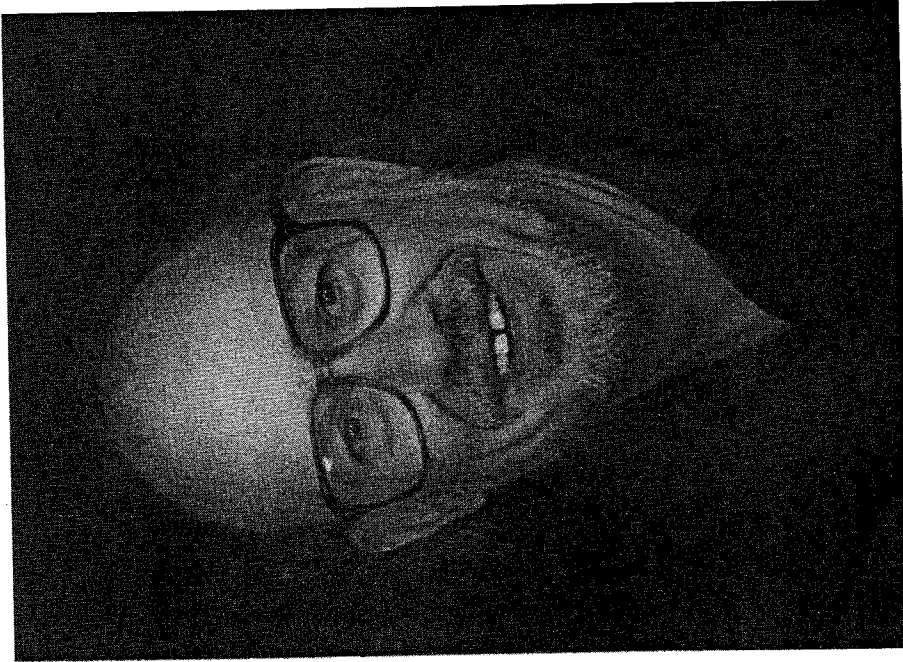


Inspired Speech

Prophecy in the Ancient Near East
Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon

edited by

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T & T CLARK INTERNATIONAL
A Continuum imprint
LONDON • NEW YORK

2004

Even if we accept Rost's thesis that the throne succession narrative is a unified composition,⁷ this tells us little about Bathsheba. We can, by suturing two passages together, conclude that she is (a) the daughter of a man named Eliam (2 Sam. 11.3), and (b) that a man named Eliam is the son of Ahithophel, one of David's most influential counselors (2 Sam. 23.34). But whether these Eliams are one and the same person is impossible to say, and the fact that her name later changes to 'Bathsheba' only complicates the problem.⁸

Bathsheba thus remains swathed behind a veil of mystery, and this has led many readers to 'fill in the gaps' and colorize her character.⁹ Alice Ogden Bellis, for example, portrays her as 'an innocent victim of (David's) lust', though the text itself is conspicuously silent (Ogden Bellis 1994: 149).¹⁰ Jon Levenson and Baruch Halpern imagine her not as a victim, but as a politician shrewd enough to entrap David sexually and replace him with the fruit of this entrapment, Solomon (Levenson and Halpern 1980). Samuel ben Nahmani argues that David never commits adultery at all because the soldiers in David's army were required to write 'bills of divorcement' before going into battle (*b. Shab.* 56a). The Torah says nothing about this 'law', however, and this makes Nahmani's interpretation look like several other attempts to beatify David.¹¹

Roger Whybray condescendingly labels Bathsheba 'a good-natured, rather stupid woman who was a natural prey to more passionate and cleverer men' (Whybray 1968: 40), but this remark has done little more than enrage feminists. Elizabeth Wurtzel, for example, insists that Bathsheba is a prime example of 'those sexually compelling Bible women' (like Jael and Delilah) who represent the kind of sexual independence which frightens men (Wurtzel 2000: 43). Esther Fuchs uses darker colors. Explaining Bathsheba's silence before David's 'rape', she argues that it is to be expected because the Bible portrays *all* women—as a class—as slaves (Fuchs 2000: 14–16). Cheryl Exum pushes this ideological argument a step further by accusing the biblical narrator of deliberately 'withholding her point of view', because he likes 'disrobing Bathsheba' as much as David does. Exum calls this behavior a 'crime', and labels as 'criminal' the interpretations of all contemporary (predominantly male) commentators who 'perpetuate' this opinion (Exum 1993: 173–74).

Adele Berlin's reading, however, relies less on political ideology than literary insight (Berlin 1982). With Levenson and Halpern she too sees a certain amount of through parochial instead of holistic lenses has led in recent history to some rather horrifying theological and political consequences (Huffman 1969).

7. Seiler (1998: 326) prefers Rost's analysis to Wirthwein's.

8. 'Bathsheba' probably means 'daughter of error' (1 Chron. 3.5).

9. 'Gap-filling' is not in itself unacceptable or inappropriate unless it becomes a substitute for holistic interpretation (Sternberg 1985: 186–229).

10. Ogden Bellis, however, distinguishes between the 'flat' character in 2 Samuel and the 'developed' character in 1 Kings.

11. Brueggemann (1985) documents several other attempts to rescue David's reputation. Van Seters (1987: 244) reminds us that 'some [rabbis] attempted to exonerate [David], but those who found him guilty of wrongdoing saw a divine purpose in the events; namely that David was to be an example of contrition and repentance to give hope and encouragement to Israel when it sinned'.

BATHSHEBA'S SILENCE (1 KINGS 1.11–31)

Michael S. Moore

Bathsheba plays a pivotal role in Israel's first successful attempt at genetic dynasty, but the contours of her character remain blurry and indefinite.¹ Certainly one of her roles is that of *mediator*,² but the biblical text's reticence to give details about this role has frustrated interpreters.³ With George Nicol we might compare this story with other texts in the biblical Bathsheba tradition and wonder here about the relative level of ambiguity (Nicol 1988). Yet we might also wonder about the 'deep aesthetic qualities' lying beneath this ambiguity and whether contemporary scholarship has fully grasped its source.⁴ Because this is the final chapter of the deuteronomistic succession narrative (2 Sam. 11–1 Kgs 2), the Bathsheba story appears at a critical moment in Israelite history and a critical point in the history of Israelite literature. For this reason alone we can ill afford to ignore it, regardless of whether we read it as a unified composition (Rost 1982) or as a lately edited amalgamation (Wirthwein 1974).⁵ Historical, literary, and even ideological approaches have told us much about Bathsheba, but we still know little about why she plays this mediatorial role.

This study will read the story of Bathsheba alongside another, similar story from its immediate Syro-Palestinian context, the legend of *Aqhat* (KTU 1.17–19). My primary goal will be to tease out of this comparison some of the more obvious similarities and dissimilarities and thereby try to situate Bathsheba's character within a more plausible socio-literary context. My secondary goal is to demonstrate the enduring value of comparative intertextual analysis, particularly the kind which employs both historical and literary methods as complementary (not antithetical)—a holistic program long championed by the recipient of this *Festschrift*.⁶

1. For a recent sampling of interpretations from widely different perspectives see Levenson and Halpern 1980; Augustin 1983; Bal 1987; Yee 1988; Nicol 1988; Exum 1993; Ogden Bellis 1994; Berlin 1994; Moore 1995; Stone 1996; and Nicol 1997.

2. Margalit (1989: 476–85) notes that female characters often enact roles as initiators in ancient Syro-Palestinian stories, and I offer a survey of female mediators in my dissertation (under Huffman's guidance; see Moore 1990: 20–65).

3. Ambiguity is characteristic of biblical narrative. Only rarely will a biblical narrator explicitly expose a character's inner thinking—what Stanley Hopper calls 'inscaping' (Hopper 1978: 63).

4. Gunkel 1901: 2. In this paper there is no need to assume that attention to literary themes and characters automatically precludes, dismisses or even speaks to questions of history and/or historiography.

5. Seiler (1998: 3–26) helpfully summarizes the discussion since Rost.

6. Over thirty years ago my *Doktorvater* pointed out that the decision to read the Bible

has hired an assassin named Yatpan (Joab) to attack Daniel's son Aqhat (Solomon)¹⁶ and steal away from him his 'bow' (the throne).¹⁷ While it may not seem obvious at first, the primary elements of this story resonate deeply with the primary elements of the *Bathsheba* story. Both traditions use similar characters, manipulate similar plotlines, and highlight strikingly similar themes in order to address the same problem—the problem of genetic dynastic succession. The following chart breaks down these parallels into three subcategories: *characterization*, *plot*, and *theme*.¹⁸

<i>Succeeding David (1 Kings 1-2)</i>	<i>Succeeding Daniel (KTU 1.17-19)</i>
<i>Characterization</i>	
David Nathan Solomon Bathsheba Abishag/(Adonijah) Benaiah	El Daniel Aqhat Anat/Paghit Anat/Paghit Yatpan
<i>Plot</i>	
David is impotent Solomon is 'longed-for' Solomon rides David's mule Abishag replaces Bathsheba Adonijah steals the throne Nathan employs Bathsheba Bathsheba falls down before David Bathsheba impugns David's integrity Bathsheba impugns Adonijah before David David impugns Joab before Solomon Bathsheba 'deceives' Adonijah Solomon's reign becomes plagued Solomon warns Adonijah Solomon gives Adonijah options Bathsheba responds to threat to Solomon Solomon lives David curses his enemies	Daniel is impotent Aqhat is 'longed-for' Aqhat receives the divine bow Anat steals the bow Anat steals the bow Daniel employs Paghit Anat falls down before El Aqhat impugns Anat's integrity Anat impugns Aqhat before El Anat impugns El Anat 'deceives' Aqhat Aqhat's bow becomes 'lost' Anat warns Aqhat Aqhat gives Anat options Paghit responds to threat to Aqhat Aqhat lives Daniel curses cities near Aqhat's death
<i>Themes</i>	
dynastic ambition is universal old age and death are inevitable throne/power/virility is temporal female mediation is complex female mediation is necessary	dynastic ambition is universal old age and death are inevitable 'bow'/power/virility is temporal female mediation is complex female mediation is necessary

16. Is she attacking Aqhat to defend Baal, like she attacks Mot (KTU 1.6.ii.30-37)?

17. That Aqhat's bow represents his virility is a logical conclusion as long as we recognize the broader implications (Hillers 1973). Virility is only one of the requirements for effective leadership (Stone 1996: 102-107).

18. This study proceeds, as does my study of the Jettu tradition (Moore 2003), on the presumption that most Syro-Palestinians are at least nominally aware of these stories, characters, plots, and themes.

shrewdness in Kings, but in Samuel she agrees with Ogden Bellis that Bathsheba operates only as a 'flat' character (Berlin calls her an 'agent'). In Samuel her function is simply (a) to be a married woman and (b) to have adulterous sex with David. Later, when Abishag enters the picture, Bathsheba's character becomes considerably more complicated and Berlin traces this complexity to the literary irony triggered by the second mention of Abishag in v. 15. In short, 'Bathsheba, who was once young and attractive like Abishag, is herself now aging, and has been, in a sense, replaced with Abishag, just as she comes for the purpose of replacing David with Solomon' (Berlin 1994: 28). Later, when Adonijah comes to ask for Abishag's hand (doubtless as his own 'agent' to win back the throne), Berlin notes the ambiguity in Bathsheba's response, but fails to offer a convincing explanation for it. Is it because Bathsheba is feigning naïveté before Adonijah's request? Is it because she still fears this Davidic prince and the potential harm he might do to her son? Is it because Bathsheba wants to use Adonijah, like Medea in Euripides' famous play, to wreak revenge against a philandering husband?¹³

It is unfortunate that so few interpreters have tried to examine Bathsheba's behavior against other female characters in ancient Near Eastern literature because this approach has great potential for unraveling some of these questions. Jack Sasson recognizes the potential of comparative literary analysis in his study of Ruth and notes that in its place we often find 'a pervasive tendency to rely too much on a *deus ex machina*... to unravel the plot of the tale' (Sasson 1995: viii). Neal Walls also recognizes the potential of the comparative approach, employing it effectively to situate Anat's character against several other 'virgin goddesses' (Walls 1992). This leads him to deeper reflection on 'the enigmatic quality of her (Anat's) symbolic identity' within 'the complexities of ancient myths and mythic characters' (Walls 1992: 2). Sasson's approach has not yet been fully engaged by biblical scholarship, but Walls's has been hailed as 'original', full of 'common sense' (Pardee 1994) and a 'model' for further research (Parker 1994).¹⁴

The fourth column of the third tablet of the Ugaritic poem of Aqhat (KTU 1.19.iv.18-61) has a heroic character named Daniel (Nathan) 'empowering' (Ug. mrr, iv.33) a female character named Paghit (Bathsheba) to use outright deception in response to a horrible injustice—one with which El (David) has passively refused to get involved (KTU 1.18.i.1-19).¹⁵ In an act of savage violence El's daughter Anat

12. Like Bathsheba, Medea makes sure that her protector (Aegeus, king of Athens) takes an oath: 'Dear woman... if you come to my country, I shall in justice try to act as your protector... (this) I swear by Earth, by the holy light of Helios, and by all the gods' (Euripides, *Medea* 719-53). Unlike Medea, however, Bathsheba does not sacrifice her child in a fit of rage, imagining that 'this will sting my husband the most' (817).

13. Commentators are divided. Berlin (1994: 29) sees Bathsheba as 'cunning' and 'jealous', but Gunn (1978: 137) sharply disagrees. Fokkelman (1981: 1, 394) characteristically looks for a mediating position.

14. See Moore (2003) for (a) an intertextual connection between the Anat and Jettu traditions, and (b) an interpretation of the latter as a Yahwistic parody of the former.

15. Clifford (1975: 300) speaks of the 'David-like charms of Baal in the heavenly court', but the aging David looks more like El than Baal.

*Inspired Speech**Characterization*

Like *Aqhat*, the biblical succession narrative works with a stock cast of characters, what Vladimir Propp calls the *dramatis personae* (Propp 1968: 21-23). Leadership vacuums, whether in the divine (El) or human realms (David), cannot exist indefinitely. The world has to go on and the people in this world have to be competently shepherded. Malevolent forces are always anxious to fill up these vacuums. Ambitious usurpers always stand waiting in the wings to seize power and take control. Thus impotent leaders, for all their experience and wisdom, eventually become a problem, and how this problem is addressed becomes the stuff of succession narrative.

Like Naomi in the book of Ruth, the characters Daniel in *Aqhat* and Nathan in the Bible serve as 'dispatchers' (Sasson 1995: 201), individuals whose function is to react to this perennial crisis of impotence/aging/death. They have to arise because the potential successor—the character Propp calls the 'sought-for person' (*Aqhat* in *Aqhat*, Solomon in 1 Kings; Obed in Ruth)—stands in dire need of help. Not having any power of his own, he stands in a very liminal, precarious situation. When leadership vacuums lead to leadership conflicts (Adonijah vs. Solomon; Abishag vs. Bathsheba; Anat vs. Aqhat), wise heroes must arise to fill in these vacuums, especially if the crisis is driven by true 'villainy' (Anat; Adonijah; Joab). Often these roles become fluidly interchangeable as the characters in the *dramatis personae* interact and interface with each other and narrators become creative, sometimes splitting roles in half or making several characters enact the same role.¹⁹ But to varying extents these ancient tales always work with a stock cast of characters, and it is in the defining of the phrase 'varying extent' that effective characterization replaces ineffective characterization, genius replaces mediocrity, and pan-cultural celebration replaces localized memory.

Plot

Plots are interesting only when they make effective use of surprise and suspense and lead to truly satisfying conclusions. Without these elements a plotline becomes lifeless and slow, and therefore easily forgotten. With a good story, though, plotting the points of the action is like connecting the dots on a map. Sometimes the shortest distance is not necessarily the best path. Sometimes it is more important to take the long way around to build suspense, or introduce a subplot, or test a character's mettle. In *Aqhat*, El is not *truly* impotent (see *KTU* 1.23), but Daniel is, and so is David (and Kirta and Abraham). David's impending death, like Elimelech's in Ruth, is the engine which drives the plot, the catalyst for everything which follows. The crisis of Daniel's impotence is what drives everything in *Aqhat*, however twisted or violent or strange or bizarre. Everything in these plotlines begins with an

initial crisis, the 'childless patriarch' being one of the more common in androcentric cultures (Bauckham 1997). One cannot imagine David's sons fighting for the throne under the watchful eye of an engaged David. Neither can one imagine Anat taking advantage of Aqhat apart from El's *laissez faire* aloofness.

As we watch the potential successors square off (Ammon vs. Absalom, Adonijah vs. Solomon, Anat vs. Aqhat), the depth of their dilemma comes painfully into focus. The very existence of succession narratives reminds us that dynastic success is hard and dangerous. It is easy for postmoderns to forget this, but stories like these, so universal, so ubiquitous, testify to the difficulty of the problem and the persistence of the ancients to address it. Zadok anoints Solomon only after the shedding of much royal blood. Aqhat arrives as El's gift to Daniel only after much fervent prayer and careful priestly ritual.²⁰ Paghit goes to reclaim her brother in the same spirit Isis goes to reclaim Osiris (Griffiths 1980) or Anat goes to reclaim Baal (*KTU* 1.5.vi.25). That these conflicts can and must involve both heaven and earth is never questioned because the cosmos is not segregated into neatly stacked cubicles. Anat's attack against Aqhat is an attack on El because it so savagely assaults his devotee Daniel, the mortal whose name means 'judgment of El'. Anat attacks Aqhat for the same reasons Adonijah attacks Solomon—not just because she wants power, but because conflict is necessary to advance the plot. This attack must sufficiently motivate a response from the *dramatis personae*.

Whether power is symbolized by a 'bow' (Ug. *qšr*)²¹ or a 'beautiful girl' (Heb. *ra'ra yāpā*, 1 Kgs 1.3) or a 'ring' (Tolkien 1954) is inconsequential—what is important is that this power be symbolically portrayed in such a way that would-be usurpers truly 'long' for it—like Anat 'longs' for Aqhat's bow (*KTU* 1.17.vi.13—Ug. *šb*), like Ammon 'longs' for Tamar (2 Sam. 13.2). Whether this symbol is manipulated or stolen by one or more anti-hero forces is irrelevant—what is more important is that this language grab the soul of the narrator's audience and squeeze hard. It has to drive them to their knees in terror, and lift them to their feet in hope. Whether the 'longed-for' successor eventually survives or not is peripheral—what is more important is that peace be restored to the cosmos. Whether this attack is from clearly benevolent or clearly malevolent sources is also peripheral—what is more important is that it sufficiently motivate a 'dispatcher' to arise and empower a 'mediator'. Even whether the method used by this 'mediator' is 'ethical' or 'unethical' is secondary to the plot of the story—what is more important is that equilibrium be competently restored via this mediator's mediation. Thus Bathsheba uses deception just as surely as Paghit deceives Yaipan, or Jael deceives Sisera, or Tama deceives Judah.

In fact, it is in the execution of this deception that female mediators really show off their skills (Thompson 1932-36; Williams 2001). In Judith, for example, the

20. The literature on Ugaritic ritual is growing: see de Tarragon 1980; Wright 2001; Parde 2002.

21. Hilliers' thesis is appropriate as long as the focus remains on Anat's desire for sexual power over Aqhat, not just sexual intercourse (Hilliers 1973: 72-74). Walls seems to miss this point when he limits her motivations only to sexual drive vs. confused sexual identity (Walls 1992: 190).

19. De Moor (1969: 170-71) and Taylor (1982) note this phenomenon in the 'twin' Ugaritic goddesses Anat and Athirat, and Taylor points to similarities in the portrayals of Deborah and Jael in *Judges*.

narrator takes great pains to show off Judith's ability to deceive Holofernes.²² In Ruth, Naomi takes great pains to adorn Ruth before she goes to Boaz and convinces him to intervene (Moore 2000: 347-53). In Aqhat (*KTU* 1.19.iv.43-46), Paghit takes great pains to deceive the murderer of her brother, Yatpan:

She puts a hero's outfit (underneath)
 She places the knife in her belt
 She places the sword in its scabbard
 And over (it) she puts a woman's outfit.²³

So effective is this ruse, the men in Yatpan's camp call her 'the woman who hired us', an obvious reference to Anat as the androgynous deity who hired them to assassinate Aqhat. What Paghit does after this preparation is unclear because the tablet breaks off, but doubtless she does what all mediators do. She restores equilibrium to a volatile situation by any means at her disposal. Deception is not a secondary role in the repertoire of female mediators. Even 'old woman' priestesses in Anatolia must use it (Moore 1990: 20-29). The whole point of homeopathic ritual is to create a likeness of something or someone in order to trick one's attackers into going after the likeness instead of the person imitated by the likeness. That Bathsheba does the same thing when she plants the 'likeness' of a promise in David's mind can be concluded from two simple facts: (a) we have no textual evidence for such a Davidic promise, and (b) female mediators habitually use deception in such situations. Bathsheba's deception may look muted when compared to, say, the deceptions of Paghit or Judith or Anat or Esther, but this is probably because the narrator does not want to portray David as a total 'dupe' (*pace* Marcus 1986).

Themes

From this brief analysis of characterization and plot we might now list a few of these narratives' more dominant themes. One of the reasons for preserving succession narratives is to assure future generations that succession crises, no matter how difficult, are not the end of the world. If managed appropriately they can eventually be weathered, scars and all. Dynastic ambition is never going to go away because the desire for power is a universal human longing. Jeroboam wants just as desperately to sire a dynasty as does David or Daniel—that is why Ahijah's condemnation of him is not simply of him, but of his entire *house* (1 Kgs 14.10). Baal, too, wants his own 'house' (*KTU* 1.3-4) just as David wants his own 'house' (2 Sam. 7.1-16). Leaders everywhere, when faced with their mortality, become highly motivated to think about the legacy they will leave for the next generation. In succession narratives it is the *realization* of this mortality which often drives aged leaders into action, however passive or reticent they may be to relinquish their power to a successor.

22. Craven (1983: 121) remarks that 'only the book of Ruth offers a parallel' to Judith's behavior, but Craven does not look at the Ugaritic evidence.

23. On Anat's androgyny see de Moor (1987: 264 n. 250) and Walls (1992: 154-59).

Yet power itself is temporal and fleeting and David dies just as certainly as Aqhat's bow becomes lost and Umapishtim's 'special plant' falls from Gilgamesh's hands (*ANET*: 96).²⁴ In some situations God/the gods punish(es) these leaders for clinging to power too long and/or withholding it from legitimate successors (Hanson 1996). In others they send (or allow) mediators to pry it out of their hands. In the story of David, Bathsheba succeeds in loosening David's grip by 'reminding' him of a promise he probably never made, but one which he probably should have made long before. Female mediation is one of the most traditional, most common, and most effective ways to force this issue with recalcitrant, desperate, and/or suffering leaders.

Conclusion

Marvin Pope says of Anat that she 'embodies the tensions and paradoxes of feminine power in an androcentric world' (Pope 1994: 350). The same might be said for Bathsheba. In rabbinic legend, the triad of David-Bathsheba-Uriah become symbols for Adam, Eve, and the serpent, but this kind of interpretation does little to situate her character in its socio-literary context (Stern 1987). Neither do contemporary analyses which read her character through ideological and theological lenses while ignoring the ancient literature to which this story owes its basic shape. Doubtless the foregoing suggestions will not answer every question about her character, but at least they attempt to situate her character in a plausible socio-literary context. Apart from some understanding of this context the temptation to colorize her character will remain too strong to resist, and Bathsheba will continue to remain silent.

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24. Note that Umapishtim's wife is responsible for Umapishtim's decision to offer Gilgamesh the 'special plant'.

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A QUEST FOR THE DIVINE AND... THE TOURIST DOLLAR:
THE DILEMMA FACED BY CONTEMPORARY DERVISH ORDERS

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I owe a debt to Herbert B. Huffmon for introducing me to the reality of modern dervishes and their sacred dance. Being keenly aware of H.B. Huffmon's dislike of opinion-based scholarship, I will attempt to craft an anthropological/ethnographic report on the subject. This paper should be considered a starting point only, with its aim to discuss the religiosity of the modern day public rites/performances of the dervishes. Should we view these rites/performances as expressions of the sacred or are they merely theatre?

The Dervish

The term *dervish* refers to a number of Sufi *tariqas* (orders, from an Arabic word meaning 'way' or 'path') which use music and dance as a means to approach unity with the divine. The dance is a series of bodily movements linked to a thought and to a sound or sounds. The sound fuses thought and movement together, leading to an ecstatic state or *hal* that orients the dancer toward the divine (Burke 1975: 49). Dervish orders include the Bektashi, the Alevi and the Mevlevi, who are the focus of this article. The Mevlevi are predominantly Turkish, but include Kurds, Syrians and others; Middle Eastern locales which have a Turkish community are often home to dervishes who may or may not be Turkish (Elias 1995: 77). The Mevlevi have gained a particularly strong following among non-Turks in the West.

Public rites/performances of the dervish *sema* (see below) can readily be found; a group was performing in Cairo during the spring of 2002. The group had been performing for a lengthy period of time after having initially performed in the Khan al-Khalili bazaar. In May of that year I attempted to see a rite/performance, but the group had moved to the Citadel in Cairo where it performed to, according to a number of accounts, 'techno', not traditional, music.

The Mevlevi (Arabic Mawlawiyah)

The order was founded in the city of Konya by the thirteenth-century poet Celâleddini Rumî (Arabic, Muhammad Jalal al-Din Rumî), and the leadership of the group has usually remained within his family until today. Much of the founder's poetry has been translated into English from the original Persian (see bibliography).