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WESTERN OBSERVATIONS OF THE MEVLEVI SEMA: NINETEENTH CENTURY REPORTS ON THE GALATA MEVLEVIHANE IN THE CONTEXT OF ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE

MEVLEVÎ SEMÂSINA BATILI GÖZLEMLER:ORYANTALİST SÖYLEM BAĞLAMINDA 19. YÜZYILDA GALATA MEVLEVÎHANESİ ÜZERİNE RAPORLAR

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Sorumlu Yazar

Abstract

Orientalism has profoundly shaped historical scholarship as a discipline that seeks to explore the East in all its dimensions, making both positive and negative contributions. On the one hand, it has contributed to a better understanding of Eastern culture, knowledge and traditions in the Western world. On the other hand, it has been criticized for reinforcing stereotypical judgements, exoticizing perspectives and colonial narratives. This study examines how the sema rituals of the Mevlevi performed in the Galata Mevlevihane in the 19th century Ottoman Empire were observed by Westerners and interpreted through an Orientalist perspective. Through a comparative analysis based on travelogues and secondary literature, the sharp contrast between the deep spiritual mission of the Mevlevi order and the superficial perceptions of Western observers is highlighted. This study will not only contribute to the existing literature on the Mevlevi traditions but will also examine how these traditions were portrayed by Western observers in the 19th century. In previous research, Western observations of Mevlevi rituals in the Galata Mevlevihane during this period have often been either exclusively positive or exclusively negative. However, this study attempts to present both positive and negative interpretations together to provide a multifaceted analysis of Western perspectives and provide a clearer understanding of the true spiritual essence of Mevlevi rituals.

Key Words: Mevlevi Order, Galata Mevlevihane, Orientalism, Whirling Dervishes, Ottoman Empire, 19th Century Western Perspective

Öz

Oryantalizm, Doğuyu tüm boyutlarıyla incelemeyi kendine görev edinmiş bir disiplin olarak tarihte derin izler bırakarak hem olumlu hem de olumsuz katkılarda bulunmuştur. Bir yandan, Doğu'nun kültürü, bilgi birikimi ve geleneklerinin Batı dünyası tarafından daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlarken, diğer yandan kalıplaşmış yargılar, egzotikleştirici bakış açıları ve sömürgeci anlatıları pekiştirdiği için sıkça eleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışma, 19. yüzyıl Osmanlı Devleti'nde Galata Mevlevihanesi'nde icra edilen Mevlevi sema ritüellerinin Batılılar tarafından nasıl gözlemlendiğini ve Oryantalist bir perspektifle nasıl yorumlandığını incelemektedir.

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Seyahatnameler ve ikincil literatür kaynaklarına dayanan karşılaştırmalı bir analiz yoluyla, Mevlevi tarikatının derin manevi misyonu ile Batılı ziyaretçilerin yüzeysel algıları arasındaki keskin farklar ortaya konulacaktır. Bu çalışma, yalnızca Mevlevi gelenekleri hakkında mevcut literatüre katkı sağlamakla kalmayacak, aynı zamanda bu geleneklerin 19. yüzyılda nasıl temsil edildiğini ele alacaktır. Mevcut çalışmalarda, 19. yüzyılda Galata Mevlevihanesi'ndeki Mevlevi ritüellerine ilişkin gözlemler hem olumlu hem de olumsuz yorumlarla bir arada ele alınmamıştır. Ancak bu çalışma hem olumlu hem de olumsuz yorumları bir arada ele alarak Batılı gözlemlerin çok yönlü bir değerlendirmesini sunmayı ve Mevlevi ritüellerinin gerçek manevi anlamını daha net bir şekilde ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mevlevi Tarikatı, Galata Mevlevihanesi, Dönen Dervişler, Oryantalizm, Osmanlı Devleti, 19. Yüzyıl Batılı Perspektifleri

Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Galata Mevlevihane emerged as a focal point of Western encounters with Ottoman cultural and religious practices. European diplomats, travellers, and Orientalist scholars frequently recorded their observations of the Mevlevi sema ritual, often interpreting it through the intellectual and ideological frameworks of their time. These reports, shaped by prevailing notions of the 'exotic East,' simultaneously reveal an admiration for the aesthetic dimensions of the ritual and a tendency to filter it through Orientalist conceptions of mysticism and irrationality. The present study examines these nineteenth-century accounts within the broader discourse of Western representations of Ottoman religious life, situating them within the evolving paradigms of Orientalism. By doing so, this article seeks to explore how these observations not only influenced European perceptions of Sufism but also contributed to the construction of a distinct cultural imagery that endured in subsequent academic and artistic engagements with Mevlevi tradition.

Western scholars and intellectuals often found Sufism attractive because it seemed to offer a "softer" and more "universal" face of Islam (Khalil-Sheikh, 2016, 195) compared to what they perceived as the rigid and dogmatic aspects of Islamic law (Sharia). Sufism, initially derided and viewed as a rival to Christianity, was portrayed by Orientalist studies as a belief system like Christianity, with the idea that Sufis could be Christianized with minimal effort (Derin, 2017, 33). The German orientalist Max Horten emphasized the influence of Indian and Persian elements in Islamic philosophy, portraying it as a product of Persian creativity wrestling with a Semitic worldview, shaped by Aryan ingenuity under diverse cultural influences (Vural, 2023, 965). His ethnocentric perspective aligns with Ernest Renan's view that Islamic philosophy merely transmitted Greek thought in Arabic, emphasizing the "Greek Miracle" as the foundation of philosophy (Vural, 2023, 965).

Historical background and Literature review

Even before the term Orientalist emerged, the West demonstrated a longstanding curiosity toward the East. Historical evidence reveals that during the medieval period, Christian scholars admired and adopted Eastern knowledge. Following the decline of Muslim power in Andalusia, Arabic manuscripts were brought from Córdoba and translated into Latin under the supervision of ecclesiastical authorities (Taşçı, 2013, 10). This intellectual exchange facilitated the transmission of accurate information about Islam to Europe as early as the 12th century (Taşçı, 2013, 11).

The term Orientalist was formally coined in the second half of the 18th century to refer to scholars—primarily in England and France—who engaged in the study of Eastern languages, literature, history, archaeology, religion, and socio-cultural life to foster greater understanding between East and West. Initially, the term carried a sense of academic prestige and legitimacy. However, over time, certain intellectual and political circles succeeded in transforming the term into one with negative connotations, largely due to its later association with colonial and imperial interests (Curtis, 2015, 20). As the East came to be examined from multiple perspectives and increasingly integrated into Western systems of knowledge, Orientalist studies gained considerable momentum. While Vasco da Gama's opening of the Cape route to Asia in 1498 significantly broadened Western access to the Orient, more systematic and detailed studies of Eastern societies did not become prominent in European scholarship until the 18th and especially the 19th centuries (Turner, 2002, 38). During the 19th century, Orientalism became institutionalized as an academic discipline, supported by the methodological frameworks of newly emerging Western social sciences such as anthropology, philology, and comparative religion (Bulut, 2007, 428). This institutionalization gave Orientalist scholarship the veneer of scientific objectivity, even though many of its conclusions were informed by longstanding Eurocentric assumptions. According to Said (2010), Orientalism is not merely an influential academic tradition; it is also a multifaceted field of interest embraced by travellers, merchants, administrators, military campaigners, readers of novels and exotic adventure stories, natural historians, and pilgrims—individuals all seeking a particular form of knowledge about the East, its landscapes, peoples, and civilizations. As such, Orientalism functioned as both a scholarly enterprise and a broader cultural practice embedded in the Western imagination.

With improvements in transportation and communication during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Western engagement with the East intensified, resulting in a surge in travel writing and ethnographic accounts. Although these works contributed to the expansion of Orientalist literature, they frequently relied on reductive and stereotypical representations. Rather than capturing the complexity and vitality of Eastern cultures, many accounts portrayed the East as static, exotic, irrational, backward, and in civilizational decline. This dichotomy between a "progressive" West and a "decaying" East became a defining trope in Orientalist discourse. In the 19th century, British colonial officials—who constituted the primary source of European scholarship on Sufism—adopted a dual attitude toward the tradition. While they admired the literary classics of Sufism, which remained part of the Persian curriculum of the British East India Company until the 1830s, they regarded its contemporary social expressions as degenerate and corrupt when measured against what they perceived as orthodox Islam (Ernst, 2002, 110).This tension is especially visible in Orientalist representations of Sufi traditions such as Mevlevi Sufism in late 19th-century Istanbul, where visual and textual depictions reflected both fascination and ideological distancing. For instance, in his renowned account of life in Egypt during the 1830s, Edward Lane examined the rituals of various Sufi orders within a chapter pointedly titled "Superstitions," reflecting the Orientalist lens through which such practices were often viewed (Bruinessen, 2009, 136). William Ramsay (1907) advanced the provocative argument that Mevlevi Sufism had Christian origins, claiming that the order was not authentically Islamic. He highlighted symbols and practices, such as blue, as evidence of deviation from what he considered to be "pure" religious traditions. Similarly, Wordsworth Donisthorpe (1898) likened Mevlevi

rituals to the fantastical narratives of *The Thousand and One Nights*, portraying the East as magical, irrational, and otherworldly. These perspectives demonstrate how certain strands of Orientalism reduced the rich spiritual life of Sufism to exoticized and oversimplified tropes.

However, not all Western observers adopted such reductive views. Scholars and travellers like Will Monroe (1907), Lucy M.J. Garnett (1912), and John Brown (1868) offered more nuanced and empathetic accounts of the Mevlevi tradition. In their writings, the *sema* ceremony is not merely presented as a visually captivating ritual but as a profound spiritual journey—one that involves inner transformation, purification of the soul, and the quest for divine love. These more sensitive portrayals mark a significant divergence from the ideological distortions present in other Orientalist writings, reflecting genuine attempts at cultural immersion and understanding. Despite its scholarly aspirations, Orientalism often served as a vehicle for cultural hegemony. By the late 19th century, even as Orientalist scholarship gained legitimacy within Western academic institutions, many of its studies remained embedded in earlier Eurocentric assumptions, albeit articulated in more scientific language. The dual legacy of Orientalism—as both a serious field of academic inquiry and an ideological apparatus of Western domination—remains a focal point in contemporary postcolonial critiques. Scholars today continue to re-evaluate the motivations, methodologies, and consequences of Orientalist discourse, particularly in its portrayals of religious and cultural practices such as Sufism.

Methodology

This study examines the narratives of Western observers who visited the Galata Mevlevihane in the 19th century and described the Mevlevi *sema* ritual within the broader framework of Orientalist discourse. The research employs a qualitative methodology that integrates discourse analysis with historical and cultural contextualization, enabling a multidimensional investigation of how Mevlevi traditions were perceived and represented in Western thought. The analysis draws on a corpus of travelogues, memoirs, and published accounts authored by Western travellers, diplomats, and intellectuals who encountered the Mevlevi Order during their visits to the Ottoman Empire. These first-hand narratives, which often present contrasting depictions of the *sema*, are examined not only as descriptive texts but also as discursive constructs shaped by the ideological and cultural frameworks of their time.

To facilitate a structured and critical analysis, the selected sources are thematically categorized into four analytical groups: Musical and aesthetic interpretations, spiritual and philosophical readings of the ritual, Orientalist distortions and exoticized representations, balanced or empathetic perspectives attentive to metaphysical meanings. This thematic classification serves as both a descriptive tool and a critical lens through which to interrogate the epistemological foundations of Western knowledge production about Islamic mysticism. The study pays particular attention to the authors' ideological orientations, the degree to which their narratives align with Orientalist paradigms, and the specific aspects of the *sema* they foreground—whether visual spectacle, spiritual significance, or performative display.

By foregrounding this interpretive diversity, the methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of how the *sema* ritual was received and reimagined in the West. In doing so, the study identifies common narrative patterns, recurring symbolic

imagery, strategies of othering, and instances of cultural idealization. Simultaneously, it highlights the contributions of select authors who offered more empathetic, insightful, and balanced portrayals of Mevlevi traditions. Within these narratives, the *sema* is frequently depicted through its aesthetic, musical, spiritual, and performative dimensions. The analysis critically assesses the extent to which these representations correspond—or fail to correspond—to the inner metaphysical meaning of Mevlevi spirituality. Framed by the theoretical lens of Orientalism, the study explores how notions of Western superiority, exoticism, and cultural othering inform the portrayals of the Mevlevi Order and Ottoman Sufism. Ultimately, this article aims to provide a multidimensional perspective on the Western reception of Mevlevi practices. It seeks to move beyond simplistic or exoticized readings of the *sema* by contextualizing these interpretations within the broader discourses of 19th-century Western engagement with Islamic mysticism. Through its comparative thematic approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Ottoman Sufism—particularly Mevlevi ritual and thought—was imagined, interpreted, and occasionally misrepresented in the Western intellectual tradition.

1. The Mevlevi Order in the Ottoman Empire

The Mevlevi order or the Mevlevilik or Mevleviye (Persian: مولویه – Molavīyeh) is a Sufi order founded in Konya (in present-day Turkey) by the followers of Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi-Rumi, Islamic jurist and theologian from the 13th century (Mevlevi Order, 2023). After several years of wandering, he finally settled in Konia, where he occupied a high religious office and was given the title "king of the religious schools" (Chittick, 2005, 3). Mevlana (Rumi), who was born in the great centre of science and culture that contributed significantly to the formation of the Melameti-Sufi understanding, such as the city of Balkh — one of the oldest and most important centres of Buddhist mystical culture — spent his first fifteen years there, but he developed his Sufi personality and ideas mainly in Anatolia (Ocak, 2011, 195). Rumi's beliefs stemmed from the Qur'an, the hadiths, Islamic theology, and the works of Sunni mystics such as Sana'i, Attar, and his father, Baha al-Din Valad (Lewis, 2000, 11). Rumi also introduced the extensive use of music into his order, and over the centuries the Mevlevi Order has played an important role in the creation and transmission of traditional Turkish music. After Mevlana's death, Çelebi Husam led the Order until 1284, during which Sema ceremonies were regularly held every Thursday at the lodge adjacent to Mevlana's tomb, with dervishes praying at his grave beforehand. Sultan Veled succeeded Husam in 1312, followed by Ulu Arif Çelebi, under whom the order spread across Ottoman lands (Friedlander, 2003, 61).

With the passing of Prophet Muhammad, differences in opinion began to emerge within Islam, leading to the formation of various sects. As Sufi thought developed, religious orders (tariqahs) also began to appear. These orders played a significant role not only in the spread of Islam but also in establishing their own institutional identities. In the Ottoman Empire, dervishes were influential both in conquests and in the establishment of settlements in rural areas and cities. In the Ottoman campaign against Christianity and heterodoxy in the Muslim countries, especially in the Balkans, Halvetis and other orders were instrumental in the empire's policy of Sunnitization (Köseoğlu, 2022, 100). The lodges were led by a sheikh, and the principles of leadership within it were shaped by the Sufi traditions and the attitude of the sheikh (Kara, 2011, 370). Since Mevlâna included music, sema and poetry in his understanding of the Sufi order, the Mevlevi lodges served as conservatories,

literary schools and academies of fine arts during the period in which they were active (Küçük, 2006, 93).

When the Ottoman Beylik was established, Mevlevism had already expanded beyond Konya into various Anatolian regions, including cities like Niğde, Amasya, Tokat, and Bayburt. Although limited in number, Mevlevi lodges began to appear in the 14th century across towns and villages. Despite the scarcity of records, Mevlevism gradually spread throughout Ottoman territories during this period (Ocak, 2023, p. 100). Starting from the 15th century, the Mevlevi Order established itself as an influential Sufi path appealing primarily to the Ottoman elite and gradually became a prominent cultural and social institution within urban centres. Over time, fourteen major and well-organized Mevlevi lodges were founded in large cities, while more than seventy smaller lodges operated in towns. Ottoman sultans—including Murad II, Bayezid II, Selim I, and Murad III—showed particular interest in the order; notably, Murad II founded a large Mevlevihane in Edirne (İnalcık, 2003, 251). By the late 16th century, the Mevlevi Order began to take on the characteristics of a state institution. As members of the ruling elite joined the order, Mevlevism gradually withdrew from rural areas and became associated with the urban upper class. During this period, many Mevlevihanes (Mevlevi lodges) were commissioned and built by state officials (Ösen, 2015, 22). During the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the influence of the Mevlevis became evident through several notable events: at the end of 1528, an order was given to send a robe and 1000 coins to Lokman Dede, the sheik of the Mevlana Lodge in Konya; during the Baghdad campaign, both Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha and the Sultan himself visited Konya and the Mevlana Lodge, in his presence, the Qur'an and the Mathnawi were recited and the sema ceremony performed generous, gifts were distributed to the poor and dervishes in the lodge and the construction of a mosque and a guest house was commissioned (Göyünç, 1991, 352-355). In the Ottoman Empire, the Mevlevi Order served as a significant point of reference not only for spiritual life but also for political authority. Through strong ties with the central administration, the Mevlevis developed an influential presence that extended beyond the confines of the imperial court. Even when located outside the imperial centre, Mevlevi lodges functioned as important religious and cultural hubs in their respective regions. While Konya—home to the tomb of Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi—stood as the symbolic capital of Mevlevism, the Galata Mevlevihane likewise held considerable symbolic importance. Despite its location across the Golden Horn from the imperial center of Babıâli, Galata established strong ties with the Ottoman bureaucracy over time, embodying the political and cultural weight of the Mevlevi presence in the capital (Ambrosio, 2012, 63). Although intellectual debates about the legitimacy of such rituals persisted in the following centuries, no further official prohibitions were implemented. From the 17th century onward, the Mevlevi Order fully matured and began to produce its most prominent and influential figures, gaining increasing influence within the administrative structures of the Ottoman Empire. Parallel to this institutional integration, Mevlevism emerged as one of the most respected Sufi communities in the empire. Its relative detachment from overtly political and social movements enabled the order to secure consistent state support, distinguishing it from other religious movements that were often subjected to persecution due to their political affiliations (Ocak, 2023, 100).

Starting from the 17th century, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of decline. During this time, significant territorial losses occurred due to military and administrative weaknesses; central authority weakened, and the influence of local

notables in the provinces increased. This period also witnessed early modernization efforts. Between the late 15th and 16th centuries, sema and devran rituals in Istanbul faced scholarly opposition but continued uninterrupted due to the sultans' balancing policies. In the 17th century, the rise of the Kadızadeli movement, led by Kadızade Mehmed Efendi, marked a turning point as these rituals were condemned as *bid'a* (illegitimate innovations introduced after the Prophet Muhammad). Although Sultan Murad IV initially maintained neutrality, the movement gained power during the reigns of Sultan Ibrahim and early Mehmed IV, resulting in an imperial ban on sema and devran, particularly targeting the Mevlevis and Halvetis. The ban not only disrupted the ritual life of these communities but also signalled a broader ideological struggle over the place of Sufism in Ottoman society. This ban lasted 18 years and was lifted in 1684 (Yılmaz, 2015, 251). By the late 18th century, Sultan Selim III's Nizam-ı Cedid (New Order) reforms stood out as major attempts to strengthen central administration and modernize the military. Although these reforms represented one of the most serious interventions in the classical structure of the empire, they could not be sustained due to resistance from conservative factions. Nevertheless, these initiatives laid the groundwork for the Tanzimat Reforms and the Islahat Fermanı (Edict of Reforms) of the 19th century, marking the beginning of a systematic effort to modernize the Ottoman Empire's administrative, legal, and military structures. This century is often regarded as a period of revival for the Mevlevi Order, during which the order withdrew entirely from rural areas and found increasing support among Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals (Ösen, 2015, 22). The close relationship between Şeyh Galib—who served as *mesnevîhan* at the court—and Sultan Selim III highlights the reformist character of Mevlevism in Istanbul. (Tanrıkorur, 2004, 470). The construction of the Üsküdar Mevlevihane by Halil Nûman Dede for traveling dervishes marked the final major Mevlevi lodge established in the city (Tanrıkorur, 2004, 470). Sultan Mahmud II, after affiliating with the Mevlevi Order, visited various lodges and extended material and spiritual support, and under his reign, figures like Hâlet Efendi played a key role in the restoration of Mevlevihanes and the provision of stipends to their sheikhs (Tanrıkorur, 2004, 470). The Mevlevis' alignment with the state during the abolition of the Janissaries further solidified their position. Despite economic and political instability during the reigns of Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz—which led to reduced vakıf revenues and donations—state authorities continued to support Mevlevihanes, recognizing their enduring influence and prestige among the public (Tanrıkorur, 2004, 471). The active presence of prominent Mevlevihanes in key districts of Istanbul, the affiliation of esteemed literary figures such as Şeyh Galib with the order, and the artistic cultivation of influential composers like Hamamizâde İsmail Dede Efendi (Ösen, 2015, 23) collectively underscore the Mevlevi tradition's deep engagement with the cultural life of the period. The remarkable contributions of these individuals to literature, music, and the arts significantly enhanced the intellectual and aesthetic prestige of Mevlevism, reinforcing its role as a vital cultural force in Ottoman society. While sema ceremonies in most Mevlevihanes across the Ottoman territories were held only on Fridays, in 19th-century Istanbul they were performed every day of the week in different districts—on Tuesdays and Fridays in Pera, Mondays and Thursdays in Yenikapı, Sundays in Kasımpaşa, Saturdays in Üsküdar, and Wednesdays in Beşiktaş or its successor, the Bahariye Mevlevihane—reflecting the prominent and privileged status of the Mevlevi Order in the imperial capital (Grierson, 2013, 137). During the reigns of Abdulhamid II and Mehmed V, numerous Mevlevihanes were repaired and restored. The sword-girding ceremonies of Sultans Abdülmecid, Abdülaziz, Abdulhamid II, and Mehmed V were conducted

by the Mevlevis (Yılmaz, 2015, 286). During the Balkan Wars and World War I—including the Gallipoli Campaign—Mevlevihanes also played an active role in social solidarity and charitable support. (Yılmaz, 2015, 286).

Archival documents also reveal that the Ottoman state was responsive to the needs and requests of the Mevlevi Order. As the Mevlevi order transitioned toward becoming an institution integrated into the state, it gradually shifted from villages to towns and from towns to cities, gaining favour among the elite through the affiliation of high-ranking state officials. For example, the Pîrî Mehmed Pasha Lodge in Konya was established by Grand Vizier Pîrî Mehmed Pasha, the Eskişehir Mevlevihane by Vizier Çoban Mustafa Pasha, the Kilis Mevlevihane by Emir Abdülhamîd el-Murtazâ, the Aleppo Mevlevihane by Ulvân and Fûlâd Mirzas, the Pécs Mevlevihane by Yakovalı Hasan Pasha, the Ankara Mevlevihane by the Beylerbeyi of Ankara Cenâbî Ahmed Pasha, the Damascus Mevlevihane by Governor Hasan Pasha, and the Jerusalem Mevlevihane by Emir Gazi Ebû Seb. (Tanrıkorur, 2004, 470). II. Abdülhamid sent assistance to various Mevlevi lodges in Anatolia. During this time, the Kütahya Mevlevihane was rebuilt, while the Mevlevihanes in Afyonkarahisar, Gallipoli, and Bursa were repaired (Tanrıkorur, 2004). On June 22, 1874, the followers of the Tarikat-ı Aliyye (Mevlevi Order) in the province of Crete asked Çelebi Efendi Hazretleri (His Grace Celebi) for permission to establish and revive a Mevlevihane in Hanya (BOA,1290). This request indicates the active presence and expansion of the Mevlevi order in the region, and the need for a formal centre to support their religious and cultural activities. On November 18, 1908, a decision was made to appoint the Mevlevi leadership in Damascus, Bursa, Edirne, Galata, Trabzon, Jerusalem and Thessaloniki (BOA, 1324). All these developments demonstrate that the Mevlevi Order was not merely a mystical institution but also played an active role in the cultural, intellectual, and political life of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the closure of lodges by law, the tombs of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî and Mevlânâ were reopened for public visitation as museums under a new law enacted in 1926 (Tanrıkorur, 2004, 471). In 1929, with Mustafa Kemal's signature, a decree was issued for the repair of the Konya Mevlevihane, which had been designated as a museum of antiquities (BCA, 1929).

2. Galata Mevlevihane: A Window into Sufism and Spiritual Reflection

Galata Mevlevihane, established in 1491 by İskender Pasha, a dignitary of the Fatih Sultan Mehmed and Bayezid II eras and known as the Kulekapısı Mevlevihane, expanded over time through various additions to become a full Sufi complex, built on a section of Iskender Pasha's hunting farm, presumably on the remnants of the H. Theodoros Monastery (Tanman, 1996, 317). While several Mevlevi lodges existed throughout the Empire, the Galata Mevlevihane's central location in Istanbul and its historical prestige made it a prime destination. Proximity to diplomatic quarters and established guide networks ensured that curious travellers could readily incorporate a Sema ceremony into their itineraries. Moreover, the lodge's openness to foreign visitors, a reflection of its cosmopolitan setting, distinguished it from more insular dervish communities. The history and name of Galata date back to antiquity. Latin historians of the IV. Crusade called the district both "Galata" and "Pera", while the Genoese, with a few exceptions, mainly used "Pera" in the middle of the 15th century (Marmara, 2021, 70). From its foundation in 1491 until its closure in 1925, the Galata Mevlevihane played an unprecedented role in the preservation and promotion of Turkish culture. It functioned as a dynamic centre for literature and music, much like a modern academy of fine arts (Özdemir, 2018, 120). Its influence was not limited to

Ottoman society; the Galata Mevlevihane became a magnet for Westerners, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. This wave of fascination transformed the lodge into a cultural and spiritual centre where Western travellers eagerly sought to experience the enchanting rituals of the Mevlevi order. During the height of Western visitation, the lodge was under the leadership of two important sheikhs: Kudretullah Dede (1817–1872) and Ataullah Dede (1872–1910), who upheld the spiritual legacy of the order while attracting the growing curiosity of foreign countries (Özdemir, 2018, 128).

By the end of the 18th century, Mevlevi lodges had evolved beyond being merely centres of Sufi practice and emerged as indirect actors in the Ottoman modernization process. This transformation was particularly evident in the Galata Mevlevihane under the leadership of Sheikh Galib, whose intellectual and spiritual relationship with Sultan Selim III played a pivotal role. Beyond being a composer and performer himself, Sultan Selim III was a significant patron of music, and a considerable number of the artists in his circle were affiliated with Sufi lodges (Benlioğlu, 2008, 4). Among his nearly one hundred surviving compositions, six are identified as religious musical works, including one Mevlevi Ceremony (Benlioğlu, 2008, 4). The Mevlevi intellectual tradition—with its openness to innovation, tolerance, art, music, and beauty—played a significant role in shaping Sultan Selim III's refined artistic sensibility (Osen, 56). Sultan's close relationship with leading Mevlevi sheikhs of the time and his decision to restore the tomb of Rūmī in Konya—the spiritual heart of the Mevlevi Order—generated a deep sense of loyalty and affection among the Mevlevi community (Yılmaz, 2022, 396). Responding promptly to Sheikh Gâlib's request for the restoration of the Galata Mevlevihane, Sultan Selim III not only oversaw the repair of the lodge but also secured its long-term sustainability by founding new endowments which included provisions for essential needs such as clean drinking water (Yılmaz, 2022, 397). From the late 17th to the early 20th century, several prominent Mevlevi families led Istanbul's major lodges, but the most influential in shaping both Istanbul Mevlevi culture and Ottoman modernization was the family of Ebubekir Dede of the Yenikapı Mevlevihane. The foundations of Mevlevi culture in Istanbul were laid during the modernization era, which intensified under the reign of Sultan Selim III at the end of the 18th century. The Mevlevi family descended from Ebubekir Dede of Kütahya, who assumed the leadership of the Yenikapı Mevlevihane in 1746, and maintained this position within the family until the closure of the lodges in 1925. Through this hereditary succession, they initiated a period of continuity and lasting influence in the mystical culture of Istanbul (Işın, 2010, p. [sayfa numarası]).

The lodge's location in Pera, a district heavily populated by foreign embassies and Western residents, made it a convenient and desirable destination for visitors arriving in Istanbul (Zarcone, 2013, 51). It is noted that travellers, upon reaching the city, would often prioritize attending the ceremonies of the whirling dervishes at the lodge, emphasizing its status as a must-see attraction. The first recorded Western depictions of the Whirling Dervishes date from the late 15th and mid-17th centuries. However, it was not until the late 18th century that the influx of visitors increased exponentially, as foreigners were granted access to the ceremonies of the Pera Lodge for a fee. Prominent Western writers and artists, including Théophile Gautier (1811–1872), Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), and Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), documented their encounters with the Mevlevi ceremonies in vivid detail, and their writings not only captivated Western audiences but also shaped the perception of the Ottoman Empire as a land of spiritual mysticism (Zarcone, 2013, 52). This interest is not limited to these centuries. The fascination with Sufi whirling has spread throughout

the West, and Mevlevi communities and Sema ceremonies can be found today in the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia (Harel, Czamanski-Cohen, Turjeman, 2021, 5).

In travel accounts of the time, the Galata Mevlevihane in Pera was often highlighted as a place where the dervishes held their sacred rituals, performed the sema ceremony and introduced Mevlevi culture to curious onlookers. The first point highlights the importance of the lodge as a place where Westerners could learn about Ottoman spirituality first-hand, suggesting that it was an important site for intercultural exchange. The ceremonial precision of the Mevlevihane was highlighted as aspects that fascinated Western visitors, showing how visual and performative elements played a role in the perception of Ottoman mysticism. John Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Constantinople, Brusa, and the Troad* refers to the Funicular Railway, which was widely used and transported passengers directly to the square near the Tekke of the "Dancing Dervishes" in Pera (Murray, 1900, 16). The second point: the lodge's connections to the Ottoman elite and its role as host to distinguished guests elevated its status as more than just a religious institution — it became a cultural and political symbol. This illustrates how spiritual spaces were intertwined with social and political networks, which influenced their perception and accessibility to foreign observers. From the 17th century onwards, the Mevlevi Order became a state institution that attracted the attention of the sultans and viziers. In this way, the Mevlevi Order, one of the most respected Sufi circles in the Ottoman Empire, also gained the trust of the state, as it generally distanced itself from social and religious movements (Akgündüz, 2007, 37).

The detailed account of the mosque in Pera, as described by some Westerners, emphasises the cultural significance and rich traditions of the Mevlevi order. Demetrius Coufopoulos (1910) served as an invaluable guide for foreigners traveling to Turkey in the 19th century. In his works, which provide a detailed exploration of Ottoman society, he makes sure to dedicate special attention to the Mevlevi order, offering insights into its practices and significance within the cultural fabric of the time. He informs visitors who want to watch the whirling or dancing dervishes, especially the Mevlevi order, in their monastery at 539 Grande Rue near the Pera terminus of the Istanbul subway. He notes that the performances occur all year round on Fridays at 8:30 am (Turkish time), and the entrance fee is 2.5 piastres per person (equivalent to 5 pence). Visitors must remove their hats upon entering, and items such as canes, umbrellas, and cameras (known as Kodaks) must be left with the doorman. Sketches or notes are not permitted during the performance (Coufopoulos, 1910, 49).

John Porter Brown (1814–1872) was an American diplomat and observer who served for many years in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century. Born in the state of Ohio, Brown moved to Tunis with his mother at a young age, where he learned French, Italian, and Arabic (Leiser, 2020). In 1832, he arrived in Istanbul at the invitation of his uncle, Admiral David Porter, who had been appointed as the first American envoy to the Ottoman Empire. Brown quickly acquired proficiency in Turkish and Persian, becoming fluent in the region's principal languages (Leiser, 2020, 186). Brown's most well-known work, *The Dervishes; or Oriental Spiritualism* (1868), is among the earliest systematic studies written on the Sufi brotherhoods active in Istanbul. In this work, Brown offers detailed descriptions of major Sufi orders such as the Mevleviyya, Bektashiyya, Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya, Rifaʿiyya, and Malāmiyya, including their physical locations, belief systems, symbols, clothing, rituals, prayers, and terminologies (Leiser, 2020, 187). It is evident that Brown's

narrative draws upon a combination of personal observations, local informants, and manuscript sources. Although the book lacks explicit citations or footnotes, it is noted that he utilized the writings of authoritative figures such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (Leiser, 2020, 187). In the preface to his work, Brown (1868) states that he had direct contact with members of various dervish orders in Istanbul, and he describes them as "liberal, intelligent, sincere, and faithful friends." This characterization stands out as a more empathetic and humanistic perspective compared to the reductive and prejudiced views commonly found in Western Orientalist discourse of the time. Moreover, Brown's acknowledgment of the influence of notable Orientalist authors such as D'Ohsson, William Jones, Edward Lane, Tommaso Ubicini, and De Gobineau (Brown, 1868, 197) reveals his hybrid intellectual position—one grounded in both firsthand observation and the prevailing Western literature. Although Brown (1868) describes his study as "imperfect," his primary objective appears to be making the mystical structures of the East accessible and intelligible to Western readers. His representations of Sufi symbols, ceremonies, spiritual journeys, and devotional practices reflect not a superficial Orientalist curiosity but rather an attempt to foster a comparative cultural understanding.

His book provides an in-depth exploration of the dervish order and sheds light on their spiritual beliefs and customs in Galata Mevlevihane. It discusses the historical development of dervish orders, the significance of music and dance in their spiritual expressions, and the rituals and ceremonies integral to their way of life. He describes the process of preparing and performing rituals in a Mevlevi Lodge, detailing how a kadiree dons specific garments, including a sikkeh (cap), tennooreh (long dress), destek gool (jacket), alif-lâm-end (belt), and khirka (cloak), before entering the sema khaneh to participate in the ceremonies (Brown, 1868, 199). Brown outlines a sequence of ceremonial acts performed by the sheik and the brothers in a Mevlevi tekke.

Ritual Actions	Details
The Sheikh's Actions in Humility and Respect	
Leaving the Postake	The Sheik leaves his seat made of sheepskin (postake).
Symbolic Movements	Takes a step forward and bows again, turning back to his seat on his right foot as if the peer is present.
Bowing to the Peer	The Sheikh bows to the peer in humility.
2. Circular Movement (Sultan Veled Devree)	
Continue Walking Through the Hall	The Sheikh continues to move through the hall.
The Participation of the Brothers	The brothers follow in turn and all walk around the hall three times.
Name of the Ceremony	The ceremony is called Sultan Veled Devree, named after Sultan Veled, the son of Hazreti Mevlâna (Rumi).
3. Chants and Music	
The Sheikh's Position	The Sheikh stands in the postake with his hands crossed in front of him.

Chanting of the Nat-i Sherif	One of the brothers on the upper floor (in the Mutrib) begins chanting the Nat-i Sherif, a sacred hymn in praise of Hz. Mohammad.
Musical Performance	After the hymn, a small orchestra begins to play in the gallery:
	- Flutes (nays)
	- Kemans (string instruments)
	- Kudoors (small drums)
4. The Role of Sama Zan	
Approaching the Sheik	One of the brothers, called Sema Zan, approaches the Sheik, bows, kisses the Sheik's hand and withdraws.
Presiding over the Ceremonies	The Sema Zan stands in the center of the hall and presides over the ceremonies, which now begin.
5. Actions of the Dervishes	
Taking off the Khirkas	The other dervishes take off their khirkas.
Laying Down the Tennures	They drop their tennures, walk single file to the Sheik, kiss his hand, pay homage to the postake, and begin to turn.
Turn and move	Turn around on the left foot and bump with the right foot. If they get too close, the Sema Zan stomps as a signal.
Raise Arms	Gradually raise the arms upwards and then extend them with the left hand down and the right hand up, head tilted over the right shoulder, eyes closed.
Murmur Zikr	Murmur "God, God" continuously as they turn.
6. Orchestral Performance	
Singing Ain-i Shereef	The musicians play for twenty minutes or half an hour while singing a hymn called Ain-i Shereef.
Shouting Hai Yar	After ten minutes, they shout "Hai Yar" (O friend) loudly and suddenly stop.
7. Reverence and Silence of the Dervishes	
Pausing and Reverence	The dervishes stop, wrap the tennures around their legs, and bow to the Sheikh.
Marching Through the Hall	Led by the Sema Zan, they march slowly and bow deeply to the Sheikh.
Opportunity to Retreat	If someone falls, they can retreat during this rest period.

Resumption of Music	Music and performance are repeated three times.
Sit Down	Everyone sits down, and the Sama Zan covers them with their cloaks.
8. Closing Prayer and Conclusion	
Reading from the Qur'an	One of the brothers in the gallery reads or recites a part of the Qur'an.
The Prayer of the Sema Zan	The Sema Zan says a prayer for the Sultan, mentioning his ancestors.
The sheik's last actions	The sheikh postake and everyone greets him before he retires from the tekke.

Brown is one of the few Westerners who really understood the deep meaning of the Mevlevi rituals. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who approached the Mevlevihanes and Sufi practices with either exoticism or superficial curiosity, his observations reflect a deeper level of empathy and intellectual engagement. He went beyond the external spectacle of the Sema ceremony and recognized its spiritual and symbolic significance as a journey of the soul towards divine love and unity.

Belief in Spiritual Existence
Mankind was created in heaven or a celestial sphere before the creation of the present world.
Existence in varied conditions before assuming human form and continued existence in other forms after death.
Final return to the original form in the sphere of blessedness near the Creator.
Proofs from the Qur'an
Reference to the Prophet: "Had it not been for you I would not have created the world," indicating pre-existence.
Adam created from earth (mineral) and returned to it corporeally, while the spirit continued its existence elsewhere.
Spirit's Knowledge
The spirit has no knowledge of its previous existence or future career in this life.

Although limited biographical information is available about Will S. Monroe (1863–1939), an American educational reformer, his detailed observations reveal a thoughtful and perceptive approach to the social and cultural fabric of nineteenth-century Istanbul. Monroe's (1907) work includes vivid descriptions of the city's characteristic districts—Pera, Galata, Fener, Balat, Eyüp, and Yedikule—and offers a visual panorama of the period through his meticulous accounts of historical monuments, mosques, fountains, markets, inns, bathhouses, street vendors, stray dogs, and other everyday urban scenes. By focusing not only on architectural elements but also on the rhythms of daily life and the interactions among various social groups, his text acquires significant value as an ethnographic and cultural document. Furthermore, references to the reigning sultan and the Ottoman administrative structure provide the narrative with both spatial and political depth. Among Monroe's most notable cultural observations is his depiction of the Galata Mevlevihane, the lodge of the whirling dervishes in Istanbul. He describes the structure as a modest octagonal building,

centred around a highly polished circular platform where the dervishes perform their spiritual dance (sema) (Monroe, 1907, 281). The central space is enclosed by a low balustrade, surrounded by balconies reserved for musicians and male spectators, while a latticed gallery in one corner is designated for Muslim women. According to Monroe (1907), the dervishes begin the ritual by saluting their sheikh, then raise their arms—with the right palm upward and the left palm downward—and commence their rotation. The rhythm of the accompanying music orchestrates their movements. His interpretation presents sema not merely as an aesthetic performance but as a profound state of spiritual ecstasy. His account contrasts with the reductionist and exoticized representations typical of many Orientalist writings of the time, offering instead a more empathetic and nuanced understanding of Mevlevi mysticism. He reflects the deep spiritual meaning that the Mevlevi order attaches to its practices, seeing them as a means of overcoming the self and uniting with the divine, rather than as mere cultic acts. He mentions that Mevlevi, the mystical founder of the order, says about the symbolic religious meaning of movements: "You speak of the sea and its waves; but in so speaking you do not mean two different things, for the sea in its rising and falling makes waves; and the waves when they have fallen return to the sea: so it is with men, who are the waves of God; they are resolved after death into Him (Monroe, 1908, 386). The metaphor of the sea and its waves serves to illustrate the Sufi concept of unity and the cyclical nature of life and death. Just as the waves return to the sea after death, humans return to their origin, which is God. For Rumi, death represents a unique oneness of existence, rooted in a cyclical philosophical understanding, and he believes in continuity of the Divine, and that the contrast of birth and death is a gift to humanity (Kökçü, 2020, 640). The sema, the whirling dance of the Mevlevi dervishes, is also symbolic of this spiritual journey of the soul's return to the divine and is reminiscent of the natural cycle of waves returning to the sea.

Another remarkable traveller is Lucy M. J. Garnett (1849–1934), who was one of the most prominent folklorists and observers of her time. Garnett spent nearly eight years in Ottoman lands, during which she conducted extensive travels across Istanbul, Izmir, Thessaloniki, and the Balkans. Her detailed observations extend beyond the Turkish population to include the diverse ethnic and religious communities of the Ottoman Empire. Particularly in her depictions of the Balkans and the surrounding regions of Istanbul, Garnett demonstrates a keen understanding of both the sociocultural dynamics and the political structures of the late Ottoman period. Her intellectual background and formal education are clearly reflected in her writings. In addition to descriptions of local populations, she offers insightful commentary on the imperial court, prominent literary and philosophical figures, and key aspects of Islamic thought. Her frequent references to Qur'anic verses and hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad indicate a deep engagement with Islamic sources and religious culture. Among the primary sources she employed are Farid al-Din Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr and Asrarnameh,* Rumi's *Mathnawi,* Aflaki's *Manaqib al-Arifin*, *the Divan* of Ashik Pasha, *One Thousand and One Nights,* Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname,* and classical masnavis such as *Yusuf and Zuleikha* and *Khosrow and Shirin* (Coşkun, 2017).

Garnett's *Mysticism and Magic in Turkey* (1912) stands out as one of the rare Western accounts that portrays the Mevlevi sema ritual not only with rich detail but also with a sense of reverence and intellectual curiosity. The text focuses not merely on the external choreography of the ritual but also attempts to grasp its mystical, symbolic, and even cosmic dimensions. Her expression that the dervishes "revolve like lovers of God… like the stars of the empyrean" (Garnett, 1912, 126) interprets sema

as a universal motion of spiritual harmony and cosmic integration. This comparison transcends the exoticizing gaze common among Orientalist observers and instead reflects a genuine effort to understand the mystical depth of the ritual. Her narrative pays close attention to both ritual choreography—such as the position of the arms, bodily posture during zikr, or the symbolic act of kissing the ear—and the symbolic meanings encoded in each gesture. The contrast she draws between the agility of younger dervishes and the slower movements of older ones (Garnett, 1912, 127) supports the notion of sema not as a performative display but as a personal spiritual journey. In this sense, the text reveals how an ancient Sufi ritual may be interpreted as a universal spiritual experience. Garnett's observations offer valuable insight not only into the mystical aspects of Mevlevi practice but also into the transformation of Orientalist discourse in the 19th century—from exoticism to empathy and scholarly engagement.

Lucy M. J. Garnett's work is one of the most significant Western sources offering a detailed depiction of the Mevlevi Order's practices, ritual architecture, and symbolic elements in late 19th-century Istanbul. The work stands out as a sensitive observation that largely avoids exoticizing discourses and instead engages with the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of Mevlevi Sufism in a respectful and nuanced manner. Garnett interprets Mevlevi garments not merely as external items of clothing but as tangible symbols of Sufi discipline and spiritual purification. Robes such as the khirkha, tennure, and taybend each carry specific symbolic meanings. In particular, the posture of the dervishes during the sema—raising the right hand upward and lowering the left hand downward—is described by Garnett as a metaphor for "receiving from the heavens and distributing to the earth," signifying the transmission of divine grace to the world. For Garnett, the Mevlevi sema is not simply a physical act but a profound mystical experience that enables the dervishes to enter a state of spiritual ecstasy (hal). One of her most striking observations illustrates both the physical and spiritual nature of the ceremony: "Some twenty men and youths spin round with closed eyes and outstretched arms… without coming into collision or showing signs of giddiness" (Garnett, 1912, 147). This description underscores the transformation of physical motion into a spiritually disciplined and ecstatic experience. In Sufism, since humans are considered a reflection of God, the human being is one of the fundamental elements in Mevlevi's thought. This is generally expressed as: "The human being is the essence of the universe, the speaking tongue, and the seeing eye of the whole of existence. What leads a person to the truth and unveils the mysteries of the divine essence (jewels) is not the intellect, but love" (Turan, 2000, 122). With sema man matures only through intuition and love, reaching God step by step, and all creatures and heavenly spheres (heavens) turn with this love (Turan, 2000, 122). The dervishes begin the ceremony by crossing their arms over their chests, symbolizing the unity of God. As they turn, they gradually open their arms, with the right hand pointing upwards to receive God's blessing and the left hand pointing downwards to pass this blessing on to the earth (Gölpınarlı, 1985). The Sufi undertakes sema, a kind of instrumental and motivational oratory, only after years of spiritual poverty, fasting, and retreats, when he has reached a certain state of mystical development (Lewis, 2000, 28).

Music constitutes another key element of the sema ritual highlighted by Garnett. The ney (reed flute), kudüm (small kettledrum), and vocal zikr (remembrance) are described as central components of the ceremony, which she portrays as a ritual that unites aesthetics with metaphysics—what she calls a "visual and auditory manifestation of cosmic harmony" (Garnett, 1912, 123). Mevlânâ emphasizes in the

Mathnawi that music serves a spiritual purpose beyond being merely an art form. The sounds of the rebab and zurna are likened to the voices of Israfil (the angel who will announce the Day of Judgment in Islamic eschatology), suggesting that music symbolizes a cosmic transformation. This analogy indicates that music possesses a universal and sacred dimension. It is expressed that we are all pieces of Adam and that we heard these sounds in paradise, highlighting that music refers to humanity's divine origin and primal nature. Music is viewed not only as an emotional expression tool but also as a means for individuals to connect with the divine. In the Mathnawi, Mevlânâ advises seeking the divine through love and sema, stating: "Sema (listening) is the nourishment of lovers. Because there is a thought of gathering in sema. Due to music, the dreams in the heart are strengthened, even taking on flesh and bone. The fire of love is empowered by melodies, just like the fire of the walnut cracker." (Rumi, 2015, 502).

An important point raised by Garnett concerns the openness of Mevlevi lodges to Western visitors and members of other Sufi orders. Particularly in Istanbul, she notes that dervishes from different orders were welcomed to participate in the sema provided they possessed the requisite skill and familiarity with the practice. This flexibility reflects the spirit of inter-order permeability and tolerance characteristic of Ottoman Sufism (Garnett, 1912, 127–130). Furthermore, Garnett (1912) provides historical context about key Mevlevi lodges such as those in Galata and Kasımpaşa. Her references to Sultan Mahmud II's visit to these tekkes lend the work a layer of historical depth that extends beyond ethnographic description. In this respect, the book offers a comprehensive portrayal of Mevlevi life in the 19th century, combining first-hand observations with historical insights to present a holistic understanding of the order. She notes that the tekkes of the Mevlevi order include a special room known as the Ism-i Jalāl Ḥujra (Room of the Glorious Name), where the brethren perform their daily prayers (*namaz*) and the obligatory *zikr* (the ritual recitation of Allah's name) (Garnett, 1912, 65). Brown also mentions this room in his book: "The Mevlevees have also another apartment, called the İsmi Jeleel Hujreh , where they perform their ordinary morning and evening namaz, or prayers ; also, the Ismi Jeleel (the beautiful name of Allah), or the Zikr; and this is not to be found in any other Tekkieh . The performance before described is always the third daily prayer, called in Turkish the İkindi, and commences about ten o'clock p.m." (Brown, 1896, 201). The term *hücre* (cell) was most used by the Mevlevis among Sufi communities, and several related expressions emerged from it. In Mevlevi lodges the dervishes who resided in these cells were called *hücrenişin* (Tanman, 1998, 456).

Foto 1: The same illustrations from Lucy Garnett's *Mysticism and Magic* can also be seen in black and white in the *Sunday Magazine* of 1910.

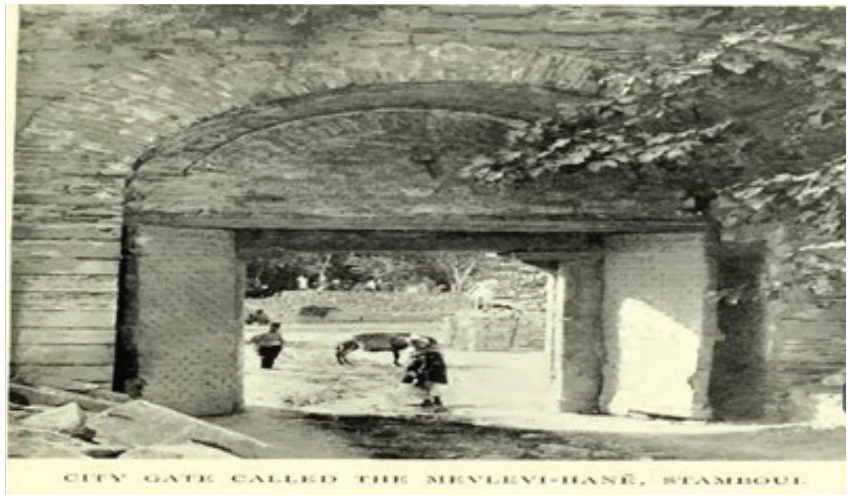

Foto 2: Mysticism and Magic

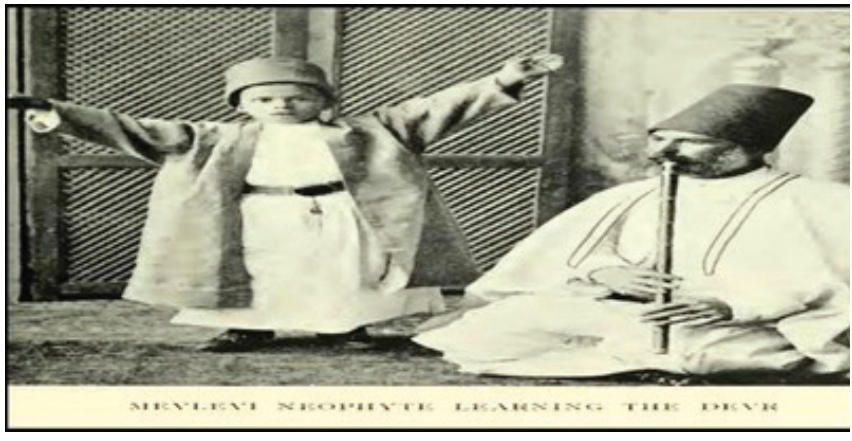

Foto 3: Mysticism and Magic

Foto 4: John Brown's *The Dervishes or Oriental Spiritualism*

3. The Critical Side of Orientalism: Exploring Negative Perceptions

The discovery of the Cape Route in 1498 expanded Orientalism, but detailed studies of Eastern societies only emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries and served Western dominance by spreading an image of Eastern inferiority to justify colonial expansion (Turner, 2002, 38). Early Orientalist studies focused on revealing the richness of the East, but over time they shifted to serve the ideological interests of Western nations, with Orientalists aiming to facilitate the domination of Eastern societies by propagating an image of the East that emphasized Western superiority and convincing the East to accept this narrative (Derin, 2017). Although Christianity also had monastic orders and a monastic way of life, the lodges in the East were far more fascinating to travellers. While curiosity was one of the reasons why the West paid more attention to the dervishes and lodges than to Islam itself, there was another dimension to this focus. With their claim that Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) was derived from Roman law and ancient civilizations, the Orientalists dealt so intensively with Sufi questions (Göregen, 2017, 37). Orientalists, who argued that Jewish traditions had significantly influenced the development of Islamic jurisprudence and the systematic structure of Islamic law, claimed that Jewish converts to Islam had introduced the legal methods of Aggadah and Halakhah from the Jewish tradition into Islam (Göregen, 2017). Initially ridiculed and seen as a competitor to Christianity, Sufi thought was presented by Orientalist studies as a belief system like Christianity, claiming that the Sufis could be Christianized with minimal effort (Derin, 2017).

Charles Eliot (1862–1931) was a distinguished orientalist and expert in Eastern languages. At the age of twenty-four, he entered the British Foreign Service and served in various diplomatic posts between 1886 and 1901 in countries such as Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Morocco, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the United States. Between 1893 and 1898, while working as a secretary at the British Embassy in Istanbul, he authored *Turkey in Europe*, a significant work that provides valuable insights into the socio-political context of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish people of that time (Özcan, 1995, 50). However, the book also contains certain orientalist perspectives characteristic of its period. Charles Eliot draws a clear contrast between the devotional authenticity of the Mevlevi rituals in Konya and the commercialized

performances staged for tourists in Istanbul. He characterizes the whirling ceremonies in Konya as "serious and private," thereby emphasizing their sacred and spiritual nature. In stark contrast, he describes the Istanbul ceremonies as spectacles aimed primarily at entertaining tourists and generating profit. This dichotomy between the "authentic" and the "commercial" reflects a recurring theme in travel literature and Orientalist discourse: once religious rituals are removed from their original socio-cultural and spiritual contexts, they risk becoming staged performances devoid of genuine religious meaning. Eliot's concern that the Istanbul ceremonies have "lost their original purpose" highlights this tension (Eliot, 1900, 199). For him, such practices had been stripped of their sincerity and were now performed primarily for monetary gain, rather than spiritual devotion.

John O'Neill (1837–1895), a writer active in the late 19th century who authored a detailed work on cosmic myths, ancient beliefs, and symbolism—though very limited biographical information about him has survived to the present day—summarises the multifaceted nature of the sema viewed through different lenses: cosmic symbolism, historical influence, and mystical devotion. The author posits that the traditions of the Mevlevi Order may have origins that predate Islam, suggesting that their rituals may be rooted in ancient, pre-Islamic practices. He places the sema within ancient cultural traditions, implying that it may contain older symbolic or spiritual elements. O'Neill notes: "It should be noted that preliminary to starting for their spin, these dervishes fold the arms on the breast in the form of the suastika; and that their pirouetting causes their full, long petticoats to balloon-out in a conical form" (O'Neill, 1897, Vol. II, 726). This description emphasizes the connection between the Mevlevi rituals and earlier cultural or spiritual practices by presenting them as a continuation of ancient traditions Swastika, which literally means "well-being", is a Sanskrit word and the Buddhist tradition of the ancient Turkic belief system, which spanned the 9th to 14th centuries, remained popular among the Turks in Central Asia despite the influence of Islam (İsi, 2024) Archaeological excavations and research expeditions in Central Asia and Anatolia, regions where traces of Turkic tribes have been found, have shown that the swastika, which was originally of Indian origin, was present in the belief system of the Turks (İsi, 2024). In Turkish culture, the swastika (also known as *çarkıfelek* or *Oz Tamgası*) was used as a symbol representing the sun and rebirth among the Oghuz Turks, and In Islamic thought, it became associated with the belief in ascension to the heavens and the journey toward God (İsi, 2024). In the teachings of the Mevlevi, the act of crossing the arms in front of the chest before beginning the sema symbolizes the number "one" and the concept of tawhid (the unity of God). This posture is also reminiscent of the principle of "dying before death" (purification of the carnal and human self); the sema is thus understood as a symbolic "grinding away" of the ego and worldly attachments, leading to spiritual purification (Gürer-Ulupınar, 2023, 115). There is no indication in the Sufi texts that this posture or the whirling itself is associated with the swastika. On the contrary, the Mevlevi sources explain the essential basis of the Sema movements with Koranic and Sufi references. According to O'Neill, there is a legend that the angel Jebrail once brought good news to the prophet, who turned around with joy like the Mevlevis and dropped his cloak (khirka) to the ground (O'Neill, 1897). According to this story, the action of the Mevlevi dervishes, who take off their cloaks during the sema, is connected to this event. In the Mevlevi tradition, however, the cloak is ceremonially presented to the dervish, and the removal of the cloak during the sema symbolizes detachment from all worldly things and represents the transition to a purely spiritual state (Aktaş, 2012, 24).

The work titled *The Turkish Empire* (originally written in German and translated into English by Edward Joy Morris) by Alfred De Besse, who served at the grand embassy in Istanbul. Roderic H. Davison, one of the leading scholars who has made significant contributions to the history of Ottoman modernization, draws upon the work of the German diplomat Alfred De Besse in his seminal study *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Davison,1863) when evaluating population data concerning the Ottoman Empire. Alfred De Besse's *The Turkish Empire* includes noteworthy details regarding the Galata Mevlevihane. In particular, the fact that the main center of the Mevlevi order was in the Christian quarter of Pera (Besse, 1854, p. 165) can be considered a significant point worthy of attention. The accessibility of Mevlevi practices to Westerners distinguishes the order from other mystical aspects of the East, which have often been portrayed as closed to foreigners. The phrase "there is nothing more unique than the way they worship the deity" (Besse, 1854, 166) reflects a typical Orientalist perspective that portrays Mevlevi rituals as exotic and categorizes them as a kind of "visual spectacle". Such descriptions tend to transform the Mevlevi ceremonies from a form of spiritual worship into a mesmerizing performance staged for Western observers. The depiction of the dervishes' spinning movements and their music-accompanied rituals with the emphasis on "strangeness" and "novelty" reflects an exoticizing perspective on this religious practice (Besse, 1854, 165). The description of the flutes as "shrill" and the drums as "loud" suggests that the ritual appears shrill and chaotic to a Western ear. This is in line with the classic Orientalist approach, which portrays Eastern art and culture as irrational and difficult to understand. The diplomat claims that the dervishes act as secret agents for the political police, using their wealth and influence to ferret out information that escapes negligent government officials (Besse, 1854, 166). It is claimed that during their ceremonies, one of the brothers secretly informs the Sultan of important events in the capital (Besse, 1854, 167). After their three-part ritual, the dervishes bow to their superior and leave. The Mevlevis and the howling dervishes of Scutari are described as one of the most curious Islamic institutions. The diplomat's claim that the Mevlevis are used as "secret tools of the political police" reinforces the perception of Eastern societies as being constantly associated with intrigue and surveillance. The claim that the influence of the dervishes was used to pass secret information to the Sultan portrays the East as a society that relies on mystical methods rather than rational governance.

William Cooke Taylor (1800–1849), an Irish writer and historian, presents in his work *The History of Mohammedanism and Its Sects* a powerful example that embodies all the characteristic features of a classical orientalist mindset. Without ever having travelled to the East or acquiring a command of Arabic, Taylor relied solely on translations produced by Western scholars to analyse Islam and Eastern thought. This approach reflects a distant and superior stance toward knowledge, indicative of a dominative attitude. By defining Islam as a heretical offshoot of Christianity and portraying its historical development through the lens of "corruption" and "degeneration," he imposes a Eurocentric conception of truth (Taylor, 1851, 303). His acknowledgment of having learned the Arabic alphabet through a French grammar and his preference for Western transcription systems demonstrate an objectifying and external relationship with Eastern languages. Although he claims to value folk literature over formal historiography in understanding the spirit of an era, his treatment of these narratives as "legends," "fables," and "fantastical tales" reflects a dismissive stance toward Eastern cultural expressions. Despite claiming academic impartiality, his labelling of both Islamic content and its interpretations as "heresy"

underscores his epistemological and ideological superiority complex. Altogether, Taylor's work exemplifies the orientalist epistemology described by Edward Said—a worldview that marginalizes, dominates, and reduces the East into a simplified and inferior other. The influence of Sir William Jones is quite evident in Taylor's work. One of the early examples of Western interest in the Mevlevi Order can be found in the works of the renowned orientalist Sir William Jones. As a pioneering figure in the European engagement with Eastern literature in the late 18th century, Jones developed a profound admiration for Persian poetry, which began with his translations of Persian works in the 1770s. In his 1771 publication *A Grammar of the Persian Language*, Jones frequently quoted passages from Rumi's *Masnavi* (Tekin, 2010, 200). Sale's translation of the Qur'an, along with works like *One Thousand and One Nights*, formed the foundation of the author's early fascination with the East (Taylor, 1851, 304). On a more scholarly level, the valuable series of publications issued by the Oriental Translation Committee proved especially useful to him. The Royal Asiatic Society, of which this committee was a significant branch, was another major institutional source he relied upon. Through these institutions, the author examined the East not through direct engagement with original texts, but via interpretations filtered through Western academic frameworks.

Taylor identifies Sufism as both a philosophical and theological system. According to him the Mevlevi Order is, for many reasons, the most remarkable among the rigid Islamic religious orders. One of the key reasons for this distinction is their rigorous initiation process, which notably includes a 1001-day novitiate period. The Mevlevis, also known as the brethren of Rumi, are deeply influenced by the mystical philosophy and theology commonly referred to as Sufism—a doctrine which Taylor characterizes as essentially a form of pantheism (Taylor, 1851, 304) reflects an Orientalist thought. Although all metaphysical doctrines of the East and some from the West have often been labeled as pantheistic, true pantheism is limited to certain European philosophers and some Eastern thinkers influenced by 19th-century Western thought (Burckhardt, 2008, 17), and the inclination to interpret the Mevlevi *sema* ritual and its spiritual journey in pantheistic terms also emerged during this Orientalist-driven period. During this time, F.A.G. Tholuck (1799–1877) characterized Rumi as a proponent of pantheism and a Manichaean conception of creation and regarded his views on prayer—particularly the idea that "every prayer is itself the answer"—as dangerously subversive (Lewis, 2000, 506). Similarly, G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) greatly admired Rückert's adaptations of Rumi's poetry, incorporating two of them into the pantheism section of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, 1827), and embraced Rumi's concept of soul-unity and love as congruent with his own philosophical system (Lewis, 2000, 507). Likewise, Hermann Ethé (1844–1917), in his *Neupersische Litteratur*, described Rumi not only as Islam's greatest mystical poet but also as the greatest pantheistic poet in world literature (Lewis, 2000, 507). However, it is not possible to attribute to Mevlana a pantheism that implies a personal union of God with the world, or that consequently abolishes the need for a mediator who functions as a symbol of God's personality—and thus implies "Godhood" for all souls (Bausani, 1994, 359). Rumi does not grant every individual an equal, direct path to divinity without intermediaries (such as prophets or saints), rather he distinguishes the "truthful man" from the rest of humanity, who remain secondary or derivative (Bausani, 1994, 359). Rumi likens the *insān al-kāmil* (the perfect human being) to an ocean hidden within a drop or a sun residing within a speck, portraying him as a microcosmic reflection—indeed, the

very essence—of the macrocosm (Bardakçı, 2008, 7). For Rumi, the human being is not merely a physical entity, but rather a divine substance situated at the center of the cosmos, carrying within himself the meaning of all existence (Bardakçı, 2008, 8). Within this framework, Rumi does not propose an identity between God and the human being; instead, he establishes a connection grounded in divine manifestation. That is, the human is not God Himself, but a mirror in which God manifests. To equate Rumi's metaphysical vision with pantheism—understood as the complete identification of God with the universe—is to misread and oversimplify his rich and nuanced philosophical outlook. Rumi's aim is to guide the human toward discovering the divine truth within the self, which does not imply reducing all being to God, but rather understanding how God becomes manifest in existence. Therefore, defining Rumi as a pantheistic thinker is a misinformed and reductive interpretation that fails to grasp the depth and complexity of his mystical thought.

William Dennison McCrackan (1864-1923), an American journalist and traveller, reflects a clear orientalising tendency in his book. The dervishes are portrayed as "seemingly immersed in mystical meditation", which only vaguely belies the depth of their spiritual practice (McCrackan, 1895, 101) By emphasizing their "inaudible" recitations and the "endless repetition" of the name of Allah, the narrative implies monotony and mechanical rituals rather than genuine spiritual devotion (McCrackan, 1895, 101). The music is described as "sullen" and "stubborn", characterizing it as emotionally oppressive and unstructured. By describing the music as "purposeless" and "incomplete", the author denies its cultural and spiritual significance (McCrackan, 1895,102). The Elder, or Sheikh, is portrayed with a mixture of reverence and detachment. The music from the gallery is described as "discordant", suggesting a Western preference for structured, tonal harmony over the modal, improvisational nature of Sufi music. This passage reduces a deeply spiritual and culturally rich ceremony to an exotic, enigmatic and somewhat alien practice. The statement that the Mevlevi order "occupies roughly the same position in the Mohammedan religion as the monastic orders in the Christian religion" (McCrackan, 1895, 103) is an orientalist generalization. While both are about spiritual devotion and communal living, the comparison ignores the unique theological and cultural foundations of Sufism and its special relationship to mainstream Islam. The passage describes the climax of the music as "torture and frenzy", with a "climactic wail" that is "excruciating to the senses of a civilized nature" (McCrackan, 1895, 103). The idea that the ritual is unbearable for a civilized person underlines the author's sense of cultural superiority, as if only Westerners have the sophistication to find such practices unbearable. The author conjures up a sense of "remote, savage ancestors", suggesting that the ritual appeals to primal, barbaric instincts. This projection reinforces the Orientalist dichotomy between the "civilized" West and the "and "irrational" East (Said, 2010) and portrays dervish practices as something primitive and inherently inferior.

This diminishes the dignity of the rituals and presents them as grotesque, animalistic spectacles rather than sacred spiritual exercises. It perpetuates the Orientalist trope of the East as uncivilized and uncultured. The exaggerated descriptions create a caricature of Eastern spirituality and portray it as bizarre and incomprehensible to the "enlightened" Western observer. In the 17th century, many writers undertook the defence of Islam against medieval prejudices and harsh attacks, aiming to demonstrate the sincerity and value of the Islamic faith (Rodinson, 1983, 55). By the 18th century, figures such as Antoine Galland introduced the exotic and enchanting image of the Muslim East to European audiences. However, in the 19th century, the East was still

perceived as the enemy—though now as a defeated and inferior one. Leading European thinkers of the 19th century increasingly asserted that Islamic thought was inherently intertwined with the despotic political and social structures of Eastern societies (Curtis, 2015, 22). As a result of this perspective, under the influence of Orientalist discourse, writers like Knox adopted a mocking and condescending tone in their portrayals of the Islamic world without hesitation. The dervishes are portrayed as passive, outlandish and primarily concerned with comfort and income, reinforcing stereotypes of Eastern religious figures that lack authenticity and substance. While the term "lodge" or is more appropriate for an Ottoman Sufism, the author uses the term "convent" reflecting a tendency to interpret foreign religious institutions through a familiar Christian lens. The author exoticizes the Mevlevi sema ceremony by focusing on the dervishes' dress, movements, and rituals, which he deems peculiar and entertaining, rather than addressing their spiritual significance (Knox, 1875, 168). Descriptions such as the "sugar hats" and "hopeless petticoats" emphasize their supposed otherness, while metaphors such as "machines under full steam" (Knox, 1875, 168-169) trivialize the deeply symbolic act of whirling and reduce it to a mechanical spectacle. The repeated emphasis on whirling and the mocking tone. "They whirled. And whirled. And they kept on whirling. And they kept it up until the brains of the spectators were in a whirl, and some of them (spectators, not brains) had their money's worth and went away" (Knox, 1875, 171) reduce the deeply symbolic act of spinning to a monotonous and meaningless motion. The ritual, which represents the soul's spiritual ascent and union with the divine, is stripped of its transcendental meaning. In the *sema* ceremony, the spiritual journey of the human being — the main goal of the Mevlevi Order and all Sufi schools — is conveyed. This journey consists of discovering the totality of the universe, purifying oneself from its transient elements, and finally recognizing God as one's servant. The sema, which is characterized by Mevlana's teachings, not only symbolizes the Mevlevi Order's main teaching of *seyr u sülûk* (the spiritual path) but also conveys the fundamental values of the Sufi tradition — such as *tawhid* (unity), love of God and the Prophet, virtuous character, and sincerity/truthfulness — through its material and representational elements (Gürer-Ulupınar, 2023, 113).

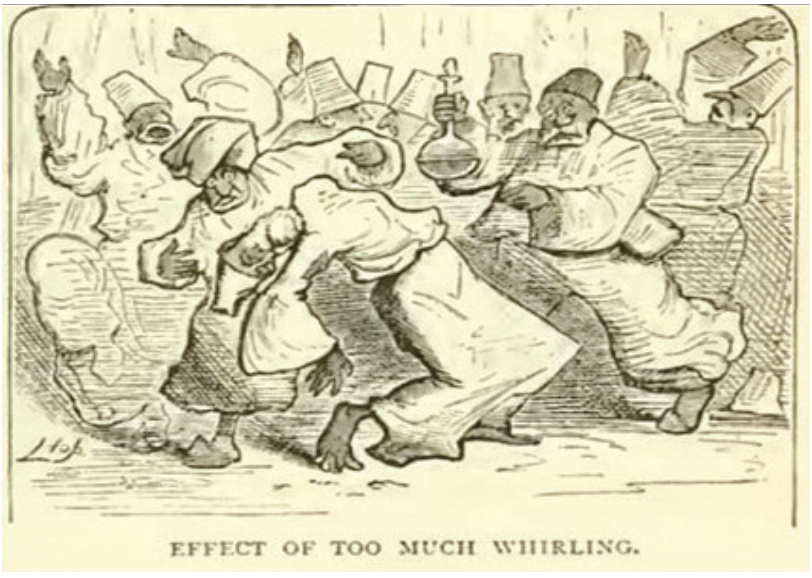

Foto 5: The author's mocking reference to the Mevlevi dervishes.

The phrase “some spectators had their money’s worth and went away” frames the sema as nothing more than a paid performance, further diminishing its sacredness and cultural authenticity. The traveller repeatedly underscores personal amusement or discomfort rather than attempting to appreciate the religious significance behind the whirling. The author’s perspective is rooted in Western aesthetic and cultural standards, judging the ceremony’s value by how entertaining or outlandish it appears. There is no mention of the Mevlevi philosophy of divine love or any reference to the deeper mystical symbolism of the Sema. Instead, the writer centres on bodily exhaustion and the possibility of “a first-class row.” In referencing “a negro, and [he] couldn’t have paled however much he wished to,” (Knox, 1875, 172) the author uses a dismissive, race-based remark. Such language not only reflects 19th-century biases but also positions the writer as an observer who casually notes physical differences without empathy or contextual understanding. Finally, describing the practice as a “performance” one attends after removing boots and paying “backsheesh” underscores the narrator’s view of the ceremony as a form of tourist attraction (Knox, 1875, 173). The title of the author’s book is also “Backsheesh”, which also reveals her perspective on the East.

In the 19th century, a significant number of female travellers visited the Ottoman territories. These travellers devoted much attention to the whirling dervishes in their writings. Pardoe is one of these female travellers who visited the Ottoman Empire. She visited the Mevlevihane in Pera twice. The author makes the mistake of viewing the Mevlevihane as a place of worship rather than a tekke, thus describing the Mevlevi dhikr ceremony as an act of worship. Mevlevihanes, however, are places where the Mevlevis, a branch of Islamic mysticism, experience their unique spiritual and physical states of ecstasy, and they are not places of worship. (Karataş, 2023, 181). The places of worship of Muslims are known to be the mosques. However, each religious order has its own places where it performs its specific religious rituals, and none of these places is an alternative to the mosque. Fredrika Bremer (1801-1865), Swedish writer and reformer, visited Galata Mevlevihane twice. The author describes the Grand Dervish as a “great charlatan” and the scene as a “shameless fraud”, which indicates a deep mistrust in the sincerity of the ritual (Bremer Vol II, 1862, 331). The observer’s detailed descriptions of the dervishes’ clothing, movements and facial expressions, such as the young dervish’s “beautiful ascetic countenance” and his “ecstatic smile”, reflect a fascination with the exotic and mystical (Bremer Vol II, 1862, 202). The depiction of the young man as “drunk with the contemplation of Allah” illustrates the Orientalist tendency to romanticize Eastern spirituality as otherworldly and emotionally intense. Most of the dervishes are described as “elderly men” with “ugly” appearances and “stupid”, heavy expressions (Bremer Vol II, 1862, 201). The ritual is likened to a “laborious day’s work”, stripping it of its spiritual significance and framing it as monotonous and physically demanding. This perspective diminishes the transcendental purpose of the sema and reframes it as a mere performance. The music is described as unmelodic, which subtly diminishes its artistic value when compared to Western musical standards. By dividing the dance into repetitive cycles, the observer conveys a sense of monotony and focuses more on the structure and duration than on the spiritual flow of the ceremony. While certain aspects, such as the music and the youthful dervish, are admired, the entire ritual is reduced to a spectacle of opposites: beauty versus absurdity, solemnity versus hardship. This analysis illustrates that Orientalist discourse is often unable to engage meaningfully with the cultural and spiritual essence of the practices it describes, preferring instead aesthetic fascination

and superficial judgments. The author assumes that the dervishes in Pera manipulate their followers to enrich themselves financially, underpinning a paternalistic narrative about the alleged lack of enlightenment in the East (Bremer Vol II, 1862, 331). By presenting the ritual as a performance to "evoke wonder — and Money", the author neglects the deeper mystical meaning of the whirling dance, which is supposed to symbolize spiritual ascent and divine union (Bremer Vol II, 1862, 331).

When Bremer was in Smyrna, the Sema was presented as a mesmerizing but enigmatic ritual, divorced from its spiritual roots and reduced to a relic of an ancient past. She suggests that "this dance is thought to be a remnant of that mystical worship which was formerly celebrated on the island of Samothrace" (Bremer Vol II, 1862, 260). The Samothracian Mysteries refer to a series of ancient Greek religious rites and initiation ceremonies that were practised on the island of Samothrace in the northern Aegean Sea. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Samothrace attracted the attention of European travellers and archaeologists, and the results of their investigations marked a new period in the development of Samothracian studies (Cole, 1984, 4). By drawing a parallel between the Mevlevi Sema and the mystical worship of Samothrace, the author imposes a Western frame of reference on an Eastern practice. The foundation of Bremer's orientalist discourse lies in his profound admiration for Ancient Greek civilization. For him, what is truly valuable is not modern Greece, but an idealized vision of classical antiquity. From this perspective, the modern Greek people are reduced to a merely exotic and folkloric image, represented through their clothing, behaviours, folk dances, and religious rituals (Letsios, 2015, 37). Bremer's observation at the Palamidi prison "Alas, poor modern Greece! In this regard, you are still a slave to Turkey and barbarism" (Letsios, 2015, 38) reflects one of the harshest forms of orientalist othering. Here, "Turkey" does not refer solely to a geographic or political entity, but symbolizes non-civilization, the very opposite of "the West." By equating Turkey with "barbarism," Bremer denigrates the Ottoman past and links modern Greece's perceived backwardness to that heritage. As Edward Said (2010) argues, the West, through such historical narratives, legitimizes not only its current superiority but also its sense of continuity with the past—often constructed through what he terms **"**an invented tradition of the past." Taylor Bayard (1825-1878), an American poet, traveller, author, and diplomat, also suggests that Baron von Hammer interpreted the Sema ceremony as an imitation of the cosmic dance from the ancient Samothracian mysteries (Bayard, 1856, 331). While analysing the Mevlevi ritual from his own perspective, Hammer associated this mystical dance with Greek culture and viewed it through a classical European lens rather than examining its Islamic and Sufi significance. The admission that "no one here knows how to interpret its meaning" (Bremer Vol II, 1862, 261) emphasises in Orientalist discourse that the people of the East are ignorant. This method of generalization, which is one of the most important mechanisms in the functioning of Orientalism, is essential to the process of objectifying and classifying "the East" (Turna, 2002, 1120).

Conclusion

This study has analysed how 19th-century Western travellers and intellectuals represented the sema ritual performed at the Galata Mevlevihane, situating these representations within the framework of Orientalist discourse. It has demonstrated that these depictions were shaped not only by individual observation but also by the discursive structures of the colonial, artistic, and academic contexts of the period. In many narratives, sema was stripped of its mystical and philosophical depth and reduced to a visual performance or an exotic spectacle, leading to a

significant disregard for the theological and cosmological dimensions of Mevlevism within the Ottoman Sufi tradition.

As Edward Said's theory of Orientalism suggests, this phenomenon can be understood as part of the broader cultural process by which the West "othered" the East. Mevlevism was not merely portrayed as a system of belief and ritual but also transformed into a cultural object instrumentalized within Western epistemologies. These representations deeply influenced the reception of Mevlevism in Europe and helped shape its place in the modern cultural imagination. However, not all Western observers can be reduced to a single Orientalist perspective. The study also identifies more nuanced and attentive accounts that attempted to grasp the metaphysical dimensions of Mevlevi spirituality. These examples are important in demonstrating that sema was sometimes understood not merely as a spectacle, but as a profound practice of inner transformation.

The findings of this study call for a reconsideration of cross-cultural representation, not only within a historical framework but also through the lens of contemporary cultural theory. Although 19th-century travellers, diplomats, and intellectuals often observed these rituals firsthand, their narratives were shaped by their cultural backgrounds, intellectual predispositions, and epistemic assumptions. As such, these texts reflect both the dominant ideologies of their time and individual subjectivities, often marked by generalizations and interpretive distortions. In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of how the sema ritual was represented in the 19th-century Western imagination, examining the ideological and discursive frameworks through which these representations were constructed and their lasting impact on modern cultural perceptions. By re-centring the original meanings of Mevlevism within its Ottoman context, it contributes a critical and interdisciplinary perspective to the study of cross-cultural representation. The representational practices embedded in these texts have continued to shape not only historical perceptions but also contemporary views of Mevlevism and Islamic mysticism. Therefore, any analysis of cross-cultural representation must also interrogate the political and cultural frameworks that underlie the production of knowledge.

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