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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

# SUFIS FROM THE LATE OTTOMAN ISTANBUL AND PHOTOGRAPHY: ALTERNATIVE READINGS ON THE 'POPULAR' MEVLEVI IMAGES

## GEÇ DÖNEM OSMANLI İSTANBULU'NDA SUFİLER VE FOTOĞRAF: "POPÜLER" MEVLEVİ FOTOĞRAFLARINA DAİR YENİ BAKIŞ AÇILARI

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**Abstract**

Despite the growing literature on Ottoman photography, the depictions of Sufi dervishes and the Mevlevis, in particular, are still considered a vestige of Orientalist thinking. Beyond art historical approaches, a close reading of these 'popular' dervish images reveals that the Mevlevis were indeed actively engaged in representing themselves. From this perspective, this article argues that their intimate involvement in photography, as a modern medium, was profoundly related to certain characteristics of the Mevlevi order.

This article also scrutinizes the possible contributions of the visual sources to the history of Ottoman music, particularly the musical aspects of the Mevlevi photographs, to which the scholarship has so far paid little attention. The representations of instruments, and the holding and playing positions of the musician dervishes in those images are discussed in this paper. Moreover, these images are instrumental in critically addressing the historiographical debates around the Mevlevi tradition and the waves of Mevlevi revivalism, both of which have emerged in Turkey from the 1950s onward.

**Keywords:** Mevlevi order, Sufism, Ottoman photography, Pascal Sébah (1823-1886), Polycarpe Charles Joaillier (1848-1904), Ottoman music, Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (1900-1982)

**Öz**

Osmanlı fotoğraf tarihi üzerine gelişen bir literatür olmasına rağmen fotoğraf üzerine yapılan teknik ve teorik analizlerde kimi önyargıların halâ devam ettiği gözlenmektedir. On dokuzuncu yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren üretilmeye başlanan Mevlevi fotoğrafları bu duruma bir örnek olarak gösterilebilir. Değerlendirmeler ağırlıklı olarak oryantalizme paralel yaklaşım biçimleriyle yapılmakta, Mevlevilerin fotoğraflar içerisindeki edilgen konumlarına işaret edilmektedir. Bu çalışma, bu görseller hakkında farklı bir bakış açısıyla, dervişlerin fotoğraf içerisindeki konumlarının edilgen olmadığını; modern hayatın getirdiği yeniliklere ilgi ve alakâ gösterip adapte olabilmelerinin Mevlevi tarikatının bazı karakteristik özellikleriyle ilgili olduğunu iddia etmektedir.

Mevlevi fotoğrafları, Osmanlı müzik tarihi açısından da tartışma zemini oluşturabilir. Enstrümanların temsili, çeşitliliği, tutuş ve icra pozisyonlarının sergilenmesi bakımlarından Mevlevi fotoğrafları, müzikolojik değerlendirmelere konu olabilecek tarihi kaynaklar olarak kullanılabilirler. 1950'ler Türkiyesi'nde, Mevlevi kültürünün yeniden canlandırılması sırasında önemli araştırmalar yayınlanmıştır.

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Tekke ve zaviyelerin kapanmasıyla yaşanan kopuş sonrası ortaya çıkan yazın kültürü, genel hatlarıyla, Mevleviliği idealize etmekte ve nostaljik tonlara sahiptir. Bu makale, bu yazına eleştirel bir bakışla yaklaşırken, tarihi kaynak olarak Mevlevi fotoğraflarını literatür içerisindeki tartışmalara entegre etmeye çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mevlevilik, Sufizm, Osmanlı fotoğrafı, Pascal Sébah (1823-1886), Polycarpe Charles Joaillier (1848-1904), Osmanlı müziği, Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (1900-1982)

## Introduction

This paper calls into question the potential value of photography in late Ottoman historical accounts by focusing on several photographs depicting Mevlevi dervishes.[1] The problematic approach of the late Ottoman scholarship, which has confined photography to assumptions of Orientalism has been reviewed critically since the early 2000s.[2] Such scholarly bias tends to locate the images of Mevlevi dervishes alongside other photographs depicting 'Oriental types'. Without any differentiation, it lumps together the photographs of dervishes, street vendors, and artisans into the Orientalist configuration due to the cultural and religious authenticity that they claimed to display. As Woodward emphasized, such historical readings run the risk of oversimplifying the complexities and nuances that the visual sources carry.[3] Moreover, a limited number of identical photographs representing the overall Mevlevi culture appears to be another problematic part to which the scholarship has not paid much attention. Micklewright is probably the first art historian to bring a critical approach to the interpretation of the dervish photographs by addressing the circulation of photography within the Sufi communities and various meanings of photography as a visual source material.[4]

This paper starts by questioning the prejudices and gaps in the current literature and offers a fresh look into the subject matter. The idea is to better integrate photographs into the interpretation of Ottoman society and culture by considering the complexities of photographic production and the circulation of images.[5] A welcoming and open attitude to novelties was considered a

1 I am indebted to Prof. Cem Behar for his valuable comments on this study. I additionally like to thank to photographer Abdülkerim Tever for helping me analyse the images technically. I presented an earlier version of this paper at an online lecture organized by the Orient-Institute Istanbul in collaboration with The Nafi Baba Center for Research in Sufism, History, and Culture at Boğaziçi University in January 27, 2021. I want to thank the scholars that participated in the online lecture, whose comments and critiques were significant for the final version of this study.

2 For critical literature on the relationship between Orientalism and photography, see Nancy Micklewright, "Orientalism and Photography", *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism*, ed. Zeynep İnankur, Reina Lewis and Mary Roberts, İstanbul Research Institute, İstanbul 2015, pp. 99-110; Ali Behdad, "Orientalist Photography," *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*, ed. Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, Getty Publications, Los Angeles 2013, pp. 11-32.

3 Michelle L. Woodward, "Between Orientalist Clichés and Images of Modernization", *History of Photography*, XXVII/4 (2003), pp. 363-374.

4 Nancy Micklewright, "Dervish Images in Photographs and Paintings", *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez, University of California Press, California 1992, pp. 270-271.

5 Methodologically, the photographs, which this study will analyse are the result of the systematic search in the

characteristic of the Mevlevi order, which the study will seek to involve in the analysis of the mutual interactions of the Mevlevis and photography.

Photographs, as primary sources, might provide historical details that could not be traceable in textual sources. Even so, many scholars are hesitant to integrate photography into historical interpretations either because of theoretical inadequacy or the tendency to hierarchically classify textual sources above visual sources. Tucker underlines that a visual source is not different compared to textual sources; similar questions should be asked to textual as well as visual material: Who took the photograph? Who is the targeted audience? In which ways it supports or opposes the established historical narratives?[6]

Having said that, photographs that are integrated into historical analyses might produce dilemmas and problems. Photographers who witnessed past events help us configure how the past event "looked" like through their photography. However, there is always something outside of the frame that is not being shown. Indeed, the photographer might have an active role in shaping the visual memory by deliberately staging scenes for the camera. One example is the photographs representing the liberation of Paris, which marked a major turning point toward the end of World War II. Photography was illegal in the occupied territories and photojournalists could only enter the area along with the Allies troops. The majority of the popular images of resistance, therefore, were taken after the war has ended and depicted artificially constructed scenes. Those images operated to shape the popular memory for a particular political purpose.[7] Thomas emphasizes the differences between the image and past realities by stating that "an image is not reality, it is a representation".[8] The same logic applies to the fact that historiography is not history itself, but a reconstruction. Even though the injection of visual materials into historical narratives might open new historical readings, the evidential complexities should not be ignored.

As a social historian, my academic interests primarily lie in the life narratives of musicians. I seek to explore the channels of transmitting musical knowledge, reveal the influential actors in the musicians' networks, and analyse the frequency of interactions among different musician communities. Even though I am not an expert in interpreting visual sources, the focus in this paper is on the photographs of Mevlevi whose life narratives have a significant share in the history of Ottoman music due to their strong artistic interests. In other words, the visual sources of this paper come from the field in which I am academically involved.

Pierre de Gigord Collection, which is provided by the Getty Research Institute. The bulk of the digital images is in open access and available in high quality. For the essentials about the history and the structure of the Pierre de Gigord Collection, see Nancy Micklewright, "Alternative Histories of Photography in the Ottoman Middle East", *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*, ed. Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, Getty Publications, Los Angeles 2013, pp. 75-92. For more information about the collection, see https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/digital_collections/notable/gigord.html [Date of Access: 27 Nov., 2022].

6 Jennifer Tucker, "Entwined Practices: Engagements with Photographs in Historical İnquiry", *History and Theory* Themed Issue, XL/4, (2009), pp. 1-8.

7 Catherine M. Clark, "Capturing the Moment, Picturing History: Photographs of the Liberation of Paris", *American Historical Review*, CXX/3, (2016), pp. 824-860.

8 Julia Adney Thomas, "The Evidence of Sight", *History and Theory*, XLVIII/4, (2009), pp. 151-168.

## On the Relationship Between the Mevlevis and the Audience

The Mevlevi order was distinguished from other Sufi orders in various ways, and in particular by the predominance of music in their rituals and *sema*. Moreover, due to various reasons Mevlevi affiliates were known to be more receptive of new new ideas and practices and this tendency might help to understand their interest in photography as a novel medium of representation. For example, the role of Mevlevi musicians in the development of the use of notation in Ottoman music can not be overlooked. The Ottoman musical tradition has profited fundamentally from oral teaching methods[9] and many scholarly works demonstrate the complexities of the transition as well as continuing practices of oral tradition in music throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[10] However, in especially in the nineteentn century new modes of notation started to be introduced to various Ottoman musical traditions and Armenian musician Hamparsum Limonciyan (d. 1839) is a leading figure in this process. The notation system that he had invented was not accepted by the church authorities but thanks to his affiliaition with some Mevlevi dervishes that appreciated, learned and used his notation, his name did not fall into oblivion. It seems that the interest and support of the Mevlevis was a crucial in creating wider awareness and acceptance of Hamparsum notation among late Ottoman musicians.[11] One may multiply the instances of innovative changes triggered by the members of the Mevlevi order as well as their receptiveness to the new practices not only in music but in different art forms, including literature and calligraphy, which, while very important, are beyond the scope of this paper.[12]

The cultural distinctiveness of the Mevlevi order is observable in the architectural aspects of the Mevlevi lodges as well, which appears to be related to the argument of why the Mevlevis but not the other Sufi orders dominated the visual culture of Sufism. Cem Behar provides valuable insights into the practicalities of Mevlevi rituals from an architectural standpoint and focuses

9 Osman Dede (d. 1730), the Sheikh of Galata Mevlevi lodge, developed a notation system that was based on Arabic letters. Abdülbaki Nasır Dede (d. 1821), the great grandson of Osman Dede, was another Mevlevi to work on a staff notation system, see Nâsır Abdülbaki Dede, *Tedkîk ü Tahkîk,* ed. Yalçın Tura, Pan, İstanbul 2006; For a critical overview of the issue, see Eugenaia Popescu–Judetz, *Türk Musıki Kültürünün Anlamları,* trans. Bülent Aksoy, Pan, İstanbul 2007, pp. 17-55; For a more recent publication that deals with the subject matter, see Cem Behar, "Inventors of Notation Systems in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Istanbul: The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner", *Annual of Istanbul Studies,* I, (2019), pp. 193-199.

10 Merih Erol, *Greek Orthodox Music in Istanbul: Nation and Community in the Era of Reform,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2015; Maureen Jackson, *Mixing Musics: Turkish Jewry and the Urban Landscape of a Sacred Song*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2013; Panagiotis C. Poulos, "Rethinking Orality in Turkish Classical Music: A Genealogy of Contemporary Musical Assemblages", *Middle Eastern Journal of Culture and Communication*, IV/2, (2011), pp. 164-183; Cem Behar, *Aşk Olmadan Meşk Olmaz: Geleneksel Osmanlı/Türk Müziğinde Öğretim ve İntikal,* Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 1998.

11 Aram Keropvyan and Altuğ Yılmaz, *Klasik Osmanlı Müziği ve Ermeniler*, Surp Pırgiç Ermeni Hastanesi Vakfı Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2010, pp. 93-106.

12 Particularly about the people of culture and art among the dervishes of Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge and the intellectual networks between the lodge and the outside world, see Bayram Ali Kaya, *Tekke Kapısı: Yenikapı Mevlevihanesi'nin İnsanları*, Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2012.

how the Mevlevis interacted with the audience during the rituals.[13] It seems the Mevlevis highly encouraged the presence of an audience during their ceremonies. Although the practice of performing religious rituals in front of other people sounds quite modern, it is not. The central lodge of the Mevlevi order in Konya, which was built in 1520, had a particular space for the visitors, *züvvar mahfili,* from the eighteenth century on. The space was separated with wooden bars from where the rituals took place. It was built as a two-story structure, the upper part of which was reserved for female visitors.[14]

Towards the middle of the seventeenth century, Istanbul had four Mevlevi lodges: Galata (1491) which was the oldest, Yenikapı (1597), Beşiktaş (1613), and Kasımpaşa (1631).[15] There is not any historical account regarding the architectural aspects of the Galata Mevlevi lodge from the time it was initially built in 1491. What we know is that the lodge at Galata has undergone major renovations over time due to destructive earthquakes and fires. The earliest visual sources can be traced back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, and they reveal the architectural features as well as the presence of the audience during the rituals.[16]

Mary Roberts provides a detailed account of a Rıfai lodge in Üsküdar while comparing two paintings of Fausto Zonaro (d. 1929) to discuss the self-portrait drawings in the Ottoman painting. The author underlines that the Rıfai lodge and the Mevlevi lodge in Galata were centers of attraction for European audiences, both of which appeared frequently in the travel guides of the nineteenth century.[17] Although visitors were indeed accepted by the Rıfais to watch their rituals, still the prominence of the presence of an audience is still not comparable to that of the Mevlevi order. The Mevlevis added a special part to their religious ritual called the 'niyaz ayini', which was based on the request of the audience to extend the rite beyond the usual schedule.[18] Given that, drawing a comparison between the Mevlevis and other Sufi order should underline that the former shifted the role of the audience from passive followers to active participants. The Mevlevis integrated visitors into the ritual deliberately, with which the ritual gained an additional dimension. The result of this amalgamation was the transformation of the religious ritual into a

13 Cem Behar, "Mevlevî Mukabelesi: İbadet ve Temaşa", *Osmanlı/Türk Musıkisinin Kısa Tarihi*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2019, pp. 177-198.

14 Haşim Karpuz, "Konya Mevlâna Dergâhının Mimari Yapısı", *Mevlâna Ocağı*, ed. Mehmet Bayyiğit, Kombassan Vakfı, Konya 2007, p. 26.

15 For more on the history of the Mevlevi lodges in Istanbul as well as the influential Mevlevi figures of the late Ottoman Istanbul, see Sezai Küçük, *Mevlevîliğin Son Yüzyılı,* Vefa, İstanbul 2007, pp. 72-175; Ekrem Işın, *İstanbul'da Gündelik Hayat: İnsan, Kültür ve Mekân İlişkileri Üzerine Toplumsal Tarih Denemeleri*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 1995, pp. 267-318.

16 M. Baha Tanman, "Galata Mevlevîhânesi", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, XIII*,* (1996), pp. 317-321; Erdem Yücel, "Galata (Kulekapısı) Mevlevîhânesi", *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi,* I/2, (1979), p. 81.

17 Mary Roberts, Istanbul Exchanges: Ottomans, Orientalists, and Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture, University of California Press, Oakland 2015, pp. 141-146. More on the depictions of the Sufis by European daily papers and travel guides as well as examples from the visual representations, see Thierry Zarcone, "Western Visual Representations of Dervishes from the 14th Century to Early 20th", *Kyoto Bullettin of Islamic Area Studies*, VI, (2013), pp. 43-58.

18 Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevî Âdâb ve Erkânı*, İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, İstanbul 1963, pp. 95-98.

performance. By addressing the issue, Thierry Zarcone proposed a controversial interpretation of the presence of the audience, locals and Westerners alike. However, the way he narrated the Mevlevis of Galata in the late Ottoman period gives the impression that the dervishes were a kind of degenerate people that sought material benefit from the crowd but especially from the Europeans.[19] The rituals were indeed free to the public and gifts were accepted by the audience after the rituals. However, it is difficult to argue that the material benefit or the financial expectations motivated the Mevlevis and thus to consider it as the underlying cause of the rituals.

Another aspect of the cultural distinctiveness of the Mevlevis was that they were known to welcome new ideas and practices as a sign of intellectual curiosity. Plus, they were in continuous interaction with the outside world through the frequenters of the rituals, which helped them develop a kind of familiarity with the practice of being watched. The popular understanding of photography particularly in early Meiji Japan (1868-88), as the historians of Meiji Japan have proposed might expand the argument. In Japan, until the late 1860s, photography in general was only accessible to privileged territorial lords. Partly related to being an expensive and limitedly circulated technology, the common understanding of photography was blended with superstitious beliefs such as that the camera would take the soul, and the person posed in the middle of a group portrait would die soon, et cetera. Even so, the Meiji government confidently employed photography to promote its visual self-narrative to the outside world as an industrialized, enlightened, and modern country. As a consequence, photography would expand rapidly into the daily life of the urban population through professional studios and would help to promote social change in the Meiji society. In contrast, on the part of the Mevlevis, reactionary attitudes towards photography seem never to be the case.[20]

## Images for Alternative Histories

The control over the image by the photographer varies, ranging from the choice of lens, the usage of light, and the way the model(s) are posed. That could be also through accessories, costumes, decors, and sometimes by the use of hired models. Creating narratives through specific compositions was a frequently applied practice for most of the nineteenth century studio photographers. Pascal Sébah's two indoor shoots showing different folk costumes worn by the same models aptly exemplify the immense influence of the photographer on the images as well as how each photograph has served a specific function.[21] It is precisely the point that I will begin

19 Thierry Zarcone, "The "Performance" of Dervishes and The European Tourists in Istanbul (19th – 20th Century)", *Journey to the Center of the East, 1850-1950: 100 Years of Travelers in İstanbul from Pierre de Gigord Collection*, ed. Ekrem Işın and Catherine Pinguet, İstanbul Research Institute, İstanbul 2015, pp. 81-95; "Şeyh Mehmed Ataullah Dede (1842-1910) and the Mevlevîhâne of Galata: An Intellectual and Spiritual Bridge Between the East and the West", *The Dervishes of Sovereignty & The Sovereignty of Dervishes: The Mevlevi Order in Istanbul*, ed. Ekrem Işın, İstanbul Research Institute, İstanbul 2007, pp. 58-75.

20 Maki Fukuoka, "Selling Portrait Photographs: Early Photographic Business in Asakusa, Japan", *History of Photography*, XXXV/4, (2011), p. 356.

21 Edhem Eldem, "The Search for an Ottoman Vernacular Photography", *The Indigenous Lens? Early Photography in the Near and Middle East*, ed. Markus Ritter and Staci G. Scheiwiller, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 2018, pp. 34-35.

speculating about the photograph in Figure 1. Who were these neatly arranged rows of people in Mevlevi costumes in the photograph taken by Mihran Iranian?[22]

***Figure 1.*** Mihran Iranian, *Derviches*, albumen print, 19.2 x 25.4 cm, undated. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Pierre de Gigord Collection, 96.R.14 (C37.14b).

At first sight, the prominence of the outfit, the instruments that were part of the Mevlevi musical tradition, and the place which is identifiable as being the main entrance of the Galata Mevlevi Lodge in Pera and the mausoleum at the right corner of the image are amply convincing details to classify this as a Mevlevi photograph. The well-organized photograph leaves no room for objection to the message the image conveys: these are were Mevlevi dervishes. But what if it was otherwise? Could we not think that they were hired models of the photographer, similar to the setups of Sébah mentioned above?

To further speculate, I suggest an alternative option between the two. Rather than being 'fake' dervishes gathered by the photographer or being 'original' dervishes, that is as permanent residents of the lodge where they were photographed, the people in the images could be outsiders

22 According to the limited biographical information, Mihran Iranian owned a photography studio in the Pera neighbourhood of Istanbul during the 1890s. Roughly about 300 images have survived until today from his lens, see Bahattin Öztuncay, *The Photographers of Constantinople*, Vol. I, Aygaz, İstanbul 2003, pp. 315-319.

of varied backgrounds. In other words, outsiders but not irrelevant souls to the Mevlevi culture. Those people were called sympathizers, or *muhib* of the order, a *sine qua non* part of the Sufi communities. Hailing from diverse social and economic backgrounds, they were acquainted with the principles of the Mevlevis set by Celaleddin-i Rumi and his followers. Being in touch with the order through personal connections with dervishes and sheikhs, they were often the financial supporters of the lodges.[23] Although it is hard to establish the precise number of *muhib*s in Istanbul, Klaus Kreiser gives a rough estimate of sixty thousand in the early twentieth century. Those people were in association with one of the three hundred lodges in the city, from which sixty to eighty-five percent of whom were active in the late Ottoman period. The number corresponds closely to one in four of the Muslim male residents in the city.[24] We are therefore talking about a sizeable number of people. Indeed, there were instances in which the boundaries between the dervishes and sympathizers seemed to blur. Occasionally, the sympathizers were allowed to wear the Mevlevi attire to attend the religious rituals in the lodges. A memoir from the late nineteenth century depicts the involvement of the *muhibs* in the rituals at the Kasımpaşa Mevlevi lodge in Istanbul:

> 'With the encouragement of the fellows from the order, I intended to wear the Mevlevi headgear, *sikke*. The Sheikh of the lodge has the right to permit the wearing of Mevlevi attire and participation in rituals on the occasion that one has a reasonable explanation for not having completed the required thousand and one days of service leading to becoming a dervish. These people were referred to as *muhib* in the order.'[25]

Going back to Iranian's photograph, we will probably never learn the real story behind it. Even so, the familiarity with the hierarchical structures that demarcated dervishes, sympathizers, and visitors, as well as the instances that cut across those separations could be instrumental to reconsider the Mevlevi images.

Following this line of thinking, the photograph of Iranian seems to have more to offer. The issue of clothing in particular needs further attention because there is something unusual about it. Apart from the tall felt hat, *sikke,* and the cloak, *hırka*, the clothings of the people in the picture are quite diverse. It seems that they were wearing casual clothes under the cloak and the tall hat. One may even observe the difference in the cloaks. The first four people from the left had the same kind of cloak, the arm lengths of which were tailored to fit perfectly. It was for everyday use. The first three from the right wore another type of cloak, which was designed for ceremonies. Dervishes wore those loosely cut ceremonial cloaks over their shoulders without putting their arms in the sleeves.[26] One may speculate that the person on the far right posed with his *ney* and seems to be wearing a necktie and a vest could be an official functionary who just left his workplace to join the dervish group in the photograph. In

23 Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevî*, pp. 133-135.

24 Klaus Kreiser, "The Dervish Living", *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez, University of California Press, California 1992, p. 49.

25 Aşçı İbrahim Dede, *Aşçı Dede'nin Hatıraları: Çok Yönlü Bir Sufinin Gözüyle Son Dönem Osmanlı Hayatı*, ed. Mustafa Koç and Eyyüp Tanrıverdi, Vol. I, Kitabevi, İstanbul 2006, p. 197.

26 Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevî.*

a broad sense, the image challenges the validity of a standard Mevlevi garb, for which the fourth and sixth persons from the left and the *kanun* player could be an example. What was widely believed is that only a white shirt without a collar had to be under the cloak. Given the complexity of the issue, it was mostly the case for dervishes who performed music, *mutrib*, during the rites. The clothing of the dervishes that performed the ritual, *sema*, was somewhat more elaborate. In addition to the cloak and tall hat, they wore long white robes called *tennure,* a white jacket called *destegül, a* wide waistband called *elif-nemed*, and shoes called *paşmak.*[27] What is notable in the photograph is that the clothing of the majority of the dervishes barely corresponded to those standards.

One may observe further diversity in the dresses in one of Sebah & Joallier's Mevlevi photographs being set at a different corner of the same lodge (Figure 2). The three individuals seen in the left part of the fountain used for ablution seem so contrasting in clothing that they did not even have the essential long felt hat and cloak on. One may even not help to question their presence in a frame whose aim was to represent the Mevlevi dervishes in an authentic environment. No matter how contrasting their looks were, it is highly probable that they were part of the community and were allowed to take part in the group portrait of the Mevlevi dervishes.

***Figure 2.*** Sébah & Joaillier, *Derviches tourners*, albumen print, 21 x 27 cm, 1884-1900. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Pierre de Gigord Collection, 96.R.14 (C37.1b).

27 Ibid.; Nurhan Atasoy, *Derviş Çeyizi: Türkiye'de Tarikat Giyim-Kuşam Tarihi*, Kültür Bakanlığı, Ankara 2000.

Meanwhile, these images propose a narrative about the everyday life in a Sufi lodge that is more interconnected with the outside world, quite opposed to the widely held opinion that dervishes lived an isolated life confined to the walls of the lodges. Similarly, perhaps the sympathizers, the immediate circle of the Sufi dervishes were much more closely associated with the Sufis than it was thought.

Given the diversity in clothing observable in the photographs, maybe the idea of seeking uniformity is itself problematic. Why should there be a standard dervish outfit? It seems to me that a significant part of this thought stems from the studies of Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (d. 1982). As a prolific writer, he was an esteemed scholar of Sufi studies in Turkey and was attached firmly to the Mevlevi communities from an early age on. With all the credentials he had, his studies on the history of the Mevlevi order have received very limited objection, his opinions were persuasive and hence played a role in creating historical memory for the past Mevlevi communities.

Gölpınarlı's studies have expanded to the innumerable aspects of the Mevlevi culture including its music. He published a book in 1953, still a seminal work in the field, and he requested Halil Dikmen (d. 1964) to describe the Mevlevi rite by stressing the musical aspects.[28] Dikmen was a painter and a ney player, who was well-versed in the Mevlevi culture. In addition to the studies of Gölpınarlı, Dikmen's concise but concentrated text seems to have far-reaching consequences not only for the groups that aimed to re-organize Mevlevi rites in the 1950s but also for the next generation of followers of the Mevlevi order. Nevertheless, these accounts that explained the principles of Mevlevi music and the rituals in detail are contestable because one would never be sure whether they indeedcorresponded to the practices of the Mevlevis before the official closure of the Sufi orders in 1925.

The majority of the Gölpınarlı's publications coincided with the re-organization of the Mevlevi rituals in public after nearly a quarter-century of interval.[29] The effort might be perceived as the cultural revitalization of the Mevlevi order. One scholar argues that Gölpınarlı cautiously wrote down every single detail regarding the cultural material of the order assuming that the traditional values and attitudes will be lost forever. The conservative approach, therefore, led to the idealization of the past culture of Mevlevis to some extent.[30]

On the part of the visual sources, the photographic representations make the issue of uniform Mevlevi garb even more controversial, and they do not align with literature on the Sufis of the

28 Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlânâ'dan Sonra Mevlevîlik*, İnkılâp, İstanbul 1953, pp. 464-65.

29 A small group of people among whom was Gölpınarlı, actively engaged in the commemoration of Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi from the early 1940s on. Given the political atmosphere of Turkey in the 1940s, the annual meetings were carefully designed not to provoke too much public interest. The meetings did not feature any musical presentation and were confined to the speeches by experts. Music was introduced to the meetings in 1948, albeit limitedly. The situation seems to be normalized by the early 1950s. But Mevlevis had to wait until 1954, for a full-fledged ritual together with the participation of whirling dervishes, see, Yavuz Selim Ağaoğlu, *Neyzen Selami Bertuğ'un Anılarından Belgelerle Hazret-i Mevlâna'yı Anma Törenleri (1942-1974)*, Kültür A.Ş., Konya 2013. Burcu Sağlam's biographical study on Saadeddin Heper while emphasizing his critical role in the reorganization of the Mevlevi ceremonies during the 1950s provides a vivid account of the tension between the organizers and the local authorities in Konya, "Türk Müziğinin Hafızası: Saadeddin Heper", *Musikişinas*, XIV, (2015), pp. 58-63.

30 Behar, "Mevlevî Mukabelesi", pp. 182-183.

late Ottoman period. They seem to illustrate an alternative narrative in which a standard outfit was not a practice strictly followed by the members of the order.

Apart from the dressings of the dervishes in the photographs, another issue that I have reservations about is the way the Mevlevis were set to pose. It is the gesture of whirling dervishes (Figure 3) that seems to be particularly noteworthy. It seems the variety in gestures is confined to the identical pose of the arms wide-open. Even though the two photographs discussed above differed from the bulk of the images as nobody was whirling, they are rare.

***Figure 3.*** Mihran Iranian, *Dervishes tourners*, the 1860s-1880s. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Pierre de Gigord Collection, 96.R.14 (F3.102).

It seems that the photographers' aesthetic concerns were at play as the type of posing looked visually attractive, yet it is unnatural in two ways. Firstly, it is largely the result of contemporary technological limits. What characterized photography in those times was the ultra-long exposure times.[31] Allowing light into the camera is basically about shutter speed and aperture and how they work with one another. To freeze the motion, 1/250th second shutter speed is needed. If the motion is really slow, one may reduce the shutter speed to one or two stops below, but not more than that.[32]

31 Bahattin Öztuncay, "The Origins and Development of Photography in Istanbul", *Camera Ottomana: Photography and Modernity in the Ottoman Empire 1840-1914*, ed. Zeynep Çelik and Edhem Eldem, Koç University Publications, İstanbul 2015, pp. 90-91.

32 The daylight was fundamental to the professional studios of Istanbul until electricity was widely available throughout the city in the first decade of the twentieth century. The studios of Istanbul were necessarily on the

Keeping that brief technical detail in mind, there was no possibility to receive a sharp image while the dervishes were whirling during an ordinary ceremony due to the technological limits. Photographers, therefore, overcame the problem by developing this artificial pose. Besides, specific to the image of Iranian, he took the photo in the garden, on unevenly paved ground, exactly the sort of place where the dervishes would never turn. Secondly, the pose is unnatural because, in a standard ceremony, it was not possible to capture a moment in which the whirling dervishes may come close to musicians. There was a wide distance between the whirling dervishes and the area reserved for the musicians, called *mutrıb maksuresi.* Moreover, they could not even be on the same floor since musicians would be seated on the upper floor of the ceremonial room, that is *semahane*, in some of the Mevlevi lodges in Istanbul. As a result, the neatly arranged rows of whirling dervishes, musicians, and sheikhs in the photographs were not a glimpse of a real ceremony but the scenes that were staged for the camera.

It might be assumed that the intervention by the photographer was somewhat limited regarding the presence of child dervishes in the images. I argue that the dervishes were more proactive about choosing to pose with child dervishes.[33]

***Figure 4.*** Photographer(s) unknown, *Dervishes tourners*, 1860-1953, albumen print. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Pierre de Gigord Collection, 96.R.14 (C39.013).

top floor of buildings. They had a transparent roof and used curtains to balance the daylight for the photographic production, see Adem Köşlü – Ünsal Köşlü, *Nicolas Andriomenos Phootgraphe*, Galenos, İstanbul 2018, pp. 71-74.

33 Although the children in the Mevlevi culture appears to be a promising topic, it has attracted very little scholarly interest. For the accounts of the child Sheiks in the history of the Mevlevi order, see Sezai Küçük, "Mevlevîlerde Çocuk Şeyhler ve Vekil Şeyhlik", *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, XV/27, (2013/1), pp. 95-119.

What could be the reason for it? Mainly because dervishes that were residing permanently in the lodges, *hücrenişin*, could not get married. Only the sheikhs had the right to have a family living in the lodges. Mevlevi lodges always had a private residence for the sheikh and his family.[34] One possibility is that the children in the photographs were from sheikh families. Alternatively, they could be the relatives of the dervishes or the children of the followers, *muhibban*s. The latter option, the children belonging to the immediate circle of the dervish community sounds more reasonable to me. Because they adhered firmly to the Mevlevi order and hence would prefer to raise the children in the environment they were affiliated to. One often encounters such expressions in the life narratives of musicians, who frequented the Mevlevi lodges and gained familiarity with its music in their early childhood years.[35] Meanwhile, the presence of the children in the images might be read as an indication of how the Mevlevis were a networked society linked by multiple contacts between dervishes and affiliated people.

Regarding the location of the three images, there might be a biased view of the situation because they were taken in the Galata Mevlevi lodge at Pera. The situation seems to reflect the general tendency in the Mevlevi photographs. On the one hand, the location's centrality in the most cosmopolitan quarters of Istanbul was an advantage for both foreigners and city dwellers. On the other hand, professional studios were concentrated in this area.[36] Having said that, it was a technology-related problem as well. Because many apparatuses of the camera, including the body, plates, lenses, and tripod were large and heavy items. The estimated weight of the overall equipment was between 20 to 30 kilograms, which posed a major obstacle to mobility. Even though smaller cameras with roll films emerged in the market in the late 1890s, photographers continued to use glass plates due to the limited sensitivity of dry films.[37] I guess these were the underlying causes of why the images from the lodge of Galata surpassed all the other Mevlevi lodges of the city, namely Yenikapı, Kasımpaşa, and Bahariye.

Although the financial dimension of the situation seems to be an intriguing part of the topic, I have not encountered any account of whether the Mevlevi dervishes commissioned professional photographers, such as Sébah & Joallier or Iranian, to document any specific events. Nor have I found a source stating that photographers paid a fee to the dervishes for the images. Nevertheless, the option that professional photographers paid dervishes for posing sounds more possible since these images were commercially profitable in the market. From the beginning of

34 M. Baha Tanman, "Bahariye Mevlevîhanesi'nin Yerleşim Düzeni ve Mimari Özellikleri", *Mevlevî Dünyasında Bahariye Mevlevîhanesi*, ed. M. Baha Tanman, İstev, İstanbul 2013, p. 8.

35 For the childhood years of Bedriye Hosgör (d. 1968) in Konya, see Mustafa Rona, *50 Yıllık Türk Musıkisi: Bestekârları, Besteleri Güftelerile*, Türkiye Yayınevi, İstanbul 1960, p. 223. Likewise, Ahmet Bey (d. 1926) was a frequenter of the Mevlevi lodge at Thessaloniki in the course of his childhood years, İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Hoş Sadâ: Son Asır Türk Musikişinasları*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 1958, p. 38.

36 *Camera Ottomana*, ed. Zeynep Çelik and Edhem Eldem, pp.18-19.

37 Sara Dominici, "Cyclo-Photographers, Visual Modernity, and the Development of Camera Technologies, 1880s-1890s", *History of Photography*, XL/1, (2018), p. 47.

the mid-nineteenth century onward, a growing number of professional studios began to operate in Istanbul. As the popularity of photography expanded, art became a profitable business. European visitors in particular created a market for panorama photography as well as images that displayed the historical architecture of the city.[38] The Ottoman postcards did not only cover beautiful corners of Istanbul but also the local types, men and women alike, with their traditional clothes on. Yet the photographic representations of dervishes were something special for the Ottoman postcard market.

## Photography Captures Music

The Mevlevi images may also be viewed from the musical standpoint which is well-connected to the art of painting. Broadly speaking, misleading and inaccurate details in depicting an instrument player appear to be the characteristic of the Ottoman painting. Much to the annoyance of historians of music and musicians, art historians have largely failed to notice these problematic points. Moreover, the controversial points are discernible both in the works of Ottoman and European painters alike. Osman Hamdi Bey's 'Two Musician Women' and Fausto Zonaro's 'Neyzen' are two conspicuous examples.

To play the *tanbur* in a standing position, as Osman Hamdi Bey has depicted it, is simply impossible. The instrument is always played in a sitting position otherwise it would move downward easily because the weight of the instrument is not evenly distributed due to its too long neck. Regarding the *ney* player of Zonaro, nothing appears to be in order but the cloak and the long felt hat. The body position is anatomically incorrect. And the same goes for the angle of the head, the point where the lips meet with the upper part of the instrument, *başpare*, the position of the fingers, and the wide distance between the two hands. Perhaps replacing the *ney* with the side-blown flute would have resolved the problem. These improper features in the painting are even more surprising as Zonaro kept visiting the Rıfai lodge in the Üsküdar neighbourhood to follow the rituals. As part of the preliminary work, he has invited some dervishes from the lodge to his residence in the Beşiktaş neighbourhood, the Sheikh, and the 'Mevlevi music master' as he described the *ney* player in his memoirs. They posed for him many times for the painting series of the Rıfai dervishes. According to Zonaro, a sense of locality was fundamental to creating art with historical value. For a foreigner, he said, the only way to possess it was to reside there for long enough. Hence, the local eye would avoid adding strange things to the environment that is painted and would help to be accurate and correct in all details.[39] Given that, it is not easy to explain what might have misled him to come up with such a caricatured portrait of the instrumentalist.

38 Öztuncay, pp. 73-77.

39 *Twenty Years Under the Reign of Abdülhamid: The Memoirs and Works of Fausto Zonaro*, ed. Erol Makzume and Cesare Mario Trevigni, trans. Dylan Clements, Geniş Kitaplık, İstanbul 2011, pp. 194-199.

***Figure 5.*** Osman Hamdi Bey, *Two Musician Girls*, 1880, Oil on canvas, 58 x 39 cm. Suna-İnan Kıraç Foundation, İstanbul.

***Figure 6.*** Fausto Zonaro, *Neyzen*, pastel, 6.5 x 9.5 cm. Suna-İnan Kıraç Foundation, İstanbul.

The inaccuracy of the musical aspects in the painting seems to be reduced to a minimum due to the documentary character of the photography. As far as I have observed, in the Mevlevi photographs, the sitting and the holding positions were correct in most details. The underlying reason might be that many of the individuals in the photographs were either members of the order or they were part of the wider Sufi circles. They likely knew how to play the instruments they posed with and even were participants of the ceremonies performed in the lodges.

As an interconnected issue, the images provide information about the diversity of the musical instruments in Mevlevi music as well. Based on the images, the *ney* and the *kudüm* appear as the most common instruments, surpassing all others. Their prominence together with the eminence of the vocals corresponds to the widely accepted opinion about their pivotal role in the Mevlevi musical tradition. The Mevlevi photographs from the late Ottoman Istanbul affirm the validity of this argument. Very few images indicate the employment of the *kanun*, the *violin*, and the *oud*, which rarely appeared as compared to the fundamental instruments. Oddly enough, the *tanbur* and the *kemenche* did not appear in the images at all. In terms of *tanbur*, its absence seems strange because it is believed to be the most suitable instrument for the peculiarities of Ottoman music due to the ease of producing the special sound intervals. Furthermore, Mehmed Celaleddin Dede (d. 1908), the Sheikh of Yenikapı Mevlevi lodge between 1887 and 1908, has witnessed and narrated the use of this instrument in Mevlevi rituals in his own times..[40]

40 *Yenikapı Mevlevihanesi: İhtifalci Mehmet Ziya Bey*, ed. Murat A. Karavelioğlu, Ataç, İstanbul 2005, pp. 185-192; Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun, *Türk Musikisi Antolojisi: Dinî Eserler II*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, İstanbul 1942-43, pp. 464-466.

## Conclusion

The paper aimed to examine the photographs of dervishes beyond certain recurrent conventions in the literature. The study approached critically the flat and reductionist understandings that tend to portray the Mevlevis as the passive elements of the images. The idea was to argue that even the most 'cliché' Mevlevi representations might be read alternatively and provide novel historical interpretations beyond the photographic representation.

I suggested that the group photographs of Mevlevis might be a way to underline the vivid relationship between the lodge and the outside world. As I have sought to discuss how the line between *muhibbans* and the dervishes is blurred, these photographss provide some evidence of the dense network of relations between the Mevlevi lodge and the wider circle of sympathizers. Yet I claimed that the photographs might offer challenges to dominant narratives of Sufism, most of which originate from the early 1950s. In doing so, I sought to interpret the photographic representations of the Mevlevis to emphasize the evolving relationships between historical narrative and photography.

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