

I
The Outward Setting



THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The 13th century is perhaps the most fascinating and, at the same time embarrassing period in the history of the Muslim world.

After the death of the Prophet Moḥammad in 632, the Muslims had extended their rule from Arabia over large parts of the then known world: Syria, Egypt, and Iran were soon incorporated into the new empire; in 711 the Muslims reached Spain, the Indus Valley, and Transoxania. The kingdoms they founded in the Eastern and Western outposts of the empire waxed stronger and more independent in the course of time. The Iberian peninsula is an exception—the slow *reconquista* of Spain by the Christians was completed in 1492, and the Spanish inherited a brilliant civilisation that was to influence deeply the development of Christian Europe.

Many different rulers had come and gone; the 'Golden Age' of the four righteous caliphs ended in 661 when ʿAli ibn Abi Ṭāleb, Moḥammad's cousin and son-in-law, was murdered. The following dynasty, the Omayyads, who shifted their residence from the homeland of Islam to Syria, waged successful wars and extended the borders of the empire further and further, although the pious disliked their worldly, luxurious life and accused them of not following the injunctions of the Koran as strictly as they were expected in their capacity as leaders of the faithful. In 680, ʿAli's cadet son Ḥoseyn was killed, together with most members of his family, in the battle of Karbala; the tragic event resulted in a deep popular veneration for him. The *shīʿatu ʿAli* (Shiites), ʿAli's party, who mainly fostered this love, soon developed into different branches and at times (thus in the 10th century) ruled large parts of the Muslim world, attracting the masses by a more emotional interpretation of some facets of Islam and also segments of the intelligentsia by their combination of philosophical and theological hermeneutics.

In 750, the Abbasids, related to the Prophet through his uncle ʿAbbās, took over the rule and shifted the capital to Baghdad; hence, Iranian influences upon Islamic culture

became palpable in every area of life. The Abbasid period is considered the heyday of Muslim civilisation, literature and art. Translations from Greek, Indian, and Persian medical, philosophical and mathematical works were produced and elaborated by Muslim scholars; the theoretical foundations of Muslim law were laid, the four schools of law, *madhhab*, developed; theological thinking, armed with the new weapon of hellenistic philosophical terminology, grew in different directions. The Mu'tazilites, who first used the tools of philosophy to defend the pure monotheism of Islam against the threat of Persian dualism and Christian trinitarian thought, were eventually banned; orthodox currents, with their unshakeable faith in the Koran as the uncreated, eternal word of God, became firmly established in Muslim lands.

At the same time, the more pious Muslims turned to stricter asceticism—in opposition to the growing luxury of everyday life; the name for Islamic mysticism, *tasawwuf*, Sufism, is derived from their woollen (*ṣuf*) frocks. In Khorassan and Iraq, in Egypt and Syria people of ascetic inclinations gathered in small groups, and out of this movement, which centred around constant meditation on the Koran, poverty and complete trust in God, true mysticism emerged. The ideal of perfect love of God, without any selfish wish—be it hope for Paradise or fear of Hell—was accepted and elaborated to its utmost consequences. Rābe'a al-Adawiyya, the woman saint of Basra, is credited with the introduction of these thoughts. As early as the 10th century one finds representatives of different trends in Sufism: there is the Nubian Zu'n-Nun in Egypt (d. 859) whose enthusiastic poetical prayers belong to the finest products of classical Arabic Sufi literature, and there is the lonely, weird Bāyazid Bestāmi (d. 874) in Western Iran, noted for his 'negative way of union' and his stress upon *fanā*' 'annihilation from human qualities' in God; we find Yahyā ibn Ma'ādh (d. 871), the preacher from Rey who 'had a tongue in hope', and the sober scholars of the Baghdadian school, headed by Moḥāsebi (d. 857) whose surname is derived from the stern psychological self-control (*moḥāsaba*) he advocated: this system of Sufi psychology which shaped the spiritual training of the later moderate Sufis finds its first expression in his writings. Among the leaders of the Baghdadian school the name of Joneyd (d. 910) is most

prominent; he was the 'sheykh of this group', 'the peacock of the poor', and most of the spiritual genealogies of the later orders can be traced back to him. It was he who—according to legends—predicted that his former disciple Ḥoseyn ibn Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj would meet a terrible end: indeed, Ḥallāj, the greatest representative of early Sufism was cruelly put to death in 922. The reasons were mainly political—not so much, as one usually tends to believe and as legend asserts, orthodox aversion to his utterance *anā'l-ḥaqq* 'I am the Truth' or, 'I am God'.

Although the mystical movement spread over almost every Muslim country, Ḥallāj's ideas were kept alive, under the surface, mainly in Iran. They became once more conspicuous in the work of Ḥaṭṭār (d. 1220), the mystical poet of Nishapur, who became spiritually initiated into mystical life by the Baghdadīan 'martyr of Divine Love'.

Persian poetry, from its very beginning—e.g. from the 10th century onwards—had beēn influenced by Sufi thought; the first author to use Persian for his beautiful poetical orisons was Ḥabdollāh-e Anṣārī (d. 1089), the patron saint of Herat and author of an important Persian biography of saints. Other mystics of Eastern Iran used the quatrain (*robā'i*) as means of expression for their mystical thought. Again in the same area—present-day Afghanistan—the first comprehensive didactic work was composed: Sanā'ī of Ghazna (d. 1131), a former court poet converted to Sufism, wrote his *Ḥadiqat al-ḥaqīqa*, 'The Orchard of Truth' around 1120; he thus set the model for all later mystical *mathnavis*, e.g. didactical works written in rhyming couplets, which contain numerous stories, anecdotes and parables without fixed order to illustrate different aspects of mystical and practical life. Sanā'ī's example was followed by Faridoddin Ḥaṭṭār, whose numerous epics are much more artistic than those of his predecessor. They soon became standard works of mystical instruction, widely read wherever Persian was spoken.

In the meantime, moderate Sufism had produced a number of handbooks in which mysticism was explained in accordance with orthodox teachings (as in the case of as-Sarrāj, d. 988, al-Makki, d. 996, al-Kalābādhi, d. 995, al Qusheyri, d. 1074, and, in India, Hojwiri, d. c. 1070). Abu Ḥāmed al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) of Tus, Sanā'ī's contemporary, created the *summa*

of moderately mystically tinged Muslim thought in his *Iḥyā' 'olum ad-dīn. The Revivification of the Sciences of Religion*—a book which has not lost its paramount importance for Muslim piety up to our day.

It was, however, Abu Ḥāmed's younger brother, Aḥmad Ghazzālī (d. 1126) who should be remembered as one of the greatest masters of mystical love theories. Mystical love, first directed exclusively towards God without any object in between, was now sometimes blended with the admiration of a beautiful face in which God's Beauty reveals itself to the loving mystic: the oscillation between heavenly and earthly love became then, a standard aspect of Persian and related poetry. Aḥmad Ghazzālī's *savāneh*, as well as the works of his disciple 'Eynolqozāt Hamadhāni (d. 1137) show this love-mysticism in highly artistic form; the union of lover and beloved in Love, the mirror-like relation with each other is described in words the subtlety of which defies translation. In the words of Ruzbehān Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1209) nearly one century later than Aḥmad Ghazzālī, these ideas reached their apogee.

Already in very early times the Sufis were attacked because of their fondness for music: a beautiful voice might induce them into ecstasy, whether the content of the text was the Koran, the Divine word, or a profane love poem. They often indulged in whirling movement to attain ecstasy, and as early as the late 9th century *samā'*-sessions were held everywhere. Here, the Sufis, intoxicated by music and recitation, whirled around their axis, often rending their garments so that not only orthodox circles, but also more sober groups among the mystics were scandalized. All these movements reached maturity in the 12th century—and this is the time when Sufism, consolidated in theory as well, began to be converted into a mass movement.

The first mystical fraternities came into existence—it may be that they were a counterweight against the Ismaili movement, which, as an extremist Shia sect, had attracted large masses in earlier days; in the 11th century, the orthodox, like al-Ghazzālī, afraid of the political and spiritual consequences of Ismaili theories, relentlessly fought against them with pen and sword. Yet the common people craved for a closer communion with God which they could not find in the outward forms of religion: the lawyer-divines and theologians

had put every movement of body and soul into such a narrow framework that the free soaring of the soul was often hampered; that is why people from all strata of society sought some outlet for their feelings in more emotional forms of religion. Such forms were offered by the orders, which, from around 1120 onwards, slowly developed in the Muslim East and soon spread everywhere. The spiritual leader, the sheykh—always highly respected and absolutely obeyed by his disciples—was now considered the sole and infallible guide on the path towards salvation: he was ‘the ladder to Heaven’, as Rumi says. His influence over his disciples grew tremendously. Many members of Sufi orders wandered through the Muslim world; they reached distant provinces like India, founding little centres (*dargāh*) which soon grew into veritable nuclei of Islamic missionary work, and they won over to the simple basic teaching of Islam thousands who would have never been attracted by the official legalistic forms of this religion, but who enjoyed the warm, loving surrender as taught and practised by the mystical leaders.

Thus was the ‘spiritual’ situation around 1200.

On the political plane, many things had changed. The Abbasid caliphate once so powerful, had lost many of the border lands. Spain had become independent in 926, when ‘Abdorraḥmān III from the Omayyad family declared himself caliph; the Eastern provinces were more or less nominally under Baghdad suzerainty. In 945 the Persian Shiite family of the Buweyhids took over de facto rule in the central provinces so that the Abbasid caliph became a mere puppet in their hands. The powerful Turkish ruler Mahmud of Ghazna, who conquered large parts of Northwestern India after the year 1004 and whose court was a centre of learning and Persian poetry, remained a loyal vassal of the Abbasid caliph and defender of Sunnite orthodoxy. Ghaznavid predominance was followed in the East by the Ghurids, in the central countries by the Seljuks, another Turkish clan who entered the realms of Islam in the mid-11th century and whose members soon became stern defenders of orthodoxy in the Eastern and central provinces. The names of Alp Arslān and Malekshāh as well as that of the capable vizier Neẓām olmolk, Ghazzālī’s protector, mark the zenith of this dynasty in the second half of the 11th century. Their army succeeded also in 1071 in

entering Eastern Anatolia at the expense of the Byzantines; in spite of the Crusaders, who often crossed Anatolia, these Rum Seljuks were able to build up a flourishing rule in Turkey, their capital being Konya, the old Iconium.

Egypt was separated from the Abbasid empire in 969 — after the short interlude of the Tulunids and the Ikhshidids — when the Fatimids (again a Shia dynasty) conquered it to rule there for two centuries. The country was brought back into the fold of the Abbasids, or at least to Sunni Islam, by the Ayyubid dynasty in 1171: the Ayyubids are known, to Western readers, as the main supporters of the Muslim cause during the Crusades, their sultan Ṣalāḥoddin (Saladin) being regarded as a model of Muslim virtue and chivalry.

The highly confused history of the Islamic Empire, in which religious and political movements interacted and worked against each other in ways not easily disentangled cannot be told in detail. Suffice it to mention that once more a revival of the Abbasid caliphate was attempted around 1200. The inaugurator of the movement was the last truly active member of the dynasty, an-Nāser li-Din Allāh. He tried to build up an organization of Muslim princes who should co-operate in the spirit of *futuwwa*, 'virtue'. This is a basically mystical ideal, which he used as basis for a chivalric organization, insignia of which he sent to the neighbouring rulers at the hand of one of the leading mystics of his time, Abu Ḥafṣ 'Omar Sohrawardi (d. 1232). Caliph Nāṣer's main aim was to call the Muslims to reunite against a power rising on the Eastern horizon during his lifetime, i.e. the Mongols under the leader Genghiz Khan. But the unwise behaviour of the Khwarezmshah, the ruler of Eastern Khorassan and parts of Central Asia, provided the Mongols with the pretext — if they needed any at all — for moving towards the Muslim lands. It need not be told how their hordes over ran Asia and parts of Eastern Europe in the 13th century, occupying an area between the Eastern borders of Germany to the shore of the Japanese Sea, leaving death and ruin wherever they went. They soon conquered Iran and adjacent countries, and reached Central Anatolia as they had already descended to the Indus Valley. The final blow came when Hulagu conquered Baghdad in 1258. The last member of the Abbasid house was killed, all traces of Baghdad's former glory wiped out. Two years later, in 1260, the Mamluks, a

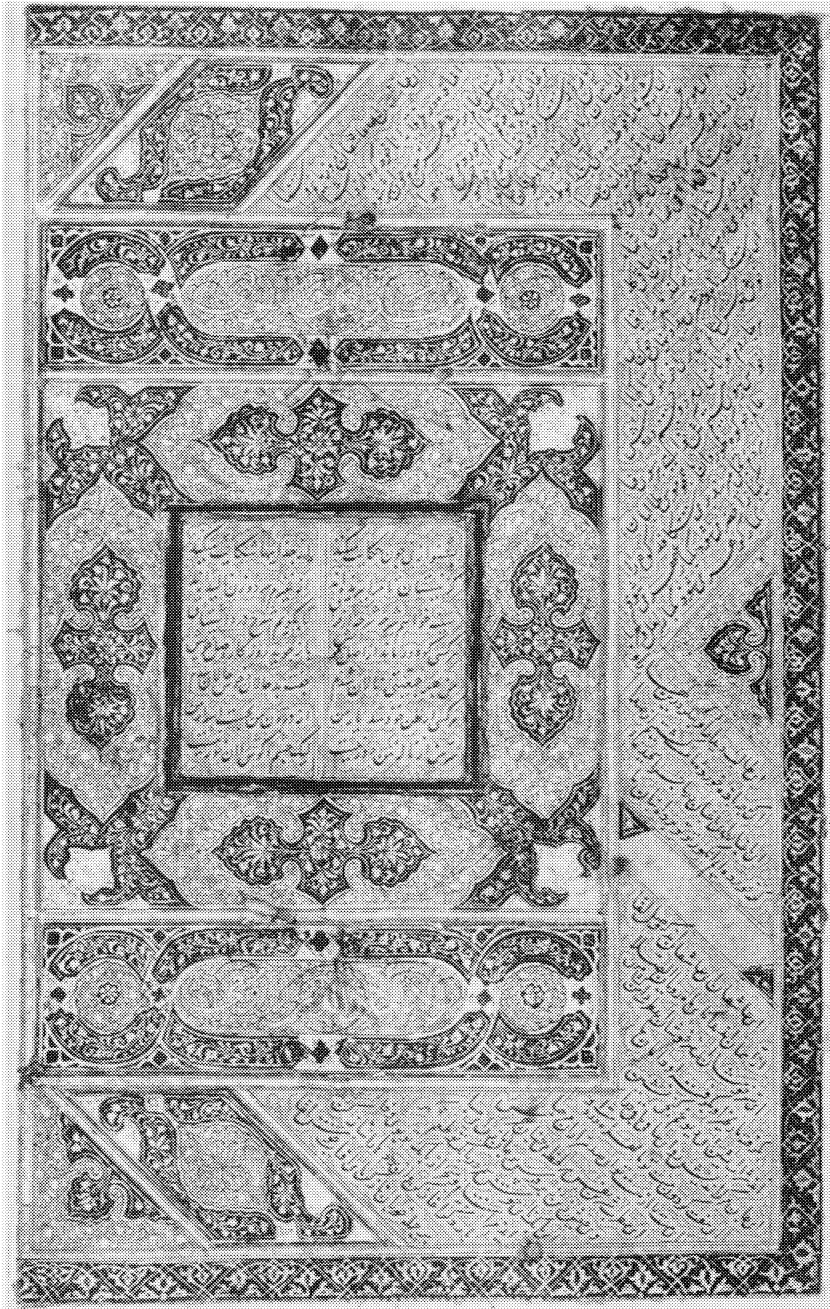
dynasty of Turkish slaves recently established in Egypt, succeeded in stopping the Mongols in ^ᶜAyn Jālūt in Syria. Yet, Mongol supremacy was established over large parts of the Muslim world. The whole political situation changed in the second half of the 13th century—not to mention the economical changes that took place after the ruin of so many flourishing cities and the destruction of irrigation works in agricultural areas. Yet, out of the Mongol rule new, and in part very attractive, facets of Islamic culture were to develop in the following centuries.

Strangely enough this period of the most terrible political disaster was, at the same time, a period of highest religious and mystical activity. It seems as though the complete darkness on the worldly plane was counteracted by a hitherto unknown brightness on the spiritual plane. The names of poets, scholars, calligraphers could be enumerated, but it is mainly the mystics who dominate this century. The supreme figure is the Spanish-born Ibn ^ᶜArabi, *ash-sheykh al-akbar* (d. 1240 in Damascus); he developed a most consistent theological system, which was to be adopted by most of the later mystics of Islam. His contemporary in Egypt, Ibn al-Fāreḍ (d. 1235) sang highly refined poems to praise eternal spiritual love. Somewhat later the founder of the Shadhiliyya order settled in Egypt; his second successor, Ibn ^ᶜAṭā' Allāh (d. 1309) is the author of words of wisdom (*ḥikam*) which have provided spiritual food for thousands of mystics in the Western Islamic world. In Iran, Faridoddin ^ᶜAṭṭār, who died in 1220, left a rich spiritual heritage of poetry and prose (among them his biography of saints, *Tadhkerat al-owliyā*); in the same year the Mongols killed Najmoddin Kobrā, the founder of an extremely interesting mystical order in Khwarezm. His disciple Najmoddin Dāyā Rāzi, like so many other scholars and saints, including Jalāloddin Rumi's family, fled to Anatolia where he composed his mystical work *Mīrsād ol-^ᶜebād* under the Seljuks. In India, Mo'innoddin Chishti (d. 1236) introduced the Chishtiyya order; from the long list of Chishti saints in 13th century India we may mention Faridoddin Ganj-e Shakar (d. 1265), Neẓāmoddin Owliyā of Delhi (d. 1325) and his faithful disciple and biographer Amir Ḥasan as well as his poet-friend Amir Khosrow. Bahā'oddin Zakariya founded a branch of the Sohrawardiyya in Multan, and in his presence

Fakhroddin⁶Erāqi, the mystical minstrel of overbounding love, spent twenty-five years of his life before his return to Anatolia. There, he found Şadroddin Qunavi, Ibn ⁶Arabi's foremost interpreter in Konya; a little while earlier Owḥadoddin Kermāni had died, a poet who had sung about the love of beautiful human beings and had written a mystical mathnavi *jām-e jam*. Antolia was filled with groups of mystics striving for social and political changes. Many of them had migrated from the Eastern lands, fleeing from the Mongol threat. Among them we may mention Hājji Bektash to whom the Bektashi order of dervishes trace back its origin; slightly later the first great poet of mystical songs in the Turkish tongue, Yunus Emre, wandered about the country.

In short, in almost every corner of the Islamic world were found great saints, poets, and mystical leaders, who, in the darkness of political and economical catastrophes, guides the people towards a world which was unhurt by change, telling them the secret of suffering love, and taught that God's inscrutable will and His Love may reveal itself in affliction even better than in happiness.

That was the spiritual environment into which Jalāloddin Rumi was born.



Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon.

First page of a copy of the Mathnawi, written in Shiraz in 1419
for Ibrahim ibn Shahrukh.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The inhabitants of Konya were seized with fear during the first half of December 1273. For days and days, the earth continued to shake and tremble, and Mowlānā Jalāloddin Rumi was feeling weak and exhausted. Eventually he declared: 'The earth is hungry. Soon, it will get a fat morsel and then give rest.' His illness increased, but he consoled his friends who surrounded him with some poems:

The lovers who die well-informed,
die before the Beloved like sugar . . .¹

melting away in the eternal sweetness of God. And:

O birds which are at present separated from your cage,
show again your face, and say: 'Where are you?'
O you who were born when you arrived at death—
This is a second birth—be born, be born!²

On December 17, at sunset, Jalāloddin passed away, to become united with the Eternal Sun; but his radiance remained behind him, never fading away throughout seven centuries.

How did this life unfold itself in the realm of time?

Jalāloddin was born in Balkh, present-day Afghanistan. The generally accepted date is September 30, 1207, although a remark in his prose-work *Fihi mā fihi* may indicate an earlier date, since he mentions the Khwarezmshah's siege of Samarqand (1207) as if speaking as an eye-witness.³ An earlier date would also agree better with his father's age. His father (born ca. 1148 or somewhat later) was a noted theologian, Moḥammad ibn al-Ḥoseyn Bahā'oddin Valad, surnamed *Soltān al-^colamā*. This title was conferred upon him, according to his grandson, by the Prophet himself through a dream which all the scholars of Balkh saw on the same night. Bahā'oddin was a mystic; according to some sources, he belonged spiritually to the school of Aḥmad Ghazzāli (d. 1126). In how far the subtle love-mysticism as described by Aḥmad in his *Savāneh* may have influenced him and, through him, his son's spiritual formation cannot yet be judged. If Aflāki's remark about Bahā'oddin Valad's verdict on 'looking at beautiful young men' as 'spiritual fornication' is correct,⁴ it

would be difficult to believe in his affiliation to the Ghazzālian school of love-mysticism. Close relations with Najmoddin Kobrā, the founder of the Kobrāviyya, are more likely.

Some claims have been made that Bahā'oddin's paternal family descended from Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam. This may or may not be true; nothing certain is known about the racial background of the family. It has also been told that Bahā'oddin's wife belonged to the house of the Khwarezmshahs who had established their rule in the Eastern provinces about 1080; but this tale can be dismissed as a later invention.

Jalāloddin's hometown was captured in 1206 by the Khwarezmshah from the Ghurids; Rumi himself later alluded in his poetry to the bloodshed in the wars between the Khwarezmians and the Ghurids when he attempted to describe how separation had drowned him in blood . . .⁵

Balkh was, at that time, still one of the centres of Islamic learning. The ancient city had played an important part during the formative period of Eastern Sufism and is the hometown of many Muslim scholars during the first centuries of the hegira. Since it had formerly been a centre of Buddhism, its inhabitants—or its atmosphere—may have served as mediators of some Buddhist ideas which are reflected in early Sufi thought: was not Ibrāhim ibn Adham, the 'prince of spiritual Poverty', a highborn inhabitant of Balkh whose conversion was told in terms of the Buddha-legend?

During Jalāloddin's childhood, one of the leading scholars in the town was Fakhroddin Rāzi, the philosopher and commentator on the Koran who enjoyed great popularity with Moḥammad Khwarezmshah. It is said that he instigated the ruler against the Sufis and was the cause of the mystic Majdoddin Baghdādi's being drowned in the Oxus (1209). Bahā'oddin Valad, too, was apparently not on friendly terms with him, as his writings prove: the pious, mystically minded theologian 'whose blessed character had become stern, and filled with awe due to the large amount of manifestations of Divine Majesty'⁶ had a heartfelt aversion against philosophy and the cerebral approach to religion; this attitude, already palpable in Sanā'i's poetry one century earlier, was inherited by Jalāloddin as well, strengthened even more by his friend Shamsoddin who called Rāzi 'a red infidel'.⁷ Half a century

after Rāzi's death, Jalāloddin Rumi could not help writing in the *Mathnavi*:

If intellect could discern (the right way) in this discussion, Fakhr-e Rāzi would have been the mystery-keeper of religion.⁸

We have, however, to dismiss those legends which attribute Bahā'oddin Valad's migration from Balkh to the growing influence of Fakhroddin; for the philosopher died in 1210, whereas Bahā'oddin and his family left Balkh only c. 1218 or 1219.

At that time, the threat of the Mongols from Central Asia must have made itself felt. The Khwarezmshah himself, by killing some Mongol merchants, had played a most fatal role in the drama which was to develop during the ensuing years in the whole Near and Middle East. Whatever the reason for Bahā'oddin's travel to foreign lands was, he, his family and his disciples (Sepahsālār speaks of 300!)⁹ were far away from his hometown when it was sacked by the Mongols. Balkh was reduced to mere ruins in 1220; thousands of people were killed.

When you are in Balkh, make a move towards Baghdad, oh father,
So that every moment you get farther away from Merv and Herat . . .¹⁰

The way led the family through Khorassan; legend tells that they paid a visit to Faridoddin 'Aṭṭār in Nishapur; and the aged mystical poet, impressed by young Jalāloddin's ability, presented him with a copy of his *Asrār-nāme*.

Then the family performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and probably lived for a while in Syria, again one of the centres of Islamic civilization. Information about the length of this journey, and of the stay in different places is contradictory; it seems most likely, however, that Jalāloddin stayed for a while in Damascus, the seat of learning, perhaps also in Aleppo; for it is mentioned that he studied under the famous historiographer Kamāloddin Ibn al-^cAdim, the chronist of Aleppo.¹¹ In one story of the *Mathnavi*, he alludes to that way in which 'Ashurā was celebrated at the Antioch gate in Aleppo¹²—since the rule of the Hamdanids in the 10th century, the Shia creed had been established at least in part in the north Syrian town.

In the mid 1220's, Bahā'oddin Valad and his family reached Central Anatolia, Rum—hence Jalāloddin's surname *Rumi*. They stayed for a while in Laranda, present-day Karaman. Here, Jalāloddin's mother passed away: the little mosque built in her honour is still visited by the people. The young scholar himself was married to Gowhar Khātun, a girl from Samarqand; his son Solṭān Valad was born in Laranda in 1226. As to the birth of his other son, 'Alā'oddin, some sources place it before that of Solṭān Valad; exact information is still lacking. Solṭān Valad was Rumi's favourite son, and was to become his father's most faithful interpreter, biographer, and at an advanced age his second successor; it was he who finally institutionalized the Mevlevi order.¹³

Karaman is situated about 100 km south-east of Konya, the capital of the Rum Seljuks. To this place, Bahā'oddin Valad was called by Solṭān 'Alā'oddin Kaykobād, who gathered around himself scholars and mystics from all over the world. Anatolia, after recovering from the invasion of the Crusaders, had developed into a flourishing country, peaceful, and at that moment still far from the reach of the Mongols.¹⁴ In 1220-21, Solṭān 'Alā'oddin (1219-1236) had built the Great Mosque on the hill in the heart of Konya, adjacent to the castle and overlooking the plains. The large, simple building bears the stamp of true greatness; it has room for 4000 men to pray under numerous pillars in front of the beautifully elaborated prayer-niche and most exquisitely carved wooden pulpit. There was no dearth of flourishing mosques and madrasas in Konya; some more were erected during Rumi's lifetime.

This was the place where Bahā'oddin Valad and his family settled about 1228 and where the learned theologian began his preaching and teaching activities with great success. After only two years, however, he died at an advanced age (January 12, 1231), and his son Jalāloddin was appointed his successor.

Up to that time, the young scholar seems to have been interested mainly in the outward sciences; he was fond of Arabic poetry, especially of the highly difficult verses of Motanabbi (d. 965); probably he had taken part in mystical activities only so far as this was 'in the air' in his family. Shortly after Bahā'oddin Valad's death, however, a former disciple of his entered Konya: Borhānoddin Moḥaqqueq at-Termezi, who had fled from Balkh first to his hometown Termez and then

farther west, began to introduce Jalāloddin into *‘ilm ladoni*, inspired wisdom, and the deeper mysteries of mystical life. He got his disciple interested in his father's collection of prose-works, the *Ma‘āref*,¹⁵ in which the teachings and thoughts of Bahā'oddin were laid down. It is told that Borhānoddin made Jalāloddin keep many *chilla*'s, e.g. forty days' periods of seclusion and meditation, until he reached the higher stages of illumination. But it is also told that Rumi spent, on Borhānoddin's advice, a long time in Syria to meet the mystical leaders: Sepahsālār relates that he had seen there Ibn 'Arabi (di. 1240), Sa'doddin-e Ḥamavi, Owḥadoddin-e Kermāni and many other Sufis of Ibn 'Arabi's circle.¹⁶

It is difficult to combine the two accounts. We may guess that Rumi indeed spent some time, though not too much, in Syria to refresh his mystical learning; at that time he may have met Shamsoddin of Tabriz for the first time without, however, being aware of his importance. A passage in Shams' *Maqālāt* seems to indicate such a first encounter.¹⁷ Borhānoddin Moḥaqeq left Konya around 1240. According to legend, he foresaw the coming of a 'great spiritual lion' with whom he could not live in one place.¹⁸ He went to Kaiseri where he asked God to take away the soul which He had entrusted to him:

O friend, accept me and take my soul!
Intoxicate me and take me from both worlds!
Into everything in which my heart has rested with Thee
Cast fire, and take that (impediment) away!¹⁹

Rumi came to Kaiseri to look after the remnants of his master's library; to his relation with Borhānoddin a line in a later ghazal may allude:

When our Caesar is in Caesarea —
do not place us in Albistan!²⁰

Borhānoddin Moḥaqeq's modest tomb, surrounded by flowers, lies in the centre of the old cemetery, above which the majestic snow-covered Erciyes mountain rises. Pious Turkish Muslims still visit the place. Borhānoddin was a stern, extremely ascetic teacher; in his *Maqālāt*, which in many respects resemble those of his master Bahā'oddin, one detects a strong influence of Sanā'i—an influence which was to become again felt in Jalāloddin's poetry.

The topic of the soul's journey, sung so eloquently by Sanā'i and then even more beautifully by 'Aṭṭār, recurs in Borhānoddin's verses as well:

The way has an end, but not the stations—one thing is the journey towards God, and something else the journey *in* God.²¹

During the years when the master stayed with Rumi, and at the time of his death, Anatolia had become shaken by internal troubles. The Seljuk ruler Ghiyāsoddin Keykhosrow, who ascended the throne in 1237, was weak. A main problem was caused by the group of Khwarezmians who had fled their country to seek shelter from the wrath of Mongols in Eastern Anatolia. Solṭān 'Alā'oddin had settled them in Akhlat, not far from Erzerum—an act which drew the Mongols to Eastern Anatolia in 1232; subsequently, the Khwarezmians were resettled in Kaiseri. Neglected by 'Alā'oddin's successors, this group became again troublesome; some of their leaders were imprisoned by the government, an action which added to the difficulties. The Khwarezmians in part joined hands with some of the mystically inclined groups whose members wandered through Anatolia and some of whom tried to introduce social changes by attacking the ruling classes. Strange saints, like the Qalandaris, the Heydaris, the Abdāl of Rum with partly strong Shia tendencies swarmed through the country and attracted the lower strata of the population. Among them, the followers of Bābā Eshāq even succeeded in conquering Tokat and Amasya; their leader was hanged in 1240.²² All these groups worked together, more or less unintentionally, to weaken the Seljuk power to such an extent that the Mongols eventually found the country an easy prey: they finally conquered Erzerum in 1242; Sivas, one of the cultural centres of Anatolia, was handed over to the Mongol army by its Qāzi; thus, human lives were spared. In Kaiseri, which was pillaged soon afterwards, all male inhabitants were killed.

People flee from the Tartars—
We serve the Creator of the Tartars . . .²³

The rulers in Konya understood that they were incapable of resisting the Mongol forces under these circumstances; they agreed in paying heavy tributes to them, and had, for all

practical purposes, lost their political independence. The weak Ghiyāsoddin Keykhosrow died in 1245, leaving three sons who were recognized, after many struggles, in 1251 as a triumvirate by Möngke Khan, the Mongol ruler. Only a short while afterwards one of the three was murdered, and long feuds between the remaining two brothers ended in a chaos in which the last surviving brother, Roknoddin, became a mere toy in the hands of his minister Moʻinoddin Parvāne.

It was during those days, when the Rum Seljuks had to accept Mongol suzerainty, that the life of Rumi was likewise completely changed—as if the catastrophe on the political level was counterbalanced by an illumination on the spiritual level.

Do not talk any more of the catastrophe of the Tartars—
Speak of the (scent of the) navel of the Tartar muskdeer!²⁴

Although ‘fire fell into the world, the smoke of the Tartar army’,²⁵ Jalāloddin saw the eternal sun rising before him: in late October 1244 he met Shamsoddin of Tabriz, the ‘Sun of Tabriz’ in Konya.

Your lovely dream-image was in our breast—
The dawn gave a sign from the Sun!²⁶

Many legends have been woven around this first meeting, and it is difficult to decide which one is closest to the truth—perhaps we may accept the report that the two mystics started discussing the difference between Moḥammad the Prophet and Bāyazid Bestāmi: Moḥammad, though a prophet called himself ‘His slave’ whereas Bāyazid the mystic exclaimed *Sobḥāni* ‘How great is my glory’ (both expressions, ‘His slave’ and *Sobḥān*, belong to the same Koranic passage, the allusion to Moḥammad’s heavenly journey in Sura 17/1).

This topic would be much in keeping with the interest of both and echoes of meditations about these words can be found in Rumi’s later verses. For six months, the two mystics were inseparable, so much so that the family and the disciples complained—Rumi neglected his classes, his friends, everybody, completely lost in the company of Shamsoddin.

For six months they sat in the cell of Ṣalāḥoddin Zarkub, discursing, without eating, drinking, or any human needs . . .²⁷

Who was this man who transformed Rumi so completely?

We do not know much about him. The legends woven around him show him as an overpowering personality who, with immense spiritual pride, wandered through the Near Eastern countries in search for a master—none of the living mystics could evade his biting criticism. He himself tells in his *Maqālāt* that he was for a while the disciple of a certain basket-weaver in Tabriz whom he left later:

In me there was something which my sheykh did not see. Indeed nobody had ever seen it. But my lord Mowlāna saw it.²⁸

Shams met the important masters in Iraq and Syria. Famous is the story of his encounter with Owḥadoddin Kermāni, one of those who 'worship Divine Beauty in created forms', e.g. who saw Divine Beauty manifested in youthful human beauty.

He told Shams: 'I see the moon reflected in a vessel with water!' Whereupon Shams rebuked him: 'If you have not got a boil on your neck, why don't you look at the sky?'²⁹

It seems that Shams has also met Ibn 'Arabi, of whose work and attitude he was rather critical—the Doctor Maximus of theosophical speculations, whose works were to exert such a tremendous influence upon later Sufism, seemed to him immature and arrogant; he saw his behaviour not fitting to the Divine Law, and compared the Great Sheykh to a pebble, Rumi being a pearl . . .³⁰

This witness as noted in his *Maqālāt* is of importance insofar as it helps us to limit the extent of Ibn 'Arabi's influence upon Rumi: although Ibn 'Arabi's main interpreter Ṣadroddin Qunavi lived in Konya and was Rumi's colleague, the possible influence of his teaching or of his whole attitude upon Jalāloddin was probably counterbalanced by Shams' aversion to these theories as well as against all theoretical burden—even the most important classics of Sufi literature were, for Shams, less valuable than a single authentic Prophetic tradition.³¹

We have no information about Shamsoddin's affiliation to one of the accepted chains of Sufi spiritual genealogy; indeed, he claimed to have received the *kherqa*, the dervish-frock, from the Prophet himself—but not an ordinary frock which would tear away and get dirty, but the frock of *ṣoḥbat*, e.g. of companionship beyond the limits of time.³² We may assume, following Gölpınarlı, that he was in fact a *qalandar*,³³ a

wandering dervish without proper affiliation, closely related to the group of Malāmatiyya, 'those who try to draw people's contempt upon themselves by outwardly blameworthy actions'. There are utterances by Shams which fit well into this picture, and Rumi's later praise of the *qalandar* seems to point to the same fact.

But even more: Shamsoddin claimed to have reached the stage of 'the Beloved'. He was no longer an *‘āsheq*, an enthusiastic lover (as they are found in three degrees), but had passed all lower stages and reached this highest possible station to become 'the Pole of all Beloved', *qoṭb-e hama ma' shuqān*.³⁴

Sepahsālār relates that Shams, in his early prayers, had asked God:

Is there not a single created being among Thy elect who could endure my company?

And he was directed to take the way to Rum . . .³⁵

There he arrived, at a ripe age—perhaps in his late forties, overwhelming, like a burning sun, or a wild lion. Rumi found him in a caravanserai, for he always used to stay in such places, as it was convenient for homeless travellers, and avoided mixing with the society of the learned or the theologians.

We can well imagine how shocked the inhabitants of Konya were when they saw their venerated master neglecting his religious and social duties and giving himself completely over to the company of this wandering dervish who did not fit at all into the Konya society. Thus, after long months of mystical love, Shams felt that he had better leave Konya, fearing the wrath of Rumi's entourage. He disappeared from the town.

Rumi was heartbroken. He who had formerly rarely cared for Persian poetry and music began to sing his passionate longing and his pain in verses:

What place for patience? For if patience were the world-encircling
Mount Qāf,
It would become annihilated like snow by the sun of separation!³⁶

He took to music and mystical dance, searched for Shams everywhere—Tabriz is the magical word:

If our clay and water had wings like our soul and heart,
It would come to Tabriz this very moment, it would cross the
desert!³⁷

He wrote letters to the Beloved which, perhaps, never reached him; a few verse-letters have been preserved:

I wrote a hundred letters, I showed a hundred ways—
Perhaps you do not know the way, or do not read a letter!³⁸

But eventually, news came from Syria — Shamsoddin had gone there. Solṭān Valad was sent to bring him back, his hand filled with gold and silver. Rumi began to sing of his joy; Damascus, the place where the Beloved was found becomes the centre of his world:

We are enamoured and bewildered and enraptured of Damascus,
We have given our soul and bound our heart to the passion of
Damascus . . .³⁹

And indeed, Shamsoddin yielded to his friend's wishes, and returned with Solṭān Valad to Konya. The sources describe the meeting of Shams and Rumi after the separation — embracing each other; nobody knew who was the lover, who the beloved . . .⁴⁰ For the attraction was mutual; not only saw Jalāloddin his Beloved in Shams, but Shams had found in Jalāloddin the master and friend for whom he had been searching throughout his life. And the line in the *Mathnavi*:

Not only the thirsty seek the water,
but the water seeks the thirsty as well,⁴¹

which condenses Mowlānā's whole philosophy of love and longing may well be interpreted as a reflection of this measureless spiritual love between the two mystics.

In the hope to keep the friend close to himself, Jalāloddin married Shamsoddin to one of the girls who had been brought up in his house. Shams loved this Kimiyā deeply. A small room in Mowlānā's house was given to the couple. When Jalāloddin's son, the learned 'Alā'oddin, passed thereby, Shams rebuked him, telling him not to intrude upon his father's friends. Whatever the character of this accident may have been, it certainly added to the aversion which 'Alā'oddin felt for the foreigner who had become his father's most intimate friend. For again, weeks and months passed in ecstatic conversation between the masters, and again the jealousy of the family and the disciples waxed stronger. Kimiyā died in the late fall of 1248, and not much later Shams disappeared, never to return.