

# MEVLANA: THE SUFI SAINT OF KONYA

Many of the carpets in this collection come from the Konya district: either from nearby villages such as Karapinar or from the town of Konya itself. In recent years, there has been a slow switch among Turkish rug collectors. Although the great names were at one time Ushak, Bergama, and other villages in the west end of Turkey, the weight of opinion has now moved towards Konya at the heart of Central Anatolia. So much so, indeed, that if a dealer now wants to make an archaic rug seem interesting, he labels it as "Konya" where he might once have called it "Ushak."

Konya was the home and is the resting place of Mevlana — Jalaluddin Rumi — the great Sufi saint of the 13th century, whose remains are still enshrined in the Mevlana mosque. I, and others as well, have found that many of the Konya rugs do seem to have more of the mysterious spiritual beauty, and I believe that this quality came about in rugs in this part of Turkey because it was in this region that Sufism was practiced with the greatest intensity.

Sufism is the mystical branch of Islam. Thus the belief that the great carpets were woven by Sufis, and as part of the teaching of Sufism, implies much more than that these carpets were all woven within the general cultural milieu of Islam. The makers of stained-glass windows in medieval England were not merely Christian. As part of their guild, they were working in the context of Christian mysticism. Just so, it is my contention that the weavers of the great and most spiritual carpets were weaving within the mental and emotional framework of Sufism. I believe, though there is not yet any direct evidence, that the greatest carpets were probably woven in Sufi *tekkes* where Sufism was taught, and that carpet weaving, like calligraphy, book making, painting, and other arts, was undertaken as part of the Sufi's quest for union with God.

In the same period, Konya was also the capital of the great Turkish Seljuk empire — the source and origin of almost everything great in Turkish rug art. Although there has been an increase in our understanding of the role played by the Seljuk inspiration in Turkish art, our main mental attitude is still dominated by the floral designs of the Ottoman empire. Yet in my own opinion, the rugs which are truly great are those that get their substance not from these floral ideas, but from the much earlier and deeper substance of the Seljuk inspiration. Just what this Seljuk inspiration was is also not clear, so that the two main streams of artistic and religious inspiration which formed the great Turkish rugs — the Seljuk empire and the spiritual work of the Sufis — are both still mainly hidden from us.