

SOME SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS IN THE MAWLAWI ORDER*

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Abstract:

Mawlawiyya is one of the most important of the order that emerged in Anatolia. This order was established in the name of Mawlānā Djalal al-Dīn al-Rūmī. But in fact this sect was established after the death of Mawlānā. As an original establishment, Mawlawiyya traditions and rituals were not immediately established because Mawlānā had not singled out specific rules. For example, he did not organized any entrance ceremony for those who declare their commitment and he did not apply any specific dhikr. Mawlānā Rūmī's pupil, Sulṭān Walad, had systematized his father's thoughts, turning Mawlawiyya into an order with its own rules and ceremonies. Therefore, Sulṭān Walad is accepted as the founder of Mawlawiyya. Symbols are of great importance in the Mawlawī order. Reflecting deep philosophical ideas, symbols are of great importance in the Mawlawiyya and the Mawlawī people often express their deep metaphysical thoughts in symbols. For example the purpose of the symbolic dhikr semā' of that Mawlawī ascends on the way to God. The spinning movement in semā' unifies with the musicals. The semā' expresses the formation of the universe, the resurrection of man in the world, the transition of love and motion to the Supreme Creator, and the turning towards the "İnsân-ı Kâmil (Perfect Man)".

Mawlawī dervish is like dead in soul. For this reason cap symbolizes tombstone and clothes symbolize shroud. Dervish cardigan is like a grave. Similarly, in the Mawlawiyya, the place where the ceremony held, symbolizes the universe. The right side of this venue represents the material World whereas the left side symbolizes the spiritual realm. The fame of Mawlawī cult had spread all over the world owing to both the ideas of Mawlānā and the sacraments of the order. The analysis of symbols of Mawlawiyya order is the main theme of this paper.

Keywords:

Mawlānā Djalal al-Dīn al-Rūmī, Mawlawiyya, Dervish, Ritual, Symbol.

* Bu makale 4-5 Nisan 2018'de Malaysia/Putrajaya'da IASTEM Uluslararası Sempozyumu'nda sunulan ve basılan tebliğin genişletilmiş şeklidir. This article was presented at the "IASTEM International Symposium" held April 4-5, 2018 in the Putrajaya, Malaysia and published after the presentation. This is the expanded form of this paper that has been presented and published. (04-05 Nisan/April 2018, pp. 1-4)

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Mevlevilik'te Bazı Sembolik Unsurlar

Özet:

Mevlevilik, Anadolu'da ortaya çıkan tarikatların en önemlilerinden biridir. Bu tarikat Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî adına kurulmuş olsa da orijinal bir oluşum olarak Mevleviliğin gelenek ve ritüelleri onun vefatından sonra teşekkül etmiştir. Mevlânâ'nın evladı Sultan Veled babasının düşüncelerini ve felsefesini sistemleştirmek suretiyle Mevlevîliği, kuralları ve kaideleri olan bir tarikat haline getirmiştir. Bu sebeple Sultan Veled bu tarikatın kurucusu olarak kabul edilmektedir. Mevlevilikte semboller büyük bir öneme sahiptir ve deruni felsefi fikirler barındırmaktadır. Örneğin Mevleviliğin sembollerle yüklü zikri semanın hedefi Allah yolunda yükselmektir. Bu yükselme musiki ile birleşir, kainatın oluşumunu, dünyada insanoğlunun dirilişini ifade eder. Sema, sevgi ve hareketin Yüce Allah'a yükselişini ve insân-ı kâmile dönüşünü ifade etmektedir. Mevlevi derviş ölmeden önce ölü gibidir. Bu nedenle dervişin hırkası onun mezarını tâcı ise onun mezar taşını simgeler. Benzer şekilde sema yapılan mekan evreni simgeler. Bu mekanın sağ tarafı dünyayı, sol tarafı ise alemi sembolize etmektedir. Bu bağlamda Mevlevi felsefesi, tarikatın bu özellikleri vesilesiyle evrensel bir özellik kazanmıştır. Bu makalenin ana teması Mevlevi tarikatının simgelerinin deruni manalarını çözümlenektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, Mevleviyye, Derviş, Merasim, Sembol.

Introduction: Mysterious Atmosphere of Mawlawîkhane (Mawlawî Dervish House) and Allegorical Language in Mawlawiyya

Mawlawiyya is the "Order of Derwishes" and is also called "whirling derwishes". Symbols are crucial in Mawlawiyya. Smbolism allows Mawlawiyya to express various spiritual and psychological events. These figures symbolize the greatness and uniqueness of Allāh, the creation of the universe and Perfect Man. Therefore, the symbolism highlihts figures/goods as part of a deeper and mysterious ritual. Some of the figures in the Mawlawiyya also draw parallel with allegorical language.¹

¹ Güldane Gündüzöz, *Tasavvufu Tâc Sembolizmi*, Büyüyenay Yayınları, İstanbul 2017.

1 Nay Blow: From The Breaths of Divine Mercy to the Perfect Man

The reed, flute or nay: a flute made by cutting a length of a naturally hollow reed cane and adding finger holes. "The nay or reed-flute as the poet's favourite musical instrument and has always been associated with the religious services of the Mawlawî ["Whirling Dervish"] Order, in which music and dancing are prominent features. The reed flute symbolizes the soul being freed from ego-centered desires and preoccupations and filled with a spiritual passion to return to its original nearness to God. Mawlânâ describes this symbol in his famous work Mathnawi as follows:

Listen to the reed (flute), how it is complaining!

It is telling about separations.

(Saying), "Ever since I was severed from the reed field,

Men and women have lamented in (the presence of) my shrill cries."

(But) I want a heart (which is) torn, torn from separation,

So that I may explain the pain of yearning.²

The reed/flute/nay in the poem points to "The Perfect Man", who is considered to be the most ideal point of competence in sūfism. Accordingly, the complaint of "The Perfect Man", the heir of the Prophet Muhammad, is not an actual complaint but rather a narration and supplication.



Picture 1: Nay-Dervish-Konya-Turkey

² Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, *Mesnevî*, çev. Tâhirü'l-Mevlevî, haz. Recep Kibar, Kırkambar Yayınları, İstanbul, 2013, vol. 1, p. 9; Abdullah Öztemiz Hacıtahiroğlu, *Mesnevî-Mevlânâ Kendi Vezni ile Manzum Tercüme*, Ötüken Yayınları, İstanbul 1972, p. 5; Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, *Mesnevî*, çev. Veled İzbudak, Meb Yayınları, İstanbul 1991, vol. 1, p. 1.

SOME SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS IN THE MAWLAWI ORDER

The reed/flute/nay looks like an elif (ل), the first letter of Arabic, in shape. Thus, the reed/flute/nay symbolizes the uniqueness of God, and at the same time symbolizes wishing "The Perfect Man" to reach Allāh.³ Mawlānā implies the desire of "The Perfect man" to reach to God with "Listen to the reed (nay), how it is complaining!" According to Mawlānā, the body of "The Perfect Man" resembles the reed (nay). Like the reed (nay), the body of man has been emptied, and only with the permission of God, human can carry out some acts.⁴ Nay cries for falling apart from the reed field. Human has been exiled to the world from eternal and spirit world. He is suffering for falling apart from God. "The Perfect Man" or whose symbol "nay" is the spiritual posture that the dervish wants to reach through the spiritual journey to Allāh.

2 Wrapping on the Vestment: Getting to the Truth of the Being

In the Anatolian mystic tradition, a dervish's clothes are the symbols of the tarik that the dervish is bound with. However it is not true to say that every order cares about clothing in the same way. In Mawlawiyya there are various symbolic meanings of goods and clothes. Accordingly, members of the lodge create a moral attitude by recognizing the depth of the clothes.⁵



Picture 2: Dervish-Konya-Turkey

³ M. Fatih Çıtlak, *Hız. Pîr Mevlânâ Celâleddîn Rûmî: 18 Beyit Dinle*, Sufi Kitap, İstanbul 2012, p. 54, 55.

⁴ Ahmed Avni Konuk, *Mesnevî-i Şerîf Şerhi*, haz. Selçuk Eraydın ve Mustafa Tahrallı, Kitabevi Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, vol. I, p. 73.

⁵ Mehmet Önder, "Mevlevî Giyimleri", *Türk Etnoğrafya Dergisi*, Maarif Basımevi, Ankara 1956, sayı: I, p. 80.

a. Sikke

The Mawlawī people are wearing a special hat called "sikke" on their heads. Just as the sultans have crowns, the sheikhs have sikke. While the crown of sultans symbolizes the material power, the Mawlawī sheikh's sikke represents the spiritual power. Though cardigan and "sikke" are not indispensable conditions of true dervish, but in lodge's life these clothes are traditionally an important part of the rituals. Sheiks and dervishes do not wear their daily crowns in ceremonies. The crowns that used in ceremonies and special occasions are much more valuable. Of course, a sheikh's crown is more valuable than a dervish's crown as "sikke" has been given to sheikh for sincerity and success of in the spiritual journey. Dervishes do not leave the crown everywhere, but they keep it in their special place.⁶



Picture 3: Sikke- Konya-Turkey

b. Destar

Destar is a fabric in different colors that is wrapped around the crown. The Mawlawī people have different fabrics according to their location in lodge. Wrapping this fabric around the crown is sign of maturity in the Mawlawiyya. Grandchildrens of Mawlānā used dark purple "destar". If these sheikhs were one of the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad, they used dark green "destar" while the Mawlawī sheikhs used white shades. There are very interesting examples of "sikke" and "destar" figure on Mawlawī sheikhs's tombstones.⁷

⁶ Muhammed el-Bâkır, *Kisvetü'l-İrşâd*, Büyükşehir Belediyesi Atatürk Kitaplığı, Osman Ergin Bölümü, no: OEYz000027/4, İstanbul ty., vr. 12^a.

⁷ Picture 4.



Picture 4: Headstone-Konya-Turkey

c. Şemse

Related to the Arabic word "shams /sun", "şemse" was often used in Anatolian culture history. This figure is a round and elliptical motif in the shape of sun. This figurine has no connection with the "Sun God" image in the Ancient Egyptian or Hittite civilizations. It can be assumed that some of figures in rose form in ancient manuscripts are the first ones. "Şemse" in the form of a circle or ellipse is a cosmogonic symbol. The thin lines extending outward from the edges of this figure represent the sun's rays. This symbolizes the reflection of God upon the creatures. This motif, shaped like a circle or ellipse, symbolizes the order of the universe.⁸

d. Candle

There is a candle symbol in the sura al-Noor: "Allāh is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light those He wills. Allāh gives such examples for the people, and Allāh is Knowing of all things."⁹

In Islamic mysticism, candle and light symbolism are important. In the Qur'ān, the divine source of light is also referred to as "(وَسِيرَاجًا مُنِيرًا)" spreading light. Qandil and light symbols

⁸ Naci Bakırcı, *Mevlevî Mezar Taşları*, Rûmî Yayınları, İstanbul ty, p. 107.

⁹ Nûr, 24/35.

are associated with sufi universe of imagination. Candlestick motifs seen in Mawlawī tombstones are related to the importance given to the Mawlawī tradition.



Picture 5: Ayin-i şerif -Konya-Turkey

3. Ayin-i Şerif: The Semā' : Ascension to God

Ayin-i şerif means "rite" or "ceremony" in Mawlawiyya. The term, ayin-i şerif, is employed by the Mawlawīs (also known as the "Whirling Dervishes") to refer to music that accompanies their mystical ritual (the semā'). Symbolism is remarkably evident in the Mawlawī Semā' ceremony. The place where this ceremony held is in the shape of a circle. Accordingly, this circle represents the universe. In Mawlawiyya everything is based on the circumvolution. Everything is whirling momentarily, and the dervish also represents this universe and is whirling. The Mawlawī dervish participates in this cosmic movement with the Semā'. Semā' symbolizes the fulfillment of the word "تَمُوتُوا قَبْلَ أَنْ تَمُوتُوا/die before you die" of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰ In this ritual the dervishes are staging "to kill the self while living". In these rituals their caps symbolize the tombstone of death. As a matter of fact, the tombs of the Sufis have been manufactured in accordance with the shape of their hat. According to this, a ceremony held before the beginning of the Semā' and called "Devr-i Veledi", indicates the resurrection and eternal life after death.¹¹

e. Khaṭṭ-ı İstiva: An imaginary line on the surface of the Mawlawī Ritual Square between Physics and Metaphysics

In the verse Taha 5: "(الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى) The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established". اسْتَوَى/İstivâ, which is one of the qualifiers used to express the relation

¹⁰ İsmâil b. Muhammed el-Aclûnî, *Keşfü'l-Hafâ*, tsh. Ahmed el-Kalâş, Beyrut, vol. II, 1985, p. 29.

¹¹ Yahyâ Âgâh, *Mecmû'atü'z-Zarâif*, Ankara: Milli Kütüphane, Manuscripts, 06 Hk 4444/3, ty., vr. 31.

of Allāh and the universe, is also a metaphor in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. This word in dictionary means "to be smooth and equal; to settle, to settle down; turn up, go up; to be a judge and to sit on the throne" In the seven verses of Qur'ān, this word refers to the throne of God and to havean in two verse, both ultimately attributing to God. This word is part of the ontology in Sufism and represents the creation process. The istiva line takes place as a remarkable element in the Mawlawī ritual area and the Mawlawī sikke. This line symbolizes the absolute wisdom of God's unity. Within this composition, this line in the Mawlawiyya is regarded as reaching perfection. It is seen that Mawlānā, his grandchildren and some Mawlawī sheikhs in Konya Mawlānā Museum are the istiva line on the tombstones. This line has been embroidered on some of the clothes of the dervishes. But in recent years, istiva has not been used. Istiva points to the coming of Allāh and the ascending to him. In the ritual area, the point where the sheikh's scarlet rug is located that indicates the starting point of istiva. This central point marks the absolute existence universe. The salutation point against this central point is the sign of humanity¹².

h. The Red Scarlet Rug: Manifestation of God's Light

The red scarlet rug/post where sheikh is sitting at the semā' ceremony is accepted as Mawlānā's place. Sheikh represents Mawlānā while sitting in this scarlet rug. The red color in Mawlawiyya is to attainment to Allāh. According to the narrations, Mawlānā died while the sun was setting down and he attained Allāh. Also, the sky gets red when both the sun rises and the sun sets. Therefore the red color of the sheikh's "post" represents the sinking of dervish from material world and in a similar manner the red scarlet rug symbolizes the birth of the spiritual scroll of the dervish like a sun. The new entrants sit on the black scarlet rug/post in this cult. The disciple is trained in this process and he finally deserves to sit on the white scarlet rug/post in Mawlawiyya. In short, the red scarlet rug in the ritual area is the "post" where sheikh is sitting on. This red carpet represents Mawlānā. The black scarlet rug/post to the right of the sheikh marks the unity of God. On this black "post", the lodge's cook sheikh (kazancı dede) is sitting. The ritual initiator "Meydancı Dede" is sitting on the white "post" to the left of the sheikh.¹³

4. Painting With God's Paint: Color Symbolism

We have already mentioned that the "red sheikh post" is very important the Mawlawī ceremonies. During these symbolic dhikr semā', sitting of the sheikh on "the red post" is explained by his representation of the Prophet Muhammad's essence. The red color of the dervish's struggle with desire and ambition is the sign of his becoming a certain level (nefs-i levvâme) of consciousness.

¹² Atasoy, "Dervish Dress and Ritual: The Mevlevî Tradition", p. 257.

¹³ Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevî Âdâb ve Erkânı*, İnkılap Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, p. 48.

There are also different color symbols in Mawlawiyya. Whirling dervish's/ semā'zen's cap is his tombstone. His black cloak is his grave. His white a long dervish's robe without sleeves called "tennūre " is his shroud. By removing his black cloak, the semā'zen is spiritually reborn to the truth with white "tennūre " and his crossed arms represent the number one, testifying to the unity of God. This situation symbolizes that he is moving towards his spiritual journey and his mi'raj/ascension.¹⁴

5. The Letter Symbolism

Alif (I) is the name of the first letter of the Arabic alphabet"¹⁵ In mystical thought, all letters are considered to be in the "alif (I)". In other words the other letters are the shapes of the alif that have been transformed into various shapes. Alif is the symbol of God in Sufism. In Mawlawiyya some cult items carry name of "alif". For example, they wear a belt called "alifi nemed" and they eat at the table called "alifi sumât". Because they are made of thin and long like "alif (I)". In addition, some cults wear a thin and long cap. This cap is also called "alifi tâc"¹⁶

6. Reaching a Secret: Number Symbolism

The number of "one (1)" in sufism and the letter "alif" point to the belief that "Allāh is unique". The fact that there are no lines on the sikkes of the Mawlawī people means that "Allāh is unique". Likewise, "nine (9)" is a symbolic number in Mawlawiyya. The value of nine is based on the belief that the sky is nine stairs. Semā' ceremony starts with nine turns on the first day and continues with nines in the following days. The number of eighteen in connection with the nine is very important in Mawlawiyya. Because the formula "basmala" or "tasmiya" bismi'llāhi'l-rahmāni'iraḥīm usually translated "in the name of God, the merciful and compassionate", is consisted of eighteen letters. The belief that there are eighteen thousand worlds in the universe has also increased the sanctity of this number. The sanctity of "number of eighteen (18)" in the Mawlawī dervish lodge is very apparent. Such that every service is performed in eighteen pieces in this lodge. In a similar way semā'zens wear eighteen striped dresses during the ceremony. Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī wrote the first eighteen rhyming couplets in "Mathnawī-i ma'nawī" himself. There are eighteen dervish rooms in Mawlawī lodges. This shows how the number symbolism has a wider effect on spiritual thought and architectural planning. Relating the number of eighteen with the creation of the universe increases the respect for this number in Mawlawiyya.¹⁷

6. Result and Evaluation

Some items have certain symbolic meanings in Mawlawiyya. Thus, the goods used in the ceremonies are beyond being mere tools. These commodities also have references to the mystical thinking of the world and the creation of the universe. At the same time, these

¹⁴ M. Serhan Tayşi and Mustafa Aşkar, *Tarikat Kıyafetleri*, Sufi Kitap, İstanbul 2006, p. 34.

¹⁵ Seyyid Ahmed Rifat b. İsmâil, *Tarikat Sırları-Mir'âtü'l-Mekâsıd*, haz. Tahir Galip Seratlı Kardelen Yayınları, Konya 2011, p. 189.

¹⁶ Yahyâ Âgâh, *Mecmû'atü'z-Zarâif*, vr. 11, 12.

¹⁷ Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlânâ'dan Sonra Mevlevîlik*, İnkılap Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, p. 392.

symbolic elements have been part of the spiritual education of sūfis in the "sulūk"¹⁸ Thus, primarily "sikke" and dervish dresses are part of a profound allegorical language in terms of colors and ornaments. These figures are part of mystic moral values and education. Symbolism, especially with colors, letters and numbers, is also associated with the way the sūfi's perception of universe in Mawlawiyya. This symbolism has been evaluated in connection with some Qur'ānic verses. Each of these figures depicts the ideal personality to be reached.¹⁹ On the other hand, sema ceremony expresses the ascension of dervishes to God. In this symbolism, both the symbolic meanings of the music and the influence of the tunes are enormous especially musical instruments such as nay.

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¹⁸ Ayten Erol, "Fikhi Bakış Açısıyla Ahlaki Değerlerin Kazandırılması", *Kırıkkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 6/2, 2016, pp. 229-254, p. 231.

¹⁹ Fatıma Zeynep Belen, "Eşlerarası İletişime Manevi Psikolojik Yaklaşım", *Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi*, 8/15, 177-194, p. 192.