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The Mevlevi Order and Its Religious Practices

Red Mevlevi in njegovi verski običaji

Abstract: The Mevlevi Order, rooted in the teachings and spiritual legacy of Mevlâna Jalaluddin Rumi, represents a significant tradition in Islamic mysticism. This study explores the historical evolution, religious practices, and contemporary state of the Mevlevi Order. The research examines Mevlâna's life and highlights his early influences, educational background, and the critical encounters that shaped his spiritual journey. The study then traces the development of the Mevlevi Order from its origins in the 13th century, detailing how it gradually institutionalized its practices and rituals, including introducing specific disciplines into its ceremonies. A comparative analysis method is employed to understand how Mevlevi practices relate to those of other Sufi orders, with a particular focus on the rituals of *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), *sema* (spiritual music and dance), and seclusion in retreats (*çilehane*). The research also considers the transformations the order underwent post-Mevlâna, emphasizing the importance of understanding these changes to grasp the full scope of Mevlevi practices.

Keywords: Islam, Sufism, prayer, Mevlâna, Rumi, Mevlevi order

Izvilleček: *Red Mevlevi, ki izhaja iz učenj in duhovne zapuščine Mevlâna Jalaluddina Rumija, predstavlja pomembno tradicijo islamske mistike. Ta študija raziskuje zgodovinski razvoj, verske prakse in sodobno stanje reda Mevlevi. Raziskava preučuje Mevlânovo življenje in izpostavlja njegove zgodnje vplive, izobrazbo in odločilna srečanja, ki so oblikovala njegovo duhovno pot. Študija nato sledi razvoju reda Mevlevi od njegovih začetkov v 13. stoletju in podrobno opisuje, kako je postopoma institucionaliziral svoje prakse in obrede, vključno z uvajanjem posebnih disciplin v svoje obrede. Metoda primerjalne analize je uporabljena za razumevanje, kako so prakse omenjenega reda povezane s praksami drugih sufijskih redov, s posebnim poudarkom na obredih dhikr (spominjanja Alaha), sema (duhovna glasba in ples) ter umikanja v samoto (çilehane). Raziskava obravnava tudi spremembe, ki jih je red doživel po Mevlâni, in poudarja pomen razumevanja teh sprememb za razumevanje celotnega obsega mevlevskih običajev.*

Ključne besede: islam, sufizem, molitev, Mevlâna, Rumi, red Mevlevi

Introduction

There are many definitions of Sufism within the Islamic understanding. Generally, Sufism is a spiritual and profound way of life-based on Islamic principles (Öngören 2011, 119). Sufism is based on love for Allah (*muhabetullah*) and fear of Allah (*mehâfetullah*). Since the fear of Allah also stems from the love for Him, these two concepts complement each other (120).

Since the inception of Islam, within the first two centuries, terms such as asceticism (*zuhd*), piety (*taqwa*), and worship (*ibadat*) were commonly used to express a person's deep and fervent religiosity in their inner world, and those who embodied these virtues were known as ascetics (*zahid*). However, after the 9th century, the lexicon of Islamic spirituality expanded, and more comprehensive terms like Sufism (*tasavvuf*) and the Sufi way (*süfiyye*) came into use (Uludağ 2002, 30). This linguistic evolution mirrors the historical development of Sufism in Islam, which can be categorized into three periods: the Asceticism Period from the 7th to the 8th centuries, the Sufism Period from the 9th to the 11th centuries, and the Orders Period that emerged after the 12th century (Gürer 2015, 123).

The first Sufis, who focused on the purification of the heart, evaluated people's behaviour from two perspectives: the body's and the heart's actions (Öngören 2011, 120). They emphasized the inner (*bâtîni*) aspects of worship, considering any behaviour that contributes to the maturation of the soul and brings a person closer to God as an act of worship. According to this understanding, a person truly worships when they become fully aware that they are in the presence of God, setting everything else aside (Uludağ 1999, 247).

In addition to obligatory (*fard*) and supererogatory (*nafla*) prayers, Sufis also engage in other forms of worship, such as reciting *evrad*,¹ performing *sema*,² and practicing *dhikr*.³ Seclusion in retreats (*çilehane*) has also been

1 *Evrad*: It is a Sufi term that refers to worship, prayer and dhikr performed at certain times in order to approach Allah (Kara 1995, 533).

2 *Sema*: The name given to the dhikr ceremonies of Mevlevi.

3 *Dhikr*: Remembrance of Allah.



regarded as worship in Sufism. On the other hand, some Muslim scholars have criticized Sufis for placing too much emphasis on these particular forms of worship, suggesting that they give more importance to these practices than to obligatory prayers (Uludağ 1999, 247).

The first Sufis had their own unique styles and methods of practicing religious life, which somewhat set them apart from other Muslims. However, these styles and methods varied from one Sufi to another and from one region to another (Uludağ 2005, 13). On the other hand, the specific forms of worship among Sufis also varied. Some practiced dhikr silently (*khafi*) within themselves, while others performed it openly. Some Sufis conducted *dhikr* while sitting, while others did so standing (Öngören 2013, 411). In some Sufi traditions, music was kept in the background; in others, like the Mevlevi order, it was practiced intensely (Uygun 2013, 412).

The formation of a Sufi group is influenced by many factors, including the environment in which its founder lived, the quality of education they received, and their religious experiences. This is also true for the Mevlevi order, which is the subject of this study. Therefore, to fully grasp the origins and rituals of this order, it is essential to have a deep understanding of its founder, Mevlâna, and his religious experiences. On the other hand, it is also essential to recognize the changes and transformations the order underwent after Mevlâna's time to see the whole picture.

When we examine the 13th century in which Mevlâna lived, it becomes clear that the Islamic world was going through a difficult period. The Mongol invasions, in particular, caused widespread destruction in many areas. During this challenging time, many Sufis from Khorasan migrated to the lands of Anatolia, and the great leaders of Sufi history emerged in this era. Most of the founders of the Sufi orders, widespread in today's Islamic world, lived in the 12th and 13th century. Orders such as *Qadiriyya*, *Suhrawardiyya*, *Rifa'iyya*, and *Yeseviya* emerged during this period. Similarly, Mevlâna's journey from Balkh to Konya after his long travels also occurred during this time (Kara, 2007, 41–42; Kayaoğlu 2002, 53).

In our study, we first discussed Mevlâna's life, the intellectual environment he was raised in, the people who influenced him, and his thought process. We then examined how his understanding evolved into a Sufi order after



his time. Over time, as the Mevlevi order took on a more institutional structure, specific disciplines were introduced into its rituals. Therefore, our study focused on the foundations of the Mevlevi order's rituals and worship practices and their transformations. Finally, we addressed the current state of the Mevlevi order today. Since the Mevlevi practices were occasionally compared with those of other orders, we primarily employed a comparative method in the study. In some parts of the text, we adopted a phenomenological approach by presenting the views of Mevlevi individuals. Due to the need to explain specific religious terms in Islamic mysticism, we provided explanations of the most important ones in the footnotes. Additionally, out of concern that some religious terms may not have exact equivalents in English, we included the original terms in parentheses next to the English translations.

The life of Mevlâna Jalaluddin Rumi

One of the great representatives of Islamic mysticism, Mevlâna Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273), was born in Balkh, present-day Afghanistan. He is known as »Rumi«, he spent most of his life in Konya, where his mausoleum is also located (Fürûzanfer 1986, 4–5). His original name was Muhammad, and his title was Jalaluddin. The name »Mevlâna« which means »our master« and is used to denote respect for essential figures, became a unique name associated with Jalaluddin Muhammad, typically used by those devoted to him (Karaismailoğlu 2007a, 2–3; Can 2004, 31).

Mevlâna's father, Bahaüddin Veled, was one of the prominent scholars of Balkh and held the title »Sultanü'l-Ulema«, which means »Sultan of the Scholars«. When Mevlâna was still a child, his father had to leave Balkh for specific reasons and moved to Nishapur, present-day Iran. There, they encountered the famous Sufi mystic Feridüddin Attar. It is said that Attar remarked to Mevlâna's father, »I hope that your son will soon burn with divine love and ignite the hearts of many« (Can 2004, 32–35).

After visiting Nishapur and Baghdad, Mevlâna and his family travelled to the Hijaz to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. Their subsequent journey took them to the lands of Syria, where they stayed for a while in the cities of Aleppo and Damascus (Karaismailoğlu 2007b, 23). During that period,



Aleppo and Damascus were essential centres for studying Islamic sciences. In Aleppo, considered one of the critical centres of the Hanafi school of thought, Mevlâna studied Islamic sciences at the Haleviye Madrasah. He then moved to Damascus, which had become a refuge for those fleeing the Mongol threat. Mevlâna was warmly welcomed by the scholars of Damascus and was hosted at the Mukaddimiye Madrasah, where he was held in great esteem. During his time in Damascus, Mevlâna met Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi and attended his lectures. After spending seven years in Aleppo and Damascus, Mevlâna and his family embarked on a journey to Anatolia. They first travelled to Malatya and then to Erzincan. Their next destination was the city of Karaman (Larende), located 100 kilometres from Konya. In Karaman, Mevlâna married Gevher Hatun; from this marriage, his sons Sultan Veled and Alaaddin Çelebi were born (Karaismailoğlu 2007b, 23). After spending seven years in Karaman, Mevlâna and his family moved to Konya, where he would reside for the rest of his life. During their stay in Karaman, Mevlâna's mother passed away. Later, in 1231, his master, spiritual guide, and father died in Konya (Gürer 2015, 33). To deepen his knowledge, Mevlâna returned to Aleppo and Damascus, cities he had previously visited, and studied jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*), and Islamic principles (*usul*) at the Haleviye Madrasah (Hidayetoğlu 2003, 18). In Konya, Mevlâna continued his studies with the leading scholars of the time and eventually became a religious scholar and Sufi master. After meeting Shams of Tabriz, Mevlâna's thoughts underwent significant changes. He passed away on December 17, 1273 (Gürer 2015, 33.43). His funeral in Konya was attended by a large crowd, including not only Muslims but also Christians (Yeniterzi 2004, 161).

Those who influenced Mevlâna's thought structure

Mevlâna followed the Hanafi school of thought and was raised by his father, a respected Islamic scholar and Sufi from Balkh. His first Sufi teacher was Sayyid Burhaneddin Tirmizi, who succeeded his father (Gamard 2010, 1233).

The influence of these two revered figures in Mevlâna's life is profound and deserves our utmost respect and appreciation. To truly understand Mevlâna's thoughts, one must be aware of the changes and transformations



he experienced. Two individuals in his life are described as mirrors of divine love. The first is Shams of Tabriz, and the other is Goldsmith Selahaddin Zerkubi.

The most significant turning point in Mevlâna's life was his encounter with Shams of Tabriz. In 1244, when Shams of Tabriz arrived in Konya, he profoundly influenced Mevlâna's life. After meeting Shams, Mevlâna abandoned his outwardly focused (*zahir*) and rigid understanding of religion, embracing instead a more ecstatic Sufi approach. Entirely devoting himself to Shams' company, Mevlâna stopped attending the madrasa and the dervish lodge and ceased engaging with his students (Gürer 2015, 32–35). Mevlâna hosted Shams in his home and became deeply devoted to him in a Sufi sense. Shams, in turn, greatly admired Mevlâna. This mutual affection sparked jealousy among those around them, eventually leading to Shams leaving Konya (Eflaki 1973, 165; Kayaoğlu 2002, 5).

According to tradition, Shams prayed to Allah in his youth, asking, »Is there not a single person among Your creatures who can withstand my companionship?« As a result of this prayer, Shams was sent to Anatolia, where he met Mevlâna. Anna Marie Schimmel compares the strong Sufi bond between Mevlâna and Shams to the mystical relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu (Schimmel 2003, 20).

According to a story in Eflaki's book *The Manaqib al-Arifin (The Acts of the Adepts)*, during a gathering of Konya's prominent figures, Mevlâna was asked, »Where is the place of honour?« Mevlâna replied, »For scholars, the place of honour is the centre of the room. For gnostics, it is in a corner of the house. For Sufis, it is at the edge of the room. However, in lovers' eyes, the place of honour is beside the beloved.« Then he stood up and sat next to Shams (Eflaki 1973, 187).

An interesting story is also told about Goldsmith Selahaddin Zerkubi, who significantly influenced Mevlâna's life. One day, as Mevlâna was walking past a shop in the goldsmiths' bazaar, he heard the sound of Selahaddin hammering gold inside. The rhythmic sound of the hammer immediately brought Mevlâna into ecstasy, and he began to perform the »sema« (spiritual dance) with divine love. Seeing Mevlâna whirling outside, the goldsmith stepped out and fell at Mevlâna's feet, exclaiming, »A treasure has



appeared in Zerkubi's shop. What a beautiful form, what beautiful meaning. What beauty! What beauty!« (Gürer 2015, 39–40) After this experience in the goldsmith's shop, Mevlâna expressed his emotions through »sema« and composed poetry during that time (Gürer 2015, 40).

Mevlâna, close friends with Zerkubi, spent six months in seclusion in Zerkubi's cell, living without eating or drinking (Schimmel 2003, 19). These experiences had a significant impact on the Mevlevi tradition. Consequently, while his father, Bahaeddin Veled, and Seyyid Burhaneddin influenced Mevlâna during his childhood and youth, Zerkubi and Shams of Tabriz later became his unique role models. This model played a crucial role in shaping the core of the Mevlevi order (Ceyhan 2009, 56–57; Ceyhan 2010, 513; Schimmel 2003, 21–23).

Mevlâna lived during the time of Ibn Arabi and his student Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi, maintaining close relationships with them and being influenced by them to some extent. Although he adopted Ibn Arabi's concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being) and expressed it in his works uniquely, Mevlâna also developed his distinct understanding of Sufism. Ibn Arabi's teachings prioritize knowledge, wisdom, existence, and divinity, whereas in Mevlâna's thoughts, love, passion, ecstasy, attraction, and the spiritual dance (*sema*) take precedence (Uludağ 2007, 79; Demirli 2007, 246–247; Aydın 1989, 157–161).

Mevlâna's Sufi life was initially rooted in the Kubrawiyya order, to which his father, Bahâeddin Veled, was affiliated. However, the Sufi lifestyle of Shams of Tabriz, whom Mevlâna later met, was a developed and transformed version of a tradition that began with Bayezid Bistami and continued through Fariduddin Attar. As a result of his friendship with Shams between 1244 and 1247, Mevlâna began to live a passionate Sufi life, composing poetry centred on love and affection. During this period, he was deeply influenced by Shams, who was an exuberant and ecstatic dervish (Uludağ 2007, 79).

In general, three stages can be identified when evaluating Mevlâna's religious understanding. These are Mevlâna before Shams, Mevlâna with Shams, and Mevlâna after Shams, representing three different phases of his life (Uludağ 2007, 79). In addition to Mevlâna's religious experiences, the



works he left behind have become significant sources for the Mevlevi order. The most well-known of his works today is the *Mesnevi*. This work encompasses all aspects of Sufi thought and is essential to Islamic culture. While some of his works are in Arabic, most are in Persian (Öngören 2004, 446–447).

The formation and institutionalization of the Mevlevi order

The Mevlevi order, which emerged in Mevlevi lodges, is a Konya-based Sufi order that embraced Mevlâna's mystical thoughts. The formation and development of the Mevlevi order occurred after Mevlâna's death (Açık 2004, 99). Like other Sufi movements in Anatolia, Mevlevi initially thought it was not a fully established classical order with defined principles and a fully organized lodge system (Tanrıkorur 2004, 468). When it was suggested that they build a »home for lovers« next to the madrasa where Mevlâna taught, he opposed the idea, saying, »We do not build a house under this celestial dome«. However, it is also true that during Mevlâna's lifetime, the madrasa where he resided had the simple nature of a lodge (Tanrıkorur 2004, 468). Hüsameddin Çelebi made efforts to expand the core structure of the order and systematize the rituals, but Mevlâna's son, Sultan Veled, made the most significant impact. Because of his influential role in institutionalizing the Mevlevi order, Sultan Veled is called the »second *pir*«⁴ (spiritual leader). Indeed, Mevlâna himself followed a Sufi path distant from formal ceremonies and rituals. The only ceremony attributed to Mevlâna was cutting a few hairs from the dervishes' hair, beard, and mustache (Küçük 2010, 317–318).

Another development that emerged after Mevlâna is the concept of »çelebîlik« (leadership within the order). While Mevlâna was still alive, he designated Hüsameddin Çelebi as his successor, and after Mevlâna's passing, Hüsameddin Çelebi became the head of the order. Later, the leadership of the Mevlevi order passed to Mevlâna's son, Sultan Veled. With his son Ulu Arif Çelebi succeeding him, the order's leadership became a tradition

4 *Pir* is the founder of a religious order that guides people on their Sufi journey (Arpağuş 2007, 272).



that continued from father to son (Akmaz-Sürme 2018, 426; Çelebi 1993, 261).

Sultan Veled appointing his son Ulu Arif Çelebi to the position of spiritual guidance marked a turning point in the history of the order. Following this event, the Mevlevi order began to be represented by sheiks from Mevlâna's lineage, who held the title »Çelebi« (Tanrıkorur 2004, 468). Thus, after Sultan Veled, the organizational structure of the Mevlevi order became characterized by administrative centralization, with the »Çelebilik« office serving as its symbol (Işın 2004, 96).

The continuation of leadership (*tarikât*) from father to son in the Mevlevi order was intended to prevent conflicts within the order. While this tradition of passing the position of sheik from father to son is cited as a justification for Sultan Veled's aim to spread Mevlevi teachings, it has also been criticized for not aligning with Mevlâna's original understanding of Sufism (Küçük 2010, 1318).

Another significant impact of Sultan Veled on the Mevlevi order is his provision of the most reliable information about his father, Mevlâna, and his close circle. Consequently, his work, *Ibtida-nama*, has become a later-generation primary source.

Mevlâna, who adhered to the »melamet«⁵ tradition which Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi regarded as the highest stage in Sufism, opposed building tombs and covering them with domes. Despite this, during the period of his successor, Hüsameddin Çelebi, and with the encouragement of Sultan Veled, a mausoleum was built over Mevlâna's grave. Later, this place, where Mevlâna and his relatives were buried, became a pilgrimage site (Tanrıkorur 2004, 468).

5 *Melamet*: an understanding of Sufism that emerged in the Khorasan region in the IXth century and later became widespread throughout the Islamic world (Azamat 2004, 24).



The spread of the Mevlevi order

While Sultan Veled meticulously established the rules that Mevlevi were to follow, he also sent them to various Anatolian cities to spread their order. The spread of Mevlevi to different places increased even more under the leadership of Ulu Arif Çelebi (Örder 2007, 134–135; Akmaz-Sürme 2018, 426).

Mevlevi order peaked during Divane Mehmed Çelebi (d. 1544), the seventh-generation descendant of Ulu Arif Çelebi. Therefore, the period of expansion of the Mevlevi order across different regions spans from the 14th to the 16th century (Göyünç 1991, 96).

The Mevlevi order was introduced into the Ottoman Empire's territories through the Mevlevihane⁶ established in Edirne by Sultan Murad II (1421–1451) in 1426 (Tanrıkorur 2004, 469). During the 14th and 15th century, the Mevlevi order essentially completed its organizational structure and secured a significant place within the vast geography of the Ottoman Empire. During this period, Mevlevihanes could be found everywhere, from Konya to Bosnia and Crimea to Thessaloniki (Ölmez 2007, 365). On the other hand, while Bektashi lodges attracted the interest of the Janissaries, Mevlevi lodges appealed more to the elite. Accordingly, it is notable that politicians, musicians, poets, and calligraphers frequented the Mevlevi lodges (Schimmel 2003, 33).

Although there were exceptions, the relationships between the sultans and the Mevlevi were generally positive during the Ottoman period. As a result of the good relationship they established with the Sultans and other statesmen, the Mevlevi received substantial support. For example, Sultan Bayezid II (1481–1512) renovated the sarcophagi at the Mevlâna tomb in Konya and sent valuable fabrics to cover them. His son, Sultan Selim I (1512–1520), allocated endowments for the Mevlâna lodge in Konya. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566) also commissioned the

6 *Mevlevihane*: the general name of the lodges, dervish lodges and asitanes belonging to the Mevlevi order.



construction of the semahane (ritual hall)⁷ and mosque within the Mevlâna tomb (Akgündüz 2007, 347).

The Mevlevi Order experienced its golden age during the reign of Ottoman Sultan Selim III (1789–1807), known for his musical compositions. Being a Mevlevi himself, Sultan Selim had Mevlevihanes (Mevlevi lodges) repaired and increased the number of endowments supporting them. From the time of Selim III and later during the reign of Mahmud II, the Mevlevi order gained greater prestige in the eyes of state administrators (Akgündüz 2007, 349). This rise in status was partly due to political reasons. With the abolition of the Janissary Corps, the Bektashi Order fell out of favour and was banned, while the Mevlevi order, along with other Sufi orders, continued its activities. The Mevlevi order's neutrality greatly influenced the close interest shown by the state administrators towards the Mevlevis and, in some cases, its slight support for the state during the abolition of the Janissary Corps. During Mahmud II's reign, nearly all the Mevlevi lodges in the country received assistance; they were repaired, maintained, and renovated, with new additions and financial support provided to sustain them (Yiner 2007, 358).

The 19th century marked the peak period for the music used in Mevlevi rituals, with significant contributions from Sultan Selim III and Sultan Mahmud II. Sultan Selim III, a member of the Mevlevi order, occasionally visited the Mevlevihanes in Istanbul to follow the musical activities there. He held the Mevlevi dede⁸ in high regard. He would visit the Galata Mevlevihane after Friday prayers, where he engaged in poetry and music discussions with the renowned poet Sheikh Galip after the ceremonies (Beydilli 2009, 425).

During Sultan Abdulhamid II's reign (1876–1909), the situation of the Mevlevis declined compared to previous sultans. Although the Mevlevis initially established good relations with the Sultan during the early years of his reign, problems eventually arose (Ölmez 2007, 365).

7 *Semahane* (*samâ`-khâna*): the place where the sema ceremony is performed in Mevlevi lodges.

8 *Dede*: a title given to dervishes who have reached a certain level in some religious orders established in Anatolia. In Mevlevi order, it is the name given to a person who has completed a thousand and one days of ascetic service, has reached the rank of dervish, and has become the owner of a cell in the dervish lodge (Uludağ 1994, 76; Gölpınarlı 1963, 12).



Worship and prayers in Mevlevi order

Mevlâna did not approve of giving up the blessings of the world completely while fulfilling the requirements of religion, and on the contrary, he wanted to perform worship with sincerity and to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad meticulously (Meyerovitch 2003, 108–109). In many parts of Mevlâna's important work *Mesnevi*, there is information about prayer and other forms of worship in Islam. In some places, Mevlâna tells a story about worship and draws lessons from it (Schimmel 2003, 149).

In many parts of the *Mesnevi*, there are examples of the importance of dhikr and prayer in Muslim life (*Mesnevi*, 2: 56b–2463, 260). Mevlâna cites examples from the prayers of both the Prophet Muhammad and many other Prophets such as Solomon, Moses, Jesus, and narrates events through them (*Mesnevi*, 2: 56b–2207, 245).

In *Mesnevi*, prayer is emphasised the most among the basic worships of Islam, but fasting, pilgrimage and zakat are also mentioned. For Mevlâna, the fulfilment of these worships is as important as the observance of its piety dimension. For example, in his following statement, he states that the person who will give zakat should be careful to ensure that the property he earns is halal: »While he gives (zakat) from his own property, how can he steal the property of his co-religionist?« (*Mesnevi*, 5: 214b–190, 617) Mevlâna gives examples of the practices of Sufis as well as the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad regarding worship (*Mesnevi*, 3: 104b–1697, 365).

One day when Sufis asked Mevlâna about the deep meaning of prayer and whether there is a shorter way than prayer, he replied as follows: »Prayer has a beginning and an end. But the spirit of prayer is eternal. So the essence of prayer is not only its form. Prayer is preparation for extinction and rapture in God. All shapes remain outside. Then there is no place in the soul even for Gabriel, who is an immaculate soul.« (Meyerovitch 2003, 109)

One of the most important acts of worship in Mevlevis is fasting. According to Mevlâna, fasting is the most important weapon to defeat the ego.



According to him, fasting is a secret of the Qur'an and a »burak«⁹ that takes man to *mi'raj* (the prophet mohammed's ascension) (Cunbur 1988, 132.140).

One of the important religious practices in Mevlevi order is »evrad«. In Sufism, »evrad«, which refers to the worship and dhikr performed at a certain time and amount in order to get closer to Allah, has its own characteristics in Mevlevism. The »evrad« of the Mevlevis consists of prayer verses from the Qur'an, prayers of the Prophet Muhammad, Mevlâna and the Mevlevi elders (Şahin 2007, 260).

In Mevlevism, there are also certain procedures for the performance of »evrad«. First of all, Rumi recommended reciting the »dhikr« at a certain time with a sincere heart, with complete purity and by gathering thoughts at one point. Apart from this, there are many other prayers performed during the sema ceremony in Mevlevi order (Şahin 2007, 265.270). The most striking religious practices in Mevlevism are the sema ceremony and asceticism (chila).

Sema ceremony

The term »sema«, which means hearing, listening, and beautiful sound, refers in Sufism to »the Sufi's hearing of divine inspiration that comes to him and transmitting it to his heart«. Examples dating back to the early centuries of Sufi history indicate that Sufis performed the same ritual. The fact that they regarded the places where sema was performed as assemblies where divine mercy descended suggests that sema was considered a necessity for them (Gürer 2023, 110–111).

The sema ceremony in the Mevlevi Order developed by the Sufi concept of »devran«¹⁰ (spiritual rotation or circling). It is noted that Mevlâna, inspired by the religious gatherings he attended, would sometimes engage

9 *Burak*: The mount that is said to have carried the Prophet Muhammad on the night of the Mi'raj.

10 *Devran*: the *dhikr* of Sufis alone or collectively by turning round in ecstasy.



in sema spontaneously without adhering to any specific ritual or procedure (Eflaki 1973, 165.174.186).

It is mentioned in various sources that after meeting Shams in Konya, Mevlâna underwent a transformation, dancing day and night, attracting the attention of the townspeople (Kayaoğlu 2002, 147). The sema that Mevlâna performed at home, in the marketplace, or sometimes during lessons was a spontaneous ritual, not bound by any specific rules. As observed, the sema ceremony at this stage was simple and lacked a defined structure (Özcan 2004, 464). However, with Sultan Walad, who played a significant role in establishing the Mevlevi Order, sema became more disciplined and systematic. The primary rules, principles, rituals, and attire related to the Mevlevi Order were solidified during the time of Ulu Arif Çelebi. After the 15th century, all the regulations regarding the Mevlevi Order were finalized and remained unchanged, continuing in this form to the present day (Akmaz-Sürme 2018, 426).

As per Jalaluddin Bakır Çelebi (1926–1996), the 21st-generation descendant of Mevlâna, the sema ceremony in the Mevlevi Order is structured into 7 sections and four salams (ritual greetings).¹¹ The Mevlevi ritual commences with a eulogy (*nât*) that venerates the Prophet Muhammad, a pivotal figure in the Sufi tradition. This eulogy sets the spiritual tone for the entire ceremony. Following this, the *kudüm*¹² (a type of drum) is heard, and the sound of the *ney*¹³ (reed flute), symbolizing the breath that gives life to everything, is played. The fourth section, known as the Sultan Veled segment, sees the dervishes greet each other three times while walking in a circular formation, symbolizing the greeting of the hidden soul to the soul. When the ceremony reaches the salam section, the semazen (whirling dervish) removes the black cloak he is wearing, symbolizing his symbolic rebirth into the truth. He then crosses his arms over his chest, representing the number 1, signifying his testimony to the oneness of God. After kissing

11 *Selam (salâm)*: Mevlevi call each part of the four-phase ritual a »salam«.

12 *Kudüm*: percussion instrument used in Turkish music.

13 *Ney (nay)*: a wind instrument used in Turkish music. The fact that the first eighteen couplets of Mevlâna's Mesnevi, which begins with the words »Listen to the *ney*...« are devoted to the *ney* has given it a special value, especially in the Mevlevi order. For this reason, the *ney* is called »nay-i sherif« in this order (Uygun 2007, 69).



the hand of the sheikh to seek permission to perform the ritual, the semazen begins the sema. There are four salams during this stage: In the first salam, the semazen reaches the knowledge of truth and becomes aware of his servitude to God. In the second salam, he is filled with awe for the power of God. His gratitude transforms into love in the third salam, and he loses himself in the beloved. The fourth salam signifies the completion of the spiritual journey and the acceptance of destiny. Both the sheikh and the head semazen, as leaders of the Mevlevi Order, participate in this final salam, reinforcing the sense of community and shared experience (Çelebi 2004, 197–198).

In the sixth section of the ceremony, the semazen recites the following verse from the Qur'an: »To Allah belongs the East and the West. Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-encompassing and all-knowing.« (Al-Baqara [2], 115) In the seventh section, the sema ceremony concludes with reciting the Surah Al-Fatiha from the Qur'an. Afterward, the dervishes retire to their cells to meditate, engaging in silent reflection without speaking to anyone following the *sema* ceremony (Çelebi 2004, 198).

The religious depths of symbols and movements in the sema ceremony

According to the Mevlevi tradition, the movements in the sema ceremony carry profound religious significance. The most prominent movement during the sema is spinning around one's own axis and centre, symbolizing the rotation of all existing things. The number of participants in the sema, often a multiple of nine, represents the planets revolving around the sun. The sheikh, who leads the sema ceremony, symbolizes absolute existence in his role as the representative of God on earth (Aydeniz 2009, 48).

In the sema ceremony, the red sheepskin (*post*)¹⁴ placed in the centre of the arena not only designates the sheikh's position during the ritual but also

¹⁴ *Post*: the term expressing the rank of sheikh in Sufism. The tradition of the *post* in religious orders is based on the fleece of the ram sent to Prophet Abraham for sacrifice. In addition to the *post* of authority in Mevlevi and Bektashi schools, there are various *posts* that carry symbolic meanings.



represents Mevlâna himself. In Sufi culture, the post generally symbolizes the authority of the sheikh. In the Mevlevi tradition, the red colour of the post representing Mevlâna is significant because it symbolizes reunion. The red colour is chosen to signify the union with God, as Mevlâna passed away at sunset on Sunday, December 17, 1273, marking his return to the Divine (Gürer 2023, 113).

The place where the sheikh stands, considered the starting point of the *semahane*, symbolizes the realm of absolute existence, while the point directly opposite represents the human state. Movement to the right from the post signifies the descent from absolute existence into the human realm. In contrast, movement to the left symbolizes the ascent from the human state back to absolute existence, representing the attainment of spiritual maturity. This reflects the concept of »davr« (spiritual rotation) in Sufism as manifested in the Mevlevi ceremony (Özcan 2004, 466).

Semazens removing their cloaks at the beginning of the sema symbolizes shedding of all human attributes and revealing all hidden secrets. This act represents the Day of Judgment, where a person's entire being is stripped bare, and all secrets are laid bare. The white garment the Mevlevi wore during the sema represents their shrouds, while the tall hat on their heads symbolizes a tombstone. The movement initiated by the sound of the ney (reed flute) signifies the concept of resurrection, representing the spiritual rebirth of the individual (Aydeniz 2009, 50).

In the sema, the right hand's position is raised upward, and the left hand is extended downward with open arms, symbolizing receiving divine grace from Allah with the right hand and turning away from everything else. In contrast, the left hand represents the distribution of that grace to the world (Aydeniz 2009, 50).

When the sema ceremony, the most striking aspect of the Mevlevi Order, is generally evaluated, the following points stand out: Mevlâna began practicing sema after he met with Shams, driven by spiritual ecstasy. With

The color of the official *post* representing Mevlâna is red because the sun turns red when it sets and Mevlâna passed away at that time. In addition, red is accepted as the color of manifestation and emergence. (Arpağuş 2007, 332–333)

the establishment of the Mevlevi Order, sema became a structured and systematic practice conducted within a set of defined rules. After the 17th century, during the Ottoman period, sema ceremonies were performed in Mevlevihanes as grand and elaborate rituals (Kayaoğlu 2002, 139).

The Chila (*çile*) in the Mevlevi order

In Sufism, *çile* refers to a period of strict asceticism and deprivation undertaken to purify the soul by overcoming personal desires. The root meaning of the word *çile* is connected to the number forty, which holds special significance in Sufism. As the Qur'an (Surah Al-A'raf [7], 142) mentioned, the Prophet Moses spent forty nights on Mount Sinai to receive divine revelation. Sufis also base the concept of *çile* on a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: »Whoever devotes forty days to God with sincerity will have the springs of wisdom flow from their tongue.« (Eraydın 1993, 315)

In Sufism, the period of seclusion, typically lasting forty days, is extended to 1001 days in the Mevlevi order (Eraydın 1993, 315). The 1001 days for *çile* are rooted in Mevlâna's total time in spiritual retreats (*khalwat*).¹⁵ During this period, a person entering the Mevlevi order undertakes eighteen different forms of service, each in a distinct area, over 1001 days (Çıpan 2007, 166).

Entering *çile* means committing to a strict discipline, where the individual cannot go anywhere without permission, and any behaviour that violates the rules nullifies the time spent in *çile*, requiring them to start over. The journey of *çile* begins in the kitchen (*matbakh*). The kitchen is not just a place where food is prepared; it is also where Mevlevi dervishes undergo their preparation, growth, and maturation process (Demirci 2007, 105). In the *matbakh*, it is not just the food cooked over the 1001 days, but the dervish himself. A person who enters the order in a »raw« state will break their ego and mature spiritually (Demirci 2007, 105).

15 *Khalwat (Halvet)*: a Sufi term meaning to prefer living in isolated places in order to worship better and to be protected from sin (Uludağ 1997, 386).



In most Sufi orders, the sheikh typically teaches the disciple one of the names of Allah to meditate upon. However, in the Mevlevi Order, novices are assigned physically demanding tasks, such as sweeping the floors or repairing the shoes of other dervishes, to help them eliminate their pride. This is not a journey for the faint-hearted, as it requires unwavering discipline and dedication. In all circumstances, the disciple must perform these duties with obedience, patience, and gratitude to Allah. After working all day, the person undergoing *çile* is allowed to rest only in the evening. They sleep in a small cell without a bed and, even in very cold conditions, are permitted to cover themselves with only a cloak. Among the dervishes, a person known as the *meydancı*¹⁶ is responsible for the cell and wakes the disciples every day an hour before sunrise (Meyerovitch 2003, 107–108).

While the disciple fulfils their challenging duties, they also perform the obligatory acts of worship and additional voluntary prayers (*nafile*). Every morning, following the prayer, the disciple participates in the *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and the gathering in the *Meydan* (courtyard), where they observe the order's customs. In their free time, the disciples read the Qur'an and *evrad* (prayers and litanies) and attend the elders' teachings and conversations (Şafak 2007, 111).

One of the most significant tasks a disciple undertakes during the *çile* (spiritual trial) is cleaning the toilet. This duty, believed to break a person's ego, is assigned to the disciple near the end of their *çile*. When the Meydancı Dede (the elder responsible for overseeing the disciples) would go out one day and announce to those present, »The service of that dervish is cleaning the ablution centre (*abrizci*)«,¹⁷ it was understood that the dervish's *çile* was nearing completion. However, the dervish, who had long lost track of time and was unaware of the procedure, might not realize the significance of this statement (Demirci 2007, 113).

16 *Meydancı* is the person who takes care of the square services in the Mevlevi lodge, lays the sheikh's post in the semahan when the sema ritual is to be performed, brings the sheikh, removes the post after the sema ritual, announces the meal time and many other services (Gölpınarlı 1963, 27).

17 *Abrizci* is the person who looks after the cleanliness of the ablution latrines in Mevlevi lodges. This is the last task given to the disciple, one week before he is due to complete his duty (Şafak 2007, 116).



After completing the *çile*, the dervish is settled into a cell following various ceremonies. After the night prayer, the elders bring gifts to the dervish and share coffee. Three days later, the *Meydancı Dede* goes to the dervish's cell to ask for permission. Upon hearing the response of »Hu«¹⁸ he opens the curtains and takes the dervish to the sheikh of the lodge. The sheikh then administers the oath of allegiance to the dervish and recites the 10th verse of Surah Al-Fath from the Qur'an. At this point, the dervish has reached the final stage. The temporary *sikke*¹⁹ (headgear) given to the disciple is removed, and the official dervish *sikke* is placed on his head. Thus, having completed the 1001-day *çile*, the disciple is now conferred with the title of dervish and *dede* (*Grandfather*) (Demirci 2007, 114).

The Mevlevi order in modern times

In 1925, a law in Turkey led to the closure of all Sufi lodges (*tekkes*) and shrines, including Mevlâna's lodge (Önder 1998, 261). Later, in 1926, another law was passed, reopening the shrines of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli and Mevlâna as museums. Following the ban on Sufi orders' activities, the head of the Mevlevi Order at that time, Çelebi Abdülhalim's son, Muhammed Bakır Çelebi, was appointed as the sheikh in Aleppo, and the order's headquarters was moved from Konya to Aleppo. This marked the end of the *Çelebi* leadership in Anatolia. The lodge in Aleppo continued its activities until 1944, but it was closed with the deterioration of relations between Syria and the Republic of Turkey due to the Hatay issue. Consequently, the *Çelebi* leadership and the Mevlevi order as an institution were consigned entirely to history (Akmaz-Sürme 2018, 427; Tanrıkorur 2004, 471).

One of the most notable ceremonies related to the Mevlevi tradition today are the commemorative events held in memory of Mevlâna's death anniversary. These ceremonies began with small-scale sema performances in Konya in 1946 and 1954. The efforts of Jalaluddin Çelebi, the son of Mehmed Bakır Çelebi, to organize conferences on Mevlevi traditions in Europe and the United States increased interest in Mevlevi practices

18 *Hu*: according to Sufis, it is the name that refers to the essence of Allah.

19 *Sikke*: the name of the Mevlevi hat made of felt.



outside of Turkey, even leading to the establishment of new *Mevlevihanes* (Mevlevi lodges). As a result, interest in the Mevlevi order has grown in Turkey and Western countries, mainly Europe and America (Cunz 2010, 1132; Tanrıkorur 2004, 471).

Today, sema ceremonies are performed by Mevlevi dervishes and semazens on days considered sacred by Muslims, as well as on special occasions and nights (Akmaz-Sürme 2018, 427). Due to the presence of Mevlâna's tomb and his legacy, Konya continues to hold a prominent place in the Mevlevi tradition. In Konya, sema ceremonies, open to public participation, are held three times a week. The most significant sema ceremonies are the *Şeb-i Arus* celebrations, which occur from December 1st to 17th each year. During this more than two-week period, international events are organized to commemorate Mevlâna. Konya, in particular, attracts many visitors from both Turkey and abroad, contributing to religious tourism (Akmaz-Sürme 2018, 428).

After 2005, the international recognition of Mevlâna and the Mevlevi tradition increased even further. In 2005, UNESCO declared the *Mevlevi Sema Ceremony* as a masterpiece within the framework of the *Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* program. Mevlâna was included in UNESCO's Anniversary Celebrations List in 2007, marking the 800th anniversary of his birth. Numerous events and *sema* ceremonies related to the Mevlevi tradition were organized that year. In 2008, UNESCO further elevated the global recognition of the Mevlevi order by inscribing the *Mevlevi Sema Ceremonies* onto the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This inclusion significantly enhanced the worldwide visibility of Mevlevi practices.

Conclusion

Sufi life has existed since the early periods of Islam. However, the formation of today's religious orders in the Islamic world and their institutionalization took place after the 13th century. At that time, many orders emerged in Central Asia, the Middle East and Anatolia. Mevlevism is an order that emerged in Konya, the central city of Anatolia, and soon became active in many regions from the Middle East to the Balkans.



The origins of some of the religious practices and prayers of Mevlevism are similar to those of other Islamic orders. However, Mevlevi order also has its own unique religious practices. The most notable are the sema ceremony and asceticism (*chila*). Although these religious practices have their origins in other Sufi groups, Mevlevism has developed a unique understanding of tariqa with some of the symbols it uses. Although the sema ritual is practised in many Sufi orders, its most complete form is in Mevlevism. However, Mevlevism has also been shaped in the historical process. In this context, Mevlevism is rooted in the religious understanding of Mevlâna Jalaluddin Rumi. However, the systematization of this sect in many areas such as prayer, worship, tradition, art and music occurred in the later period. In this sense, the foundation of Mevlevism was laid by Mevlâna, its columns were built during the time of Hüsameddin Çelebi and Sultan Veled, and its roof and final form were completed in the 16th century. In the following years, although there were changes in some of the rites and procedures of Mevlevism, these were not radical changes, but additions to the previous ones. The most glorious period of Mevlevism took place under the patronage of the Ottoman Empire. Mevlevi lodges were established in many geographies where the Ottoman Empire spread. Today, Mevlevi order, which has attracted great interest in Western countries as well as in Turkey, is coming to the forefront especially with its sema ceremony, and attracts attention not only in a religious context but also in cultural terms.



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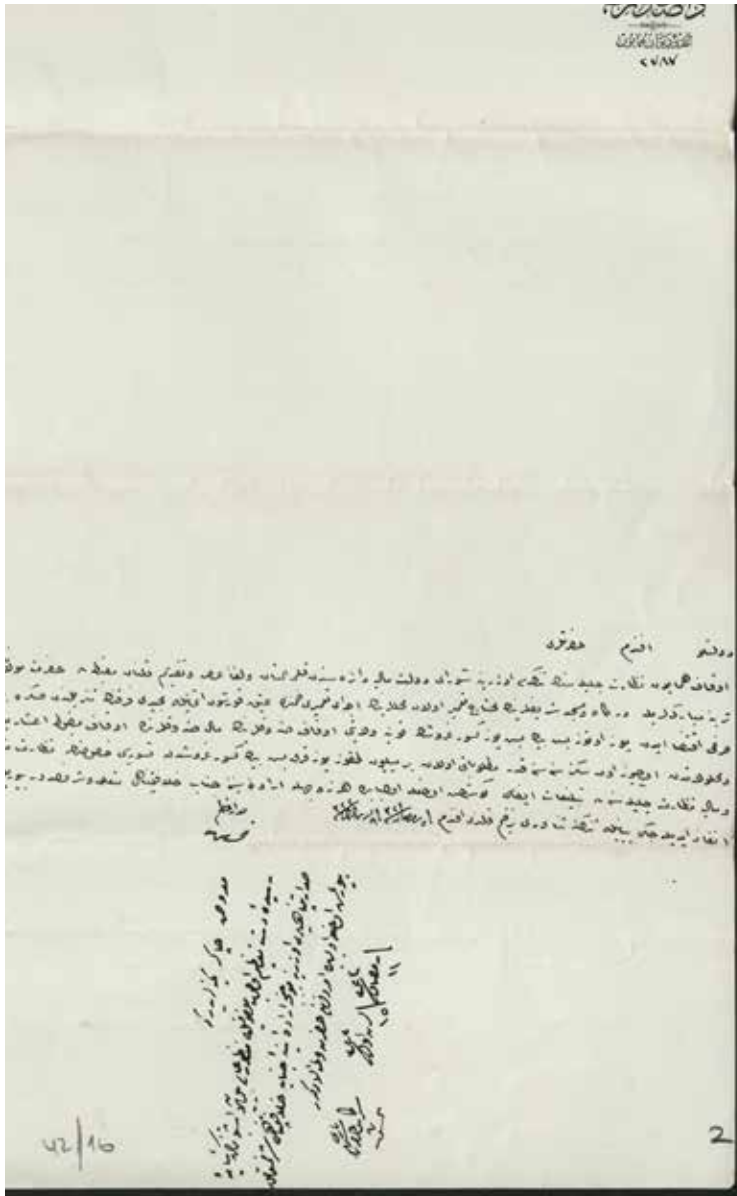


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Picture: 1

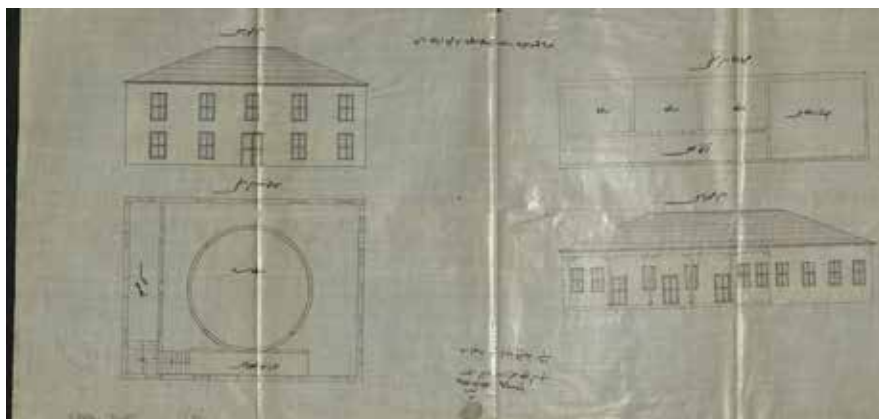
Archive document regarding the repair costs of the Mevlâna tomb, dervish lodge and mosque in Konya covered by the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman archive document number (BOA): İ.EV. 42/16, November 3, 1906.



Picture: 2A-B

Semahane and rooms of the Mevlevi Dervish Lodge in Skopje (North Macedonia).

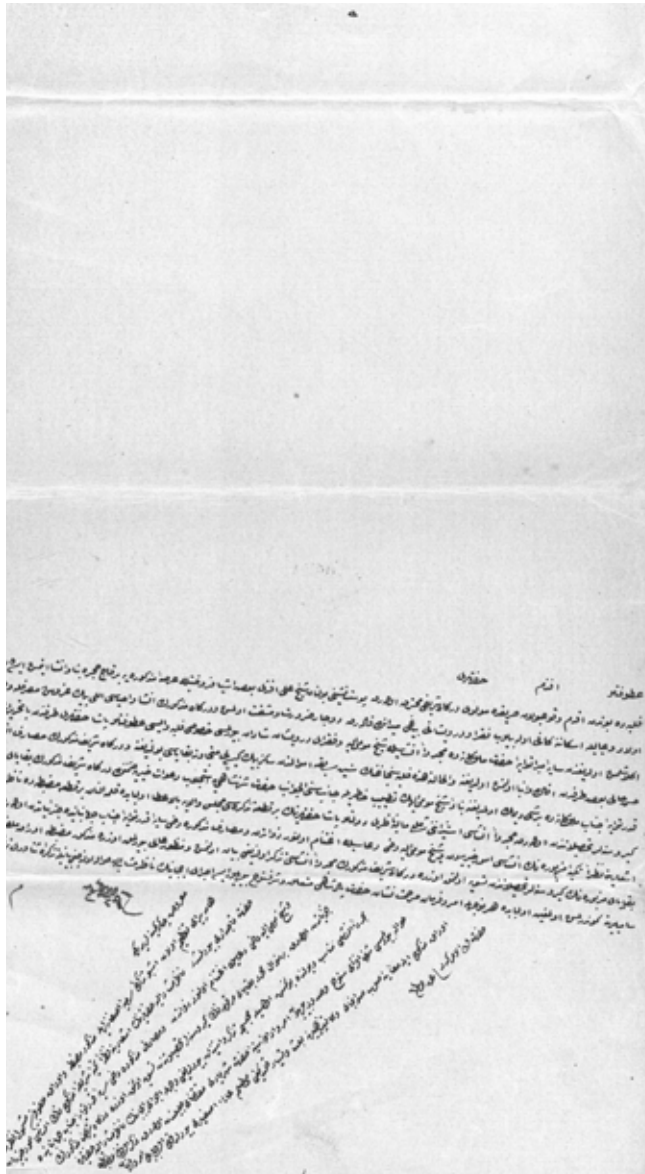
Ottoman archive document number (BOA): Y.PRK.TNF. 3/30, March 20, 1892.



Picture: 3

Official document regarding the construction of the Mevlevi Lodge in Plovdiv (Bulgaria) during the Ottoman Period.

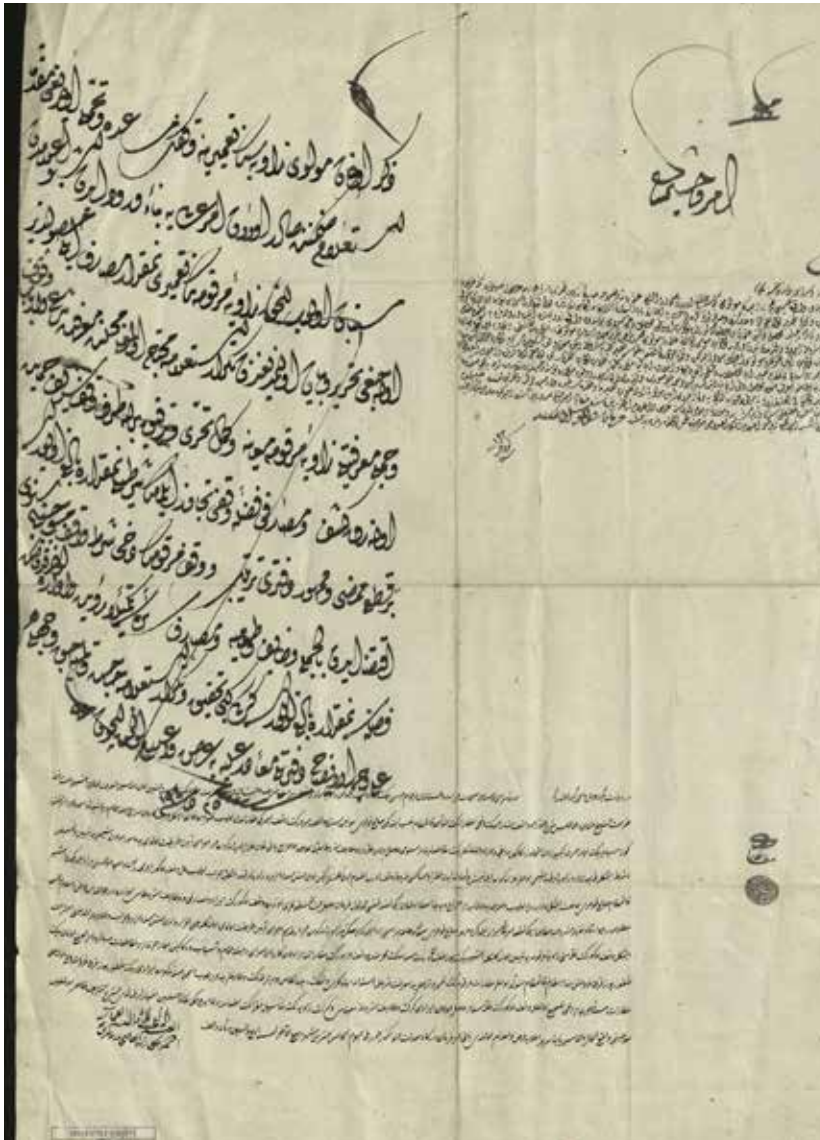
Ottoman archive document number (BOA): İ.MVL. 127/3336,
October 27, 1848.



Picture: 4

Ottoman archive document regarding the exploration of the Mevlevi Lodge belonging to the İsa Bey Foundation in Sarajevo for its reconstruction, since it was in ruins.

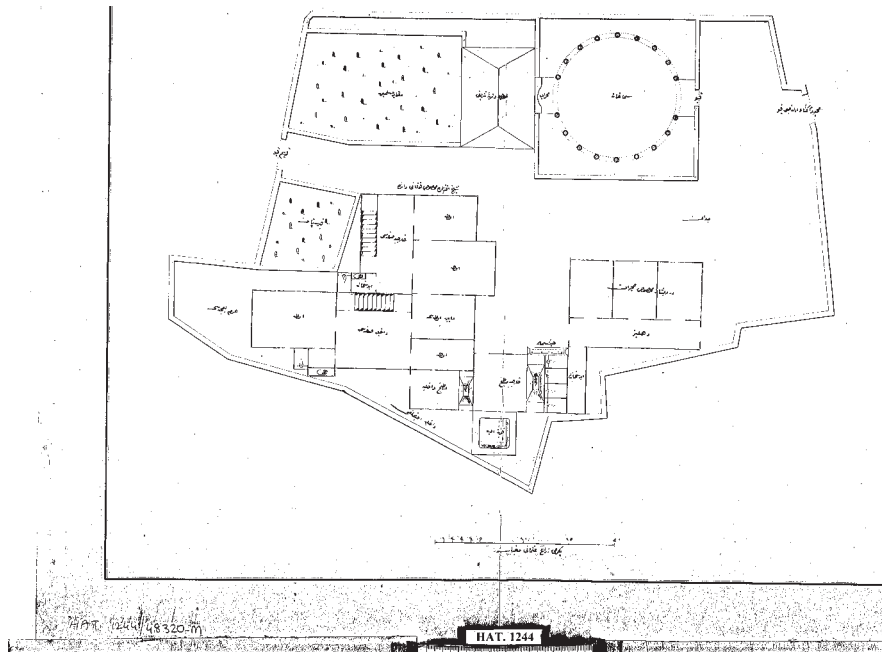
Ottoman archive document number (BOA): C.EV. 160/7996, April 20, 1790.



Picture: 5

Ottoman archive document regarding the plan of the Mevlevi Lodge to be built in Kütahya.

Ottoman archive document number (BOA): HAT 244/48320, March 15, 1839.



Picture: 6

Mevlâna Museum (front view)



Picture: 7

Mevlâna Museum (back view)



Picture: 8

Mevlâna Museum and the Specialized Library next to it.



Picture: 9

Mevlâna's coffin located in the museum.



Picture: 10

Mevlevi dervishes performing the sema ceremony (representative object in Mevlâna Museum).



Picture: 11

Mevlevi cuisine (representative object in Mevlâna Museum).



Picture: 12

Mevlevi table called simat or somat (representative object in Mevlâna Museum).



Picture: 13

Sema ceremony in Konya.





Znanstvena knjižnica 86

Bojan Žalec

Človečnost v digitalni dobi: Izzivi umetne inteligence, transhumanizma in genetike

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