

Article

One Poem, Three Forms: Textual, Visual, and Ritual Uses of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in Ottoman Literary Culture

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Abstract

Ottoman literary culture was inherently multilingual, interweaving Arabic, Persian, and Anatolian Turkish without requiring audiences to translate or decode source texts. This paper examines the reception and resonance of one of the most celebrated poems in the Islamic world, *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (The Poem of the Mantle) by al-Būṣīrī (d. 1294–97), with a particular focus on its role in Ottoman culture. The *Burdah*'s transmission unfolded across three interconnected dimensions: textual, visual, and ritual. Through richly adorned multilingual manuscripts, architectural inscriptions, and liturgical performances, the poem circulated widely, evoking both reverence and aesthetic admiration. The *Burdah*'s association with the Prophet Muḥammad—especially the belief that al-Būṣīrī was miraculously healed after composing it—further reinforced its spiritual significance. Rhythmic recitations and collective singing of the poem became integral components of devotional gatherings. By analyzing this multifaceted reception, the paper demonstrates how Ottoman multilingual manuscripts and ritual performances preserved and revitalized Arabic and Persian poetic traditions, thereby deeply embedding them in Ottoman religious and literary life.

Keywords: multilingualism; *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*; Ottoman literary culture; translation

1. Introduction

Originally written in Arabic, the famous poem *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (Poem of the Mantle) is one of the most influential poems in Ottoman literary history, remaining notable even today. It has been translated into various languages, reproduced and rewritten beyond its original poetic form, inscribed on buildings, used as an ornamental element on the walls of interior spaces, recited at gatherings, sung in various musical forms, and presented in nearly every conceivable medium throughout Ottoman literary culture. Therefore, *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* is one of the strongest examples of how Ottoman literary culture engaged with an Arabic poem in everyday life—textually, visually, and ritually.

Additionally, *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* is a prime example of multilingualism and, consequently, in Ottoman literary culture. The scholarship on Ottoman multilingualism reveals evidence across various media, including epigraphy, inscriptions, architecture, literature, scholarly writings of all kinds, and manuscript decoration. Building on this predominantly textual body of scholarship (Açı́l 2024), this article aims to expand the spectrum by including the musical, architectural, and ritual dimensions of multilingualism alongside its textual manifestations (Serdaroğlu 2007; Artan 2023; Ayçiçeği 2024a, 2024b). This article demonstrates how a single poem contributed to Ottoman multilingual literary culture through its textual, visual, and ritual uses across music, architecture, gatherings, private spaces, calligraphy, and even the education system.



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Many scholars describe Ottoman Turkish as encompassing at least three languages—Arabic, Persian, and Anatolian Turkish—which makes Ottoman literary culture fundamentally multilingual. Due to this multilingualism, translating from Arabic and Persian into Ottoman Turkish is easier than translating from other languages. Moreover, the Ottoman audience of translations could readily understand the linguistic and cultural codes of the source languages, particularly Arabic and Persian (Hagen 2003). Hany Rashwan observes that “al-Jāhiz portrays multilingualism in the ninth century as a crucial element for achieving intellectual and literary excellence” (Rashwan 2024a, p. 616), which may help explain why premodern scholars employed multilingualism in their works.

There are two well-known versions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, a poem honoring the Prophet Muḥammad, though this article will focus on only one of them. The first was written by Kaʿb b. Zuhayr (d. 24 AH/645 CE), during the Prophet’s lifetime. Zuhayr composed the poem to seek forgiveness from the Prophet Muḥammad and to praise him. This version had a significant impact on Ottoman literary culture. Demonstrating the multilingual nature of Ottoman literary tradition, renditions of the poem were produced in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.

Ömer Said Güler examines the legacy of this poem in Ottoman culture and catalogs its versions in three languages—Turkish, Persian, and Arabic—written during the Ottoman period by Ottoman authors. The number of Turkish renditions reported by Güler may shed light on the poem’s influence in Türkiye. During the Ottoman period, there were twenty-five Turkish versions: thirteen commentaries, seven translations, one fiver (*tahmīs*), one translation of a specific commentary, one parallel, and one marginal gloss. Including new rewritings from the Republican period, beginning in 1923, the total number reaches approximately forty (Güler 2022, p. 587). These numbers and the long timespan demonstrate that Kaʿb b. Zuhayr’s *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* maintained a continuous presence within Ottoman literary culture. The wide variety of renditions also suggests that Ottoman authors employed the poem in nearly every possible prose and poetic form that displays their abilities.

Güler also compares the version of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, written by Kaʿb b. Zuhayr, with that of al-Būṣīrī (d. between 694–7 AH/1294–7 CE). Although both poems were referred to by the same title in Ottoman literary culture, Güler notes a distinction found in one manuscript, according to which the former [Zuhayr’s] is the “original *Burdah*,” (*ḥaqīqī*) and the latter is “metaphorical” (*majāzī*) (Güler 2022, p. 549). An anonymous work, *Mejmuʿa Ḳaṣāʾid ve Resāʾil* (The Collection of Odes and Treatises), makes this distinction explicit. The compiler refers to Zuhayr’s poem in red as “*al-Qaṣīdat al-Burdah al-ḥaqīqīyyah wa hiya qaṣīdat Bānat Suʿād*” [The original *al-Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, which is known as *Bānat Suʿād*] (fol. 12r) while the poem by al-Būṣīrī is labeled “*al-qaṣīdat al-burdah al-majāzī*” [the metaphorical *al-Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*] (fol. 17a).

Although the compiler of this manuscript makes such a distinction and Güler seems to adopt a similar terminology, the “original” (*al-ḥaqīqī*) vs. the “metaphorical” (*al-majāzī*) distinction is not generally supported by manuscripts produced or preserved in Ottoman manuscript libraries. Since both were widely known among Ottoman audiences in various languages, authors often distinguished them by adding “*burdah*” (mantle) or “*burʿa*” (cure) to the poem’s title or by referring to them through the names of their authors, such as *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* by Zuhayr. In other words, Güler’s observation appears to be exceptional; Ottomans seem to have chosen to use *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (*Ḳaṣīde-i Bürde* in Ottoman Turkish transcription) for both versions.¹

The purpose of this article is to analyze *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* by al-Būṣīrī, originally entitled *al-Kawākib al-durriyyah fī madḥ al-khayr al-bariyyah* (Pearly Stars in Praise of the Best of All Creation). The poem was composed in the second half of the thirteenth century by Sharaf

al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd al-Sanhājī, known as al-Būṣīrī. He was a scribe, Qur’ān reciter, and a Ṣūfī. Born in Egypt, al-Būṣīrī lived in Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina before returning to Egypt, where he died in Alexandria between 1294 and 1297 (Stetkevych 2010, p. 81). *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* became highly popular through its numerous translations, commentaries, and expansions in nearly all literary languages used by Muslims (Stetkevych 2010, pp. 70–71). It reached a broad audience across different strata, including sultans, viziers, scholars, diplomats, poets, and scribes. The poem also appeared in both verse and prose forms, was used in inscriptions, and was recited at gatherings.

It can be asserted that *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*’s exceptional reach and influence stemmed from a story narrated by al-Būṣīrī’s biographers concerning the composition of the poem and its mystical and religious effects. According to these biographers, al-Būṣīrī composed the poem to express his gratitude to the Prophet for restoring his health (Veit 2009, p. 59).

The poet composed *the Burda* when he was semi-paralyzed as a result of a serious illness. Having completed it, the poet prayed to God for his recovery, whereupon the Prophet appeared to him in a dream, laid his hand upon his forehead, and draped his mantle (*burda*) around him. When al-Būṣīrī awoke, his paralysis had lessened, and he could get up and walk. (Sperl and Shackle 1996, p. 470)

Because of this story of recovery, the poem, also known by the alternate title *Qaṣīdat al-Bur’a* (The Poem of the Cure), came to be regarded as possessing therapeutic and liturgical functions. In a marginal note found in *Mejmū‘a Kaṣā‘id ve Resā’il* mentioned above, next to the title of the *Qaṣīdat al-Bur’a*, it is stated:

“برء لفظی تسمیه اولنمق صاحب قصیده نك علتندن بری اولمسینه سبب اولدیغی ایچوندر”²

which reads “The reason for using the word ‘bur’e’ is the healing of the author of the ode from illness.” Since then, Muslims have reproduced the poem in various forms, in the hope of gaining a spiritual blessing.

Ottoman readers encountered three main types of multilingual engagement with poetry as exemplified by this poem: textual, visual, and ritual. I argue that textual forms highlight the aesthetic dimension of Ottoman multilingualism; the visual aspect may be characterized as performative use, while the ritual dimension reflects its religious character.

By presenting revealing examples of the translated poem in a multilingual environment and demonstrating that translation may be understood as extending beyond the textual level or the mere adoption of a culture, I argue that multilingualism constituted a way of life and formed an inseparable part of the definition of the Ottoman literary culture. Therefore, this article is divided into three main subsections devoted to the textual, visual, and ritual renditions of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* by al-Būṣīrī.

Two recently published studies demonstrating the textual and aesthetic influence of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* on Ottoman literary culture have made writing this article easier. The first (Açıl 2024) argues that Ottomans utilized multilingualism as an aesthetic tool in their texts. The second is a two-volume study dedicated to the influence of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* by al-Būṣīrī on Ottoman literature, social life, and art (Ayçiçeği 2024a, 2024b), demonstrating the various ways in which Ottomans engaged with the poem. This article may be regarded as a continuation of the former in terms of multilingualism and broadening the discussion by incorporating visual and ritual dimensions, and an expansion and repositioning of the latter study, making its subject more accessible to the English-speaking world. The visual and ritual dimensions of the poetry tend to extend beyond the textual uses of multilingualism. In contrast, performative and liturgical dimensions reveal the multilayered uses of the same text.

Before turning to the analysis, it is necessary to discuss multilingualism from both theoretical and methodological perspectives. Although multilingualism is a modern the-

oretical framework for approaching literature, multilingual practices themselves are pre-modern. Hany Rashwan, in his editor's introduction to a Special Issue on multilingualism, argues that the theory "must draw from the insights of Postcolonial Studies, which takes into account the epistemic and ontological consequences of colonization or imperialism" (Rashwan 2024c, p. 605). He further argues that premodern societies were inherently multilingual, engaging with multiple languages and literary traditions (p. 606). This was the case in the Abbasids, al-Andalusi, Persian-speaking Saljuq, the Mongol, and Ottoman courts. The standardization efforts of modern nation-states have displaced multilingual and multicultural literary cultures, a transformation that may be labelled as a transformation from a multilingual milieu to monolingual regimes.

The case of al-Andalus has likewise been evaluated as a multilingual literary culture that challenges the modern monolingual ideology embodied in the paradigm of "one nation, one language," highlighting instead the multilingual, multicultural, and multireligious character of life in al-Andalus and other premodern and Islamic societies (Salvaggio 2024, p. 633). As Salvaggio notes through his use of Arno Borst's concept of "theology of multilingualism and multiculturalism" (p. 650), Islamic knowledge traditions may be interpreted through Qur'anic references to linguistic diversity. Because "While Qur'an never mentions the episode of the Tower of Babel, several Qur'anic passages directly deal with the issue of language diversity," this diversity may be understood as "theology of multilingualism." (Salvaggio 2024, p. 636). Therefore, linguistic diversity and consequently multilingualism may be regarded in Islamic culture and literary tradition as part of divinely ordained order. As an example of "intercultural, multicultural, and transcultural conceptions of Ottoman culture", Hasan Çolak quotes a passage from the famous *Turkish Letters* by Lady Montagu: "I live in a place, that very well represents the tower of Babel: in Pera they speak Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, Russian, Sclavonian, Wallachian, German, Dutch, French, English, Italian, Hungarian; and what is worse, there are ten of these languages spoken in my family." (Çolak 2025, pp. 44–45).

According to Salvaggio, it is precisely because of this understanding, "for the Italian orientalist Alessandro Bausani, by premodern Islamic authors 'Turkish, Persian, Urdu, *et similia* are perceived as dialects of a common literary and cultured language; stylistic forms assumed by a *quid* that in reality is a *single language*.'" (Salvaggio 2024, p. 648). Ottoman Turkish, which comprises Turkish, Persian, and Arabic may thus be understood as a realization of this "single language," functioning simultaneously as both one language and multi-lingual literary medium. As Hagen observes, "hardly any elite culture text in Ottoman literature is purely Turkish or Ottoman Turkish but regularly includes elements in Arabic and Persian" (Hagen 2003, p. 131) that, at the same time, convey Persian and Arabic culture.

To conclude, Islamic understanding of language and culture treats multilingualism and multiculturalism as theological necessities, which helps explain why premodern Islamic societies and authors were multilingual in both theory and practice, especially when recalling the cultural atmosphere of the Abbasid, Andalusian, and Ottoman courts.

2. Textual Renditions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*: Aesthetic Re-Use

Ottoman literary culture appears to have been primarily a textual tradition in character. As a multilingual literary tradition, Ottoman literary culture made use of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in nearly all the written languages prevalent in Ottoman society. Therefore, this section of the article will focus on its textual reuse. The discussion examines the poem's textual renditions within Ottoman literary culture to assess whether it was as influential as previous scholarship has suggested. Accordingly, it is necessary to identify and examine Ottoman Turkish translations, commentaries, and fivers based on *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*,

whether composed in prose or verse, in order to demonstrate how the poem influenced Ottoman written culture. The number and form of these renditions, the date of their compositions, and the number of surviving copies are all important for gaining a clearer understanding of the poem's level of influence.

2.1. Translations and Commentaries in Prose

Ottoman literary culture was rich in both the quantity and quality of translations and commentaries of Arabic and Persian works, as exemplified by *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. Within Ottoman literary tradition, commentaries and translations shared many common features, making the distinction between them increasingly difficult. What constituted a commentary in Ottoman literary culture? What, if anything, differentiated a translation from a commentary? Although these questions have attracted considerable scholarly attention, recent studies tend to treat commentaries and translations as similar in nature. One of the leading scholars in the field argues that commentaries included translations, while translations were likewise treated as commentaries, as well (Paker 2015).

Duygu Yıldırım draws attention to another aspect of translation that foregrounds the translator's aims. Discussing the translations of Ali Ufkî, a convert to Islam who served at the seventeenth-century Ottoman court, she argues that "translation texts became an act of translating the self" (Yıldırım 2024, p. 420). According to Yıldırım, Ali Ufkî attempted to present to European audiences as remaining faithful to his origins, thereby seeking to maintain ties with them. Thus, the translator's aim and political positioning should also be taken into account when examining translations. For the purposes of this article, translators may have sought to portray or build themselves as individuals capable of reading and writing in three languages-Arabic, Persian, and Turkish-that also make her/him a part of Islamicate literary tradition.

One can observe that more Ottoman commentaries were written on works originally composed in Arabic or Persian than Turkish. Mainstream Ottoman literary culture was trilingual in these languages and inherited a large body of pre-Ottoman Arabic and Persian texts. One might suppose that this distribution implies translation was one of the purposes of commentary. (Holbrook 1994, p. 15)

Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that commentary inherently involves translation or rather contains a form of translation. On this basis, I will discuss prose translations and commentaries together, treating them as the body of material. When listed chronologically, it becomes clear that translations and commentaries were produced continuously from the fifteenth through the twentieth century, demonstrating sustained Ottoman interest in the poem.³

The table demonstrates that renditions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* began from the fifteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. These renditions include mixed verse-and-prose commentaries (Al-Kubrawī), prose commentaries (al-Anḡarawī), abbreviated commentary accompanied by verse translations (al-Ḥulwānī), translations of earlier commentaries on *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (ʿOsmān Tawfīq), translations (Meḥmed Saʿīd Paşa), combined translations and commentaries (ʿĀbidīn Paşa), Turkish translation of the author's own Arabic commentary (Ḥasan Fehmī Efendi), interlinear translations (unknown author), and abbreviated translations (unknown author). These works contain Arabic, Turkish, and Chagatai.

Although these commentaries and translations are primarily in Turkish, they also include material in other languages. While preserving the Arabic originals, some also incorporate Persian and Turkish translations.⁴ Although the examination of the profiles of the authors of these renditions is excluded from the current research, they were written by scholars, poets, and *taṣāvvuf*-related writers.

All renditions itemized in Table 1 were written in prose. The question that naturally comes to mind is whether there is any poetic or aesthetic difference between prose and verse. Many scholars following Walter J. Ong’s monumental book on orality argue that authors tended to compose their work in verse because poetry is easier to memorize than prose. According to him, “in a primarily oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shared for ready recurrences.” (Ong 2005, p. 34). He further argues that an author has to employ formulaic patterns generally attached to poetry, such as rhythm, repetitions, alliterations, and assonances. Although this theory implicitly suggests that verse renditions would outnumber prose renditions in premodern literary traditions, this was not the case, at least with respect to rewritings of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. Comparison of Tables 1 and 2 demonstrates that the number of verse and prose renditions was quite similar.

Table 1. Commentaries and translations in prose.

Number	Authors	Works	Basic Features of the Work
1	Al-Kubrawī (d. 1432–1442?)	Keshf al-Hudā	Mixed Commentary, in both verse and prose. Written in 834/1430–31
2	Unknown Chagatai Commentary	Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde	Commentary
3	al-Anḳarawī (d. after 1508)	Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde	Commentary, written in 1508.
4	Le‘ālī (d. 1563)	Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde	Commentary
5	(attributed to the disciple of) al-Ḥulwānī (d. 1577)	Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde	Abbreviated commentary along with a verse translation. Almost the same as al-Anḳarawī (d. after 1508).
6	Yahyā b. ‘Abdullāh (d. after 1605)	Tarcamat al-Asrār fī Madḥ Sayyid al-Abrār	Commentary, copied in 1013/1605.
7	(attributed to) Shaykh al-Islām Rūmī (d. 1662)	Sharḥ al-Muḥtaṣar	Commentary
8	al-Bosnawī (d. 1702)	Zubdat Shurūḥ al-Turkiyya	Commentary, presented to Meḥmed IV (r. 1648–1687).
9	Balcizāde Ḥasan Istanbulī (d. ?)	“Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde”	Commentary, presented to Muṣafā II (r. 1695–1703).
10	Unknown. (MSS. Berlin Staatbibliothek Hs. Or. 5151)	“Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde”	Commentary Copied in 1146/1734.
11	Unknown. (MSS: Süleymaniye Hüdai Efendi 1332)	“Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde”	Commentary Copied in the 18th century.
12	Şağīr-zāde (d. after 1738)	Irshādiyye: Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde	Commentary, written in the 18th century.
13	Şağīr-zāde (d. after 1738)	Cübbe: Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bür’e	Commentary, written in 1150/1738 and copied in 1153/1740.
14	Muṣṭafā Belāmī (d. 18th century)	“Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde”	Commentary, the oldest manuscript copied in 1161/1748.
15	Unknown. (MSS. Süleymaniye Hacı Mahmut 6286, fol. 54r-79v)	“Sherḥ-i Qaṣīde-i Bürde”	Commentary Copied in 1190/1776/77

Table 1. Cont.

Number	Authors	Works	Basic Features of the Work
16	Unknown. (MSS: Süleymaniye Hacı Mahmut 6286, fol. 132r-143v)	“Sherh-i Kaşide-i Bürde”	Commentary
17	Mehmed Mekkî Efendi (d. 1797)	Tevessül	Commentary
18	Muhammad b. Fayzullâh (d. after 1806–07)	“Sherh-i Kaşide-i Bürde”	Commentary Written in 1221/1806/07
19	‘Abd al-Qâdir b. Ismâ‘îl (d. after 1852)	“Sherh-i Kaşide-i Bürde”	Commentary, probably written in the last year of the author’s life.
20	Ismâ‘îl Niyâzî (d. 1858)	al-‘Umda ‘alâ al-Burdah	Commentary
21	Kayaciği Süleymân Efendi (d. after 1881)	Türkçe Kaşide-i Bürde Şerhi	Commentary
22	‘Osmân Tawfîk (d. after 1882)	Harpûtî Tercüme-i Mücmeli	Translation of al-‘Aşîdat al-Shuhdah Sharh Qaşîdat al-Burdah by al-Harpûtî (d. 1882)
23	Hâfiz Muhammad Turzkâde (d. after 1887)	Ğurretu’l-Munîre Sherh-i Kevkebi’l-Muzî’ a yâhûd Sherh-i Kaşide-i Bürde	Commentary, written in 1304/1887.
24	Nûh Naşûh b. Ismâ‘îl (d. after 1890)	Nebîzü’ş-Şürûh fî Taṭyîbi’r-Rûh	Commentary, written in 1307/1889–90.
25	Mehmed Sa‘îd Paşa (d. 1892)	ed-Dürretü’l-Muzî’e fî Tarcamat al-Qaşîdat al-Burdah	Translation
26	Hocazâde Mehmed al-Sanâ‘î (d. after 1895)	Kaydlı Kaşide-i Bürde	Commentary, printed in 1314/1896/97
27	Necîb Efendi (d. after 1897)	Muhtaşar Tevessül	An abbreviated commentary on Tevessül by Mekkî Efendi (d. 1797) mentioned above.
28	Muhammad Fawzî al-Tawasî (d. 1900)	Miftâh al-Nacât	Abbreviated commentary, written in 1273/1876
29	‘Âbidîn Paşa (d. 1906)	Tercüme ve Sherh-i Kaşide-i Bürde	Translation and commentary, written in 1888.
30	Mehmed Hayrî Bey (d. 1909)	Hediyye	Commentary, written in 1299/1882.
31	Hasan Fehmî Efendi (d. after 1923)	Mecma‘ al-Fezâ‘îl	Turkish translation of his Arabic commentary.
32	Hâcî Muhammed Sa‘îd	Kaşide-i Bür’e Şerhi	Commentary, written at the beginning of the 20th century.
33	Unknown (MSS. Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Mehmet Serayihî 9 and 903)	Waşîlat al-Maghfirah	Incomplete commentary in two different manuscripts
34	Hâfiz Mehmed Hayrî	Kaşide-i Bürde	Commentary, printed.
35	Ahmed Efendi (d. 1953)	Kaşide-i Bürde Tercümesi	Translation.
36	Unknown (MSS. Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Mihrişah Sultan 175, fol. 145r-152r.)	Kaşide-i Bürde	Interlinear translation.

Table 1. Cont.

Number	Authors	Works	Basic Features of the Work
37	Unknown. (MSS. Istanbul Research Institute Library, Suna and Inan Kiraç Association Manuscript Collection, SR_000263_02, fol. 3v-13r.)	“Kaşide-i Bürde Tercümesi”	Interlinear translation.
38	Unknown. (MSS. IBB Atatürk Library, O. E. 1758.)	“Kaşide-i Bürde Tercümesi”	Interlinear, abbreviated commentary.
39	Unknown. (MSS. GDA 16)	“Kaşide-i Bürde Tercümesi”	Translation.
40	Unknown. (MSS. Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Lala Ismail 688, fol. 112v-143v.)	“Kaşide-i Bürde Tercümesi”	Abbreviated translation.
41	Unknown. (MSS. Bursa Inebey Manuscript Library, Ulucami 968.	“Kaşide-i Bürde Şerhi”	Commentary on the marginalia.

Note: “?”: The date of his death is unknown.

Table 2. Commentaries and translations in verse⁵.

Number	Authors	Basic Features of the Work
1	Al-Kubrawī (d. 1432–1442?)	Commentary, most probably written in 834/1430–31.
2	Rızāyī Aḳsarāyī (d. 1599)	Commentary, written between 1054/1644 and 1058/1648.
3	Naẓifī Aḳḫişārī (d. after 1790)	Commentary
4	‘Abd al-Raḥīm Ḳaraḫişārī (d. 1495–96)	Translation, written in 857/1453.
5	Aḥmed-i Rıdḡvān (d. 1528–1538?)	Translation
6	Kemālpāşazāde (d. 1534)	Translation
7	(attributed to) Le‘ālī (d. 1563)	Translation
8	Nihādī (d. 1587)	Translation
9	Şemseddīn Sivāsī (d. 1597)	Translation
10	Yaḥyā b. ‘Abdullāh (d. after 1604)	Translation, written in 1013/1604
11	Kemālātī Meḥmed (d. ?)	Translation
12	Fazlī Efendi (d. after 1626–27)	Translation, written in 1626–27.
13	Naḥīfī Süleymān Efendi (d. 1738)	Translation
14	Ḥüseynī al-Amāsī (d. after 1640)	Translation, written in 1050/1640–41.
15	Esāsī (d. before 1631)	Translation
16	Cihādī (d. 17th century)	Translation
17	Meḥmed Ṭālib Üsküdārī (d. 1685–86)	Translation
18	‘Abdulḥay Celvetī (d. 1705)	Translation
19	Ḥulvī ‘Abdullāh Efendi (d. 1746–47)	Translation, written in 1125/1713.
20	Zātī (?)	Translation
21	Aḥmed ‘Arif (d. after 1772)	Translation, written in 1772–73.

Table 2. Cont.

Number	Authors	Basic Features of the Work
22	Şalāhī-i ‘Uşşākī (d. 1782)	Translation
23	Ḳoçhişārīzāde Süleymān Ṭālib (d. after 1793)	Translation
24	Ismā‘īl Müfid Efendi (d. 1803)	Translation
25	Sūzī Aḥmed Efendi (d. 1830)	Translation
26	‘Abdurrahīm Ḳādirī (d. 1865)	Translation, written in 1862–63.
27	Şerīf Mu‘taşim al-Buḥārī (d. after 1876)	Translation, written in 1293/1876–77.
28	Ḳudsīzade Ḳadrī (d. 1891)	Translation, written in 1302/1885.
29	Meḥmed Sa‘īd Paşa (d. 1892)	Translation, written in 1301/1883.
30	Kenān Rifā‘ī (d. 1950)	Translation, printed in 1327/1909–10.
31	Şayrafī (d. ?)	Translation
32	Şafāyī (d. ?)	Translation
33	Turābī (d. ?)	Translation
34	Na‘īmī (d. ?)	Translation
35	‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl Babadaġī (d. ?)	Translation
36	Ḥafīz Meḥmed Ḥayrī (d. after 1924)	Translation, written in 1329/1911.
37	Unknown. Millet Library Ali Emiri 4341/5; University Michigan 448	Translation
38	Unknown. Beyazıt Devlet B3535; Istanbul University Rare Collection 10227	Translation
39	Unknown. Istanbul University Rare Collection TY 1990, TY 3277	Translation
40	Unknown. Süleymaniye Library Lala İsmail 738/1	Translation
41	Unknown. Çorum Hasan Paşa 19 Hk 573	Translation
42	Unknown. Egypt National Library, Turkish Literature, Talat 161	Translation

Note: “?”: The date of his death is unknown.

2.2. Translations and Commentaries in Verse

Another way in which Ottomans reused or created *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* was through verse translations and commentaries. These versions of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* may be regarded as more poetic and more challenging to produce. The composition of verse texts requires a greater range of poetic skills, such as mastery of meter, rhythm, and rhyme, than prose composition. Nevertheless, the renditions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* do not support this premise, since the number of verse and prose renditions does not differ significantly.

The table demonstrates that renditions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* began in the fifteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. These renditions consist of commentaries and translations. Unlike the prose commentaries and translations presented in Table 1, the verse counterparts in Table 2 are less diverse in form. Both tables reveal that *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* exerted a continuous influence on the Ottoman literary culture. Regarding authors of renditions in verse and prose, there is no remarkable difference; the profiles of the authors are almost the same. Therefore, the first-hand audience of these renditions would be *madrasa*, dervish lodges, and poetic gatherings.

2.3. Fivers

Commentaries and translations were not the only means of rewriting literary works in Ottoman literary culture and premodern literary tradition. One of the most widely used forms of rewriting in Ottoman literary culture was fivers (*tahmises*), in which a later poet adds three hemistiches to each couplet of an earlier poet, thereby transforming it to a five-line stanza. Scholarship on *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* mentions several Turkish fivers, two of which no longer exist, while only six survive today (Ayçiçeği 2024a, pp. 169–80).

Translations and commentaries may be regarded as direct renditions of a literary work, whereas a fiver represents a poetic reimagining and reformulation that requires greater creative intervention on the part of a poet. In that sense, a fiver may also be understood as a form of intertextuality in terms of “any text is absorption and any transformation of another” as conceptualized by Kristeva (1980, p. 66).

Among the fivers listed, those written by Taşköprüzâde Kemâleddin Mehmed Efendi (d. 1621) (Fleming et al. 2012) and Mollacıkzâde Mehmed Râ'if Efendi (d. 1825) (Arslan 2014) are no longer extant. The earliest surviving fiver was composed by Süleymân Nahîfî Efendi (d. 1738) (Ambros 2012), probably before 1702. Şalâhî-i 'Uşşâkî (d. 1783), a prominent actor in the Ottoman cultural life (Ceyhan 2009), first composed a fiver on *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in Arabic, and later translated it into Turkish together with the original poem (Koç 2024a, pp. 345–74). Shaykh al-Islâm Makkî (d. 1797) (Özcan 2003) also composed a fiver on *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* and later wrote one of the largest commentaries on the poem entitled *Tevessül*, recognizing that the fiver would be difficult to understand without commentary (Keskinsoy 2011).

The fiver by Muṣṭafâ Maḫsûd Resâ Efendi (d. 1852–53) (Koç 2021; Ayçiçeği 2024a, pp. 175–76) follows the model of Süleymân Nahîfî Efendi. Şerîf Mu'taşim al-Buḥārî (d. after 1876) produced two related renditions: a verse translation and its corresponding fiver (Koç 2024b). Muḥammad Fawzî al-Tawasî (d. 1900) (Ayçiçeği 2024a, pp. 179–80) produced a trilingual version of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* that still retained the five-line stanza form. He later wrote a commentary on it (Kuzubaş 2007; Ayçiçeği 2024a, p. 179).

Bünyamin Ayçiçeği evaluates all these fivers in his book. According to him, the main characteristic of Süleymân Nahîfî Efendi's fiver is that it served as the model for later fivers. He also states that al-Tawasî's rendition possesses a more multilingual character than others (Ayçiçeği 2024a, pp. 171–72).

A comparison of the dates of translations, commentaries, and fivers reveals that the fivers were generally produced later than the translations and commentaries. As argued above, composing a fiver required more poetic imagination than other forms of renditions. Therefore, these fivers demonstrate the creative abilities of Ottoman writers in a multilingual context. Authors of these fivers were high-level scholars and Sufis who most likely produced them in *madrasas* and dervish lodges.

3. Visual Re-Use of the Poem: Performative Use of Poetry

The textual use of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* was not the only means through which the poem circulated in Ottoman society. A second way of engagement with *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* involved its use as an aesthetic and ornamental element on various surfaces, including buildings and manuscript pages. These visual uses built upon and extended the poem's textual presence. The visual use of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* may therefore be regarded as evidence of the poem's enduring legacy in Ottoman society.

When both textual and visual uses of the poem are considered together, it becomes clear that *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* occupied a visible place across both personal and public spheres. Ottomans incorporated the poem into architecture, aesthetic arrangements, and calligraphy, all of which constituted its visual manifestations. Therefore, it is reasonable to

argue that *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* occupied a distinct place within the visual culture and collective memory of ordinary people. In conclusion, poetry in general and *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in particular reverberated beyond the written page into various facets of life through multilingual and multilayered forms of usage such as architecture and aesthetic arrangements.

3.1. *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in Architecture

Poetry and architecture often went hand in hand in the Ottoman Empire, where poetry functioned as an architectural ornament on buildings. Mosques, fountains, hospitals, baths, tombs, shrines, and gravestones were among the architectural settings in which poetry appeared (Serdaroğlu 2007, p. 80). As one of Istanbul's largest public spaces, the Aya Sofya (Hagia Sofia) complex represents a site where poetry and architecture intersect, since poetry was incorporated throughout the complex. Tülay Artan argues that *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* was inscribed on the ablution fountain of the Aya Sofya (Hagia Sofia) because of the poem's spiritual significance, which was intended to attract and gather people on their way to pilgrimage (2023, p. 9) (Figures 1 and 2). Thus, a spiritual poem accompanied a religious and spiritual journey.



Figure 1. The ablution fountain of the Ayasofya Mosque. Photograph by Şeyma Kaya, 11 October 2024.



Figure 2. Details from the ablution fountain of the Ayasofya Mosque. Photograph by Şeyma Kaya, 11 October 2024.

At the fountain, two couplets from the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* were written on each side, allowing people to encounter them while performing wudu, drinking water, or resting on their way to the holy Ka'bah. The use of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* as an aesthetic architectural element was not unique to Ottoman culture. For example, in Java, it was used “in the guest reception room of the religious leaders’ house” to protect them from evil and danger (Millie and Shiyabuddin 2005, p. 110).

In Figure 2, the opening verses of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* are displayed in their original Arabic. However, it is unlikely that the entire audience could read and fully understand the Arabic script and the verses inscribed on the fountain. Hagen argues that “the multilingual character of Ottoman culture and its integration into universal Islamic culture saved the translators a great many code-switching operations and liberated them from the obligation to transfer culture-specific elements.” (Hagen 2003, p. 133) This assertion by Hagen could be true for the audience, too. Nevertheless, people around the mosque and fountain were aware of the poem’s spiritual significance and its devotional role.

A related point was made centuries earlier by al-Jāhiz, who praised “voracious readers who appreciate the value of multilingualism and integrating the advantages of multilingualism into the Arabic intellectual and scholarly tradition.” (Rashwan 2024a, p. 616). Thus, the purpose or function of poetry carved into architecture was not primarily textual but rather visual, symbolic, and decorative. In this context, the textual dimension served as the basis for the poem’s visual function. As Irvin Cemil Schick argues, “Islamic calligraphy is deeply polysemic. At the most basic level, of course, it embodies written text, and as such expresses *symbolically* the meaning—whether literally or metaphorical, denoted or connoted—of that text. As a highly visual art, Islamic calligraphy sometimes means *iconically*.” (Schick 2008, p. 211). It is also important to note that, while many other inscriptions on the architecture were from the Qur’ān, inclusion of pieces from such poetry demonstrates how the Ottomans attached importance to *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in both their literary and religious culture.

Another symbolic site of great importance to the Ottomans was Topkapı Palace, which features numerous passages from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. Many parts of the palace, the center of Ottoman administration, were adorned with calligraphic inscriptions of verses from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (Figures 3 and 4). Among these are the walls of the *Has Oda* of Ahmed the Third (r. 1703–1730), the sultan’s private apartment in the palace, also known as Fruit Room (*Yemiş Odası* in Turkish), which was decorated with verses from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. The Fruit Room, located within the Harem, the private residential area designated for the sultan’s family in Topkapı Palace, was intended for the sultan’s personal use, particularly for his meals. Its walls are adorned with flowers and fruits alongside verses from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. The architectural style of the room suggests that the verses were regarded as aesthetically comparable to the flowers and fruits themselves. The room was built in 1705 (Salbacak 2019, p. 516).

Qaṣīdat al-Burdah was employed here as both an architectural and calligraphic element, resulting in visually ornamented and aesthetically refined renditions of the poem. Thus, textual, visual, and aesthetic dimensions of the multilingual poem converge in this setting. At first glance, this use of the poem may appear primarily personal. However, its architectural context simultaneously renders it public, distinguishing it from the use of the poem on decorative panels, which may be regarded as more personal because they were displayed within domestic spaces. Therefore, I argue that panels were generally intended for personal or family use, whereas architectural calligraphy addressed a public audience.⁶ The Javanese case mentioned above likewise demonstrates personal and public purposes of the poem’s use on the wall of a room. As Millie and Shiyabuddin explain, the performative and ritual use of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* may serve protective purposes: “the lines

reproduced in the wall hanging have the special property of warding off evil and danger” (Millie and Shiyabuddin 2005, p. 110), according to Javanese people.



Figure 3. Fruit Room at Topkapı Palace. The picture is taken from (Ayçiçeği 2024b, p. 256).



Figure 4. Another wall from the Fruit Room at Topkapı Palace. The picture is taken from (Ayçiçeği 2024a, p. 256).

3.2. Aesthetic Arrangements

Aesthetic arrangements of manuscripts that portray the multilingual character of Ottoman society and literary culture may be regarded as a second form of poetic rendition. Although Ottoman literary culture is rich in multilingual manuscripts, I will present a few aesthetically arranged examples discussed in recent scholarship. Açı (2024) examines two manuscripts related to *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* to demonstrate the aesthetic value of multilingual manuscripts in Ottoman literary culture. The author further argues that Ottoman multilingualism extends beyond purely textual definitions and embraces aesthetically ornamented arrangements of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* as a visual expression of multilingualism.

The example discussed by Açı (2024) is a complex, aesthetically arranged manuscript containing ten renditions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* on a single page, each distinguished by a different color, style, form, and layout (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5. MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Pertev Paşa 299, fol. 1v.

This style of arrangement was itself developed by al-Amāsī (d. after 1640) (Yazar 2018), who presents ten different versions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* on each page. Through this elaborate calligraphic arrangement, he introduces an additional aesthetic and poetic dimension, thereby transforming the manuscript into a form of visual rewriting. Al-Amāsī employs distinctive inks and calligraphic styles for each rendition, arranging some texts from bottom to top and others from top to bottom. Each page begins with two Persian *tahmīses* by Seyyid Muḥammed Ṣerīfī (d. 1040/1631) and Ḥocā-zāde Es'ad Efendi (d. 1034/1625). These are followed by the original Arabic couplet by al-Būṣīrī and the Persian verse translation by Ḥāfiẓ Ṣeref. At the center of the page appears the Turkish prose commentary by Le'ālī Muṣṭafā Efendi (d. 1563), flanked by Turkish verse translations by Ṣems al-Dīn Sivāsī (d. 1006/1598) and Kemālpaşazāde (d. 940/1534). The page also includes Turkish verse translations by 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ḳaraḥiṣārī (d. after 888/1483) and Esāsī Efendi (d. before 1040/1631). Each page of the manuscript concludes with the Turkish verse translation by Le'ālī Muṣṭafā Efendi. In the introductory passage written by al-Amāsī himself, he explains the reasons behind arranging the manuscript in such an ornamental manner.

بو قصیده شریفه منثور و منظومه ترجمه‌ای ایلہ بر طرز معقوله و اسلوب بدیع مقبول اوزره جمع ایدوب اخوان و صفایه عرض ایتدکده بر اهل وفا بو قصیده فریدمنک بعض تخمیس پسندیده‌سندن بوکا عنوان جریده اولسه دخی و صفايه عرض ایتدکده بر اهل وفا بو قصیده فریدمنک بعض تخمیس پسندیده‌سندن بوکا عنوان جریده اولسه دخی (Huseyn b. 'Alī al-Amāsī, n.d.)

I compiled the verse and prose translations of this noble ode in such a logical manner and amazing and accepted style that when I presented them to the companions and brothers, I followed a faithful one among them who said it would be even more unparalleled and incomparable if they were given the title *Jarīda* ('register') because of some of the pleasant *tahmīses* [made from] this unique ode.

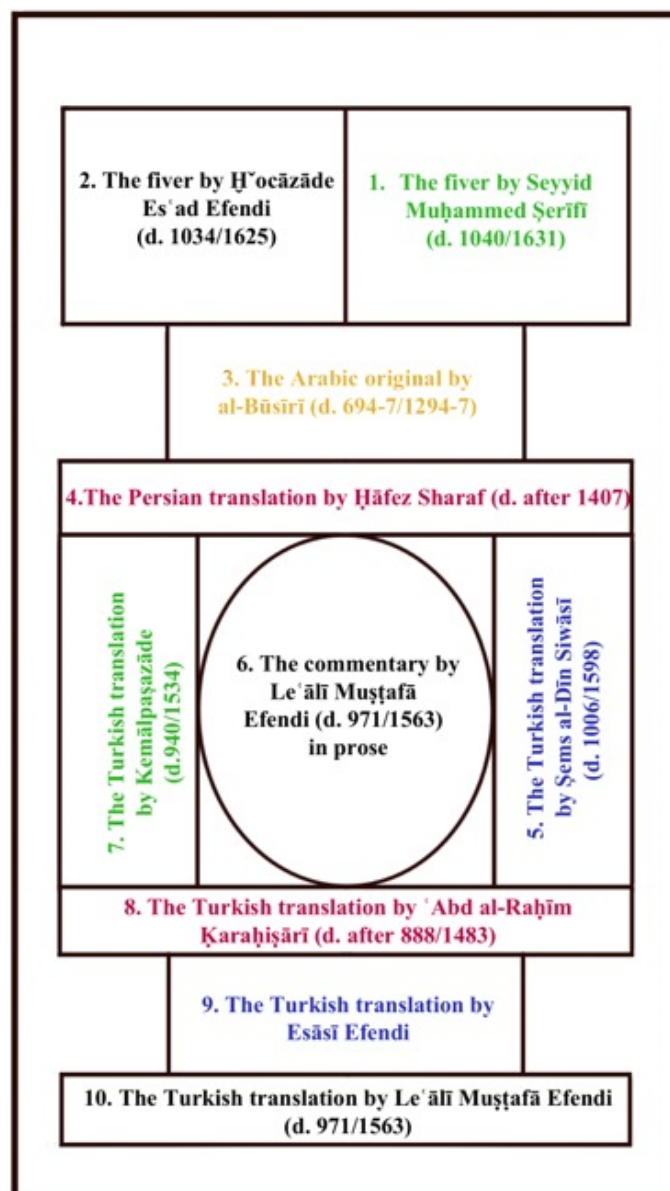


Figure 6. Graphic Scheme of MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Pertev Paşa 299, fol. 1v. Illustration by the author.

According to this passage, al-Amāsī compiled the manuscript in order to obtain spiritual benefit, since anyone who reads the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* would spiritually reach the Prophet. This belief helps explain why the composition, reading, recitation, and memorization of the *Burdah* became so popular among Muslims (Stetkevych 2010, pp. 70–71), including the Ottomans. al-Amāsī selected several translations of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, incorporated them into an ornamentally designed structure, and described this arrangement as a ‘moderate manner’ and an ‘original style.’

Although the compiler arranged the ten poems aesthetically on the pages, their chronological sequence is as follows:

1. Arabic original by al-Būsīrī (d. 694–7/1294–77)
2. The Persian verse translation by Ḥāfīz Şeref (d. after 1407)
3. The Turkish verse translation by ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Ḳaraḥiṣārī’s (d. after 888/1483)
4. The Turkish verse translation by Kemālpaşazāde’s (d. 940/1534)
5. The Turkish prose commentary by Le’ālī Muṣṭafā Efendī (d. 1563)
6. Le’ālī Muṣṭafā Efendī’s Turkish verse translation

7. The Turkish verse translation by Şems al-Dīn Sivāsī
8. Tahmīs by Ḥ'ocā-zāde Es'ad Efendi (d. 1034/1625)
9. Esāsī Efendi's (d. before 1040/1631) Turkish verse translation
10. Tahmīs by Seyyid Muḥammad Şerīfī (d. 1040/1631)

These authors were prominent scholars in the Ottoman society: 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ḳaraḥiṣārī and Şems al-Dīn Sivāsī, for example, were renowned Sufis of their period, whereas Kemālpaşazāde and Ḥ'ocā-zāde Es'ad Efendi served as sheikh al-Islam (Açıl 2024, pp. 833–39).

Sadık Yazar has published another version of this aesthetic arrangement, featuring the same ten renditions (Yazar 2023). The arrangement style and aesthetic qualities displayed in that version differ slightly, suggesting that al-Amāsī sought to achieve the most refined aesthetic arrangement of the poem.⁷

4. Ritual Renditions: Religious Re-Use of the Poem

The three forms of usages-textual, visual, and ritual-converge, in some cases, as in the performative use of the poetry. Alongside the textual and visual reuse of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, the Ottomans also incorporated the poem in rituals. For instance, established part of Ramadan ceremonies that began during the reign of Selim I (1512–1520). In this context, the poem became an element of public performance or religious entertainment in daily life. This ritual continues today as an official ceremony (Güler 2022, p. 556). People attached religious and ritual significance to the recitation of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* during that month. This practice was not unique to the Ottoman era; it continues in Türkiye and likely in many other Muslim societies.

Another well-known religious tradition, the *ḥilye-i Sherīf*, which is “a textual tradition describing the physical characteristics and the moral beauty of the Prophet Muḥammad,” was likewise recited during religious ceremonies, much like *Mevlids*, texts narrating the birth and life of the Prophet Muḥammad (Küçükbaş 2022, pp. 255, 271). The performative use of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* is neither unique to Ottoman society nor to premodern period. For example, Ines Weinrich portrays three occasions in Beirut during which the poem was performed, all related to Prophet Muḥammad's life: *laylat al-qadr* in 2009, *mi'rāj* in 2010, and *mi'rāj* in 2011 (Weinrich 2016, pp. 108–21). Similarly, *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* forms a part of performative religious literature of the broader Muslim world and may also be situated within world literature through traditions of praise (*madīḥ*) poetry (Ghali 2023, pp. 2–3). In the following section, I discuss the ritual use of the poem in three areas: performative use in gatherings, its role in music, and its place in education.

4.1. Oral Performances of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in Gatherings

Ottoman poetry was not merely a form of leisure reading, but also a meaningful and indispensable element of performances held in gatherings. As Pfeifer observes, “long before the rise of coffeehouses in the mid-16th century—and long after—literary salons often called *majālis* constituted the main spaces for social and intellectual exchange across much of the Islamic world.” (Pfeifer 2015, p. 221). The *majlis* (gatherings) functioned both as the rationale behind the composition of poetry and as the setting for its performance. Performativity, therefore, was a defining feature of poetic practice in Ottoman society. Andrews and Kalpaklı similarly argue that “the *meclis* not only provided a context for the performance of poetry but was a primary element in structuring poetic speech and in constituting its meaning.” (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2009, p. 312).

Within this context, the recitation of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* also functioned as a medium of performance. Consequently, several booklets were produced to outline the proper manner of recitation and thereby enhance the efficacy of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. Drawing attention to

Ekiz's manuscript, published in critical-edition form (Ekiz 2024, pp. 191–207), I will briefly discuss several of the rules presented there. Such manuscripts demonstrate that *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* was frequently recited in gatherings by different individuals and in various styles, to such an extent that some considered it necessary to codify appropriate rules. These regulations aimed, on the one hand, to prevent incorrect recitation and, on the other, to enhance the spiritual and practical benefits derived from the poem's recitation, thereby encouraging its continued reading and performance.

These booklets may be described as the manual of recitational etiquette. The rules are categorized under different headings; the first of which concerns the preparations required before recitation. Although nine rules are listed, I will discuss only three of them here.

1. Preparation for recitation of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*:

- a. First and foremost, performing two rak'ah prayers
- b. Beginning the recitation of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* on a Friday
- c. Reciting the Qur'ān before the recitation of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* (Ekiz 2024, p. 201).

As the rules make clear, not everyone was authorized to recite *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. According to the third rule, only Qur'ān reciters are permitted to perform it, thereby linking the religious character of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* to Islam's sacred scripture. The recitation was also required to begin on a holy Friday, wherein all Muslims gather to pray in mosques for communal prayer. Another symbolic point of preparation was the performance of prayer itself. Completing all these acts spiritually prepared the reciter for the poem. Thus, prayer, the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān, and communal gathering on Friday were brought together through these prescribed rules. The regulations also structured the performance itself, making it clear that the primary purpose was not performance alone, but rather its integration into religious ritual.

The primary purpose of reciting *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* was not aesthetic or poetic but rather liturgical and ritual. Eighteen rules were prescribed to enhance the poem's liturgical and ritual functions, though I will discuss only six of them.

2. To enhance the influence of the poem

- a. To obtain permission (*ijazah*) from a qualified master
- b. To have ablution while reciting
- c. To face the qibla while reciting
- d. To recite with attention to meter, since the poem should be recited likewise was addressed to the Prophet
- e. To bless the Prophet by repeating the following verse: "Mawlāya ṣalli wa ṣallim dā'iman abadan/ 'alā ḥabībika ḥayr al-ḥalqī kullihim."⁸
- f. To refrain from worldly speech while reciting (Ekiz 2024, pp. 201–2).

Reciting *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* is traditionally taught as a craft, learned from a master, as with other Islamic sciences. The poem has an inherent meter, and this meter was observed when it was presented to the Prophet. Thus, adhering to this tradition, reciting it with attention to meter, is also among the rules. One must perform ablution as if preparing for prayer and face the qibla. Although Ottomans generally followed the rules for reciting the poetry, observing such rules became an essential part of reciting *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, much like the recitation of the Qur'ān is. A general rule for all prayers is that no worldly matter should intrude; therefore, one must refrain from uttering worldly speech. In other words, the formal ritual requirements of praying were likewise applied to the performance of the poem. It can thus be asserted that much like the calligraphy in mosque fountains, these practices endowed the poem with a high religious status. Therefore, *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* became deeply intertwined with religious practices, whether textually, visually, or ritually.

In the same book, the conditions for gaining the greatest benefit from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* were outlined. Although the book itemizes various benefits, I list only a few here: 101 complete readings of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* for seeing the Prophet (pbuh) in a dream, 41 complete readings for protection against the plague, 1 complete reading for escaping imprisonment, 2 complete readings for relieving headaches, and pain in different parts of the body. These conditions reveal that the Ottomans treated *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* as a sacred text through which they could obtain worldly and otherworldly benefits. It seems that the use of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* extended beyond textual and visual dimensions to include ritual and liturgical, and thus religious functions.

4.2. In Music

As discussed above, the Ottomans considered poetry a performative tool. Performance has two main aspects: poetry and music. Musical performance benefits from poetry lyrics, as it brings together harmony and words simultaneously. *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* combines both dimensions of performance through its rhythmic and melodic structures in gatherings. This feature of the poem was also emphasized in the Ottoman educational system, which incorporated poetry as a means of improving students' musical skills. Therefore, primary school curricula included *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. Specifically, female students were required to learn and recite it in a harmonic musical form to graduate (Ayçiçeği 2024a, p. 275). Accordingly, the Ottomans composed many poetic lyrics that were then set to music. I will provide only one example of lyrics produced from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in Figure 7.

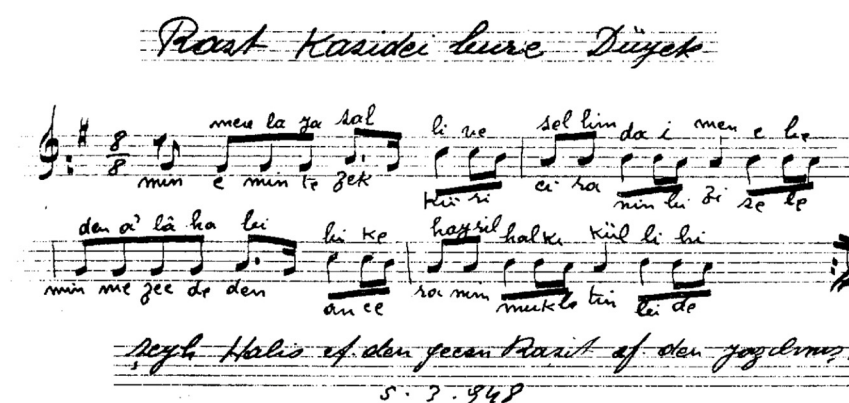


Figure 7. Lyrics of a *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* song⁹.

In conclusion, the musical use of poetry in general, and of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* in particular, constituted one of the well-structured traditions of Ottoman literary culture, employed specifically in gatherings. This poem also reveals the multilingual character of the culture and society manifested in these gatherings.

4.3. In Calligraphy and Education

Calligraphy was one of the most highly developed Islamic arts in Ottoman Istanbul. Since calligraphers, for the most part, sought to reveal and copy the Holy Qur'ān, they frequently employed words, sentences, or phrases from the Qur'ān in their calligraphic panels. Because *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* carries a profound spiritual and devotional significance, calligraphers also utilize verses from the poem in the composition of calligraphic panels, often in combination with Qur'ānic passages. Thus, some famous panels include couplets from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*. The two examples shown in Figures 8 and 9, which also contain hemistiches from *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, were produced by the renowned calligraphers İzzet Efendi (Derman 2020) and Mehmed Şefik Bey (Dursun 2023).



Figure 8. Panel by İzzet Efendi (Ayçiçeği 2024a, p. 272).



Figure 9. Panel by Şefik Bey (Ayçiçeği 2024b, p. 273).

In the panel, İzzet Efendi includes one of the final couplets of the poem and employs its colophon, which declares the completion of writing *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* while offering praise to the Prophet.

In contrast to İzzet Efendi, Şefik Bey preferred to include the opening hemistiches of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, which is why the panel was ornamented in the manner of a manuscript title page.

Qaṣīdat al-Burdah was also employed as a final examination text for primary school students in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the context of musical education. Students could not graduate unless they were able to write the poem calligraphically, thereby combining artistic performance with education. Milie and Shiyabuddin describe translation, performance, music, and religious education as deeply interconnected in the Javanese con-

text (Millie and Shiyabuddin 2005, p. 113). They portray the whole process as follows: One sings and interprets a professor's commentary. Students sit around him in a circle and take notes in the margins of their copies. Then, one student is invited to read the studied and corrected lines aloud. Lastly, it is sung by the same person (Millie and Shiyabuddin 2005, pp. 113–14). Thus, translation, commentary, music, education, and ritual converge within the same gathering.

Consequently, the textual, visual, and ritual dimensions of the poem built upon one another and brought together its musical, calligraphic, performative, liturgical, and religious functions both in Ottoman and other Muslim societies.

5. Conclusions

As a multilingual society, Ottoman literary culture encompasses various textual, visual, and ritual forms. Therefore, multilingualism and translation studies should incorporate methodologies from cultural studies and manuscript studies, rather than relying solely on literary studies. The article contributes to the literature on *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, a poem that should be considered a representative of world literature through its renditions in various languages. The main argument of this article is that *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* has a worldwide influence not only through its textual rewritings but also through its visual and ritual reuses in different forms.

Apart from these conclusions, there are some directions that should be mentioned for future studies, which will build upon them.

Excerpts from the *Burdah* appear in architectural buildings across the world, including mosques, inscriptions, and fountains. For instance, the verses from the *Burdah* in the ablution fountain of Hagia Sophia, as Artan (2023) argues, created a meeting point for visitors from the Muslim world in cosmopolitan Istanbul with intellectual and religious people. Thus, poetry plays a role in establishing social networks among Muslims, distinct from the poetry gatherings organised in palaces by patrons of the art. In this context, people spontaneously created a new kind of 'public sphere'. As a result, future studies may explore how fragments of poetry connected people and unintentionally fostered social networks.

The fact that people from different regions and backgrounds came together around poetry requires scholars to discuss poetry, in this case, the *Burdah*, as a part of world literature. The poem was translated into Turkish, Persian, Latin, English, French, Italian, and German, as well as into various languages and dialects spoken in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Balkans, among others. Therefore, two essential questions remain for future research: (1) How do translations integrate the poem into world literature? (2) What role does the performative religious literature emerging from the translations of the *Burdah* play in world literature?

Hadith and the *Burdah* are Islamic genres that have generated various rituals among Muslims, allowing comparisons between them from different perspectives. This offers a productive avenue for future studies to explore the relationship between the *Burdah* and hadith in greater detail. The two genres are similar in terms of their relationship with the Prophet, yet they differ significantly in literary form. The main hadith books (Rashwan 2024b, pp. 49–52), which record reliable hadiths, are written in prose, whereas the *Burdah* is an exceptional example of the eloquence of Arabic poetry. Thus, they belong to different literary genres, namely verse and prose. The primary function of the hadith literature is to guide religious practice, since it serves to 'provide the legal and behavioral standards for all later times.' (Sperl 2007, p. 478) Moreover, 'some scholars view the sayings of the Prophet as the secondary source of spiritual guidance following the Qur'ān.' (Rashwan 2024b, p. 49) By contrast, the *Burdah* is intended to be memorised and recited in gatherings as a performance through which participants may obtain liturgical benefit.

The dream that al-Būṣīrī narrates as the reason for composing his poetry provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between poetry and hadith through the *Burdah*. The explanation that Le'ālī offers for his interest in the *Burdah*, while also revealing why he or others comment on, translate, read, or recite the poem, simultaneously connects it to the Prophet and hadith tradition: He or she who is occupied with the *Burdah* may attain all their wishes, and whoever esteems this poem may encounter the Prophet.¹⁰ What Le'ālī wrote not only explains the popularity of the *Burdah* in Ottoman literary culture but may also help explain its widespread popularity among Muslims worldwide. The *Burdah* appears to have derived much of its reputation from its association with the Prophet Muḥammad and its connection to the hadith tradition.

Scholars have written many commentaries, translations, and explanations on both hadith and the *Burdah* that help readers understand their meaning, historical context, and spiritual significance. Another significant difference between the hadith and the *Burdah* lies in their transformation between oral and written forms. While hadith literature demonstrates a transition from oral to written culture, the *Burdah* originally emerged from a written culture and later became integrated into oral culture in various regions. One may also ask whether any hadith influenced the *Burdah*. Did al-Būṣīrī draw upon sayings of the Prophet recorded in the well-known hadith collections apart from the dream he narrated in the poem?

The relationship between the *Burdah*, its multilingual translation, and *hilyah* tradition constitutes another dimension of *Burdah* scholarship that deserves further attention in future studies. What the *Burdah*, as a poetic work, and the *hilyah*, as a panel, generally composed in prose, share is their aesthetic arrangement. Since *hilyah* panels are based on narrations describing the physical appearance of the Prophet Muḥammad, these three genres, *hilyah*, *Burdah*, and hadith, ultimately derive from the same source, despite their differing formal characteristics.

In conclusion, *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* constituted an inseparable part of multilingual Ottoman literary culture in its textual, visual, and ritual forms. The poem's renditions reflected both the personal and public aesthetic values attached to it, as exemplified by the Fruit Room of the Sultan and the ablution fountain of Hagia Sofia.

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Notes

- ¹ The largest manuscript database for manuscripts once used, written, or obtained by the Ottomans is portal.yek.gov.tr, in which one comes up with 2030 results searching the word “*bürde*” (*burdah*) while just 59 for “*bür’e*” (*bur’ah*).
- ² *Mejmu‘a Kaşā‘id ve Resā‘il*, MS Istanbul, İÜ Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi, 603, fol. 17v.
- ³ I have produced Table 1, using the raw data provided in (Ayçiçeği 2024a, pp. 39–87), presents the numbers, authors, works, and their basic features, such as the dates on which they were written or copied.
- ⁴ For other examples illustrating different arrangements of the same number of renditions of *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, see (Yazar 2023).
- ⁵ I have produced Table 2, using the raw data provided in Ayçiçeği (2024a), presents the numbers, authors, works, and their basic features, such as the dates when they were written or copied.
- ⁶ See the use of panels in Section 4.3 of this article.
- ⁷ See (Açıl 2024) for the details on the Pertev Paşa 299.
- ⁸ Translation of the passage reads: “O Lord! Send your blessings and peace upon him, the most beloved of all creation.”
- ⁹ See <https://divanmakam.com/attachments/mevlaya-salli-ve-sellim-daimen-ebada-kaside-i-burde-belirsiz-rast-v1-pdf.38732/> (accessed on 13 August 2025).
- ¹⁰ *Sharḥ al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Madḥ al-Khayr al-Bariyyah*, MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Hacı Mahmud, 3809, fol. 1v.

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