



ABOUT THE DJVAN  
OF SULTAN MEHMED THE  
CONQUEROR (AVNĠ)



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Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror, powerful sovereign of the world power Ottoman State, which for centuries administered a vast area with great justice and provided humanity with beauties as if it had been the spring season of history, ruled for thirty years and lived during the years 1432-1481.

Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror, who by conquering Istanbul changed the course of history, was not just a powerful sovereign, a great political genius, a clear minded strategist, and victorious commander, but also an intellectual and able poet who inscribed his name in golden characters as he also did in the fields of culture, the arts and literature.

Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror was brought up by the brightest scholars, intellectuals and artists of his time and was the son of Sultan Murad II, who was also a poet. He was of noble spirit; he had been steeped in the rich and variegated culture, which was the mainstay of the Sublime State (*Devlet-i Aliyye*); he was at

his ease with various Oriental and Western languages, and he was competent in mathematics and the positive sciences, in philosophy and in literature.

We find information concerning Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror's poetic abilities in the *tezkires* (memoranda) and *nazire* (witty imitations of other poems) collections of his time, but also in the *Divan-ı Sultan Mehmed*, which is a collection of a part of his poems and a manuscript copy of which has survived to our days as one of the greatest of our cultural assets.

As yet, not all his poems have been found and the only known copy of the texts of the Sultan's poems is the one registered as number 305 in the Manuscript Poems Section of the Fatih Millet Library that was found by Ali Emirî Efendi. This manuscript was a collection made up mostly of *ghazals* (lyric poem with a definite pattern) and Ali Emirî copied it in his own handwriting twice and presented it to scholarly circles himself.

Dr. Georg Jacob was the first to compile a coherent collection of the Sultan's poems. The greatest part of this collection was made up of poems copied from a manuscript kept at the Library of the Upsala Royal University while some were obtained by other sources. The collection, which was published in 1904 in Berlin with the title of *Divan-ı Avnî*, was actually a small *gazeliyat* (collection of *ghazals*).

The second publication of the Sultan's poems was the *Fatih Divanı* by Saffet Sıtkı (Bilmen), published in 1944 on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul. It was prepared on the basis of the manuscript copy by Ali Emirî of the manuscript at the Millet Library. This work was done in a very haphazard way, contains absolutely no explanation of the verses, but does contain a lot of reading (of the originals in Arabic characters), transcription, printing and evaluation mistakes.

The third publication of the *Fatih Divanı* was the one prepared by Kemal Edip Ünsel (Kürkçüoğlu), also on the occasion of the 500th

Illustration 1. Portrait of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror 1944. (Feyhaman Duran, Sabancı Collection, Istanbul, 1995, p. 191)



anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul that was titled *Fatih'in Şiirleri* (The Poems of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror).<sup>1</sup> It was published in 1946 by the Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) and was completely based on the Ali Emirî copy. This book, comprising 87 poems, ten of which were obtained from other sources, was the most scientifically sound collection to date. It was not just a transcription, but also contained a facsimile reproduction of the Ali Emirî manuscript copy. Nevertheless, this book also has reading, printing and evaluation mistakes, even if they are not numerous.

The fourth collection of the poems of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror was *Fatih ve Şiirleri* published in 1992.<sup>2</sup> This publication prepared by Ahmed Aymutlu comprised also an explanation in prose of the verses. Nevertheless, due to the many mistakes of reading and of interpretation of the meanings, this book has no scientific qualities whatsoever.

The last publication of *Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's (Avnî) Divan* was the one prepared by Prof. Dr. İskender Pala, who is an expert of *divan* (in this case the word refers not to the collection of poems, but to the style with which they were written, in other words to classical poetry) literature. In this work, published in 2001,<sup>3</sup> İskender Pala provided information concerning the cultural background of the Sultan under the title of "The First Poet Sovereign to Establish an Empire," an overview of language and literature during the times of the Sultan, a description of the Sultan's protection of poets and of his poetic side and finally he listed in alphabetical order various poems, including their translations into prose and detailed explanations.

Nevertheless, an evaluation done considering the deep roots of classical literature, its profound and variegated cultural base and the systematic relationship between the visible and the deeper meaning, deriving from centuries old social, cultural, historical and literary experiences, shows us that, just like in the case of previous such publications, this work also contains many reading, printing and evaluation mistakes



Illustration 2. Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's monogram. (*TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 12, p. 468)

and that both the versions in prose and the explanations have incredibly serious and frequent mistakes. It is clear that the renditions in prose were prepared in great hurry, in a way not reflective of the original syntax and with interpretations not in accordance to the original message. As for the explanations, Prof. Dr. İskender Pala cruises superficially over the intricate and profound layers of meaning making up the background of the poems, without delving deeper into them. His attempt to vulgarise *divan* literature fixes him on the most superficial meaning, making him lose sight of the spirit of the poems. As far as the limited space provided by this paper permits us, we will refer to some of these mistakes in reading, interpreting, expressing in prose and explanation. In the near future we shall publish a detailed and scientific paper in which we will describe these mistakes that are in contrast with the intellectual and literary personality of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror.

We would also like to announce that we have finished preparing a book concerning the Sultan's *divan* that we had been preparing for a long time. Within the next few months, this book that includes the text of the *divan* with commentary, its rendition into prose and multifaceted interesting explanations, will be published.

Now let us analyse a few of these *beyit* (couplets), which are more representative of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's intellectual, mystical, religious and literary personality, and let us enjoy together the beauty of these gems of eloquence and meaning that reflect his shiny spiritual, religious, intellectual and artistic world. Let us also remind you that the numbers you will see on the borders of the verses are based upon Edip Ünsel's version.

1. Kemal Edip Ünsel, *Fatih'in Şiirleri*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 1946.
2. Ahmed Aymutlu, *Fatih ve Şiirleri*, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1992.
3. İskender Pala, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed*, Şûle Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001.

4. Muhammet Nur Doğan, *Şeyh Galib-Hüsn ü Aşk* (Text, Nesre Çeviri, Notlar ve Açıklamalar), p. 339.

**Yüziñ meh-i ıyd ü ser-i zülfiñ şeb-i İsrâ  
Gamzen yed-i Mûsâ leb-i lâ'lin dem-i İsa**  
(1-1)

(Oh Prophet!) Your face is like the moon of a festive night, your hair is like the night of İsrâ... Your meaningful glance is like Moses's miraculous hand, your ruby like lips are like Jesus's life giving breath.

In this first ghazal, which seems to have been written as a eulogy to the Prophet Muhammad, the face of the Prophet is compared to the moon on a festive night, because of its luminosity and because its appearance heralded the beginning of a happy and saintly era for mankind, akin to a festivity; his hair is compared to the night of İsrâ (when the Prophet Muhammad was bodily carried by God from Mecca to Jerusalem), because of its length and blackness. According to the poet, the meaningful look of the Prophet Muhammad resembles the white and miraculous hand (*yed-i beyza*) of the Prophet Moses, which instilled fear and confusion into the hearts of his enemies and peace of mind into those of his believers; the Prophet's lips, as precious as rubies, resemble the breath of Jesus, which through his miraculous lips resuscitated dead people and cured ill people, since they also have blown a new life into the hearts of believers.

In the poem the lips of the Prophet have been compared to *dem-i İsa*. *Dem* means breath, but also blood, in which case this compound noun would signify "the blood of Jesus." This brings to mind wine and according to Sufi symbolism, love, because according to the Christian religion wine represents the blood of Jesus. Thus a similarity has been established between the red colour of lips and of wine.

**Bu hüsn-i Hudâyî ki Hudâ sana veripdir  
Mânî-i cihân yazmadı tasvîrine hemtâ**  
(1-2)

(Oh loved one!) Of the divine beauty that God gave you, not even Mani could create the equal.

Mani was the Persian founder of Manichaeism and also a famous miniature

painter. It is said that his Scriptures called *Erjeng* or *Erteng*, which were full of sacred and enchanted miniatures, were revealed to him. In the verses, the fact that not even Mani had been able to render the beauty of the lover symbolises this beauty's uniqueness.

**Alın kamerine yüziñ ayına müşâbih  
Bunca göz ile görmedi bu çarh-ı muallâ**  
(1-3)

(Oh loved one!) Even though it looks with so many eyes, this exalted firmament has not seen a moonlit night as shiny as your forehead nor a full moon as beautiful as your face.

The forehead has been compared to the moonlight, because of its whiteness and luminosity, with the whole face being similar to a full moon. The word *kamer* means both moon and moon light. In these verses it has been used with its second meaning. A shiny full moon is a frequent image of divan literature. Another example of this is the 1667th couplet of Şeyh Galib's *mesnevi* (poetry composed of rhyming couplets, each with a different rhyme) titled *Hüsn-ü Aşk*.<sup>4</sup> Here Şeyh Galib describes the wine in the glass by comparing it to the full moon in the middle of a moonlit sky:

**Mehtâbda meh meh içre mehtâb  
Mey şîşede şîşe meyde gark-âb**

In his couplet, Avnî compares the stars in the sky to eyes. A careful reading of these verses will show us also that the black hair surrounding the moon like face has been compared to the night.

**Şol câm ki nûş eylemişem bezm-i  
gamında  
Bir sâde habâbıdır anın künbet-i hadrâ**  
(1-4)

*Such was the goblet of wine I drank in your grief filled absence that the celestial dome is but a simple drop of it.*

The poet compares the Prophet Muhammad to a lover and the world in his absence to a tear filled banquet. The love he feels for him is like wine in comparison to which worldly cares (the celestial dome) are insignificant and of a temporary nature, just like a drop.

*Avnî seni medh eyledi çün tarz-ı gazelde*

*Matla' dedi yüzüne vü ağzına muammâ*

(1-5)

*(Oh loved one!) Avnî has composed a ghazal to praise you and he calls your face matla and your mouth a riddle.*

*Matla* is the place of appearance or rising (of the sun, moon or stars) and also the first couplet of a kaside (poem in praise of someone) or ghazal. The term *muamma* means riddle in general or more specifically a riddle in rhymes. The face of the Prophet is being compared for its beauty and luminosity to the rising of a heavenly body, while its mouth to a riddle because of the secrets it harbours.

*Kâ'be hakkı Avnî baş eğmez namâza  
yüz yumaz*

*Kaşların mihrâbına secde yeter  
kıblem bana*

(3-7)

*(Oh my loved one to whom I turn as if you were) my kible! Avnî does not prostrate himself in prayer for the Kaaba, nor does he cleanse his face... For me it is enough to sit in adoration, with your eyebrows as my mihrab.*

The *kible* is the direction of the Kaaba to which Muslims turn when praying, while the

mihrab is the niche in a mosque indicating the direction of the Kaaba. The expression "Avnî does not prostrate himself in prayer for the Kaaba, nor does he cleanse his face," is to be taken as a metaphor within the context of Sufi philosophy. It means that prayer should not be hypocritical nor be done with pride, but only as a way of showing one's love to God, who is the most sublime of the loved ones. In divan literature the loved one's eyebrows are frequently compared to a mihrab. In the same way the presence of the loved one and in particular the sanctity of its face is considered akin to the *kible* for the lover. What must be underlined here is the fact that within the context of Sufi beliefs, the love for a mortal is seen as a symbol for the love towards God and that the love described in the context of divan philosophy and aesthetics is always strictly platonic.

*Gece yol üzre yatıp mest nakdi aldırırım*

*Ne kaldı Avnî elinde k'ola bahâ-yı şarâb*

(5-5)

*Last night I lay down drunk, along the road and got robbed... Oh Avnî! What have you got left with which to buy wine?*

The word *nakid* (money) symbolises reason while wine symbolises love. Thus within the context of Sufism the contraposition between money and wine symbolises the contrast between reason and sentiment. According to Sufism, reason and love cannot co-exist, to attain love one must abandon reason. The following couplet by Ziyâî from Mostar is a good example of the contraposition between reason-money and love-commercial good and of how the only way to attain love is to abandon reason:

*Aklumun nakdin metâ'-ı aşk-ı yâra vireli*

*Hâce-i âlem hakı-y-çün görmedüm aslâ  
ziyân*

(g.343-2)<sup>5</sup>

5. Müberra Gürgendereli, *Hasan Ziyâî: Hayatı-Eserleri-Sanatı ve Divanı* (İnceleme-Metin), p. 273.

*Since the moment I let go of the money of reason to obtain the love of my loved one, the teacher of the universe (Prophet Muhammad) has never let me be the less for it.*

In his couplet, Avnî tells of how, intoxicated with love, he lies drunkenly along the road and loses his money-reason. Now he has nothing left with which to buy wine-love.

*Ten-i bî-câna müjen hançeri kim câna geçer*

*Hasta-i aşka ecel şerbeti dermâna geçer*

(10-1)

Illustration 3. Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror Süheyl Ünver Miniature 1953. (*Fatih'in Defteri*, Süheyl Ünver, İ. B. B. Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996)



*(Oh loved one!) A dagger made of one of your eyelashes (your irate look) provides my well nigh dead body with a new life just as the cup of death comes as succour for a lovelorn person.*

In divan poetry, verses referring to cutting or sharp pointed objects like swords, daggers or arrow points were completed with the concept of water, because water was used to sharpen these objects. Lovers long for the moment when their loved one will wound them with a sword, dagger or arrow. They are under the impression that this will douse the fire in their hearts, just like water would. The following couplet of the *Su* (water) *Kasidesi* of the great poet Fuzulî is a good example of this:

*İste peykânın gönül hecrinde şevkim sâkin et*

*Susuzam bir gez bu sahrâda benim çün ara su*

*Oh loved one! Here is your arrow point, use it to douse my love in your absence. I am thirsty, wander around this endless plain and look for water for me.*

In his couplet, Avnî compares the dagger like eyelashes of his loved one injuring his body to a lover finding solace to his pain by drinking from the cup of death. The difference being that these dagger like eyelashes will revive him.

*Avniyâ kılma gümân kim sana râm ola nigâr*

*Sen Stanbul şâhısın ol Kalatada şâhdir*

(14-5)

*Oh Avnî! Do not harbour the hope that that beauty will submit to you, because you are (just) the sovereign of Istanbul, while she of Galata (the Christian area of Istanbul).*

Here we have a contraposition between Istanbul proper, see of the government and

prevalently Muslim, on the southern side of the Golden Horn and mainly Christian Galata on the northern side. Istanbul was where the poet himself (the Sultan) had his palace, while Galata or Frenkistan (land of the Franks or Europeans) was where this Christian beauty lived. The Christian beauty had through her charms become sovereign of Galata in the eyes of the poet. According to Avnî, Galata, with its *huri* (beautiful women said to inhabit paradise) like women, was much better than the real paradise, and the women of Galata, gently swaying like cypresses while walking, were better than the cypresses of paradise.

The poet compares his own domain to Galata and reaches the conclusion that Galata is better. Thus despairs that this Christian beauty, whose domain of Galata is better than his, will ever submit to him.

*Bir harâret var derûn-ı dilde zahm-ı tîğma*

*Gamzesi tîği erişince benim bana geçer*

(19-3)

*Such is the longing deep in my heart for the sword (of my loved one) to wound me that when her sword like look touches me, my life comes back to my body.*

This couplet, which at first sight may look a bit complicated in its Turkish version, becomes much clearer when one takes into consideration the formulae and aesthetic values of classical literature and in particular interprets in a correct fashion the other poems of Avnî.

Kemal Edip Ünsel, who published the Sultan's poems, thought that as it stood, the second verse of this couplet was meaningless and reached the conclusion that "benim bana" (mine to me) must have been a spelling mistake, with the correct version being "benim yana" (to my side).<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is not correct and the truth will easily surface, once the words are analysed carefully and the whole body of the work of the Sultan is taken into consideration. The first ben refers to the soul (*nefs* in Arabic), while the second to the body. Thus when the poet longs for the sword like look (wrathful, meaningful, coquettish) of his loved one to wound him, it means that he is expecting back his life and soul. Consequently the "benim bana"

6. See Kemal Edip Ünsel, *ibid.*, p. 22.



Illustration 4. Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror Süheyl with scholars Ünver Miniature. (*Fatih'in Defteri*, Süheyl Ünver, İ. B. B. Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996)

7. See İskender Pala, *ibid.*, p. 109.

is correct, but should not be interpreted as mine to me, rather as my soul to my body. The fourth and following couplet proves this. The first couplet of the tenth ghazal, which we have already seen, is also along the same lines:

*Ten-i bî-câna müjen hançeri kim câna  
geçer*

*Hasta-i aşka ecel şerbeti dermâna geçer*

*(Oh loved one!) A dagger made of one of your  
eyelashes (your irate look) provides my well nigh  
dead body with a new life just as the cup of death  
comes as succour for a lovelorn person.*

Water is mentioned in the context of pointed objects like swords, arrows and daggers, because steel is manufactured using water, they shine like water and water is used to douse fires like the one burning in the heart of the lover.

The verses refer also to how the parched earth (the wounded body of the lover) will revive once it is watered (the dagger like look of the loved one is thrust into his body).

*Hüsn ile cânânlar içre cân-ı cânândır  
Üveys*

*Şerbet-i lâ'liyle dil derdine dermândır  
Üveys*

(30-1)

*With such beauty, Üveys is the most desirable  
among loved ones and the nectar of his lips is a balm  
to all broken hearts.*

The name Üveys, which is an Arab male name, is frequently used in classical Turkish literature to symbolically denote the loved one and is only one of many such anonymous symbols. Within the context of platonic Sufi love, which is the basis of classical poetry, ideal beauty is reflected in the beauty of a male. Thus the fact that in many poems of the Sultan the loved one is a male, should be interpreted in the light

of symbolism representing divine love and the name of Üveys should not be seen as the name of a real person. Stating like Prof. Dr. İskender Pala does that the Sultan must have written these verses for one of his servants or slaves<sup>7</sup> means that one has not understood the relationship between symbolism and reality in divan literature. In addition to this, the least one can say is that it is a lack of respect for Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's personality.

*Kâmetin yâd etmez ana kim leb-i cânân  
gerek*

*Sakınır lâ-büüd hevâdan her kime kim cân  
gerek*

(41-1)

*In the same way that he who needs his loved  
one's lips does not think about its stature, someone  
pursuing (immortal) life should not be distracted by  
fleeting whims.*

The rhetorical figure used in this couplet is the *lef-ü neşr*, which consists of first listing a series of symbols and then the essential elements symbolised by them. Thus the poet couples the stature of his loved one with whims and the lips of his loved one with immortal life. The lips, which we use to talk, are considered, in classical literature, a symbol of not just words, but also of the spirit and of life. This is due to some interesting connections between word and spirit. In some verses of the Holy Quran and in some *hadis* (sayings and acts of the Prophet Muhammad), Jesus Christ is defined as the spirit, which God blew into the Virgin Mary and the power to miraculously resuscitate dead people and cure illnesses through his breath is ascribed to Him. Thus in texts of classical divan poetry, when one referred to lips, the mouth or to talking, allusions were frequently made to Jesus Christ's life giving properties, resuscitation, miraculously wise talking and to the spirit. In this couplet, the expression *leb-i cânân* (lips of the loved one) symbolically refer to the spirit, finally being able to

reach God as the most exalted loved one and indirectly attainment of immortal life. *Kamet* (stature) refers to the beauty of a human body and thus to worldly pleasures. According to the poet, whoever desires the attainment of immortal life and to reach the most exalted loved one (*fena fi'llah* or annihilation and becoming one with God), has to purify himself from worldly pleasures and passing whims. The word *heva*, in addition to whims means also air currents, which could cause other ailments.

*Âteşde karâr eyledi gerçi ki semender*

*Sûz-i dil ü cân ruk'asına olmaya hâmil*

(47-2)

*The salamander has decided to live in the fire so as not to have to wear the clothing of (love) that breaks the heart and the spirit.*

The salamander to which the poet is referring is a mythical animal, which it was believed lived in the fire. The poet interprets the fact that it lives in the fire, to its imaginary fear to assume the position of a lover, because that would prove to be much more burning. This is an example of *hüsn-i talil* (the assignment of a suppositious reason to a certain event). The poet compares love, which is an abstract (*mücerred*) concept to a burning shirt that would burn both the body and the soul. This couplet, with its elegant turns of speech and mastery of rhetorical figures, is a very good example of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's poetic abilities and of the sophistication of divan literature.

*Gözün ki kasd ede kan dökmeğe hüsnâm okuyam*

*Müjen ki sîneleri çâk ede sinâna yazam*

(51-3)

*(Oh loved one!) If your (sword like) eye willed to wound me, I would say a prayer for that sword (to be*

*sharper); if your (lance like) eyelash willed to pierce my breast, I would write (a talisman) on that lance (for it to better pierce).*

Here reference is made to prayers said or talismans written to facilitate the function of weapons like daggers, arrows and swords by making them sharper. The following verses also refer to such prayers called *dua-yı seyf* (sword prayer) or *hızr-ı yemânî*. In particular the following couplet by Nev'î, which refers to a sword given to the governor of Damascus, implies that a prayer was said for that sword every day at a certain hour:

*Du'â-yı seyf okurdum sanki vird-i subh-gâhında*

*Getürdiler önüme bir mücevher tîg-i bürrânı*

(k. 46-2)<sup>8</sup>

A prayer for the sword I said at dawn break, when they brought me a jewel like sharp sword.

The following couplet from the *Ferhâd ü Şîrîn* mesnevi by Lâmi'î, means "It was as if it was under a spell, such was the way that sword cut through (marble) that everybody was enchanted" and can be interpreted in the sense that spells were made on such objects:

*Sanasın tîgine efsûn okurdu*

*Tirâşım kim ki görse baş kordı*

(b. 1688)<sup>9</sup>

That a sword prayer would influence the enemy was another common belief:

*Du'â-yı seyf ile ol düşmeni ider teshîr*

*Meger hamâil olup zahm-i tîri kurtara ser*

(Nev'î *Divan*, k. 16-23)<sup>10</sup>

With the sword prayer one can conquer the enemy and the sword strap will heal the sword wound.

From the following couplets from the Karamanoğlu Nizamî *Divan*<sup>11</sup> one can under-

8. Dr. Mertol Tulum-M. Ali Tanyeri, *Nev'î Divan* (Tenkidli Basım), p. 138.

9. Hasan Ali Esir, *Lâmi'î Çelebi Ferhâd İle Şîrîn* (İnceleme-Metin-İndeks), p. 212.

10. Dr. Mertol Tulum-M. Ali Tanyeri, *ibid.*, p. 55.

11. Halûk İpekten, *Karamanlı Nizamî, Hayatı, Edebi Kişiliği ve Divanı*, p. 55.

12. Dr. Mehmed Çavuşoğlu-  
Ali Tanyeri, *Zâti Divanı*  
(Edisyon Kritik ve Transkripsiyon), Ghazals Chapter,  
vol. III, p. 404.

stand that this prayer served also the purpose of safeguarding one from being wounded or killed:

*Ol nev-bahâr-ı hüsnâ irmesün diyü  
Sûsen du'â-yı seyfi ile hızzü'l-emân okur*  
(g. 30-5)

Lest the sadness of autumn should befall the beauty of a fresh spring, the combatant recites his sword prayers.

*Nizâmî gamzen ile leblerini yâd ideli  
Du'â-yı seyfi okur gâh geh du'â-yı kadeh*  
(g. 7-7)

Whenever Nizâmî remembers your look or your lips, he recites the sword prayer or a prayer for a full glass.

From the following couplet by Ahmed Paşa, which can be translated as, "Do those beautiful eyes cast a spell on their arrow like looks, so that the desire for an arrow point is aroused in those that behold their wounds," one sees that spells were cast upon sharp weapons to increase their effectiveness.

*Gamzesi okuna efsûn mı okur gözleri kim  
Olur ol zahmı gören tîr ile peykâna heves?*

Let us also keep in mind that "Hüsam" and "Sinan" could be symbolic names denoting the loved one.

*Hüsnün ki mesken eyledi haddin serîrini  
Sundu kaşın revân ana miskîn iki keman*  
(59-2)

*Your beauty has settled on the throne of your cheeks and your eyebrows have offered it two musk smelling cups of wine.*

In these verses by the Sultan, beauty has been compared to a sultan sitting on a throne, the cheeks being the throne. On the other hand the eyebrows have been compared to a servant offering him two cups of wine. The words *revân*, *miskîn* and *kemân* have all double meanings. *Revân* means both "immediately" and "wine," *miskîn* both "black as musk" and "perfumed as musk," while *kemân* means both "bow" and "goblet of wine." In the case of these verses, it is the second meanings, which have been employed. Thus the *îham-ı tenâsiüb* (wilful ambiguity) adds a humorous note to the verses.

If one takes into consideration the fact that in classical literature the black eyeballs in the centre of the eyes that are reddened with inebriation, are frequently compared to a glass of wine, to which musk has been added, one can better appreciate the profound mastery that is hidden in these verses.

*Nâvek-i dil-dûzdur cân mülkün âbâd  
eyleyen*

*Hançer-i dildârdır dil hânesin ma'mûr  
eden*

(62-2)

*It is the heart-piercing arrow (of the beloved) that makes the earth of the life prosper; it is the dagger (like look) of the beloved that refreshes the spirit.*

This couplet mentions two weapons. The first is an arrow with a steel point (the steel of which has been sharpened by means of water), to which the wrathful (or meaningful or coquetish) look of the beloved is compared, since it wounds the heart of the lover and remains stuck in it. The process, by which the steel of the arrow-point has been sharpened, reminds one of water and it is this water that douses the fire of love burning in the lover's heart. The arrow waters the spirit of the lover, which is compared to earth, and makes it prosper. The second weapon to which the look of the beloved is compared is a dagger. The lover has hung on the

wall of his spirit, which is compared to a house, the image of this dagger like look, just as if it had been the image of a dagger itself, with the hope that it should safeguard his house. This refers to a custom that was once widespread and still is present. Namely the fact that images of the sword *Zulfikar* (the double pointed sword of the Caliph Ali), with auspicious prayers inscribed over it, were hung on the walls of coffee-houses, shops or houses, in the belief that it would save the house or building in general from catastrophes like fires and earthquakes and bring it luck. *Zatî*, who was a poet of the 16th century, refers to this same custom in the following verse:

*Üstine yazdum anun "lâ seyfe illa Zulfikar"  
Şekl-i gamzen dâr-ı dilde eyledüm peydâ Alî  
(g. 1634-3)<sup>12</sup>*

*Oh Ali! I hung the image of your look in the house of my spirit and wrote over it the hadîs "there is no sword, but Zulfikar".*

While on the one hand *Avnî* describes, following well tested metaphors of divan literature, how the look of the beloved makes of him a happy man, on the other he refers to an interesting and widespread custom, which had been in existence since the 15th century.

*Gamzeler tîrini toldurmuş kaşı  
kurbânına  
Dil nişân olmak diler benzer susadı  
kanına*

(65-1)

*The arrow like looks (of the beloved) have replenished the eyebrows, making them similar to the sheath. To quench one's thirst one hopes that the spirit will be pierced.*

The word *kurban*, which in Turkish is generally understood with its meaning of ritual slaughter can also mean quiver for arrows or

sheath for a sword, especially when mentioned in a context containing also terms like arrow, arch, sword, eyelashes or eyebrows. This is because the word *kurban* derives from the Arabic *ka-ra-be* which means approaching or bringing close and thus is used to describe both the action of putting those weapons into a case and the case itself. In these cases the word *kurban* would be used in this way, but there would also be a *îham-ı tenâsüb* (wilful ambiguity) with the more common usage of ritual slaughter or animal to be ritually slaughtered. Thus *Avnî* compares the wrathful look of his beloved to an arrow and her arched eyebrows to a quiver into which her arrows are placed.

In the only copy of the *Avnî Divan* to have reached us, the word *tîrini* has been erroneously spelt as *tîğini*. This is clear from the context and from the other words in the same text. None of the editors of the modern printed versions of this work noticed this error or did not feel it necessary to correct it.

*Gör mey ferâğını nazar et sakf-ı deyre  
kim*

*Nâr-ı Kelîmden diler isen zebâne(y)i*

(68-5)

*If you desire to take a flame of the fire of the interlocutor of God (Moses) (if you want to speak with great eloquence just like Moses did on Mount Sinai) go to the upper storey of the tavern (but it means also church) and see how the wine is poured.*

There are a lot of points that should be cleared if this couplet is to be correctly understood. The compound word *sakf-ı deyr* means the upper storey or attic or gallery of the church. Nevertheless the word *deyr*, in addition to church (or temple in general) could also mean literally tavern, which would be a metaphor for "humanity, a reunion of scholars or saintly people, a dervish lodge, the heart full of divine love, enthusiasm and knowledge of a mature scholar" (See Süleyman Uludağ, *ibid.*, page 365 and oth-

13. Mehmed Tevfik, *İstanbul'da Bir Sene*, pp. 163-4.

Illustration 5. The Bosphorus. (L'Orient, E. Flandin)

14. See the Tâhâ Sura, 9-13<sup>th</sup> verses.



ers). If we consider the word *deyr* to mean tavern, then the compound word would indicate the upper storey of a tavern. To be more precise, it would mean the gallery on which the better sort of customers sat or the big barrels from which wine would be got with buckets after having ascended a few steps. Information about the latter is to be found in the section devoted to the old Istanbul taverns of *İstanbul'da Bir Sene* (A Year in Istanbul) by Mehmed Tevfik (1843-1893), also known as Çaylak Tevfik:

As for the barrels and jars... Since wine is kept not just in big barrels, but also in big jars, taverns are even called *humhane* (from *hum*, which means jar)... These barrels being very big, the servants in the taverns ascend by means of stairs to their top, from where they take the wine with buckets..."<sup>13</sup>

*Ferağ* means transfer, in this case pouring a liquid like water or wine. *Mey* being wine, it is clear that in accordance to the previous description, the couplet is referring to the helpers in a tavern going up with stairs to the top of the barrel, taking wine with a bucket and pouring it into the customers' glasses.

The *Nâr-ı Kelîm* compound word refers to the fire seen by the interlocutor of God (the Prophet Moses) on Mount Sinai. According to

the Holy Quran,<sup>14</sup> while going from Midian to Egypt where his mother was, the Prophet Moses lost his way. Suddenly he beheld a fire near a tree on Mount Sinai and turning to his family he told them "Wait here! I am sure that I saw a fire. I may be able to take a flame for you or I may find someone there to tell us which way to go." Once there he heard a voice telling him, "Oh Moses! I am most certainly your Lord. Take off your sandals, for you are in the holy valley of Tuva..."

The Holy Quran was the biggest source of inspiration for the poets of classical *divan* literature and within the context of the Holy Book the events dotting the life of the Prophet Moses were the most referred to. Almost all the stories from the Prophet Moses's life, from the Quran or the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), have been referred to, in various occasions and have become part of the rich ensemble of symbology within *divan* literature. Thus, the words *Nâr-ı Kelîm* and *zebâne*, in this couplet by Avnî, refer to this event in the life of the Prophet Moses and also to a complex and profound set of symbols related to Sufi philosophy. In classical literature, the word *nâr* (fire) was used to mean wine, because of its colour and effect, but it had also meanings tied to

Sufism, like “love, the warmth of love or the flame of passion. *Zebâne* on the other hand meant flame and also “language, eloquence and richness of vocabulary.” In this couplet it refers to the fire the Prophet Moses saw on Mount Sinai and to the flame he wanted to get from it, but also to the communication between him and God. The poet compares the taking of wine from the top of the big barrel to the Prophet Moses wanting to take a flame from the fire on Mount Sinai. He also implies that to be able to gain divine confidence and thus be informed of secrets like the Prophet Moses was one should partake of the wine, which symbolises divine love. Consequently the poet is also comparing the tavern and the big barrel of wine to Mount Sinai. Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror made a similar comparison also in the second couplet of his 52nd ghazal:

*Hum-ı meyden götürü âlemi seyrân edelim*

*Tûr-ı aşka çıkalım yine münâcât edelim*

*Let us drink from the jar of wine and watch the whole world; let us thus climb Mount Sinai and converse (with God).*

*Yüz sürem bir şehsüvârın atı izine deme*

*Dahi gerdine erişmeden gubâr eyler seni*

(69-3)

*Do not prostrate yourself on the ground trod by a rider, for she will make dust out of you before your forehead touches ground.*

Once the words *şehsüvâr* and *gerd* and the expression “prostrating oneself” (with the forehead touching the ground) are all taken together, the couplet is revealed for having many more meanings than at first apparent.

Within the context of the meanings and culture of divan literature, the hierarchy made up of “God - sun - sultan - beloved” is very impor-

tant. These four elements are frequently compared to each other on the basis of their main characteristics and attributes and are used as metaphors of each other.

The word *şehsüvâr* in the couplet describes the beloved, Sultan of all beauties and also God and sun, within the context of the relationship between the sun and the smallest particle, which is the main idea of Sufism. In other words the ascent of man following the cycle of *seyr-i urûc*, from the lowest level to the top level, when he will be annihilated and become one with God (*fenafi'llah*). The fact that dust particles rise with the effect of the heat and under the sun light seem to be flying upwards, was once interpreted as the dust being attracted by the sun and trying to reach it. This was seen as a symbol of the Sufi vision of the universe, according to which everything evolves until it reaches God. The perceived fact that dust should rise up to the sun and even become one with it was compared to a devoted dervish being attracted by divine love and reaching God and becoming one with Him after having followed the *seyr-i urûc*.

Prostrating oneself on the ground trod by the beloved or by her horse is another favourite divan figure of speech. Here prostrating oneself on the ground and rubbing one’s face on the earth is compared to putting on kohl around the eyes. The most famous kohl being the one made in the Persian city of Isfahan, the expression *kûhl-i İsfahanî* (Isfahan kohl) is frequently used. It was believed that eyes with kohl around them were protected from intense sunlight and could see better. It was even believed that some kinds of kohl would let one see illusions, the exact position of stars and through solid objects. Thus, rubbing one’s face on the earth upon which the beloved (symbolising God - the sun - the sultan) had trod or on earth that was somehow connected to her, was a way of expressing one’s attachment, loyalty, respect, obedience and love to her and just like kohl improved the sight of eyes. Rubbing one’s face of the earth would improve the sensitivity of the spirit and mind and make one perceive things that one

15. See Süleyman Uludağ, *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü*, p. 86.

16. İsmail Erünsal, *The Life and Works of Tâci-zâde Ca'fer Çelebi, With a Critical Edition of His Dîvan*, p. 50.

would not normally realise. *Can gözü* (the eye of the spirit) is what lets you see the future and the truth, without being distracted and without falling in error. In addition to this, a spirit that has been enlightened by the light of divine truth will perceive the inner meaning of things. This is also called *kudsî kuvvet* (divine force).<sup>15</sup> The following couplet by the famous 15th century poet Tacizade Cafer Çelebi, is another good example of kohl being compared to a strong sense of perception and to divine force:

*Ne meclis olur ki hâki pâki*

*Cân çeşmine ayn-i tûtiyâdur*

(k. 9/1-6)<sup>16</sup>

*There are places the ground of which is so clean that it can be used as kohl for the eyes of the spirit.*

In the light of all previous explanations, the couplet can be interpreted in a Sufi context in the following way:

*(Oh searcher of truth!) If you prostrate yourself on the road to God, the Sultan of absolute beauty, and if you detach yourself from all worldly considerations, applying all yourself to his service, at the very moment that you take this decision, that Sultan will reveal to you all the beauties of the innermost secret and, the true nature of things and will guide you towards Himself, just like the sun attracts the most minuscule particles.*

In conclusion we can say that in the light of the studies we made about the Divan of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (Avnî), of the preparation of "An Analysis of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror's Divan" for the "Cultural Atlas of the Age of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror" published by the Foundation for Turkish History, on the occasion of the 550th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul and of the preparations for our recently published book on the meaning and interpretation of this divan, we can summarise the great Sultan's cultural and aesthetic values in poetry with the following points:

1. The poetry of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror reflects, not just the cultural background of the Sultan, who had received very good schooling, knew many languages and was knowledgeable about the scientific, cultural, philosophical, political and intellectual situation of his time, but also the accumulated values of classical Turkish literature, which at the time had almost reached its summit of perfection.

2. The sentiments and ideas expressed in these poems that make up just a small divan, reflect the Sultan's artistic personality in a colourful, sincere and original way.

3. The couplets reflect the ambitious personality of the sovereign of a world power, who wanted to be not just the Sultan of the Orient, but also the Caesar of Europe and also his strength of character accentuated by his mastery of poetry and words.

4. A comparison based on a serious research of the great poets of his time, but also of all the poets of classical Turkish literature will show us that Avnî was not at all a mediocre poet as has been stated, but, especially if one takes into consideration also his style, which was very variegated as far as imagination and knowledge was considered, a first class artist, who had nothing to be envious about other poets.

5. Avnî's poetry reflects not just all the cultural and aesthetic heritage of classical Turkish literature in all its magnificence, but also the metaphors, symbolism and even allegory of Sufism and of all the elements of Sufism. In his poems, the beloved, all the physical elements of his beloved one's beauty, wine, tavern, church, idol, *zînnar* (rope girdle worn by Christians), wine bearer, sultan, slave etc. are used both in their worldly (literal) meanings, but also as metaphors and symbols of Sufi (Platonic) thought.

6. Avnî's poems are amazingly well endowed with figures of speech like *teşbih* (comparison, parable), *teşhis* (personification), *mecaz* (metaphor), explicit or implied *istiare* (metaphors that indicate both the symbol and

the essence or only one of these elements), *telmih* (allusion), *hüsn-i ta'lil* (attributing an event to a person eulogised even though that person has nothing to do with it) and *iham* or *tevriye* (ambiguity).

7. Thanks to this divan, which is not big but is rich in literary and aesthetic values, Avnî can be considered to be a master poet, occupying a prominent position in Turkish literature. A serious explanation and commentary of his divan, will underline this.

8. The philosophical, cultural, Sufi and aesthetic gems in these poems show us how Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror was not just a powerful sovereign, but also an artist and poet of renown. This in turn shows how the Ottoman State attributed great importance to science, culture, philosophy, faith, art and literature.

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