

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FR 8942

SUFI CEREMONY

RIFA' CEREMONY

of the Eleventh Day of
Rabi—L^zAchien, honouring
Abdul Hadir Beker

Recorded by the Islaamia
Refia Jamaa Sect of
Malayan Mohammedans in
the Union of South Africa

BY KAJAR THE MAGICIAN

Notes by Professor Joseph Schacht

M
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I8
S946
1959

MUSIC LP

by Ronald Clyne

SUFI CEREMONY RIFA' CEREMONY

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Michael Nixon

MUSIC LP



Introductory notes by Prof. Joseph Schacht

There is a number of Sufi fraternities, commonly known as "dervish orders", in Islam. They are not sects but associations for the achievement of religious enthusiasm and ecstasy by means of exercises undertaken in common. Each fraternity was founded by some great mystic of the past, who had prescribed his own method for achieving ecstasy. The methods vary greatly, but all have in common the rhythmical recital of certain formulas which, when sufficiently drawn out, produces a kind of trance. Each fraternity has a central head who is connected with the founder by an uninterrupted chain of master-and-disciple relationships, and each regional or local head (khalifa or "representative") is connected with the present or a former central head, and therefore in the last resort with the founder himself, by the same kind of spiritual chain. The Sufi fraternities are not mutually exclusive, and a Muslim may belong to more than one, so as to combine the spiritual blessings proper to each.

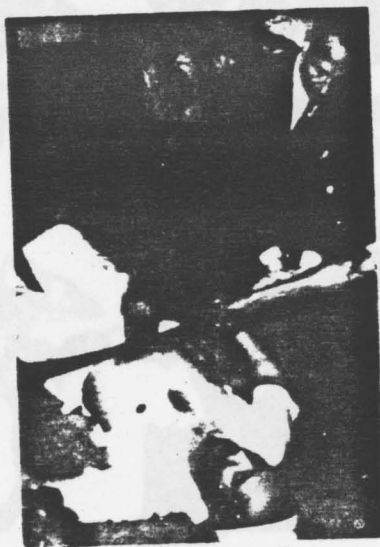
The two oldest Sufi fraternities are the Kadiyya, founded by Abd Al-Kadir al-Jilani (died in Baghdad in 1166), whose anniversary is on the 11th day of Rabi' al-Akhir (or Rabi' II, the fourth month of the Muslim lunar year), and the Rifa'iyya, founded by al-Rifa'i (d. in 1183). The Kadiyya is one of the most widely spread of Sufi fraternities, and the anniversary of Abd al-Kadir is in many places celebrated not only by the members of his fraternity but by other Muslims as well. This explains the fact that the Rifa'iyya in South Africa held a meeting on his anniversary, in order to gain his spiritual blessings. The Rifa'iyya is found mainly in Iraq, Syria and Egypt (and formerly in Turkey), and the record is, as far as I know, the first evidence of its existence in Malaya and now in South Africa, where khalifa Abdullah is the regional head of the "Islamic Rifa'iyya Association" (this is the meaning of the words transcribed in your letter as Islaamia Refia Jamaa).

The Rifa'iyya and some other Sufi fraternities practice in the trances induced by their meetings feats of anaesthesia, hypnotism and suggestion, such as imperviousness to pain, walking on red-hot embers, eating glass, and piercing their bodies with sharp instruments without bleeding; this gains their members much respect among the uneducated. Another feature of the Rifa'iyya (which, however, does not appear in the record), is their unwillingness to kill or to give pain to living creatures.

The heyday of the Sufi fraternities was from the 12th to the 19th century. At present, they are viewed rather with disfavour in more than one Islamic country in the Near East; all were dissolved in Turkey as part of the secularizing

movement, the property of some at least, among them the Rifa'iyya, was confiscated in Egypt in the 'twenties and 'thirties, and they were forbidden in Saudi Arabia, where the official puritan Wahhabi doctrine regards them as non-orthodox. But great masses of Muslims remain deeply attached to them.

The recorded ceremony is remarkable insofar as it begins without the usual introductory formula of all religious occasions in Islam: "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful". It starts with praise of the Prophet, switches over to the Islamic profession of faith: "I attest that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah", and its greater part is taken up by the formulas "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is great), "Allah", and "'al-Allah" (It is up to Allah) -- this last presumably accompanying individual feats of anaesthesia; all this is repeated many times over to the accompaniment of drums.



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Notes of the ceremony by KAJAR

Ceremony on 11th day of Rabi-l-Achien honouring Abdul Kadir Beker, a follower of the Prophet (approximately middle of December, varying with moon) to symbolize the power of faith exemplified by bodily resistance to steel.

Held in the home of Khalifa Abdullah of the Islaamia Refia Jamaa sect of Malayan Mohammedans in the Union of South Africa.

Men remove shoes before entering room for ceremony, sit on floor with legs akimbo and don white cotton caps for the rites.

The thirty Mohammedans pretend to wash their hands and face while the Khalifa lights incense and waits for aroma to pervade room.

Sharp instruments of Damascus steel, over a thousand years old, are spread on a cloth laid on floor before Khalifa.

Khalifa places Koran on cloth with instruments and begins seemingly interminable prayers in Arabic, which are repeated by the worshippers.

Finally, a bongo-type drum, heated to a certain temperature to obtain the proper pitch, is struck by Khalifa.

Beating of the ten, large, tambourine-type drums (rebanas) begins: boom, da-da, boom, da-da, boom, da-da, BOOM.

Men begin to chant in rhythm with drums, which maintain a steady beat but grow in intensity.

Every man sways with the drums as they beat for over half an hour until the sound is so great that the vibration is felt by the entire body and the believers unite their astral and physical bodies.

One at a time, each worshipper rises from the floor, Hadji Ali gives him one or more of the instruments from the assortment in front of the Khalifa and he begins to dance.

Precisely on the heavy BOOM of the drums, and only then, the dancer pierces his cheek or neck or tongue or arm or stomach with the instrument.

Every worshipper dances and pierces himself, including the five children, the youngest being six years of age.

No blood appears on the skin of the dancers when the flesh is pierced UNLESS the dancer is guilty of violating his moral code.

The intensity of the drums subsides after the last dancer and when the last drum beat sounds there are more prayers to conclude the rites.

The entire ritual creates such a state of trance that at the height of the ceremony I was convinced I could fearlessly pierce myself just as they did and suffer neither pain nor harm.

Because of the trance induced by the ceremony itself, I am certain the participants neither took nor needed narcotics.

Photographs taken by an African magician also subject to the trance.



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KAJAR the MAGICIAN