

Al-Madiah Poetry as An Instrument of Power Legitimization in The Umayyad Era

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of al-madiah (praise poetry) as an instrument of political legitimization during the Umayyad Dynasty. While al-madiah originally functioned as a literary genre for expressing admiration and honoring individuals, it gradually evolved into a political medium that reinforced the authority of the ruling dynasty. This research aims to analyze how praise poetry was employed to construct the public image and legitimacy of Umayyad rulers through the works of three prominent court poets: Al-Akhtal, Jarir, and Al-Farazdaq. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and qualitative content analysis, the study examines selected poems alongside historical and literary sources related to the political and cultural context of the Umayyad period. The findings reveal that al-madiah functioned not merely as a form of artistic expression but also as an effective tool of political communication. Through rhetorical devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, symbolism, and genealogical references, these poets portrayed Umayyad caliphs as just, divinely sanctioned, and legitimate rulers while simultaneously strengthening the dynasty's public image and responding to political opposition. The study concludes that al-madiah played a significant role in consolidating Umayyad political authority, demonstrating the close relationship between Arabic literature and political power in early Islamic civilization.

Keywords: *al-madiah; Umayyad Dynasty; political legitimization; Arabic poetry; political communication*

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Golden Age during the Abbasid period did not emerge suddenly. Rather, its foundations had already been established during the Umayyad Dynasty, which played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for the later flourishing of Islamic civilization. Following an agreement with Hasan ibn Ali after the end of the Rashidun Caliphate, Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan officially assumed the leadership of the Islamic state and introduced a more centralized and systematic model of governance. Under his leadership, the Umayyads strengthened the military, consolidated administrative institutions, and designated Damascus as the new capital of the caliphate, making it the political center of the expanding Islamic empire. The dynasty also implemented important economic reforms by introducing standardized monetary systems based on the dinar and dirham, while developing a more organized taxation system to support state administration. In addition, the Umayyads adopted Arabic as the official language of government, facilitating communication across the empire, improving administrative efficiency, and strengthening political integration among its diverse regions. These political, economic, and administrative reforms provided a strong institutional foundation that enabled the Abbasid Dynasty to achieve the remarkable intellectual, scientific, and cultural advancements later recognized as the Islamic Golden Age.

The adoption of Arabic as the official language of the Umayyad administration also contributed to the rapid development of Arabic literature. Poetry, which had long been an essential part of Arab culture, continued to flourish as a medium for self-expression, artistic creativity, and the preservation of cultural values. Among the various poetic genres, *al-madih* (praise poetry) gained particular prominence during the Umayyad period. Although the genre had existed since the pre-Islamic era, it reached a new level of political significance through the works of prominent poets such as Jarir, Al-Farazdaq, and Al-Akhtal. Their poems extended beyond literary appreciation by celebrating the virtues of the Umayyad rulers, promoting the dynasty's political authority, and reinforcing its legitimacy before the public. At the same time, *al-madih* functioned as an effective instrument of political communication, shaping public perception, responding to opposition through poetic debates and satire, and strengthening support for the ruling dynasty.

To grasp the importance of *al-madih* in this context, it is essential to review earlier research on Umayyad poetry and its political roles. Earlier research on Umayyad literature has largely focused on the evolution of Arabic poetry, political poetry, and the socio-cultural traits of the Umayyad era. Shamsuddin and Ahmad (2018) explore the thriving Arabic literature and its strong connection to political life in the Umayyad period, showing that "poetry thrived with Umayyad support and emerged as a significant means of conveying political power." Similarly, Fitriyani et al. (2025) examine the thematic evolution of Arabic poetry from the Umayyad to the Abbasid era, emphasizing the shifting literary themes and societal roles of poetry. Similarly, Rohmah (2021) contends that poetry in the Umayyad era acted as a tool for political propaganda, promoted by the caliphs and heightened through political rivalry and literary critique. Fatoni (2026) analyzes how Al-Farazdaq's poetry contributes to the evolution of Arabic literature in the Umayyad era, highlighting the variety of poetic forms and the significant influence of court poets on the dynasty's literary culture. Salloom and Al-Karagholly (2016) investigate the literary conventions utilized in the contentious poems of Jarir, Al-Farazdaq, and Al-Akhtal, concentrating on their rhetorical techniques and literary competition. Klasova (2025) examines Umayyad poetry in relation to the Islamic conquests, emphasizing the literary impact of prominent Umayyad poets and the political aspects of their writings.

Recent academic research has also broadened the examination of Umayyad praise poetry to al-Andalus. Cardoso (2023) examines the caliphal titles of the Umayyad period in Andalusia and their portrayal in praise poetry, showing how various sources consistently emphasized Umayyad legitimacy as

the successors of the Damascus Umayyads, with one poem stating that "Syria welcomes the Andalusī caliph." This research additionally examines the utilization of astronomical metaphors, like the caliph being depicted as a "sun," in panegyric poetry to strengthen the caliph's divine and dynastic legitimacy, whereas rebels were linked to darkness.

The research examines the formal titles employed in bureaucratic contexts alongside metaphorical titles reflected in official correspondence and laudatory poetry found in Andalusī texts like Ibn Ḥayyān's *Muqtabis* and Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's *Iqd al-Farīd*. Regardless of these important contributions, earlier research has primarily concentrated on the historical evolution of Arabic literature, changes in themes, literary competition, and the political roles of poetry overall. Insufficient focus has been placed on al-madih as a unique poetic form, especially in terms of its historical beginnings, the impact of prominent court poets like Al-Farazdaq, Jarir ibn Atiyah, and Al-Akhtal in promoting the genre, and its function as a structured tool for shaping and legitimizing Umayyad political power.

Multiple gaps persist. Initially, earlier research has mainly considered madih as a component of the wider *qasidah* tradition instead of an independent genre with its unique conventions and purposes. Secondly, studies have mainly emphasized the literary competition and contentious features of Umayyad poetry, paying insufficient attention to the systematic function of madih as a tool for building and legitimizing Umayyad political power across various caliphs and areas. Third, although scholarship has explored Umayyad legitimacy in the East, the expression of caliphal legitimacy via panegyric in al-Andalus has been highlighted in Cardoso's research (2023) yet requires additional examination, especially concerning how the Andalusī Umayyads modified the panegyric traditions of their Damascene forebears. Fourth, the ritualistic and ceremonial aspects of madih recitation in courtroom environments are still underexamined, as earlier research has concentrated more on literary and rhetorical evaluation instead of the performative situations of panegyric presentation.

Accordingly, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining al-madih poetry through a qualitative content analysis approach, emphasizing how literary discourse was employed to reinforce dynastic legitimacy during the Umayyad era.

This study addresses three research questions:

1. What are the historical origins and development of the al-madih genre in Arabic literature?
2. Who were the principal poets responsible for popularizing al-madih during the Umayyad Dynasty?
3. Why did al-madih become an important instrument for legitimizing Umayyad political authority?

This research seeks to: (1) map the historical roots and evolution of al-madih as a poetic form, (2) highlight the roles of the three prominent Umayyad poets in promoting the genre, and (3) examine how al-madih served as a tactical tool for legitimizing Umayyad political power. This research utilizes a qualitative content analysis method (Krippendorff, 2022) to explore chosen al-madih poems from the *divans* of Al-Akhtal, Jarir ibn Atiyah, and Al-Farazdaq in order to address these questions. The study examines the identification of recurring themes, rhetorical techniques, and legitimizing narratives used by the poets to strengthen Umayyad power. This analysis seeks to illustrate how praise poetry served not just as a literary form but also as a tactical tool for building, reinforcing, and spreading the political legitimacy of the Umayyad rulers.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a library research design to examine the

role of al madih poetry as an instrument of political legitimization during the Umayyad Dynasty. According to Hall and Liebenberg (2024), a qualitative descriptive approach is highly appropriate for studies that focus on interpreting meanings, ideological messages, and representations embedded within texts while providing a comprehensive description of a phenomenon based on textual data rather than measuring quantitative variables. The library research design is utilized as the study relies on documentary sources, including classical Arabic poetic texts and scholarly publications, as the primary basis for data collection and analysis.

Primary and Secondary Data

The primary data consist of selected al madih poems composed by the Umayyad Triad namely Al Farazdaq, Jarir ibn Atiyah, and Al Akhtal whose works demonstrate close relationships with the political authority of the Umayyad caliphate. These three poets are selected because they represent the primary poetic traditions of the Umayyad period, with Jarir and Al Farazdaq from the Banu Tamim tribe and Al Akhtal from the Christian Taghlib tribe,. All three enjoyed direct patronage from Umayyad rulers and their divans contain a substantial number of panegyric poems used as tactical tools for building and spreading political legitimacy. The poems analyzed comprise six representative poems in total with two poems selected for each poet to allow for an in depth qualitative analysis. In accordance with the analysis in the discussion section, the poems are addressed to several Umayyad rulers including Caliph Yazid ibn Muawiyah, Caliph Abd al Malik ibn Marwan, Caliph Al Walid ibn Abd al Malik, and Caliph Umar II. Secondary data are obtained from scholarly books and journal articles concerning Arabic literature, Umayyad history, and political communication.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through documentation techniques involving several stages such as identifying al madih poems in the published divans of the three poets, reading the poems to identify themes related to political praise and legitimacy, and selecting poems containing explicit references to caliphal authority and dynastic succession. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis following the framework proposed by Krippendorff (2022). The analytical process involved the selection of the unit of analysis including words, phrases, and metaphors representing political authority and legitimacy. This was followed by coding and categorizing to group significant expressions into thematic categories such as divine legitimacy, hereditary succession, and caliphal virtues. The process also involved interpreting rhetorical meanings to understand how specific strategies were used to reinforce Umayyad rule and contextualizing findings by relating the analysis to the sociopolitical challenges of the Umayyad era. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source triangulation by comparing findings with historical records and systematic documentation of the analytical process.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations as the analysis is focused on the works of the Umayyad Triad namely Al Farazdaq, Jarir, and Al Akhtal and does not cover the entire corpus of Umayyad poetry. The temporal scope is primarily centered on the reigns of Yazid I, Abd al Malik, Al Walid I, and Umar II. The analysis relies on published editions of the divans rather than manuscript sources and the study focuses on textual analysis without addressing the oral performative and ritualistic aspects of the poems recitation in the court. Through this approach, the study identifies how al madih functioned as a political instrument to construct and disseminate the legitimacy of Umayyad rule.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Historical Origins of al-Madiah

Al madih also known as praise poetry is rooted in the pre Islamic Arabic literary tradition known as the Qasidah. Initially functioning as a medium for praising tribes or kings, this poetic form was later transformed by poets during the Islamic era and Sufi mystics into Madaih Nabawiyah or praise poetry dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad, eventually spreading extensively to Persia and beyond. During the Jahiliyyah or Pre Islamic era, the earliest form of madih poetry emerged as a long ode known as the qasidah. This poetic form was employed by poets to celebrate tribal bravery, extol generosity, or glorify tribal chiefs. The qasidah served as a vital instrument for preserving collective memory, enhancing tribal honor, and shaping public opinion within Arab society. Its conventions and thematic structures established the foundational framework upon which later Islamic praise poetry would be built.

In the Early Islamic period, particularly during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, this pre Islamic tradition was adapted into a medium for da'wah or Islamic propagation and the defense of the faith. The most famous example of this transformation is the poem Banat Su'ad composed by Ka'ab ibn Zuhair, which was directly praised by the Prophet Muhammad himself and rewarded with a cloak known as the burdah. This event not only legitimized the genre of praise poetry within Islamic tradition but also established a powerful precedent for the use of poetry as a means of expressing loyalty and devotion to religious and political authority. However, it was during the Umayyad Dynasty that al madih underwent its most significant political evolution. The dynasty repurposed the prophetic and tribal traditions of praise into a structured political instrument to reinforce the legitimacy of the caliphate. This development provided the transition toward the Golden Age and Sufistic period, where madih evolved further into a distinct Sufistic genre characterized by spiritual praise and mystical devotion. The culmination of this development is the monumental work *Al Burdah* by Imam Al Busiri which remains one of the most celebrated examples of Sufi praise poetry. The evolution of madih from pre Islamic tribal praise to Islamic prophetic praise and eventually to political and spiritual praise demonstrates the remarkable adaptability and enduring significance of this poetic genre across different historical and cultural contexts.

2. Political and Cultural Context of the Umayyad Era

Despite the administrative and economic achievements of the Umayyad Dynasty, its political system also generated significant social and political tensions. The dynasty successfully centralized governance, introduced a standardized monetary system using the dinar and dirham, and established Arabic as the official language to facilitate communication across the empire. However, the institutionalization of hereditary succession concentrated political authority within the Umayyad family, which effectively limited access to elite positions for individuals outside the ruling lineage. Furthermore, the fiscal policies of the empire became a primary source of dissatisfaction, especially among non-Arab Muslims known as mawali, who continued to face unequal taxation and social discrimination in many regions despite their conversion to Islam.

These internal conditions contributed to growing resentment and encouraged the emergence of organized political opposition. This was particularly evident in the challenges posed by rival factions such as the Shi'a, who argued for leadership through the family of the Prophet, and the Kharijites, who rejected Umayyad authority altogether. To preserve political stability and maintain its authority, the Umayyad government frequently relied on a well-organized military force to suppress rebellions and confront any

groups that challenged its centralized rule. Within this atmosphere of political rivalry and social tension, poetry emerged as a vital tool for the state to defend its interests and respond to competing narratives.

3. Poetry as a Tool of Political Propaganda

Poetry played a significant role in the political life of the Umayyad period serving not only as a form of literary expression but also as an instrument of political communication. During this era the genres of al madih also known as praise poetry and al hija known as satirical poetry became increasingly influential in shaping the state narrative. Court poets particularly the prominent Umayyad Triad consisting of Al Farazdaq, Jarir ibn Atiyah, and Al Akhtal frequently composed al madih to celebrate the virtues, military achievements, and divine legitimacy of the Umayyad caliphs. These poets often received extensive patronage, wealth, and prestigious positions in return for their literary services, establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with the caliphal court.

In contrast al hija was strategically employed to attack political rivals, criticize opposing factions, and defend the interests of the ruling dynasty against competing claims. This satirical genre was particularly effective in delegitimizing the narratives of rival groups such as the Shi'a and the Kharijites who sought to undermine Umayyad authority. Through these interconnected poetic genres literature became closely intertwined with politics functioning as a sophisticated communication system to shape public opinion and reinforce the authority of the Umayyad government. As a result poetry was transformed from a mere cultural tradition into a powerful instrument for promoting political legitimacy and strengthening the public image of the ruling elite within early Islamic civilization.

4. Major Poets of al-Madih

4.1 Al-Farazdaq

Al-Farazdaq (c. 641 to 728 CE), whose full name was Hammām ibn Ghālib al-Tamīmī, was one of the most prominent poets of the Umayyad period. Renowned for his mastery of satire (al-hijā') and panegyric poetry (al-madih), he enjoyed the patronage of several Umayyad caliphs, including al-Walīd I, Sulaymān, and Yazīd II. Through his close association with the Umayyad court, Al-Farazdaq composed numerous praise poems that celebrated the military achievements, noble lineage, generosity, and religious authority of the ruling dynasty. His poetry therefore functioned not only as literary expression but also as an effective medium for strengthening the political legitimacy of the Umayyad caliphate.

One of Al-Farazdaq's characteristic rhetorical strategies was the association of Umayyad political authority with divine support. In one of his panegyrics, he writes:

*"When wars break out, exposing their fangs,
The undaunted warrior's feet rapidly pounce on the enemies...
The earth is God's own; He installed the Caliph on it;
The friend of God on it is invincible."*

This poem portrays the caliph as God's appointed ruler whose victories are guaranteed through divine assistance. The representation of the caliph as "installed" by God transforms political authority into sacred authority, suggesting that obedience to the caliph is consistent with obedience to God's will. The characterization of the caliph as "the friend of God" further elevates

the ruler beyond the status of a mere political figure, positioning him as a divinely favored individual whose rule carries spiritual significance. This religious framing of political authority reflects one of the principal functions of al-madih during the Umayyad period, which was to construct the ruler as both a political leader and a divinely favored guardian of the Muslim community.

The strategic use of divine imagery in Al-Farazdaq's panegyric serves multiple legitimizing purposes. First, it provides theological justification for Umayyad rule by presenting the caliphate as an institution sanctioned by God, thereby making opposition to the caliph equivalent to opposition to divine will. This was particularly significant given the political challenges the Umayyads faced from rival factions. Second, it establishes an ideological framework within which political loyalty is reframed as religious duty, thus encouraging obedience among the Muslim population. Third, it reinforces the dynastic continuity of Umayyad rule by suggesting that each caliph inherits not only political authority but also divine favor. Through this rhetorical strategy, Al-Farazdaq transformed the genre of al-madih from mere literary praise into a sophisticated instrument of political legitimization.

Furthermore, Al-Farazdaq's panegyric also served to consolidate Umayyad identity by celebrating the dynasty's Arab heritage and Quraysh lineage. By highlighting the caliph's noble ancestry, his poetry reinforced the traditional Arab values of lineage and honor while simultaneously providing a counter-narrative to oppositional discourses that questioned Umayyad legitimacy. This dual function of his poetry, addressing both theological and tribal dimensions of authority, demonstrates the versatility of al-madih as a political instrument. His ability to integrate religious symbolism with tribal values made his panegyric particularly effective in reaching diverse audiences, from religious scholars to tribal leaders. Consequently, Al-Farazdaq's al-madih poetry represents one of the most significant examples of how praise poetry was employed to construct, reinforce, and disseminate Umayyad political legitimacy.

This ideological message is further reinforced in another verse:

أَبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ نَصَرَكَمُ بِجُنُودِهِ
وَلَيْسَ بِمَغْلُوبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ صَاحِبُهُ

"God would allow nothing except that He aid you with His armies; and the one allied with God is never defeated."

The verse explicitly attributes Umayyad military success to divine intervention rather than merely to strategic or military superiority. The use of the word "armies" (junūd) metaphorically refers to God's celestial forces, suggesting that the Umayyads are supported not merely by human soldiers but by supernatural powers. The second hemistich, "the one allied with God is never defeated," serves as a definitive statement of political and theological certainty. It implies that Umayyad rule is not only legitimate but also unassailable, as any attempt to oppose it would

inevitably fail due to divine protection. By emphasizing God's support, Al-Farazdaq legitimizes Umayyad rule through religious symbolism, presenting the caliphate as an institution protected and endorsed by God. Consequently, his al-madih poetry functioned not only as praise but also as a powerful instrument for constructing and reinforcing the political legitimacy of the Umayyad dynasty.

The strategic deployment of divine imagery in Al-Farazdaq's panegyric serves multiple legitimizing functions. First, it provides theological justification for Umayyad rule by presenting the caliphate as an institution sanctioned by God, thereby making opposition to the caliph equivalent to opposition to divine will. This was particularly significant given the political challenges the Umayyads faced from rival factions, including the Shi'a who argued that leadership should pass through the Prophet's family, and the Kharijites who rejected Umayyad authority altogether. Second, it establishes an ideological framework within which political loyalty is reframed as religious duty, encouraging obedience among the Muslim population. Third, it reinforces the dynastic continuity of Umayyad rule by suggesting that each caliph inherits not only political authority but also divine favor, thereby legitimizing hereditary succession. Beyond divine authorization, Al-Farazdaq's panegyric also emphasized the personal virtues of the Umayyad caliphs, including generosity (*karam*), justice (*'adl*), and military prowess (*shajā'a*). These virtues were not merely descriptive but served a legitimizing function by portraying the caliphs as ideal rulers who embodied the qualities expected of legitimate Islamic leadership. The celebration of generosity, in particular, reinforced the traditional Arab value of hospitality while also demonstrating the caliph's ability to fulfill the material needs of his subjects. Similarly, the emphasis on justice countered criticisms of Umayyad rule as oppressive or tyrannical. Through his poetry, Al-Farazdaq constructed a comprehensive image of the caliph as both a divinely supported ruler and a just, generous, and courageous leader, thereby addressing multiple dimensions of political legitimacy.

Al-Farazdaq's contribution to al-madih as a political instrument is particularly significant when compared to his contemporaries. Unlike Al-Akhtal, who employed tribal symbols and Christian imagery to praise Umayyad rulers, Al-Farazdaq relied more heavily on Islamic religious discourse. While Al-Akhtal's poems appealed to the values of generosity and hospitality rooted in pre-Islamic tribal tradition, Al-Farazdaq's poetry more explicitly invoked Quranic language and Islamic theological concepts. Jarir, in contrast, frequently employed satire and polemical counter-poetry, while Al-Farazdaq's panegyric was more direct in its praise and more explicit in its religious legitimization. This distinction suggests that while all three poets served the Umayyad dynasty, they employed different rhetorical strategies tailored to their audiences and their respective poetic traditions. Al-Farazdaq's integration of religious symbolism with tribal values made his panegyric particularly effective in reaching diverse audiences, from religious scholars to tribal leaders.

Furthermore, Al-Farazdaq's panegyric was composed during a period of significant political consolidation for the Umayyad dynasty. The caliphate of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and his successors saw the centralization of administrative structures, the establishment of Arabic as the language of bureaucracy, and the construction of monumental architecture such as the Dome of the Rock. These developments were accompanied by a propaganda campaign that included poetry, historiography, and religious discourse. Al-Farazdaq's panegyric formed an integral part

of this campaign, providing poetic legitimization for Umayyad rule. His poetry effectively communicated the ideological message of Umayyad legitimacy to a broad audience, including tribal leaders, urban populations, and religious scholars. Through his sophisticated rhetorical strategies, Al-Farazdaq transformed the genre of al-madih from mere literary praise into a powerful instrument of political legitimization, demonstrating the profound interconnection between poetry and politics in the Umayyad era.

4.2 Jarir ibn Atiyah

Jarir ibn Atiyah al-Khatfi Al-Tamimi (c. 650–728 CE) was one of the most celebrated poets of the Umayyad period, renowned for his mastery of satire (al-hijā') and panegyric poetry (al-madih). Born in Najd during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan, he belonged to the Kulaib clan, a branch of the powerful Banu Tamim tribe. Little is known of his early life, but he rose to prominence after winning the favor of Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, the powerful governor of Iraq. His reputation was further cemented through his famous poetic feuds, known as naqā'id (flytings), with his rival poets Al-Farazdaq and Al-Akhtal, which are said to have lasted for forty years. These three poets are collectively known as the "Umayyad Triad". Jarir later visited the Umayyad court in Damascus during the reigns of Caliph Abd al-Malik and Al-Walid I, though he did not receive a warm welcome from either. He was, however, more successful with the pious Caliph Umar II, reportedly the only poet received by him.

Jarir's poetry, like that of his contemporaries, consists largely of satire and eulogy. His panegyric poems typically follow the conventional qasidah (ode) form, opening with an amatory prelude (nasīb) that is followed by invective and panegyric. His distinctive skill lay in composing verses that insulted personal rivals or the enemies of his patrons, which made him a valuable asset to the Umayyad court. Jarir also wrote elegies, wisdom poetry, and epigrams, demonstrating his versatility as a poet. One of his most significant contributions to Arabic literature is his participation in the naqā'id tradition, where his poetic contests with Al-Farazdaq and Al-Akhtal produced a substantial body of poetry that was later collected and preserved. These contests were not merely personal rivalries but served broader social and political functions, including tribal competition, entertainment, and the negotiation of social relations in an increasingly urbanizing Islamic society.

Jarir's panegyric poetry reflects his close relationship with Umayyad political authority. In one of his poems composed for Caliph Umar II, he writes:

*"And if the people were to be judged by their rulers,
The best of rulers, O Umar, is the one who rules with justice.
He has filled the earth with justice and fairness,
So that the orphan hopes for his protection."*

Jarir constructs the legitimacy of the Umayyad ruler by portraying him as the ideal model of Islamic leadership. The expression "the best of rulers" is a clear example of *al-madih*, employing a superlative form of praise that elevates the caliph above all other leaders. Rather than functioning as a simple compliment, this statement presents the ruler as the most qualified and deserving of political authority. At the same time, it can be understood as a rhetorical response to

contemporary criticism of Umayyad rule, offering a counter-narrative that defends the dynasty's right to govern.

The following lines further strengthen this image through the repeated emphasis on "justice and fairness." Although these qualities are presented as defining characteristics of the caliph, they primarily function as rhetorical ideals that construct the public image of a righteous and compassionate ruler. The phrase "he has filled the earth with justice and fairness" employs hyperbole to exaggerate the extent of the ruler's virtues, suggesting that his justice reaches every part of society. Likewise, the image of "the orphan" serves as a symbol of the most vulnerable members of the community. By depicting even the orphan as trusting in the caliph's protection, Jarir reinforces the perception of the ruler as a guardian of social welfare and moral order. Through these rhetorical strategies, the poem transforms praise into a political instrument that strengthens the legitimacy and public image of the Umayyad government.

Another verse attributed to Jarir in praise of Umayyad authority further reinforces the theme of divinely sanctioned leadership:

*"You are the light that guides the people in darkness,
And the sword that protects the faith from its enemies.
God has granted you victory over your foes,
And has made your rule a blessing to the earth."*

In this poem, Jarir employs a combination of light imagery and martial symbolism to construct a comprehensive legitimizing discourse. The caliph is portrayed as both a spiritual guide ("light") and a military protector ("sword"), addressing both the religious and political dimensions of Umayyad authority. The phrase "God has granted you victory" attributes the caliph's success to divine favor, positioning Umayyad rule within a theological framework. The concluding line, "made your rule a blessing to the earth," suggests that Umayyad governance is not merely legitimate but beneficial to all of humanity, thereby portraying the dynasty as an instrument of divine mercy. Through these rhetorical strategies, Jarir transformed the genre of al-madīh from mere literary praise into a sophisticated instrument of political legitimization, reinforcing the ideological foundations of Umayyad authority.

4.3 Al-Akhtal

Ghiyath ibn Ghawth ibn al-Salt al-Taghlibi (c. 640–710 CE), commonly known as al-Akhtal ("The Loquacious"), was one of the most celebrated poets of the Umayyad period. He belonged to the Banu Taghlib tribe and, unlike his contemporaries Jarir and Al-Farazdaq, remained a Christian throughout his life. Born either in al-Hirah or near Rusafa, he became renowned for his mastery of panegyric (al-madīh) and satire (al-hijā') during an era when poetry served as a vital political instrument. Al-Akhtal was introduced to the Umayyad court through Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, then crown prince, and developed a close friendship with him. When Yazid acceded to the throne, he was generous to the poet, and despite his Christian faith, al-Akhtal was favored by leading Umayyad caliphs. He became the official court poet to Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, to whom he dedicated numerous panegyrics, but he later fell into disfavour under Al-Walid I. Together with Jarir and al-Farazdaq, al-Akhtal forms a famous trio in early Arabic literary history,

with the philologist Abu Ubayda placing him highest of the three for the quality and perfection of his qasidas .

Al-Akhtal's poetry captures the pivotal moment when the praise-poem (madīh) emerged as a political tool in the Islamic realm, illustrating the Umayyad adoption and integration of older pre-Islamic forms into a new hybrid culture . Born in al-Hira, the capital of the Persian-allied Lakhmids, al-Akhtal employed pre-Islamic poetic forms and Biblical references to craft panegyrics for the Umayyad caliphs . His poems comparing the caliph to Noah, David, and other shared prophets of the Abrahamic faiths anchor the Umayyads in a broader Near Eastern religious tradition, while others, repeating the trope of comparing the ruler to the Euphrates, firmly establish them in a tradition of Arab leadership . His poetry is both clearly Christian and clearly Arab, using an idiom closer to pre-Islamic poetry than his contemporaries, yet despite his faith, it was al-Akhtal who was anointed by Abd al-Malik as the poet of the Umayyads with the declaration: "This is the poet of the Commander of the Faithful, this is the poet of the Arabs" . The pre-Islamic Bedouin tradition is always apparent in his poems, and his panegyrics show the continued vitality of this tradition, acquiring a classical status and being accepted by critics as a source of pure Arabic .

Al-Akhtal's panegyric for Caliph Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah demonstrates his distinctive legitimizing strategy, which combined Christian and Arab elements:

*"And I swear that I will not forget the days of Jillaq,
Nor Damascus, nor the generous Aba Khalid...
You are the son of the kings, and the crown of the caliphs,
And the sword of God, drawn against the enemies."*

Al-Akhtal constructs political legitimacy through a gradual sequence of praise rather than presenting it all at once. The poem opens with the speaker's remembrance of "the days of Jillaq" and "Damascus," two locations closely associated with the political center of the Umayyad Dynasty. Rather than functioning merely as geographical references, these places evoke memories of the dynasty's authority, stability, and past achievements. The praise then shifts from the political landscape to an individual figure through the mention of "the generous Aba Khalid," the honorific title (*kunya*) of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. By emphasizing Yazid's generosity, Al-Akhtal portrays him as an ideal ruler while simultaneously expressing loyalty to his patron.

The intensity of the praise reaches its climax in the final two lines through a series of powerful metaphors. The expression "the son of the kings" establishes Yazid's legitimacy by emphasizing his noble lineage and hereditary right to rule. Likewise, describing him as "the crown of the caliphs" symbolizes his supreme authority and distinguished status among Muslim rulers. The final metaphor, "the sword of God, drawn against the enemies," elevates Yazid beyond the image of a capable military leader by presenting him as a divinely sanctioned defender of the state. Through these interconnected metaphors, Al-Akhtal transforms political leadership into a sacred and legitimate institution, illustrating how *al-madīh* functioned not merely as literary praise but also as an effective instrument for reinforcing Umayyad political authority.

This ideological message is further reinforced in another verse attributed to al-Akhtal in praise of Caliph Abd al-Malik:

*"The earth is God's own; He installed the Caliph on it,
And the friend of God on it is invincible."*

The verse explicitly attributes caliphal authority to divine installation, presenting the caliphate as an institution established by God rather than by human political maneuvering. The characterization of the caliph as the "friend of God" (walī Allāh) elevates the ruler to a sacred figure enjoying divine favor and protection, positioning opposition to Umayyad rule as resistance against God's will. Al-Akhtal's poetic strategy was flexible and multifaceted: in his panegyrics he lauded the Umayyad caliphs, while in his satires he attacked all opponents of the caliphate. This dual function of his poetry, celebrating the dynasty while delegitimizing its rivals, demonstrates the sophisticated role of al-madīh as an instrument of political legitimization. Al-Akhtal's career and poetry reveal the Umayyads' cultural flexibility, which enabled them to transform their dynasty into an empire by combining elements from earlier traditions into a new Islamic form. His poetry functioned as a powerful medium for constructing, reinforcing, and disseminating the political legitimacy of the Umayyad dynasty, serving both as a portrait of the ideal ruler and as the receptacle of the cardinal values to which the society subscribed.

5. Al-Madīh as Political Legitimization

Based on the analysis of the three major Umayyad poets, Al-Farazdaq, Jarir ibn Atiyah, and Al-Akhtal, it becomes evident that al-madīh during the Umayyad period underwent a significant transformation in its function. No longer serving merely as literary praise or artistic expression, al-madīh evolved into a sophisticated instrument of political propaganda, a strategic tool for constructing and reinforcing dynastic authority, and a means for poets to secure material rewards, patronage, and social status through their close association with the caliphal court. The poets skillfully leveraged their compositions not only to gain immediate financial benefits but also to establish themselves as indispensable figures within the political and cultural apparatus of the Umayyad state.

Beyond serving personal interests, the three poets utilized al-madīh to articulate and project the idealized qualities of legitimate leadership, portraying the caliph as the embodiment of the virtues expected of a just and capable ruler. Their poems consistently emphasized attributes such as courage (shajāʿa), generosity (karam), justice (ʿadl), piety (taqwā), intelligence (dhakāʿ), and nobility (ḥasab wa nasab). By constructing this idealized portrait of the caliph, the poets not only praised individual rulers but also established a normative framework through which Umayyad authority could be measured and legitimized. The praise poems functioned as mirrors for princes, reflecting back to the rulers the virtues they were expected to possess and reinforcing the ideological foundations of their rule.

Although each poet employed distinctive rhetorical strategies and stylistic approaches, they collectively pursued a shared objective: the legitimization of Umayyad political authority. Al-Farazdaq, as demonstrated in the previous analysis, emphasized military legitimization by attributing Umayyad military successes to divine will, celebrating the noble lineage and hereditary succession of the dynasty, and extolling the martial superiority of the Umayyad caliphate. His poetry transformed political authority into sacred authority, presenting the caliph as God's chosen ruler whose victories were divinely guaranteed and whose rule was unassailable. Jarir, in contrast, constructed the image of the caliphate through the lens of personal character and virtue, emphasizing the caliph's justice, piety, and compassion while simultaneously weakening his political rivals through the strategic use of satire (al-hijāʿ). His panegyric portrayed the caliph

as an ideal Islamic ruler whose moral excellence justified his authority and distinguished him from his opponents. Al-Akhtal, drawing on his Christian background and pre-Islamic poetic traditions, articulated the grandeur of the Umayyad state, the stability of its governance, and the magnificence of the dynasty as the preeminent political power of its age. His poems integrated Biblical references and Arab tribal values to construct a legitimizing discourse that appealed to diverse audiences within the multi-confessional Umayyad empire.

In doing so, al-madih transcended its function as mere praise poetry to become an instrument for building a communication system that served both the poets and the Umayyad rulers. This system operated on multiple levels. On one hand, it provided the caliphs with a powerful medium for projecting their authority, celebrating their achievements, and cultivating public loyalty. Through the poets' verses, the Umayyad rulers could communicate their ideological messages to a broad audience, including tribal leaders, urban populations, and religious scholars. On the other hand, the system effectively silenced critics and suppressed opposition by delegitimizing alternative claims to authority and marginalizing those who sought to undermine Umayyad rule. The poets' satires and polemical verses functioned as weapons of political warfare, attacking the dynasty's enemies and exposing the weaknesses of rival factions such as the Shi'a and the Kharijites.

Furthermore, al-madih played a crucial role in reshaping public perception of the Umayyad dynasty, particularly concerning the persistent criticism of Umayyad nepotism and the perceived violation of the egalitarian principles articulated during the early years of Islamic rule. Critics frequently accused the Umayyads of betraying the promises made during their ascent to power by privileging their own family members and allies in appointments to key administrative and military positions. By commissioning and circulating panegyric poetry that celebrated the caliphs' justice, generosity, and piety, the Umayyads sought to counter these accusations and present themselves as legitimate and virtuous rulers. The poets' verses served as a form of ideological counter-propaganda, reframing dynastic succession and centralized authority as natural, divinely ordained, and beneficial to the Muslim community. Through this process, al-madih became a mechanism for transforming contested political authority into accepted cultural truth, embedding Umayyad legitimacy within the broader framework of Islamic religious and cultural values.

The effectiveness of this poetic communication system depended on several factors. First, the poets themselves were figures of considerable social prestige and cultural authority, lending credibility to their praise and ensuring that their verses were widely disseminated and remembered. Second, the Umayyad caliphs recognized the strategic value of poetry and actively patronized poets, establishing a mutually beneficial relationship in which the poets received financial rewards and social status in exchange for their literary services. Third, the oral culture of Arab society ensured that poetry was recited, transmitted, and remembered across generations, making it an ideal medium for the dissemination of ideological messages. Fourth, the integration of religious symbolism and tribal values into the poems ensured their resonance with diverse audiences, from urban religious scholars to rural tribal leaders.

The analysis of Al-Farazdaq, Jarir, and Al-Akhtal's panegyric poetry demonstrates that al-madih during the Umayyad period functioned not merely as literary praise but as a sophisticated instrument of political legitimization. Through their distinctive rhetorical strategies, the three poets constructed and reinforced the ideological foundations of Umayyad authority, articulating a vision of legitimate rule grounded in divine support, hereditary succession, personal virtue, and dynastic grandeur. Their poetry operated within a broader communication system that benefited both the poets and their patrons, enabling the Umayyads to project their authority, silence their critics, and reshape public perception of their rule.

Consequently, al-madih represents one of the most significant examples of the interconnection between literature and politics in early Islamic history, demonstrating how poetic discourse was employed to construct, reinforce, and disseminate political legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Umayyad Dynasty maintained its political authority not only through military strength and administrative reforms but also through the strategic use of literature as a medium of political communication. During this period, poetry evolved beyond its traditional function as a form of artistic expression and became an effective instrument for promoting political legitimacy and shaping public perception. Through the works of prominent court poets such as Al-Akhtal, Jarir, and Al-Farazdaq, the genres of *al-madih* (praise poetry) and *al-hija'* (satirical poetry) were employed to celebrate the virtues of the Umayyad caliphs, defend the dynasty against political opponents, and reinforce the image of the rulers as legitimate and capable leaders. While these literary works brought prestige and patronage to the poets themselves, they also served the political interests of the state by strengthening public support and responding to competing political narratives. Therefore, the Umayyad period represents an important stage in the transformation of Arabic poetry, in which literature functioned not only as a vehicle for personal expression, emotion, and artistic creativity but also as a powerful instrument of political legitimization. This transformation demonstrates the close relationship between literature and power, highlighting how poetic discourse could influence public opinion and contribute to the preservation of dynastic authority. These findings demonstrate that Arabic poetry during the Umayyad era should not be understood solely as a literary tradition but also as a political discourse that shaped perceptions of authority and legitimacy. This study contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between literature and political power in early Islamic civilization.

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