

***Mukabele*¹: Evolution, Impediment and Return**

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Abstract

The Mevlevi ceremony – composed of prayer, litanies, singing, music and dance – known, depending on the time, as Sema (or Samâ'), Ayin, Devr-i or Mukabele, has today, in Turkey, the following structure: 1. Nat-i (invocation); 2. Devr-i Velede (circumambulation with instrumental pesrev); 3. Ney Taksim (ney flute improvisation); 4. Sema or Samâ' (4 cycles of turns with 4 vocal saddle[s]); 5. Son Pesrev (last instrumental prelude); 6. Son Yürük Semai (last yürük semai); 7. Son Taksim (last improvisation); 8. Kur'na-i Kerim (recitation of the Qur'an). Although the Mevlevi attribute the organization of the Samâ' to Sultan Veled (?-1312) or Walad (as he is often called in the West), son of Jalaluddin Rumi or Mevlana, neither the writings of Rumi and his son nor other 14th century Mevlevi records give a detailed picture of Samâ' that matches the current Mukabele. It is assumed, however, that the Mukabele Mevlevi developed more systematically from the 14th and 15th

¹ ***Mukabele*** means, literally, "responding to an action with the same action." In the following sense: if someone hits you, you respond in kind; if someone kisses you, you reciprocate. In the Mevlevi context, ***mukabele*** is a type of ***selam*** (greeting): a mutual salutation between dervishes. Since the time of Sultan Veled, Rumi's son, Mevlevi dervishes have traditionally performed three circular walks in the ***semahane*** (*Sema* hall) before beginning the cycles of whirling. Over time, these walks came to be called ***devr-i veledi*** which means "the walk of Veled." During the circumambulation, each time the dervishes pass in front of the red sheep rug – which represents the *Sheikh* of the Order and all *Sheikhs* who came before him, including Rumi – they turn towards each other in the circle, exchanging greetings. This is why the word ***Mukabele***, along with ***Sema*** or ***Samâ'*** and ***Ayin*** became a common term for referring to Mevlevi ritual.

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centuries onwards, reaching its final form in the 16th and 17th centuries. According to Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, the Mukabele, as we know it today, was established by Pir Adil Çelebi (1421-1460) in the first half of the 15th century. Mustafa İtri's Nat-i (invocation) (1640-1712), which is now part of Mukabele, was added to Samâ' between the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Gölpınarlı adds that Pir Adil Çelebi won the title of Pir (master) – a title given only to Sheikhs of the orders of dervishes – for having definitively fixed the Mukabele as a Mevlevi ritual. Recent research tends to confirm this view. The fact is that we do not find in any of the early Mevlevi sources any clear information about the origins of Samâ' or Sema. Later sources, however, can give us some clues. My intention here is to address some of them.

Keywords : Mevlevi Order, Whirling Dervishes, Sema. Samâ', Ayin, Devr-i, Mukabele.

The dance, in the form that inspired Rumi and which he transmitted to his disciples, derives its efficacy from a rich and eloquent symbolism, as well as from its concentrated, centripetal action on the human faculties. Gathered in an octagonal enclosure, the dervishes spread out to dance around multiple concentric orbits, resembling the planets in the sky. A dervish, usually the eldest [the *Sheikh* of the Order], occupies the center of the room [on the line-axis called *hatt-i istiva* (equator)], in which he represents one of the "poles". He turns slowly, without moving through the space, while the others positioned in circles, revolve around themselves and around the orbits on which they are situated. The dance includes some arm gestures: initially, the arms are crossed in front of the chest, signifying humility and recollection of the soul. Then, the arms open up, as if blossoming: one hand, the right one, facing the sky; and the other, the left one, facing the earth. Through this gesture, the dervish indicates that he opens himself to receive the Grace [**baraka**] from the heavens. With

confidence, he distributes the received Grace [*baraka*] to the earthly world and all beings that inhabit it. Transformed into a spinning cross, he mortifies himself without pain: his head slightly inclined, his shoulders constantly at the same level. His white dress, inflated like a corolla, represents the vastness of the Universe, saturated with blessings, while the vertical axis of his body, elongated by the presence of the tall felt hat, is the sign of the exaltation that the seeker can only achieve after his dissolution into the whole. Reproducing on Earth the movement of the stars – symbol of the forces and angelic hierarchies – the dervish is aware of participating in universal harmony and of contributing to establishing the order that exists in the heavens down here. Surrendered to the rhythm of celestial harmonies, he becomes the instrument through which divine love communicates with creatures who suffer from cosmic separation and illusion. Through his rotation, he affirms Divine's unique presence in all directions of space: "Wherever you turn, there will be the face of Allah' (Quran, II, 114), and he identifies with this Omnipresent center and Principle (Michon 160-161).

The Mevlevi ritual – made up of prayer, litanies, singing, music and dancing – known, depending on the era, as *Samâ'* (*Sema* in Turkish), *Ayin*, *Devr-i* or *Mukabele*, has today the following structure³:

1. *Nat-i* (invocation)
2. *Ney Taksim* (*ney* flute improvisation)

³ *Sema* (in Turkish) or *Samâ'* (in Arabic form) or *Sama* (as it has been written in the West) typically refers to the part of the ceremony in which the dervishes whirl. *Ayin* refers to the music of the *Sama*. *Devr-i Veledi* pertains to the three circumambulations of the dervishes (where *devr-i* means "to circumambulate" by walking, not spinning). And *Mukabele* encompasses the entirety of the ceremony, including the recitation of the *Quran* and/or the *Masnavi* of Mevlana Rumi.

3. *Devr-i Veledi* (circumambulation with instrumental *pesrev*)
4. *Sema* or *Samâ'* (4 cycles of turns with 4 vocal *selam*[s])
5. *Son Pesrev* (last instrumental prelude)
6. *Son Yürük Sema-i* (last *yürük sema-i*)
7. *Son Taksim* (last improvisation)
8. *Kur'an-i Kerim* (recitation of the *Quran*)

Although the Mevlevi attribute the organization of the *Sama* to Sultan Veled (?-1312) – also known as Walad in the West, son of Jalaluddin Rumi or Mevlana – neither the writings of Rumi and his son nor other Mevlevi records from the 14th century provide a detailed image of the *Sama* that corresponds to the current model. It is, however, assumed, that the Mevlevi *Sama* developed more systematically from the 14th and 15th centuries onwards, reaching its final form in the 16th and 17th centuries.

According to Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı⁴(Gölpınarlı 370), *Sama*, as we know it today, was established by Pir Adil Çelebi⁵ (1421-1460) in the first half of the 15th century. The *Nat-i* (invocation) by Mustafa Itri (1640-1712), which is now part of *Sama*, was added to *Sama* between the late 17th and early 18th centuries

⁴ The most detailed and reliable description of *Mukabele* in the Mevlevi tradition can be found in the chapter 'Mevlevilik Adâb ve Erkânî Semâ ve Mukabele' by Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı.

⁵ "Çelebi" means that the person belongs to the family of Mevlana. It has been used as a surname. [This began] since the fourth grandson of Mevlana used this name, which means "good man," "someone who has a good view of things." So, some people began to use this word as a surname, but it is not considered elegant [for members of Mevlana's family]. The Mevlevi [who are not part of Rumi's blood family] do not use this surname because it belongs only to Mevlana's family. After his grandson, Ulu Ârif Çelebi, the son of Sultan Veledi, Rumi's relatives started to use this name as a surname: Abid Çelebi, Biiyik Çelebi, Emir Çelebi, Adil Çelebi etc. [up to the present day]" (Explanation by *Sheikh* Mevlevi Nail Kesova [Istanbul, 1996]). (Interview, transcription, and translation: by the author)

(Inançer #).⁶ Gölpınarlı adds that Pir Adil Çelebi earned the title of Pir (master) – a title granted only to the *Sheikhs* of dervish orders – for definitively establishing **Sama** as a Mevlevi ritual. Recent researches tends to confirm this view.

Citing the ethnomusicologist Walter Feldman, who in his text *Cultural Authority and Authenticity in the Turkish Repertoire – on the emergence and evolution of Ottoman Classical Music* – demonstrates, through various examples, that the **Ayin-i Serif** (a musical genre that accompanies Mevlevi **Sama**) cannot predate the 16th century. According to Feldman, the Ayin is the first example of a cyclical concert form, emerging in the 16th and 17th centuries (Feldman 85).

The fact is that we do not find any clear information about the origins of **Sema** or **Sama** or in any of the early Mevlevi sources. Later sources, however, can provide us with some clues. Let's take a look at some of them:

Jalaluddin Rumi's father, Bahauddin Walad (1148-1231), seems to have had a tolerant attitude towards **Sama** and *zikir* (repetition of God's names), although he did not agree with the institutionalization of music and **Sama** as means of reaching ecstasy (**wajd**). For Bahauddin, both music and **Sama** are good emotional conductors, but they are not triggers for reaching the Truth (*Haqiqat*) or having a profound experience of God (Gölpınarlı 370).⁷ Najmuddin Kubra (1145-1221), who was Bahauddin Walad's mentor and the founder of the Kubrawiya or Kubravi Tradition, was a supporter of **Sama** and *zikir-i jahri* (vocal *zikir*). Sayed Burhanuddin Muhaqqiq Thirmidhi, Bahauddin Walad's disciple and Rumi's mentor, also approved of *zikir*.⁸ It is

⁶ The addition of **Nat-i** at the beginning of the **Ayin-serif** was not a spontaneous act; it began in the dergâh or lodge of Konya, which was the formal center of the Mevlevi order, and was copied by other Mevlevi *tekkes*.

⁷ According to Gölpınarlı, although Bahauddin practiced *zikir*, it was not a fundamental practice for him.

possible, then, that Bahauddin Walad – and also Thirmidhi – transmitted some of the practices received from Kubra to Jalaluddin Rumi or Mevlana, including **Sama**."

In the *Risala-i Sipahsalar*, on the other hand, Ahmed Sipahsalar considers Shamsuddin of Tabriz to be the most significant influence on Mevlana's life. Through his contact with the extraordinary dervish, Mevlana transforms from a respected theologian and scholar into a great mystic and poet. According to the *Risala-i Sipahsalar*, Mevlana followed Shams' way of performing **Sama** (*tari ka-i samâ'*), which leads us to consider the hypothesis that Mevlevi **Sama** may be an adaptation of the mystical exaltation techniques practiced by Shams.

In Rumi's *Fihî ma Fihî (The Book of the Inner)* and Sultan Walad's *Kitab al-Ma 'ârîf (The Book of Gnostic Science)*, we also find some chapters about **Sama**. However, like many other Sufi treatises, these were written with the purpose of defending **Sama** against criticisms from the Ulema (Islamic clergy) and do not provide any substantial information about the structure of the **Sama** or how to practice it. It is precisely in the *Risala-i Sipahsalar* (from the 14th century), written by Faridun bin Ahmed Sipahsalar, that we find the oldest description of Mevlevi **Sama**.

Every movement that emanates from the mystics during **Sama** represents an idea or a truth. For example, the whirling (*charh zadan*) is a sign of unity, and this is the station of the saints (*'arifan-i muvahhid*), who see the beloved and the desired one everywhere and in all directions, obtaining divine grace wherever they turn. The jump (*jahadan*) and the foot stamp (*pa kufîtan*) denote two things: the jump denotes the joy of connecting with the spiritual world and the tapping of the foot stamp denotes that the sufi, in this position, subordinates himself, by stepping forcefully, over all things except God. The open arms (*dast afsandan*) signify several things: the first is related to the joy and honor of reaching [...] the degree of

perfection; the second represents the victory over the army of the ordinary appetites of the self (*nafs-i ammara*). The greatest of all holy wars (*jihad*) consists of defeating them. When, in *Sama*, the dervish (*fakir*) becomes completely empty of himself, that is, when he completely annihilates the self (ego), [he is ready to] embrace a saint (*'azis*) and dance together with him. At the moment when he is recovering – in the middle of that gathering, in whose deep mirrors he observes himself full of pleasure – he holds that holy person and, with the image of his own beauty (*jamal*) [reflected in it], he touches, at the same time, the "lover" and the "beloved". Attracting people to *Sama* and inciting them to move is the task of the sober person (*ahl-i sahiv*) [possibly referring to the dance master who does not spin during the ritual], and the benefits of this act extend to everyone present, publicly conferring God's compassion on all.

Although it may not be possible to identify some of these gestures, such as the 'jump' or the "tapping of the foot", in actual performances of the Mevlevi *Sama* – just as the *Risala-i Sipahsalar* does not allow us to visualize a strictly ritual structure of the *Sama* – many of the examples given in Ahmed Sipahsalar's *Risala* find support in Ahmed Aflaki's *Manakib al-'Arifin*.

If, on the one hand, the first works to deal with the Mevlevi ritual do not present a clear description of the structure of the *Sama*, on the other hand, the Mevlevi themselves created a poetic tradition in which music and the *Sama* were frequently invoked. One of the most important authors of this genre was Divâne Mehmed Çelebi (?-1530), who wrote a short *Mesnevi* concerning *Sama*, entitled *Treatise Concerning the Mevlevi Sama*. In this *Mesnevi* or treatise, Divâne Çelebi – who was largely responsible for the spread of the Mevlevi Order in the 16th century – divided the *Sama* into three distinct sessions, called *devr-is* (cycles). If this is a genuine reflection on a real Mevlevi ceremony, it can be assumed that Divâne's *Sama* was the forerunner of the *Sama* and

that during the first half of the 16th century the Mevlevi **Sama** was divided into three sessions.

In addition to this evidence, Divâne's poetry allows us to build a symbolic relationship between Sama Mevlevi and popular conceptions of **Sama**, which gives us access to one of the most essential elements of Mevlevi ritual cosmology:

IsteJ kim biline evsâf ile
Emredüp halketti nûn-u kâf ileⁿ

(With His qualities He wishes to be known,

So He commanded and created with [the letters] *nûn e kâf*)

This part of the poem talks about the Creation of the Universe. At the moment of Creation, God is said to have pronounced *kun* (be!), an Arabic word made up of the letters *kaf e nûn*, and the Universe was created.⁸⁵ There is an image of this vision in the anonymous *Risâla*, a short treatise on **Sama**, of which the oldest copy dates from the 15th century. This treatise was attributed to 'Ashik Pasha, the famous Sufi poet of the 14th century, grandson of Baba Ilyas-i Horasani, a Sufi and political activist of the 13th century. It is assumed that this short treatise was written for a popular audience in order to legitimize **Sama**, "music" and "dance". In it, **Sama's** music was described, in relation to the Creation of the Universe, as an emerging divine melody (*nagamat-i ilahi*). According to the *Risâla*, this divine melody is made up of twelve notes (*oniki perde*). From these twelve notes, four movements emerge: *çarh* (circular), *raks* (vibrating), *mu 'allak* (suspended) and *pertav* (leaping). The four movements represent the four elements (*'anasir-i arba 'a*) and the four seasons. The image is of a blue, ethereal cloak (*sufi-i azrak-push*) that dances to the rhythm of each sound movement. The *Risâla* is a relevant reference because it allows us to conclude that both the Mevlevi and popular religious perception see the **Sama** as an imitation of the cosmic universe, which justifies the fact that many authors

translate the word Sama as "cosmic concert" or "spiritual hearing".

From the same period, and no less relevant than the Risâla, is Vahidi's *Menakib-i Hvoca-i Cihan ve Netice-i Can*, which contains descriptive information about various mystical groups of the time, such as the Qalandari, the Abdal, the Haydari, the Cami, the Bektashi, the Shams-i Tabrizi, the Edemi, the Alim and, of course, the Mevlevi. With the exception of the Alim, who most likely represented the Ulema (Clerics), the others corresponded to 16th century mystical brotherhoods. Vahidi attributed the practice of zikr to the Sufis, referring more specifically to the Sunni tariqats, such as the Naqshbandi and the Halveti. Regarding the Sama Mevlevi, I transcribe the words of Pir 'Ali Konevi, the fictional *Sheikh* Mevlevi in Vahidi's work:

Through the **Sama**, the Mevlevi strive to return to the Father, who is Heaven, itself also in constant rotation (the Mother is the Earth). The moment that incites the Mevlevi to dance is indicated by the sound of the bamboo flute, and the spirit that is intoxicated by this sound will ascend to heaven.

About Mevlevi's appearance and habits, Vahidi comments:

Beards grown and moustaches trimmed according to law and tradition. Eye lids darkened with kohl, wearing a seamless one-piece, on the length of which appears, in green lines, the shape of the letter alif [One], The lobes of the turbans wrapped around the hats reach the waist. Dressed in black tunics and cloaks, with scarves around their necks. Playing tambourines, drums and flutes. Singing hymns and prayers and engaged in **Sama**.

From Vahidi, we learn that the Mevlevi used to play the tabla (a kind of tambourine), the *ney* (bamboo flute) and the clef (small tambor) and that they practiced **Sama** after dinner. This text unfortunately contains very little information about the ritual structure of Mevlevi **Sama**, although Vahidi pays special attention to the legal definition of the word **Sama**. According to Vahidi,

Sama is permissible because it is a means of reaching the manifest Truth of God (*Haqiqat*).

The earliest description of the Mevlevi **Sama**, which corresponds to the practices of the 19th and 20th centuries, was recorded by Sakip Dede (?-1735) in *Sefine-i Nefise-i Mevleviyan*. This is the first book since Aflaki's *Manakib al-Arifin* (1353) to cover the entire history of the Mevlevi Order. Sakip Dede records a short Risâla called Isarat al-Basara about the **Sama** and attributes it to Jalal al-Din Ergun Çelebi (14th century). In this Risâla, the Mevlevi **Sama** is divided into four sessions or cycles of turns (*selam[s]*), according to 20th century practice, and the Mukabele is explained according to the movement of the planets (*sayyara*). Sakip Dede tries to incorporate the principles or rules of the Naqshbandi Order, whose basic practice is *zikr*, into the Mevlevi Sama, while at the same time trying to combine the Naqshbandi *silsila* (line of spiritual ancestors) with the *silsila* of Mevlana's followers. These are more than clear signs of the Naqshbandi influence on the Mevlevi Order.

However, there doesn't seem to be any considerable Naqshbandi influence in the Mevlevi **Sama**. Although the Mevlevi practice *zikr-i hafî* (silent *zikr*) – proper to the Naqshbandi – by repeating the name of God, Allah, internally while spinning, the Mevlevi have never considered *zikr* (repetition of the names of God) to be the basis of their ritual. But they did allow members of other *tariqats* to perform vocal *zikr* (*zikr-i jahri*) before or after the **Sama**:

As long as it was convenient for the *zikr*, it was possible to sing some parts of the Mevlevi Ayin (*âyin-i serif*) in the **Ayin** [music] of another *tariqat* [school of dervishes]. In fact, the Mevlevi didn't sing *ilâhi(s)* (hymns) due to the demands of their Ayin[s]. Moreover, on special days, when the *mevlid* [?] or *mirâciye* [?] were sung, they used to invite the members of other *tariqat(s)* and, after the **Sama** Mevlevi, they would leave the running of the meeting to the eldest *Sheikh* (master of the

tariqat) who was present at the meeting; and they would ask his permission to sing hymns and perform the *zikr-i kiyami* (*zikr* performed standing) or the *zikr-i ku udi* (*zikr* performed sitting).

Just as the dervishes from other *tariqats* were allowed to participate in ***Sama***, the Mevlevi were allowed to attend and participate in the rituals of the different Sufi *tariqats*, and could even perform *Sama* during their *zikr* practice. The music that accompanied these rituals – *zikr* or *Sama* – was also shared by the members of the different *tariqats*:

A musician belonging to Mevlevi *tariqat* would compose the stanzas of a Halveti verse; a Saadi would listen to a Celveti work; a Bayrami would listen to an *Ilahi* [hymn] kadiri, in his own tone, in the *tekke* [or *tekkia*] to which he belonged. Fundamentally, the works – because they were created specifically for a [certain] type of ceremony – were classified not according to the *tariqat*, but according to the type of *zikr*. There was never a tradition of "if this *ilahi* is sung in the Rufai tekkes, then it can't be sung in the kadiri tekkes".

It seems that Sufi rituals were not a divisive factor among the *tariqats* (Sufi orders) of the Ottoman Empire, which seemed to have found a way to perform their rituals both within their own endogenous communities and among other Sufi orders. However, with the founding of the Republic of Turkey on September 2, 1925, a dictatorship aimed at banning the old Sufi fraternities was instituted in the country. Three months later, on December 13, 1925, the then-President of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, officially closed down all the tekkes (Sufi lodges) in Turkey through Law 677, thereby prohibiting and abolishing the Sufi ritual practices.

All *tekke(s)* [dervish stores] and *zaviye(s)* [or *zawya(s)*] [central dervish stores] in the Turkish Republic, even those in the form of *wakf* [religious foundations] or personally owned by their Sheikh or established in any other way, are closed

[...]. All orders that use titles such as *Sheikh* [master], *Murid* [disciple], *Murshid* [spiritual guide], *Dede* [a type of *Sheikh* of an order], *Çelebi* [title of the leader of the Mevlevi Order], *Seyyed* [a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad], *Baba* [the eldest of a religious order, a type of *Sheikh*], *Emir* [descendant of the Prophet Muhammad], *Nakip* [guardian of a religious order], *Khalifa* [substitute *Sheikh*] [. ...] are forbidden to wear them, and to wear the dervish cloak. [...] Those who open the closed *tekke(s)* [dervish stores] or *zaviye(s)* [central dervish stores] [...] and those who re-establish them or give temporary opening to the orders or persons who are called by any of the aforementioned mystical names or those who make use of them, will be sentenced to at least three months in prison and will be fined at least 50 Turkish liras.

Only the *camis* (mosques) and *mescits* (small mosques) remained legally open for communal prayer, but under the supervision of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyamet Isleri Baskanligi*).

Law 677 meant much more to the dervishes than simply preventing them from practicing their rituals. The violation of their rights to perform their traditional practices was, on the dervish side of the equation, an act of unjustifiable violence, a crime against the soul, which struck – affronting, offending and dishonoring – at the heart of Islam's mystical culture. The writer Shams Friedlander, in his book *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes*, reconstructed the moment, of extreme sadness, when the Mevlevi of the Üsküdar *tekkia* (an Istanbul neighborhood) were informed of the law that would prevent them from spinning for almost 30 years:

It was on a Saturday in December, during the final rotation of the last *Sama*, that the military police entered the Mevlevi *tekke* [or *tekkia*] of Üsküdar, decreeing it closed. The rapid footsteps of the dervishes' bare feet creaked as they stepped on the serene mirror of the wooden floor of the *semahane* [*Sama*

room], The chief of police read out the law that declared dervish ritual practices, frequent gatherings in the *tekke(s)* [or *tekkia(s)*], the profession of *tomb-keeping* and the office of *Sheikh*, as well as other dervish initiations, officially abolished [...]. The dervishes wept. Their waving skirts hung loosely, like the shrouds they represented. Their *sikke(s)* [hats], now tilted away from the sun, became gloomy tombstones. The *Sheikh* [Ahmed Remzi Dede] moved away silently to change his clothes in the street; and the dervishes, mute, followed him in a line. Their feet slid petrified across the floor. The police padlocked the entrance door, enclosing the vibrations of love and peace and the curious after-sounds of bare feet turning sharply to the wail of a non-existent *ney* [flute]. That same night, people came and lit candles over the police padlock.

Two years later, in the winter of 1927, Kemal Atatürk allowed the tomb of Rumi or Mevlana, located in Konya, to be reopened, but as a museum. The site was once again visited by Mevlana's lovers and by pilgrims from all over the world. Other tombs of saints – both for their historical importance and their artistic legacy – were reopened from 1950 onwards. The other prohibitions have not been repealed to this day. It is, however, common knowledge that there were Sufi meetings during the Kemalist era and that many nationalist politicians were (and still are) affiliated with the Turkish *tariqat(s)*. Meetings were tolerated as long as the orders did not openly act as organizations and the individuals in the *tariqats* operated through legal political parties.

The Mevlevi *tekyas* never reopened and it took almost thirty years for an alternative solution to allow the Mevlevi dervishes to spin again. "If the *tekyas* is closed, then we must become the *tekyas*". It was with this thought that, in 1953, Sadettin Heper, the *kudumzenbashi* (kudum [double drum] master) of the old Yenikapı *tekyas* in Istanbul, approached the Mayor of Konya, suggesting that

a situation be created in which the dervishes could spin without breaking the law. With him was Halil Can, a renowned Mevlevi **neyzen** (**ney** [bamboo flute] player). Together, they began the talks that would lead the Dancing Dervishes to a kind of public **revival** in which the **Sama** would be reborn in the form of a ritual-spectacle with no (at least apparently) mystical or religious purpose. Halil Can was willing to accept the Mayor's proposal – that this should not be a dervish ceremony, but an occasion to celebrate the birthday of the great Persian poet, Mevlana – but Heper resisted until it was agreed that the **Kur'an-i Kerim** (recitation of the Quran) could be part of the ceremony. The great **hafiz** (person who recites the Quran) Kani Karaca (?-2004) – whom I had the opportunity to meet at the Mevlana Festival in 2003 – was contacted.

In December 1953, a select audience was invited to the local cinema in Konya to witness the first **Sama** Mevlevi since the closure of the **tekkias** in 1925. Unlike the **Sama(s)** of the past, which featured a full orchestra (**mutrip**) and several **semazen(s)** (whirling dervishes), this time there were only three musicians: Halil Can and Ulvi Erguner, playing **ney**, and Sadettin Heper, playing **kudum**. Kani Karaca recited the Quran and two **semazen(s)** (whirling dervishes), Hulki Amil Çelebi and Abdul Baki, whirled, in ordinary clothes, to the lament of the **ney**.

Sama's rebirth was ample proof that the closure of the **tekkias** had failed to destroy the gnostic ideal proposed by Rumi seven centuries ago. In 1954, the event was repeated. This time it was organized by the Konya Tourist Association. The writer Annemarie Schimmel, one of the distinguished guests at that concert, provides us - in the chapter *Ils entrent tons dans la Danse, la Danse...*, of her book *L'Incendie de L'Ame: l'aventure spirituelle de Rûmi* - with one of the rare testimonies of that unusual evening:

In December 1954, I received an invitation to take part in a celebration of Mevlana's *Shab-i Arûs* or "spiritual nights"

(named after the anniversary of a saint's death). I had recently arrived in Ankara to teach at the Faculty of Islamic Theology and had already published a number of versified translations and short studies of Mevlana's poetry in German. Excited at the thought of attending the first celebration of her birthday, I dreamt of the dancing dervishes and, in mid-December, happily set off with my mother for Konya. We were welcomed into a kind and wealthy family; late at night, they took us to a vast house [he's referring to Konya's cinema hall] in the center of the old city, where two stands had been set up for the noble guests. With profound astonishment, we observed a group of old men carrying mysterious bags from which emerged flutes, *rebab(s)* [a kind of violin], tambourines, and even dervish hats and cloaks. What was going on? The Mevlevi ritual had been banned since Atatürk closed the dervish convents in 1925, so how could all the instruments still be used? Hafiz Sabri, who taught Qur'anic recitation at our college, smiled: "You'll see, your dream will come true!" and he was right. For the first time in 29 years, the men began to perform the mystical dance together. We listened to the music, the flutes, the drums, the powerful introductory hymn [*Nat-i Serif*] (in praise of the Prophet) and saw the men spinning, whirling, their white skirts flapping like huge moths on white nights, spinning around a candle, like atoms gravitating around the sun, like stars in cosmic harmony. They hadn't practiced together for decades. But they were gathered here - they had come from Istanbul, Afyon, Samsun and Ankara - and immediately rediscovered the movement of the ancient rhythm of *samâ'-i samâwi*, the celestial dance.

In 1955, although it continued to be performed at the local cinema in Konya, the *Devr-i Veledi* (circumambulation) was re-introduced into the ceremony and the *tennure* (the white Mevlevi

outfit) and *sikke(s)* (the traditional brown felt hats) were once again worn. The number of musicians (*mutrip*) and dancing dervishes (*semazen[s]*) increased and Resuhi Baykara took up the post of *Sheikh*. Jalaluddin Çelebi was the *semazenbashi* (dance master). In 1956, the *Sama* was moved to the Konya library and the ceremony was also performed in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. That year, Mithat Bahari took the place of Sheikh and Resuhi Baykara became semazen (whirling dervish).

At one of these first *Sama(s)*, the police noticed that one of the old dervishes was praying during the turn. After the *Sama*, they warned Sadettin Heper that this should be a Sama for tourists and not a Sama for dervishes. Heper replied: "He's an old man and has no teeth. That's why his mouth moves up and down while he's spinning."

In another December, the police were concerned about the presence of young *semazen(s)* at the ceremony. "They'll grow up to be dervishes!" said the authorities. It was then explained that only the movements of the dance were being taught to the youngsters and that they knew nothing about its true meaning.

From 1956 onwards, the "Dancing Dervishes" began to attract people from all over the world. The Konya Library became too small for such a large audience. It was then decided to move the ceremony to the city's sports hall. Konya was once again becoming a center of cultural effervescence.

It is possible that this period of openness - which enabled the rebirth of *Sama* in the city of Konya - is related to the arrival of the Democratic Party in 1950. After 37 years of Republican Party power, Turkey was experiencing a period of bipartisanship that lasted until 1960, when the military took power. An anti-romantic view of this period - and one that helps us understand the context in which these first Sama ceremonies were performed - is given to us by the musician Mevlevi Kudsi Erguner, in his autobiographical book *La Fontaine de la Séparation: Voyages d'un musicien*

*souf*¹⁰³, from which I quote some excerpts in chapter 6, dedicated to the Mevlana Festival.

After the coup d'état in 1960, the military decided to attend the ***Sama*** ceremonies. At that time, the organization of the ceremony was concentrated on three people: Mithat Bahari, a great commentator on Rumi's Masnavi, and ***Sheikh(s)*** Resuhi Baykara and his older brother Gavsi Baykara, both sons of the last ***Sheikh*** of the Yenikapi ***tekkia***, the largest Mevlevi center in Istanbul.

In 1967, an incident occurred involving ***Sheikh*** Resuhi Baykara: during the ***Sama***, while he and the other two ***Sheikhs*** were walking towards the "post", the photographer from one of the newspapers present followed them, clicking a photo very close to Resuhi Baykara's face. The ***Sheikh*** abruptly turned to the photographer, shouting: "Get out!" There was a great commotion in the ***Semahane*** (***Sama*** room). After the ceremony, a representative of the Konya Tourist Association announced on the microphone that Resuhi Baykara would no longer be invited to participate in ***Sama***'.

The acting general, Cemal Gursel - the mastermind of the 1960 coup d'état – was present and the episode had consequences. The first was the decision to no longer invite the Sufi community in Istanbul to take part in the Mevlana Festival. On the other hand, they wanted the event to continue in subsequent years. The solution continued to come from Istanbul:

As they wanted to keep the Festival going despite everything, they found a character [among the dervishes of Istanbul]: Ahmed Bican Kasaboglu. He offered to teach the dance of the whirling dervishes to the young people of Konya. They published small advertisements in the local newspapers to recruit students to inculcate the *Sama* in view of the ceremonies the following year. From those who applied, they chose those who met the criteria of height, facial beauty and

ease of movement. Most of them were members of the city's soccer or basketball team. Under the direction of Bican Kasaboglu, they learned to spin in just a few months. Then they dressed them in clothes [*tennure*] and felt hats [*sikke*] to give them the appearance of dervishes. [...] The following year, a vote was held in Istanbul. I remember it well, because many of those decisive meetings took place at my father's house [Kudsi is the son of Ulvi Erguner, one of the Mevlevi musicians who took part in the first *Sama* in the history of the Mevlana Festival]. What would they do? Should the musicians, indispensable elements in practicing *Sama*, take part in this parody of a ritual? There was no one in Konya who was prepared to lead the musical part of the ceremony, which was refined enough for it not to be performed by just anyone. It was decided then, after much discussion, to continue performing *Sama*'s music in order to exercise a minimum of control over what was going on in Konya. The authentic community of whirling dervishes was discarded and once again restricted to the underground, while in Konya we moved closer to folklore every year.

Kudsi's speech brings us directly to the main theme of chapter 6 [*The Sama of the Mevlana Festival (ethnographic and historical notes)*]: the paradoxical nature of the *Sama* (tradition/folklore, ritual/performance, show/prayer) presented publicly. The main aim of this work, however, is not to exhaustively discuss the ambiguous aspects of today's Mevlevi *Sama*, but rather to give a vision of the *Sama* that allows us to understand it, historically and synchronically, in the most comprehensive way possible.

If the historical process that led to the *Sama* being presented as a public spectacle allowed the dervishes to be at the mercy of questions that call into question the authenticity of their traditional ritual, the process that led to the *Sama* (or *Mukabele*),

to be performed, after the closure of the *tekkias*, inside other dervish *tariqat(s)*, gave back to the Mevlevi (and non-Mevlevi too) of Turkey, the right to practice spiritual hearing (*al-sama*) within a context of gnostic learning.

As mentioned earlier, Law 677 closed the physical *tekkia(s)* of the dervishes, but it was not strong enough to destroy the bonds of tolerance and cooperation that had always existed between the *tariqat(s)* of Turkey. Freedom of thought, a characteristic of Sufism, has remained indelible in all areas of Turkish culture. Over time, after the official abolition of dervish practices in 1925, those who wanted to continue performing Sufi rites were, as we will see below, allowed to do so, as long as it was not under the aegis of an organized religious body.

With specific regard to the practice of *Sama*, let's take a look at what happened inside one of the oldest and most respected dervish *tekkia(s)* in Istanbul - the Nureddin *tekkia* (in the Fetih neighborhood), belonging to the Jerrahi or Jerrahiyya Order (a subgroup of the larger Halveti or Khalwatiyya order), founded by *Sheikh* Nuruddin Muhammad al-Jerrah (?-1720). In 1980, the year in which *Sama* was again practiced in the Jerrahi *tekkia*, the *Sheikh* of the order was Muzzaffer Ozak (?-1985).

At the request of the then Mevlevi *Sheikh* Celaleddin Çelebi (?-1996), the 25th descendant of Mevlana - to gather the Mevlevi under his protection - Muzzaffer Ozak asked Yakup Koyuncu Efendi, his disciple since 1974, to teach *Sama* to a group of young *murid(s)* (disciples) who wanted to become *semazen(s)* (whirling dervishes). The episodes that led Yakup *Baba* Efendi to become the *semazen-bashi* (master of *Sama*) of the Jerrahi *tekkia* in Istanbul were told to me personally on the afternoon of December 23, 2003. And it is they who illuminate – at least as far as the practice of *Sama* in Turkey is concerned – the recent history of the Mevlevi *tariqat*:

I was born in Nigde, a small Turkish town near Konya and Aksaray, in Anatolia, south-central Turkey. My contact with Sufism began when I was still a child: my father, Ahmet Saadettin Efendi, and my mother, Medine Hanim Efendi, used to receive dervish travelers in our house and I ended up having contact with these people too. There was a *Sheikh* Bektash [an order founded by Haji Bektashi (?-1270) in Anatolia in the 13th century] in our neighborhood. His name was Ali Baba and he used to affectionately carry me around on his shoulders to show me the gardens. There was also another *Sheikh*, Zekeriya Efendi, who was my mother's relative. One day, they called me in to talk about Sufism. My mother asked *Sheikh* Zekeriya Efendi about the current spiritual situation in the world. He gave her an unexpected answer: "Medine, my sister, I could explain it to you at length, since for seven years I have been regarded as a cartographer of the heavens and the earth. *Inshaallah* [God willing] your son may one day be entrusted with tasks as auspicious as this." Once, during my elementary school years, I told my grandfather that I wanted to be a Bektash. He replied: "A Bektash dervish has to pray 80 *rak'at(s)* of *salat* a night [meaning that the person has to repeat the performance of the traditional Islamic prayer (*salat* or *namaz*) 80 times and not twice, as Muslims do in the five daily prayers]; you can't do that, seek your destiny in some other Order". When I was in Nigde, aged 10 or 12, I had a dream about the Prophet Moses. He told me that I should go to Istanbul by train. So, in the dream, we went to Istanbul and I got off the train with Prophet Moses. Then we parted and I was left alone. I saw myself in a large area with many tombs around it. The view of the place is somewhat reminiscent of the area where the Süleymaniye mosque stands. There, I met the Prophet Jesus (Spirit of Allah). The prophet had long, golden blond hair. He was so young and handsome... He was like light (m/r). He showed me the places I would live later.

The dream ended after that. And I'm still living, as far as I can remember, in the places presented to me by the Prophet Jesus. In 1974, I became a disciple of Süleyman Muzzaffer Ozak Efendi, who was the *Sheikh* of the Jerrahi Order of Istanbul. Around 1978, he gave me the caliphate in the Order. Once, before I met Muzzaffer Ozak, the Mevlevi *Sheikh* Celaleddin Çelebi, 25th descendant of Mevlana, offered him a *sikke* [Mevlevi hat], asking him to operate in the Mevlevi order as well and to organize and put all the Mevlevi together. Faced with this request, Muzzaffer Efendi replied: "I am waiting for a spiritual sign to accept this request". In 1978, I had another dream. I was about 28 years old. In this dream, I met Hz. Mevlana who made me do the *Sama* spiritually, near a river. He also gave me four names of Allah. I told the dream to Muzzaffer Efendi and he told me about the request that the then *Sheikh* Mevlevi had made to him: "Celaleddin Çelebi asked us to serve Hz. Mevlana. From now on, as your dream confirms, you will be responsible for this service". I also told him that Hz. Mevlana had given me 4 *Ayet-el Kürsi* in the dream, while Muzzaffer replied: "Then we'll give you 3 more *Ayet-el Kürsi*, so the total will be 7 and Hz. Mevlana will take you under her protection". One day, a Mevlevi *Sheikh* came to my work (I was a tailor), saying: "let's make a *Sama*". I accepted the invitation and we did the *Sama* seven times, on different days. On the eighth time, the *Sheikh* said to me: "you've done 1001 spins without stopping, now you're ready to be a *sema-zen*." *Sheikh* Mevlevi told me that I should have a *tenure* [skirt] of the Mevlevi Order. I asked him what it should look like. He said: "Green! Green is manifest. This *Sheikh* Mevlevi had seen me wrapped in a green light while I was spinning. So I bought some green cloth and had a Mevlevi *tennure* made. So, when we gathered in the house of a scholar - in the presence of *Sheikh* Mevlevi, *Sheikh* Murtaza Efendi and Ibrahim Subasi, I made a *Sama*. They said it was very

good. I had my *sikke* in hand, when Murtaza Efendi said: "Take it to Muzaffer Efendi to be blessed". I took the *sikke* to *Sheikh* Muzaffer, he blessed the *sikke* and made me wear it: "From now on, we will do *Sama* and Yakup Efendi will be our teacher". After these events, in 1980, my friends asked Muzaffer to allow me to instruct them in making *Sama*. Muzaffer then asked me to teach the young dervishes the correct uses and manners of *Sama* and to make them practice it. I started *Sama* in the Jerrahi *tekky*a and, in three years, I trained 18 *Semazen*(s) [whirling dervishes]. Muzaffer was pleased and encouraged me to continue. About five years later, more precisely on the evening of February 12, 1985, Muzaffer Efendi asked me: "Today I want to see *Sama* here and then we'll have a big dinner". So I conducted the *Sama* that evening and Muzaffer Efendi attended. When the *Sama* was over, he said: "*Alhandulillah* [thank God!], we made it". On the evening of the following day, February 13, 1985, he passed away. In 1988, I made the '*Umra*, the small pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, with Sefer Efendi [*Sheikh* Jerrahi who took Muzaffer's place] and a group of about 70 to 80 dervishes: I was in the "Garden of Paradise" - in *Ravza-i Mutaharra*, *Mescit-ül Nebevi* - making *Salat*, when an old man, about 80 years old, looked at me, among hundreds of people, approached me and asked me for permission to make a *Santa*. I told him that I had no authority to give him permission or not. He insisted. Faced with his determination, I replied: "With Allah's permission and in the presence of my friends, you can spin". And he began to spin. When he had finished, he approached me again. I looked at his face and he looked at me as if we were seeking mutual recognition. A while passed without either of us uttering a word. Until the moment when, breaking the silence, I asked him: "Where does your essence come from?" And the old man replied: "I come from Damascus and I'm also a Mevlevi. I come from the

branch of Sami-ül Mevlevi Dede and I'm in the Emevi Mosque in Damascus. I have 300 dervishes, but there are no *Semazen(s)*. That authority was given to you by Hz. *Pir* Mevlana. I recognized that you had this permission, so I wanted to make this *Sama* in the presence of the Prophet, in the presence of Allah and in his presence." [The old *Sheikh* wept and kissed Yakup's feet.] The people around him asked themselves: "What's going on here?" Someone replied: "Mevlana and Shams have met". The place - the *Garden of Paradise* - was full of people waiting to pray. After a long moment of commotion, I asked him where I could meet him again. He said that he would be preaching after the morning prayer, in the presence of the Prophet, in Ward 19 and that I could meet him there. Then, while they were looking at the dome of the garden, which is called *Kubbe-i Hadra*, *Sheikh* Mevlevi presented me with a Mevlevi *arakiye*, handing me a written permission slip from the Sami-ül Mevlevi school. Then the old *Sheikh* said to me: "Come tomorrow afternoon and I'll give you some presents to give to the dervishes. As I am an old man, I pray in the afternoon, after the morning prayer. So, in the afternoon of the next day, in front of the *Baba Saïam* gate, *Sheikh* Mevlevi gave me a large fish and a basket full of fruit, saying: "Please take this as a gift for the dervishes". And I offered the fish and fruit to my friends. On the second day in Medina, in the *lobby* of the hotel where he was staying, Sefer Efendi asked his students: "We came to Medina from Mecca. Did you witness anything extraordinary?" One of the dervishes said: "Yakup Baba met an important person at the *Ravza-i Mutahhara*. And I told him what had happened. Sefer Efendi said that he would like to meet *Sheikh* Mevlevi and I told him how he could meet him. He went to meet the *Sheikh* with his friends and they walked together. ["After meeting him, Sefer Efendi told Yakup Baba that he recognized the high level of his spiritual development

and that he congratulated him on it," said a Jerrahi member (during the interview), who had also witnessed the scene.] Then he said these words: "Celaleddin Çelebi sent me a Mevlevi *sikke*, we will give it to you according to the spiritual sign". And he added: "This is what is called spiritualism: Alhah determines where and when". Shortly before he died in 1996, Celaleddin Çelebi invited me to his house. I went and he asked me how many *semazen(s)* I had trained. I replied that according to the records, 18 foreigners and 110 Turks, a total of 128 *semazen(s)*. Celebi said that no one in the history of the Republic had trained so many *semazen(s)*. He congratulated me, saying: "God willing, your students will teach others". As you can see, I am only a servant of this path (Koyuncu Efendi, Yakup. *Interview*. By Camargo, Giselle Guilhon Antunes, 23 Dec. 2003.).

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