

## Signs and Symbols of a Modern Sufi Ceremony in Istanbul

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**Abstract :** The aim of this contribution is to describe a Sufi ceremony personally observed and recorded in Istanbul. It is part of research on the semiotics of religion that has been going on for some time. Over the centuries, Sufism has produced remarkable literature, elaborated mainly in the context of Arabic literature and Persian literature, but has also found expression in many other languages (Turkish, Indian, Malayo-Indonesian, etc.). Among the genres cultivated are: devotional books (prayers, meditation, spiritual exercises, etc.); the hagiographic texts, containing the biographies and sentences of the best-known Sufis; the texts that illustrate the abodes or stations of the spiritual path; finally, the theoretical treatises on various topics, often of an apologetic nature. Another typical expression of Sufism is in the literature in verse, which includes first-rate poets of both Arabic (Ibn al-Farid, Ibn 'Arabi) and Persian (Farid al-Din al-Attar, Rumi, Hafez, Gohar Shahi) expression. To observe an authentic Sufi ceremony, we contacted the Silivrikapı Mevlana Cultural Center in Istanbul. The ceremony we will talk about is a characteristic of the brotherhood called Mevleviyye (Mawlawiyya), so called from Mawlānā ('our lord', in Turkish: Mevlānā) Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (13th century) better known as the brotherhood of the Whirling Dervishes, founded in Konya. The characteristic of the order is to pray about one's love for Allah with music and dance in a ritual that has the name of Semā. The dance is a swirling movement in a group, representing a mystical journey of the spiritual ascent of man through the mind and love for the 'perfect'. Turning towards the truth, the follower of the group ascends towards love, passing beyond the World and Nothingness. After asceticism, he returns to the common world to communicate his own experience.

**Keywords :** semiotics of religion, sufi, rumi, islamic philosophy

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