Mehmed II, Bayezid II, Selim I, Süleyman I, Selim II, Murad III, Ahmed I, Osman II, Ahmed III, Selim III). It is argued that these types of poems by Ottoman sultans, besides being the result of a simple literary pursuit; they served as a means of communication that reinforced the religious and political legitimacy of the sultans.

Keywords: Ottoman sultans; poetry; religious legitimacy; political legitimacy; political propaganda

1. Introduction

Discourses are a means for humans to express themselves and connect with their surroundings; however, not all words carry the same importance and impact. While words are a means of communication in the ordinary and daily use of language, poetry is the most refined, harmonious, and intense form of words. Poetry is a powerful artistic form that transcends the limits of words and can penetrate the depths of the soul. In this respect, poetry proves that words are not only communicative but also transformative and influential. In other words, poetry is the most powerful and influential type of word. This unique power of poetry is fundamentally nourished by three main sources: intensity and refinement, musicality and harmony, emotional and intellectual depth. Firstly, poetry is the art of intensity and distillation. The poet has the ability to condense an idea, a feeling, or a scene that a novel or article would describe in long paragraphs into a few lines. This distilled language creates an immediate and striking image in the reader’s mind, ensuring the message reaches its target with powerful force. Secondly, poetry contains musicality and harmony. Elements such as metre, rhythm, rhyme and alliteration go beyond making words sound pleasant to the ear; they create an emotional vibration. This internal music affects the emotional state of the reader or listener, ensuring that the subject matter is accepted directly on an emotional level, even if it is not rational. Thanks to this harmony, poetry can be much more persuasive and lasting than logical argument. Finally, poetry is



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a vehicle for emotional and intellectual depth. The most complex philosophical questions, the most intense personal pains, or the most sublime loves are expressed through poetry. Poetry not only conveys the poet's feelings but also resonates with the reader's own personal experiences. This universal resonance transforms the reader from a passive recipient of the text into a part of the work.

Every nation has an artistic vein that shapes its identity, spirit, culture, and history; for Turks, this vein is, without question, poetry. Poetry, from pre-Islamic times through Islam to the present day, is an art form that has deeply permeated every layer of Turkish life and state tradition. It is not only a source of aesthetic pleasure but also the most powerful vehicle for collective memory, education, politics and belief.

The roots of poetry in Turkish civilisation extend back to pre-Islamic times. Bards, shamans and kam (shamans) led religious ceremonies and passed down the history, heroism and worldview of their tribes from generation to generation through poems recited to the accompaniment of the "kopuz". In this era dominated by oral culture, poetry, made easier to remember through its rhythm and harmony, served almost as written laws and history books. Epic poems, in particular, recorded the political and military achievements stretching from the Huns to the Göktürks and Uighurs, who were all Turkish states, and thus served as a fundamental mortar in the formation of national identity. Ahmed Yesevi's poems, called "hikmet," and Yunus Emre's "ilahî" played a significant role in the spread and consolidation of Islam among the Turks. The Turks' love for the Prophet Muhammad has also been strengthened by the 15th-century poet Süleyman Çelebi's *mesnevi* (*mathnawi*) entitled *Vesiletü'n-necât*, and has remained strong to this day.

The powerful expression and impact of poetry have always ensured interest in and prestige for poetry among Turkish state administrators. Members of the dynasty and the poets they patronised also contributed to the strengthening and continuation of this tradition. Kadı Burhaneddin The sultan of the Kadı Burhaneddin State, Kadı Burhaneddin (1345–1398), the Karakoyunlu sultan Cihanşah (?–1467), the Akkoyunlu sultan Uzun Hasan (1423–1478), the Timurid sultan Hüseyin Baykara (1438–1507), the Mamluk sultan Kansu Gavri (1440?–1516), the Uzbek sultans Şiban Khan (1451–1510) and Ubeydullah Khan (?–1538), the Babur Shah (1483–1530), sultan of the Baburlu state, Shah Ismail, sultan of the Safavid Empire (1487–1524), and Gazi Giray Khan (1554–1608), one of the Crimean khans, were also important Turkish khans who were poets (Deniz 2021, p. 160). This list is significant in that it demonstrates how poetry writing was an indispensable part of rulership in other Turkic states both before and after the Ottoman Empire, reflecting the centuries-old model of the 'wise ruler (wise khan)'. Indeed, this situation has enabled Turkish to survive as a poetic language across a vast region—from India to the Middle East, Central Asia to Anatolia, Egypt to Crimea and the Balkans—despite the geographical and cultural differences between these areas. It has also led to poetry being used as a diplomatic and ideological language among rival states and sultans. For example, the fact that rival rulers such as Shah Ismail and Selim I (Yavuz) or Uzun Hasan and Mehmed II (Fatih) wrote poetry at the same time proves that the struggle between them was not only a war over territory and sect but also a 'race for cultural supremacy'. This is an important demonstration of how art can be transformed into a soft power weapon.

With the adoption of Islam, poetry experienced a great enrichment in both form and content. The Islamic sciences, Sufism (Islamic mysticism), and Arabic-Persian literary traditions brought by the new religion established a profound classical tradition within Turkish literature, specifically the 'Classical Turkish Poetry' with its own distinct objectives and rules. With Islam, Classical Turkish Literature attained an elite/high literary status, established, defined, and disseminated by the literary authorities of Eastern civilisation, particularly Arabic and Persian. In the Ottoman Empire, reciting poetry within this liter-

ary tradition was regarded as a sign of prestige, representing high culture. Therefore, the sultans sought to demonstrate their mastery of this high art and, above all, to ensure its continuation. They themselves became poets within the tradition and encouraged poets to recite this poetry through various flattering gestures. This situation made poetry the official artistic language of the court and the state. The sultans' poetry gatherings developed the artistic talents of the sultans, while poets needed the support of those in power to publicise their works, preserve their names, and secure material prosperity. This mutual benefit and interaction brought the rapprochement between artists and state officials to its peak in the Turkish dynasties, especially during the Ottoman period.

It is known in world history that there were members of royalty who wrote poetry in ancient states. In poems written from a royal perspective, the most crucial element is the speaker's conviction of possessing a divinely bestowed charisma (Paul 2024, p. 433). Eryılmaz, discussing the reasons why Ottoman sultans wrote poetry, states that poetry became a perfect tool not only for conveying personal emotions but also for promoting the image of a 'civilizing' sultan, challenging rivals, and shaping political public opinion (Eryılmaz 2024, p. 561); she emphasizes that this was an integral part of an ideal ruler's mission (Eryılmaz 2024, p. 589).

Classical Turkish poetry served not only as an artistic activity within the Ottoman Empire's system of power, but also as a multifaceted tool of propaganda and legitimacy. This situation, which can also be described as a kind of "establishing cultural superiority" and "providing cultural patronage," had an influence and tradition extending back to medieval Iran and Central Asia (İnalçık 2003, p. 10). Indeed, the fact that sultans personally engaged in poetry and that ten sultans possessed their own divans indicates that this system was not merely an incentive, but also a manifestation of the dynasty's cultural supremacy. This tradition reached its peak in the Ottoman Palace, transforming into a continuity and literary power. So much so that "it would not be wrong to say that no other state in the world has such a tradition of poetry writing that has lasted for generations among its dynasty members. The Ottoman dynasty is unique in this respect." (Deniz 2021, p. 162). For the Ottoman sultans were not only commanders who won victories at the head of the army, but also portrayed themselves as high-minded artists and cultured rulers who conquered the hearts of their people through literature and poetry. Thus, the Ottoman power certified its political power and prestige with the immortalising power of the art of poetry, crowning all the actions of the dynasty with cultural reinforcement.

"The Sultans utilized poetry as a medium of communication and propaganda to articulate their religious beliefs (humility and servitude), political assertions (jihad and justice), and even their personal grievances. From 1299 to 1923, the Ottoman Empire was ruled by 36 sultans. Of these sultans, 27 wrote poetry, and 10 compiled a divan (poetry collection). The sultans whose poetry has been identified, along with their pen names (mahlas), are as follows: Osman Bey (1281–1324), Orhan Bey (1324–1359), Sultan Murad I (1359–1389), Sultan Bayezid I/Yıldırım (1389–1402), Sultan Mehmed I (1413–1421), Sultan Murad II/Murâdî (1421–1451), Sultan Mehmed II/Avnî (1451–1481), Sultan Bayezid II/Adlî (1481–1512), Sultan Selim I/Selîmî (1512–1520), Sultan Süleyman I/Muhibbî (1520–1566), Sultan Selim II/Selîmî (1566–1574), Sultan Murad III/Murâdî (1574–1595), Sultan Mehmed III/Adlî (1595–1603), Sultan Ahmed I/Bahtî (1603–1617), Sultan Osman II/Fârisî (1618–1622), Sultan Murad IV/Murâdî (1623–1640), Sultan Ibrahim (1640–1648), Sultan Mehmed IV/Vefâî (1648–1687), Sultan Mustafa II/İkbâlî-Meftûnî (1695–1703), Sultan Ahmed III/Necîb (1703–1730), Sultan Mahmud I/Sebkatî (1730–1754), Sultan Mustafa III/Cihângîr (1757–1774), Sultan Abdulhamid I (1757–1774), Sultan Selim III/İlhâmî (1789–1807), Sultan Mahmud II/Adlî (1808–1839), Sultan Abdulaziz (1861–1876), and Sultan Mehmed V/Reşâd (1909–1918). As can be seen, from the founding of the Ottoman Empire in 1299 onwards, there were

four poet sultans in the 14th century, four poet sultans in the 15th century, five poet sultans in the 16th century, six poet sultans in the 17th century, five poet-sultans in the 18th century, two poet-sultans in the 19th century, and one poet-sultan in the 20th century. While governing the state, they also acted as patrons and guides for the construction and development of classical Turkish poetry. In this tableau, which points to the balance between the ‘sword’ (military power) and the “pen” (intellectual power) in the Turkish state tradition, it is quite striking that the political power of the Ottoman state drew a ‘parallel trajectory’ with the power it gave to art. Indeed, the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, when there were many poet sultans, are recorded as centuries in which the Ottoman Empire expanded its borders and filled its treasury with political and military victories. According to Deniz (2021), the Ottoman sultan poets who had a *divan* (book of poems) or a *divançe* (small book of poems) are “Fatih Sultan Mehmed (Avnî), Bayezid II (Adlî), Selim I (Selîmî), Süleyman the Magnificent (Muhibbî), Selim II (Selîmî), Murad III (Murâdî), Ahmed I (Bahtî), Osman II (Fârisî), Ahmed III (Necîb), and Selim III (İlhâmî).” (p. 161). The fact that these ten sultans possessed *divans* serves to validate not only the military but also the cultural and intellectual authority of the sultan; it transcends their classification as mere ‘rulers who wrote poetry,’ transforming them into strategic actors who personally ‘textualized’ their own artistic paradigms, ideologies, and talents. Spanning from Mehmed II to Selim III—that is, from the 15th to the 18th century—this chronological trajectory attests that the persona of the ‘poet-artist-intellectual sultan’ was upheld throughout every era, from the Empire’s rise to its modernization process, thereby evidencing that the composition of poetry was an institutionalized tradition.

There are many personal and political reasons behind the Ottoman sultans’ writing poetry and showing such interest in literature. One of these is the suitability of poetry as a means of religiously based political propaganda.

From the perspective of the modern discipline of political communication, propaganda is a style of communication that is systematically produced and disseminated with the aim of legitimising the existence of a form of government and changing the attitudes and behaviours of the target audience in the desired direction (Brown 1992, pp. 23–24; Bektaş 1996, p. 180; Ateş 2000, pp. 119–21). Propaganda has been used as an integral part of political life not only in contemporary democracies but also in absolutist regimes. Throughout history, the continuity of political power has largely depended on the ability to produce and analyse these propaganda texts. In this context, artistic texts such as poetry have taken on the function of shaping social attitudes and behaviours by conveying spiritual messages to the masses with emotional intensity, using images that emphasise the ruler’s justice, heroism, piety, humility, and the transience of the monarchy. This is because poetry, as Matthew L. Keegan states, is a privileged form of communication in which social identity is performed, negotiated, and reinforced (Keegan 2023, p. 24). Furthermore, through its emotional intensity, poetry connects directly to society’s most sensitive and powerful motivational force, “religion.”

According to Santayana, both poetry and religion are concerned not with the factual realities of life, but with the ideal meanings and values that respond to humanity’s existential quests. Both aim to express the perfection, spiritual depth, and moral appropriateness of human experience. Religion, using the dramatic and mythological power of poetry, takes on a structure that transcends daily life and shapes the social conscience (Santayana 1900, pp. v–vi). This philosophical framework allows us to view the intense interest of Ottoman sultans in poetry and the image of the artist-ruler not merely as a cultural trend, but as a strategy of power that disseminates idealism to society through the language of religion.

In theocratic structures such as the Ottoman Empire, where religion and state are intertwined, propaganda must go beyond traditional political discourse and rely on religion, the most powerful source of legitimacy. In this context, poetry, the most widespread and emotionally effective art form in Classical Turkish Literature, ceased to be a mere literary pursuit for the Ottoman dynasty and became institutionalised as a religion-based political propaganda tool. The fact that the sultans themselves owned divans and wrote poetry is the highest reflection of the strategy of emphasising the divine origin of political authority to make the sultanate unquestionable.

This study is based on the hypothesis that Ottoman sultans used poetry as an effective religious and political propaganda tool to appear pious and artistic, to reinforce the legitimacy of their reign and to ensure social control. The study seeks to answer the questions: “What themes, images, and discourses do the poems in the divans of Ottoman sultans contain that serve the ruler’s religious and political propaganda purposes?” and “What is the correlation between this tendency and their successes?” The study is limited to the divans of ten Ottoman sultans who had divans between the 15th and 18th centuries: This study is limited to the divans (collections of poems) of ten Ottoman sultans from the 15th to 18th centuries who turned the act of writing poetry into a bold statement and formalized their claims/ideologies by “committing/preparing divans”: Mehmed II, Bayezid II, Selim I, Süleyman I, Selim II, Murad III, Ahmed I, Osman II, Ahmed III, and Selim III. Ten divans were examined in terms of religious and political discourse with propaganda characteristics. These two subjects carry the two main messages that the sultans wanted to convey in their divans. They contain the main political propaganda, which shows how devout the sultans were, how powerful their reigns were, how much they valued art, and thus how powerful they were. In ten divans, verses expressing the aim of political propaganda based on religious and political discourse were classified, examples were analysed from a religious, historical, and literary perspective, the message conveyed by the poetry was attempted to be revealed, and the contribution of poetry to the success of governing a great state was attempted to be measured.

2. Material and Analysis: Sultan Poets and the Transformation of the Divan Tradition

By personally transforming into poets who compiled Divans, the Sultans aimed to establish a symbolic superiority over the ulema (scholars) and literary circles. This effort at intellectual hegemony did not merely control the palace environment; rather, through the image of the “just, pious, and wise ruler” constructed via poetry, it formed the foundation of the religio-political propaganda mechanism across the imperial geography. Consequently, poetic production in this period functioned not merely as an aesthetic pursuit, but as a strategic tool that consolidated the cultural capital of the Ottoman dynasty and built the imperial vision upon a ground of “versified legitimacy.”

Sultan poets, who turned poetry writing into an assertion of authority by compiling Divans and codifying their claims/ideologies, offer significant clues regarding the transformation of the tradition of Divan writing. Indeed, the claim to compile a Divan, stretching from Mehmed II to Selim III, drew a graph parallel to the claims/periods of the Ottoman Empire’s foundation and rise. Therefore, in this section, the general state of the Divans of ten padishahs (Mehmed II, Bayezid II, Selim I, Süleyman I, Selim II, Murad III, Ahmed I, Osman II, Ahmed III, and Selim III), who possessed independent “Divans” in the Ottoman Empire, is discussed in conjunction with their political and literary identities, thereby drawing attention—century by century—to the transformation in the tradition of Divan writing.

2.1. Early Period and Empire Building (15th Century): Ghaza and Sufism

Prior to the conquest of Constantinople, classical Turkish poetry in Anatolia developed in the central cities of the Seljuks and the old Anatolian Turkish beyliks. In the 15th century, with Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople, an Istanbul-centric literary language and approach were adopted. Nevertheless, the old Ottoman capitals such as "Bursa and Edirne," and cities serving as sanjaks for princes like "Manisa, Amasya, and Kütahya," generally preserved their characteristics as literary milieus throughout history.

The 15th century is the century in which the Ottoman state began to transform into a world empire. In this regard, starting from Mehmed II, the padishahs aimed to be not only military and administrative leaders but also the absolute masters of the cultural and intellectual sphere. In this process, which began particularly with Mehmed II in the 15th century and reached its peak with Süleyman I in the 16th century, "knowledge" and "art" were made inseparable parts of political legitimacy.

Opening a new era with the conquest of Constantinople, Mehmed II (Avnî) (b. 1432–d. 1481) took art under the patronage of power by establishing a broad literary circle consisting of 185 poets in his palace (Kutluk 1978, p. 77). Although described in sources as having a sensitive soul, being a scholar, and being fond of poetry (Ak 2001, p. 104), he is defined in Islamic terms as a quintessential "warrior for Islam" (gaza eri) (Kut 2000, p. 162). In this respect, while Mehmed II's Divan is predominantly one that treats the subject of "love," the Sultan emphasizes in many of his poems that his intention is to fight in the path of Allah and for the religion of Islam, and that he is a warrior of Ghaza. With his small Divan consisting of "76 ghazals, 1 mukhammas, 1 murabba, 2 qit'as, 11 couplets, and 1 line" (Baltacıoğlu 2003, p. VI; Kesik 2020a), he earned the title of the first Ottoman sultan poet to possess a Divan. This stance of Mehmed II was viewed as a superior standard for the sultan poets who were his grandsons; thus, members of the dynasty accepted his line as the ideal in both politics and art.

Bayezid II (Adlî) (b. 1447–d. 1512), one of Mehmed II's sons, known as "Bâyezîd-i Velî" (Bayezid the Saint) due to his inclination towards Sufism, highlighted the emphasis on Sufism more in his poems. The Padishah, who prioritized economic development and order during his reign, was personally interested in arts such as calligraphy and poetry, and assigned stipends to 30 poets. His Divan, consisting of "144 ghazals, 1 murabba, 1 qit'a, 1 nazm, 4 matla, 2 mufrad, and in Persian 14 ghazals, 1 qit'a, 2 matla," reinforced the image of a ruler protecting the artist parallel to the empire's cultural development (Bayram 2018, pp. 15–32; 2022).

2.2. Classical Period and Intellectual Emphasis (16th Century): World Domination

Sultan poets Selim I and Süleyman I, who lived in the first half of the 16th century, made great efforts to reinforce the image of virtuous rulers and morally perfect individuals (Czygan 2024, p. 541). To this end, they used themes of "jihad, holy war, and world domination" as central propaganda elements, particularly in their divans, in parallel with the rise of the empire.

Selim I (Selîmî) (b. 1467–d. 1520), who altered political balances by transferring the Islamic Caliphate to the Ottomans alongside the military victories won during his short eight-year reign, was an intellectual who did not separate himself from his chests of books even while on campaign. Indeed, during his era, a literary genre known as "Selîm-nâme," which took his military successes and personality as its subject, emerged and gained popularity (Tanyıldız 2020). His Persian Divan (Terzi Sarı and Kurt 2021), composed of 599 poems under the pseudonym "Selîmî"—specifically "1 munajat, 1 na't, 11 qasidas, 1 na't, 549 ghazals, 3 takhmis, 12 qit'as, 9 ruba'is, 2 mufrads, and additionally 10 poems"—can be

evaluated as a concrete indicator of the Ottoman claim to intellectual and literary leadership in the Islamic world.

Suleyman I (Muhibbî) (b. 1494–d. 1566), known by the titles “Kanûnî” (the Lawgiver) and “Magnificent,” is the padishah who reigned the longest (46 years) and the owner of the most voluminous Divan among sultan poets with a massive collection of 4134 poems (Durmaz 2021; İsen 2022). During the time of Suleyman I, who attached great importance to cultural development and poets, Istanbul and the palace were transformed into a veritable venue for poetry.

In the second half of the 16th century, that is, during the period of Kanûnî’s successors, poetry continued its function of preserving the cultural power of the palace. However, in the post-Kanûnî period, it is noteworthy that in the Divans of Selim II and Murad III—who generally conducted state administration through grand viziers—qualities of inner maturity and spiritual leadership became more dominant.

Selim II (Selîmî) (b. 1524–d. 1574), one of Kanûnî’s sons, left state administration to Grand Vizier Sokullu Mehmet Pasha upon ascending the throne, turning towards entertainment, art, and the ulema, and also engaging with poetry. In his small Divan consisting of “27 ghazals, 13 mufrads, 1 tasdis, and 1 qit’a,” he drew a more introverted profile and treated the subject of love (Kesik 2012, p. 32; 2020c).

Murad III (Murâdî) (b. 1546–d. 1595), the son of Selim II and the padishah of the period when the Ottoman State reached its widest borders, is the second most prolific poet among the padishahs with his 1566 ghazals. It is possible to evaluate the Sultan, who predominantly treated religious and Sufistic subjects in his Divan containing “1566 ghazals, 1 mukhammas, 48 masnavis, 38 qit’as, and 47 mufrads,” as a representative of spiritual authority within the Divan tradition (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 60; İsen 2020).

Although projections of love, Sufism, and a refined soul generally dominated the poems of the 16th-century sultan poets who possessed Divans, it is possible to say that themes of “jihad, ghaza, and world domination” were treated more frequently compared to the 15th century, parallel to the construction, consolidation, and rise of the empire. It is observed that military and religiously-based political propaganda were given more space, particularly in the Divans of Selim I and Suleyman I. These are addressed in the Section 3.

2.3. Political and Social Crises (17th Century): Discourses Encouraging Struggle

At the beginning of the 17th century, with the slowing of conquests and internal crises in the Ottoman Empire, it is seen that poetic discourses encouraging jihad and struggle came to the forefront in the Divans of sultan poets. This situation can be read as an effort to ensure the loyalty of the public and the army through religious sentiments during periods of political instability.

Although he ascended the throne at a young age, Ahmed I (Bahtî) (b. 1590–d. 1617) struggled with foreign wars and Celali rebellions, and he included these subjects in his poems. In his Divan, consisting of “5 munajats, 3 poems on the Prophet, 4 ramazaniyyas, one eulogy each for Abu Ayyub al-Ansari and Mevlana, one elegy for Mehmed III, 28 ghazals, 1 tarji-band, one takhmis, 36 murabbas, 3 sharqis (songs), 4 qit’as, and 4 mufrads,” subjects of religion, heroism, love, morality, and Sufism occupy a central place (Kayaalp 2019, pp. 3–14; Yıldız 2020).

Osman II (Fârîsî) (b. 1604–d. 1622), who was martyred at a young age, fitted a total of 119 poems in 6 different verse forms—“30 ghazals, 1 musaddas, 67 nazms, 2 qit’as, 1 ruba’i, and 18 mufrads”—into his short reign that ended with a tragic rebellion. His poems reflect the traditional mazmuns (metaphors) and the world of similes of classical Turkish poetry (Ördek 2020; Erdemir 2018, p. 161; Ersoy 2021, p. 25).

2.4. Late Period (18th Century): Aesthetic Renewal and Reforms

In the 18th century, when the Ottoman Empire suffered the pangs of modernization, efforts to “say new things in a new way” drew attention in the Divans of sultan poets. Indeed, from the Tulip Era beginning with Ahmed III at the start of the century to the era of reforms extending to Selim III at the end of the century, a new breath is felt in poetry as well. The atmosphere of the Tulip Era in the first quarter of the 18th century, focused on entertainment and art, was the fundamental element governing and directing the Divan tradition. In this period, too, poetry continued to be used as a tool conveying the ruler’s identity as an artist and patron to the public. This interest shown in poetry occasioned the writing and presentation of countless poems to both Ahmed III, the Padishah of the Tulip Era, and his Grand Vizier Damat Ibrahim Pasha.

Reflecting the aesthetic understanding and artistic curiosity of the Tulip Era in his poems, Ahmed III (Necîb) (b. 1673–d. 1736) became one of the representatives of renewal in the Divan tradition through the sharqi and murabba forms he used in his Divan, which consists of “1 masnavi, 11 murabbas, 38 ghazals, 6 qit’as, 5 matlas, 3 sharqis, 7 lines, and 1 mufrad” (İlhan 2016, p. 17; Kesik 2020b).

Selim III (İlhâmî) (b. 1763–d. 1808), known for his reformist identity, is the last of the Ottoman sultan poets to possess a Divan. The intensity of the sharqi form and the deep bond he established with music in his Divan—comprising “6 qasidas, 209 ghazals, 105 sharqis, 28 musammats, 74 muqatta’ats, 64 mufrads, 1 masnavi, and poems written in syllabic meter” (Yılmaz 2001, pp. LXIII–CLXIX; Durmuş 2020)—along with poems written in syllabic meter, present the literary traces of the transition between tradition and novelty, reflecting the effort to reconstruct the spirit of the state culturally as well.

In conclusion, when looking at the Divans of the ten sultan poets with Divans who lived in the period from the 15th century to the 18th century, it is seen that the tradition of compiling a Divan was adhered to in general terms. That is, it is observed that subjects appropriate to the agenda and condition of the state, parallel to the foundation and rise of the empire, were treated in poems by the sultan poets. Indeed, based on the discourses of the sultan poets, it is possible to characterize the 15th century as imperial construction supported by ghaza and Sufism; the 16th century as the model of world domination protected by religious and political leadership; the 17th century as a protectionist period encouraging struggle that tried to solve political and social crises by clinging more to religious and political ideals; and the 18th century as an attack period in which efforts began to interpret and live religion and tradition through the modern. Although centuries changed, the fundamental element that did not change in the sultans’ Divans is the typology of the “ideal ruler.” In their Divans, Sultans appear before society in the roles of “lover,” “soldier/sultan of Allah,” and “sinful servant.” This situation is the greatest proof that power stands not only on force but also on an “aesthetic legitimacy.”

3. Sultan Divans as a Religion-Based Political Propaganda Tool

Turks “are by nature prone to contemplation, love to descend into the depths of the secrets of existence, to dive into the darkness of the other world through thought, and to wonder about the beginning and end of everything there. At the same time, they are moralists at the highest level. Even in the lightest works of their authors, there are almost always a few religious and philosophical traces connected to the main subject, placed either to crown the work or to protect against errors if necessary.” (de Sugny 1999, p. 36; İspir 2017, p. 103).

In classical Turkish poetry, no poet can keep themselves distant from the religious thought structure of society. Whether what is said is religious in content or human (secular), regarding the source of the concepts formed, expressions are made in a style that

society will not find odd and that will evoke common meanings, both in cultural and artistic approach and in the basis of the formed belief (İspir 2017, p. 106).

In this context, the Divans of Ottoman sultans appear as literary texts that reinforce the authority of the padishah by using the power of poetry, religion, and philosophy. These texts functioned as effective tools of administration and politics that supported the aim of spreading Islam and declared the image that the sultan was a “servant bound to religion” and a “just and strong ruler” to both the public and the enemy. Sultan poets frequently used religious motifs in their poems, thereby providing a spiritual basis for their sultanates and serving the ideal of unity and solidarity by establishing a closeness between themselves and their Muslim subjects. This was based on a strategy of directly linking the source and legitimacy of the reign to Allah. This strategy reinforced the sultan’s authority among the people by emphasising his identity as a devout servant. As will be seen below, the fact that the first poem in the sultan’s divan was addressed to Allah and then to the Prophet Muhammad, the emphasis that the reign and victories were achieved with divine assistance, the statement that the campaigns were organised against infidels and those who sought to distort Islam, the promotion and glorification of the concepts of jihad and holy war, and the preparation of soldiers for battle with the motivation of martyrdom and jihad are examples of religion-based political propaganda. These aspects have been identified in the sultan’s divans and analysed below.

3.1. First Poem: The Construction of Religious Identity

In the tradition of classical Turkish poetry, the primary sources utilised are the Qur’an, hadith, and Sufism. In this tradition, religion is not merely a matter of belief but exists as an institutional structure that shapes the form and content of poetry. Indeed, this ‘religion-based institutional structure’ has also been at work in Arabic and Persian poetry, which served as sources for Turkish poetry. According to this, in classical Turkish poetry, when a divan (collection of poems) is compiled, the poems are arranged within the book according to a specific procedure. This procedure prioritizes poems of praise to Allah (poems of Tawhid and Munajat), followed by poems praising the Prophet Muhammad (poems of Nat), and then poems of various genres and forms (Çelebioğlu 1998, p. 349). This method is also observed in the divans of the Ottoman poet—sultans. This sensitivity of the sultan poets stems from the Islamic requirement to begin every task, and especially written texts, with the name of Allah. This tradition is based on the verse in the Qur’an, “İkra bi-ismi rabbikellezî halak(e)” (Read in the name of your Lord who created everything). (Al-Alaq, 96/1–2) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 692) and the verse “İnnêhû min Süleymâne ve innêhû bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm.” (The letter is from Solomon. It begins with ‘Bismillahirrahmanirrahim’.” (An-Naml, 27/30) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 418) and is supported by numerous hadiths. However, the “Bismillah” (In the name of Allah) appears at the beginning of all surahs in the Quran except Surah At-Tawbah. During the pre-Islamic era, work was commenced by saying, ‘In the name of Lât and Uzzâ!’ With the advent of Islam, it became necessary for Muslims to begin their work with a name specific to Allah. Therefore, Allah’s name was first invoked, and then the task at hand was undertaken. The hadiths mention that work not begun with the basmala will be incomplete. Thus, the basmala has also found its place in the literary tradition. The promise that those who begin their works with the basmala and write it beautifully will be forgiven has been the main reason why calligraphers take special care in writing the basmala and write it frequently. Over time, writing the basmala as a single line at the top of the page has become a rule (Bilgin 2020, p. 92).

The following sultans, adhering to the tradition of beginning divans with the basmala (tazmin-i besmele), a verse containing the basmala, or a poem dedicated to Allah

or the Prophet Muhammad, thus express their desire to construct their pious identities, strengthen their devotion to Allah, and provide a spiritual foundation for their reigns at the very beginning of the book. It should be noted that the choice to use the basmala at the beginning of a divan may sometimes depend on the preferences of copyists or typesetters; furthermore, the existence of multiple manuscripts for the sultans' divans must be taken into consideration. Therefore, the following findings are based on the Latin-alphabet editions of the divans cited in the relevant sections. Accordingly, among the ten sultans who possessed a divan, those whose collections begin with the basmala or a *tazmin-i basmala* are Süleyman I and Murad III.

The first poem in Süleyman I's divan is a *munajat* that begins with the basmala verse. Here, the sultan states, "Mentioning the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful, He knows the hidden and the open": "*Zikr-i bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm/Âşikâr u gizlüye sensin 'alîm*" (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/129) (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful/A verse expressing the protection of Allah).

The first poem in Murad III's divan is a declaration of monotheism that begins with the line "*Bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm*" and reminds us that the basmala is a verse:

"*Bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm*
Âyet-i unvan-ı kelâm-ı kadîm" (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 79)

As for the other eight sultans, even if they did not begin their divans by inscribing the Basmala, they opened them with religious poems such as *tawhid*, *munajat*, and *nat*.

Mehmed II began his divan with a *nat* (*ghazal*) expressing his praise and love for the Prophet Muhammad. In the poem, he likens the Prophet Muhammad's gentle gaze to the miraculous hand of Moses and his ruby-red lips to the life-giving breath of Jesus. Thus, the poet-sultan emphasises that the Prophet Muhammad bears traces of all the prophets and their teachings, and that all beauty is embodied in him. This is also the declaration by Mehmed II himself that the Ottoman Empire was a Muslim state, despite encompassing ethnic groups from many faiths and sects, primarily Jewish and Christian: "*Yüzün meh-i îd ü ser-i zülfün şeb-i İsrâ/Gamzen yed-i Mûsâ leb-i la'lün dem-i İsâ*" (Doğan 2023, p. 90) (Your face is the crescent of Eid, and the tip of your hair is the Night of Isra/Your gaze is the Hand of Moses, and your lip is the breath of Jesus).

Bayezid II begins his divan with a *munajat*. This *munajat* is followed by a *tawhid* and a *nat*. In the following lines of the *munajat*, the sultan-poet states, "O Allah! It befits you to be Allah, and it befits me to be a beggar," indicating that he will make requests from Allah like a beggar in the rest of the poem: "*Hudâyâ Hudâlık sana yaraşur/Nitekim gedâlık bana yaraşur*" (Bayram 2018, p. 39) (O Allah! It becomes You to be God/It becomes me to be a beggar.)

Selim I begins his Persian divan with two *tawhid* and one *nat* (Kaya et al. 2023, pp. 41–49). In the first *tawhid*, he emphasises that Allah has no equal or counterpart, that He is one and only: "O banner of unity, veil of majesty, in the land of uniqueness, you have no equal or counterpart" (Kaya et al. 2023, p. 41).

Süleyman I began his divan with a *munajat*, three *nats* expressing his praise and love for the Prophet Muhammad and asking for his intercession in the hereafter (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, pp. I/129–131).

Selim II began his divan with a *nat* in which he sought intercession from the Prophet Muhammad (Kesik 2012, p. 37).

Murad III begins his divan with three *tawhid*, one *munajat*, and one *nat* (Kırkkılıç 2015, pp. 79–81).

Ahmed I began his divan with five *munajat*, one *nat*, two *mawlid*, three *Ramazaniyye*, one *Bayramiyye*, and religious poems praising the companion Eyüp Ensari and the Sufi Hz.

Mevlana (Kayaalp 2019, p. 5). In the first supplication, the Sultan expresses his gratitude to Allah for what He has given him and declares that he surrenders all his affairs and circumstances to Allah: “İlâhî her nefes ilhâmun üzre olsun a’ mâlûm/Rızân üzre geçe dâ’im cihân içre meh ü sâlûm” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 18) (O Allah! May all my deeds be guided by Your inspiration at every moment. May all my months and years in this world pass in accordance with Your divine pleasure).

Osman II’s divan begins with a *nat* in which he sends prayers and greetings to the Prophet Muhammad (Erdemir 2018, p. 189; Ersoy 2021, p. 40).

Ahmed III’s divan begins with a letter of advice written to his nephew, Sultan Mahmud I, followed by a tawhid and four *nat* (İlhan 2016, pp. 27–32).

Selim III’s divan begins with four munajat. These poems, filled with expressions of supplication to Allah, are followed by three *nat*, one munajat, and one poem praising the four caliphs.

As can be seen, in accordance with the requirement in Islam to begin every task, and especially written texts, with the name of Allah, Sultan Süleyman I and Sultan Murad III began their divans with verses containing the basmala. The remaining eight sultan-poets also began with a religious poem; both to adhere to the tradition of compiling divans and to emphasise that they were Islamic sultans, they glorified Allah at the very beginning of their works, giving thanks and supplication to Allah.

It should also be noted that the sultans did not only include religious poems, especially munajat and *nat*, at the beginning of their divans. It is also possible to find such poems scattered throughout the divan in the form of *ghazals* and other forms. For example, although Muhibbi included three *nat* poems at the beginning of his divan, there are more than thirty *nat* poems scattered throughout various parts of his divan (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. 1/98). This situation in the Divans is a personal declaration by the sultans that the Ottoman State was Islamic and Muhammadan, despite harboring ethnic origins from many faiths and sects, primarily Jewish and Christian.

3.2. Sultanate as the Grace of Allah: The Divine Legitimacy of the Sultanate

From Ancient Greece onwards, thoughts and concepts regarding state administration gained a religious quality with the spread of revealed religions, and the authority of the ruler was presented as a “divine command.” During this process, philosophers, in particular, put forth religious grounds to legitimize the dominance of statesmen and emphasized that this was Allah’s command. Consequently, those who came to power argued that they received their authority directly from Allah to legitimize their rule. This understanding manifested in different forms, such as the “Son of Heaven” in China and the “deification” of the ruler in Iran and Rome, thereby moving political power to a sacred ground (Eroğlu 2003, p. 22). For instance, Dante, one of the 14th-century thinkers, attributed a divine meaning and mission to the Roman emperor, assuming that this right was given to him personally by Allah (Eroğlu 2003, p. 21).

The absoluteness of power seen in the understanding of sovereignty extending from the early Turks to the Ottomans, and the dynasty dedicated to a mystical ancestor and a divine being (Beşirli 2011, p. 143), constitute the foundation of the absolute monarchy seen in Turkish history (Koç 2021, p. 435). With the arrival of the Turks in Islamic geography, their acceptance of the Islamic religion, and their assumption of the leadership of Islam from the Abbasids, this was named with the concept of “Zillullah” (Shadow of Allah) (Eroğlu 2003, p. 23). As a reflection of the Old Turkish State understanding and Islamic tradition, in the Ottoman state tradition, the ruler was accepted as a representative of divine justice and a sacred authority with the title “Padişah-ı ruy-ı zemin zillullah-i fi’l-arz” (Allah’s shadow on the face of the earth) (Eroğlu 2003, p. 19). This divine understanding

regarding the Ottoman ruler was also reflected in early Ottoman chronicles as the perception that sovereignty was linked to Osman by Allah through a blessed personage. It is observed that the Islamic identity in the Ottoman concept of state and sovereignty became even more distinct after the 15th century, and with the capture of Mecca and Medina, the old concept of the caliphate began to revive, in a sense, in the person of the Ottoman ruler. It is necessary to restate here the important role played by Ottoman statesmen like Kemalpaşazâde and Ebu's-Suud in this Islamic identity showing itself so obviously in state layers (İnalçık 1958, pp. 68–69, 73–74; Eroğlu 2003, p. 24). This concept was also reflected in Ottoman law codes (kanunnames) from Mehmed II onwards and gained a legal quality. Thus, any attempt or rebellion against the padishah, who is a sacred and great figure, was considered not only a political uprising but a transgression against the sacred order and central authority (Eroğlu 2003, p. 19).

Sultans emphasised the divine basis and legitimacy of their reigns in their divans of poets, stating that their sultanate was a blessing from Allah. According to them, this blessing was a divine reward for knowing Allah and being His servant. In the poems below, the sultans' reference to themselves as "this lowly/insignificant servant" stems, on the one hand, from the idea of absolute servitude and humility, and on the other hand, from their desire to reinforce the idea that God can elevate even the most insignificant servant to become a powerful sultan. This "servitude humility" can be seen as an effective discourse that serves to strengthen the image of the sultan as a devout and therefore legitimate leader. Similarly, it is a message/propaganda asserting that the sultan's political power does not come solely from the army or the sword, but that his true power and immunity come from a divine source, from his devotion to Allah. In this way, the ruler appeals to the spiritual feelings of the people and also shields his authority with a religious armour against possible opposition.

In the first poem/*nat* in Selim II's divan, he shows humility, saying that he is not worthy of the sultanate, but that Allah has bestowed this position upon him: "Eylemiş Allâh bu tahtı nasîb-i ümmetün/Ben günehkârüm degül lâıyk bu ihsân u 'atâ" (Kesik 2012, p. 37) (Allah has granted me this throne as the lot of the Ummah; I am a sinner, and I am not worthy of such favor and grace).

Murad III, in the following verses, asserts that he is an ordinary servant, that the sultanate was bestowed upon him by Allah; that is, his true power and immunity stem from a divine source (his devotion to Allah), thus once again employing a religiously grounded political discourse: "Bu Murâdî kulumı kul iken itdün sultân/Sana pes lâıyk olan yine budur sultânâ" (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 101) (You elevated Your servant Muradi to the throne from the state of servitude; O Allah, the Eternal Sovereign, this is indeed worthy of Your majesty).

In the following verse, Ahmed I states that Allah gave him the state, that is, happiness and sovereignty, and that he therefore submits all his affairs and circumstances to Allah. Thus, this surrender conveys the message that, beyond being personal, all the affairs of the state are under divine protection: "Çü ben Bahtî'ye virdün hâtrumda yog-iken devlet/Sana ısmarladum yâ Rab umûrum cümle ahvâlüm" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 18) (You have bestowed upon me sovereignty and prosperity when they were not even in my thoughts; O Allah, I have entrusted all my states and affairs unto You).

In the next verse, Ahmed I emphasises that the throne is not a personal achievement but a divine gift, bestowed by Allah's grace. This is again both a display of humility and a religious basis for the inviolability of his reign. Therefore, according to these statements, the sultan's authority is sealed by divine will against any rebellion: "Âciz ü bî-çâre vü dermânde iken emr idüp/Beni kulun kıldun serîr-i saltanatda tâc-dâr" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 36)

(While I was helpless, desperate, and grief-stricken, You made me a sovereign wearing the crown on the throne of sultanate).

Ahmed I again emphasises the idea that his authority comes from Allah in the following verses. Here, it is declared that the sultan's "creation from nothing" and his being made "the head of the great and glorious commanders" is entirely the work of Allah: "Beni serverlere serdâr-ı âlî-şân iden sensin/Bu ednâ bendeni ser-defter-i merdân iden sensin/Duâ-yı hayrını makbûl idüp ihsân iden sensin/Yoğ iken var iden bu Ahmed'i sultân iden sensin/Habîbün hürmetine leşker-i İslâm'a nusret vir" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 45) (You are the One who brought into existence from void and made this Ahmed a sovereign; out of love for the Prophet Muhammad, aid the armies of Islam).

Here are the sultans' statements of this kind; they contain a message that equates rebellion or opposition to the divine will with disobedience to God and the state officials. Indeed, as in the verse, "O you who believe! Obey Allah, obey the Messenger, and obey those in authority among you." (Nisa 59/97–98) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 692), obedience to state administrators in Islam has been regarded as a divine command.

3.3. Love for Allah: The Spiritual Legitimacy of the Sultanate

In the Islamic tradition of thought, love is not merely a human emotion, but an ontological principle that explains the reason for the existence and functioning of the universe. According to philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, Allah is not only the unity of 'reason-rational-rationalised' (reason, the rational and the rationalised), but also the sole source of the unity of 'love-lover-beloved' (love, the lover and the beloved). From this perspective, every entity in the universe acts out of a 'longing for perfection' towards Allah, who possesses absolute perfection (Kutluer 1991, p. 18). In the Sufi school, the concept of love is shaped through 'Muhabbetullah' (Uludağ 1991, p. 11). The sacred hadith, 'I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known; I created creatures so that they would know me,' confirms that divine love and the desire to be known lie at the foundation of creation (Uludağ 1991, p. 13). In Sufi literature, love is the driving force behind the process of the seeker (sâlik) disciplining his ego, transcending his own existence, and becoming lost in the absolute being (fenâfillâh) (Uludağ 1991, p. 19).

The theme of 'love' that appears in the divans of the Ottoman sultans is, beyond a purely individual feeling, a poetic expression of the cosmological hierarchy in classical Islamic thought. In the tradition of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, love is the source, mover, and ultimate goal of existence. In this context, when the sultan positions himself as a 'lover,' he actually declares his inclusion in this great ontological flow of the universe. The ruler builds his duty to distribute justice and mercy as a reflection of this love on earth upon a foundation of spiritual love.

The emphasis on divine love in the sultan's poetry aligns his power with the attribute of 'Zillullah' (the shadow of Allah on earth). For this yearning for absolute perfection (Allah) legitimises the sultan's rule as the manifestation on earth of divine attributes such as 'mercy,' 'justice,' and 'order.' Therefore, the sultan's appearance before the people as a 'meczub-ı ilahî' or 'muhib' (lover/beloved) conveys the following message to his subjects: This ruler derives his power not from worldly ambitions, but from a divine source and the spiritual responsibility that comes from his love for that source. In this respect, the discourse of divine love constitutes one of the most powerful layers of propaganda, combining with the poetic aesthetics of Ottoman political discourse. In other words, in the Ottoman state tradition, legitimacy is reinforced not only by the sword but also by the ruler's spiritual depth on the path to becoming a "perfect human being" (insan-ı kâmil). The concept of "love" is the mystical-philosophical key to this spiritual depth and divine mandate.

In this context, sultan poets also created another spiritual foundation for the legitimacy of the sultanate in their divans, building it upon love and devotion to Allah.

In the following couplet, Suleyman I expresses that love was presented to him since eternity and that he shall have no business other than love. By alluding to the eternal nature of divine love and the event of ‘Bezm-i Alast’ (the primordial covenant), he declares that his sole quest in this world is ‘love.’ Thus, through the love of Allah and the passion for truth (Czygan 2024, p. 551), he reinforces his spiritual authority and the mystical legitimacy of his sovereignty: “Nasīb itmiş ezelden çün sunuldu bana kâr-ı ‘ış/N’iderem ‘ışkdan gayrı cihân içinde ben kârı” (Since the business of love has been presented to me as my lot from eternity, what other business should I pursue within this world but love?) (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. II/1655).

In the following lines, Selim II emphasises the religious authority that supersedes political authority, stating that true happiness lies not in the Ottoman throne but in the love of Allah: “Tâlib-i aşk-ı Hudâ ol var ise ‘aklun dilâ/Sanma taht-ı saltanat bu milket-i Osmandır” (Kesik 2012, p. 50) (O heart, if thou art wise, aspire to the divine love of God; do not imagine that the true throne of sovereignty is limited to this Ottoman domain). This discourse is a powerful propaganda element suggesting that the sultan’s political power is a result of his piety, and therefore obedience to him is also obedience to a divine command.

The word “state” in Sultan Murad III’s request to Allah in the following verse, “Devlet-i Kübrâ” (Greatest State), has two meanings: first, happiness; second, country. The concept of “Devlet-i Kübrâ” (Greatest State/Happiness) shows how political and spiritual goals are intertwined. Therefore, for the sultan, the greatest happiness or the greatest country is “to see Allah.” This desire, linked to the experience of “Vahdet” (Wahdat al-Wujud/Divine Unity: Existence is one, and all things are but manifestations of God’s existence. Demirli 2012, see more pp. 431–33) in the second line, reveals that the goal of being both the happiest person and the greatest state is only possible through spiritual maturity and divine consent: “Yâ Rab cemâlün gösterüp vir devlet-i kübrâ bize/Vahdetde hoş-hâl eyleyüp gayrıdan istignâ bize” (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 800).

Ahmed I, in the following munajat, emphasises the inadequacy of the worldly consolation brought by the crown and throne, declaring that his heart and soul are filled with the love of Allah, and that despite possessing the greatest worldly position, like the “kingdom of Solomon,” his true goal is to be a sultan in the spiritual realm. This is a symbol and declaration of his desire to unite his identity as worldly sultan with his identity as sultan of the heart: “Bana zâhirde itdün bunca ihsân/Müyesser eyledün mülk-i Süleymân; Olupdur ‘aşkun ile pür dil ü cân/Beni kıl ‘âlem-i ma’nîde sultân; Bana lutfun ile eyle tecellî/Bu tâc ü taht ile gelmez tesellî” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 20) (You have bestowed numerous blessings upon me and granted me a dominion like that of Solomon; my heart and spirit are overflowed with Your love. Make me a sovereign in the realm of meaning; manifest Yourself to me by Your grace, as I cannot find consolation in this crown and throne).

3.4. Love for the Prophet Muhammad: Leadership of the Ummah

As explicitly stated in many verses in the Quran, loving Prophet Muhammad and obeying him is obligatory (fard): The verses meaning, “He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah; but those who turn away—We have not sent you over them as a guardian.” (Nisa, 4/80) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 101) and “So they who believe in him, honor him, support him and follow the light (the Quran) which was sent down with him—it is those who will be the successful.” (A’raf, 7/157) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 184) are only two of the verses that serve as the justification for this love and obedience.

With the Turks’ acceptance of Islam, people from every segment of society, from state rulers to the public, have expressed the affection they feel for the Prophet through various

activities. This love nurtured for the Prophet was also shown to his descendants and to those living in the lands where he was born and raised. The affection of the Turks for the Prophet, his close relatives, and his companions (ashab) manifested itself in every area of their lives. This situation reached its peak in the Ottoman State with activities such as the Haremeyn foundations established specifically for Mecca and Medina, the Surre processions organized for the aid given annually to the people of the Hejaz region, and the institution of Nakıbu'l-Eşrâf established to help the descendants of the Prophet and to follow up on their affairs (Karataş 2008, p. 47). Such activities transformed the love for the Prophet into a tool of legitimacy, elevating the Ottoman dynasty to the position of the sole protector of the Islamic world.

Since Prophet Muhammad was not only the prophet of Islam but also the leader of the Ummah, every Islamic state after him competed with one another to take his caliphate, that is, the leadership of the Ummah. In this competition, which had both religious and political aims, Ottoman padishahs used the title “caliph” starting from Murad I (Özcan 1998, p. 546); however, although it is doubtful according to historical records (Sümer 1992, pp. 676–77)—the information that the caliphate fully passed to the Ottomans after Selim I's conquest of Egypt has been generally accepted. With the office of the caliphate, defined as ruling among people in the name of Allah (Uludağ 1997, p. 299), the Ottoman State entered into a sign of strong sovereignty in a political and religious sense. The mission of being the protector of Muslim peoples cemented the trust and obedience felt towards the padishahs (Koç 2021, p. 435).

Starting from Kutadgu Bilig (11th century), one of the first known Islamic Turkish works, it became a tradition to express praise and love for Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of literary works. Subsequently, many literary genres describing the love for Prophet Muhammad—such as “na't, siyer, Muhammediyye, mevlid, Miraciyye, forty hadith, one hundred hadith, hilye”—emerged in Turkish literature to an extent unseen in any other literature.

In this context, sultan poets also wrote poems praising the Prophet Muhammad, positioning themselves not only as political leaders but also as spiritual representatives of the community and lovers of the Prophet. All the sultan poets who owned divans wrote at least one nat.

By including *nats* in his divan, Selim I fulfilled the requirements of the Sunnism and tradition he represented. In his first *nat*, he states that even Adam, who committed the first sin, will seek intercession from the Prophet Muhammad, emphasising that he is the king of prophets: “آدم اول که گنه کرد همی دانستی/ که تو آخر بسر تخت شفاعت آیی” (Adam, the committer of the first transgression, was aware, O Muhammad, that in the end, you would be seated upon the throne of intercession (shafa'ah) (Kaya et al. 2023, p. 47). Thus, he paints a portrait of himself as a lover of the Prophet in the eyes of Muslims and reinforces his leadership of the ummah. He also states that he is the greatest of the prophets in a *nat/terkib-bend* he wrote: “او شاه مرسلست و رسولان تمام خیل/ مقصود اوست کون و مکان در رهش طفیل” (He is the Shah of the prophets; the other prophets are his soldiers. He is the purpose of existence; time and space were created for his sake) (Kaya et al. 2023, p. 155).

There are more than forty *nat* in the divan of Sultan Süleyman I. In this respect, Sultan Süleyman I is the sultan poet who wrote the most *nats* (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/98).

Süleyman I begins his divan by thanking Allah for making him a member of the ummah of Muhammad: “Hamdülillâh kim Muhammed ümmeti/Eyledün bu bendeleri yâ Kerîm” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/129) (O God, the Bountiful (Al-Karim), all gratitude is due to You for ordaining these subjects of Yours to be among the community (Ummah) of Muhammad).

Suleyman I states below that the greatest happiness and sovereignty for him is to love the Prophet Muhammad: “Yiter Muhibbî sana bu devlet cihânda kim/Oldun muhibbi cân-ıla âli Muhammed’ün” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/923) (O Muhibbi, this sovereign grace is enough for you in this earthly life; because you have been granted the honor of loving the household (Ahl al-Bayt) of the Prophet Muhammad).

In the first poem/*nat* in Selim II’s divan, he asks the king of prophets to intercede for him: “Âcizüm pür-âsim ü zenb ü mu’âsidür kulun/Merhamet kılmazsan ey şâh-ı rûsûl hâlüm fenâ” (Kesik 2012, p. 37) (I am frail; I am a subject full of transgression, vice, and defiance. O Muhammad, the King of Prophets, unless you intercede with mercy, my condition will be one of utter ruin).

Ahmed I expressed his love for the Prophet Muhammad by writing one *nat* and two *mawlids*, thus seeking to prove that the Prophet Muhammad was the leader of his ummah. In this verse, the poet also expresses his wish for the Islamic world to be victorious out of respect for the Prophet Muhammad, the saying goes as: “O sultânun yüzi suyına Hak’dan budur ümîdüm/Zamânumda muzaffer eyleye a’lâm-ı İslâm’ı” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 25) (For the sake of that Sovereign Muhammad, my hope from Allah is this: May the banners of Islam be victorious during my reign).

In the divan of Ahmed III, there are more than 20 poems that praise the Prophet Muhammad and commemorate his birth. These poems constitute approximately half of the divan’s volume and are noteworthy for revealing the sultan’s love for the Prophet. Among these poems is the following ode, which expresses his love by declaring his devotion to the Prophet and accepting servitude at his threshold as the true sovereignty: “Eşiginde ‘abd-i memlûk ol müdâm/Andan özge yokdur i’lâm-ı merâm/Saltanat budur Necibâ bil tamâm/Şimdi zât-ı müctebâyâ ‘âşıkam” (İlhan 2016, p. 64) (Remain forever as a humble Mamluk slave upon his threshold, for there is none other to whom you may grant your petitions. O Necib, true sovereignty lies in this: that I am a lover of Muhammad).

3.5. The War of Religion: Gaza and Jihad

The concept of “gaza,” known as the sacred war waged against non-Muslims to protect or spread the religion of Islam (see Kafadar 1996, pp. 427–29), and the concept of “jihad,” defined as “learning and living according to religious commands, teaching them to others, striving to enjoin good and forbid evil, proselytizing Islam, and struggling against both the ego and external enemies” (see Özel 1993, p. 527), served as the foundation for the successful reigns of most Ottoman sultans. The “Gaza Thesis,” introduced by Paul Wittek in his work published in 1938, defines the understanding of *gaza* as a “holy war” and equates the military and political successes of the Ottomans with *jihad* (Wittek 1938, p. 45). According to Kafadar, who discusses the concept of *gaza*, although some researchers use *gaza* and *jihad* synonymously or interchangeably, they are not the same. Kafadar states that *gaza* was used in the sense of a “predatory raid or an expedition into foreign lands,” arguing that *gaza* belongs to a lower category than *jihad* and that it was not mandatory for everyone in the Muslim community to contribute to it. He defines *jihad*, on the other hand, as a defensive war undertaken in situations where the peace of the Islamic world or the ummah is threatened (Kafadar 1995, pp. 79–80). Furthermore, Kafadar notes that while Ottoman warriors were united in the dream of conquest in the name of religion, this shared vision diverged when it came to the distribution of power following the conquest (Kafadar 1995, p. 152). When the verse in the Quran with the meaning, “Say: ‘If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have obtained, commerce wherein you fear decline, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and *jihad* in His cause, then wait until Allah executes His command. And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient

people.” (Tevbe, 9/24) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 206), is examined carefully, it is seen that three elements are held superior to everything else. These are Allah, Prophet Muhammad, and jihad. Therefore, these three elements are indispensable for both the rulers and the peoples of Islamic states. Besides that, “Allah forbids you to take as friends those who fight you in religion, expel you from your homes, and aid in your expulsion; whoever takes them as friends—they are the wrongdoers.” (El-Mumtahanah, 60/9) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 617). As stated in this verse, fighting/defending for the sake of religion and homeland, i.e., jihad, is an attitude expected from all Islamic countries and rulers. Therefore, going out on ghazwa, that is, going to war in the name of Allah, has been accepted as a requirement of religion, both for the sultan’s leadership motivation and for the motivation of the soldiers and the people. Sultan poets often addressed the concept of ghazwa in their poems.

In the following poem, Mehmed II states that his intention is to fight in the way of Allah and for Islam, that his aim is to utterly destroy the infidels with the help of Allah and the army of saints, that he seeks Allah’s help for victory, that he is very eager for jihad, and that he wishes for his state to triumph over the enemies of religion with the miracles of the Prophet Muhammad: “İmtisâl-i câhidû fî’llâh olupdur niyyetüm/Dîn-i İslâmün mücerred gayretidür gayretüm; Fazl-ı Hakk u himmet-i cünd-i ricâlullâh ile/Ehl-i küfri ser-te-ser kahr eylemekdür niyyetüm; Enbiyâ vü evliyâyâ istinâdum var benüm/Lutf-ı Hak’dandur hemân ümmîd-i feth ü nusretüm; Nefs ü mâl ile n’ola kılсам cihânda ictihâd/Hamdüli’llâh var gazâyâ sad hezârân ragbetüm; Ey Mehmed mu’cizât-ı Ahmed-i Muhtâr ile/Umaram gâlib ola a’dâ-yı dîne devletüm” (Aymutlu 2005, p. 140) (My intention is to be an example to those who wage jihad in the way of Allah; My endeavor is the struggle to exalt the religion of Islam. My intent, with the aid of Allah and the army of saints, Is to utterly crush the people of infidelity from one end to the other. I place my trust in the prophets and the saints; My hope for conquest and succor lies in the grace of Allah. What does it matter if I sacrifice my soul and my wealth in this world? Praise be to Allah, I long for hundreds of thousands of gazas. O Mehmed! Through the miracles of the Prophet Muhammad, I hope to overcome the enemies of the faith). In this respect, the poem is an important one that most clearly reveals Mehmed II’s political ideology and propaganda strategy, demonstrating how art and religion were intertwined to emphasise the legitimacy of the sultanate. Here, the sultan presents himself not as a king fighting to acquire more land, but directly as a “servant carrying out Allah’s command”.

Selim I, in the following *ghazal*, explains that he fought his wars for Allah, that he fought against unbelief, thereby granting his wars religious legitimacy: “Even if the enemy army stretched from Kaf to Kaf, I would not turn my back on that battle for the sake of Allah. When I draw my sword from its sheath in the morning, it rises like the sun and dispels the darkness of unbelief from the world.” (Tarlan 1946, p. 199). Furthermore, in this poem, he states that the sultan must actively participate in battle on the battlefield, otherwise rumours about his lack of courage will spread among the people, thus revealing that he also cares about the people’s opinion of him: “He must go straight to the battlefield. Otherwise, the people will say all sorts of nonsense.” (Tarlan 1946, p. 199).

In his first *nat* in the *divan*, Süleyman I expresses his desire to fight wholeheartedly and sincerely in the religious path of the Prophet Muhammad: “Tut elümi ayaga düşdüm gel ey dîn serveri/Eyleyem dînün yolında cân u dil ile gazâ” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/130) (O leader of the faith (Muhammad), hold my hand, for I have fallen; Let me wage gaza for the sake of religion with all my soul and heart.).

Süleyman I states that he undertakes his campaigns for Islam, not for wealth and property, and that Allah knows this: “Gayret-i İslâm içündür kıldugum ‘azm-i sefer/Hak bilür kim itmedüm ben anı mülk-i dâd için” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. II/1383) (The

reason for my intention to set out on an expedition is for the sake of Islam; Allah knows that I did not do it for the sake of wealth or property).

In the following verse, Suleyman I also wishes to illuminate the darkness of infidelity like the sun by drawing his sword. This is also a propagandistic statement, uttered as a manifestation of the understanding of jihad: “Rûşen kılam zulmet-i küfri çün âfitâb/Ger subhgâh tîg çeküp idem az-gılâf” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/847) (Let me illuminate the darkness of infidelity like the sun; Drawing the sword from its scabbard at the break of dawn).

In the following verse, Suleyman I describes the Ottoman administration’s campaigns against Shiite Iran as a religiously motivated military operation: “Revâfız kasdına alup ele tîg/Çeküp asker bizi Îrân’a saldun” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/922) (You have caused us to take up our swords against the Shi’a; By mobilizing the army, you have sent us to invade Iran).

Suleyman I conducted three major military expeditions against the Shiite Safavid State: the Campaign of the Irakeyn (1533–1535), the Tabriz Campaign (1548–1549), and the Nakhchivan Campaign (1553–1554) (R. Kılıç 2017). In the following *ghazal*, which we believe he composed for one of these campaigns, recited on the occasion of his Iranian campaign, Sultan Suleyman I describes his expedition against the Shiite Safavid State, i.e., the Kızılbaş. He mentions raising the battle flag with cries of “Allah Allah” and his desire to annihilate the Kızılbaş army. He emphasises that it is a sin to sit idly by and not fight for the cause of spreading Islam, which is obligatory upon them. Furthermore, in this war, he wishes for the first two Islamic caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar, whom the Kızılbaş dislike, to be their guides. Thus, Suleyman I uses this poem as an element of both threat and provocation: “Allâh Allâh diyelüm sancak-ı şâhî çekelüm/Yüriyüp her yanadan şarka sipâhı çekelüm; Pâymal eyleyelüm kişverini surh-serün/Gözine sürme diyü dūd-ı siyâhı çekelüm; Bize farz olmuş-iken olmamız İslâm’a zahîr/Niçe bir oturalum bunca günâhı çekelüm; Umaram rehber ola bize Ebûbekr ü ‘Ömer/Ey Muhibbî yüriyüp şarka sipâhı çekelüm” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, pp. II/1208–1209) (Let us invoke the name of Allah and raise the imperial standard; let us march forth and summon the army from every flank toward the East. Let us trample the Qizilbash realms underfoot, and cast the black smoke of our fires into their eyes like kohl. Since this path is an explicit religious obligation in Islam, how could we remain still and tolerate such transgression? It is my hope that Abu Bakr and Umar shall be our guides; O Muhibbi, let us march and lead the army to the East).

In the following poem, Ahmed I bases his war and conquest policy on religious and spiritual grounds, aiming to boost the morale of the army and consolidate his sovereignty. According to this, the Ottoman army is “Allah’s army”; the Ottoman cause is also the “cause of Islam,” established to live and spread Islam. For this reason, the Sultan frequently used the expressions “cünd-i İslâm, leşker-i İslam, asker-i İslam” in his poems, defining his army as the army of Islam and seeing himself as its high-ranking commander/standard-bearer: “İlâhî ‘izzetün hakkı mu’în ol cünd-i İslâm’a/Ese nusret yili anda ola lutf u zafer peydâ; Çün İslâm dini yanunda mu’zzedür mükerrermdür/Umulur ‘an karîb yâ Rab olardan bir eser peydâ” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 34) (O Allah, by the grace of Your Sublime Majesty, grant aid to the hosts of Islam; May the winds of Your divine assistance blow, delivering us unto victory. For Islam is held high and exalted for Your sake alone; O Allah, grant that a sign of Your favor may soon be revealed).

In another poem, Ahmed I again describes his army as the “army of Islam” and states that he prays for his army: “Cünd-i İslâm’a du’â itmededür çün Bahtî/Ey sabâ turma hemân anlara ilet haberi” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 35) (Bahtî offers his prayers for the hosts of Islam; O morning breeze! Tarry not, and bear unto them these tidings).

Ahmed I, in the following ode he composed for the victory of Cigalazade Sinan Pasha, whom he sent to the eastern front, and Lala Mehmed Pasha, whom he sent to the western front, emphasises that it is Allah who created him from nothing and made him sultan, stating that victory is only possible through His grace and assistance, and imploring Allah for help for his soldiers' victory: "İlâhî cânibeyne salmışam ben iki serdârı/Kerem kıl düşmeni kahr eyle mansûr eyle anları; Biri ol çâr-yârı sevmeyen zâlimleri kırsun/Biri varsun helâk itsün senün emrûnle küffârı; Habîbün hurmetine 'asker-i İslâm'a nusret vir/Kemâl-i cûd ü lutfundan ol anların nighedârı; Teveccüh eyleyüp dergâhuna çok yüz süregeldüm/Habîbün yüzi suyına irişdür 'avnün ey Bârî; Yog iken var idüp bu Ahmed'i sultân iden sensin/Yine sen vir anun maksûdın ey 'âlemlerün varı" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 44) (O Allah, I have dispatched two commanders to the two fronts; Grant Thy grace, crush the foe, and make them victorious. Let one destroy the tyrants who love not the Four Caliphs; Let the other, by Thy command, perish the infidels. Aid the soldiers of Islam for the sake of Muhammad the Chosen; Be their guardian through Thy bounty and benevolence. To Thee I have turned, prostrating long at Thy threshold; Help them for the sake of Muhammad. It is Thou who brought forth existence from nothingness, and made Ahmed the Sultan; Grant him that which he desires).

Ahmed I, unable to lead his soldiers in battle, sent them the following poem along with his greetings, seeking to encourage them. In the poem, he advised the soldiers not to let Allah's name slip from their lips during battle and to pray for His help; he also said that he himself was constantly praying for this jihad: "Ey uranlar kılıcı heybet ile küffâra/Cân ü dilden sizi ısmarlamışam Settâr'a; Eyledüm size du'â ile selâmun irsâl/Siz selâmetde olun düşmen ola bî-çâre; Ahmedâ hayr du'â ile guzâta her dem/Diler isen ki mu'în ola Hudâ anlara" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 42) (O warriors, who strike the infidels with a sword of majesty! With all my soul and heart, I have entrusted you to Allah. I have sent my prayers and greetings unto you; May you remain in safety, and may the enemy be left helpless. O Ahmed, at every moment, with your auspicious prayers for the Ghazis, You seek aid for them from the Almighty).

Ahmed I is generous in reciting poetry to his soldiers; below, he again asks Allah for protection for them: "Askerin Bahtî kulun sana sipâriş eyleye/Her kazâdan anlara mahfûz idüp mesrûr kıl" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 40) (Let Your servant Bahtî entrust his soldiers to You (O Allah); Protect them from all harm, and fill their hearts with joy).

Ahmed I sought divine assistance from Allah against the Kızılbaş, who had been a religious and political problem for the Ottomans for many years, thereby legitimising his request for divine help. For he declared the Kızılbaş (sûrh-serân) to be enemies of the faith, emphasising the concept of jihad, and thus made the military campaign against them a necessity and a religious duty (jihad). In the rest of the poem, the Sultan reinforces his Sunni identity by praying for the rights of the Four Caliphs (Çâr-yâr) and strengthens his claim of ideological superiority over the Shiite-leaning Kızılbaş: "Dahı sûrh-serânı eyle pâmâl/Bi-hakk-ı çâr-yâr-ı bâ-safâmuz; 'Adû-yi dîn olana gâlib olsun/Mu'în ol Bahtî'ye ey pâdişâmuz" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 39) (Annihilate the Qizilbash; For the sake of the Four Caliphs, let them defeat the enemies of the faith; O Allah, our Sovereign King, be the helper of Bahtî).

In the following poem, Selim III cites the occupation of neighbouring lands by infidels as justification for his political and military activities, imploring Allah for help and invoking the name of the Prophet Muhammad: "Tutdum sana yüzü Mevlâm lutfeyle/İşin gücün açılır resûl zikriyle/Aldı etrâfımızı kâfir billâh/Bunca memleket kalsın mı böyle" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXXI) (My God, I have turned to You, grant me Your grace; The affairs of those who remember Prophet Muhammad shall flourish. The infidels have surrounded us on every side; Shall all these lands be left in such a state?).

In the continuation of the above poem, Selim III expresses his wish to go on a campaign before his death and to achieve victory over the infidels by Allah's command. Thus, he will be able to attain the title of "ghazi," which is important for Muslims: "Ölmeden bir kerre edeydik sefer/Hudâ'nın emriyle bulursak zafer/Ehl-i İslâm askeri ne cevâb eyler/Kâfir kılıcı altında kalalım mı böyle" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXXI) (If only we could set out on a campaign just once before we die; If only we could find victory by the command of Allah. What answer would the soldiers of Islam give-Shall we surrender ourselves to the sword of the infidel?).

In the continuation of the same poem, Selim III states that the sword is what the enemy deserves, that one must sacrifice one's life for Islam, and that they will draw their swords by God's command: "Vâcibdir a'dâya kılıc sezâdır/Dîn-i mübînin uğruna cânım fedâdır" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXXI) (It is only fitting for us to draw the sword against the enemy; My soul is sacrificed for the sake of Islam).

Selim III, in the continuation of the poem, states that through this war, one can attain either martyrdom or the rank of a veteran, that the infidels have cast a spell upon Islam, and that in response, they will recite the "ism-i azam" prayer to break this spell. He also expresses that the Tatars remain in the hands of the infidels and that a noble city like Crimea should not remain in such a state, once again imploring Allah for help: "Küffâr İslâm üstüne sihrini saçar/Okuyalım ism-i a'zamı efsûnu bozar/Kâfir elinde kaldı bunca Tatar/Kırım gibi üçe şehir kalsın mı böyle" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXXI) (The infidels desire to cast spells upon the Muslims; Let us recite the prayer of Ism-i Azam, for it shatters all sorcery. So many Tatars have remained in the hands of the infidels; Shall a city as sublime as Crimea remain in such a state?).

In the continuation of the same poem, Selim III declares his determination once more, stating that unless he sends the Ottoman lions into battle and takes revenge on the enemies of religion and the infidels, he will die with his eyes open: "Osmanlı arslanların cenge salmadan/Dîn düşmanına şâtır çalmadan/Şu kâfirden intikâmım almadan/Gözüm açık kalır ölürsem böyle" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXXII) (Without unleashing the Ottoman lions into the fray, Without vanquishing the enemies of the Faith, Without taking my vengeance upon this infidel, If I should die like this, my eyes would remain open in the grave).

Selim III states the rationale for this goal: the infidels have taken many souls and many prisoners, and therefore, according to Islamic law, it is not appropriate to sit and wait: "Nice ibâdullâhın kâfirden var âhı/Derûnumda yanar dâ'im çerâğı/Hele kırâ'at edelim Kitâbullâhı/Dînimize şer'î midir oturmak böyle; Hele derdimi söyledim biraz muhtasar/Er olanlar olmalıdır cenge muntazar/Kâfir almışdır haylice esir/Bu nice askerimizi kalsın mı böyle" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXXII) (The sighs and cries of many servants of Allah are held by the infidel, Their fire burns eternally within my heart. Let us read the Holy Qur'an; Is it fitting for us to sit idly in our Faith like this? I have voiced my sorrow briefly: Those who call themselves men must be ready for war! The infidel has taken countless captives; How can our soldiers remain still in such a state?).

In the final lines of this poem, Selim III expresses his intention to wage war, stating that he does not wish to leave his ancestors' curse upon the infidels: "Gidelim semt-i gazâyâ yâ nasîb neyler/Ya mağlûb eyler bizi ya galib eyler/Âh edip Sultân Selîm böylece söyler/Ceddimiz âhı kâfirden kalsın mı böyle" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXXII) (Let us go forth to Holy War (Gaza), and see what destiny has in store for us; Whether we win or we lose, let it be. Sultan Selim uttered a sigh and spoke thus: Shall the vengeance of our ancestors remain like this in the hands of the infidels?).

In the following poem, which we understand was written by Selim III before he became sultan, he says that when power is granted to him, he will take pleasure in serving people and asks Allah for help in honour of Islam: "Bendeye müyesser olursa cihânın

şâhlık şevketi/Safâdır bana etmek cümle nâsın hizmeti/Dîn-i İslâm hurmetine olur Hakk'ın inâyeti/Gâh yıkılır gâh yapılır buna derler zîrâ devrân" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXIX) (If it be destiny for a humble servant like me to become the Padishah of the world, It would bring me joy to be in the service of all humanity. God's divine aid comes for the sake of the religion of Islam; Sometimes things fall apart, sometimes they are rebuilt for this is what they call the Cycle of Time).

In the continuation of the above poem, Sultan Selim III once again emphasises his religion—based political goal, stating that if the sultanate is granted to him, he will fight the infidels: "Bu abd sultan olursa fâ'il-i muhtâr sanmasın/Anın da şâhı Mevlâdır kendini şâhsız sanmasın/Bir murâdım vardır ancak Hudâ cânım almasın/İntikâm almaktır kâfirden âlemde murâdım hemân" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXIX) (If this humble servant becomes a Sultan, let him not think it was of his own doing; For Allah is his King as well—let him not think himself without a Master. I have but one wish, may Allah not take my soul before it is granted: My desire in this world is to take vengeance upon the infidel).

Selim III, in the continuation of the same poem, states that the followers of Islam have grown weak and the infidels have multiplied. Therefore, he asks Allah for victory and assistance for himself and his soldiers, declaring that he is prepared to become a martyr for this cause: "Ehl-i İslâm za'îf olup küfrün var kesreti/Benim yüzümden nasîb et Hudâ fethi nusreti; Allâh açsın yolumuz gidelim semt-i gazâya/Elbet gelse gerekdir ne yazıldı ise kafaya/Murg-ı cân uçarsa kafesden ben râzıyım kazâya/Ya gâlib olurum ya mağlûb edeydim bir kez imtihân/Ehl-i tedbîrim askerim ile hep muvâfık yâr olsun/Urayım kâfire şemşiri ceddin ruhu şâd olsun/Fedâ kıldım serimi giderse de uğur olsun/Din-i İslâm uğruna şehidlikle gitsin bu can" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXIX) (The Muslims have grown weak, and the infidels have increased; O my Allah! Grant me the honor of conquest and victory. May Allah clear our path, let us head toward the frontier of Gaza; Whatever is written in destiny shall surely come to pass. Even if the bird of the soul flies from its cage, I am content with fate; Whether I win or lose, let me try my path but once. May my governance and my soldiers always remain in harmony; And let this soul be martyred for the sake of the religion of Islam).

One of the most striking aspects of this poem by Selim III is how it emphasises the allegiance of the state and its institutions to Allah and asks for His help. The sultan, together with the state's scholars, viziers, and naval and land armies, turns to Allah and asks for His help: "Devletin gülşeni ulemâ vüzera ehl-i kalem ile/Berren bahren şân-ı şevket cümle ocaklar ile/Tutmuşum dergâha yüzümü ben kuluna imdâd eyle" (Yılmaz 2001, p. CCCXXIX) (With my scholars, who are the rose garden of the state; With my viziers and the members of my bureaucracy; With all my military institutions, across both sea and land; I have turned my face toward Thee; grant Thy help to this, Thy servant).

In the following poem, Selim III states that they shoot arrows in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and go to war against the enemy for the sake of Allah: "Tâlib-i tîr-i kemânız Sa'd-ı Vakkâs pîrimiz/Sünnet-i Peygamber ile atarız biz tîrimiz; Fî-sebîlillâh atınca erem gazâda düşmene/Düşmene vermez amân hiç tîrimiz şemşîrimiz" (Yılmaz 2001, p. 239) (We are seekers of the bow and arrow, and Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas is our patron saint; We release our arrows following the Sunnah of Muhammad; May they strike their marks in the path of Allah, during the holy struggle against the enemy; Our arrows and our swords shall never show the foe any mercy).

3.6. The Victory of Religion: Victory Belongs to Allah

The verse in the Quran with the meaning, "Allah made it not but good tidings for you and to reassure your hearts thereby. And victory is not except from Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Wise." (Al-Imran, 3/126) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 75), is a verse underlining

that Prophet Muhammad received direct aid from Allah in the Battle of Badr and aiming to boost the morale of the companions for Uhud. Indeed, Allah, who granted victory at Badr, did not grant a complete victory at Uhud. So much so that in the continuation of the surah, with the verse meaning, “When a single disaster smote you, although you smote (them) with one twice as great, you said: From where does this come to us? Say, It is from yourselves. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.” (Al-Imran, 3/165) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 80), it is seen that the losses at Uhud are attributed to the negligence of the Muslims. Therefore, in wars fought in the name of Islam, victory was evaluated as the grace of Allah, while defeat was evaluated as the incompetence/negligence of individuals.

According to basic Islamic belief, good and evil are from Allah. And both are to test man. That is, some defeats are not due to incompetence/negligence but are destinal, and this too has a divine reason, that is, a wisdom (hikmet). This is either to give counsel to man or to prepare man for greater successes. Therefore, the general acceptance is this: Victory is from Allah; the error belongs to the servant (human). The servant is obliged to do their part and strive.

Thus, the construction of victory as a divine grace and defeat as a human flaw in Ottoman political discourse takes its source from these events and attitudes in the Quran. That is, while the victory at Badr was linked to divine will, the losses at Uhud were attributed to the strategic negligence of the Muslims. This dual approach created a tradition in Ottoman state philosophy that assigned the legitimacy of victory to Allah and the bill of defeat to the “break in the chain of command.” When Ottoman practice is examined in the context of the Jabriyah (fatalism) debates that emerged in the 8th century (for more, see Fettah 1993, pp. 205–8), it is seen that this situation is balanced with an “ethics of responsibility” that attaches importance to will, rather than an absolute passive fatalism. Yes; for the Ottomans, victory is won with the help of Allah; however, for this help to come, the servant must fulfill the condition of “esbaba tevessül” (clinging to causes/means), that is, preparation and merit. Therefore, while defeat is a “decree” of Allah, the worldly cause of this decree has always been seen as the negligence of a commander or the indiscipline of the soldier. With this understanding, from time to time in the Ottoman Empire, commanders or grand viziers who failed after a war were executed (Mumcu 1962, pp. 50, 55–100). Since defeat was coded in the Ottoman political mind as a human “betrayal” or “incompetence” that could bring harm to the dignity of the padishah and thus the religion, the responsible party was eliminated by being “strangled” or similar methods. This situation is a strategy of preserving spiritual superiority by attributing victory to Allah, and preserving the infallibility of the state and the caliph by personalizing defeat. In this aspect, the Ottoman approach followed a dynamic defense mechanism aimed at protecting political legitimacy rather than a static sectarian fatalism.

In the Ottoman Empire, sovereignty, military campaigns, and victory were fundamental concepts for the continuity of the state. Particularly in the context of the Ottoman ideal of global domination, before embarking on a military campaign, ceremonies were held with the awareness that victory could only be achieved with Allah’s help, and the Qur’an was recited and prayers offered in every corner of the empire. Therefore, the sultans legitimised their victories by declaring that they had been achieved with Allah’s help. A victory over the infidels was seen as a victory for Islam. In this respect, the divans of the following sultans also served as victory chronicles, recording political events and military successes.

In the following poem, Bayezid II states that the sultanate, fortune and happiness were bestowed upon him, that Allah granted him the throne, that the candle of Islam burned with the fat of the hearts of the infidels, that Kara Bogdan’s eyes darkened the world, and that he had subjugated the Tatars to his command, and that he must continue to ask Allah for whatever he desires: “Devlet ü baht u saâdet bize çün yâr oldı/Nerd-i gamda dil-i

bed-hâhun işi zâr oldu; Şol şehinşehliği erzâni kılupdur bize Hak/Ki cihân şehlerine bende dimek âr oldu; Dîn-i İslâm’umuzun şem-i şeb-efrûzı dahı/Ehl-i küfrün yüregi yagile yanar oldu; Kara Bogdân gözine âlemi tâ târ itdüm/Emrûme tâbi olan server-i Tâtâr oldu; Adliyâ her ne murâdun var ise virdi Hudâ/Ârzû dilde hemîn vuslat-ı dil-dâr oldu” (Bayram 2018, p. 179) (Statehood, fortune, and felicity have become our faithful companions. In the game of sorrow, the traces of the ill-willed became but tears and losing dice; God has deemed this ‘Kingship of Kings’ worthy of us; It would be a shame to even call the world’s monarchs our slaves. Even the night-illuminating candle of our religion, Islam, Was fueled by the melting fat of the infidels’ hearts; I have turned the world into darkness for the eyes of Kara Bogdan; The Tatar chief has become the head of those who obey my command. O Adli, whatever desire you held in your heart, Allah has granted; Now, the only longing left in my soul is to reunite with the Beloved).

In the following lines, Selim I states that his victories are a divine manifestation and that the black-hearted enemy cannot understand this, thus emphasising that his political legitimacy has a divine basis: “سليم خصم سیه دل چه داند این حالت/ که از ظهور الهیست فتح لشکر ما” (Selim, how can the black-hearted enemy understand that our soldiers’ conquest of lands is by the grace of God?) (Kaya et al. 2023, p. 207).

Selim I waged a major war against the Safavid Empire, which was ruled by Shiism and posed a threat to Sunni Muslims. Viewing Shiism as a movement aimed at distorting the religion of Allah, Selim I essentially waged this war in the name of Islam. After winning the war, he proclaimed his victory in the following verses, seeking to legitimise his religiously based reign. In these verses, he states: “With my soldiers, I set out from the throne of Istanbul and embarked on a campaign towards Iran. I drenched the Kızılbaş in blood. The governor of Egypt became a slave to my determination and zeal with all his heart and soul. I raised the banner of the sultanate above the nine heavens.” (Tarlan 1946, p. 214).

In the following verse, Murad III attributes the victories of the Islamic people to the word “Allah” being written on their banners. In the rest of the same poem, he states that they must be constantly grateful, so that their days will continue to be filled with conquests and victories: “Zaferdûr her zamân her dem karîni ehl-i İslâmun/Livâ-i nusret üzre çün yazıldı ism ile nâmun; Murâdî hamdüni eyle ziyâde sâaten sâat/İki vech üzre feth u nusret ile olur eyyâmun” (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 459) (Victory is close to the Muslims at every single moment, For upon the banner of triumph, the Name of Allah is inscribed. O Muradi, increase your gratitude and praise every moment, So that your days may be filled with conquests and victories).

Murad III explains that his campaigns were always heralded by conquest with the phrase “inna fetahna” from the Qur’an: “İrişür ‘İnnâ fetahnâ’ müjdesi/Ey Murâdî nireye kılsan sefer” (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 360) (The glad tidings of ‘Verily, We have granted you a victory’ shall reach you, O Muradi, no matter where you direct your campaign).

Murad III emphasises that his army is an Islamic army by defining it as the “La ilahe illallah” army: “Ey Murâdî kırar sevâ çerisin/Leşker-i lâ-ilâhe illâllâh” (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 79) (O Muradi, the army of “There is no god but Allah”/Shall shatter and crush all other hosts).

In the following poem, Ahmed I expresses his happiness at conquering Dishigrad and Estergon, stating that Allah has destroyed the infidels and set fire to their lands, thus making every night in the Islamic world a night of power and every day a wedding. This is also a poetic expression of Ahmed I’s political promise that his reign would bring constant prosperity, peace, and divine grace to his subjects: “Bi-hamdillâh ki kılmış dîn-i İslâm’ı Hudâ mansûr/Dışigrad ile Estergon’ı almışlar olup mesrûr; Guzât-ı müslimîne irişüp ‘avni o Kakhârûn/Urup küffâra top-ı kahrı kılmışlar yine makhûr; Çü küffâr iline ateş bıraktılar idüp nâgeh/Aceb mi bu harâretten kral olsa yine mahrûr; Çün irdi müjde-i fethi bu iki kal’anun Bahtî/Aceb mi ehl-i İslâm’un şebi Kadr olsa rûzı sûr” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 38) (Praise

be to God, He has made the religion of Islam victorious; They rejoiced in the capture of Disigrad and Estergon. Divine aid reached the Muslim ghazis, And they struck the crushing cannon of wrath upon the infidels. Since they cast a sudden fire into the lands of the disbelievers, Is it any wonder if the King burns and rages in that fire? O Bahtî, for the glad tidings of these two fortresses have arrived; Is it any wonder if the Muslims' nights are like Qadr, and their days like a wedding feast?).

3.7. *The Spiritual Foundation of Power: Legitimacy Through Religion and Sufism*

Although every religion contains certain social and legal regulations, its essential field is metaphysics. There can be no religion without metaphysics. The metaphysics of Islam is Sufism (Tasavvuf). Sufism is a fundamental spiritual discipline that attracted interest at every level of the public and state administration in the Ottoman geography. Some of the Ottoman sultans were not merely interested in this science but personally affiliated with tariqas (Sufi orders) and experienced a process of spiritual progress. Sufism is a path that combines the material and spiritual dimensions of Islam with the measures of asceticism (zuhd) and piety (taqwa) in the personal life of Prophet Muhammad. The fundamental aim of this path is for the servant to pass away from their own existence and attain subsistence through the existence of Allah, achieving a "state of presence" as if they are in His presence at every moment (M. E. Kılıç 2019, p. 2). Within the framework of this definition that constitutes the basis of our study and specifically in the context of the Ottoman State, Sufism is not merely an effort for individual maturation; as the result of a deep-rooted cultural heritage, it is a holistic lifestyle in which Sufis served as 'role models' in every field, from the battlefield to social life, in the survival of the state, the guidance of the people, and the overcoming of social troubles.

Although the padishah is the representative of absolute authority in Ottoman political philosophy, Sufi discourse functioned to tame power by placing an armor of 'trust' (amanah) and 'responsibility' over this authority. In this respect, the relationship and dilemma established by sultan poets between the 'dervish cloak' (hırka) and the 'crown' (tac) actually functioned as a shelter protecting the ruler's moral superiority in moments of political crisis. The disdain for the world and the highlighting of Sufism in the poems essentially purified the sultan's military moves from personal ambition and grounded them on a divine duty (i'la-yı kelimetullah—exalting the word of Allah).

The characterization of the sultanate as a 'struggle' (kavga) by the most powerful rulers of the world can also be evaluated as a theopolitical message reminding the subjects that even at the peak of power, one is subject to a spiritual control mechanism. Therefore, this poetic humility in the sultans' Divans is not an indication of weakness; on the contrary, it is a strategic rhetoric that covers the worldly errors of power with a spiritual veil and brings the ruler closer to the ideal of the 'flawless dervish-sultan'.

In this respect, Sufi tendencies and religious poetry also aim to transfer the political legitimacy of the sultanate to a spiritual foundation. This strategy positioned the sultan not only as a ruler but also as the sultan of the people's hearts and their spiritual guide. Although the throne was the dream of every prince from childhood, some poet-sultans, stating that "the throne is a dry worldly struggle," chose to alleviate the negative image brought about by worldly responsibilities and political struggles (struggles for the throne) by devoting themselves to spirituality.

Bayezid II must have been referring to the struggle for the throne with his brother Cem after the death of his father, Mehmed the Conqueror, or the struggles for the throne among his sons while he was still alive, for in the following poems he declares that he did not prefer the throne to dervishhood and that true happiness lies in seclusion. This is an effort to subordinate political authority to spiritual values, even in the heart of the

ruler himself, and thus to certify his piety and justice in the eyes of the people. In these poems, the Sultan expresses that he dislikes throne struggles, that they cause him distress, and advises himself to choose dervishhood, piety, and seclusion over the throne: “Saltanat unvânının gavgâları çokdur belî/Bir abâyile hemîn sa’y it gedâlıkdan yana” (Bayram 2018, p. 46) (The battles and turmoils of the station of sovereignty are many; Don a dervish’s cloak, and strive to be a beggar-in the path of God-).

Sultan Bayezid II must have followed this advice himself, as the following poem is like a manifesto of his retreat into seclusion during his reign. In the poem, he states that he has never been happy for a moment in this world and that whoever he confides his troubles to only adds to his sorrow. More importantly, he states that what troubles his heart is the struggle for power, and that happiness lies in dervishhood. In the final verse, he advises himself to abandon the sorrows of the people and the troubles of the country, and if he is wise, to realise his situation and mourn: “Olmadı âlem içinde bir nefes hurrem gönül/Olmadı bir lahza bî-gam olana hem-dem gönül; Her kime gönlüm gamın didüm gamından gam yidüm/Gâlibâ yokdur cihân içinde bir bî-gam gönül; Saltanat gavgâsıdır Adlî seni dil-teng iden/Hırka-pûş olanda vardur var ise hurrem gönül; Ko raiyyet gussasını memleket kaygusını/Âdil isen hâlün anup eylegil mâtem gönül” (Bayram 2018, p. 111) (The heart did not laugh for even a single moment in this world, Not for an instant could it find a friend free of sorrow. To whomever I confessed my heart’s grief, I only received more grief in return; Perhaps there is no heart in this world that is without pain. O Adlî! It is the struggle for the throne that constricts your soul; If true laughter exists, it is found only in the dervish life. Leave behind the grief of the people and the responsibility of the state. If you are truly just, weep for your own condition).

Despite being a sultan who tripled the borders of the Empire in a short time and ascended the throne by rebelling against his father, Selim I emphasises the worthlessness of the world and the throne in his poems. In this way, he reinforces the perception that his conquests were not for personal gain but in accordance with Allah’s command and the goal of spreading Islam (jihad), distinguishing himself from ordinary rulers who pursue worldly things. In the following verse, he states that the purpose of worldly sultanate is fame and glory, and that one should not desire this in this filthy world. The acceptance that the world is filthy and despicable is also a Sufi-based approach, according to which sultans should not be greedily attached to this lowly and despicable world: “O Selim, the purpose of worldly sovereignty is merely fame and glory. Is this impure world ever to be desired? We do not even take it into account.” (Tarlan 1946, p. 81).

Selim I reminds us that his reign was granted by Allah, that Allah gave him a hundred states and kingdoms, but that he must not become attached to them and stray from Allah: “O heart, do not seek help or friendship from others; do not fear your enemies. State and kingdom are only granted by Allah. Do not seek fortune and happiness from the crown and throne. For the true sultan, Allah granted Joseph the sovereignty of Egypt from the bottom of the well. O my soul, even if you were granted a hundred states and realms like Selim, do not become attached to the world and distance yourself from your friends.” (Tarlan 1946, p. 143).

The expression “Sovereignty is a worldly struggle” is a frequently recurring theme in the poems of Ottoman sultans and reflects an awareness of the transitory nature of power.

This strategy of emphasising the transience of worldly affairs and the strife brought by sovereignty is propaganda designed to portray the sultans as leaders free from lust for power and focused on spiritual values. Through these verses, the poet-sultans downplay the worldly power that comes with the throne, declaring that true status lies with Allah and that they are “sultans in appearance but worthless servants in reality.” This display of spiri-

tual humility unquestionably reinforces the religious legitimacy of the sultanate by linking the source of the ruler's justice and power to divine approval rather than personal gain.

Despite being the ruler of a vast territory, Suleyman I states that sovereignty is an unnecessary worldly struggle and that true happiness lies in knowing Allah: "Saltanat didükleri ancak cihân gavgasıdır/Olmaya baht u sa'âdet dünyede vahdet gibi" (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. II/1676) (That which they call "Sovereignty" is but a worldly strife; There is no bliss in this world like the state of Divine Unity).

In the following verse, Suleyman I also advises that sultanate is a great struggle and that it is better to be a person of the heart than a sultan: "İy Muhibbî pâdişâhlık çün ulu gavgâyımıŖ/Yıgdür andan ehl-i dillerden olasın sen hemîn" (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. II/1856) (O Muhibbi! Sovereignty is but a grand struggle; To be a master of the heart is loftier than being a king).

If one wishes to be sultan of two worlds, one should not accept the sultanate, for he knows that the sultanate carries heavy responsibilities. He knows that the sultanate carries the risk of distracting one with worldly affairs and distancing one from religion: "Sultân olam dir isen eger iki 'âleme/Kâni olup Murâdî kabûl itme saltanat" (Kırkkılıç 2015, p. 190) (If you wish to be the Sultan of both realms, O Muradi! Accept not the earthly sovereignty).

In the following poem, Osman II advises against becoming arrogant with the temporary sultanate of this transient world and urges one to withdraw before suffering the cruelty of time: "Şeh-i âlemlige ey Fârisî sen olmasan magrûr/Cefâ-yı rûzigârı çekmeden çeksen Ŗu dâmânı" (Ersoy 2021, p. 96) (O Farisi! Boast not of being the Shah of the universe; Withdraw your hand and hem from the world, before suffering the cruelty of time).

Ahmed III states in the following poem that the pleasure of sovereignty lies in the love felt for the Prophet Muhammad: "Saltanat budur Necibâ bil tamâm/Şimdi zât-ı müctebâyâ 'âşıkam" (İlhan 2016, p. 64) (O Necib! Know that true sovereignty is this: Right now, I am in love with the Prophet Muhammad).

In the following poem, Selim III states that although the sultanate appears to be bliss, it is actually a hollow struggle: "Bâg-ı âlem içre gerçi pek safâdır saltanat/Dikkat etsen bir kuru gavgâyâ câdır saltanat" (Yılmaz 2001, p. 35) (Sovereignty in the garden of this world is most delightful; Yet if you look closely, it is but a place of hollow strife).

3.8. Love of the Homeland Comes from Faith

Homeland (Vatan) refers to the piece of land where a person is born and lives, and to which they are bound politically and emotionally. In historical and literary sources, extensive space is given to the importance of the homeland for people, and to the literature regarding the love and longing for the homeland. Al-Jahiz, one of the first authors to write works in this genre, states in his treatise titled *el-Hanîn ile'l-evtân* that love for the homeland and longing for the homeland are deep-rooted feelings innate in humans. However, there is another point Al-Jahiz emphasizes in his treatise titled *Menâkıbü (Fezâ'ilü)'t-Türk*, and it is this: The feeling of homeland is inclusive of all humans and effective in every region, but this feeling is stronger and more deep-rooted in Turks than in any other nation (Çağrıçı 2012, p. 563). Indeed, Turks are bound to the lands they have adopted as a home with a sacred bond. There are reasons for this, such as viewing the homeland as religion and honor (namus), and considering a land watered with the blood of martyrs as a trust (emanet) to themselves. At the foundation of this understanding lies the ancient Turkish state tradition that identifies the homeland with "mother" and "ancestor/father" (ata). With Islam, the love of the homeland was further reinforced with a faith-based identity. The phrase "Hubbu'l-vatan, mine'l-imân" (Love of the Homeland is from Faith), attributed to Prophet Muhammad, found a political counterpart in Ottoman civilization as well. Faith

(Iman), that is, believing in Allah, is a priority for a Muslim. Associating the love of the homeland with faith is the result of viewing the homeland as a divine grant.

Bayezid II presents his love for his homeland as a requirement of faith in Allah. In the following lines, he states that he does not leave his beloved's neighbourhood in the hope of seeing her face, because love for the homeland is a requirement of faith: "Çıkmazam kûyından ümmîd-i likâ-yı yâr ile/Ehl-i îmâna olur hubb-ı vatan çün pâ-y-best" (Bayram 2018, p. 49) (I do not depart from my beloved's quarter, hoping to behold her face; For the love of one's homeland binds the feet of those with faith).

3.9. The Turks' Ideal of World Domination

Being one of the most deep-rooted nations in the world, Turks have established a developed state and organizational structure since ancient times in order to ensure social order. The state philosophy of the Turks bears a universal (cihanşümul) character that embraces not only their own society but all of humanity. Lying at the foundation of this understanding is the Turkish Khagans' view of themselves as responsible for the whole world and the aim of spreading justice to the earth. As stated previously, in the Turkish conception of dominion, the legitimacy of the ruler is based on a divine source. Indeed, as recorded in ancient Chinese annals, Mete Khan (Mo-tun) Yabgu, the first known great Khagan, addressed the Chinese emperor in the introduction of a letter he wrote using the title "Tengri Kut" (Hun Khagan seated on the throne by Allah), thereby basing his own legitimacy directly on divine will. This thought inspired the title "Shadow of Allah on Earth" (Zillullah-i fi'l-arz) used for Turkish Khagans in later ages, and was even effective in the padishah descriptions in the Book of Dede Korkut and in the European Hun Emperor Attila being referred to as the "Sword of Allah." Parallel to this deep-rooted belief system, the main aim of the Turkish state has been to establish sacred dominion in the "Tört Bulung," that is, the four corners of the world, and to spread Turkish justice to the whole world "from where the sun rises to where it sets." Likewise, this universal vision was expressed in the Ergenekon Epic as "there remained no place in the world where the Turkish arrow did not sing, or where their arm did not reach." Consequently, seeing themselves since the depths of history as a distinguished people protected by Allah and as blessed envoys tasked with establishing world dominion, Turks placed this consciousness of divine duty and the ideal of world dominion and world order at the center of their state structures (Gömeç and Fidan 2020, pp. 329–30). Again, the following expression spoken by Oghuz Khagan in the Oghuz Epic summarizes this ideal: "Kün tuğ bolgıl, kök kurıkan" (May the sun be our flag and the sky our tent!) (Bang and Arat 1936, p. 17). That is, let everywhere under the sky be ours. Thus, Turks continued this ideal of Turkish world dominion, which existed before Islam as well, by combining it with the understanding of jihad with the advent of Islam and absolutely reinforcing this thought.

It is possible to see the ideal of Turkish-World dominion in the Divans and political lives of the Ottoman sultan poets as well.

In the following verse, which is a propaganda piece for the Ottoman ideal of world domination, Ahmed I asks Allah to make every place from east to west a prosperous Islamic country: "Yâ İlâhî cümle îmân ehlini mesrûr kıl/Şark u garbı dâr-ı İslâm eyleyüp ma'mûr kıl" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 40) (O Allah, bring joy to the hearts of all believers; make the East and the West the abode of Islam and adorn them with beauty).

In the following verse, Ahmed I, invoking the verse "nasrun minallâh (help from Allah)" (As-Saff, 61/13) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 621), emphasising the Ottoman ideal of global domination by wishing for the flag to fly everywhere with Allah's help: "Bi-hakk-ı âyet-i "nasrûn minellâh"/Ser-efrâz eyle her yirde livâmuz" (Kayaalp 2019, p. 39) (For the

sake of the verse “Victory is from Allah”; O Allah, raise our flag high in every corner of the world!).

In the following poem, which Ahmed I wrote upon the conquest of Peste (İlgürel 1989, p. 30) during the early years of his reign; states that Allah helped the Muslims, that the people of Buda rejoiced at the conquest of Peste, and that Engürüs also asked Allah for the good news of the conquest; thus expressing that the oppression of the infidels would end and that the sun of faith would fill the lands of the infidels with light. This is religiously based political propaganda targeting non-Muslim lands. The Sultan expresses that he is not satisfied with the current victory (Peste) and desires the complete conquest of Engürüs (Hungary), the ultimate political goal. This is noteworthy in that it conveys the message that the Ottomans will continue their unstoppable expansionist policy and that the army must constantly focus on new targets. Furthermore, the poem’s depiction of the enemy king (the Austrian king) begging for mercy in a humiliating manner is a sharp propaganda language used to demonstrate the Ottoman Empire’s political superiority and the enemy’s helplessness, serving as a deterrent for both internal morale and foreign policy. In the final verse of this poem, the sultan awaits Allah’s help to lift the “darkness of unbelief” and fill all non-Muslim lands with the “light of faith.” This is a clear expression of the idea of “world domination,” suggesting that the Ottomans were not only expanding their territory but also carrying out a mission to save the world spiritually and ideologically: “Şükr ü hamdüm anadur cân ü gönülden ki Şekûr/Ehl-i İslâm’un olup yâveri kılmuş mansûr; Peşte’nün fethi Budin ehline cân-bahş oldu/Bu beşâret haberi kıldı cihânı mesrûr; Lîk kâni degülem ben buna Hak’dan umaram/Engürüs’ün haber-i fethi dahı ide zuhûr; Münhezim eyleyeler gayret ile küffârı/Cünd-i İslâm’a vire fursat ü nusret o gayûr; Ahmedâ zulmet-i küfri giderüp ol Hâdî/Mihr-i îmân ile küffâr iline doldura nûr” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 37) (My gratitude is from the soul and heart to Allah; He is the Helper of Muslims and has granted them victory; The conquest of Peste has granted new life to the people of Buda; This glad tidings has rejoiced the world; I pray to Allah that He may also grant the news of the conquest of Hungary; May they put the infidels to flight; May He grant opportunity and aid to the soldiers of Islam; O Ahmed, may Allah dispel the darkness of disbelief; May He fill the land of the infidels with light through the sun of faith). Thus, while celebrating the current victories (Peste), the poet also clearly declares the great political goals for the future.

3.10. The Religion of the State Is Justice

In the Quran, justice is expressed through concepts such as “mizan” and “adl.” These concepts generally mean “order, balance, equality, and honesty.” In the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad, it is characterized as a part of religion and state administration, the measure of blessings, and the most auspicious of worships. According to Islamic political thinkers and writers of siyasatnames (books of politics): “The standing of the heavens and the earth is through justice. Justice is the continuation of religion, the pillar of the state (mülk), and the basis of politics in the eyes of all religions and sects, and Arab and Persian states.” That is, the most fundamental value that keeps the universe and the state standing is justice (Adalıoğlu 2024, pp. 23–24).

The subject of justice and the characteristic of being just frequently appear in the divans of sultan poets as a sign of sultanate. According to them, the sultan must be just because he represents Allah, for justice is what Allah expects from rulers. As stated in the verse, “Verily, Allah commands you to render the trusts to their rightful owners and to judge with justice among people” (Nisa 4/58) (Altuntaş and Şahin 2011, p. 97), what Islam, the religion of the state, commands is justice; therefore, the religion of the state is also justice.

Suleyman I frequently advises being a just sultan and states that Allah does not love the oppressor: “İy Muhibbî adl kıl bir kimseye zulm eyleme/Hak ta’âlâ çünkü bilürsin ki sevmez zâlimi” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. II/1639) (O Muhibbi, be just and oppress no soul; For thou knowest well that Allah loveth not the oppressor).

Below, Suleyman I states that even the prophet Suleyman knew that sovereignty is temporary, proclaiming that ruling justly is the only legitimate basis for sovereignty: “Mûr gibi pâymâl itdürme gel miskînleri/Saltanat geçer Süleymân dahı olsan hem çü bād” (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. I/298) (Do not crush the helpless like ants beneath thy feet; For even if thou wert Solomon, worldly power is but fleeting).

In the following couplet, Suleyman I emphasizes that if one desires the bliss/sovereignty of both worlds, one must pay heed to the state of the helpless and the broken-hearted: ‘Ger ister-isen iki cihân devletin iy dil/Dermânde vü dil-hastelerün hâline tut gûş’ (If you desire the sovereignty of both worlds, O heart/Pay heed to the state of the helpless and the broken-hearted) (Yavuz and Yavuz 2016, p. 772). According to Czygan’s evaluations, the discourse of authority in Muhibbî’s divan was directly shaped by Ibn al-Arabi’s doctrine of the ‘Perfect Man’ (insan-ı kâmil). Since the perfect man represents ‘God’s vicegerent on earth,’ it is noteworthy in terms of pointing to the divine source of sultanate and power. Accordingly, Muhibbî is considered not only a political leader but also the perfect manifestation of divine names on earth (Czygan 2024, p. 544). This, in turn, obliges the sultan to be just, equitable, thoughtful, good, and righteous.

Ahmed I wishes for people to work for Allah, spread justice, and for everyone in authority to be just. This wish also targets the internal political order in terms of the quest to spread justice. For this contains the message that the state stands not only on military power, but also on law and justice: “Yolında ‘âdil olsa her mansıb ehli ‘adli/Allah için çalışsam neşr-i ‘adalet itsem” (Kayaalp 2019, p. 41) (If only every holder of rank and office would act with justice for the sake of God; And if only I too could strive in His path to spread righteousness and equity).

The first poem in Ahmed III’s divan contains his advice to his nephew, Mahmud I, upon being forced to relinquish the throne. Here, the poet’s first piece of advice to him on how to be a sultan is justice: “Hâcet ashâbına adâlet kıl/Fukarâ hâline riâyet kıl” (İlhan 2016, p. 27) (Be just toward those in need; Keep watch over the plight of the poor).

In the following verse, Selim III states that no one should be proud of the sovereignty/happiness of this time, and that if the ruler is just, the ruler can derive happiness from this sovereignty: “Bu zamânın devletiyle kimse magrûr olmasın/Kâm alırsan adl ile ol dem be-câdır saltanat” (Yılmaz 2001, p. 35) (Let no one pride themselves on the worldly power or prosperity of these times; For if you succeed in being just, only then have you attained true sovereignty).

4. Conclusions

Poetry is an art form that destroys the idea that words are merely a tool, transforming words into a power in themselves. By carefully selecting words, giving them a musical form, and intensely expressing the deepest human states, poetry emerges as the most powerful and influential type of speech. It is evident that Turks used poetry not only as an art form but also as a tool for building civilisation. Poetry serves as a medium for both art and culture. This study aims to highlight how poetry was utilized as a tool for religious and political propaganda.

Ottoman sultans, in particular, portrayed themselves not only as commanders achieving victories at the helm of their armies but also as high-caliber artists and highly cultured administrators who conquered the hearts of their people through literature and poetry. In this way, the Ottoman sovereignty ratified its political power and prestige through the

immortalizing potency of the art of poetry, crowning all actions of the dynasty with a cultural reinforcement. To such an extent, the fact that the sultans were personally involved in poetry—with ten sultans possessing their own *divans* (collected works)—persisted not merely as a form of patronage but as a demonstration of the dynasty's cultural supremacy.

This study evaluates the *divans* of Ottoman sultans as the most precious literary texts that consolidated the sultan's authority by harnessing the power of both poetry and religion. Furthermore, it is posited that these poems can be regarded as religion-based political propaganda posters. In the examined texts, it has been identified that political messages were frequently delivered—proclaiming the sultan's power, the majesty of his state, his conquests, and the permanence of his dynasty—all while attributing these attributes to divine grace, thereby rendering them beyond dispute. It is possible to state that these texts functioned as effective instruments of administration and politics; they supported the objective of spreading Islam and broadcast an image of the sultan as a “piously devoted servant” and a “just and powerful ruler” to both the public and the enemy. Additionally, it can be argued that these poet-sultans sought to reinforce their leadership over the *ummah* (Muslim community) by frequently expressing their love for Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, thus striving to portray a sincere and humble Muslim persona. Furthermore, since Ottoman sultans identified as Muslims and framed their actions within the context of Islam, the primary audience of these discourses can be identified as the Muslim populace, with the function of motivating and consolidating the community. Furthermore, the use of poetry to threaten Shiite leaders and non-Muslim monarchs suggests an intent to intimidate neighboring rulers and populations.

Of the thirty-six Ottoman sultans, ten were poet-sultans who possessed a *divan*. The centuries in which these sultans lived (15th century–18th century) encompassed both the country's political and economic heyday and the years considered to be the peak of *divan* poetry. This is significant in that it reveals the parallel relationship between a country's political prosperity and its artistic prosperity.

Among the poet sultans of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed II, Selim I, and Suleyman I in particular were sultan poets who left their mark on Turkish and Islamic history with their political achievements. Mehmed II conquered Constantinople, the centre of Orthodox Christianity, from the Byzantines; Selim I secured the transfer of the Islamic caliphate to the Ottomans; and Suleyman I significantly expanded the borders of the Ottoman Empire and strengthened the state treasury. The common theme in the propaganda-like poems of these three poets is the ideal of “spreading the name of Allah” throughout the world. Other sultan-poets also used spiritual depth and idealism to spread his political aims (conquest and the triumph of the state) to the social conscience (in religious language) in his poems.

In their poems, the sultans kept alive the spirit of conquest and the ideal of *jihad* (war in the name of religion). They wrote poems to boost the morale of the army, presenting the Ottoman army and its campaigns not as a matter of “state interest” but directly as “Allah's army” (*cünd-i İslâm*) and “the cause of Islam”. They frequently took care to both sanctify their victories against enemies of religion (infidels and *Kızılbaş*) and use expressions that reinforced authority against internal enemies. This attitude also reinforced the perception that their wars were not for personal gain, but carried out in accordance with Allah's command and the goal of spreading Islam (*jihad*).

This study aims to draw attention to ancient texts not only from the perspective of literary history but also from the perspective of the history of political communication. Indeed, even today in Middle Eastern societies, political leaders' speeches still feature religious references, poetic quotations, and careful use of rhetoric. Therefore, in our view, the impact of such elements in texts on the peoples living in this region, the antiquity of this impact, and its future are matters worthy of examination.

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