

pull of greater acceptance by the larger society and the attractions of increased power (political and financial) for the members of the subculture acting together were already evident. We may expect that a continuation of that trend, once the AIDS crisis has ebbed, will tend to undermine the cohesion of the gay subculture further, while conversely strengthening the internal unity of such emerging sub-cultural-type groupings as **sadomasochists** and **pederasts**.

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### SUETONIUS (BORN CA. 69)

Roman biographer. Suetonius led a largely uneventful life as a bureaucrat, but his access to the records of the imperial palace lends his writings authenticity. Of the books that he wrote the only one to survive in full is the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, presenting biographies of **Roman emperors** from Julius Caesar through Domitian.

Suetonius' *Lives* have been criticized for their lack of chronological organization, making it hard for later historians to date the anecdotes he presents. In comparison with his contemporary **Tacitus**, whose powerful moral vision caused him to edit and shape the material to make points, Suetonius presents facts without any particular tendency.

Of the rulers he profiles, only one, **Claudius**, seems to have been purely heterosexual. Often criticized by earlier generations for the profusion of racy details, his sexual material is used to illustrate the character of his subjects. In the

case of **Julius Caesar**, his affair with **Nicomedes** of Bithynia shows his charm and resourcefulness. But in the **Life of Nero**, the "marriages" with **Sporus** and **Doryphorus** reveal the wilful profligacy of that emperor's later years. In a period in which imperial power was absolute, it is not surprising that the emperors should have been tempted to have their way with the attractive bodies that surrounded them at every turn. The mores presented are those of the highest society rather than of the people, whose lives must have remained more prosaic and conventional. Refraining from making such contrasts, in his attitudes Suetonius is a naturalist rather than a moralist.

Much read through the centuries, Suetonius' portraits have—probably contrary to his intention—contributed to the image of the **decadence** of Rome. In fact he treats the rising age of Roman rule, with its very height—the second century—still to come. The material he provides therefore represents sidelights on an era of exuberant prosperity and imperial ostentation, rather than object lessons of the decline that was to come two centuries later.

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### SUFISM

Sufism, Islamic mysticism, is that aspect of Islamic belief and practice in which believers seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. A difficult term to define, it consists of a great variety of mystical paths that give rise to different kinds of personal feelings and experiences. All paths are aimed at culmination in the ultimate union of lover and beloved, signifying the abandonment of the personality (or self) of the mystic in the Absolute Reality. The western term "Sufism"

(Arabic *tasawwuf*) derives from the Arabic word for mystic (*sufi*), which in its turn is derived from 'wool' (*suf*), referring to the woolen garments of early Islamic ascetics. Sufis are also known as "the poor," yielding the words "dervish" and "fakir."

*Basic Features.* The origins of Sufism can be found in Islamic asceticism, which developed in the seventh and eighth century in reaction to the increasing worldliness of the expanding Muslim community and to the purely dogmatic and non-emotional trend of orthodox Islam. Love mysticism took the place of asceticism in the ninth century and reached its height in the thirteenth century. Sufism still exists among the Muslim communities around the world, often organized, as in earlier days, in mystical orders centering on a mystical guide (*shaykh* or master).

Strict obedience to the religious law, especially to the inner aspects, is basic to Sufism, although some mystics attracted public contempt by acting outwardly contrary to the law, while hiding their inner devotion to God. The absolute indifference of some Sufis to socially accepted norms and values led to a mostly unjustified reputation for Sufism in general as being licentious and libertine, which was further strengthened by the use of intoxicants (wine and hashish) and illicit love as symbols in Sufi writings and talk.

Because mystical and intuitive feelings and experiences were hard to express and therefore difficult to convey to others, Sufis used metaphors derived from worldly experiences, especially those of love and intoxication. Love and wine both led to drunkenness, to loss of reason, to an absolute indifference to the world, and ultimately to a loss of self. The cupbearer (*saki*), often a beautiful youth, symbolized the spiritual guide, who helped the lover on his way by making him drunk with love. The use of worldly images in Sufi symbolism led to a fascinating ambiguity, intensified by the fact that non-mystical writers, such as the famous Persian poet

**Hafiz** (ca. 1325–1390), tended also to use mystical symbols. It is especially this ambiguity, combined with the dominating theme of love, which continues to make Sufi literature so attractive and charming.

*Forms of Love.* Love was essential for all mystics. Some Sufis even explained themselves solely in terms of love, and that is why they have been called the "School of Love," of which **Rumi** is the most famous example.

Mystical reasoning about love and beauty was somewhat like the following: because God in his Absolute Essence could not be known, he created the world as a reflection of it, shining through forms so that lovers could realize part of his Essence through its manifestation in forms. The most perfect manifestation of the Divine Reality on earth was man, "created after His own image," and especially the beardless boy was considered to be the purest witness (*shahid*) of God. As in a saying of the Prophet: "I have seen my Lord in the form of greatest beauty, as a youth with abundant hair." Looking at beautiful faces was considered a religious activity, as Rumi said: "Behold that face on whose cheeks are the marks of His face, contemplate him on whose brow shines the Sun." Looking at beauty would inevitably lead to love, "wherever beauty dwelt in dark tresses, love came and found a heart entangled in their coils."

Some Sufis practiced *shahid bazi*, the game of love with the witness of God's beauty on earth, in which contemplation of its beauty was a central form of meditation. *Shahid bazi* consisted primarily of looking at the face and form of the beloved, with possibly some embracing and kissing, while the meditation was sometimes accompanied by music and dance, which could lead to ecstatic experiences. Famous Sufi *shaykhs* who practiced *shahid bazi* were Ahmad al-Ghazzali (d. 1126), Awhad ad-Din Kirmani (1164–1238), and Fakr ad-Din Iraqi (1213–1289).

The ideal witness was generally a beardless youth because of his almost perfect beauty and purity. His beauty was often described in Sufi literature in lyrical terms: He was as beautiful as Joseph, with a face for love of whom the moon turned upside down, and for which the sun trembled like an epileptic before the new moon. One look at him and day would break in the midst of the night. The fresh down on his cheeks was like calligraphy, and his curls like ambergris rolling over the face of the moon. The lasso of his locks cast over the earth, while his lips caused confusion into the heavens. His eyes were like two Negro children caught in a snare; each Negro child with a bow to shoot arrows in the hearts of desperate lovers. In short, he was the paragon of God's beauty and creative power. Sufis often were misogynistic, and looked upon women as symbols of the material world, caught up in forms, while boys were seen as innocent and pure, unconscious of their attraction, and of course much more available.

Worldly love, also known as the love of outward forms, was considered an education experience which prepared the lover for his path of passion and yearning, suffering and submission, and could serve as a bridge to Real Love. In Sufi literature, stories of worldly love relationships were used to teach mystics what kind of behavior and feelings were expected of real lovers. Apart from some male-female couples, one of the exemplary loves was the legendary relation between Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (969-1030) and his faithful slave Ayaz (d.1057).

Shahid bazi and worldly love in general were considered positively when chaste and spiritual, and striving for the higher love of God; aimed at the Reality that was reflected, and not at the beautiful form itself, which was only illusory and relative. Mystics were not supposed to linger on the bridge of worldly love, while they should definitely not become entangled in sensual love. The latter was rejected as a desecration of love, leading to

unlawful sex, for example with boys. Feelings of lust and desire, the so-called "sinful self," were sometimes designated as "the menstruation of men," signifying the uncleanness resulting from such feelings, which would make union with God impossible. Therefore the "sinful self" had to be shackled and controlled, struggling against the seductive snares and devilish temptations of worldly entanglements, which diverted from the road to God. Only those mystics who had conquered their "sinful selves" were capable of enduring the irresistible beauty of beardless boys or the seductiveness of women, while loving them. Shahid bazi was therefore only allowed to masters and advanced mystics. Paradise was promised for those who stayed chaste, but were not able to cope with their passionate feelings, and died because of them as "martyrs of love."

*Controversial Aspects.* There were also mystics, however, who fell victim to sin, and although some of them repented and mended their ways, for which God had promised forgiveness, it gave Sufism a bad name. Even worse for the reputation of mysticism were people who behaved as if they were mystics, but did not follow the rules at all, and only reaped the fruits of behaving indifferently to the world. All this confirmed the orthodox in their criticism of Sufism, and was cleverly exploited.

Because a mystical current deviates from the established, dogmatic path, and therefore threatens the authority of orthodoxy, a clash will become inevitable, often leading to accusations of immorality and heresy. According to orthodox Muslims, the only way to seek knowledge of God was through his words (the Koran) and through the example of the Prophet (*hadith*, Tradition); their path was one of obedience and not one of love.

Looking at and loving beautiful forms was considered immoral and sinful, and a devilish diversion of real love, because it would inevitably lead to passionate love that, in its turn, would give rise to

sexual desire and unlawful sex. They maintained it was common knowledge that no healthy man was capable of resisting the seductiveness of a beautiful boy.

Even when chaste, the orthodox argued, passionate love led to an idolization of the beloved, which was blasphemous because there was only one God, and besides, all worldly love had to be subordinated to real love. The orthodox viewed practices like *shahid bazi* as typical of the hypocrisy of Sufism, which used religion as a cover for sexual debauchery and lustful and perverse activities. The continuing self-criticism among Sufis about the paths taken, intensified out of fear of persecutions because of seemingly heretical ideas, gradually led the mystics to become more careful in their expressions and practices. The path of love became more hidden and discrete, which it still is.

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## SUICIDE

Suicide is the voluntary termination of one's own life, either to escape unbearable pain or humiliation, or because

one's toleration of grief or disappointment is exhausted. Both types of suicide are known in homosexuals. The constant need to hide and falsify one's sexual identity, the burden of leading a double life, the gnawing fear of discovery and social ruin, if not actual prosecution, were motives enough for the homosexual to think of ending his own existence.

*Earlier Data.* In 1914 Magnus Hirschfeld claimed that of the ten thousand homosexual men and women whose case histories he had collected, no fewer than 75 percent had thought of suicide, 25 percent had attempted it, and 3 percent had actually taken their own lives. Similar figures, albeit more fragmentary, were reported by other investigators from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hirschfeld frequently observed wounds left by suicidal attempts, such as knife wounds on the wrists or bullet wounds in the vicinity of the heart or the temples. Many homosexuals, he indicated, carried poison on them at all times so that they could end their lives on the spot if arrested or similarly compromised.

The chief cause of suicide in Hirschfeld's time was threat of legal prosecution, double suicides of lovers were second in frequency, and **blackmail** was third. Other motives were family conflicts, depression over one's homosexual orientation, grief at the loss of a lover, and the situation of being pressured by one's family into a heterosexual marriage that entailed an impossible sexual role. Hirschfeld conceded that in many cases the threat was exaggerated and the situation not so hopeless as the homosexual subject imagined, and he did his best to console his patients and make them feel that their lot was at least bearable. However, in his propaganda for repeal of **Paragraph 175** he laid great stress upon suicide as a consequence of the legal plight of the exclusive homosexual, and the theme became a usual one in subsequent homophile literature. Today it is seldom mentioned, even if suicides by AIDS patients have figured in