A Persian Qur'an?: The *Masnavi-e Ma'navi* as Scripture

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ABSTRACT

Matthew B. Lynch: A Persian Qur'an?: The *Masnavi-e Ma'navi* as Scripture
(Under the direction of Carl W. Ernst)

This dissertation investigates the category of "scripture" as constructed

within the field of religious studies generally and in Islamic studies particularly. I

argue that narrow definitions of "scripture" as restricted to solely the Qur'an within

Islamic traditions do not account for the diverse phenomena of scriptural

production within Islamic and Islamicate polities, past and present. As a

consequence, the field has re-instantiated a normative understanding of scripture

within Islam, while subsuming other Islamic scriptural writings as of secondary

value. Using the example of the *Masnavi-e Ma'navi*—a 13th century epic poem from

the Persian and Islamic traditions—I demonstrate how scriptural traditions have

been formed and utilized by Muslim religious communities and how these

scriptures in turn shape their communities*.*

In my argument, the *Masnavi* constructs itself as, and comes to be, an Islamic

scripture: it has even been referred to as "the Qur'an in Persian." The *Masnavi-e*

Ma'navi's status as scripture stems from two aspects: its internal discourses about

and related to scripture and its reception and usage as scripture. Within the work, it

identifies itself as a scripture through internal discourses related to the Qur'an and

other Islamic traditions, such as hadith and Sufi folklore. This internal discourse is

supported by claims to authority the *Masnavi* makes about itself—what I call its

"self-authentication" as scripture. In terms of reception and usage, the *Masnavi* becomes recognized and recognizable as scripture through the interactions between its progenitor, Jalal al-din Rumi, and the disciples (the nascent Mevlevi order, later called "whirling dervishes") who formed the text's immediate audience.

I argue that the adoption of the *Masnavi* within the teachings and rituals of the Mevlevis shows a community in formation around a text— a process that mirrors the formation of the early community of Muslims around and by the Qur'an. I show how the (re)production of the *Masnavi* and its ritual use were intertwined within broader the socio-cultural landscapes of Anatolia and the Mediterranean. The *Masnavi* thus laid claim to Islamic scriptural authority within the intellectual, political, and spiritual environs of its epoch. As a consequence, scholarship on Islam, Sufism, and religious studies must revisit the definition of "scripture" within these fields.

For my father, Terry, the contrarian.

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I take it as a given within this project that no work comes to be solely as result of a single person's efforts. My dissertation is no exception. It would have been impossible for me to complete this project without the support of my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors. From the circle of poets with whom I first read Rumi in translation to the dissertation committee who so generously responded to the dissertation in its final form, I want to express my sincerest gratitude. To name everyone who had a role to play would be impossible. For those unnamed here, I hope you will find your own stamp within these pages.

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NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLITERATION

This dissertation draws on a number of primary and secondary source materials that originally appeared in Persian and/or Arabic. In my own renderings and translations of these materials, I have followed the IJMES (*International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*) guidelines for transliteration. Names of key individuals appear in the text first in their full transliteration; in subsequent citations, I have often used a more simplified spelling to aid in readability.

Since secondary source materials in languages other than Persian and Arabic use a broad range of transliteration methodologies, I have generally left quotations from other authors in their original form. Thus "*Masnavi*" will appear on occasion as "*Mathnawi*" in some quotations and citations. Likewise, the name of the poet "Rumi" may also appear as "Mawlana", "Mowlana", "Mevlana", "Khodavandgar", or "Jalal al-din Balkhi." These all refer to the same historical person—though, as I explain within, the titles used may indicate different attitudes towards him.

In terms of translation, I have followed the standard translation of the *Masnavi* by Reynold Nicholson. I have smoothed out his translation at points by removing parentheses within the quotations. Nicholson's translation is generally accurate and literal; however, it does have a Victorian flavor that can render the quotations overly quaint. On some occasions, I have found it necessary to either translate the passages myself or to utilize Jawid Mojaddedi's translation. The

footnotes will reflect this usage. My translations utilize Sobhani's critical edition of the *Masnavi*.

For the Qur'an, I have used Yusuf Ali's English version of the Arabic original, unless otherwise noted. Quotations from the Qur'an found within the *Masnavi* reflect Nicholson's or Mojaddedi's rendering of those passages.

I have included the original Arabic and Persian terms in my analysis when necessary. In the footnotes, I abbreviate the *Masnavi* as "M x: y-z", with "M" standing for *Masnavi*, "x" representing one of the six volumes of the text, and "y-z" representing the verses that are being quoted or cited. Similarly, Qur'anic citation appears as "Q x: y-z." I also abbreviate the *Encyclopedia of Islam, Volume 2* as EI^2, with the corresponding entry in quotations following thereafter.

The formatting and structure of the text, footnotes, appendix, and bibliography follow the standards of the University of North Carolina's "Thesis and Dissertation Guide."

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INTRODUCTION:

ON THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE IN THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND SUFISM

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Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."[1]

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It is well known that ʿAmr ibn ʿUthmān al-Makkī, seeing Hallaj writing something, said to him: 'What is this?'

'This?' said Hallaj, 'I put it on a level with the Qurʾan.'
Then Makkī cursed him and blacklisted him.[2]

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In the opening volume of the *Masnavi-e Maʿnavi*, the text explains how it is customary, within a courtly setting, for Sufis to sit facing the king. The Sufis have this pride of place, "for they are a mirror for the soul, and better than a mirror."[3] In the Sufis' polished heart, the king's beauty may be reflected back to him. Thus "the beauteous face is in love with the mirror: it is a polisher of the soul and a kindler of the fear of God in

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[1] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 59.

[2] A story attributed to Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, as quoted in Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Hallaj*, Vol. I, 114-115.

[3] M I: 3156.

men's hearts."[4] The latter part of this line utilizes a particular Qur'anic phrase, *taqwa al-Qolub*, to describe the function of Sufis as mirrors. Within its original context of Sura al-Hajj, this "heart-piety"[5] is a quality of those who "hold in honor the Symbols of Allah."[6] Thus, in a few short lines, the *Masnavi* ties the state of Sufis in front of kings to the Qur'anic context: their state is the precise one of "heart-piety" that the Qur'an has described.

The *Masnavi* continues this discussion of the mirror by further engaging with the Qur'anic imaginary by means of an invocation of the narrative of the 'most beautiful of stories,' that of Joseph.[7] In the *Masnavi*'s narrative, a friend of Joseph arrives and asks him to recount the tale of his captivity in the well and in prison—an experience Joseph likens to the waning period of the moon and to a seed that has been ground into the mill waiting to become bread. Following this exegesis of Joseph's state within the familiar scriptural account of his life, told in the voice of no less a figure than Joseph himself, is followed by Joseph demanding a gift of his friend:

> "Now, O so-and-so, what traveler's gift hast thou brought for me?"
> To come empty handed to the door of friends is like going without wheat to the mill.
> God, exalted is He, will say to the people at the gathering (for Judgment), "Where is your present for the Day of Resurrection?
> *Ye have come to Us* and *alone* without provision, just in the same guise as *We created you*.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Leonard Lewisohn, "Taḵwā", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

[6] Q 22: 32. (trans. Yusuf Ali, 829-830), Cf. *Qur'an va Masnavi*, 119.

[7] Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, "Yusuf in Mawlana Rumi's Poetry," in *The Heritage of Sufism, Vol. II*, 45-59. Schimmel sees the *Masnavi*'s deployment of the Joseph narrative, especially in his relationship to Zulaikha, as being metonymic for Rumi's relationship with Shams al-Din Tabrizi.

> Hark what have ye brought as an offering—a gift on homecoming for the Day
> when ye rise from the dead?
> Or had ye no hope of returning? Did the promise of (meeting Me) to-day
> seem vain to you?"[8]

Joseph likens his own request for a gift to that which God will demand on the Last Day, invoking both the Islamic eschatological framework as well as citing, in a mix of Persian and Arabic, the 94th verse of Sūra al-Anʿām.[9] Joseph explains to his friend why he should refrain from eating and rest, despite his long journey, using further Qurʾanic allusions to convince him. After this somewhat terrifying request for a gift from no less a figure than Joseph, his friend is at first ashamed. He asks, "How should I bring a grain of gold to the mine, or a drop of water to the sea of Oman?" Ultimately, however, the friend finally reveals what he has brought to Joseph:

> "I deemed it fitting that I should bring to thee a mirror like the light of a pure
> breast,
> That thou mayst behold thy beauteous face therein, O thou who, like the sun, art
> the candle of heaven.
> I have brought thee a mirror, O light (of mine eyes), so that when thou seest thy
> face thou mayst think of me."[10]

Just as the Sufi, in the previous story, had been a mirror for the king, in this story the mirror functions to reflect the beauty back to its recipient. At this point, the *Masnavi* slips out of the narrative voice, and begins to explain the symbols and metaphors it has just deployed. The text asks, "What is the mirror of Being?," only then to provide the immediate answer: "non-being."[11] It commands that the hearer (or reader) of the story "bring not-being as your gift, if you are not a fool." It continues, in a homiletic dialogue

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[8] M I: 31-37.

[9] Cf. *Qurʾan va Masnavi*, 119-120.

[10] M I: 3197-3199.

[11] M I: 3201.

with the audience, to explicate the role of the mirror, or the role of one opposite in revealing another: "Because every contrary is certainly made evident by its contrary; because honey is perceived to be sweet by contrast to vinegar."[12] It invokes the Qur'anic words of Iblis, or Satan, who saw himself as better than Adam, in order to show the limits of perception and the need for assistance in order to see properly.

The *Masnavi* follows this account with the story of a scribe who wrote down the Revelation during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. This scribe apparently became confused by the Revelation's rays hitting him alongside the Prophet, and became an enemy of Islam. The *Masnavi* 'quotes' the Prophet, who calls the man an "obstinate miscreant" for confusing his role with that of the Prophet's.[13] By extension, the *Masnavi* appears to be rebuking those who would claim a type of wisdom or role for themselves that they do not have.

However, this rebuke comes after the *Masnavi* has just cited the Qur'an, retold and explained the story of Joseph and added a narrative of its own about him, and then quoted the Prophet. The *Masnavi* thus arbitrates between the position of the scribe, who claimed a certain knowledge, and that of the Qur'an and the Prophet. It ultimately lands in favor of Muhammad and 'the Religion'—ostensibly making this judgment from a position of authority above that of the scribe who had received revelation. The Prophet, the Qur'an, and the narrator of the *Masnavi* all 'speak' in the same voice in regards to this scribe within the text.

The question that drives my study is this: how are we to understand a text that uses these methods? How is a text that speaks in the voice of Islam's prophet, at times

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[12] M I: 3211.

[13] M I: 3235.

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quoting his words and at times seeming to make them up, meant to be understood? How do we understand the function of the Qur'an in a text that quotes or alludes to it in over 15 percent of its 26,000 verses? Although it may seem precisely counterintuitive, given the repudiation of the scribe by both Muhammad and the *Masnavi*, it is my view that the text is positioning itself, perhaps *intentionally* paradoxically, as a scripture in its own right. Its exegetical function is clear: it tells the story of Joseph as a mirror for the Qur'anic story of Joseph, reflecting the features of that narrative back upon the previous narratives. The *Masnavi* also, somehow, polishes that mirror, both refining and enhancing its image; its stories add dimension and depth at the same time that they cite and reflect upon their source.

This framework was the genesis for my consideration of the *Masnavi* as scripture. In reading the explanation of the Sufis in front of the king, and then the figure of Joseph and his mirror, along with the story of a scribe who mistakenly received revelation, I began to view the text as operating at an authoritative level that could cite and invoke the Qur'an as well as embellish and expand upon it in its own unique ways. This, to me, did not appear to be simply exegesis, but an attempt to establish a work with its own claim to spiritual, and thus, scriptural, authority.

Of course, I was not nearly the first to make this observation. The famed quote, often attributed to the fifteenth century poet Jami, crystallized a certain understanding of both the text's 'author', Mawlana Jalal al-din Rumi, and his most famed writing:

> Mawlana's Masnavi is the Qur'an in the Persian tongue
> I am not saying he is a prophet, but he does have a book.[14]

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[14] 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, *Nafahat al-ons men hazarat al-qods.* (cf. Lewis, Franklin. *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*, p. 467-469). I address the problematic provenance of this quote later in the dissertation.

Even during Rumi's own time, there is evidence that the text was used in ritual settings alongside the Qur'an as part of his emerging order's praxis. The book's self-descriptions also betray just how important it should be considered: the first volume calls the *Masnavi* "the roots of the roots of the roots of the Religion." Yet to call the *Masnavi* a "scripture" challenges basic normative ideas of what is possible within Islam, given that the Qur'an has long been understood as the last and perfect revelation of God. Further, to discuss the *Masnavi* as scripture requires revisiting the taxonomical underpinnings of the field of religious studies, and to (again) reconsider the definition of the term "scripture" itself.

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<center>**The *Masnavi* as an Object of Analysis**</center>

In order to discuss how the Masnavi functions as a scripture, it is necessary to describe just what the book is, how it came to be, and how it has been understood. While authorship is a thorny issue, it is commonly accepted that the book was written by the great and knowledgeable mystic, Jalal al-din Rumi (1207-1273), in the second half of the thirteenth century (the seventh century of the *hijra* calendar). Rumi composed the work at the behest of his followers: according to traditional accounts, his disciples asked him to compose a *Masnavi*, at which point he pulled a piece of paper from his turban which contained its opening verses. These verses, "the song of the Reed," have come to be among the most famous in all of the Persian language.

While there exists some small disagreements over precisely when the book was begun and completed, generally scholars place the production of its six volumes of 25,575 verses[15] as having occurred between 1258 and 1273, or roughly the last decade

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[15] This is the number according to Sobhani's critical edition that is based on the earliest known copy; Nicholson's translation has 25,632 as he was using a different manuscript

and a half of Rumi's life.[16] The book's title, *Masnavi-e Ma'navi*, has been translated as "the spiritual couplets" and "the *masnavi* of hidden meanings." The *masnavi* genre (or *mathnawi* in transliteration from Arabic)[17] emerged as a popular verse form in the Persian language in the 10th century. It consists of rhyming couplets of ten or eleven syllables within a specific meter. Works in this genre can vary in length; the *Masnavi*'s 25,575 verses makes it significantly longer than Attar's most famous *masnavi*, the *Conference of the Birds*, which is only about 4500 lines of verse. It is also much shorter than another famous epic of the genre, the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) of Firdausi, which is around 50,000 verses. By way of comparison, Dante's entire *Divine Comedy* is about 14,000 lines in length.

The *Masnavi* has six discrete volumes, each introduced by a prose prologue in Arabic. The volumes range in length, with the second volume the shortest at 3,721 lines and the sixth the longest at 4,929 lines. Despite this, the sixth book appears to have been cut off, mid-narrative—leading to an explanation by Sultan Valad (Rumi's son) appended to the end.[18] A 7th volume circulated for some time, though it has largely been rejected as a spurious addition (with some notable exceptions).[19]

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up until when he had reached the third book. Cf. "About the *Masnavi*," http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/about_masnavi.html; accessed December 12, 2018.

[16] Franklin Lewis discusses some of these issues in his essay, "Towards a Chronology of the *Divan-i Shams*," in *Philosophy of Ecstasy*, 145-176.

[17] EI[2], "Mathnawi."

[18] I return to this topic in the fourth chapter of this project.

[19] Cf. Eliza Tasbihi, "Ismā'īl Anqarawī's Commentary on Book Seven of the Mathnawī: A Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Sufi Controversy," 33.

In the years following Rumi's passing, the *Masnavi* was widely republished and distributed—perhaps exceeded only by the Qur'an within areas of Persianate influence, including territories in the eastern Mediterranean, central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. It also has a vast commentary history composed by the Mevlevi Order (founded in Rumi's memory) and other Sufi groups. There were *masnavi-khane*, or "*Masnavi* houses," to teach the work across Ottoman lands from Baghdad to the Balkans. This allowed for the Persian text to be taught to popular audiences in local vernaculars like Turkish and Arabic. Additionally, Mevlevi *tekkes* featured recitations of the *Masnavi* for disciples of that order.

While much has been written about the *Masnavi*, in large part this has been done in the service of explicating its inner meanings. The poem's didactic tone and its wide range of discourses and narrative traditions do necessitate some explication, especially as audiences become further distanced by time, space, and language from its original setting. In this way, commentary and exegesis of the *Masnavi* function in similar ways to exegesis of other scriptures. Yet unlike other scriptural traditions, much of the extant academic scholarship on the *Masnavi* has not emancipated itself from the truth-claims and worldview of its subject matter. Thus the text remains under-theorized, to an extant.

Further, most approaches to the *Masnavi* embrace and reinforce Rumi's role as author, with the consequence that the text is a further demonstration of his status as "the most eminent Sufi poet who Persia has ever produced,"[20] as E.G. Browne described him. Rumi's intended meaning becomes the primary mode of discussing the *Masnavi*. In this way, it becomes possible to put the *Masnavi* together with other of Rumi's writings in

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[20] Cf. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*, 563. Browne goes on in the quote to state that the *Masnavi* "...deserves to be ranked amongst the greatest poems of all time."

order to develop a system of thought or consistent ideology inflecting all of his

writings.[21] This approach necessitates the decontextualizing of his writings—despite the

fact that this poetry probably spanned the length of several rather tumultuous decades.

It has a further function of placing the book and its value solely within Rumi's purview

and lifetime—despite the wide-ranging influence it had subsequently. In my approach

here, I aim to demystify the text. I describe how it functions both internally and within its

contexts of both production and reception. This necessitates, in my view, extricating the

book from the intention of the author—while still being attentive to the author and his

audiences' place and role within the contexts of the book's production and reception.[22] It

has also necessitated, to some extent, excluding certain aspects of what I might call

"enchanted" scholarship from my analysis: since much of the scholarship about Rumi is

produced by scholars with a strong affinity for his teachings, I have found it necessary to

treat these with a grain of salt, and have relied on more 'objective' treatments in order to

avoid the re-inscription of this enchantment and the further reification of Rumi.[23]

When discussing scriptural writing, it is also not uncommon to leave off the

question of human authorship and instead allow the text to speak for itself. For instance,

general usage when discussing the Qur'an is to quote it by saying, "The Qur'an says…"

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[21] For example, William Chittick's *Sufi Path of Love* identifies a number of themes and categories within Rumi's writings and then lists examples. These writings are from as disparate sources as his personal letters to his quatrains and ghazals to the *Masnavi*.
[22] A recent attempt to explicate the inner meaning of the work, and Rumi's intentions in creating that meaning, was undertaken by Safavi and Weightman in *Rumi's Mystical Design*. I discuss their approach further in Chapter Three.

[23] Franklin Lewis' scholarship on Rumi, for example, remains largely objective, or at least descriptive, on questions of historicity and Rumi's place within that history, and thus seems a more reliable source for discussing those matters than those who take as their starting point that Rumi is a saint whose wisdom transcends the ages. I discuss this issue further in the Conclusion.

rather than, for example, "Muhammad says in the Qur'an…". This is accepted usage for other scriptural writings, and since, in my view, the *Masnavi* lays claim to certain types of inspiration and authority, an approach that allows the text to speak on its own terms will open up new means of analyzing those claims (rather than, for example, reducing it to merely Rumi's own poetic eccentricities).[24] This method of approaching the text in terms of its own agency also connects with ongoing discussions within the study of religion about materiality, or how religious objects come to have their own agency amongst religious communities. The *Masnavi*, with its extensive manuscript history and pride of place of these manuscripts within Mevlevi and other settings, is a prime example of the power of the text-as-object.[25]

Since, in many ways, I see the *Masnavi* as acting in similar ways to the Qur'an—as an religious object as a scriptural text—I also explore the *Masnavi*'s relationship to the Qur'an. While some analyses see the *Masnavi* as a commentary on the Qur'an, or an exegetical treatment of the Qur'an, in my view the relationship between these texts is more complex. I build upon the approaches of recent scholars, including Nargess Virani and Jawid Mojaddedi, who have explicated aspects of Rumi's relationship to the Qur'an in

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[24] Cf. Jawid Mojaddedi, "Rumi, Jalal al-Din: Rumi's Teachings" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*: "In the fourth book of the *Maṯnawi,* he also states that the Sufi Bāyazid Besṭāmi (d. 261/874) received the same kind of divine communications as prophets, and that the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ-e maḥfuẓ*) in heaven was the source of his knowledge. He explains in this context that Sufis may use different terms (e.g., *waḥy-e del*) for their divine communication in order to imply that theirs is inferior to that of the prophets, but this is just for the sake of hiding the truth from the non-mystic (*az pay-e rupuš-e ʿāmma*; *Maṯnawi* IV, v. 1854)."

[25] My models for this approach to the text as a type of material object has been informed by Catherine Bell's "Ritualization of Text, Textualization of Ritual," as well as Cecily Hillsdale's "Translatio and Objecthood: The Cultural Agendas of Two Greek Manuscripts at Saint-Denis."

his writings.[26] Both scholars rely on Rumi's intent as the primary mode of analysis. In my view, the texts' relationships with each other is not explained solely by authorial intent, but is also contingent on the books' audiences. Much of the data that I utilize in my analysis was drawn from Persian-language scholarship of these two texts, largely in the form of concordances that offer little theorization about the two texts' relationship.[27] They do, however, offer insight into the technical process of quoting, translating, or alluding to the Arabic source material within the macaronic text of the *Masnavi*. What the function of that materials' presence is left up to other theorists.

Within contemporary debates about scripture in Islam, there have been attempts to expand the experience of revelation beyond that of the Qur'an and its messenger. For example, Abdulkarim Soroush discusses, in *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, how revelation is conditioned by context. This has the consequence that the Qur'an as revealed is but one form of God's message, but not necessarily its final or complete form, since human beings play a role in conditioning revelation.[28] Soroush suggests, in his writings, that Rumi himself was a recipient of divine wisdom, and thus the *Masnavi* is the written result of that experience. The conditioning of revelation by context, and the ongoing nature of divine self-disclosure, has also been argued by feminist Muslim scholars. Aysha Hidayatullah, in *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (and elsewhere) discusses

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[26] Cf. Virani's "'I am the Nightingale of the Merciful': Rumi's Use of the Quran and Hadith" and Mojaddedi's "Rumi." Virani's article examines themes and imagery Rumi borrows from the Qur'an and how they are deployed, but unfortunately (for our purposes) focuses on the *Divan*. Mojaddedi's approach is discussed further in Chapter Three. Both rely on Rumi's authorship and intent as a given in this analysis.

[27] Cf. Mirza's *Quran dar Masnavi*, Khorramshahi and Mokhtari's *Qur'an va Masnavi: Farhangvahre-ye ta'sir-e Ayat-e Qur'an dar Ebyaht-e Masnavi*, Kutanayi's *Quran va Masnavi-i maʿnavi : ayat-i Masnavi*.

[28] Abdulkarim Soroush, *Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, 109-118.

how the new conditions of the modern age as necessitating a new understanding or approach to the Qur'anic message.[29] The possibility of ongoing divine self-disclosure is thus not limited to the Qur'anic context, but could indeed be ongoing. Although they offer compelling evidence and hermeneutical methods, the approaches of Soroush and Hidayatullah largely function within normative and activist spheres of Islamic studies scholarship, which is not necessarily my aim here. However, they do demonstrate that the potential for new scriptures, or at least new revelations, can pose a controversial challenge to the normative boundaries of Islamic practice—as well as its perhaps inadvertent echo within Islamic studies scholarship of those practices. In the next section, I discuss scripture as occurring within the realm of human activity, and seek to show how analyzing the *Masnavi* as functioning as a scripture within that realm can open up new viewpoints on the text and the fields in which it could and should be studied.

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What is Scripture? (Revisited)

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The contemporary field of religious study continuously uproots itself in order to grow the field beyond its theological origins. What is taken as a given during one period of scholarship becomes, in later scholarship, the precise point of critique. Categories that once were constructed on comparative grounds become problematized by the invocation of differing epistemic and historical frameworks. Basic terms like "ritual" and "myth" need to be revisited and reexamined as the given-ness of what these terms mean and entail is shown to lack universal application. Some terms come to mask more than they reveal in terms of their object of study. Even the top-level categories of the 'major world religions' face reconsideration, as they exist neither as entities with a separate existence

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[29] Cf. Aysha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*, 80-82.

nor external from the practitioners who have shaped and continue to shape what the religious tradition is thought to be.

Within this upheaval of given categories in the field of religious studies, it was perhaps inevitable that the term "scripture" should come under special scrutiny.[30] Coming out of the Latinate tradition, scripture refers, literally, to what is "written." Primarily, "scripture" came to designate the written Bible which contained the Old and New Testament. Thus, the concept of scripture was laden with the authority of the textual in mediating religion, a legacy enshrined in the Reformation battle-cry, *solo scriptura*. Eventually, "scriptures" in other traditions were identified, and thus the term no longer referred primarily to the Jewish and Christian scriptural tradition. A hallmark example of this expansion can be found in Max Müller's collection, *Sacred Books of the East*.[31] This collection, published from 1879-1910, included major scriptures of the Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Confucian and Islamic traditions. In the latter case, this only entailed the Edward Henry Palmer translation of the Qur'an, published over two volumes in 1880. Other traditions admitted multiple entries into Müller's collection, a demonstration of Jonathan Z. Smith's famous adage: "Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization."[32] Regardless, these examples conformed to the

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[30] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, 2-3.

[31] Carlo G. Cereti, "The Sacred Books of the East," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2014, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sacred-books-of-the-east (accessed on 27 October 2018).

[32] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, xi.

definition of scripture as the sacred written textual materials of one confessional

tradition or another, a shift "from specific to generic."[33]

Even a generic definition has its limits. William A. Graham discussed these limits

in his examination into scripture, *Beyond the Written Word.* For Graham, "Scripture, not

unlike religion, or ritual, or any other significant element of human life and society,

proves finally ambiguous and elusive of simple definition or easy delineation."[34] Part of

the reason for this is that what is often identified as scripture as synonymous with a

written text was actually produced orally. The written aspect is secondary to its original

production and reception. Additionally, for Graham, it is difficult to ascertain precisely

what should be selected and counted as scripture:

> A further difficulty in delimiting scripture is to distinguish the primary sacred text
> or texts of a religious tradition from others that are also sacred but secondarily so.
> Such distinction between a community's preeminent scripture and the rest of its
> sacred texts is helpful in understanding many religious traditions, but others not
> at tall: in some cases, the panoply of texts revered is so great and the relative
> distinctions of authoirity and sacrality among them so unclear or unimportant
> that all have some legitimate claim to the title "scripture."[35]

The decisions made by Müller in collating his collection may have set the framework for

which of "the east's" texts may count as "sacred," yet these decisions may have been

rather arbitrary, or even influenced by the normative practices of the people who these

scholars had encountered.[36] In this way, the definition of scripture for Islam became

singular: echoing the normative Sunni perspective on the Qur'an's eminence while

ignoring other sacred works that held prominence within the Islamic tradition.

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[33] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, 6.

[34] Graham, *Beyond the Written Word,* 3.

[35] Ibid., 3-4.

[36] Cf. Kendall W. Folkert, "The 'Canons' of 'Scripture'", in *Rethinking Scripture*, 171-172.

In another acclaimed work in the field, *What is Scripture?*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith devotes the entire manuscript to both problematizing and answering the titular question. Smith's approach is comparative and historical. He demonstrates that the concept of "scripture" has a resonance across linguistic and confessional traditions, though what is called "scripture" is often not written, but oral/aural traditions.[37] He cites certain Vedas and the Zoroastrian Avesta as examples of the latter; and he further points to the Qur'an's linguistic root as "recitation" rather than writing as an example of scriptural orality. Rather than argue for a single definition of scripture, Smith demonstrates that it is a multifaceted phenomenon that both is a product of human activity as well as an agent in producing humans in certain ways:

> Fundamental, we suggest, to a new understanding of scripture is the recognition that no text is a scripture in itself and as such. People—a given community—make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it a certain way.
> I suggest: *scripture is a human activity*.[38]

In this way, humans participate in both the production and definition of scripture: it is not a given, neither as a category nor as a religious phenomenon.

In relation to Islam, this recognition of scripture as human activity necessitates an expansion beyond the categorization of the Qur'an as the sole sacred text. One scholar, Peter Awn, suggests that scripture within Islam can be treated more expansively:

> Historians of religion often equate scripture in Islam solely with the Qur'an. But if scripture is understood to include those texts for which a claim of divine inspiration is made by the Muslim community, other bodies of Islamic religious literature must be included.[39]

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[37] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 7.

[38] Ibid., 18.

[39] Peter Awn, "Classical Sufi Approaches to Scripture" in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, ed. Steven Katz, 141.

He further argues that in addition to the Qurʾan both hadith and the Shariah should be included within the category of Islamic scripture. He uses this re-categorization to then examine how Sufis interpret Islamic scriptures, missing, in my view, the opportunity to further examine how Sufis actually reconstitute Islamic scriptures of their own. Whether it be in reference to Sufi manuals like the *Kashf al-mahjub* or Sufi epics like the *Conference of the Birds*, the definition of Sufis as exegetes of the existing Islamic scriptural tradition, while valid on many levels, overlooks the power of Sufi textual production to achieve scriptural status on its own. Since most, if not all, scriptures function in reference to some pre-existing scriptural tradition, why constrain the definition of Islamic scripture to the Qurʾan, or the Qurʾan, hadith, and Shariah? Why not expand our definition to include works that make those "claims of divine inspiration" and, especially, those that are then held up—even if it be by subsets of the community— as scriptures in their own right? Given Awn's description of the hadith and Shariah as part of the scriptural tradition of Islam—to say nothing of the Qurʾan's own inclusion of "heavenly books" like the *Zabur* and Torah—why constrain further this definition of Islamic scripture, when human activity shows something much more expansive?

Fundamentally, the constraint is discursive: it has been produced in reference to the claims to authority of both scholars and practitioners of Islam. According to Vincent L. Wimbush, there is a fundamental question of power underneath our definitions of scriptures:

> But it is important that it be recognized that what is basically always at stake is power as knowledge, knowledge as power; that is, the phenomena of scriptures have to do with claims or assumptions about the dynamics, translation, or performativity of power as knowledge. The scriptural is always necessarily about

the political, and the political in all phases and aspects of modernity is still about (various forms or) the scriptural.[40]

Scriptures are texts that perform power as knowledge and are thus political. In the current study, this dynamic is clearly present in the narrative of the Sufi in front of the king: the *Masnavi*, as with other Mevlevi writings like the *Manaqeb al-Arifin*, shows no shyness with laying claim to power within the political sphere. The *Masnavi* further demonstrates its authority within that sphere with the unique claims to knowledge that it makes, utilizing (as I demonstrate in this dissertation) performative language alongside allegories in order to communicate its status vis a vis power and knowledge. In these ways, the *Masnavi* further conforms to a definition of scripture within the discursive environment of Islam specifically and textual materials more broadly.

To return to the role of the scholar, it is also true that Wimbush's expansion of what is at stake for the scholar of scriptures is designed to enfold the scholar, self-reflexively, as one of the "children of Gutenberg."[41] While previous approaches may have been attendant merely to the text-as-scripture, ultimately the written portions of scriptures are the synecdochic manifestation of the complex contexts from which they emerge. The actual scripture is, for Wimbush, something much vaster: "The point is that scriptures should always be understood as a larger complex phenomenon that is embedded within, and is also a product of and projection and sign of, society and culture."[42] Wimbush thus argues that the study of scripture should not be de-historicized or depoliticized, nor treated with the reverence of a devotee, as "neither befits the

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[40] Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction" in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as the Political*, 10.

[41] Ibid., 10.

[42] Ibid., 11.

complexity of the phenomenon."[43] Despite his ambivalence to the devotees, it is worth

noting that much of what is recognizable as scripture comes precisely as the result of the

operations of devotees. To contextualize scripture necessitates their input and

participation, as well as that of the text, to some extent. One need not agree or parrot the

ultimate claims of the believers in order to acknowledge the power (be it political or

spiritual) the believers gained through the deployment of scripture. These, in fact, form

an intrinsic part of scripturalization. As I will show in the example of the *Masnavi*, it was

the presence of the book that emboldened the followers of Rumi in establishing their

own order, differentiating themselves from the culture in which they were embedded.

The book's agency in its own scripturalization is often overlooked in theorizations

about scripture. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's 'new' definition, "The word

"scripture" has come to designate a text of special status, but a status that is now

conferred upon it by men and women, not by God and the universe." In my view, the

Masnavi certainly was conferred with a special status by men and women, yet those men

and women took their cues from the text itself. The *Masnavi* demonstrates, throughout

its six volumes, an awareness of the discourse about scripture as being the divine word

and inserts itself into that discourse through a variety of methods. These methods

include direct or explicit appeals to people's recognition of it as scripture, as well as

through other forms of self-authentication. Among these are the text's usage of a divine

narrative voice as well as the text's copious quotation and reiteration of the Qur'an.

Scripture, then, will be shown in the case of the *Masnavi* to be at once a socially situated

text, a text that self-authenticates, and a text that is recognized and ritualized within a

community of religious practitioners.

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[43] Ibid., 12.

Scripture and Canon, Scripture versus Canon

A parallel, and at times overlapping, phenomena to the emergence and definition of scripture can be found in the formation of canon. Some have even offered "canon" as a substitute for "scripture" within discussions of these, as "scripture" is too laden with its Protestant model to be useful analytically. For example, Kendall W. Folkert suggests:

> ...the Protestant view of the Bible is significantly restricted to only certain dimensions of the phenomenon represented by the several names applied to it; but the inapplicability of some of the names is not recognized by scholars. Hence, although many terms are in use, the terms are actually subservient to an *a priori* notion of scripture on the Protestant model.[44]

Folkert proposes using "canon" in its place to better designate the phenomena of scripture, refining it into two categories (Canon 1 and Canon 2) that reflect actual usage rather than the "Protestant model."[45] Yet "canon" carries with it its own history and complications that are left unacknowledged in Folkert's approach. The term is not restrictive to confessional formats: there exists a Western canon, for example, as well as literary canons from any number of linguistic traditions.

It is as "canon," in fact, that we most often see Islamic literary texts classified. This is a recognition of the fame and import of these books within the tradition, while not elevating them to the status of the Qur'an. Canon functions to classify a work as an important cultural product of a given context, while obfuscating how it may have been embedded in the ritual and broader religious life of the area in which it was produced. In the case of the *Masnavi*, it can be claimed as part of the Sufi, Islamic/Islamicate, and Persian/Persianate canons.

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[44] Folkert, 172.

[45] Ibid., 172-173.

Jonathan A. C. Brown has written extensively on the canonization of the hadith traditions during the time of Nizam al-Mulk. As Brown notes, prior to the early medieval period, a variety of hadith collections were in circulation and were used by legal scholars. While some of these surely had more authority than others, the canonization of two specific hadith collections was a result of a Seljuk political program: Nizam al-Mulk developed this program to train scholars in *madrassas* as part of his mediation amongst the Maliki and Hanafi *madhabs* in order to inculcate "Sunni communalism."[46] Canon, like scripture, was thus embedded in the negotiation of power and knowledge in the establishment of al-Bukhari and Muslim as the authoritative hadith collections. However, following Awn's argument, hadith also function as scripture for Muslims prior to the interventions of Nizam al-Mulk: the scripture of the hadith actually became restricted by its formalization into canon.

This restriction, or delimitation, explains why I argue that the *Masnavi* is not merely a part of an Islamic canon, but is, in fact, a scripture in its own right. Canon delimits at the same time that it authorizes: what the text's ultimate claims are about itself become subordinated within the broader category that includes texts that do not make similar claims or do not function similarly for their respective religious communities. There is a distinct set of claims made by the *Masnavi*, as well as a pattern of usage in ritual practice, that demonstrates its attempt to be understood as not merely another in a line of 'secret writings,' but in fact, "the roots of the roots of the roots of the Religion."[47]

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[46] Jonathan A.C. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon*, 4.

[47] MI: Preface, 3.

The process of canonization and scripturalization do overlap. They both

necessitate the participation of an audience, for example. As Brown describes it:

> Canonization involves a community's act of authorizing specific books in order to meet certain needs. It entails the transformation of texts, through use, study, and appreciation, from nondescript tomes to powerful symbols of divine, legal or artistic authority for a particular audience. [48]

As I have shown above, the community is also an active participant in scripturalization.

Indeed, following Smith and Neuwirth,[49] it appears that the scripture 'makes' the

community. Reception, in this way, works hand in hand with community production.

Though the *Masnavi* could hardly be described as a "nondescript tome," it follows a

similar process of recognition and usage to the hadith collections. The context of use was

surely different, though the time period and regions are not disparate. Instead, the

context of the hadith collections' usage and the *Masnavi*'s reception and deployment is

indicative of another dynamic within medieval Muslim society: that is, the presence of

unique and competing discourses around authority in Islam typified by the *khanaqah*

and *madrassa*, by the Sufi and the jurist.

There appears to be little controversy in identifying the *Masnavi* as a participant

in the Islamic canon—so long as that usage of canon refers to texts that have been

important to Muslims and have been authorized as canonical by Muslims. However, in

order to include it in the Islamic *scriptural* canon—not merely literary canon—some

issues of normativity and authority emerge. Scriptural canons are generally more

restrictive creatures, as, especially in the case of the New Testament, they have been

bound up with the hierarchical structures of authority which then enforced their

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[48] Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhari and Muslim*, 6.

[49] Cf. Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community*, 23-25 and 184-187.

boundaries upon their constituents. When the definition of scriptures expanded to include the 'Sacred Books of the East,' scholars inevitably looked for such authorizing structures and, consequently, echoed their claims. In a similar vein, as Kecia Ali has observed, "Modern Islam is a profoundly Protestant tradition."[50] Hence, the Islamic scriptural canon was largely delimited to the Qur'an, with the hadith forming a secondary scriptural text. Works like the *Masnavi*, or even Hafez's *Divan*, have been relegated to tertiary status: not scriptures, per se, but canonical Islamic literary works. In my argument, such a relegation not only reflects certain normative Islamic claims about the status of the Qur'an as the scripture *par excellence*, it also neglects the claims the *Masnavi* makes about itself, its status as a palimpsest and exegesis of the Qur'an, and its reception and use within the community of Mevlevi believers that it helped produce. Thus, I insist that the *Masnavi* is a scripture, and not merely canon, through the stipulative definitions I have offered here. In the following section, I will describe how Sufis authorized forms of scriptural discourse, especially in terms of divine eruption, sainthood and ongoing revelation.

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Sufi Scripture-making: Revelation and Prophecy in Sufi Writing and Practice

The historiography around Sufis can at times be a confounding and self-contradicting enterprise. Sufis are portrayed as the transgressors of the Islamic tradition and its most sincere adherents. They exist at the liminal boundaries of Islamic spiritual life, yet permeate all forms of Islamic thought and practice. They are antinomian, while also central organizing societal figures. This often incoherent portrayal of Sufis resembles, in some ways, internal Sufi discourse: they have the humility of a dervish,

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[50] Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad*, 239.

with the eminence of the 'Pole of the Age.' Some Sufis, like al-Hallaj and Ayn al-Qadat, were sacrificed on society's altar; others became the 'mirrors for kings' described previously.

The multiple societal and political responses to Sufis and their teachings, in which Sufis were either incorporated into the power structures (under the Seljuks) or were express opponents of certain authorities, can be seen in the composition of the community of followers of Jalal al-din Rumi and their internal discourse. Rumi's father was famous for purportedly telling one ruler, "You are a sultan and I am a sultan"—and that ruler's inability to recognize Baha al-din's status proved his downfall at the hands of the Mongols.[51] Yet Baha al-din had arrived in Konya ostensibly at the invitation of the Seljuk authorities there, who apparently did recognize his eminence in some way.

Whatever their relationship to external political authorities, amongst Sufis, the establishment and recognition of religious authority was no mean pursuit. This authority has been frequently discussed in terms of "awliya," a word that has been (problematically) translated as "saints" but in fact encompasses a different set of associations than its Christian corollary.[52] This can be explained through its various senses in Arabic, as Vincent Cornell discusses in *The Realm of the Saint*. The term "wali" can refer to a "friend" of God, but the term is also closely related to acting as an authority

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[51] *Manaqeb al-Arifin*, 12-13. Baha al-din addressed the Khwarazmshah, the most powerful person in his vicinity at the time, further explaining: "They call you Sultan of the Commanders and they call me Sultan of the Religious Scholars, and you are my disciple."

[52] Cf. Carl Ernst, *Sufism*, 58-60. Ernst contrasts the intrinsic quality implied by "sainthood" with the relational quality contained in the Qur'anic/Arabic sense of the term "wali."

or intermediary: in this case, on behalf of God.[53] Shia Muslims use this term to describe ʿAlī ibn Abu Talib, and it appears in the Qurʾan as well.[54] Sufis, as is their wont, further expounded upon the 'Friends of God' discourse, positing that there are hierarchical levels to this friendship. The highest status is reserved for the *qutb*, or "pole" who, as Annemarie Schimmel describes it, "rests in perfect tranquility, grounded in God—that is why all the "minor stars" revolve around him."[55] Sufis might claim or compete for recognition of their status as the *qutb*, along with using other terminology to describe their spiritual status.

The community of followers that grew around Jalal al-din Rumi in 13th century Anatolia was no stranger to this "Friends of God" discourse and the discussion of the *qutb*. This is discussed extensively in Jawid Mojaddedi's *Beyond Dogma*. According to Mojaddedi, Rumi frequently invokes the "awliya" in conjunction with the prophets:

> Rumi usually mentions God's Prophets and His Friends together as a pair of categories (anbiya wa-awliya) so as to distinguish them from other people, next to whom they are compared with "the heart in relation to the body." Rumi makes the particular analogy work by stating that our hearts make any journey before our limbs do, and that Prophets and God's Friends travel to the spiritual world, then come back to urge us to follow them there and to abandon this temporary ruin.[56]

Mojaddedi further observes that the *anbiya* and *awliya* pairing can be linked as either the Friends succeeding the Prophets or as associates during the Prophets' lifetime. He cites a passage in the *Masnavi* that is particularly instructive in this regard, as it 'quotes' from

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[53] Vincent Cornell, *The Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, 3-10.

[54] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 199-200. Schimmel cites Sura 10:63: "Verily, the friends of God, no fear is upon them nor are they sad."
[55] Ibid., 200. Schimmel further quotes from M2: 3325: "He who does not know the true sheikh—i.e., the Perfect Man and *qutb* of his time—is a *kafir*, an infidel."

[56] Jawid Mojaddedi, *Beyond Dogma*, 30-31.

Muhammad in order to show that Muhammad saw some of his own contemporaries sharing in his "essence" and "aspiration":

> Remove then your own attributes to view
> Such a pure essence which belongs to you!
> Within your heart you'll find the Prophet's knowledge
> Without a book or teachers at a college.
> The Prophet said, "There are some in my nation
> Who share my essence and my aspiration;
> Their souls are viewing me by that same light
> With which I also keep them in my sight."[57]

Despite the fact that the *Masnavi* tells its reader such knowledge can be found "without a book or teachers at a college," it should be noted that this message is being imparted by a book within a teaching environment. In this way, the *Masnavi* mediates the very form of spiritual inquiry it is describing and further confirms its own authority on these matters for Rumi's community.

In addition to the community's incorporation of textual materials that include Sufi discourses about the friends of God and the pole of the age, the community also reflected their attitude towards their figurehead through his titles. Though largely known to contemporary audiences, especially in English, as "Rumi," Jalal al-din Balkhi was also known as "Mawlana," meaning "our teacher" or "master," and another epithet, "Khodavandgar."[58] This last term contains the Persian word for God, "*khoda*," and has been translated as "Lordship" or "Lord," drawing a parallel with medieval and monarchical titulature. However, the term appears to be a bit more loaded: according to *Dehkhoda*, the title means something along the line of "divinized man," synonymous with

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[57] Mojaddedi, 32, quoting his own translation of M1: 3474-3477.
[58] Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*, 9-10.

"khaleq," which itself means "fashioner of the world."[59] While it may be tempting to see this as typical Sufi boasting or exaggeration of the status of the teacher, it corresponds to a certain outlook elsewhere expressed in the *Masnavi* that understands God's presence within the production of that book.

The perspective on Rumi's spiritual eminence and connection to the divine, latent in the Friends of God discourse and evident in his disciples' attitude towards him, was famously encapsulated in an adage attributed to Jami:

> Mawlana's *Masnavi* is the Qur'an in the Persian tongue
> I am not saying he is a prophet, but he does have a book.[60]

Clearly, this is a case of the poet 'protesting too much': if the book is the Qur'an (albeit in Persian), then its messenger surely has some claim to similar status. The Friends of God discourse, found elsewhere in the *Masnavi* and other writings, authorizes this perspective on the *Masnavi* as a divinely sourced book. Put simply, the *Masnavi* understands itself as divinely revealed scripture, as I discuss in chapter two of this work.

Yet the notion of revelation is particularly thorny within Islam: how can anyone claim revelation (*wahy*)[61] after the Prophet's death, given that Muhammad is often

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[59] "Khodavandgar," and "Khaleq", *Dehkhoda*. The entry also describes the former term as being used in application to later Ottoman sultants, perhaps fashioning themselves after Rumi's own authoritative claims. The term certainly could use more examination and theorization.

[60] 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, *Nafahat al-ons men hazarat al-qods.* (cf. Lewis, Franklin. *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*, p. 467-469). The quotation, apparently, cannot be found within Jami's writings. It has been attributed to Shaykh Bahai, as well. Its origins can be found in an attribution from India in the17th century, but cannot be found in any extant version of Jami's writing prior to that.

[61] "Wahy," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. II.

understood as the last Messenger?[62] The Friends of God and *qutb* discourses offer a way of understanding God's ongoing dialogue with the world, but revelation itself still demands some accounting. If, according to one theologically-oriented definition, scripture is "God's words" written down by humans, then how does the *Masnavi* manage the question of revelation? It is clear from Sufi writings that the moment of revelation for Muhammad is of huge import. Laying claim to the same or similar type of experience, however, pushes past a simple exegesis of that prophetic experience. In this way, the *Masnavi* must negotiate the normative boundary of *wahy* while asserting its own supremacy in religious matters. In the following section, I will frame how the *Masnavi*'s usage of intertextuality contributes to its claims to spiritual—and thus scriptural—authority.

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Intertextuality and Scripture

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The Qur'an is clearly a text that relies throughout on self-definition through intertextuality. Whether in reference to the "Kitab" traditions of Jewish and Christian scriptural writings, or the subtler intertextual relationship with pre-Islamic, Arabic odes,[63] the Qur'an clearly relies on the audience's awareness of other books. It alludes to

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[62] Cf. Abdolkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience* for an extended discussion of this issue. Soroush famously argues that mystics can actually expand past what the prophets do in their missions. He is quoted as writing: "Hence, mystics' experiences are complementary to and an expansion of the Prophet's religious experience." (306)

[63] Cf. Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of Community*, 28. In analyzing the 'early Meccan suras', Neuwirth argues: "The instances of poetic intertextuality should not be ignored in these suras: not only do the early images of paradise display a reversed image of the atlal (deserted encampments), a common image found in the *qasida*, but the exemplification of divine justice through God's destruction of the *umam khaliya*, the bygone communities, should be understood as a response to and an inversion of the pre-Islamic poet's lament about the ruinous state of his familiar landscape."

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known stories, to various communities who received God's message previously, affectively establishing its own authority to interpret and arbitrate what had occurred prior to its arrival. The conception of the Qur'an as a composite text of existing Christian and Jewish scriptural writings circulating within 7th century Arabia has largely been abandoned,[64] but the Qur'an's relationship to existing scriptural writing is clearly part of its own self-image (to borrow Daniel A. Madigan's framing).[65]

The Qur'an clearly is its own entity separate from the previous scriptural messages other prophets had received, whether they be "Kitab" or otherwise. It differentiates itself while at the same time invoking these other scriptures. This creative "intertextuality," in my view, provides a type of model for the *Masnavi*'s own intertextuality with the Qur'an. The *Masnavi* affirms the Qur'anic message: by my count, over 15 percent of the epic references or alludes to specific verses from the Qur'an. Yet in so doing, the *Masnavi* also displays similar 'supersessionist' tendencies as the Qur'an, as I argue further in the third chapter. How is it that we understand the Qur'an's statements about itself as a type of "self-scripturalization" yet still claim that the *Masnavi*, which makes plenty of its own bold claims, is merely Qur'anic exegesis?

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, cited above, sees the Qur'an as the endpoint of the scriptural tradition that emerged from the 'Near East' over the previous two millennia.[66] That limit point was certainly a generous expansion from the view on scripture that

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[64] Cf. Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 56-57, and Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 30-32.

[65] Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*. Madigan extensively examines the Qur'an's deployment of the word "kitab" alongside other Qur'anic references to existing/known scriptures, such as the Gospels and the Torah.

[66] Smith, "Scripture as Form and Concept," 31-32, cited also in Madigan (above) 22.

would have it end with the Gospels, yet it sets a certain limit on discussing how scripture would have been understood amongst communities in the succeeding time after the Qurʾan's reception and codification. In my view, it is more productive to look at the scripturalization process rather than specific products in order to understand the phenomenon. As Miriam Levering argues:

> Such an approach reflects a conviction that however the "scripturality" of scripture may originate in a community, what characterizes its scripturality for persons and communities is that the words or texts in question are understood to play special roles in religious life. Being able to play these special roles, scriptures come to be read and used differently from other texts. They remain scriptural as long as they are found to sustain those different ways of being read and used (which I will call modes of reception) in the context of religious life.[67]

Ultimately, these texts' claims about themselves form only a portion of what makes them scriptures. They necessitate a community of followers to continue their use within ritual and other religious settings, as I demonstrate in chapter 4. Using the model of how these texts work internally as well as how they are received externally, I come to the conclusion that the *Masnavi* must be considered a scripture.

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Structure of the Argument

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In order to demonstrate how the Masnavi is a work of scripture, I have developed a strategy involving contextualization, textual analysis for performance and intertextuality, and reception within and production of religious community. Following Miriam Levering, who observed that "...'scripture' is a relational term,"[68] I demonstrate the relationship the text has to elements of the context that produces it. The first chapter

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[67] Levering, "Scripture and Its Reception: A Buddhist Case," in *Rethinking Scripture*, 59.

[68] Ibid, 2. Levering further observes: "That is, it refers to kinds of relationships people enter into with these texts. It seems helpful to propose that scriptures are a special class of true and powerful words, as class formed by the ways in which these particular words are received by persons and communities in their common life."

highlights various aspects of the medieval, Muslim, mystical, and Mediterranean context in which the *Masnavi* emerged. Among these, I identify how the *Masnavi* emerges during a period that some see as either the end or near the end of the "Islamic Golden Age" of high caliphal culture in Baghdad. The "Golden Age" paradigm, I argue, ignores the contributions medieval Muslims made in rearticulating and invigorating the received tradition. Along with that, the paradigm betrays a bias against Persian-language and Persianate Islam, of which the *Masnavi* is among the most important cultural artifacts. I further situate the *Masnavi* within medieval and Mediterranean negotiations of religious identity, and show how Rumi and his followers navigated the shifting power centers that were the consequence of the transition of Seljuk rule to Ilkhanid vassalship in Konya. Ultimately, I argue that the *Masnavi* is part of an emergent Sufi, Sunni, and Persian canon; one in which it articulates itself as the pinnacle text.

The second chapter examines precisely how the *Masnavi* articulates its own status. I analyze aspects of the work in terms of performative language; that is, how the text does things with words (following J.L. Austin). I argue that the *Masnavi*'s statements about itself follow a familiar scriptural trope of self-authentication. It does this in dialogue with its immediate audience and context, as discussed in the first chapter, as well as in dialogue with its scriptural interlocutors: the Qur'an, hadith, and other Sufi writings. The third chapter examines the Qur'an as its most important scriptural interlocutor, using a discussion of intertextuality in order to demonstrate the poly-form ways the Qur'an influences the *Masnavi*. Ultimately, the *Masnavi* establishes its own authority in relation to and by means of the Qur'anic model, in combination with its own self-authenticating claims and performative language.

In the fourth chapter, I return to the scriptural approach of Levering and Bell,[69] who offer a modality of considering the production of scripture in relation to its audience. In the case of the *Masnavi*, that early audience was largely the group of followers who came to be known as the Mevlevi order in the years following Jalal al-din Rumi's death. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the *Masnavi* was implanted into ritual settings, how it was understood within hagiographical writings, and how it influenced the growth and spread of the Mevlevis within the competitive Sufi and Islamic religio-political climate of 13th and 14th century Konya.

Ultimately, I argue that the *Masnavi* was produced and received as a work of scriptural writing, encapsulating in its six volumes the religious attitudes and discourses of its period while also transforming those circumstances by its presence. The text's success as scripture relied on its performative and self-authorizing statements, as well as its dynamic integration and redeployment of Qur'anic quotations, themes, and imagery. I argue that the literary designation that the *Masnavi* achieved in European and American academic and popular circles is not indicative of the way the text was used and understood across a wide swath of the Islamicate world. The appellation of the text as 'the Qur'an in Persian' is thus not merely indicative of the presence of the Qur'an within its pages, but rather aptly describes the function that the book played within the Mevlevi and other religious communities—a function that was a direct product of the book's discourses about the Islamic and Sufi traditions it inherited, as well as its own statements about itself and how it should be understood.

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[69] Cf. Catherine Bell, "Ritualization of Text and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy," *History of Religions,* Vol. 27, No. 4 (May, 1988), pp. 366-392.