



Research Article

Visual representation of Mevlana's Philosophy in paintings from the middle ages to the present¹

Mert Yavaşca²

Painting Department, Fine Arts Faculty, Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Türkiye

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Abstract

Mevlevism is a Sufi tradition founded on the teachings of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi in the 13th century. Known for its unique whirling ritual called the Sema, Mevlevism emphasizes love, compassion, and the unity of all beings. Mevlevi dervishes, or semazenens, express these spiritual concepts through their graceful movements and music. Mevlevism, known for its profound spiritual philosophy, music and whirling rituals, has inspired artists across diverse cultures and periods. The visual language of Mevlevism has captivated miniature painting artists, orientalist painters and Turkish painters who have infused their paintings with these evocative images. Western art sources from the Middle Ages to the present century feature prominent depictions of Mevlevi figures, Sufis, and dervishes. These portrayals often emphasize their distinctive appearances, such as their dance movements, ceremonial attire, and clothing styles, to capture the viewer's attention. While 18th-century European art focused on detailed and captivating depictions of places, figures, and ceremonies, the 19th century saw the emergence of Orientalist influences. This trend evolved significantly in the 20th century, with artists like Osman Hamdi Bey adopting a more allegorical and diverse approach to the subject. The captivating performance of the whirling dervishes and the rich, mystical symbolism associated with Mevlevism continue to inspire artists, offering a deep well of creative possibilities. By analyzing artworks from various regions, the study explores how the Mevlevi's distinct spiritual and cultural motifs—such as the Sema dance, dervish attire, and mystical iconography—have been visually interpreted and reinterpreted. Methodologically, the study utilizes a historical-interpretive approach, assessing both Eastern and Western artistic depictions to reveal evolving perspectives on Mevlevi philosophy. The findings underscore the Mevlevi Order's role as a vital subject in art, embodying both specific religious symbolism and universal themes of spirituality and transcendence.

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Introduction

Mevlevism, exemplifies how shared beliefs and philosophies can transcend cultural and societal boundaries. This powerful tradition, with its emphasis on love, compassion, and unity, has resonated with people of diverse backgrounds for centuries. Mevlana's message of tolerance and universal love has been widely studied and admired, captivating individuals from various faiths and inspiring them to embrace a more inclusive and compassionate worldview. The daily

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² Asst. Prof., Painting Department, Fine Arts Faculty, Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Türkiye. Email: mert.yavasca@comu.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0002-6280-6056

lives of dervishes, particularly the Mevlevi order, have served as a potent source of inspiration for artists, notably painters. From early miniature paintings to later classical, Orientalist, and modern works, artists have consistently demonstrated a fascination with this subject. The West's growing interest in Eastern cultures during the 19th and 20th centuries, fueled by travel and exploration, significantly contributed to this artistic engagement. Many Western travelers, initially encountering Mevlevi practices by chance or through recommendations, were deeply impressed and often sought out further encounters with the Mevlevi order. The dissemination of Rumi's *Masnavi* in English during the 20th century further broadened Western awareness of Mevlevi philosophy and practices. Travelers from diverse backgrounds, including writers, painters, journalists, and diplomats, were drawn to observe and experience Mevlevi culture firsthand during their travels. Many of these travelers, captivated by the unique lifestyle and rituals of the dervishes, not only documented their observations through writing but also engaged in artistic representations, either personally or by collaborating with other artists. Artists have been captivated by the mesmerizing movements of the dervishes, the serene ambiance of the *semahanes*, and the profound spiritual experiences associated with this unique tradition, translating these elements into a diverse range of artistic expressions. These artistic representations provide valuable insights into the multifaceted ways in which different cultures have engaged with and interpreted the mystical and philosophical tenets of Sufism.

Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi is one of the most important thinkers and poets of Sufism. He was born on September 30, 1207, in the city of Balkh, Afghanistan (Khorasan). Contrary to popular belief, Mevlevism, in which Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi is regarded as a *pir* (patriarch) was not founded by Mevlana. It is a sect that emerged in Konya after the death of Mevlana on December 17, 1273. It is known that it was founded by his son Sultan Veled, grandson Arif Çelebi and his friend Hüsameddin Çelebi in order to transmit Mevlana's teachings to next generations.

Mevlana, in his own time, had not pursued a sheikhdom case. He was a reformist. He had established a humanity, a unity, a mausoleum of love. Those who adopted this path which developed with music and dance, fed on love and temptation, but not with a temptation that made a man ecstatic and immersed in mystical illusions, but with the temptation that spread through his personality, spread to people, the universe, loved him, fell in love with him, gave him their being, found themselves and humanity in him (Gölpınarlı, 2006, p. 35).

The concept of Sufism is important for understanding the Mevlevi philosophy. The philosophical definition of the word Sufism is "the religious and philosophical current that explains the nature of God and the formation of the universe with the understanding of the unity of being". The theological definition of the word is "The effort to live the lifestyle proposed in the Qur'an and practiced in the life of the prophet; Islamic mysticism" (sufism, t.y.).

According to Prof. Dr. Neşet Toku, the sufi path of the Turkish-Islamic thought tradition is fed by three basic sources, and the combination of these three sources shapes the flow of the sufi river;

The first of these is the bedouin-desert life. The discontent against the city and the luxurious life and the determination to lead a simple life have caused such a reaction against worldly activities. That is why Sufi piety includes a bedouin life more. The second is Pythagorean Hellenism and Alexandrian gnosticism, which permeated Judaism and Christianity. These thoughts, which lived in the same geography for a thousand years before the birth of Islam, were undoubtedly transferred to the thoughts of Muslims during the process of Islamization. Pythagorean Hellenism, while transferring the doctrine of reaching the truth through the path of *ishrak* (mysticism-eschatology) to sufism; Gnosticism taught that the soul following a simple life through virtue and contemplation should desire to reunite with God and the possibility of this. The third is that Muslims learned from the Asian lands they conquered the approaches of Buddhism and Shamanism to condemn this world, to withdraw from the world for a contemplative and ascetic life (Toku, 2000, p. 205).

In the Sufi thought of Mevlevism, dedicated to beauty, tolerance, sincerity and simplicity, the goal is to reach the true knowledge of existence. According to the Sufi belief, the way to obtain this knowledge also includes experiences such as inward looking and individual enlightenment. Individuals who devote themselves to this life and orientation on the path of Sufism are called *sufis*.

Sufis and Dervishes

In the Islamic society on the 8th century, the attempt to analyze the world has become widespread by keeping it in line with the understanding of civilization. In a sense, people who adhere to Platonist views, stay away from the tendency to pursue knowledge on earth and devote themselves to God, renounce the material world, desire a mystical life, have begun to be called dervish or sufi. In the dictionary of the Turkish Language Institute, the word Sufi is used synonymously with mystic; It is defined as "a person who devotes himself to God by adopting the beliefs of Sufism, an Islamic mystic". The origin of the word comes from Arabic.

The term "dervish" is first seen in the form of <dermscler / durmishlar> in 1481 in the book dedicated to the Ottoman Empire by George the traveler from Hungary. The word is of Persian origin (drigu, driyosh, daryosh) and has two separate meanings in pre-Islamic Zoroastrian culture, such as a miserable and poor person and a person seeking spiritual awareness. Although the original meaning of the term has not disappeared with the collapse of Zoroastrianism and the rise of Islam, it has become more mysterious and ascetic (Zarcone, 2013).

There are many Sufi orders, and their diversity is due to their origins in different lodges. Sufism often clashed with the central authority of Sunni Madrasah. Sufis began to catch up by including poverty and reckless life in the understanding of Islamic mysticism, especially in rural areas. Despite the different manifestations of these Sufi orders, there are similarities in their status and in the responsibilities of figures engaged in social and political life, as well as in their clothes, musical instruments and accessories. Shortskirts and long scarves are common parts of the costumes of dervishes (typical representatives of Sufism). Some also wear wrist or anklebracelets, necklace, pendants or earrings The word 'sufi' was also used along with 'dervish'. While the words dervish and sufi referred to the same representation in ancient times, the meanings of the words have become to contain some differences today (Shams and Farrokhfar, 2020, p.108).

The Dervishes, who often appear in the travel diaries of European travelers between the 15-19th centuries, live on the path of Sufism has a unique representation that decouples from the Mevlevis and Sufis. Prof. Dr. Fikret Tutan who has done research on the Ottoman Miniatures Album at the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester describes those dervishes as extraordinary sufis.

The dervishes we could place in the second group in the album are dervishes who have isolated themselves more from the ties of the world and society, which we can call unusual sufis, are members of various western heterodox sects who live simply with their clothing and lifestyle. Their common features include wearing as few clothes as possible, shaving hair, eyebrows and beards completely, and sometimes wearing large ring-shaped earrings in the ear (Turan, 2015, p. Dec. 9).

Sema

The sema ceremony performed by Mevlevis accompanied by music includes symbolic gestures, items and movements. In the Sema ceremonies, where the formation of the universe, the existence of humanity, the love of God and the effort to reach truth, goodness, beauty, morality and God are represented, the clothes of the Semazens and the items they use also have symbolic meanings.

Sema was defined in the circular of the Republic of Turkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism dated 22/10/2008 as: "A ceremony that symbolizes the degrees of the path to reach Allah, contains religious-sufi elements and themes in it, and thus includes detailed rules and original practices". (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2008) Mevlevism and Sema ceremonies are one of our intangible cultural heritages with a history of 8 centuries old. UNESCO declared the Sema Ceremony a masterpiece in 2005. Sema was added to the "Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" in 2008. The Sema is a mystical ceremony in which the simplified soul in Mevlevism experiences the possibility of reaching God. Sema is used in Mevlevism as a kind of worship accompanied by rhythm and music, performed by spinning and turning a wheel around the heart from right to left (Gölpınarlı, 1977, p. 290).

It is accepted that there is a feature in the sema that brings a person closer to Allah and elevates him, and that it is an occasion for creating love and attraction among Mevlevi (Uludağ, 2005, p. 168-178). Throughout the sema, a person embarks on a journey from the periphery towards both the center of the universe and the center of man's own existence. This dance also makes the body the temple of the soul and a positive element in a spiritual alchemy that some masters

define as 'the spiritualization of the body and the embodiment of the soul', and the body 'realizes the soul' (quoted by Baytar and Okkalı, 2020).

In Western sources, "Whirling Dervishes", "Dancing Dervishes" or "Dance of the Dervishes" are usually described and illustrated. The dances performed by the dervishes were a very attractive show for the western travelers of the period. The ritualistic dance 'sema', which the Mevlevi maintain today, is the reason why they are mentioned with the words "Whirling" or "Dancing" in the travel diaries published in ancient times. Different cult groups are also mentioned in the same sources. These are Mevlevi with the name "Mevlevi order", Rufais with the name "Rifa'i order" and Kadiris with the name "Kadri order".

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a multidisciplinary framework drawing upon art history, religious studies, and cultural studies to investigate the artistic representations of Mevleviism. Key artists like Jean Leon Gerome, Osman Hamdi Bey and Cemal Tollu offer crucial insights into how Western and Eastern artists have depicted Mevlevi figures, rituals, and symbolism. Scholars such as Baytar & Okkalı, Güler, and Shams & Farrokhfar provide valuable context by analyzing the socio-cultural and historical significance of these representations. Additionally, the philosophical and theological dimensions of Mevleviism are explored through the works of scholars like Gölpinarlı, Grierson, Işık, and Toku. The study will examine how Orientalism influenced these depictions, how modern and contemporary art reinterpreted them, and how Mevlevi imagery has contributed to the construction of religious identity. By analyzing works by artists like Van Mour, Gritchenko, and Yvon (Western) and Osman Hamdi, İbrahim Çallı, and Fahrelnisa Zeid, the research aims to demonstrate that Mevlevi representations are not merely aesthetic objects, but rather complex reflections of cultural identity, religious beliefs, and artistic expression.

Literature Review

A search conducted on the YÖK Academic platform revealed 4,395 academics associated with the keyword "art." When the search was narrowed down to "painting," the number decreased to 1,175, and further to 63 for "fine arts." Based on the data entered by academics, 966 theses were found under the "painting" discipline. A search for "Mevlana" yielded 696 articles, of which only 25 were within the "Fine Arts" domain. Among these 25 articles, 8 were categorized under "Art History" and only 2 under "Visual Arts." When searching for "Mevlana," 213 theses were found, with only 3 of them falling under the "Fine Arts" category. A search for "Mevlevi" resulted in 363 articles, 59 of which were in the "Fine Arts" domain, and only 3 of these were specifically in the "Visual Arts" field.

A literature review conducted on academic research in Turkey highlighted a significant deficiency in the number of studies under the headings of "Art History" and "Visual Arts" within the broader category of "Fine Arts."

Importance of Study

This study seeks to contribute to a growing body of scholarship on the artistic representations of Mevleviism. By focusing on the works of Turkish artists, it aims to offer a unique perspective on how this significant spiritual tradition has been visually interpreted within a specific cultural context. While Western artists often emphasized the exotic and orientalist aspects of the Sema, Turkish painters, with their deeper cultural and often personal connections to Mevlevi philosophy, may have offered unique insights into the mystical and spiritual dimensions of this tradition. This study endeavors to identify and elucidate these unique perspectives, thereby enriching our understanding of the diverse artistic responses to Mevleviism. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the preservation and dissemination of Turkey's rich artistic heritage, providing valuable insights for art historians, cultural scholars, and religious studies scholars interested in exploring the complex interplay between art, religion, and culture in the Turkish context. This research aims to contribute to the limited existing scholarship on artworks depicting Mevlevi dervishes within the history of painting. Through a rigorous analysis of these artworks, the study will explore not only their formal and stylistic characteristics but also the underlying artistic and philosophical perspectives of the artists who created them, thereby providing valuable models for future research in this area.

Aim of the Study

Western artists, frequently influenced by Orientalist perspectives, often emphasized the exotic and sensational aspects of Sufism, focusing on the visual spectacle of the Sema and the dramatic portrayal of dervishes. In contrast, Turkish painters, with their deeper cultural immersion and often personal connections to Sufi traditions, may have offered unique interpretations that emphasize the mystical, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions of Sufism. This study aims to address this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of artistic representations of Mevleviism created by Western and Turkish painters. By examining their stylistic choices, thematic concerns, and the underlying cultural and philosophical assumptions that shaped their work, this research seeks to identify and articulate the distinct artistic perspectives brought to bear on the depiction of this significant spiritual tradition, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the history of art by highlighting the diverse ways in which artists from different cultural and historical contexts engage with and interpret religious and spiritual themes.

Method

Research Model

This research employs a historical and interpretive model, analyzing visual artifacts across different eras and regions. The study categorizes artistic representations by stylistic approaches, cultural origins, and the evolving perceptions of Mevlevi imagery. The article thoroughly covers primary sources, including manuscripts and paintings, and incorporates scholarly interpretations. The extensive use of visuals enhances the technical quality, allowing a detailed examination of aesthetic elements and historical context.

Documents

The documents analyzed include Middle Eastern miniatures, European traveler illustrations, and Orientalist paintings, along with artworks by modern Turkish painters. This selection represents diverse perspectives on Mevlevi portrayals.

Table 1. Selected documents for research

Figures	Artwork	Artist	Date
Figure 1	A dervish from the Ilkhanid State miniature art	-	14 th century
Figure 2	Dancing Dervishes	attributed to Master Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād	1480
Figure 3	Two Dervishes having a conversation,	attributed to Mehmed Siyah Qalam	-
Figure 4	The illustration of the dervish	Nicolas de Nicolay	1580
Figure 5	A Wandering Dervish	-	1620-1650
Figure 6	The Whirling Dervishes	Van Mour	1720-1737
Figure 7	The Dance of the Dervishes	attributed to Robert Pranker and Thomas White	1796
Figure 8	Dancing Dervishes by the Kadiri	-	1790
Figure 9	Ceremony of Dervishes from the Rūfai Sect	-	1790
Figure 10	Dancing Dervishes by the Mevlevi Order	-	1820
Figure 11	Whirling Dervish	Jean Leon Gerome	1895
Figure 12	Rūfai Ceremony	Adolphe Yvon	1879
Figure 13	The Dervish Ceremony	Fausto Zonaro	1910
Figure 14	The Tortoise Trainer,	Osman Hamdi Bey	1906
Figure 15	Whirling Dervish	Alexis Grichenko	1920
Figure 16	Mevlevis	İbrahim Çallı	-
Figure 17	Mevlevis	Alexis Grichenko	1921
Figure 18	Mevlevi	Mahide Arel	1958
Figure 19	Mevlevis	Mümtaz Yener	1998
Figure 20	Mevlevi	Aliye Berger	1960
Figure 21	Mevlevis	Fahrelnisa Zeid	1952
Figure 22	Mevlevis	Cemal Tollu	1968

Figure 23	Mevlevis	Cemal Tollu	-
Figure 24	Mevlevis	Cemal Tollu	1958

Analysis

A comparative analysis is used to evaluate iconographic themes, symbolic attire, and the context in which Mevlevis are depicted. The analysis considers both stylistic and cultural factors that influence the portrayal of Mevlevis across various artistic traditions.

Process

The research process involves collecting artworks, categorizing them by historical period and origin, and interpreting their visual elements. The study systematically examines the continuity and transformation in Mevlevi representation from medieval art of painting to contemporary painting.

Findings

Through a chronological lens, this section will examine paintings that depict dervishes, Sufis, and Mevlevis within the broader context of art history. The analysis will focus on identifying specific visual elements that signify the subjects' identities and will explore how Western and Eastern artistic traditions have represented these figures in contrasting ways.

Examples from medieval Eastern miniature painting

Dervishes, sufis and mevlevis were among the subjects dealt with by painters (nakkaş) in the ages when the Islamic geography kept alive the tradition of miniature painting. The first dervish figures took place on miniature art of Middle East and the Far East in the 14th century. One of the infamous miniature painters was Mehmed Siyah Qalam and according to theories there are figures in his compositions that are suggested to represent dervishes. There are also dervish figures are depicted in miniatures which has survived from the Ilkhanid State (14th) to the present day (Christies, Arts & Textiles of the Islamic & Indian Worlds, 2024). Iranian miniature painting was developed in the 15th century, especially under the patronage of the Timurid (1370-1507) and Safavid (1501-1736) dynasties. and it has reached its peak in 16th century.



Figure 1. A dervish from the Ilkhanid State miniature art, 13x9.4 cm, 14. century, Iran, (Christies, Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds, 2024)

In the miniatures of these ages, a rich symbolism appeared, in which worldly and religious themes were deeply processed. The life of Muhammad and religious stories are illustrated. Religious motifs have become an important element in miniature painting as indicators of spiritual thought and idealism. In addition to the religious miniatures, painters (nakkaş) also influenced by the everyday life and social events of the period. Artists such as Ustad (Master) Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād have depicted their social observations in a detailed style and have produced masterpieces with high artistic value. Cultural exchange and the patronage system are together referred to as the epochs in which the magnificent works

of Iranian miniature painting were produced through 15th and 16th centuries. Dervish, sufi and mevlevi figures are found among the miniature paintings that have extant today.

Miniature named *Dancing Dervishes* attributed to Master Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād (15th century) is the best example of dervish-themed miniature paintings from Iranian art. In the painting, four dervishes dancing in the middle of a crowded group of figures are depicted as forming a circle. On the right side of the composition there is a musician group consisting of three people. The effects of ecstatic dance on dervishes can be seen by the viewers. The work is the oldest examples reflecting the poetic and spiritual life of the Islamic world against the grotesque dervish illustration of European artists that appeared in the 16th century.

In the works produced in the Middle East, Asia and Far East, scenes from Masnavi, various dance scenes, views from everyday life are also depicted.

“Given the significant social roles of Sufis in the fifteenth century, it is reasonable for them to be reflected in the paintings. It is also worth considering that other theories about the time range in which Siyah Qalam's paintings were produced most often coincide in the fifteenth century.” (Shams and Farrokhfar, 2020, p.110)



Figure 2. Miniature titled *Dancing Dervishes* attributed to Master Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād from the *Hafiz Divan*, Iran, 1480, (Metmuseum, 2024)



Figure 3. Miniature entitled Two Dervishes having a conversation, attributed to Mehmed Siyah Qalam (Roxburgh, 2005)

The theories that the grotesque demon (satan) figures we see in the paintings of the Mehmed Siyah Qalam represent the Sufis are a topic of discussion that remains up to date. These grotesque and terrible images uploaded to the Sufis can be presented as evidence of the tense political conflicts of the period.

The gathered iconographic evidence indicates that the grotesque figures and demon-like creatures are related to Sufism. Indeed, the images depict Sufis who are represented as demons. However, there is not much more in the paintings to identify to which Sufi order these Sufis belong...Steinhardt says that the Chinese paintings that were inspiration sources for Siyah Qalam's paintings show a contrast between the Mongols and Chinese and indicate the discontent of Chinese painters due to Mongolian domination during the Yuan era in China. Answering the main question of the article, a social and cultural milieu containing a political conflict in which Sufism is a side, and that might have resulted in a protest by artists affiliated to a court can be suggested as the social context of Siyah Qalam's paintings (Shams and Farrokhfar, 2020, p.109).

The most important miniature painter who influenced the Western painters of the period was Levni. Levni has depicted the daily life of Istanbul, appearances of individuals, their lifestyles with a detailed observation. Levni, one of the last masters of Ottoman miniature art, is thought to have influenced European painters with his compositions on the subject of dervishes. "Levni's miniature called *Kalender Dervish*, which he made during his own period, also influenced the famous painter of his period, Jean Baptiste Vanmour, Vanmour made a painting called *Mevlevi Dervishes*, which he made in response to this miniature of Levni" (Irepoğlu, Renda, Bull, & Nicolas, 2003).

In European art, the earliest dervish illustrations are the engravings in Nicolas de Nicolay's book *Quatre Premiers Livres des Navigations et pérégrinations orientales*, produced in 1555 and published in 1568. Nicolas Decolay visited the Ottoman Empire between 1551 and 1552. However, as can be understood from Nicolay's book in the 16th century, the illustrations that are a subject of curiosity for European audiences, in the words of Prof. Dr. Fikret Tutan, *they are extraordinary/eccentric dervishes*. The sema ceremonies of the Mevlevi has become a show that travelers who come to see Istanbul watch with interest in 17th century. The first painting known to depict the dance of dervishes in European painting art is dated 1654. This painting, which is thought to belong to an Austrian engraver, Franz Hermann, Hans Gemminger or Valentin Mueller (Öller, 2005, p. 131). There are three dervish groups that have attracted the interest of western travelers and researchers, and therefore their readers, in the 16th and 17th century. Prof. Dr. Fikret Tutan defines the first group as eccentric dervishes, including mostly kalenders, who came to the Ottoman Empire from Asia and India. These Eccentric dervishes, who beg for food and money, dance in the streets and perform various shows, were distinguished from the begging bowls and their appearance. The other two groups are the Mevlevi (Whirling Dervishes)

and the Rufais (Howling Dervishes). There were two tekkes belonging to Mevlevis and Rufais in Istanbul in the 18th century. An article in a French magazine called *Le Magasin Pittoresque* (1839) stated that the Mevlevis and the Rufais were the most distinctive sects of the Sufis with their ascetic and eccentric methods, and as their names indicate (Whirling and Howling), Mevlevis danced and the Rufais chanted. “In brief, the interest of the Westerners in the performances of these dervishes comes from the fact that they appreciated the beauty of the dances of the first order, while being horrified by the howling of the second (Zarcone, 2013, p. 51)”

Gestures, movements and symbols in sema have become important inspirational things for painters and over time those elements have become indicators representing sufis and dervishes in the art of painting. French orientalist painter Jean Leon Gerome (1824-1904), Flemish painter Jean Baptiste Vanmour (1671-1737), known for his whirling dervish paintings, Italian Fausto Zonaro (1854-1929), known by the title of Ottoman palace painter, are the artists who painted the Mevlevis in their works before modern art era.



Figure 4. The illustration of the dervish from the 1580 edition of the book *Quatre Premiers Livres des Navigations* by the French geographer Nicolas de Nicolay, (Ziletti, 1580)



Figure 5. A Wandering Dervish, Ottoman miniature, 1620-1650, (Christies, Arts & Textiles of the Islamic & Indian Worlds, 2024)

One of the oldest oil paintings of sema belongs to Jean Baptiste Vanmour. Vanmour came to Istanbul in 1699 with the French ambassador. He has depicted the daily events from the Ottoman palace and Istanbul as a subject in his works. Vanmour's painting called *The Whirling Dervishes*, which he produced in the 18th century, is one of the important works on the subject of the Mevlevi. Today, the work is exhibited with other masterpieces of art history at the Rijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It is estimated that the painting was made between 1720 and 1737. The Sema Ceremony is depicted in the composition. The Mevlevihane of Pera, where the Sema Ceremony was held, has been processed with all the details. Elements such as the embroideries on the dome and carpet, window guards, nails of the wooden cladding on the floor are evidence of the artist's observation skills and craftsmanship. In the foreground of the composition, there are figures watching the sema on the left and right.

On the left side, the musicians (*mutrip*) located on the mezzanine floor and the wooden stairs can be seen. Each one of the whirling dervishes (*semazen*) has depicted in a different dance move. The dim atmosphere in the interior adds a spiritual effect to the painting. The artwork printed and published in 1712, formed a reference to the artists that interests in same subject.

There are several engravings in different editions of *Ignatius Mouradgea D'ohsson's Tableau général de l'Empire Othoman* which published 1790, titled *Dance of the Dervishes of the Mevlevi Order, Exercices des Derwischs Rufayis, Dance of the Dervishes of the Kadri Order, Exercices of the Dervishes of the Rifa'i Order*. The album is one of the most important publishes has works depicting the rituals of Mevlevi, Rufai and Kadiri sects in Istanbul (Laskaridis Foundation, 2014).



Figure 6. *The Whirling Dervishes*, oil on canvas, 76x101 cm, (Van Mour, 1720-1737)



Figure 7. The Dance of the Dervishes, attributed to Robert Pranker and Thomas White in the book published for Frederick Calvert's collection Eastern Clothes, engraving entitled the interior view of a Tekke in Pera, Istanbul, 1796. (Grierson, 2015)



Figure 8. Dancing Dervishes by the Kadiri Sect from the 1790 edition of the book Histoire de l'Empire Othomane, (Laskaridis Foundation, 2014)



Figure 9. Histoire de l'Empire Othomane, Ceremony of Dervishes from the Rūfai Sect from the edition of the book made in 1790, (Laskaridis Foundation, 2014)



Figure 10. Histoire de l'Empire Othomane, Dancing Dervishes by the Mevlevi Order from the 1820 edition of the book, (Laskaridis Foundation, 2014)

Mevlevis in the modern painting

The interest that painters on Mevlevis and other sects has also maintained its importance in modern painting art. But in the 19th century, documentary illustrations in the diaries of travelers and collection albums were replaced by large oil paintings by orientalist painters.

The French orientalist painter Jean Leon Gerome who used the elements of eastern culture also painted dervishes in his works. In his painting “Whirling Dervish” dated 1895, he depicted a dervish while dancing. As an orientalist painter, he synthesized his academic painting style with an idealistic point of view. Gerome’s dervish is whirling in the middle of a group of other dervishes who are chanting in a mosque-like interior. Gerome has depicted two groups of dervishes in his work. Those are “Whirling Dervishes” and “Howling Dervishes” as they are often described in European sources. Gerome’s dervish figures look like represent eccentric dervishes by their appearance. On the left side of the composition, a young man with a white turban is sitting on the floor. It is as if the sema is being presented to him as a show. There are

musicians in standing and sitting positions around this young audience. When the sema scene in Gerome's painting is carefully examined, a critical opinion can be reached that this should not be the most correct angle and movement to depict a whirling dervish. The right arm of the whirling dervish is not visible, and he stands as if motionless.

Compared to Vanmour's painting, the Whirling Dervish Gerome's painting resembles a photo frame in which the image is frozen. The dervish rises by stepping on the tips of his bare feet. It can be said that Gerome's semazen evokes a ballerina.



Figure 11. Whirling Dervish, oil on canvas, 72.5 x 95 cm, (Gerome, 1895)

Another ceremony that attracted the attention of tourists, writers and painters who visited Istanbul in the 19th century is the chanting rituals of the Rufais. The rite of the Rufais consist of two parts. In the first part, the dervishes insert skewers into their bodies and faces. The purpose of this demonstration is to prove that God protects the dervishes. The second part of the rite is more interesting than the first part, and therefore it was the subject of a painting by two important painters, the French and Italian orientalist. In this ritual, the sheikh of the Tekke walks on the backs of the disciples who are lying face down on the ground. It is believed that happiness and health are given to the disciples that the sheikh walks on his back (Zarcone, 2013, p. 54-55).

The French painter Adolphe Yvon and the Italian painter Fausto Zonaro are among the orientalist painters who painted the ceremonies of the Rufais, who are called "Howling Dervishes" in western sources.



Figure 12. Rüfai Ceremony, oil on canvas, 46.4 x 55.5 cm, (Yvon, 1879)



Figure 13. The Dervish Ceremony, oil on canvas, 100 x 201.3 cm, (Zonaro, 1910)

In the Ottoman Empire, one of the realistic paintings about mevlevis belong to Captain-ı Derya Hacı Ahmed Vesim Pasha, dated 1888. Th composition shows a sema ceremony in the Galata Mevlevihane (Okkalı, 2014, p. 106). Captain Derya Hacı Ahmed Vesim Pasha's gouache painting has also a documentarily importance. It is made by an amateur painter on the border of tradition and modernity. (Işın, 2010, p. 142).

We can say that the figure in Osman Hamdi's painting *The Tortoise Trainer* represents a dervish. In the work, which has two separate versions completed in 1906 and 1907, the old man holds a Ney, a sufi music instrument.



Figure 14. The Tortoise Trainer, oil on canvas, 122 x 222 cm, (Hamdi, 1906)

The bowl on his back is likened to the begging bowl used by the dervishes. “According to some, what hangs on a man’s back is a kashkulufukara, a begging bowl made of coconut or ebony, formerly used by dervishes and beggars” (wikipedia, 2023) Considering that the old man represents a sheikh dervish and tortoises represent Sufis, an allegorical interpretation of the teacher-student relationship in Mevlevism stands in front of us.

After a long break, the subject of the Mevlevis appears in the paintings of Ibrahim Çallı. His friendship with Russian painter Alexis Grichenko laid the groundwork for painting about Mevlevis. Russian painter Alexis Grichenko, born in Ukraine in the 1920s, fled the civil war in Russia and stayed in Istanbul for a temporary period, between 1919 and 1921. He formed a friendship with Ibrahim Çallı, they studied together. It is seen that Çallı, who works with an impressionist and academic painting style, turned to a different style under the influence of Grichenko. The influence of these two artists, who worked together by forming a friendship in Istanbul, is clearly seen in the works on the subject of the Mevlevis. In Çallı’s Mevlevi compositions, there is a transition from impressionist realism to abstraction, perhaps under the influence of Sufism, which he had just encountered and observed.



Figure 15. Whirling Dervish, watercolor on paper, (Gritchenko, 1920)



Figure 16. Mevlevis, oil on duralit, 60 x 74 cm, (Çallı, t.y.)



Figure 17. Mevlevis, oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm, 1921, (Güler, 2014)

The Mevlevi Lodges and other tekkes closed in 1925 by the new Turkish Republic's laws. The sema ceremony of start up again in the 1950s with the interest in the subject of painters comes alive again. Painters such as Maide Arel, Aliye Berger, Ruzin Gerçin, Mümtaz Yener, Cevat Dereli, Fahrelnisa Zeid and Fikret Otyam have created unique

compositions that are processed by the abstraction reflex, although they are figurative. At this point, the negative common denominator of the works is that they are without content. In those paintings and engravings, melevism and its indicators have been able to reach formalistic variations.



Figure 18. Mevlavi, oil on canvas, (Arel, 1958)

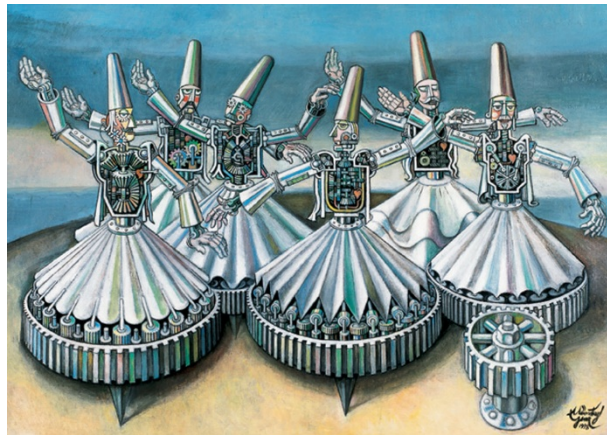


Figure 19. Mevlavis, oil on canvas, (Yener, 1998)



Figure 20. Mevlavi, printmaking, 31,1 x 38,7 cm, (Berger, 1960)



Figure 21. Mevlevis, Sharpie on paper, 35 x 50 cm, (Zeid, 1952)

At this point, Cemal Tollu's works depicting the Mevlevis deserve special attention in our history of art of painting. The primary goal in Tollu's figurative compositions is to be able to represent the human being. The human body and identity are positioned beyond the formal pictorial representation in the picture. In Tollu's Mevleviler series, there is an observation and a search for meaning that differs from other painters.

Cubist forms are distinctive features in 3 paintings by Cemal Tollu depicting the Mevlevis. In the horizontal canvas dated 1968, the Arabic inscription 'Hazrat Mevlana' attracts viewers attention. In another canvas whose date is unknown (Tollu, Mevleviler, t.y.), a whirling dervish fills the space at the top of the composition alone. In Tollu's 1958 painting The Mevlevis, whirling dervish is depicted as a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. The blue color that dominates the painting carries a feeling of peace, happiness and serenity. This deep blue emptiness represents an unknown and unrecognizable (noumenon) space. In the work, metaphysical and mystical thoughts are depicted without conflicting with each other. Tollu did not prefer the documentarian reflexes of his predecessor painters but brought the supersensible things of Sufism into the subject of the painting. This is the sensitivity that places Cemal Tollu in a different position among the works of painting on the subject of the Mevlevis.



Figure 22. Mevlevis, oil on canvas, 75 x 100 cm, (Tollu, Mevleviler, 1968)



Figure 23. Mevlevis, oil on canvas, no size information, (Tollu, Mevlevis, t.y.)



Figure 24. Mevlevis, oil on canvas, 81 x 116 cm, (Tollu, Mevleviler, 1958)

Conclusion

In the history of the art of painting, the interest in sufis, dervishes and mevlevis has maintained its vitality throughout the ages. Important differences in these works appear in the painters' approaches to the subject. From the Middle Ages, Mevlevi, sufi and dervish images stand out in paintings in western sources up to the century with their external appearances, dances, ceremonies or clothes in the context of fashion that will attract the attention of the viewer. In particular, the interior depictions of the tekkes were often preferred in the works that were reproduced by printing and included in the travelogues of travelers. In works produced in the Middle East, Asia and the Far East, the position of the communities to which the dervishes are connected in the political conflicts diversifies their representations of identity. In the Mongolian and Chinese struggle, the identities represented by the dervishes were transformed into grotesque images from place to place under the influence of the belief and thought that the painters were parties to.

In the 18th, European artists painted places, figures and ceremonies with full details that will attract the attention of western viewer. In 19th century art, there is an influence of orientalist thought in the approach to the subject. Since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been a divergent allegory-laden prominence in the approach of painters such as Osman Hamdi bey to the subject. However, this intuition loses its effect with the productions of our painters who approach the idea of modern painting art with formalistic preferences. Cemal Tollu's view of the Mevlevi has brought a completely different sensibility back to the agenda, and together with Tollu, the reflections of conceptual art thought unique to our country in the art of painting have been felt. Tollu's sufis are in the mood of search with the artist's cubist interventions, just like atomic particles, one but together, in a transcendent dimension. Other painters who continue to process the subject continue to have a rush to formally depict the visuality of the Sema in a descriptive style. In art of painting, Mevlevi continue to be a preferred subject although not as much as before. However, new media art and alternative production methods opened by digital art also attract the attention of young artists. How the new generation of artists will handle the subject is an element of curiosity.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides a broad analysis of Mevlevi representations in art, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the selection of artworks is largely based on availability and documented works, which may exclude some lesser-known pieces, especially those not widely circulated or digitized. Additionally, the study focuses on visual arts, primarily painting, thus omitting other forms such as literature, music, or performance, which also play significant roles in representing Mevlevi culture and philosophy. Further research incorporating these additional forms could provide a more comprehensive understanding of Mevlevi representation in the arts.

Biodata of Authors



Artist and academician **Mert Yavaşca** was born in 1983 in Çanakkale, Türkiye. completed his bachelor degree at Eskişehir Anadolu University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Printmaking, his master's degree at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Painting and his proficiency in art at Izmir Dokuz Eylül University Institute of Fine Arts, Department of Painting / Cardiff School of Art and Design. The artist, who concentrated his graduate education on modern and contemporary Turkish painting art within the framework of his art history researches, worked with Prof. Atilla Atar, Prof. Hayri Esmer, Prof. Mümtaz Sağlam, Prof. Gülay Yaşar Sağlam and Prof. Dr. Simber Atay. The artist, who continues his studies with the title of Assist Prof Dr at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Painting, is the founder of the independent art initiative SHELTER Artists Run Space. The artist, who has participated in exhibitions as a curator and artist in various countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Greece and Portugal, continues to work on art history and painting art in the Middle East and Turkey, as well as digital art, cybernetics and art povera. He is one of the founders of SHELTER Artist Run Space, an independent art initiative that continues its activities in Lisbon. E-mail: mert.yavasca@comu.edu.tr **ORCID:** 0000-0002-6280-6056

Academiaedu: <https://comu.academia.edu/MertYavasca>

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