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DĀRŪ 'L-MASNAVĪ OF THE MEVLEVİ ORDER

A Visit to the Tomb of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi and the Oldest Manuscript of the Masnavi

On April 5, 2004 I arrived at the bus station in Konya, Turkey. I had not been there since 1977, and was very grateful to God for another opportunity, al-Hamdu li-lلāh! The next morning, I went to pray the pre-dawn ritual prayer (salātū 'l-fajr) at the mosque which contains a memorial "tomb" in honor of Shams-i Tabrīzī. Later, I returned there a second time with friends, to pay our respects to Shams (it is customary to go there first, before visiting Mevlana's tomb). Then we went to the Mevlevi graveyard across the street from the beautiful building which contains Mevlana's tomb. In the graveyard we were shown the tomb of Jelaluddīn Chelebī (died, 1996), the father of the present Chelebi Efendi, as well as the tomb of the last Masnavi reciter [Masnavī-khwān, Mesnevi han] at the Konya Mevlevi center, Sidkid Dede (died, 1933). I also saw the tomb of the last true dede (who completed the traditional 1001 days of Mevlevi retreat [chille]), Osman Dede, who was also called "Chille Dede."

Then we crossed the street and went to the building within which is Mevlana's tomb. I bowed in the Mevlevi fashion at the threshold of the entrance to the gallery housing all the tombs, and first stood in front of the tomb of Husamuddin Chelebi, to whom Mevlana dictated the Masnavi. Then I went and stood in front of the tomb of Hazrat-i Mevlana--qaddasa 'llāhu sirra-hu 'l-'azīz--and stood for a while in the "semazen" posture out of respect.

After a time, I turned around to see what museum exhibits there were behind me in the whirling prayer hall [samaa`-khaana, semahane] and was immediately drawn to the two glass-covered cases: the first contained the earliest manuscript of the Masnavi (1278 CE, completed five years after Mevlana died); the second contained the two volumes of a beautiful edition of the Dīvān-i Kabīr (completed in 1366 and 1368 CE). I scribbled down some of the Persian verses from all three volumes displayed. For a time, I went back and forth between these manuscripts and Mevlana's tomb. The only other display that I spent any time looking at was the dervish hat of Shams-i Tabrīzī (which had written on it, "There is no divinity but God" [lā ilāha 'llā 'llāh]). Then I noticed a very elderly man who was sitting in front of Mevlana's tomb, silently reading from a book. When I saw him beginning to stand up, I waited patiently (it took him quite some time due to his frailty and curved back), gave him the greeting of peace ("Selamun aleykum!"), looked into his eyes briefly, and then kissed his hand. He returned the greeting and smiled and walked on. I sat in his place for a long time and attuned to the extraordinary "perfume" of Divine Love [maHabbat] present there.

The next day we were driven to the tomb of Mevlana's mother, Mū'mina Khatūn, in Karaman (formerly, Larenda) which was a two-hour's drive away. On returning to Konya, we stopped briefly at the tomb of Fakhrū 'n-Nisā [Fahrunisa], who was Mevlana's most saintly woman disciple and the tomb of Suleyman Hayati Dede, the late Shaykh of Konya ("1904-- 19-1-1985").

Then we went to Mevlana's tomb for the second visit. I bowed Mevlevi-style again at the various thresholds. When I bowed at the last one before entering the gallery room of tombs, a museum guard softly invoked, "Huuu"--acknowledging that I was a Mevlevi. I smiled and greeted him and payed my respects to the tomb of Husamuddin Chelebi again. I then went immediately to sit as close as I could to the tomb of Mevlana, in order to sit as long as I could until closing time. I had no desires to see any other exhibits or rooms, but just sat happily absorbed in that holy place.

Upon returning home, I was able to determine (using a Persian concordance of the Masnavi which lists correspondences to Nicholson's translation) that the page of the Masnavi that was displayed in front of Mevlana's tomb were the final lines the Book V of the Masnavi. In my own (slightly modernized) Persian edition based on this oldest manuscript I found the following lines-- that I had felt attracted to at the time:

The "Water of Life" is the orientation of those who love life, (since) the orchard is green and (expansively) smiling because of water.

(But) the drinkers (of the cup) of Death have uprooted (their) hearts from life and the "Water of Life" (and) are alive by means of His Love.

When the "Water" of Your Love gave (its) "hand" to us, the "Water of Life" became cheap and uninteresting in our sight.

Every life has freshness from the "Water of Life," but You are the Water of the "Water of Life."

--Masnavi, Book V: 4219-22

âb-e Haywān, qibla-yē jān-dōst-ān
z-âb bāsh-ad sabz-o khandān bōstān

marg-âshām-ān ze-'ishq-ash zinda-and
del-ze jān-o âb-é jān bar-kanda-and

âb-é 'ishq-é tō chō mā-râ dast dâd
âb-é haywān shod ba-pêsh-é mā kasâd

z-âb-é Haywān, hast har jān-râ nawâ
lêk âb-é âb-é Haywan-î tow-î

I also had the good fortune of being able to determine what verses were displayed in the manuscript of the Dīvān-é Kabīr. This is a special edition made by the Mevlevis in which the poems were selected according to the 23 meters that Mevlana used in his compositions (plus some miscellaneous meters). With such an edition, the Mevlevis could recite Mevlana's mystical and ecstatic poems in the same meter at length. The Turkish scholar Golpinarlı (died, 1982) used this edition to make his complete translation from Persian to Turkish. More recently, Dr. Nevit Ergin, a retired Turkish physician, translated Golpinarlı's entire Turkish translation into English (he has published 22 volumes so far). Dr. Ergin also took photographs of every page of this two-volume manuscript and put them on a CD, which he has made available, and a copy of which he kindly gave to me ("Divan.35mm CD"). With the aid of the "Ergin-Foruzanfar Concordance" and this CD, I was able to find a picture of the very pages of the Divan that I gazed at in front of Mevlana's tomb two weeks previously.

Volume I of this Divan manuscript (mislabelled in the exhibit, I now realize, as "Volume II") had its pages open to the following verse which began on the upper right side of the right page, which I had written down:

(Spiritual) drunkenness, loverhood, feeling youthful, and our (spiritual) beloved, The Spring festival, the Spring season, and the pregnancy (of all living beings) are (all) calling out an invitation.

--Mevlana's Divan, line 34859, Tarjī'band No. 7 (see also Nevit Ergin's translation, "Divan-i Kebir, Meter 4," selection 6, which corresponds to "62.tif" on his CD of this manuscript).

mastī-wo 'âshiqî-wo jawâni-wo yâr-é mâ
naw-rôz-o naw-bahâr-o Hamal mî-zan-ad Salâ

Volume II of the Divan manuscript had its pages open to the following verse which began on the upper right side of the right page, which I had also written down:

(As for) the soul and heart of the poor one (and the) wounded heart of the captive, by means of (displaying) the charities of your own (qualities of) beauty, you are making (such hearts to be) the treasure of needy supplication (toward God).

--Mevlana's Divan, line 26145, Ghazal No. 2472 (see also Nevit Ergin's translation, "Divan-i Kebir, Volume 21" (Meter 17) selection 114, which corresponds to "266.tif" on his CD of this manuscript).

jâni-del-é faqîr-râ, khasta-del-é asîr-râ
az Sadaqât Husn-é khwad, ganj-é neyâz mî-kon-î

--the above translations and transliterations were made from the original Persian by Ibrahim Gamard, 4/23/04