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SUFI MYSTICS--THE GOLDEN AGE

What I intend to do in the last two lectures is to divide up the sufi mystics into the two main periods in which there was writing. The golden age is that of individuals while the formative age (c. 13th cent ff) was that of the formation of brotherhoods

all the women mystics fall into the period of the Golden age, most living in the 9th century. From then on, there are no more women mentioned with one exception.

RABE'AH--AL-ADAWIYA (d. 801)

Rabe'ah is one of those Sufi women who surpassed most of the contemporary sufi masters in her piety, her knowledge and her ascetic self-restraint. Her perfection evolved far beyond many of the later Sufi saints, making her renowned as the "crown of Men."

nothing much is known about her early life but that she was born to poverty and sold into slavery as a young child thus was forced to pass her youth in hard labor and destitution, after her parents died.

It seems doubtful that she ever married for she said "it would be impossible for me to turn from God to you for even the blink of an eye"

Rabe'ah's nights were occupied in sleepless vigilance and her days in worship of God. It is said that she was deeply absorbed in grief and wept exceedingly.

the following account written by a woman close to Rabe'ah says:

Rabe'ah used to pray all night, then permitted herself to doze lightly before dawn until the shadow of daybreak tinted the horizon. Then she would rise and say possessed by deep fear, "O soul, how long shall you go on with this sleeping and waking? the time is nearby when you will sleep so much that only the trumpet call of the Resurrection will summon you awake." This was her way of life until she died, extremely eager to maintain the night vigil unless some task arose that kept her from it.

it is recorded that Rabe'ah was extremely fearful and felt so ashamed before God that for forty years she never raised her head to heaven.

in an account of her nature it was said by one:

In her whole house -I saw only a pitcher with a chip on its spout, which she used to perform ablutions as well as drink water, a brick which she used as a pillow, and a mat of woven reeds on which she prayed. Besides this, there was nothin else. Whatever people bestowed on her she rejected, saying, "I have no need of the world."

For Rabe'ah the way to God was the purity of love. It was she who really brought the doctrine of Divine Love into Sufism. She expresses this in powerful verse:

There are two ways of love--/ my selfish way, and Yours above.
My selfishe love is when I find / I yearn to grasp you in my mind.
pure love is when You took/ the veil from my devoted look.
I cannot glory in either phase./ Two ways of love--in both be yours the praise!

she declared that her love for God left no room for hatred of any, even Satan.

One of her visions was of a glorious tree with wonderful golden fruits. She was told that the tree was hers and the fruits her praises of God but some fruits were lying on the ground. She asked if they would not have been better on the tree: "They would have been there, but that you, when you were praising God, were thinking to yourself, "Is the dough leavened or not?" and so those fruits fell off. The servant who desires to be close to their Lord must possess nothing in this world or the next save Him."

There are many adages and anecdotes told about her, mostly hagiography but she is still considered one of the greatest of the Sufi mystics.

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NO RABE'AH OF SYRIA (d. 851 ce)

Rabe'ah of Syria was a pious devotee and ascetic and possessed vast learning and undeniable charismatic powers.

when she asked Ahmad to marry her, the latter never supposed that she solely wished to please God by this action and he rejected her entreaty, declaring himself to be preoccupied with his own spiritual devotions to consider women.

by way of rebuttal, Rabe'a also professed herself to be too enwrapped in her own state to be attentive to him. The reason she wanted to marry him was to donate to him and his 'muslim brothers' a rather large inheritance and she viewed him as a medium to accomplish this act of charity, as a way of assisting herself to attain truth.

Ahmed got permission of his master to marry because the master, on hearing he was to marry Rabe'a gave encouragement saying: "She is the perfect saint of God; her words are minted with sincerity. Ahmad thus married her.

there has been confusion between Rabe'ah, just mentioned, and this Rabe'a so many times stories got mixed up. However, the ones related by her husband, Ahmad are surely about this rabe'a:

Some of what he relates are as follows:

"a variety of mystic states overcame Rabe'a Ahmad relates. "sometimes Love and intense affection prevailed, sometimes awesome fear.

when possessed of Love, she would exclaim:

O my Love--like Him there is no one./ Other than Him, none may share my heart./
O my Friend--hidden to myself/ From my eyes concealed, invisible
Yet from my heart never absent.

Overcome with fear, she confessed:

Should I weep for lack of provision/ or for the duration of the sojourn?
How shall I ever attain the Real Aim?/ My provisions fall short.
Shall You punish me by fire,/ O Ultimate Aim of all desire?
In this lies both my fear's origin/ and the source of all my hope.

She continually reminded Ahmed that her love for him was only sisterly and she didn't love him as a husband.

she encouraged him to take other wives and he did because she was not interested in sex, only in God.

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NAFISAH (d. 830 CE)

Nafisah was a descendant of Muhammad, born in Mecca, but subsequently went to Egypt for seven years with her husband. She was a devout woman,

renowned for her abstinence. The Egyptians had great admiration for her and it was said that when a certain Imam went to Egypt, he heard her relate prophetic traditions, which he transmitted on her word alone.

it is related that Nafisah spent most of her time engaged in asceticism, worship, fasting and nightly vigils of prayer. She was widely reputed for her saintliness and her charismatic powers.

it is said that as the hour of her death approached, Nafisah was fasting and people encouraged her to break her fast. She remarked, "How strange a request! For thirty years now, I have aspired to meet God while fasting. IS it now the time to break my fast? No! impossible!"

she then began to recite the sura which said, 'They have an abode of peace with their Lord' and passed away.

her tomb is famous for its efficacy in granting prayers, and tho her husband wanted to take her corpse to Medina, he had a dream saying to leave her there in Egypt where Divine Mercy will favor the Egyptians.

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TOHFAH (d. 856)

Tohfah was a minstrel and slave-girl who was frequently in ecstasy being transported from self and senses through the love of the Truth.

She knew neither sleep nor food and day and night was crying and moaning in love for God. Finally, when her state proved to intense for her master's household to handle, they sent her to a madhouse.

the story goes that a famous mystic felt called to go to the hospital where she was held in chains, and seeing her, realized her love for God.

when her master came in he offered to bury her for whatever cost, tho he had no money. that night, after praying about it, a man with wealth came and provided the money. Upon going to the hospital the next day to pay for her, her owner said for no amount would he sell her but that God had dealt with him and she was to be free to go where she would.

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Now we will begin with the men. I am doing this by the year of death and interestingly enough, the women all came first as they seem to have been the early sufis that are remembered. However, it was short and sweet, for from here on it is a man's organization.

DHU 'L-NUN (d.861)

NO. An Egyptian Sufi, alchemist and mystic, who linked Islamic monotheism with the traditional wisdom of Egypt (hermetic tradition).

like Rabe'ah he wrote mystical -poetry using the language of physical passion. for example.

I die, and yet not dies in me/ the ardour of my love for Thee
Nor hath Thy Love, my only goal,/ Assuaged the fever of my soul

To thee alone my spirit cries;/ In thee my whole ambition lies
and still Thy wealth is far above/ the poverty of my small love.

Central to Dhus thought is gnosis, or mystical knowledge revealed only to the few. He was something of a pantheist and found testimony to the Unity of God in the noises of animals, the murmur of the trees, the splashing sound of water, the song of birds.

to him God was All-Prevailing, all-knowing, All-wise, all just, all true.

His love of nature was such that it was said that the birds flocked above his coffin to give it shade.

another legend tells of an inscription appearing mysteriously over his grave: "This is the beloved of kGod, who died from his love for God, killed by God'.

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yes ABU YAZID (801-874)

he is of interest because his thought shows some signs of interaction with the Hindu Vedanta (ie, the upanishads, the end of the Vedas).

In one vision God said to him: "Abu Yazid, my creation is yearning to see you." He answered: "Adorn me with your unity; clothe me with your selfhood, raise me to your oneness so that when your creatures see me, they may say,

"We have seen Thee and Thou art That." Yet I will not be there at all.'

Another experience he describes in lively language: 'I sloughed off myself as a snake sloughs off its skin, and I looked into my essential being and saw that "I am He."

he had the experience of passing beyond time and space: This servant is with God in all places and no place is w/o him"

more, he found himself one with all things; he was All and, being All was one with God, was indeed God.

~~Abu al-Hasan Ali Nadwi~~
To Orthodox Islam this is blasphemous to identify oneself with God (shirk) and this was the greatest impression he made.

however, at other points he sees himself as detached from God, in the familiar image of lover and beloved: "It is impossible to know you and not to love you", "the lover's thirst is never satisfied, his tongue hangs out, and he says "more".

This is the language of many mystics but at one point Abu makes a discovery, that his very love stands in the way of his reaching the object of his love.

This profound realization led Abu into his extreme position. He now had to accept frustration or claim attainment.

he claimed attainment and renounced conventional religious practices, reading the Qur'an, the worship in the mosque, the pilgrimage to Mecca; he did not need them.

he renounced the practices of mysticism, asceticism and meditation; he felt he did not need these either. they were for the unenlightened, for those incapable of -mystical experience.

he claimed to be above the prophet; the banner which he carried was a banner of light.

He seems to be a man carried away by his own imagination but there is much of lasting value and insight.

One of the best stories of him tells how someone knocked at his door. He called out 'Whom do you seek?' "Abu Yazid" he answered, 'I too have been seeking for Abu Yazid for thirty years and have not yet found him.'

Of one thing he was certain, Attainment was not achievement. All was of God, not himself: "At the beginning I was mistaken in four respects.

I concerned myself to remember God, to know Him, to love Him, to seek Him, and when I had come to the end, I saw that He had remembered me before I remembered Him, that His knowledge of me had preceded my knowledge of Him, His love towards me had existed before my love to Him, and He had sought me before I sought Him."

So he was able to say "I have known God by means of God, and what is other than God by the light of God.

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AL-JUNAID (d. 910 CE)

perhaps the subtlest and most systematic of the Sufi mystics; he was nicknamed 'the crown of the mystics.'

He starts from the separation of the Eternal from that which was originated in time. Man's separate existence is part of God's plan.

at the same time God wills to break down the separateness by the gift of His own being.

the story of man is the story of his quest to return to the state in which he was before he was--before the creation, the time when there was only God.

But people cannot do this of themselves; it is the gift of God; and the means are FANA, the dying-to-self, the death of self which is life in God.

Yet the mystic does not wholly cease to exist as an individual. Rather, his individuality is given a new dimension by being taken up in God.

In the flesh, one is still -separated. God grants freedom from this world while in union with Himself, but then separates the mystic and restores him to this world again.

al-Junaid, like Rabe'ah and Dhu uses the language of love, of the lover yearning for the Beloved. He also uses the language of nature-mysticism, for the separated mystics will seek the creator thru His creation,

Al-Junaid spoke of this rhythm of separation and union in a poem."

Now I have known, O Lord,/ What lies within my heart;
In secret, from the world apart,/ My tongue hath talked with my Adored.

So in a manner we/ United are, and One;
Yet otherwise disunion/ is our estate eternally.

Though from Thy gaze profound/ Deep awe hath hid Thy Face;
In wondrous and ecstatic Grace/ I feel Thee touch my inmost ground.

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EVEN in the highest state the self is not annihilated, as in Buddhism; It continues in God since even in the highest state the worshipper cannot apprehend the fullness of Deity. he claims this is not deification but it is a loss of will to find the eternal self in God.

it must be said that not all Sufis made these fine distinctions.

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AL-HALLAJ (857-922)

Born in Fars, the son of a wool-carder, he early showed himself concerned with spiritual truth.

at the age of 20 he emigrated to Basra, where he became a Sufi. He also married, remaining monogamous all his life.

he traveled widely to Baghdad and Mecca, and as far as Iddia and Turkestan, laying aside the garb of the Sufi because it was inhibiting his group.

He preached the message that everyone should find God in his own heart, calling himself "the carder of consciences.

He is perhaps the supreme example of the 'intoxicated' sufi as he was utterly dedicated to the Will of God.

to him are due the concepts of mystical intoxication, irradiation, enclosed solitude, open solitude, and others, including BAQA AND FANA, whose first identification and definition came from him.

On his last pilgrimage he prayed that God should reduce him to nothing, so that all might be God.

Because the highest mystical experience lies in reunion with God, he claimed that man may be seen as God and the revelation of God, taking Jesus as his example.

He did not claim to be divine himself, but his assertion on his final return to Baghdad, "I am the Creative Truth" comes near it:

"If you do not recognize God, at least recognize His signs. I am that sign. I am the Creative Truth, because through the Truth I am a truth eternally."

He was denounced for claiming mystical union with God, condemned and crucified, identifying himself with Jesus on the cross even praying for his executioners. and foreseeing his resurrection.

His last words were, "all that matters for the ecstatic is that the Unique should reduce him to Unity."

his most famous verse was:

I have become he whom I love, and he has become myself,
We are two spirits in one body, / When you see me you see him.

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NO ABU SAID IBN ABI 'L-KHAYR (967-1049)

One of the great mystical sufis of Islam. When he was young he learned some 30,000 verses of secular poetry by heart.

he studied theology at Merv and tried to win spiritual peace from learning.

he passed through a spiritual crisis in which he continually repeated the name of Allah, spent some years in solitary meditation and ascetic practices.

He led a nomadic life and eventually settled down to develop a monastic community at Nishapur until his final years of retirement

His mysticism is an account of practical experience: "

"Take one step out of yourself to arrive at God.",

"Anyman who begins to know himself-as not-being-knows God as true Being."

"God Himself communicates to the heart the consciousness of God"

"All comes from God; as long as we say to God "Thou and I" we remain self-centered; our worship becomes a reality only when we can say, "Thou, Thou"

Abu Daïd tends in his mysticism to be a pantheist:

"there is nothing other than God."

He chose his own epitaph: "This was love's servant."

THE CHISHTI ORDER - 10th Century

~~before leaving the 10th century~~ I want to discuss the major dervish order founded that century that still exists today.

it was founded by Abu-Ishak Chishti (the Syrian' who was born early in the tenth century. He was a descendant of the prophet Mohammed- and claimed as his 'spiritual pedigree' the inner teachings of the family of Hashim.

This Chishti community specialized in the use of music in their exercises.

the wandering dervishes of the Order were known as Chist or Chisht. They would enter a town and play a rousing air with flute and drum to gather people round them before reciting a tale or legend of initiatory significance.

Traces of this figure occur even in Europe, where the Spanish Chistu is found with closely similar garb and instruments. --a sort of itinerant jester.

it must be remembered that the moors were in Spain from 711 till the mid 1500s so there is obvious influence.

As in the case of the other Sufic Orders, the specialized methodologies of the Chishtis soon became crystallized into a simplified love for music; the emotional arousal produced by music being confused with 'spiritual experience.'

The Chishtis made their most enduring impact upon India. For the past

nine hundred years their musicians have been esteemed throughout the subcontinent.

they used stories to make a point, one good example is "The Oath"

a man who was troubled in mind once swore that if his problems were solved he would sell his house and give all the money gained from it to the poor.

the time came when he realized that he must redeem his oath. But he did not want to give away so much money. So he thought of a way out.

He put the house on sale at one silver piece. Included with the house, however, was a cat. The price asked for this animal was ten thousand pieces of silver.

Another man bought the house and cat. The first man gave the single piece of silver to the poor, and pocketed the ten thousand for himself.

Many peoples minds work like this. They resolve to follow a teaching ; but they interpret their relationship with it to their own advantage

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RIR-I ANSAR (d.1088)

A persian poet and mystic he composed an important sketch of Sufi philosophy, but his lasting qualities lie in his devotional poetry, especially his Munajat or Orisons, in which rhyming prose is interspersed with verse quatrains.

O Powerful, Who of Godhead worthy art!
O Creator, who shewest the way to every erring heart!
To my soul give Thou of Thy Own spotlessness,
And to my eyes of Thy Own Luminousness;
And unto us, of Thy Bounty and Goodness, whatever may be best
Make Thou that They Bequest

O Lord, in Mercy grant my soul to live,
and patience grant, that hurt I may not grieve:
How shall I know what thing is best to seek?
Thou only knowest: what Thou knowest, give!

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ABU HAMID IBN MUHSMAD AL-GHAZALI (1058-1111)

he wrote "the Destruction of Philosophy" because he wanted to restore emphasis on religion and to synthesize mystical doctrine with orthodoxy.

He did more to make The Sufi's acceptable to the orthodox than any other writer and this was his ultimate concern. He was the greatest muslim scholar.

ELEMENTS OF AL GHAZALIS MYSTICAL CREED

first, had the Quranic concept of the supreme creator. God created by an act of free will, not -by thinking as the neo-platonists said.

Man can be connected to God by reason which is a gift.

The sufi concept was that Allah dwells in the soul which is his instrument.

Reason and faith are two beginning steps but one must go on to experience to know God as creator.

Ghazali uses the scripture about light (already quoted) and says that the scripture is talking about the primary, uncreated light.

other objects are only light figuratively (such as reason) and other objects, in fact all light gets its life from God.

The hierarchy of beings get lighter the higher they go in the spheres. (he had obviously read Dionysius.)

All beings receive light from Allah and all are purely derivative in relation to Allah.

Only Allah possess essential being--everything derives being from Allah.

Only Allah makes things be from moment to moment. He sustains existence from moment to moment.

In the mystical experience one realizes they derive their being from Allah. everything except God is pure non-being.

a key concept- is that of derivation. I am because Allah is.

the human is created in Allah's likeness, and is a microcosm of the whole universe. Any value the human has is derived from Allah.

only the human being who knows him/her self can attain to the vision of Allah which is union.

When one experiences this then one experiences God the merciful, not God the Lord as he can never be portrayed in words.

One can't talk about God in himself as it's a divine mystery.

the Highest knowledge is direct mystical experience but one must have the gift of prophetic spirit to experience God.

the highest vision was of Allah the Creator. Those who obtain this recognize the divine unity--not identity--they recognize their complete dependence and attention to God and loss of all interest in the self.

Reason takes us to a point but only experience brings one to Allah

The Core of Religion is to repent of one's sins and purify the heart of all but God, and by exercise of religion attain a virtuous character. This was his solution.

he said that Sufi methods were of great value for then one performs the five pillars (prayer, fasting, alms, pilgrimage, and confession of Allah as one) from the heart.

thus one combines the mysticism of the Sufis with law and tradition.

he was considered a moderate.

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OMAR KHAYYAM (d. 1122)

Omar Khayyam is probably the best known Sufi in the west thanks to Edward Fitzgerald. Unfortunately, Fitzgerald does not do him justice.

He was an important Persian philosopher, mathematician and scientist as well as an instructor in Sufism. In fact, his verses are incomprehensible without a knowledge of Sufism. The best known of Fitzgerald's verses runs:

Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough,
a Flask of wine, a book of verse--and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness--/and wilderness is Paradise enow.
it looks like an erotic picnic, but bread and wine have long been religious symbols.

the Sufis composed many verses, retired to the desert, and sought union with 'thou' which was the best paradise.

this has to be read in a mystical manner, as do the following:

The secret must be kept from all non-people:/the mystery must be hidden from all idöots
See what you do to people--/The Eye has to be hidden from all men.

Omar has been granted the vision of the truth:

When the Origanil cause determined my being
I was given the first lesson of love
It was then that the fragment of my heart was made
The Key to the Treasury of Pearls of mystical meaning.

So when we read of wine in Omar, as we often do"

I cannot live without wine,
Without the cup's draught I cannot carry my body.
I am the slave of that breath in which the Saki says
'Take one more cup'--and I cannot do so--

thus he presents the Sufi doctrine of spiritual intoxication as part of
the ecstatic experience which leads to gnosés or knowledge.

and when has the via negativa been more clearly put than in the line:

"O ignorant ones--the Road is neither this nor that!?"

Omar, in addition to his mystical poetry, was a great mathamatician.

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THE QUADIRE ORDER (begun 12th cent)

~~to conclude this lecture,~~ and the 12th century, I will deal with the two
major orders founded that century.

this order was founded and organized by Abdul-Qadir of Gilan, and his
followers. He was born at Nif, in Gialn distraict, to the south of the
Caspian Sea.

he died in 1166 and used terminology very similar to that which was
later employed by the Rosicrucians in Europe.

Abdu-Qadir specialized in the induction of mystical or spiritual states,
called the science of states. this was to bring about consciousness of the
presence of God.

His doings have been so exaggerated by his followers that his personality
bears little resemblance to his own definitions of a Sufi master.

the Qadire organizations have deteriorated it seems, from an ardent overemployment of ecstasy producing techniques. This follows a common pattern in enthusiasts when the producing of an altered state of mind becomes an end and not a means properly controlled by a specialist.

one of Abdul-Qadir's statements shows that 'producing states was not, for him, an end in itself. He says:

The jackal thinks that he has feasted well, when he has in fact only eaten the leavings of the lion.

I transmit the science of producing 'states'. This, used alone, causes damage. He who uses it only will become famous, even powerful. He will lead men to worship 'states,' until they will almost be unable to return to the Sufi path."

It is evident that the later leaders of the Qadire organizations did not heed his advice.

Abdul-wadir is said to have called together all his adherents in Baghdad and said to them concerning the transmission of Grace.

~~Abdul-wadir said to them concerning the transmission of Grace.~~
"I beg you never to forget what I am now going to tell you, because otherwise you will become the source of great error. I address those of you who will remain more ignorant than the others, because the Knowers and the Attainers will never make the mistake which I shall now describe.

During the period of Duty and Repetition (certain exercises) many people acquire the capacity to affect others with a strange experience. This produces trembling, excitement and many other feeling, and signals a stage of awareness. There may be visions of great teachers, or of divine influence.

Acting upon the unprepared "heart", such experiences must instantly be stopped, because they cannot progress to real contact with the Divine until something else has been cultivated in the disciple.

This opening of capacity, once discovered by the ignorant or raw, spreads especially among villagers and other simple people, until they indulge it regularly, thinking it to be a true state. It is in fact merely a signal, a sign of something. When it occurs, it must be reported, and those who experience it should undergo an appropriate period of preparation.

Persistence in this practice in the past exhausted the capacities of the followers of saints and prophets, all deludedly believing themselves to be the recipients of Baraka (grace). Those who Attain dare not induce this state once it has appeared. Those who indulge it may never Attain.

Follow only the practices of the Teacher, who knows why these things occur and who has to adjust the study accordingly."

THE SUHRAWARDI ORDER (founded 12th Xian Cent.)

this order, based on the teachings of Junaid, (d. 910) ~~already discussed~~.
it was founded by Sheikh Ziaudin Jahib Suhrawardi.

India, Persia (Iran) and Africa have all been influenced in their mystical activity by the methods and personages of the Order, tho the Suhrawardis are among the most fragmented of the Sufi groups.

Their practices vary from the production of mystical ecstasy to the completely quiescent exercise for the 'perception of Reality' (contemplation)

instructional materials of the Order are often, to all appearances, merely legends or works of fiction.

to the devotees, however, they contain materials which are essential to prepare the ground for the experiences which the disciple must eventually undergo.

without them, it is believed, there is a possibility that the student may simply develop altered states of mind which render him unfit for ordinary life..

like all the orders, they use stories and parables to make their points. the only saying of Sheikh Ziaudin I found says:

"Self-justification is worse than the original offence."

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next week we will deal with the so called FORMATIVE PERIOD and following, that is the 13th and 14th centuries, with a few strays that come later.

SUFI MYSTICS-- THE FORMATIVE PERIOD AND BEYOND (13th cent, ff)

Almost all the people I will discuss this ~~last lecture~~ fall within the time of the 13th and 14th century, with two exceptions from the 19th century.

There is no way I can cover everyone, but I have tried to pick up the most important mystics of the Sufi tradition.

FARID AL'DIN ATTAR (d. 1229)

NO Attar was a Persian Sufi poet who is best known for an elaborate allegory called The Parliament of the Birds in which the birds set out on a quest for the lord of creation, the SIMURGH.

They have to pass through the valleys of Search, Love, Knowledge, Detachment, Unity, Wonder and Self-annihilation.

of all the thousands of birds only thirty win through. At the palace door they see thousands of resplendent suns and beautiful moons.

A chamberlain comes out to test them; he calls them 'a feeble handful of dust '.

The King has his being always and eternally and does not depend on their homage. But they are aflame with love, as the moth for the candle.

they are admitted to the presence--and find that in seeing the SIMURGH (which means thirty birds) they are seeing themselves.

w/o speaking, the king conveys to them this truth: "The sun of my majesty is a mirror. He who sees himself therein sees his soul and his body, and sees them completely. Since you have come as thirty birds (Simurgh); you WILL SEE THIRTY BIRDS IN THIS mirror. If forty or fifty were to come it would be the same. Although you are now completely changed you see yourselves as you were before. . . But I am more than thirty birds. I am the very essence of the true Simurgh. Annihilate yourselves gloriously and joyfully in me and in me you shall find yourselves."

so the birds lose themselves in the Simurgh as the shadow in the sun.

'seek the trunk of the tree, and do not worry if the branches do or do not exist."

IBN AL-FARID (1182-1235)

born in Cairo, he was a great mystical poet with a gift for combining fantasy and realism. His greatest poem was the Ta'iyya (rhyming on the letter t') in which he recounts the different phases of mystical experience through which he passed before attaining union with God. He seeks to convey something of that ultimate bliss.

The imagery is that of a love-song, and God is symbolized as the Beloved.

He is a difficult poet, enigmatica and obscure, abounding in word-play intellectual conceits and fantastic imagery.

He must have acquired a disciplined and practiced control of words, since his close friends record that he would dictate his poems on emerging from a mystical trance which might last as long as ten days.

Sometimes his mystical experience takes the form of union with the spirit of the prophet (Mohammad), but in at least one passage he seems to claim such union with God that he appears as God incarnate, and as the elan vital of the universe:

My spirit is a spirit to all the spirits; and all visible beauty in the universe flows from my nature.

Ascribe to me alone the knowledge with which I alone was endowed before my visible appearance, while amongst created beings my friends did not recognize me.

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IBN AL ARABI (1165-1240)

al Arabi was born in the township of Murcia in Spain in August, 1165 to a strongly religious family. Three of his uncles had become Sufi's.

at age 8 his family moved to Seville where he began his formal education.

he was welll educated and became a Sufi at age 20, with his wives encouragement. He had one trait that was not to be popular and that was a supreme self-confidence that often made him intolerent of the acheivements of others.

he had a background in astrology and alchemy as well as the sufi way.

two of al arabi's spiritual teachers were women, both considerably advanced in age when he became their disciple. in fact, one was over 95 years old and he built her a hut of reeds to live in until she died.

His fame grew until even in Mecca he was greatly respected. He had a strong appreciation of the feminine (such as Dante shows to Beatrice) at least in its spiritual aspect.

in 1206 in Cairo, his reputaiton went before him but not in a good sense. the mullahs of the city denounced his teachings and the popular reaction almost cost him his life.

this sort of antagonism to Ibn al Arabi has continued down to the present day in certain circles of the Muslim World, since all mystical experience tends to express itself, when it does so, in terms often abhorrent to minds firmly fixed within rigid doctrinal limits.

His life was saved by a timely letter of recommendation to the Egyptian ruler.

He then went to Konya, in Asia Minor where the newly arrived master was taken to their hearts and it was as a result of the spiritual contacts he made there that his influence became so dominant in all later Sufism down to the present day.

in 1214 he returned to Mecca to deal with the criticisms of his collection of mystical love poems The Interpreter of Desires . Religious scholars objected to them as being inappropriate to religious feelings, as they were to erotic for pious sensibilities.

Al arabi thus composed a full commentary explaining the inner meaning of his verses, much like John of the Cross did a few centuries later.

as he said:"all our poems are related to divine truths in various forms, such as love themes, eulogy, the names and attributes of women, the named of rivers, places, and stars.

Al Arabi's literary output was monumental, and about a hundred works survive, and perhaps the same amount failed to survive.

in his works he effectively provided a compendium of mysticism for the Arabic world.

His system can be summed up under nine headings:

1. God is Absolute Being; in Him Being and existence are inseparable; He is the source of all existence.
2. The universe possesses relative being; In God's knowledge it has eternal existence, but, being external to God, it has temporal non-existence.
3. God is both transcendent and immanent; "The Reality of whom transcendence is asserted is the same as the Creation of whom immanence is asserted, although the Creator is distinguished from the created."
4. Being, apart from God, exists by virtue of God's will. His agents are the Divine Names, the Platonic Forms.
5. Before coming into existence material objects were latent in the Mind of God (as Platonic Forms); These Platonic Forms are thus intermediary between the One and the Many.
6. There is no such thing as becoming one with God; there is the realization that the mystic is already one with God.
7. The creative, animating and rational principle of the universe, the primary Nous or Intellect, is the Reality or Form of Muhammad, and finds its full manifestation in the Perfect Man. (this is adapted from Plotinus)
8. Every prophet is a Logos of God, Muhammad is the Logos, and all the others are gnity in the Form of Muhammad.
9. The Perfect Man is a miniature of Reality, a microcosm who reflects all the perfect attributes of the macrocosm. He is the epiphany of God's desire to be known; he alone knows God, loves God and is loved by God.

* * * * *

Ibn Al-Arabi used the Ka'ba, the sacred building at Mecca, as a central theme for mystical meditation.

"Behold the secret building before it is too late, and you will see how it takes on life through those who circle round it and walk round its stones."

The eye of the heart sees through the attributes to the essence, through the dead stones to the living God, so that to kiss the Black Stone is to kiss God's right hand.

the love poems already referred to really have to be read on two levels. They are straightforward love poems, and we know something of the girl, Nizam, to whom they are addressed, But they are also the poems of a mystic who platonically , looks behind the face of a girl to the eternal beauty.

to quote: The ordinary lover loves an appearance, a second best,
 I love the Real.

In one poem, shocking to orthodoxy, his creed rings clear:

My heart is capable of every form:/ a cloister for the monk, a fane for ido\$
A pasture for gazelles, the votary's Ka'ba/the tables of the Torah, the Quran
Love is the creed I hold: wherever turn/ His camels, love is still my creed & faith

He was accused of pantheism, but despite orthodox hostility his influence was immense both on Islamic and Christian mysticism. He has been called "the Greatest Sheikh."

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JELLAL-ED-DIN RUMI (1207-1273)

born in Balkh, Afghanistan to a man who was a student of the teachings of Al-Arabi, but who also could not refrain from political debate, was forced to leave Balkh in 1212. they travelled around for 16 years and finally settled in Konya, in Asia Minor and his father became a professor under the royal patronage of Anatolia, Turkey.

Rumi inherited his father's profession and became professor of theosophy attracting several hundred students, inheriting his father's library & position.

Rumi's father died in 1228 and in 1230 a good friend and disciple of his father came to Konya. He was a true dervish who had lived in solitude in the mountains in a state of mystical ecstasy. Upon his arrival in Konya he was informed of the father's death and decided to stay and devote his life to the spiritual training of Rumi.

for the next 9 years Rumi was initiated into the Sufi doctrine.

Rumi once told of the death of Al Hallaj saying: Al Hallaj had claimed that he was the Truth and the people had dismembered his body. Rumi then said that if he told what he knew his body would be chopped into small pieces.

He founded the Mevlevi Order of Dervishes in Turkey, which was outlawed in the 1920's by Turkey. However, they still exist underground. Rumi was really noted for his poetry and has been called the greatest mystical poet in any language.

In his Mathnawi he expounds in verse the whole Sufi system. At the outset he uses the image of the reed-pipe to express the mystic's way to God.

Harken to the reed forlorn/ Breathing, ever since 'twas born
From its rusty bed, a strain/ of impassioned love and pain.

The secret of my song, though new,/ None can see and none can hear.
Oh, for a friend to know the sigh/ And mingle all his soul with mine!

'Tis the flame of love that fired me,/ 'Tis the wine of love inspired me.
Wouldst thou learn how loves bleed, /Hearken, Hearken to the Reed!

Love and wine are frequently used as allegories of mystical experience in Rumi's lyrics. But other images are there as well. His association with the Whirling Dervishes leads him to a peculiar emphasis on the power of the rotating wheel, the circling of the heavenly bodies, the mill-wheel and millstone.

the Mountain of the sun/ I'll fashion to a mill.
And as my waters run,/ I'll turn thee at my will.

Rumi was also something of a nature-mystic.

Men have argued (but they lied)/ That this image does not bide
One declared we are a tree, / Said another, grass are we.

Yet the rustling of this bough/ proves the breeze is stirring now;
Silent then, O silent be;/ That we are, and this are we.

Sometimes his absorption with nature takes him in the direction of pantheism:
In one poem he speaks of the ascent of the soul to God through progressive
incarnations (he ~~was ambivalent~~ about reincarnation) in which in one sense the soul
is always in God, but in another has to ascent from mineral to plant to
animal to man to angel and ultimately to God alone.

Ultimately, all power and meaning comes from God:

We are the flute, the music you,/ the mountain we, which echoes you,
The chessmen set in line by you,/ to win or lose now moved by you.
We are the flag embroidered with the lion,/ the unseen wind which ripples us is you.

No one is clearer than Rumi that when we seek God it is because God is
seeking us.

Love was the key word for him and was the relationship between God and
the soul, in fact this was his ultimate concern.

Love was the supreme principle and is a bridge to divine love
the human's love is the result of God's love for the love a person has for
Allah is really Allah's love for Allah--in loving the soul, God loves himself.

all action is God's action. humans appropriate God's actions

Rumi feels that we are both pre-determined and have free will.

God is the cause, he compels us, yet we are also free to choose.

how should one act then? one must act as if they have free will and obey
Allah and even if you don't and find out it's really God's action it doesn't
matter.

EMMANATIONS come out from God--the world is always divine emanating himself.

the universe is the projected and reflected image of God, a mirror, just
like the soul is a mirror of Allah.

each part of the world reflects the mirror above him. The world is in
some sense divine.

Beyond the universe there is nothing

the perfect man- is polished mirror--the microcosm that reflects the Divine.

he believed that Muhammad was divinized, made the logos, like Al Arabi.

The path begins with mortifying the flesh as the body is bad

We are bound to do the wrong thing as we have a propensity to leave God and
do evil.

What is Evil? God created pain and grief to manifest happiness by its opposite.

One must have a spiritual director who has come to union with God

We must recognize our failure before we can begin to grow--one has to
choose self abnegation.

pride and desire will inhibit a person

He was not concerned with reason but wrote hymns, stories and poetry.

* * * * *

SA'DI, MUSHARRIF (1215-92)

Sa'di is one of the greatest Persian poets, came from Shiraz, and studied in Baghdad. He travelled widely and adventurously (he was captured by crusaders) before settling back in Shiraz.

He is best known for "The Orchard" a didactic poem which ranges from practical politics to mystic love, and "The Rose-Garden", a collection of improving anecdotes, often about dervishes, interspersed with verse comments;

Part of Sa'd's strength is that his language is straightforward, but his thought is such that it can be interpreted at many levels. Sufi masters find in it the deepest communicable wisdom.

His precepts range from the immediately practical to the inexhaustibly profound. Here are two examples.

Make No friendship with an elephant-keeper, if you have no room to entertain an elephant.

and

I fear that you will not reach Mecca, O traveller!
The road you are following leads to Turkestan!

Here is a simple but profound expression of mystical wisdom:

A raindrop dripping from a cloud, / was ashamed when it saw the sea.
'Who am I where there is a sea?' it said. / When it saw itself with the eye of humility.
a shell nurtured it in its embrace.

* * * * *

SHARAFUDDIN B. YAHYA MANERI (1263-1381)

Sharafuddin was born in Maner, in Bihar, a state adjacent to Bengal in northeast India. His father was a famous sufi in his times. He became known as Makhdum ul-Mulk, "The Spiritual Teacher of the Realm" and is still venerated as the most famous Muslim saint ever to have lived in Bihar.

The shrine built to him there attracts pilgrims on the anniversary of his death, as is the Sufi custom.

he married (against his wishes) and had one son. After his father's death he gave the son to his mother and left his young wife and adopted a life of celibacy (a sunyasi in the Hindu custom) and went out searching for a spiritual guide.

in Delhi he met a number of Sufi masters but did not become the disciple of any of them.

He was about to return to Bihar dissatisfied but his brother persuaded him to visit yet one more guide, the little-known Najibuddin Firdausi.

An immediate overpowering attraction drew the two men to each other. and Sharafuddin became the disciple. On the way back to Maner, Sharafuddin disappeared into the forest of Bihia, famous for the association with the Buddha and the countless Buddhist and Hindu monks who reside there.

many years later he was coaxed to come to the Friday prayer in Bihar, about 12 miles away and then coaxed into living there in a land grant that the reigning sultan gave him. He lived then till his death in Bahir in a maintained center built for him.

What Sharafuddin is known for is called "the Hundred letters" . They are letters concerning the spiritual journey written for Qazi, the governor of Chausa in western Bihar since he could not attend the audiences held by him.

The Hundred letters rapidly gained fame beyond Bahir, in fact are in all sufi circles by now but early were in all the Asian sub-continent. they cover just about every topic of spiritual interest imaginable.

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MUHAMMAD HAFIZ (1326-1390)

One of the greatest lyric poets of all time. He was from Shiraz, Persia and spent his early days in poverty and sang of wine and love.

Hafiz has always been a figure of superstitious respect; and his poems like the Bible and Vergil, have been used as oracles by being opened at random.

Sufis claim that he was a mystical poet, that intoxication represents mystical ecstasy and the Beloved stands for God.

Recent European scholarship has tended to take the poems literally.

it is important to see that these are not mutually exclusive, and Sufi literature often allows interpretation at various levels.

One example must serve: the last line points the deeper level:

When my Beloved the cup in hand taketh
The market of lovely ones slack demand taketh
I, like a fish, in the ocean am fallen,
Till me with the hook yonder Friend to land taketh,
Every one saith, who her tipsy eye seeth,
'Where is s shrieve, that this fair firebrand taketh?
Lo at her feet in lament am I fallen,
Till the beloved me by the hand taketh
Happy his heart who, like Hafiz, a goblet
of wine of the Prime Fore-eternal's brand taketh.

a modern Persian critic has said of him, "Hafiz's spiritual greatness and mental power proceeded from that mystical consciousness which in him attained perfection."

ABDU AL -JILI (1365-1412)

Little is known about al Jili's life except that he came from south of the Caspian sea and travelled in India.

He wrote numerous mystical treatises, of which the best known is The Perfect Man, or more fully, The Man Perfect in Knowledge of the first and last things.

His theme is God, His names, attributes and essence.

God's essence is pure being; it is the 'dark mist'.

Absolute Being descends from Oneness, through "He-ness", to "I-ness," thus becoming both the subject and object of thought.

The created world is the outward aspect of that whose inward aspect is God.

Man is the cosmic thought taking flesh; he is the bridge between Absolute Being and the world of nature.

The three stages of mystical illumination correspond to the three stages of the descent of Absolute Being: they are in reverse order of course

The illumination of the Names, The illumination of the attributes and the Illumination of the Essence.

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THE NAQSHBANDI ORDER (founded 14th cent)

one of the so called "sober orders" still in existence today this dervish school called Khajagan (masters) rose in Central Asia and greatly influenced the development of the Indian and Turkigh empires.

the order gave rise to many specialist schools, which adopted individual names.

Many authorities regard this as the earliest of all the mystical 'chains of transmission'.

Khaja Bahaudin Naqshband (d. 1389) is one of the greatest personages of this school. After his time it was known as the Naqshbandi Chain: the 'Designers' or "masters of the Design."

Bahaudin spent seven years as a courtier, seven looking after animals, and seven in road-building. This series of 7 has numerologically significant meaning most certainly and cannot be taken literally.

He studied under the redoubtable Baba el-Samasi, and is credited with having returned to the original principles and practices of Sufism.

The naqushbandi sheikhs alnoe have the authority to initiate disciples into all the other orders of dervishes.

Because they never publically adopted any distinctive dress, and because their members never carried on attention-attracting activities, scholars have not been able to reconstruct the history of the order, and it is often difficult to identify its members.

Because of the tradition of the 'Masters' to work entirely withing the social framework of the culture in which they operate, the Naqshbandis in the Middle East and Central Asia have gained the repute of being mainly Muslim pietists.

Bahaudin Naqshband wrote of the reasons for founding a school and it serves as a good summary of what is involved in the various Sufi orders:

THE PALACE OF THE ENLIGHTENED REASONS FOR THE FOUNDING OF A SCHOOL

The Path (Order) of the Masters derives its substance in unbroken succession from the earliest times. It maintains its connection, in a parallel way, with both the ancients and the contemporary teachers, by direct communication of being.

Now many externalists have been confused by the fact that there are different Orders and formulations in our Path. They are the more perplexed because, although the adherents of one School esteem, revere and follow one teacher and his methods, they may well join another one at some time or other.

The reason is not far to seek, if you know how to seek it. The answer is in the ancient aphorism of ours: 'Speak to Everyone in Accordance with his Understanding.'

The task of the teacher is to teach. In order to teach he must take into account the present preoccupations and fixed ideas of his pupils. He must, for instance, use the terms of Bokhara with the Bokharan and the terms of Baghdad in Baghdad.

If he knows what he is teaching, he arranges the outer form of the means of teaching it, like building the physical shape of a school, in accordance with this. Also involved are the nature and descriptions of the disciples, and their potentiality.

Take an example in musical assemblies. We do not attend them nor do we employ music. This is because for our time and in our position

there is more harm than good in it. Music, heard in the right way, improves the approach to the Consciousness. But it will harm people who are not sufficiently prepared, or of the correct type, for hearing and playing it.

Those who do not know this have adopted music as something sacred in itself. The feelings which they experience while indulging in it they mistake for sublime ones. In fact they are using it for the lower purpose of arousing sentiment, emotion which is no basis for further progress.

Dervishes join the Order most suited to their inner nature. They remain with their teacher until he has developed them as far as possible. After this they may go or be sent to another teacher, in order to participate in the special exercises which he may offer. This is because there may be a side of them which will be benefited by this specialization.

In the Path of the Masters we follow the bases of the Dervish Work. Some of our exercises are used in one way, some in another. Some are reversed, because they do not apply to this place or this time. Similarly with all other schools. It is for this reason that you will find here masters who have the Robe of Permission to enrol disciples in all the Orders, but who work with this community in accordance with its needs, based on the original science upon which all other forms are based.

Our school is founded on the verifiable and impeccable authority of our predecessors in unbroken and documented succession of spiritual pedigree. Little do you know, however, how little these externalists (which satisfy you by our moral repute) count in comparison with the fundamental Truth of Experience which is our invisible, powerful inheritance.

Bahaudin Naqshband

BIBI HAYATI (d. 1853)

Now there is a big jump in time and I will deal with two 19th cent. mystics of the Sufis.

Bibi Hayate was a poetess and mystic from Kerman. She was born in the early 19th century in the Kerman province of Persia and raised under her brother, a shaikh of and one of the masters of the Nimatullahi order.

it was perhaps due to his guidance that her contemplative life later acquired such brilliance.

In her early years of maturity, she was taken by her brother to attend one of the Sufi gatherings of Nur 'Ali. The spiritual light of his presence apparently caused a change of state in her and awakened an intense ardor for spirituality within her.

shortly thereafter, she was initiated into the rites of Nimatullahi Sufism.

She progressed along the path and eventually she fell in love with Nur 'Ali and married him.

Hayati's Sufi life, in conjunction with the wife-husband relationship, only served to further perfect her spiritual nature.

knowing his wife's poetic inclination, Nur 'Ali Shah finally requested that she try her hand at verse. She describes it thus:

He said: If you must adorn yourself, you should become a diver in the profound ocean of rhetoric, breaking open the pearl-laden oysters of verses, till you find about yourself an ode of decorative jewels."

she tried to excuse herself saying she was not a person of letters or the pen her husband replied

"But being a lover is the work of men, since the seeker of the Lord is male. In the realm of love, sincerity, and Sufism, you too are a man. True manhood is courage. The real man is one who never retreats, who holds firm once he has put down his feet in search of perfection."

thus following her master's command, she began to compose a Divan of poems

which eventually came to constitute a remarkable collection of profound and beautiful verses.

in reading her poetry it appears that Hayati was perfectly acquainted with both the exoteric and esoteric (or mystic) sciences. she adhered both to the external principles of her religion and to the fundamentals of Sufi gnosticism.

In addition ; she was highly practical and demonstrated her capacity as a warm-hearted caretaker of her Sufi brothers and sisters.

she had one daughter who also possessed command of literature and was given to the expression of mystical subtleties. This daughter also married a Sufi, who led the same order. In short, they provided a dynasty of Shaikhs of the Nimatullahi order.

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ABU AL-ALAWI (1869-1934)

a mystical poet from Algeria, with a strongly intellectualist bias as the following extract shows:

I am Essentially One, Single, Unencroachable
By the least object. Leave I any crevice,
Any space vacant that to another might go?
For the Inside am I of Essence in Itself
And the outside of the quality, diffuse concentration.
'Thither' is there none whither I am not turning.
Doth other than me exist, empty of my Attribute?
My Essence is the Essence of Being, now,
Always, My infinity is not limited by the least grain of mustard
Where can the Creature Find room to intrude on the Truth's Infinite?
Where other than It, when All is Full?
Union and separation are thus in Principle the same,
And to behold creation is to behold the Truth,
If creation be interpreted as it truly is.

He set himself towards the goal of Supreme Sainthood, the Great Peace, inward intoxication and outward soberness.

He experienced many visions, especially in sleep.

He became an almost hypnotic teacher.

His doctrine was the oneness of being, oneness in essence, qualities and actions.

so in his verse the Creator says:

"The veil of creation I have made as a screen for the Truth, and in creation there be Secrets which suddenly like springs gush forth."

The letters of the alphabet were for him symbols, much like for Abraham Abalufia, and the exterior acts of ritual purification and prayer an essential part of interior religion.

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SUMMARY

at present Sufism is passing thru a period of decline, tho it is still very much alive.

modernization of Islamic society has weakened virtually every one of its traditional institutions in a more or less radical way, and the Sufi brotherhoods are no exception.

to many of those who are leaders of the struggle toward development and modernization Sufism has appeared as a villain.

These see the Sufi cult of saits, the visitation to tombs, and the belief in miracles as departures from true Islam and as reasons for the loss of spiritual vitality.

furthermore, they consider Sufi cosmological and philosophical teachings to be obscurantist and to act as an impediment to the acceptance of progressive and scientific ways of understanding.

The conservatives have almost always felt that the Sufis were an aberration and not true Islamic thinkers and they have persecuted them over the years as, for example, al-Hallaj.

Thus there is virtual unanimity among the leadership, both intellectual and religious, in turning away from Sufi practice and condemning it.