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An Orthodox Christian Bridging the Boundaries of Mavlana's Thought: Yaman Dede's Middle Path between Christianity and Islam

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Abstract: This essay delves into the phenomenon of the "unveiling of Sufis" and traces Yaman Dede's journey to becoming a dervish within the Mavlavī Order in the Republic of Turkey. The Mavlavī Order, a longstanding Islamic Sufi tradition dedicated to preserving the spiritual teachings of Mevlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī and his successors for over seven centuries, faced challenges under Turkey's secularization policies in 1925. This essay explores the extent to which the Mavlavī Order could practice its religious rituals within the secular framework of the Turkish Republic. Additionally, it examines the compelling appeal of the Mavlavī Order to seekers, worshippers, and intellectuals, a call that resonated deeply with Yaman Dede, a Christian Orthodox individual from Anatolia. Through biographical insights into Yaman Dede's identity quest amidst the backdrop of his conversion story, the essay sheds light on his inner turmoil caused by the clash of two faiths, ultimately leading to personal reconciliation as he embraced the path of a Mavlavī dervish. The latter part of the essay delves into the dynamics of the master-disciple relationship, with a focus on the interaction between Remzi Dede and Yaman Dede as a case study. Furthermore, it explores the enduring intellectual legacy of Yaman Dede and its impact on shaping the contemporary Sufi tradition in Turkey.

Key Words: Mavlavi, Yaman Dede, Sufism, Secularism.

Mevlana'nın Düşüncesinin Sınırlarına Yaklaşan Bir Ortodoks Hıristiyan: Yaman Dede'nin Hıristiyanlıkla İslam Arasındaki Orta Yolu

Öz: Bu çalışma tasavvufun keşfi olgusunu ele almakta ve modern Türkiye'de yaşamış olan Yaman Dede'nin Mevlevî tekkesinde derviş olma yolculuğunun izini sürmektedir. Yedi asırdan fazla bir süre boyunca Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rûmî ve onun haleflerinin ruhani öğretilerini korumaya adanmış köklü bir İslami Sufi geleneği olan Mevlevî tekkesi, 1925 yılında Türkiye'nin sekülerleşme politikaları altında birtakım değişikliklere maruz kalmıştır Bu makale Mevlevi tarikatının dini ritüellerini Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin laik çerçevesi içinde ne ölçüde uygulayabildiğine değinecektir. Bununla birlikte, Anadolu'dan Hristiyan Ortodoks bir birey olan Yaman Dede'de derin yankı uyandıran bir çağrı olan Mevleviliğin etkileri incelenmektedir. Bu makale, Yaman Dede'nin ihtida öyküsünün arka planındaki kimlik arayışına biyografik bakış açısı sunarak onun iki inancın çatışmasının neden olduğu iç çalkantılarına ışık tutup onun bir Mevlevi dervişinin yolunu benimsemesini değerlendirmektedir. Makalenin son kısmı, Remzi Dede ile Yaman Dede arasındaki etkileşime bir örnek olay olarak odaklanarak mürşit-mürit ilişkisinin dinamiklerini araştırmaktadır. Ayrıca Yaman Dede'nin nesilden nesile geçen entelektüel mirasını ve bunun Türkiye'deki çağdaş Sufi geleneğini şekillendirmedeki etkisini araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mevlevi, Yaman Dede, Tasavvuf, Laiklik.

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1. Introduction

In this essay, I will investigate the "unveiling of Sufis" and the process of Yaman Dede's becoming a dervish in the Mavlavī Order in twentieth century Turkey. The Mavlavī Order is a traditional Islamic Sufi order that has preserved the spiritual teachings of Mevlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, his descendants, successors, and followers for over seven hundred years. In 1925, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Republic of Turkey's founder and the first president, banned all the dervish orders and lodges as a part of the newly founded Turkish Republic's secularization policies.[2] As a result of this action, this sufi order had gone underground for decades until the 1956. In 1956, the Turkish government made one exception solely to the Mavlavī order: according to this code, Mavlavī tekke's whirling dervish ceremony was recognized as a cultural asset even though legislation still outlawed these Sufi hermitages. My question will be to what extent the Mavlavī Order was free to practice their religious rituals under the secular constitution of the Turkish Republic. As an additional point, I will try to discuss the importance of the sincere call of the Mavlavī Order for wonderers, worshippers, and lovers of learning. This powerful message reached Yaman Dede of the twentieth century, who was a Christian Orthodox from Anatolia. I will give biographical information about Yaman Dede and his identity search throughout the story of his conversion. While his passion for Mavlavī Sufism led to his inner suffering because of the dichotomy of two religions, this period of suffering also led to his personal reconciliation. In the end, he became a Mavlavī dervish, and his naats are still very famous and praised. In the second part of my essay, I will discuss the master-disciple relationship, and as a case study I will focus on Remzi Dede and Yaman Dede's interaction. I will also argue in which ways Yaman Dede's intellectual legacy has influenced the modern Sufi tradition in Turkey.

2. Sufi tradition and Its Legality Issues from the Ottoman Legacy to the Republic of Turkey

Religion within the Ottoman Empire not only conferred legitimacy upon political authority but also played a pivotal role in maintaining stability by acting as a crucial intermediary between the central government and the rural populace. According to Mardin's concept of

[2] "Madde 1 – Türkiye Cumhuriyeti dahilinde gerek vakıf suretiyle gerek mülk olarak şeyhının tahtı tasarrufunda gerek suveri aharla tesis edilmiş bulunan bilümum tekkeler ve zaviyeler sahiplerinin diğer şekilde hakkı temellük ve tasarrufları baki kalmak üzere kamilen seddedilmiştir. Bunlardan usulü mevzuası dairesinde filhal cami veya mescit olarak istimal edilenler ipka edilir" https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.677.pdf

religion serving a "dual function," religion could function as a mechanism of control while simultaneously fostering cohesion and facilitating social mobility (Mardin, 1971: 204-205). Turkish Islam operated on two distinct planes: the formal, doctrinal religion sanctioned by the state and the more grassroots, mystical faith practiced within Sufi orders (Lewis, 2002: 191-193). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Sufi orders succeeded in bridging these two aspects of Islam, playing significant roles in both religious and social spheres throughout Ottoman history, as noted by Zürcher. These brotherhoods, as Zürcher suggests, "had served vital religious and social functions throughout the Ottoman history" (Zürcher, 2004: 191). In rural areas where orthodox Islamic authority was lacking, common people sought guidance and assistance from these dervish orders. Consequently, while the dervish orders were sometimes viewed as heterodox and faced criticism from orthodox Islamic authorities such as sheikh ul-Islam and ulema (scholars of Islamic law), their influence remained strong, with Sufi shaykhs maintaining connections across societal strata. Despite tensions between the ulema and Sufi shaykhs, the latter continued to wield considerable influence, even among the Ottoman ruling elite, including sultans and ministers. This clandestine influence occasionally manifested in their actions during the Ottoman era.

The Mavlavī tekke, a predominantly urban Sufi order active in Anatolian and Rumelian cities, gained significant influence within the Ottoman state. By the eighteenth century, it had extended its reach to nearly every provincial town in Anatolia, solidifying its political clout particularly during the reign of Selim III (Gölpınarlı, 1983: 274). Amidst the Western-oriented reforms of the nineteenth century, which emphasized a dichotomy between Islamic and Western civilizations, traditional Islamic institutions were not dismantled but rather coexisted with new dual institutions. By the 1840s, bureaucratic oversight dominated policy-making processes. However, these top-down reforms often faltered due to a lack of consideration for the everyday realities and behavioral changes of the populace, leading to alienation between the modernizing bureaucrats, Islamic legal scholars, and the common people, as noted by Mardin. Through their modernization reforms, as Mardin states, "the bureaucrats were alienated from both the doctors of Islamic law and the folk, whereas in the past a common idiom and code of conduct used to link these elements" (Mardin, 1989: 9-10). As a reaction to the cultural influence of modernization, Sufi orders became more active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Depending on their political stances, some Sufi orders, including the Mavlavī Order, contributed to events such as the War of Independence. For instance, during the First World War, followers of the Mavlavī Order, under the leadership of Veled Çelebi, formed and led a

volunteer brigade. Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, this cultural duality eventually gave way to a broader acceptance of Western civilization.

While the 1924 secularizing reforms primarily targeted the ulema rather than the dervishes, it became evident that the strongest resistance to secularism would eventually emerge from the Sufi Orders. According to Toprak, the institutional secularization of this period represented more of a "symbolic secularization," and among the Turkish public, it sparked the most controversy regarding Kemalist secularization policies (Toprak, 1981: 46-47). The 1924 laws resulted in the banning of medreses (theological seminaries), yet to ensure the availability of qualified personnel, the Ministry of Education established İmam-Hatip schools, vocational secondary institutions aimed at training religious functionaries, which became the focal point of intense debates. Pak argues that İmam-Hatip schools symbolize the government's attempt to control the dissemination of religious knowledge throughout modern Turkish history (Pak, 2004: 322). In August 1925, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of Turkey, visited Kastamonu and publicly introduced the *fez* while criticizing traditional garments like the shalvar. His speech in Kastamonu served as a precursor to the reforms that were about to be launched.

> Could a civilized nation tolerate a mass of people who let them be led by the nose by a herd of Sheikhs, Dedes, Seids, Tschelebis, Babas and Emirs; who entrusted their destiny and their lives to chiromancers, magicians, dice-throwers and amulet sellers? (Atatürk, 1929: 722).

The next pivotal step in the secularization process occurred with the suppression of the *tarikats* (dervish orders) in November 1925. A newly enacted law dissolved these brotherhoods, shuttered their convents, prohibited their ceremonies, and outlawed all related activities henceforth. Despite these measures, the Turkish government continued its efforts to nationalize and modernize Islam, including initiatives such as delivering the call to prayer from mosques in the Turkish language. Meanwhile, the Sufi Orders endeavored to adapt to this changing landscape by operating covertly. An extraordinary development in contemporary Turkish Islam was its resurgence driven by public pressure (Fazlur, 1982: 92). In 1927, two years later, the Mausoleum of Mavlana in Konya was permitted to reopen as a museum. Following Turkey's adoption of a multi-party democratic system in 1953, the government, in response to religious revivalism and to ease tensions between devout Muslims and their Westernized leaders, officially revived the annual ceremony of Mavlana. This ceremony, already being held privately and clandestinely, saw its first authorized public performance in a movie theater in Konya in

1953. Subsequently, permissions for public ceremonies were granted in 1955, with events held in various venues including a library in Konya and parallel ceremonies in Ankara. As these ceremonies attracted large crowds, they were eventually moved to a spacious auditorium in Konya, where an annual performance has been held every December since. In 1973, the government authorized performances in London, Paris, and the United States to commemorate the 700th anniversary of Mavlana's death. (And, 1977: 84).

3. Yaman Dede's Journey to Islam through Sufism

Diyamandi of Rum, whose name translates to "diamond," was born into a Greek Orthodox Christian family in the small town of Talas, situated in Central Anatolia, during a period marked by authoritarianism and religious intolerance. His father, Yuvan, worked as a tradesman, while his mother, Afurani, was a homemaker. Shortly after his birth, the family relocated to Kastamonu, a city on the northern coast of present-day Turkey, where Diyamandi commenced his education at a Greek Orthodox school.

Although there are variations in accounts regarding Diyamandi's exact date of birth, he himself indicated that he began attending İdadi Mektebi (a high school of the Ottoman period) at the age of thirteen in 1900, suggesting that he was born in 1887. He completed his education at this institution after seven years, achieving exceptional academic success. During his schooling, he became known as Yamandî Molla due to his remarkable proficiency in Persian and Arabic languages.[3]

His high school years were particularly significant, as it was during his second year that he had his first encounter with Mavlana Celaleddin Rumi. One day, his Persian language teacher wrote the first three couplets of the Masnavi on the board, leaving a profound impact on Yamandi:

> The name "Mavlana" seemed so nice to me and the verses gave me a deep shock. The last line on the board struck my bosom deeply. Henceforth, I started to burn slowly. The flames were burning me so wildly but at the same time so nicely that they were like the kisses of a mother. I will never be able to describe this feeling with words (Özdamar, 2008: 20).

[3] The name "Diyamandi" was pronounced as "Yamandi" in Anatolia.

Yamandi Molla was seen as extraordinary by both his Muslim and Non-Muslim classmates and his teachers, partly because he was attending religious education classes although those courses were not obligatory for non-Muslims under the Ottoman State, and partly because his great passion for Arabic, Persian and literature was causing confusion and sometimes jealousy among his fellows:

> Our literature teacher Sıddık Efendi brought a couplet from a poem and asked us to compose new lines in accordance with it. The verses that I wrote were so well praised that our teacher wrote a thank you couplet for me to show his gratitude.[4]

While Yamandi Molla may not have been fully cognizant of the shifts unfolding in his life, his teacher subtly hinted at these developments through the lines written for Yamandi:

> Ta küçükten Yemandi nazra-i insâf'ta,
> Gösterirdi beyn-el-akran gayretin efkârını (Özdamar, 2008: 22).
>
> (If considered from a moderate point of view, among his friends,
> Diyamandi stood out with his intellectual enthusiasm.)

Upon completing high school, Yamandi relocated to Istanbul and enrolled in law school in 1903. Unfortunately, detailed records of his college years are not readily accessible. However, Yamandi Molla persisted in receiving Arabic and Islamic law instruction from a sharia consultant, specifically to address particular cases not covered in the *Mecelle,* the Ottoman code of civil law. Embracing the study of sharia represented another stride for Yamandi in grasping various facets of Islam. During breaks from school, he made visits to his family in Kastamonu. One day his friends there told him that there was a Mavlavī *shaykh* called Ahmet Remzi Dede who had invigorated the old and ruined Mavlavī *tekke* in the town and started arranging Mavlavī ritual services (Subaşı, 2005: 92). Upon discovering that Ahmet Remzi Dede was residing in Istanbul, Yamandi made the decision to pay a visit to his fellow townsman. Beyond their shared origins in Kayseri, both individuals were also poets. Following their initial encounter, Yamandi became a student of Remzi Dede and commenced attending Masnavi classes taught by him at the Üsküdar and Galata Mevlevihane.

After finishing school in 1913, in order to fulfill his parents' wish, Yamandi married the daughter of a Christian priest and started working as an inheritance lawyer, solving the cases of Muslim clients (Subaşı, 2005: 99). One day, Yamandi had a car accident and broke his leg. For

[4] "Aferin yavrum güzel, hem de hakikat pek güzel,
Mânevi, sûrî füyûz'un berter etsin Lemyezel."

this reason, he had to stay in his home. During this time, he finished reading the six volumes of the Masnavi and wrote a commentary on the first 18 lines. After Yamandi had read his commentary to Remzi Dede, his *shaykh* was touched with its beauty and said, "It is good that you had that accident and broke your leg. Otherwise, how would we have such a rich commentary?" (Subaşı, 2005: 117).

On May 20, 1939, Yamandi went to Konya to visit the *kaba of lovers*, Mavlana's shrine where he would be visiting every year on *Şeb-i Arus* (lit. meaning nuptial night), the anniversary of Mavlana's death. There he refused to speak, but instead he wrote two poems, *Canânımın Harîminde* (In the Seraglio of My Beloved) and *Ağlatma Beni* (Do Not Make Me Cry). (Özdamar, 2008: 40). On May 23, 1939, Yamandi delivered a radio interview discussing Esrar Dede, an 18th-century Mavlavī poet and disciple of the Galata Mevlevihane. Esrar Dede had a close relationship with Şeyh Galib, one of the most prominent poets of the Ottoman Empire, and during the interview, Yamandi compared the literary styles of these two poets. This discussion highlighted several significant points: Firstly, Yamandi's praise of Islam during this period was particularly courageous, given the prevailing secular mindset among Turkish state officials under martial law. Moreover, ultranationalist sentiments would likely have been displeased with Yamandi's emphasis on multiculturalism and the unity of people from diverse ethnicities and religions, especially considering his Anatolian Greek heritage. Additionally, Yamandi's efforts led to the public recognition of Esrar Dede and his works, prompting two columnists from different Turkish newspapers to write detailed articles about Esrar Dede, expressing gratitude to Yamandi for his significant contribution. Subsequently, Yamandi delivered three more speeches on Mavlana Jalaladdin Rumi in the cities of Tokat, Konya, and Kayseri. (Özdamar, 2008: 60).

The Greek community's reactions to Yamandi's engagement with Islam were multifaceted and complex. In his memoir, Yamandi discusses this issue with Zeki Tekin (Subaşı, 2005: 117), shedding light on the challenges he faced with his family and within his Greek Orthodox circle due to his dual identity.

Yamandi's life, characterized by this dual identity, presented intricate complications within his family and community. For instance, during Easter celebrations, he would accompany his wife and daughter to church, only to return home alone afterward and invite friends to read from the Masnavi. Similarly, during Ramadan, he fasted without partaking in a pre-dusk meal and prayed at the Eyüp Mosque on Mondays and Fridays, all while maintaining the façade of continuing his Christian practices.

The tension resulting from this dichotomy eventually prompted Yamandi to share his secret with his Greek wife and daughter, expressing his longstanding connection to Islam and his desire to embrace it openly:

> Although I was born to a Greek family, I have been Muslim from time immemorial. It's been years and I could not express this publicly, but I do not want to keep this a secret anymore. Come and join me so that we can be happy in both worlds. If not, then let us not scatter our family. My Muslimism does not require me to leave you.

Despite his plea for unity, his wife and daughter, under the influence of pressure from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, rejected his offer. Subsequently, Yamandi left the house. (Özdamar, 2008: 63).

In an official announcement published by the Tasvir-i Efkâr newspaper on February 15, 1942, brief information about Yamandi Molla's life was provided, stating that he had formally converted to Islam and adopted the name "Mehmed Kadir Keçeoğlu." This public declaration marked a significant turning point in Yamandi's life, as he openly embraced his Muslim identity despite the challenges and repercussions he faced within his Greek Orthodox community.

This new chapter in Yamandi's life saw him enter into a new marriage in 1947 with Hatice Hanım, who was Muslim and a teacher. After over two decades of practicing law, Yamandi decided to change careers and transitioned into teaching at various schools.

From 1940 to 1942, he taught the Turkish language at the Saint Louis French clergy school. Between 1942 and 1950, Yamandi taught Turkish culture and religion at institutions such as Notre Dame de Sion, Saint Benoit, and Saint Michel French high schools, as well as Austrian and British middle schools for girls.

As an educator, he continued teaching at various Islamic schools from 1950 to 1961, including the *Istanbul İmam Hatip Lisesi* (Istanbul Religious Islamic High School) and *İstanbul Yüksek İslam Enstitüsü* (Istanbul Higher Islam Education Institute), which later evolved into the Faculty of Theology at Marmara University.

However, starting from the late 1950s, Yamandi's health began to deteriorate due to serious heart disease problems. Despite his doctors' advice to avoid overexertion and strenuous work, Yamandi persisted in teaching until the final months of his life. On May 3, 1962, Yamandi passed away in Acıbadem, Istanbul. His tomb is located in Karacaahmet, and the inscription on his gravestone reads:

> Huve'l-Bakî
> Mevlânâ âşıkı Yaman Dede
> Hakka kavuşmak için
> İrciî emrine itaat etti.

(God alone is eternal / Yaman Dede, being the lover of Mavlana / To reunite with the Truth / Obeyed the rule of *irciî*.)

4. The Master-Disciple Relationship: The Case of Remzi Dede and Yaman Dede

Ahmet Remzi Efendi was born in Kayseri *Mevlevihane* in 1872. He received his education from his father until he reached the age of 20, mastering the Arabic and Persian languages at an advanced level (Subaşı, 2005: 45). His passion for literature led him to become a poet himself. In 1892, he moved to Istanbul, where he worked as a civil servant and a high school teacher of Arabic and Persian. In 1908, Ahmet Remzi Efendi traveled to Konya, where upon the request of Çelebi Efendi, the shaykh of Konya Mevlevihane, he decided to remain and resigned from his positions in Istanbul. During his time in Konya, he was appointed as the shaykh of the Mavlavīhane in Kütahya, earning the title "Dede."

His journey also took him to Kastamonu, where he served as a Mavlavī shaykh. In 1913, Ahmet Remzi Dede and his followers participated in the First World War in Damascus and were honored with a medal of achievement by the Ottoman state for their service. The following year, he was appointed as the postnişin (the chief shaykh) of the Mevlevihane in Aleppo.

During his tenure in Aleppo, Ahmet Remzi Dede organized religious study circles, primarily consisting of Armenian and Jewish individuals. He composed numerous poems during this period, expressing his concerns about the war and mourning the loss of soldiers.

In 1919, Ahmet Remzi Dede assumed the leadership of the Istanbul Üsküdar Mevlevihane. A couplet attributed to him reflects his attitude of humility towards this significant new role:

Hadim etmişler fakiri Mevlevî dergâhına,
Hoş görür zannım Muhibb-i livâ'yı Üsküdar.

(I, the poor, was appointed as a servant of the Mevlevihane
I hope the lovers of Üsküdar village support this.)

During his service in Istanbul, Ahmet Remzi Dede re-started the ritual services and offered Masnavi classes, and he becomes the center of a circle of intellectuals: Arif Nihat Asya (poet), Nüzhet Ergun (historian), Feridun Nafiz Uzluk (historian of medicine), Ahmet Süheyl Ünver (academic), and Süleyman Nazif were the foremost disciples of Remzi Dede (Subaşı, 2005: 57). After a long life, Remzi Dede died on November 20, 1944 in his hometown Kayseri.

The initial encounter between Remzi Dede and Yamandi took place when Yamandi visited Remzi Dede in Istanbul. Despite Yamandi's young age, Remzi Dede perceived him as remarkably mature. Subsequently, Yamandi began attending Remzi Dede's Masnavi lessons and became his disciple.

The primary sources regarding the relationship between Remzi Dede and Yamandi are the letters written by Yamandi and the memories he frequently recounted. Yamandi often quoted his master's words and verses in his commentaries. To express his gratitude towards Remzi Dede, who was also a poet, Yamandi composed poems praising his master's virtues.

Furthermore, under Remzi Dede's tutelage, Yamandi expanded his understanding of Masnavi and Mavlana. In one of his letters, Yamandi acknowledges this growth in knowledge and learning:

> "Merhum ve mağfur Ahmed Remzi Dede'den Mesnevî okudum. Îmânım da o nispette kuvvetlendi. Koca Mevlana'nın büyüklüğü karşısında ürpermeğe başladım…" (Özdamar, 2008: 25).
>
> (I read Masnavi with the late and forgiven Ahmed Remzi Dede. My faith became stronger in this sense. I started to tremble at the greatness of Mavlana…)

In his commentary of Masnavi's opening section, Yamandi includes his master's thoughts and refers to him as "Mesnevî hocam, velinimetim, cennetmekân Ahmed Remzi Dede…" (my Masnavi teacher, benefactor Ahmed Remzi Dede, may his place be in heaven…)

Yaman Dede's great love for his master was expressed in in his letter to one of his students, Yaman Dede says:

> "Mesnevî hocam Remzi Dede merhumun akrabalarından herhangi birinin keşke çok yorucu emirleri olsa da yapsam. Onun ruhunu şâd etmek için insan hangi zahmetten kaçınır?" (Özdamar, 2008: 352).
>
> (I wish one of the relatives of my Masnavi teacher, the late Remzi Dede, had some difficult requests that I could fulfill. What labor would be too great for one to please Remzi Dede?)

5. His Influence and Intellectual Legacy on the Modern Sufi Tradition in Turkey

Yaman Dede's extensive travels from Kayseri to Istanbul and his journeys across Anatolia attracted disciples from diverse backgrounds and religions, reflecting the multicultural essence that has long been central to Mevlevism. His background as an educator greatly facilitated this process. Many prominent Turkish scholars today were once students of Yaman Dede. Examples include İsmail Karaçam, Bekir Topaloğlu, Saim Yeprem, Yaşar Kandemir, Ahmed Kahraman, and Muhammed Eroğlu from Istanbul University's Theology School; Emin Işık and Selçuk

Eraydın from Marmara University; Ali Öztaylan and Mahir İz (Sufi shaykhs); Mehmed Doğru (mufti of Eminönü); Selahaddin Kaya (mufti of Istanbul); and Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (poet). Yahya Kemal Beyatlı's couplet serves as a poignant example of Yaman Dede's profound influence:

> "Yüz sürdü gerçi pâyine çok müslüman Dede
> Mollâ-yı Rûm görmedi bundan Yaman Dede."
>
> (Many Muslim shaykhs touched their faces to your foot
> The *molla*s of Rum had not seen such an intelligent shaykh)

The memories and stories recounted by Yaman Dede's students reflect numerous significant characteristics that deeply impressed them (Özdamar, 2008: 177-227).

Firstly, Yaman Dede's enduring love for Mavlana Jalaluddin Rumi is a prominent aspect that his students often emphasized. They noted that his love for Mavlana served as a pathway to understanding all dimensions of Islam. According to his students, he was not simply Yaman Dede, but Yanan Dede, consumed by the flames of love for Mavlana, God, and the Prophet. Known for his courtesy, punctuality, sincerity, humility, and compassion towards his students, Yaman Dede would often respond to questions about his journey to Islam by stating, "Evlâdım, ben kırk senedir Mevlânâ'nın fırınında yanıyorum!" (My child, I have been burning for forty years in the oven of Mavlana.)

One poignant account by Ahmed Kahraman illustrates Yaman Dede's profound love for the Prophet Muhammad. Kahraman recalls an incident where he found Yaman Hoca standing motionless near a mosque close to the German Consulate in Istanbul, tears streaming down his face. Concerned, Kahraman approached him and inquired about his distress. Yaman Dede replied, "There is not any problem, my son, but whenever I think of *Rasulullah* (Mohammad the Messenger), I lose myself and my strength and start searching for a place to sit down" (Özdamar, 2008: 185-186).

Yaman Dede's combination of secular and religious education broadened the scope of his influence, reaching a diverse audience with his thoughts and works. While initially appearing personal, his written correspondence with students and close friends provides insight into his thoughts, principles, and the prevailing situation in Turkey during that period. Through these letters, known as *Mektubât* (meaning 'letters'), Yaman Dede continued the traditional

method of teaching disciples, a practice that has endured for centuries. In one such letter dated March 10, 1945, Yaman Dede wrote the following:

> "İlhamlar bu fakire mektup şeklinde gönderiliyor. Benim gönlümle aynı dalga uzunluğunda işleyen gönüllere ve ruhlara bu ilhamlar akıp gidiyor." Özdamar, 2008: 227.)
>
> (The inspirations are sent to this fakir [the poor, indicating himself] in the form of letters. These inspirations are flowing to the hearts and souls that live at the same level with my heart.)

Between the years 1943 and 1955, Yaman Dede penned a total of 67 letters, as published thus far. Notably, the majority of these letters, two-thirds to be precise, were written during the period spanning 1945 and 1946. The distribution of his letters includes one in 1943, four in 1944, and 16 between 1947 and 1955 (Subaşı, 2005: 153). It appears that Yaman Dede exhibited greater productivity in letter writing during his single years from 1942 to 1947. However, after his second marriage, this practice gradually waned.

An intriguing observation is that a significant portion of Dede's letters were addressed to his female students. Moreover, these letters were disclosed by his wife Hatice following Dede's passing, rather than by the recipients themselves. This suggests that Dede likely made copies of his letters before dispatching them.

The contents of Yaman Dede's letters can be categorized into two main groups: reflections on his journey in Islam and his personal concerns. He predominantly delved into discussions about the Islamic faith, expressing his deep love and reverence for Mavlana, the Masnavi, and the Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of his role as a teacher in schools attended by non-Muslim minority groups. Alongside these spiritual themes, Dede's letters also revealed the sorrow of being separated from his first wife and daughter and his quest for official documentation to affirm his ethnic identity as a Turk.

Yaman Dede was also a great poet and wrote numerous *ghazal*s (love lyrics), *na'at*s (poetry praising the Prophet Mohammad), and poems about *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the unity of existence) and Mavlana, as well as articles on poetics, late Ottoman intellectuals, Mavlana, and Mavlana's influence on foreign scholars. His poems are not arranged chronologically but can be classified according to the levels of intensity with which he reflects on his longing for God. His various *naat*s were composed the musically, for example, *Yanan Kalbe Devasın Sen* (You're the cure for the burning heart), his famous poem, which is the most frequently circulated and performed naat in Turkey.

In one of his articles on Mavlana, Yaman Dede mentions his exchange of letters with Anne Marie Schimmel, famous German orientalist and scholar on Sufism, and tells of Schimmel's love for Mavlana by quoting her words. (Huda, 2004: 191-192). At the end of her letter, Schimmel attaches a faded rose that she took from the tomb of Mavlana (Özdamar, 2008: 440-441).

6. Conclusion

The secularization of social life and the suppression of Sufi orders in Turkey posed significant challenges for their functioning. Throughout the 1930s, the pressure of secularization intensified in Turkey, yet these reforms had limited impact on the rural populace, comprising the majority of the Turkish population. Despite efforts towards secularization, Turkey's transformation remained incomplete, with manifestations of popular religion persisting, particularly in Anatolia through the cult of shaykhs. Yaman Dede's upbringing in a small town facilitated his immersion in Islam, yet his Christian background posed ongoing challenges.

Influenced by Turkish nationalism and his burgeoning interest in Islam, Yaman Dede embarked on an exploration of his ethnic heritage, seeking to affirm his Turkish origins rather than Greek. This quest led him to visit Kayseri twice in 1939 to consult the *shariyya* registers and subsequently delve into his family history in Bor, Niğde. Through these efforts, he discovered his roots within the Karaman Turk tribe, which had settled in Anatolia prior to the Seljukid reign and had converted to Christianity under the Eastern Roman Empire (Subaşı, 2005: 121-123). This revelation helped Yaman Dede reconcile his dual identities, providing clarity to his sense of self.

In Sufi Islam, spiritual knowledge and power are believed to be transmitted through the *silsila* (lineage) from the Prophet Mohammad to the present master. Consequently, the Sufi shaykh serves as a model for disciples, encouraging imitation of his actions. Yaman Dede, through complete obedience to his master and emulation of his conduct, deepened his understanding of Islam and Mavlavism.

Yaman Dede's influence on modern Turkish Sufi tradition endures through his poetry, religious gatherings, and his students. Additionally, the Christian Orthodox church built in

Talas, Kayseri in 1886 was converted to a mosque during the First World War after the departure of Anatolian Greeks from the town. Following Yaman Dede's passing, the mosque was dedicated in his honor, reflecting his enduring legacy.

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