Jalal al-Din Rumi

Sufi mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi was born Jalal al-Din Mohammad-e Balkhi on the edge of the Persian Empire, in Balkh in modern-day Afghanistan (though another birthplace in Tajikistan is also claimed). Rumi’s family fled the Mongols, settling in Samarkand and then Anatolia. Rumi’s discovery of poetry is generally dated to his midlife friendship with the mystic Shams al-Din Tabrizi. Around 1244, Shams arrived in Konya, preaching the possibility and necessity of direct communion with God. Rumi became a disciple and intimate friend to Shams; the two were rarely apart. It is said that Rumi’s sons and followers were jealous of Shams and drove him from the city. Whatever the cause, after Shams’s disappearance, Rumi consoled himself with writing poetry, chanting, and performing dance, in particular the circling dances set to music that became known as the whirling dervish. Rumi quickly gained a reputation as an ecstatic visionary, and devoted the rest of his life to writing and worship. Rumi’s fame during his own lifetime was notable, and his death was widely mourned. Rumi remains one of the world’s most popular poets.