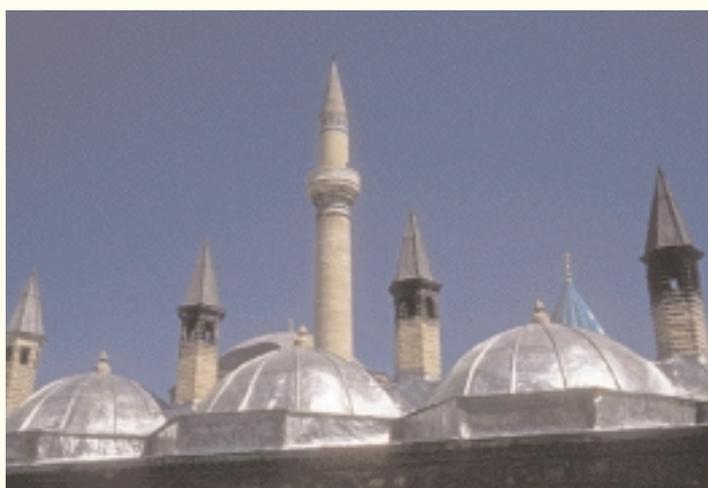


Konya

The Tradition Of Mevlana Jalal Ad-Din Rumi

By: Derick McGroarty

To the very heart of Turkish Anatolia is a long distance over vast stretches of flat rural landscape. A surprise and welcome relief was a stop in the large bustling city of Konya, the home of Sufisim.



Konya, The Mosque

مسجد قونية



Konya, Mevlana Tomb

ضريح مولانا الرومي

There has been modern development but the old part was more like a "time warp". For a city of 600,000 it is unlike any other I have visited in Turkey. Many women are veiled, restaurants do not serve alcohol and there is a general feeling of decorum.

Konya, has irrigated gardens, several fine mosques and the Monastery of the Maulawlyah of whirling dervishes.

Under the Persian Empire, Konya, (then called Iconium) was the frontier city of Phryra. It was also the capital of the Sultanate of Rum established in the 12th and 13th centuries by the Seljuks. It attracted artists and philosophers from distant shores, among them Rumi, Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Din (1207-1273), a Persian mystic.

Rumi was influenced from an early age by Islamic mysticism and this element permeates his lyrical poetry. In 1244 he accepted the religious guidance of Shams ad-Din, a dervish living in Tabriz and hoped to devote his life to creating poetry expressing his feelings for this spiritual

person. Shams ad-Din disappeared, without explanation, in 1247, and Rumi composed nearly 30,000 verses of grief at this loss.

Later spiritual friendships again inspired him. This had an immense influence on Islamic literature and thought. In old age he became known as Mevlana (master) and after his death in 1273 his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. His lifetime interest in Dervishes led to a brotherhood who preached his teachings and beliefs, called the Mevlana Dervishes, who vow perpetual travel. To this day they perform their ritual structured whirling dances on the day he died. The continuous turning is said to induce a trance. It must be a sight well worth seeing in the proper setting but on my brief visit I only saw pottery models of the dancers with their tall hats and long robes in a souvenir shop.

The Mevlana tomb in a separate section of the mosque is impressive. The green dome of the Tekke of Mevlana houses the remains of the Holy man and his successors. Each is

covered by thick gold embroidered brocade surmounted by a huge white turban. A small mother of pearl box contains a few precious hairs from the beard of the Prophet. It is the most venerated pilgrimage site in Turkey. The hall of the dervishes and the mosque were both rebuilt in the 16th century by Suleyman the Magnificent

I left Konya, in the afternoon to continue my journey with the city still pictured in my mind whilst travelling on once again through the flat agrarian landscape.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION:

A comprehensive network of inexpensive air conditioned coaches reaches all parts of Turkey.

The Berlitz pocket guide is useful to carry and has excellent pictures and brief history of major sites. A visa is required (£10) obtainable at the arrival airport.

Contact: Turkish Tourist Office:

www.gototurkey.co.uk ■