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The Museumification of Rumi's Tomb: Deconstructing Sacred Space at the Mevlana Museum

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Tourists and pilgrims from across Turkey and around the world flock to the tomb of Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), one of the greatest poets and Sufi masters in Islam. Since 1925, the Turkish government has relentlessly struggled to control Islamic influences in society and to channel people's devotion to the memory of Kemal Ataturk (d. 1938) and his secular ideology. This article argues that by restructuring the layout and presentation of the tomb complex of Rumi, and putting the sacred space through the process of museumification, the Turkish state has attempted to regulate the place in order to control people's experience of the sacred. The Museum functions simultaneously as a sacred place and a tourist site and the role of visitors as pilgrims and tourists is ambiguous. This article examines the history and politics of the space in order to illustrate how it functions as a site of contestation and how visitors act as important agents in the construction of the space's meaning.

Key Words: Rumi, Turkey, tourism, pilgrimage, sacred space, space and place, Sufism, mysticism, museumification, secularism, Ottoman history

Introduction

Immediately upon arriving to the Turkish town of Konya, I made my way to the most popular site in the town, Rumi's tomb, officially known as the Mevlana Museum, to learn more about the 'best-selling poet in America' (Ernst, 2003:181). On my way to the museum, I passed by an impressive Seljuk-era mosque and then joined the line at the ticket office to purchase a ticket for the museum. I then passed through a turnstile and a metal detector and entered into a delightful courtyard, which was full of foreign visitors and Turkish families milling around. In the large courtyard, there were luscious gardens and in the centre an intricate fountain. I could catch the overwhelming scent of jasmine and roses wafting from the foliage. As it was the height of the Eid holidays, the area was packed with visitors and I had to weave my way through the crowd to reach the humble doorway to the shrine.^[1]

Upon walking into Rumi's mausoleum after a hi-tech machine swathed my shoes in small plastic bags to protect the carpets and wood floors, I was first drawn to the sensory experience of sound: piped-in classical

Turkish Sufi music evokes Sufi ceremonies that would have taken place there long ago. I passed by the decorated gravestones of descendants and followers of Rumi. At the end of the passageway, I came across the elaborately embellished tombs of Rumi and his father, which were covered in richly embroidered clothes draped over the tombstones and surrounded by a visual banquet of Arabic calligraphy, arabesque and geometric designs. This section of the tomb had been lavishly preserved and restored, but at the foot of the gate before the tomb stood a guard whose job was to keep visitors moving along.

Fig. 1 Visitors enter through the turnstiles after purchasing tickets and enter into the courtyard of the Museum complex before approaching the main attraction of Rumi's tomb.



1 'Eid' is the Arabic / Turkish term for the two major Muslim holidays on the Islamic calendar.

Fig. 2 The grave of Rumi is covered with an elaborately embroidered cloth that includes verses of the Qur'an. On top of the grave is a turban that represents the high spiritual status of Jalal al-Din Rumi.



Here, I observed visitors stopping for a quiet moment, whispering the Islamic prayer for the dead and requests for intercession on behalf of a sick child or for a safe journey. The guard insisted they move on, but some pilgrims remained defiantly in supplication, while others snapped photos and moved on to the next station in the Rumi exhibit. After spending time in the tomb, I entered into the room once used for communal prayers and Mevlevi Sufi 'whirling dervish' ceremonies. This room is now home to ritual objects such as copies of the Qur'an and manuscripts of Rumi's poetry, musical instruments, dervish garments, and prayer mats—all locked beneath glass museum cases. Recently, part of the room has been opened up to allow for Muslim pilgrims to engage in their prayers, a new addition in recognition of the room's historical use and perhaps due to a government increasingly influenced by religion.

Exiting the sanctuary, I made my way to another section of the museum, formerly cells where dervishes (Sufi initiates) lived and studied. As soon as I entered the room, the wax mannequins dressed in the garb of dervishes caught my attention. The dummies were forever frozen in time. One was practicing his whirling for an eternity, another was cooking a stew that would never be ready, and one in the corner was practicing penitence on his rickety knees. Taken aback by the

2 Visitors from afar can now go on a virtual tour of the entire Mevlana Museum at the website of the Museum: <http://dosyalar.semazen.net/Mevlana/english/a01.htm>, as well as at this website: <http://www.3dmekanlar.com/tr/mevlana-muzesi.html>.

Fig. 3 Visitors examine ritual objects in museum display cases.



kitsch portrayal of pre-modern Sufi life, I exited the museum through another turnstile and once again enter modern Konya.^[2] Struck by the conflicting uses of the museum, I was led to dig deeper into the history of the Sufi lodge and tomb as well as contemporary uses of the museum to understand the nature of contested sacred space in Turkey.

Located in central Anatolia, Konya is a large city, although it is pleasant and feels more like a small town than a sprawling metropolis. Over the past decades, the suburbs have encroached upon rural villages and farms and the center of the city is full of low-rise buildings and historic monuments. Despite its modern exterior, those who know where to look can taste a bit of the old Konya, where the famous mystic and poet Rumi (d. 1273) – known as Mevlana in Turkish – used to live. Annemarie Schimmel, a scholar of Islam who wrote on

Fig. 4 Wax figures of Mevlevi dervishes depict several disciples practicing the ritual whirling ceremony.



the poetry and life of Rumi, visited Konya on numerous occasions, and described her impression of the town:

Revisiting Konya in these days, is on the external level, a disappointing experience. One looks in vain for the charms of the old town and loses one's ways among constructions—but despite the enormous crowds that have settled there, despite the numbers of tourists who throng around the mausoleum, one feels in the late evening, especially in the presence of old family friends who preserve their tradition without ostentation that Mawlana's presence still hovers over the city. (Schimmel, 1997: 67)

Viewed from above, the city has a circular shape. In the center lies the Ala al-Din park hill and mosque, built by the Turkish Seljuks in the early thirteenth century. From this circular park, which is surrounded by historic monuments, you can follow Mevlana Street to the sacred center of Konya, Rumi's tomb and Sufi lodge, now known as the Mevlana Museum, bordered by three roundabouts in an older neighborhood of the city. Streets that surround Rumi's mausoleum have names such as Turbe (Tomb) Street, Amil Celebi (an early 20th century Mevlevi shaykh), and other references to Rumi, his mausoleum, and his Sufi order. Hotels, stores, and bus lines carry the name of Mevlana, and the influence of the great Sufi master pervades every corner of the city, from the mosques to the marketplace.

The present-day Mevlana Museum is located on the site of a garden that was owned by one of Rumi's disciples and Rumi often visited it during his lifetime. Rumi's father was a religious teacher who had fled the Mongol invasions from their home in Balkh, in present-day Afghanistan, and ended up in Konya, in the

middle of Anatolia. Rumi grew up speaking and writing in Persian and Arabic and was a teacher of the Islamic sciences until he met his Sufi master teacher, Shams al-Din Tabrizi. After meeting Shams al-Din, Rumi became intoxicated with his love for God and wrote the epic Masnavi, a six-volume collection of Persian poetry comprising more than 50,000 lines. His followers founded the Mevlevi Sufi order that took inspiration from the Masnavi and Rumi's teachings.

Soon after his death in 1273, his disciples donated funds to build his tomb. Although Rumi scholar Franklin Lewis suggests that Rumi did not actually want a dome to be built over his tomb so that he would be venerated after his death, in Aflaki's biography of Rumi's life, Manaqib al-Arifin (Biographies of the Gnostics), a disciple of Rumi reads Rumi's written will,

Our disciples shall construct our tomb at a high location so that it can be seen from long distances. Whoever sees our tomb from a distance, and believes in our faithfulness will be blessed by God. God will meet all the needs and wishes of those who come to visit our tomb with absolute love, perfect honesty, absolute truth, and knowledge. All their wishes, either worldly or religious will be accepted (Lewis, 2000: 427).

It took one year for the tomb to be built and was a simple dome that drew inspiration from the Armenian churches popular in Anatolia at the time. Inside, the dome was covered in stucco reliefs and the exterior of the dome in turquoise tiles, which gave its name - the 'green dome' (Lewis, 2000: 427). The turbe, or tomb, was the sacred center of the entire complex. Other components of the tomb complex included cells for dervishes, several courtyards with ablution fountains

Fig. 5 A shrine in the heart of old Konya.



Fig. 6 A view of the newer part of central Konya.



and pools, and an outdoor cemetery. Some of the highest-ranking Mevlevis and some of their female relatives were buried inside the tomb complex. There was also a small mosque and the semahane, or room dedicated to performing sema, which in the Mevlevi context specifically refers to the whirling ceremony unique to this Sufi order.

Methodological Approach

This article draws upon several visits to Konya between 2006 and 2009, as well as analysis of text and media sources that cover aspects of the Mevlana Museum. Drawing upon an interdisciplinary approach from within the discipline of religious studies, I interrogate the museumification of the medieval tomb of Rumi and adjoining Sufi lodge and argue that the modern Turkish state has attempted to regulate, and consequently do away with, the experience and presence of the sacred in the museum for its visitors. G.J. Ashworth describes museumification as an alternative to eradicating cultural symbols, or rather, through museumification:

[the] contemporary meaning of symbols is neutralized by their interpretations as objects possessing only historic artistic value, the nature of the message being changed to one that has less contemporary social or political relevance (Ashworth, 1998:268).

The process of museumification consists of imposing national identities onto a conserved heritage site and recreating a heritage site with a specific agenda that conforms to the ideals of the nation. The process considers every place and object connected to a distinct culture or religion to be an artifact that can be preserved and re-presented in an acceptable format, although some scholars argue that it 'distorts, inverts, and subverts meanings' (Dellios, 2001:1).

By redesigning Rumi's tomb complex into a museum, the Turkish state has sought to secularize the space in order to remove what it perceives to be the shrine's sacred quality. Despite the state's best efforts, however, visitors continue to recreate the experience of the sacred, while inhibited by the museum setting of the complex. Many visitors are on a religious pilgrimage to encounter Rumi, the Sufi saint, and gain blessings. Other visitors venture to the museum to learn more about Rumi, the prominent Turk, and the richness of Turkish folk heritage, or just to see a striking example of a Seljuk-era architectural splendor. The Museum is a carefully regulated performative place that is in a constant state of change through its multiplicity of meanings for its visitors.

When examining the case of the Mevlana Museum, it is useful to briefly discuss other buildings such as the Aya Sofia, a former Byzantine church located in Istanbul that was converted into a mosque by the Ottoman sultans and then into a museum in 1934 under the Turkish Republic. The museum preserves both the Byzantine mosaics that had been recently uncovered as well as Islamic ritual features that were added after its mosque conversion. The museum both glorifies the political legacy of the Ottoman Empire through its defeat of the Byzantine Empire, and also presents it in a secular format in its presentation as a museum (Shaw, 2007). Similarly, the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul, which was once the palace of the Ottoman sultans, was renovated and museumified in a way to establish a historical connection between the Turkish republic and Turkey's Ottoman past, but also maintained proper distance (Shaw, 2007). Shaw goes on to argue that unlike museums in the West,

Turkish museums, by not using the discourse of art as a systemic meta-narrative, functioned not to bring together material culture into a systemic grand narrative of heritage but rather to provide each aspect of heritage (p.273).

The Mevlana Museum is one of many examples of museums in Turkey that display the Turkish republic's attempts to manipulate its connection to the past and reinterpret religious meaning. Since 1925, the Turkish government has relentlessly fought to control Islamic and Sufi influences and channel people's devotion towards the memory of Atatürk - the ideal Turk - as well as his secular ideology, and an interest in Turkish history. The state could not prevent people from going on pilgrimage to the tomb of Rumi, making supplications, and sending their greetings at their tomb; but it could attempt to reconfigure the tomb and transform it into a folk heritage museum. Despite its efforts, though, the state has not stopped people from performing pilgrimage to the shrine and experiencing the sacred in the Museum, but they have made it more difficult for pilgrims to experience the tomb complex and Sufi lodge as its patrons originally intended.

If Rumi's shrine is no longer a religious institution by name, then what is it? As part of the state's program to modernize Turkey in the 1920s, the state decided to convert the shrine into a museum. Outside of Turkey, many Muslims today - especially ones who interpret Islam literally - are also uncomfortable with the idea of pilgrims visiting the tomb of a deceased saint, and would presumably support the state's measures to prevent outbursts of devotion and 'unseemly' acts of veneration in the shrine. So it is possible that the museum format is actually a neutral ground that

conforms to the demands of the state and Salafi Muslims, while also allowing visitors of any sort to pay their respects to the saint? In this case, how do we interpret the case of the Mevlana Museum, which was an active shrine and Sufi lodge-turned-museum?

Religious studies scholar Chris Arthur proposes that exhibits of religion could

constitute an accurate reflection of the nature of what might be termed postmodern religious experience - diverse, disjointed, disorientating . . . it [the museum] may become a resource for finding new spiritual harmonies which might resonate with, and make sense of, life in the last years of a discordant century (Arthur, 2000: 23).

Rumi's museumified tomb represents the secularist Turkish approach to religiosity, removing the space from its original intention while also allowing visitors to produce their own meanings. Furthermore, while museums in Europe developed alongside the emerging academic discipline of art history, in the context of Turkey, museums served the agenda of the state in its efforts to claim a pure and unified sense of Turkish territoriality, ethnicity, and nationhood (Shaw, 2007). In this way, we can seek to understand a 'progressive sense of place', which considers the meaning-making of a place based on the activities that focus on it instead of establishing an 'essential identity' that remains static throughout history (Edensor, 1998: 200).

The Mevlana Museum is both a tourist and a pilgrimage destination. The activities of tourists and pilgrims at the Museum often overlap and the boundary between tourists and pilgrims becomes blurred. Numerous scholars of tourism studies have concluded that it is difficult to draw a clear line between pilgrims and tourists, 'even when the role of pilgrim and tourist are combined, they are necessarily different but form a continuum of inseparable elements' (Graburn, 1983: 16). Victor and Edith Turner similarly propose that 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (Turner & Turner, 1978: 23).

At Rumi's tomb, tourists often find themselves awestruck by the magnificent collection of ritual objects, calligraphy that adorns the wall and other decorative elements as well as experience intense emotions upon seeing pilgrims praying at the tombs. Pilgrims visit the exhibits and learn about Mevlevi history and later pick up a Rumi keychain in the neighboring bazaar. Annemarie Schimmel, the well-known scholar of Islamic Studies and Sufi poetry, who

visited Konya numerous times described the spiritual connection she had to Konya,

I visited it for the first time in the Spring of 1952, all by myself, and found it surrounded by a romantic sadness. A thunderstorm caused the flowers to open; all of a sudden the dusty city was filled with the fragrance of the igde bushes and covered with a lovely veil of fresh green- 'paradisical garments', [which] Mawlana [would] call the young leaves for the gardens, [which] at the time, reached almost to the center of the town (Schimmel, 1997: 62).

And of the masses of tourists she saw who walked about with 'empty eyes', Schimmel asked,

Would they feel something of the presence which we had experienced so often when visiting the Green Dome along with friends from all over the world . . . To what extent would they appreciate the sama of the Mevlevis, seeing it not merely as a nice and interesting folkloric performance but rather as an expression of the sweetest and deepest secrets of mystical love (Schimmel, 1997: 64-5)?

Although Schimmel might have been skeptical about the experience of tourists at the Museum, pilgrims do not necessarily always fit into her understanding of the term. Pilgrims also participate in touristic activities, such as sightseeing, picture taking, and souvenir shopping. Just outside of Rumi's tomb, vendors sell a variety of Rumi-themed souvenirs, from the usual tourist items with the omnipresent symbol of the whirling dervish, Sufi music, and postcards, to specifically Islamic ritual objects, such as prayer beads, prayer carpets, and perfume. Travelers to Konya have reported seeing souvenirs such as dervish-shaped chocolates, music boxes and clocks engraved with dervishes, and jewelry embossed with dervishes and Rumi's portrait (Thurkill, ND:36). The many visitors who make their way to the Mevlana Museum bring with them their own experiences and perceptions of the space. Consequently, the visitors are important agents in the construction of the space's multivocal meaning. The secular Turkish state has implemented changes inside the Mevlana Museum that have transformed the space from a sacred Sufi shrine to a secular museum. Despite the museum setting, many pilgrims are still able to experience the sacred as intended by the original architects of the medieval tomb.

For a place to exist, people must construct its meaning. The original construction, deconstruction (in 1926,

when it was closed), and reconstruction of the Mevlana Museum have transformed the space. Nevertheless, visitors continue to experience the Museum from the vantage point of their communities. Ultimately, the government's power to change people's experience is limited because visitors to the Museum also play a role in the construction of the tomb's meaning, based on the lived experiences they bring with them, which transcend the external alterations of the shrine-turned-museum.

Sufism and Politics: From the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey

Ataturk (d. 1938) was certainly not the first ruler in Turkey to assert his control over religious, and in particular, Sufi institutions. Under Ottoman rule, Sufi orders, including the Mevlevi order founded by Rumi's son, were patronized by the ruling elite and received an elevated status in society. They provided education to the children of the elite and also were responsible for developing the Sufi literary tradition as well as propagating Persian poetry (Lapidus, 1992). Mevlevi Sufis also wrote their poetry and writings in Turkish and contributed to the rich cultural legacy of the Ottomans (Soileau, 2006). While the Mevlevi order started out mainly as a rural Sufi order, by the late sixteenth century, it had become more institutionalized and gained popularity in urban areas.

Mevlevi shaykhs were able to foster relationships with rulers and the elite; even Sultan Selim III joined the order and participated in Mevlevi ceremonies (Soileau, 2006). The order developed an elaborate hierarchical system and laid out a formula for advancing students along the Sufi path. Students practiced distinct rituals that were intended to help them reach certain stations in the path (Soileau, 2006). Mevlevi dervishes also wore special clothing to distinguish themselves, with variances based on their spiritual and hierarchical ranking (Soileau, 2006). While Sufi orders and their institutions functioned on a relatively independent basis with elite patronage, the Ottoman Empire later sought to consolidate its authority and to centralize the government by forcing rulings on the lodges. As early as 1812, Sultan Mahmud II issued rulings that regulated and controlled all Sufi lodges in the Ottoman Empire. The rulings helped the rulers keep a tight watch over the politics of the orders in order to stem any rebellion and keep the leaders of the orders under their control, as well as maintain authority over the financial affairs of the lodges.

Despite being regulated, the Mevlevi Sufis gained substantial political favor from the rulers when the

Bekteshi Sufis were systematically oppressed and their network obliterated by Mahmud II's elimination of the Janissary corps, which was closely affiliated to the order. The Mevlevis were fervent supporters of Mahmud II as well as his reforms and enjoyed privileges that other Sufi orders were denied (Soileau, 2006:). With the rise of the Tanzimat period under Abd al-Majid I, further reforms were implemented in the Ottoman Empire to replace traditional institutions with modern ones influenced by Western models (Soileau, 2006). By 1866, the Tanzimat reforms saw the established of the Council of Shaykhs, which encompassed all of the lodges and orders and placed them under the control of the Shaykh al-Islam, or the leader of religious affairs for the Ottoman Empire. Under direct jurisdiction of the government, the central lodge controlled smaller lodges. The state safeguarded its power by providing funds to the lodges, controlling private donations, and putting employees of the lodges on its salary (Soileau, 2006). The Mevlevi order continued to receive favor from the state even up to the World War I, when they formed a voluntary regiment of soldiers called the Mevlevi Warriors (Soileau, 2006).

When Ataturk first took control after becoming the president of the newly minted Turkish Republic, he involved Sufi leaders in his decisions regarding Sufi orders. In 1920, when he organized the first National Assembly, he chose the head of the Mevlevi order to represent the city of Konya (Soileau, 2006: 303). After Ataturk transformed Turkey into a secular republic, organized Sufism quickly went underground and Sufi lodges, shrines, madrasas, and religious courts were closed and Sufism officially became 'illegal'. A 1925 law proposed by Ataturk entitled the 'suspension of pious foundations and religious titles, the banning of mystical societies and displays of dervishes and the suspension of Sufi hostels [lodges]', and outlined the specific restrictions that were imposed by the state onto Turkish Sufis:

Article 1: All of the Sufi hospices in the Republic of Turkey, whether pious endowments, personal property of shaykhs . . . will be closed and the right of ownership suspended . . . The graves of sultans and the shrines of dervishes are closed and the occupation of shrine custodian is voided. All persons who reopen closed-down Sufi hospices, hostels, or shrines, or those people who use mystical titles to attract followers or serve them, will be sentenced to at least three months in prison and a fine of 50 lira (Lewis, 2000: 465).

The situation was so serious that many of the descendants of Rumi, including the last shaykh of the order and many followers, fled Turkey and settled in Aleppo, Syria, where they could freely practice Sufism.

Ataturk made the practice of Sufism a crime, and any person who claimed to be a shaykh or disciple, or who played any kind of role in a Sufi order, was deemed a criminal and sentenced to a minimum of three months in jail. Furthermore, men were forbidden to wear the traditional fez headdress and women were forced to remove their headscarves in public (Al-Fers). Ataturk and his administration led a modernization project in an attempt to imitate Western culture and society with the goal to achieve 'contemporary civilization', wherein modernization equaled Westernization. Ataturk asserted that Islam represented 'a set of traditions, values, legal rules, and norms which were intrinsically non-Western in character' (Soileau, 2006: 225). Ataturk's first mission was to build a completely new institutional foundation of the government, and he singled out Ottoman religious institutions. He abolished the position of the caliphate, sent the Ottoman dynasty into exile, and dismantled the religious courts (Soileau, 2006).

The original 1924 Turkish constitution permitted all religious ceremonies and declared that

no one may be censured on account of his religion, sect, Sufi orders, or philosophical convictions. As long as they are not contrary to the public order, the ethics of social relations, and the decree of the laws, the performance of every type of religious ceremony is free (Soileau, 2006:245).

Yet after a rebellion broke out with a Naqshabandi Kurdish shaykh at its head in early 1925, Ataturk began a harsh attack on all Sufi orders. In one speech he made his attitude towards Sufi orders very clear:

In the face of knowledge, science, and of the whole extent of radiant civilization, I cannot accept the presence in Turkey's civilized community of people primitive enough to seek material and spiritual benefits in the guidance of sheikhs. The Turkish republic cannot be a country of sheikhs, dervishes and disciples. The best, the truest order is the order of Civilization. To be a man it is enough to carry out the requirements of civilization. The leaders of dervish orders will understand the truth of my words, and will themselves close down their

lodges and admit that their disciples have grown up (Soileau, 2006:246).

According to Ataturk, if a Sufi shaykh's goal was to guide his disciples towards worldly and spiritual happiness, then logically, there was no more need for organized Sufi orders because modern civilization could fulfill this goal even better and more efficiently.

Ataturk reflects his hostile views towards organized Sufi orders in this blunt statement: 'May it be well-known to all, that the Turkish Republic is no place for sheikhs, their disciples, and sympathizers' (Kezer, 2000: 109). Perhaps, he presumed, by relegating important places of mysticism and religion to glass museum cases and behind velvet cordons, he could contain the spread of what he saw as superstitious and backwards beliefs and practices. Ataturk stressed that people whose

mentalities that [were] incapable of accepting the revolutionary drive to modernize and civilize the nation [would] be irrevocably purged [because it was not possible] to bring the light of truth into the minds of such people (Kezer, 2000: 109).

Ataturk assumed that by developing the economy of Turkey as well as promoting urbanization and modernization, the cultural practices of Turks would quickly evolve towards a Western model according to what he called 'the nation's manifest path toward modern civilization' (Gulalp, 2003: 382).

In Turkey, therefore, secularism has been imposed from the top down and closely monitored and controlled by the state (Gulalp, 2003). Despite attempts to suppress Sufis, many followers managed to keep the tradition alive in private homes. Over many centuries, the rich tradition of Islam in Ottoman Turkey was imbibed with Turkish, Persian, and Arab influence. The Ottoman heritage was kept alive by Turks despite the rise of the Turkish Republic and continues to play a significant social and communal identity in the collective memory of the nation (Gulalp, 2003). These changes have fundamentally transformed the appearance of the religious landscape of Turkey until the present day.

Constructing Memories of Rumi

In Turkey, not just Rumi's tomb and the related Sufi order have become secularized. Scholars and government-sponsored efforts have also moved to remodel Rumi's identity and message. Over the years,

he went from representing a Persian-speaking Muslim from Balkh to a Turkish universalist and humanistic mystic who spread a message of tolerance, peace, love, and brotherhood (although not necessarily informed by his deeply religious background). Nationalist intellectuals also engaged in a campaign to rewrite the biographies of a number of other Muslim saints and Sufi poets, including Hajj Bektash Veli and Yunus Emre (Soileau, 2006).

According to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Mevlevi Order believes in the 'brotherhood of all humanity' and holds women in high esteem. But rather than focus on the Islamic and mystical aspect of Rumi and his Sufi order, the Ministry chose to categorize this topic under folk culture, and even the wording of the title of the online article 'Turkish Humanism and Anatolian Muslim Saints (Dervishes)' reflects this agenda (Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, n.d.). The article goes on to stress the universal teachings of Rumi and Haji Bektash, the eponymous inspiration of the Bekteshi Sufi order, and their interactions with both Muslims and non-Muslims. Haji Bektash, for example, is noted for having lived among Christians in Anatolia, and an article on the website of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism claims that his educational activities played an important role in creating 'cultural integrity' in the region. Haji Bektash is especially important, as the article argues, because his work influenced Atatürk to establish a secular and democratic country that respects human rights (Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, n.d.). The article makes an effort to establish the universalist perspective of Rumi's thought, and while it does somewhat acknowledge Rumi's Islamic background, the author stresses the humanist principles found in Rumi's poetry and his associations with non-Muslims as well as Muslims. The emphasis on Rumi as a humanist carefully connects him to the European notion of humanism at a critical juncture in Turkish history.

The Turkish state ultimately used the figure of Rumi to help carry out its political agenda and developed a way

has argued that tombs help support the communal memory of a country's past, positing that

while tombs - graves or shrines that are visited - usually belong to one person, those who visit them are an entire nation. Thus, tombs and places of visitation are not of persons, but of the nation. The person whose site has become a tomb has now become the property of the

nation. The nation that has tombs is a nation that has a past. The nation that visits and remembers with respect its tombs is a society that respects its past in national terms (Guzel, 1998).

At an early stage in the formation of the Turkish Republic, Turkey's leaders sought to increasingly regulate aspects of people's lives to ensure cohesive and universal adherence to newly created laws, regulations and customs (Kezer, 2000: 101-2). The government sought for complete cultural integration and sought to eliminate components of society that they viewed as threatening towards building a new, modern society - such as Sufi lodges. They believed they would be able to ensure the future of the Republic by erasing parts of Turkish culture and religion from the public view. The leaders therefore rewrote Turkey's history and future, spinning tales to

fabricate venerable pasts that never were, and to erase collective remembrances that challenged official ideology (Kezer, 2000: 103).

Turkey's ideologues combined aspects of Turkish culture they deemed 'safe' with modernist values imported from the 'West,' such as secularism and democracy (Soileau, 2006: 9-10).

Atatürk was fond of Rumi and once stated that Rumi was

a mighty reformer, who had adapted Islam to the Turkish soul (Al-Fers n.d.).

Fig. 7 Traditional Muslim prayer beads that contain 1,000 beads each would have been used by Mevlevi Sufis in all-night remembrance ceremonies. Now they are placed under glass cases in the museum for visitors to gaze upon.



Upon visiting Konya, Ataturk exclaimed,

Whenever I come to this city I feel excitement inside. The thought of Mevlana envelops me. He was a great genius, an innovator for all ages (Al-Fers, n.d.).

During his visit, Ataturk also toured the tomb complex of Rumi and watched a performance of whirling dervishes. Interestingly enough, when he toured the tomb complex, he already had a plan in mind. After seeing all of the beautiful ritual objects and art in the lodge, he decided that they would look even better in a museum collection.

After 1925, all lodges in Turkey were declared state property and subsequently closed, while their belongings were moved to ethnographic museums. Most Sufi lodges were eventually converted into mosques, museums, and other public and private institutions, and completely stripped of any signs relating to their original function. This aided the process of 'modernization' by delegating ritual objects from Sufi lodges to ethnographic museums, where they were deemed to be remnants of Turkey's folk heritage (Shaw, 2007: 267).

Ataturk made an exception for the lodge in Konya in 1926, saying that due to its 'architectural and ethnographic value' (Al-Fers) it should be made into a museum instead of being boarded up. Despite his concessions, Ataturk warned the head Mevlevi leader of Konya about the future of Sufism, declaring,

You, the Mevlevis have made a great difference by combating ignorance and religious fundamentalism for centuries, as well as making contributions to science and the arts. However we are obliged not to make any exceptions and must include Mevlevi Sufi lodges. Nonetheless, the ideas and teaching of Mevlana will not only exist forever, but they will emerge even more powerfully in the future (Al-Fers).

Apparently, Ataturk had a plan to appropriate the figure of Rumi for his own purposes of creating new memories of Turkish culture and history. As part of the plan, the Ministry of Education also supported a project to translate all of Rumi's work into Turkish, thus ensuring Rumi's legacy (International Mevlana Foundation).

One of the reasons that the rulers privileged the Mevlevi Order over other Sufi orders was because the state saw it as an elite tradition that did not necessarily oppose modernity (Kafadar, 1992: 312). As long as certain practices were omitted in order to conform to modern beliefs, then Mevlevis were allowed to function under the close supervision of the state. The centuries-long relationship between the Mevlevis and the state continued after Ataturk, and the Mevlana Museum remains in many ways intact, instead of meeting the fate of the thousands of other lodges in the country. Despite this, the compromise made by the Mevlevi Order forever changed their nature and the communal memory of Rumi.

Experiencing the Sacred in a Museum

In order to understand the nature of the sacred at the Mevlana Museum, it is useful to take Jonathan Z. Smith's theory of ritual place into consideration. For Smith, place is the construction of the sacred itself rather than a reaction to the sacred. He contends that space is a ritual response to the presence of the sacred in time and space (Smith, 1987: 45). As Smith sees it,

human beings are not placed, they bring place into being; the experience of the sacred is not derived from the place itself, but rather from

Fig. 8 The Turkish flag flies above the entrance of the Mevlana Museum to symbolize the national identity of the Museum.



the social signs that give the place meaning
(Smith, 1987: 28).

Smith's view seems to limit the role of space and objects themselves in people's lives as he gives complete agency to human actors. I assert that material culture and architecture also play important roles in mapping out how people interact with space and how the sacred comes into being. Humans bring structures into existence, but people from diverse backgrounds can experience them differently. The layout of this museum causes pilgrims to also experience it as a tourist and tourists to experience the Museum as a pilgrim. Furthermore, the experience of the sacred is not only derived from the sensory experience of place itself, but also from the social signs that give the place meaning. In this way, people create meaning.

In the case of the Mevlana Museum, the Ministry of Tourism and the curators of the Museum, under directions from the Turkish State, have attempted to control the museum. Despite the state's intentions to create a site of historical significance, it neglected to take into account people's subjective experience, faith, and memory of Rumi. In order to gain insight into how power is manifested in space and people experience the sacred, David Morgan offers a helpful concept called 'the history of practice,' which can be understood as the history that people bring to things (Morgan, 2010: 65). In this way, objects and architecture contribute to the construction of space and signify a sacred space, drawing devotees' attention to a central point (Morgan, 2006: 56). Thus, instead of just deconstructing space and analyzing how humans create space, we need to also study the dynamics of human interaction with space and material objects.

Naturally, the rhetorical powers of a space can change over time 'as its meanings shift for the individuals and communities who find it distinctive' (Bremer, 2006: 27). Atatürk claimed, 'it is a disgrace for a civilized society to appeal for help from the dead' (Soileau, 2006: 247). Therefore, within the confines of the state's ideology, the (only) acceptable purpose for Turks to visit Rumi's tomb was to foster national pride by learning about 'important Turkish figures.' From this perspective, there would be no problem for Rumi's shrine to become the 'the non-exclusive property of the nation,' in that it contains an important Turkish heritage site that is also relevant to people from around the world (Soileau, 2006: 262). As a result of this policy, Rumi's tomb has endured a complete paradigm shift, from a regional sacred Sufi site to a point of historical and cultural interest for an entire nation and beyond.

Museums can be used as weapons of defense against what some would label pre-modern superstitions. Dean MacCannell, a geographer, sociologist, and landscape architect, speculates that museums

establish in consciousness the definition and boundary of modernity by rendering concrete and immediate that which modernity is not
(MacCannell, 1976: 84).

Fundamentally, a museum teaches its audience that what is contained within its confines is part of the historical memory of a culture that can be appreciated but is no longer relevant to modern society. MacCannell asserts that the function of the museum in modern society and

the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the non-modern world but its artificial preservation and conservation in modern society
(MacCannell, 1976: 84).

The Turkish government followed this pattern of thinking, proposing to impose modernity on Turkish culture by the museumification of sacred spaces, such as the Mevlana Museum.

Contestation over space happens whenever one or more parties have a stake in the same place, and both groups attempt to construct meaning. The struggle over space can involve issues of ownership or control, or even more subtly, may involve a

rhetorical battle over the specific meaning of a place. The social aspects of a place thus plays itself out in the discursive outcome of these never-ending attempts to define and control the site (Bremer, 2006: 27).

Places encompass the pasts, presents, and futures of their meaning, so in the case of the Mevlana Museum, inspired by nationalist rhetoric, the state ensured that the past purpose of the museum shifted.

People can have different experiences in the same place, which Thomas Bremer has called the 'simultaneity of places' (Bremer, 2006: 27). Visitors to the Mevlana Museum occupy the same space at the same time, but their experiences and interpretations of the space's significance may vary greatly. The museum therefore remains a sacred space but at the same time is also a touristic and secular space.

The phenomenon of regulating sacred space is not unique to the Mevlana Museum, and sacred spaces around the world have undergone the process of museumification. Such spaces include the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor, the Aya Sophia in Istanbul, the Taj Mahal in Agra, and the Forbidden City in Beijing. Canterbury Cathedral in London, which also falls unto the category of regulated sacred space, provides an especially productive comparison with the Mevlana Museum: while the Cathedral is a historically important destination of pilgrimage in the mainly unchurched country of England, it retains its sacred qualities while functioning as a museum at the same time. The curators are careful to control the experience of the visitor and set up cordons to keep visitors at a safe distance from especially sacred areas and objects and to maintain a solemn environment. Christian pilgrims hold the site where St. Thomas of Canterbury was martyred in great reverence. In response to what administrators saw as inappropriate expressions of veneration, the area was cordoned off:

roping off this most holy of places was a 'heritage' decision: it tells us that this spot is not for potentially embarrassing or damaging histrionic demonstrations of religious fervor, but for respectful gazing from a distance. A prime aim of traditional museums has been to preserve, and to keep the view at a distance in order to facilitate that preservation. The presence of these ropes, like crowd barriers at royal visits, turns the cathedral into more of a museum, and less of a holy place (Durrans, 2000: 218).

Fig. 9 Turkish Muslims perform ritual ablutions at the fountain in the courtyard of the Museum before entering the tomb chamber of Rumi. Muslims typically perform this ritual before entering a mosque or shrine.



Fig. 10 Foreign visitors wait at the threshold enter the crowded tomb room, where Rumi's grave is located.



Intrinsic to the museum experience is the distancing of the viewer from the experience of the sacred. Canterbury Cathedral continues to function as a space for religious rituals—it holds daily worship services—and as a pilgrimage destination, although it has accommodated tourists by modifying the physical layout to make it familiar to visitors interested in learning about its history and architecture. In this way, visitors can experience the Cathedral in different ways. It places both sacred and secular objects safely behind glass display cases and keeps visitors at a distance from displays. Pilgrims are also tourists and their interaction with the sacred is regulated by the museumified context.

The situation in Konya is very similar to that of Canterbury Cathedral, where many of the pilgrims greet Rumi as if he were alive in his grave, read from the Qur'an, and make supplications at the foot of his tomb. At the same time, museum guards are stationed throughout the museum and their job is to ensure that people do not linger at the graves in the tomb area. Despite government attempts to regulate the crowd, many visitors pay no heed to the guards and spend their time in prayers. Although it is forbidden to perform the five daily prayers in the museum, Muslims have been known to pray in hidden corners of the museum.

Afterhours, Sufi groups who have connections to government and museum officials, hold worship circles, illustrating that many visitors continue to experience and construct the sacred in the Museum (Safi, 2010, and Davidson, 2002: 321). One scholar reports visiting the Museum on a holiday and despite finding it closed, witnessed people praying (or perhaps supplicating) outside the Museum's walls (Vicente, 2007: 37).

Hundreds of English-language online blogs, articles, and poetry from foreign visitors and pilgrims describe their experience at the Museum. Some visitors espouse the universal themes of love and tolerance that can be found in Rumi's poetry while others are not as impressed.

One Australian journalist reflects on her tour of the Museum:

Inside is a different world, strangely beautiful and decidedly holy. Hazy sunlight filters through stained-glass windows onto the mausoleum's tiled walls creating a kaleidoscope of opulent hues and mysterious patterns . . . Everything is exquisite. Everything is divine. All around is a sense of hushed awe like that shared by a wedding congregation when a beautiful bride walks among them (Sydney Morning Herald, 2010).

One popular travel website which has been examined, includes 165 user reviews of the Mevlana Museum, offering brief perspectives from people who visited the Museum from around the world. One reviewer comments on the sacred aspect of the place,

More a shrine than museum. Interesting place—mostly for watching the reverence the local people gave to the shrines

and another person calls it a place

for pilgrims and lovers of Rumi.

Another review recommends readers to experience the sacred during their visit along with the audio tour,

Visit not just to see the beautiful architecture and splendid scenery, but to immerse yourself in a crowd of religious pilgrims, there to see the tomb of Rumi.

One reviewer describes her experience of the Museum as a sacred space, but remarks that she felt like an intruder amidst the people involved in prayers. Many

reviewers write about their surprise - sometimes unease and sometimes fascination - in encountering religious pilgrims at the shrine who seemingly venerate the tomb of Rumi. Other reviewers were uninspired by the museum exhibits and do not mention the devotional atmosphere by the tomb (TripAdvisor).

Part of the draw for many visitors appears to be the ability of being able to immerse oneself in the rituals of another religious tradition, one that they might not experience back home. In this way, the Mevlana Museum not only offers visitors a chance to learn about the history of the Mevlevi Order and Rumi's life but also to witness a living tradition. Therefore, for many visitors, it is both the Museum and the people who visit the Museum which comprise the main attraction. These online reviews reflect the multivalent nature of the Museum, illustrating how a single place can have a multiplicity of meanings for different people who visit the Museum.

We can clearly see how the organization, layout, and material composition of the Mevlana Museum reflect this concept and how the struggle of the Turkish Republic to maintain control over sacred space has been embodied in the museum. While at Muslim shrines around the world pilgrims engage in practices to pay their respects to the saint and offer vows, the official Turkish ideology holds that these rituals are backwards and based on superstition. Despite the best attempts of curators to strip the Mevlana Museum of its power and sacredness, many visitors are able to experience the sacred nature of the space and to feel as if they were in a Sufi lodge and shrine and not a museum celebrating Turkey's national heritage

Fig. 11 Professional 'Mevlevi' actors perform the Mevlevi whirling dervish ceremony on a daily basis outside of the Mevlana Museum complex.



(Bremer, 2006: 29). Secular Turks, including schoolchildren who visit the museum on fieldtrips, as well as non-Muslim foreigners who visit Konya as part of their package tours around the country, experience the shrine in a variety of different ways.

Many people are aware of the importance of Rumi as a famous mystical poet but have little or no knowledge about Rumi's role as a Muslim religious and legal scholar, Sufi guide, and Muslim saint. A secular Turk would be interested in visiting the Mevlana Museum to learn more about the life of a great 'Turk.' Other visitors - Turks and foreigners alike - would be interested in visiting the 'museum,' in order to obtain baraka, or blessings, from Rumi and his descendants and followers buried in the museum. In addition to package tourists and pilgrims, the Turkish government often brings visiting foreign dignitaries to the Museum to expose them to a sanitized and romantic version of Turkish Sufism. The Turkish government also brings many of its foreign dignitaries to visit the Mevlana Museum. The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall were given a VIP tour of the Museum in 2007 and also watched a whirling dervish ceremony. Prince Charles's remarks after his visit reflect the attraction of Rumi's tomb on a universal level:

What better place than here near the resting place of Mevlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi to rededicate ourselves to the purpose of re-acquiring an understanding heart and a rebalance of the East and West in ourselves . . . At this crucial time in history we need to look very closely at the values our modern world now exposes and consider the extent to which they enable us to live more integrated and sustainable lives (BBC News, 2007).

Visitors of all stripes - Muslim and non-Muslim - experience the museum on multiple levels: they can learn about the history of the Mevlevi order, pick up some souvenirs, and recite a prayer at Rumi's grave, all in the same visit.

For Sufis in particular, their visits to the Museum are often part of a journey to a sacred place where great Sufi masters once worshiped as well as the resting place of Rumi. Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore, an American Sufi poet, reflects the anticipation he felt before entering the sacred space of Rumi's tomb in a poem entitled 'Going to Konya,'

*Will Mevlana be tall or short, visible or invisible?
Will he greet me as I enter his tomb, his smile
like a sweet breeze blowing through Konya?*

*Will the tomb rise up into the starry heavens
themselves—its turquoise dome entering
dimension after dimension - each glowing in
Konya?*

*Am I expecting too much - O faint heart - or am
I expecting too little?*

*Will the tomb of Rumi be silent as stone or
softly echoing in Konya?*

*Will I see Rumi face to face at some moment in
some way and forever after my heart be like
an open ocean rowing in Konya?*

*Some saints leave traces - some saints leave
majestic mountains - Rumi's stature with God
a whole world seems to be shadowing from
Konya,*

When we step off the bus will my feet tingle?

*Will I hear the hammer beating the copper
Rumi heard - its heart-pulse bestowing on
Konya? (Moore, 2002)*

For Moore, and other Sufis, the Mevlana Museum is merely a façade that contains the remains of a saint and is the site of miraculous events and visions. Moreover, there are stories of Sufi and non-Sufi Turks as well as foreign Sufis who temporarily claim the space of the Mevlana Museum as their own Sufi lodge where they perform the whirling ceremony - flash mob style - during the opening hours of the museum. In one video, what appears to be a group of foreign pilgrims in various types of modest and less modest dress, women and men start whirling together among the museum display cases in the room known as the semahane, or room of whirling ceremonies (Mevlana Müzesi, 2008). In another video, officially sanctioned whirling dervishes, sponsored by the Turkish government to perform for tourists inside Turkey and around the world, turn around the semahane (Mevlana Sema 5, 2007).

In the film, the display cases and ritual objects have been removed from the room for the performance. The carpet that usually covers the floor is gone, revealing the slick wooden floor that was purpose-made for turning. Produced as a way of promoting tourism to Konya by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the video attempts to recreate the Mevlevi sema ceremony in what used to be the original room built for the ritual, but is now of course part of the secularized museum setting. This room was specifically designed so that when the dervishes participated in the turning ceremony, they would pay homage to the shaykh on an axis with the tomb of Rumi. They believed that this would ensure that Rumi was present in spirit during the sema (Tanman, 1992: 132). The situation proves ironic and shows the struggle of the government to represent

the 'authentic' Sufi tradition in a carefully controlled environment, but in a way that is not overly Islamic or religious. The government often refers to the whirling ceremony as a type of Sufi 'folk dance' practiced by 'folk dancers.' Notwithstanding the intentions of the organizers, many Sufi dancers speak of entering an ecstatic state while performing and audience members also have described experiencing the sacred while watching the dance.

Conclusion

Over the years, the Turkish government has supported the commodification of Rumi and his legacy as a result of the confluence of Turkish secularism and the state's capitalizing on the world's obsession with Rumi. A large portion of Konya residents benefit from the Rumi economy as well as others around the country involved in producing and selling dervish-themed products and whirling dervish shows. As Thomas Bremer, a scholar of religious studies, has pointed out in a study on religious tourism:

the touristic way of experiencing the world also relies on a modern aesthetic sense. Consequently, tourists serve as consumers in a marketplace of aesthetically pleasing experiences (Bremer, 2006: 32).

Tourists seek out 'authentic' destinations and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has done a good job of appealing to this need by keeping the Mevlevi traditions alive, albeit through the discourse of culture and ethnography.

The Mevlana Museum is both a sacred space and touristic place, for as Bremer demonstrates,

touristic concerns and religious interests respond to and reinforce each other, thus producing a meaningful sacred site (Bremer, 2006: 33).

Tourists enjoy experiencing a religious place that educates them about times past, and their interest in the Museum ensures that it remains open and accessible. Despite its museum setting, the space functions as a setting for rituals and maintains a certain level of reverence for the sacred, with the intention of encouraging reflection and education (Duncan, 1995: 10).

As the case of the Mevlana Museum shows, the making of place, and in particular sacred place, also deals with the making of identities, and the construction of identity is intimately connected with

the construction of places, as place and identity are interdependent. Modernity has dramatically altered the discourse of sacred space in Turkey. While it thrived as a center of religious training under the patronage of the Ottomans, with the establishment of the secular Turkish Republic, the Mevlana Museum was transformed to go along with the new ideology of Atatürk's reformatory. Mark Soileau argues that the saint 'can be a mirror of history, reflecting change,' which demonstrates how the perception of Rumi has altered over time (Soileau, 2006: 12). The Mevlana Museum itself mirrors the past of the Ottoman Empire as well as the present and future of the Turkish Republic.

As Eileen Hooper-Greenhill argues,

as long as museums and galleries remain the repositories of artifacts and specimens, new relationships can always be built, new meanings can always be discovered, new interpretations with new relevancies can be found (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:215).

By tracing the transformations of this museum, one can parse how the perceived meanings and construction of the shrine-turned-museum have changed over time and reflect changing attitudes in Turkish politics and society. The meaning-making of place also deals with the formation of identities and is intimately connected with the construction of place. What Rumi would have said about the Mevlana Museum is anyone's guess, but one can be sure that he would not have prevented anyone from visiting his shrine, including secular tourists, as reflected in a Persian verse of Rumi's poetry that is posted at the entrance to his shrine/museum,

*This shrine is the Ka`bah of the lovers,
All who come here lacking, find completion.*

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