

AL-FARAZDAQ AND THE POETICS OF THE Umayyad COURT: MADH, HIJĀ', AND NAQĀ'ID AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

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Abstract

This study examines the poetry of Al-Farazdaq, a prominent poet of the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750 CE), through a thematic-synthesis library research approach. Rather than treating early Islamic poetry as a uniform body of aesthetic production, this research analyzes a purposively selected set of poems and poetic exchanges documented in primary editions of *Dīwān al-Farazdaq* and in secondary scholarly literature, organized across four recurring thematic domains: panegyric (*madh*), satire (*hijā'*), tribal rivalry and self-glorification (*naqā'id* and *fakhr*), and poetry as an instrument of political legitimation. Employing a qualitative descriptive method grounded in historical-biographical criticism, the sociology of literature, and a heuristic-hermeneutic reading model, this study finds that Al-Farazdaq's poetic corpus functioned as a multidimensional cultural artifact rather than a single-purpose literary practice. His panegyric poetry, exemplified by the ode delivered in praise of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn before Caliph Hishām, operated as a vehicle for contesting religious and political legitimacy rather than mere court flattery. His satirical verse combined personal and moral critique, holding both rivals and authority figures accountable to communal standards of conduct. His *naqā'id* exchanges with Jarīr reveal tribal identity as a continuously renegotiated discursive contest, one that classical critics themselves recognized as being in tension with the egalitarian spirit of Islam. Finally, his broader role as a court-associated poet demonstrates how poetic reputation and political risk were closely intertwined within the Umayyad state. Read together, these four domains indicate that Al-Farazdaq's poetry registers a deeper historical friction between inherited tribal convention and emergent Islamic ethical norms, a friction the poet continually re-enacted rather than resolved. This study contributes to early Islamic literary scholarship by offering an integrated, cross-genre reading of a single poet's corpus as historical evidence, an approach that has been largely absent from prior studies focusing on isolated poems or single rivalries.

Keywords: Al-Farazdaq, Umayyad Dynasty, Arabic Poetry

A. BACKGROUND

Literature has long functioned as a medium through which civilizations preserve collective memory, negotiate cultural identity, and articulate ideological transformation (Zalukhu, 2025). Within the oral and textual traditions of early Arab society, poetic and narrative forms served as instruments for transmitting communal knowledge and consolidating group identity well before the codification of written records; this transmission function persisted and was reinforced once Islamic civilization began documenting its intellectual and religious heritage in writing, as reflected in studies tracing the shift of Arabic literary culture from orality to codified text (Pharamesti et al., 2025). Within the broader tradition of Islamic civilization, poetry occupies a distinctive position because it not only reflects aesthetic expression but also

records the social, political, and religious developments that accompanied the emergence and expansion of Islam. During the formative centuries of the Islamic world, poetic texts evolved from instruments of tribal representation into sophisticated vehicles for moral instruction, political legitimacy, religious devotion, and cultural negotiation. Consequently, the study of early Islamic poetry provides valuable insight into the interaction between literary production and the historical realities that shaped Muslim societies (Majid & Andayani, 2020).

The development of poetry in the early Islamic period cannot be detached from the influence of successive dynasties that redefined the intellectual and cultural landscape of the Muslim world. In particular, the rise of the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750 CE) generated significant changes in literary themes, stylistic conventions, and the social functions of poetic discourse. Existing scholarship has demonstrated that Arabic poetry during this period exhibited diverse genres including *madh* (praise), *hijā'* (satire), *zuhd* (asceticism), *ghazal* (romantic verse), *khamriyyat* (wine poetry), and *naqā'id* (poetic rivalry) each carrying distinct rhetorical strategies while simultaneously responding to shifting political and ideological circumstances (Hinduan et al., 2020). Among the most influential poets of this era was Al-Farazdaq, a poet of the Banū Tamīm tribe renowned for the density of his diction and the moral and tribal weight carried in his verse; his *hijā'* poetry in particular has been documented as a vehicle through which personal and moral satire intertwined with tribal pride and political commentary (Buana, 2019). The recurrence of these thematic and rhetorical patterns across his body of work illustrates that literature was not merely an artistic endeavor but also an active participant in constructing and transmitting the values of Islamic civilization.

In addition to political transformation, the spread of Islamic teachings significantly influenced the language, imagery, and thematic orientation of literary works. The incorporation of Qur'anic vocabulary, ethical concepts, and religious narratives into poetic and prose compositions marked a substantial departure from many pre-Islamic conventions; the Qur'an reshaped Arabic rhetoric, vocabulary, and stylistic sensibility to the extent that early Islamic literary production absorbed religious terms faith, hypocrisy, prayer, almsgiving alongside thematic concerns such as jihad, moral exhortation, and eschatology (Aflisia et al., 2022). Rather than eliminating poetic expression, the early Islamic intellectual tradition redirected it toward new moral and spiritual purposes while preserving its rhetorical sophistication and cultural relevance. These characteristics are particularly evident in Al-Farazdaq's poetry, where political commentary and tribal discourse frequently intersect with ethical reflection and Islamic values (Iqbal, 2016).

Despite this growing scholarly attention, many existing studies continue to examine early Islamic poetry through broad historical or descriptive lenses, or through isolated case studies of a single poem or a single rivalry, rather than through a thematically integrated reading of a poet's corpus as a whole. Several Indonesian studies, for instance, adopt descriptive-analytical methods to outline the general development of poetry and prose across the Umayyad and early Islamic periods without conducting close readings of individual texts (Safitri & Tasnimah, 2022). Existing studies of Al-Farazdaq specifically tend to isolate a single dimension of his work his *hijā'* satire (Buana, 2019), his polemical exchange with Jarīr, or a single celebrated panegyric without systematically relating these dimensions to one another as parts of a coherent poetic response to the political and religious conditions of the Umayyad period. Consequently, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to examining how Al-Farazdaq's panegyric, satirical, and tribal-polemical poetry function together, across genres, as an integrated body of evidence for the intellectual and socio-political climate of his time.

Addressing this gap is essential because literary texts constitute primary cultural artifacts that preserve the intellectual climate and social consciousness of their respective periods. Through close reading and critical interpretation, poetry reveals how authors negotiated questions of authority, faith, identity, morality, and communal values while responding to

changing historical conditions. Such analysis enriches not only literary scholarship but also interdisciplinary discussions in history, cultural studies, and Islamic studies, particularly where poetry functioned as a vehicle for social critique and moral instruction directed at rulers and society alike (Salsabila et al., 2025).

Accordingly in light of this gap and the broader significance of literary analysis outlined above, this study aims to analyze the thematic structure of Al-Farazdaq's poetic corpus as it relates to the Umayyad Dynasty, drawing on a purposively selected set of poems and poetic exchanges documented in primary editions of *Dīwān al-Farazdaq* and in secondary scholarly literature, organized across four recurring thematic domains: panegyric (*madh*), satire (*hijā'*), tribal rivalry and self-glorification (*naqā'id* and *fakhr*), and poetry as an instrument of political legitimation. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) what dominant themes and rhetorical strategies recur across these thematic domains in Al-Farazdaq's poetry; (2) how do these domains, taken together, represent the political, tribal, and socio-religious dynamics of Umayyad society; and (3) in what ways does this thematically integrated reading reveal tensions between inherited tribal convention and emergent Islamic ethical norms during the Umayyad period. Ultimately, this research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of early Islamic literary production by demonstrating that Al-Farazdaq's poetry functioned not only as an artistic expression but also as a significant medium for preserving and communicating the evolving values, ideological tensions, and historical consciousness of the Umayyad period an integrated, cross-genre reading that has not yet been systematically undertaken in the existing literature on this poet.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research (*studi pustaka*) approach to examine the thematic structure of Al-Farazdaq's poetry within the historical and cultural context of the Umayyad Dynasty (Fadli, 2021). A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research seeks to interpret literary meanings, rhetorical constructions, and cultural representations embedded in poetic texts and their documented commentary, rather than to produce statistical measurements or numerical generalizations (Adlini et al., 2022). Furthermore, library research enables the systematic investigation of literary works through documentary sources, allowing the researcher to contextualize textual findings within broader historical, political, and intellectual developments reflected in early Islamic civilization (Nugrahani, 2014).

The analysis is grounded in two complementary theoretical lenses: (1) a historical-biographical approach, which situates Al-Farazdaq's poetry within his personal trajectory, tribal affiliation (*Banū Tamīm*), and the political circumstances of the Umayyad court; and (2) the sociology of literature, which treats his poems as social documents reflecting the values, tensions, and power relations of their period. At the textual level, close reading is guided by a heuristic-hermeneutic reading model, in which each poem or excerpt is first read literally to establish its surface meaning (heuristic reading), then reread in light of poetic conventions, intertextual references, and historical context to arrive at a fuller interpretive meaning (hermeneutic reading).

The data of this study consist of poems and poetic exchanges attributed to Al-Farazdaq that are documented in primary editions of *Dīwān al-Farazdaq* (notably the annotated editions of Fā'ūr, 1987, and al-Hāwī, 1983) and discussed in secondary scholarly literature. Selection of the poems and exchanges examined follows three explicit inclusion criteria: (a) thematic representativeness, ensuring coverage of Al-Farazdaq's major genres *madh*, *hijā'*, *fakhr*, *naqā'id*, and poetry with discernible political function; (b) scholarly documentation, prioritizing poems and exchanges that have already received sustained critical discussion in primary commentaries or peer-reviewed studies, so that the researcher's interpretation can be checked against an

established body of scholarship rather than resting on an isolated reading; and (c) historical traceability, limited to poems whose composition can be situated with reasonable confidence within a specific historical episode or relationship (e.g., the panegyric delivered before Caliph Hishām, or the naqā'id exchange with Jarīr), so that textual interpretation can be anchored to verifiable historical context rather than speculative dating.

Secondary data comprise scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical records, and academic publications discussing early Islamic literature, the Umayyad Dynasty, Arabic poetic traditions, and Al-Farazdaq's literary contributions specifically (Buana, 2019). These supporting materials are used to corroborate the dating and circumstances of each poem or exchange, to provide historical background, and to cross-check the researcher's interpretation against existing critical commentary (Safitri & Tasnimah, 2022).

Data collection is conducted through documentation and systematic literature review. The researcher first identifies thematic categories based on the established genre taxonomy of Umayyad poetry, then locates representative poems or exchanges within each category using the inclusion criteria above. Each identified text is subjected to the heuristic-hermeneutic reading sequence described earlier in order to determine its dominant themes, diction, imagery, rhetorical devices, and structural characteristics, while the corresponding historical and biographical context is documented in parallel to support a historically informed interpretation.

The collected data are analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis integrated with close textual reading and contextual literary criticism. The analytical process begins by examining the intrinsic elements of each poem or excerpt, including language use, stylistic patterns, thematic organization, and rhetorical technique. These textual findings are then interpreted alongside relevant historical and cultural evidence to explain how the texts articulate issues of political legitimacy, tribal identity, religious values, and social relations during the Umayyad era. Finally, cross-thematic comparison is undertaken across the four thematic domains *madh*, *hijā'*, *naqā'id/fakhr*, and politically instrumental verse to identify recurring motifs and points of tension, particularly between inherited tribal convention and emergent Islamic ethical norms, thereby enabling the formulation of comprehensive conclusions regarding Al-Farazdaq's contribution to the development of early Islamic poetry and the preservation of Umayyad intellectual and cultural values.

To support the trustworthiness of the interpretation, two safeguards are applied. First, source triangulation is used: each poem or exchange is, where possible, checked against more than one critical edition or scholarly commentary before an interpretive claim is finalized, rather than resting on a single source. Second, claims that bear directly on historical fact (e.g., dates, political events, tribal alliances) are corroborated against independent historical sources on the Umayyad period, separate from literary-critical sources, to reduce the risk of circular interpretation between text and context.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Thematic Distribution Across Al-Farazdaq's Poetic Corpus

Close reading of Al-Farazdaq's documented poetic output, guided by the inclusion criteria outlined in the Method section, reveals that his work clusters around four interrelated thematic domains: panegyric (*madh*) directed at religious and political figures, satire (*hijā'*) aimed at rivals and corrupt authority, tribal rivalry and self-glorification (*naqā'id* and *fakhr*) exchanged with the poet Jarīr, and poetry deployed as an instrument of political legitimation for the Umayyad order. These four domains are not isolated; rather, they intersect within individual poems, such that a single composition often performs more than one social function simultaneously for instance, combining tribal pride with political commentary, or moral exhortation with personal attack. This thematic layering supports the view that Al-Farazdaq's poetry operated as a multifunctional cultural artifact rather than a purely aesthetic exercise

(Hinduan et al., 2020).

Panegyric (Madh): Poetic Legitimation Between Religious and Political Authority

Table 1. Panegyric (Madh) Theme

Arabic	Transliteration
هَذَا الَّذِي تُعْرِفُ الْبُطْحَاءُ وَطَائِفُهُ وَالْبَيْتُ يَعْرِفُهُ وَالْجَلُّ وَالْحَرَمُ	Hādhā alladhī ta'rifu al-Baṭḥā'u waṭ'atahu wa al-baytu ya'rifuhu wa al-ḥillu wa al-ḥaramu.
هَذَا ابْنُ خَيْرٍ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ كُلِّهِمْ هَذَا النَّقِيُّ النَّقِيُّ الطَّاهِرُ الْعَلَمُ	Hādhā ibnu khayri 'ibādi Allāhi kullihimī, hādhā al-taḥiyyu al-naḥiyyu al-ṭāhiru al-'alamu.
هَذَا ابْنُ فَاطِمَةَ إِنْ كُنْتَ جَاهِلُهُ بِحَدِّهِ أَنْبِيَاءُ اللَّهِ فَدُ خَيْمُو	Hādhā ibnu Fāṭimata in kunta jāhilahu, biḥdihī anbiyā' al-lah fadū khaymū

The most widely studied instance of Al-Farazdaq's panegyric poetry is his ode ("This is the one whose footsteps the valley of Mecca recognizes"), composed in praise of 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (Zayn al-Ābidīn) before the Umayyad caliph Hishām (noorhikmah.com, 2026). Scholarship analyzing the poem's rhetorical and argumentative structure has shown that its verses are built around a cumulative chain of identity-affirming clauses each opening with the demonstrative hādhā ("this is") that progressively establish Zayn al-Ābidīn's religious legitimacy through descent, piety, and recognition by the sacred sites of Mecca itself, in implicit contrast to the caliph's own claim to authority. This rhetorical strategy illustrates a defining feature of Umayyad-era madh: praise is rarely a simple act of flattery but functions as an argument, structured to perform a competing claim to legitimacy in front of the very ruler whose authority it appears, on the surface, to honor. The poem thereby exemplifies how panegyric could become a vehicle for political risk-taking rather than mere court convention, consistent with broader findings that Umayyad poetry absorbed religious vocabulary and genealogical argument as instruments of legitimation (Aflisia et al., 2022).

Satire (Hijā'): Personal and Moral Critique

Table 2. Satire (Hija) Theme

Arabic	Transliteration
أَرَى جَرِيرًا يَصُولُ بِغَيْرِ مَا شَرَفٍ كَأَنَّمَا هُوَ فِي الْأَقْوَالِ مِثْلُ الرَّبْدِ	arā Jarīran yaṣūlu bi-ghayri mā shara fin, ka-annamā huwa fī al-aqwāli mithlu al-zabadī.
إِذَا تَفَاخَرَ أَقْوَامٌ بِمَجْدٍ قَدِيمٍ لَمْ يَجِدْ إِلَّا لِسَانًا فِيهِ لِلْكَذِبِ	Idhā tafākharu aqwāmun bi-majdin qadim, lam yajid illā lisānan fīhi lil-kadhibi.

Al-Farazdaq's satirical corpus has been systematically classified into two principal types: personal satire (al-hijā' al-shakhṣī), which attacks an individual's physical attributes or personal conduct, and moral satire (al-hijā' al-akhḥlāqī), which targets a subject's ethical failings, hypocrisy, or abuse of power (Buana, 2019). This typology is significant because it demonstrates that Al-Farazdaq's hijā' was not reducible to crude insult; rather, it operated on a spectrum from interpersonal mockery to broader social-moral commentary, often directed at figures whose conduct was perceived to violate communal or religious norms. The coexistence of these two satirical registers within a single poetic tradition supports the broader claim that Umayyad poetry functioned as an instrument of social control and accountability, holding both rivals and authority figures to standards of conduct rooted in tribal honor and, increasingly, Islamic ethical expectation (Salsabila et al., 2025).

Tribal Rivalry (Naqā'id and Fakhr): Identity, Lineage, and Symbolic Conflict

Table 3. Tribal Rivalry (Naqaid and Fakhr) theme

Arabic	Transliteration
وَإِنْ تَمِيمًا مِنْكَ حَيْثُ تَوَجَّهْتَ عَلَى السِّلْمِ أَوْ سَلَّ السُّيُوفُ خِصَامُهَا	Wa inna Tamīman minka ḥaythu tawajjahtat, 'alā al- silmi aw salli al-suyūfī khiṣāmuhā. Humu al-ikhwatu al-adnawna wa al-kāhilu alladhī, bihi Muḍarun 'inda al-kizā'ī izdihāmuhā.

هُمُ الْإِخْوَةُ الْأَكْتَنُونَ وَالْكَاهِلُ الَّذِي
بِهِ مُضَرٌّ عِنْدَ الْكِظَاطِ إِزْدِحَامُهَا

The naqā'id exchanged between Al-Farazdaq and his lifelong rival Jarīr represent one of the most extensively documented poetic feuds in classical Arabic literature. In this exchange, Al-Farazdaq's verses characteristically foreground fakhr pride in the courage, intellect, and noble descent of his tribe, Banū Tamīm while simultaneously disparaging Jarīr's lineage within the Kulayb clan; Jarīr, in turn, responds by inverting these very claims against Al-Farazdaq. This pattern of escalating, mutually referential composition illustrates how naqā'id functioned as a structured discursive contest in which tribal identity was continuously renegotiated through public poetic performance rather than settled once and for all. Notably, classical Arabic literary criticism itself registered ambivalence toward this practice: critics observed that the boastful and mocking character of naqā'id poetry sat uneasily against the egalitarian spirit of Islam, which discourages pride in lineage and the public ridicule of others even as the same critics acknowledged that naqā'id enriched Arabic language and preserved valuable historical and cultural detail about pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab society. This tension between inherited tribal convention and emergent Islamic ethical norms is itself a significant finding of this study, indicating that Umayyad-era poets such as Al-Farazdaq were composing at a cultural fault line rather than within a settled value system (Hinduan et al., 2020).

Poetry as a Political Instrument of the Umayyad Order

Table 4. Political Theme

Arabic	Transliteration
لَيْسَ قَوْلُكَ مِنْ هَذَا بِضَائِرِهِ الْعَرَبُ تُعْرِفُ مَنْ أَنْكَرْتَ وَالْعَجَمُ	Laysa qawluka man hādhā bi-dā'irihi, al-'Arabu ta'rifu man ankarta wa al-'ajamu.
اللَّهُ شَرَفُهُ قِيَمًا وَعَظَمُهُ جَزَى بِذَلِكَ لَهُ فِي لَوْجِهِ الْقَلَمُ	Allāhu sharrafahu qadman wa 'a'zzamahu, jarā bidhālīka lahu fī lawḥihi al-qalamu.

Beyond interpersonal rivalry, Al-Farazdaq's poetic output is consistently read in the secondary literature as having functioned within the broader political apparatus of the Umayyad state (aldiwan.et, 2026). Alongside Jarīr and al-Akhṭal, Al-Farazdaq is identified as one of the three principal court-associated poets whose verse served multiple governance-adjacent functions: reinforcing dynastic legitimacy, mediating or inflaming factional conflict, transmitting tribal and cultural tradition, and exercising social criticism and control. A concrete instance of this function is documented in Al-Farazdaq's political verse praising the provincial governor Bisyr while disparaging his rival al-Muhallab; the poem frames both men as tribal leaders from Qays and Khindif respectively, while mocking al-Muhallab's faction the Banū Azad through animalizing imagery, likening them to tethered horses and bearded Nabateans (Fitriyani et al., 2025). This single poem illustrates how panegyric and satire could be fused within one composition to perform a direct political function: securing patronage from one power-holder while symbolically degrading a rival, in a register clearly intended for circulation within an audience attentive to current factional alignments rather than for purely aesthetic appreciation.

This multifunctional role positioned the poet not as a peripheral entertainer but as a participant embedded within the political life of the caliphate, whose praise could confer legitimacy and whose satire could damage reputation and standing at court. The case of Al-Farazdaq's strained relationship with the powerful Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf further illustrates this dynamic: poets of this period operated within a field where poetic reputation and political risk were closely intertwined, such that praising or criticizing a given authority carried tangible consequences for the poet's own safety and status. Read alongside the Bisyr–al-Muhallab poem, this confirms that Al-Farazdaq's madh and hijā' were frequently not

separate genres applied to separate occasions, but two faces of a single political transaction praise extended to a patron almost always implied, explicitly or implicitly, the simultaneous diminishment of that patron's rival.

D. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the poetry of Al-Farazdaq, read across four recurring thematic domains panegyric, satire, tribal rivalry, and politically instrumental verse reflects the intellectual, political, and socio-religious dynamics of the Umayyad Dynasty. The findings indicate that no single thematic category is sufficient to characterize Al-Farazdaq's literary contribution. His panegyric poetry shows that praise in the Umayyad court was rarely neutral, but rather a calculated rhetorical act capable of contesting the legitimacy of the very ruler it appeared to honor. His satire demonstrates that *hijā'* extended beyond personal insult into a recognized form of moral and social accountability. His participation in the *naqā'id* tradition with Jarīr reveals tribal identity as an unstable, continuously performed construct rather than a fixed inheritance, one whose boastful and adversarial character classical critics themselves viewed with ambivalence against the backdrop of Islamic ethical teaching. Finally, his position as a court-associated poet confirms that poetic production in this period was inseparable from the practical exercise of political power, where praise and satire alike carried real consequences for a poet's safety and standing.

Taken together, these findings support the central argument of this study: that Al-Farazdaq's poetic corpus, when read cross-thematically rather than through any single genre in isolation, functions as a historically consequential medium through which the ideological tensions of the Umayyad period between tribal honor and Islamic egalitarianism, between court loyalty and personal risk were continuously negotiated rather than settled. This integrated reading addresses a gap in existing scholarship, which has tended to examine Al-Farazdaq's *hijā'*, his rivalry with Jarīr, or individual panegyrics as separate objects of study rather than as interlocking expressions of a single historical consciousness.

This study is not without limitations. Because the analysis relies on poems and exchanges documented in available primary editions and secondary scholarly commentary rather than on an independently translated and exhaustively annotated reading of the complete *Dīwān* al-Farazdaq, the thematic patterns identified here should be understood as representative rather than comprehensive. Future research would benefit from direct, systematic engagement with critically edited Arabic editions of the *Dīwān* such as those of Fā'ūr (1987) and al-Hāwī (1983) to expand the corpus, verify translations independently, and test whether the thematic tensions identified in this study extend consistently across Al-Farazdaq's lesser-studied poems. Comparative studies placing Al-Farazdaq alongside his contemporaries, particularly Jarīr and al-Akhtal, using the same four-domain framework, would also help clarify whether the tension between tribal convention and Islamic ethical norms observed here is particular to Al-Farazdaq or characteristic of Umayyad court poetry more broadly.

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