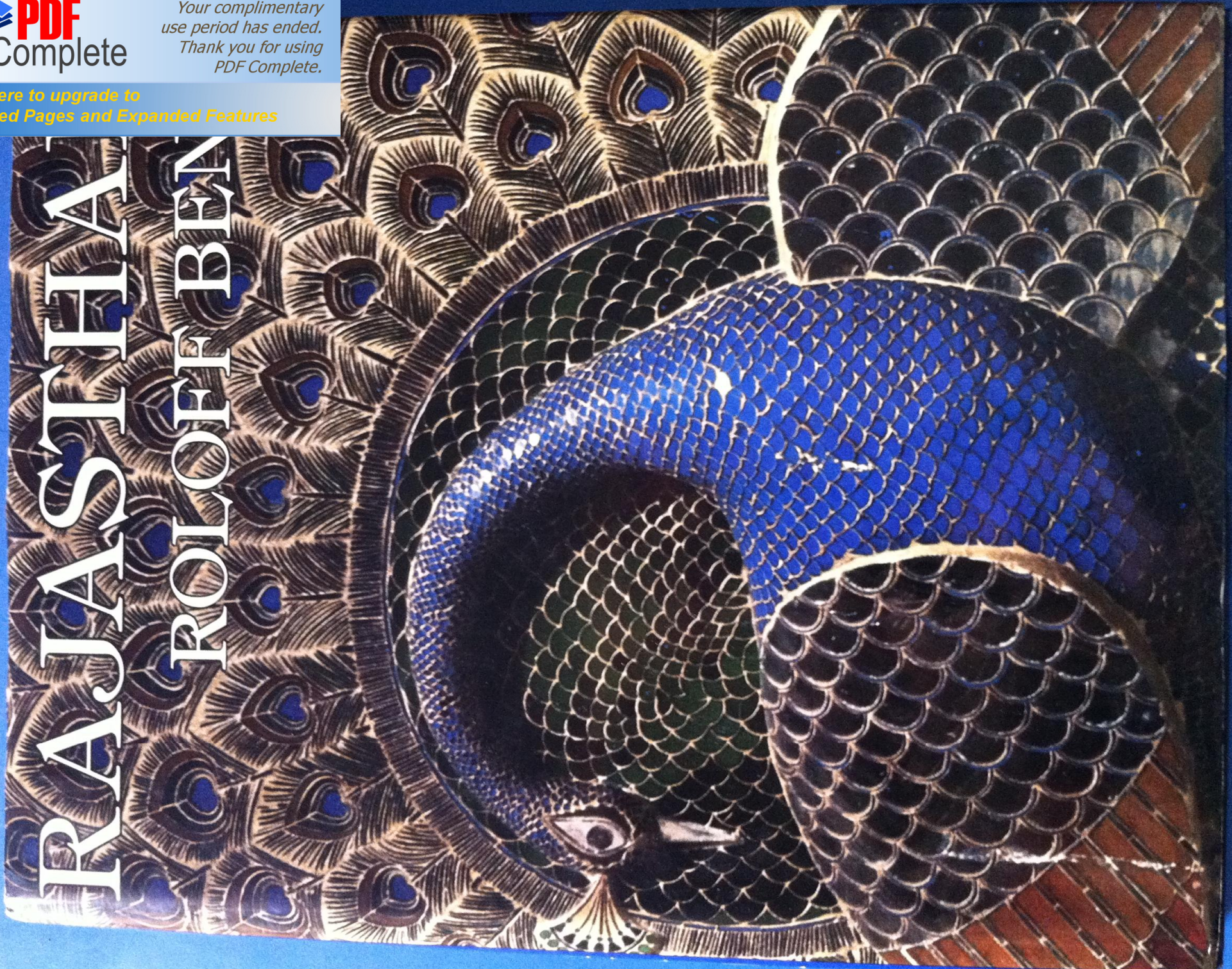


RAJASTHAN ROLOFFBEN



To James George
former High Commissioner of Cam
& Mrs Carol George

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- Persia: An Archaeological Guide
- Leathercraft in the Lands of Ancient Persia

Very sadly, Roloff Beny died while this book
was in preparation. Those of us who worked
with him on it would like to feel that it is
a fitting memorial to a great photographer.

Page 1: Tombs of the Ranis of Jodhpur, sunset.

Title page: A woman on the roof of a temple at Ranakpur

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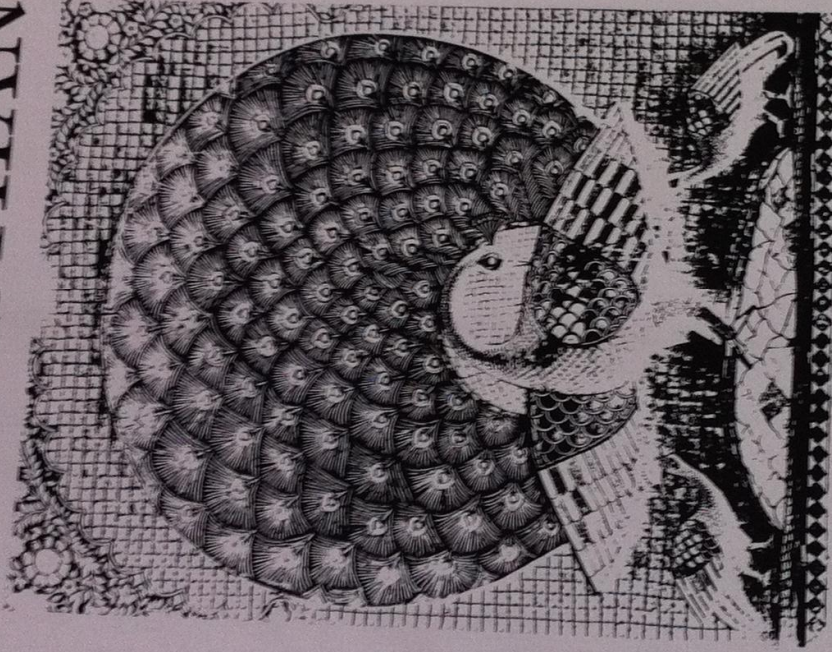
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RAJASTHAN



And from black cedars a lone peacock cries
Laurence Binyon

opportunity to claim ownership of abandoned land or houses.

Another ancient festival, perhaps dating to Scythian custom, is that of ancestor worship. Fifteen days at the end of the rainy season are devoted to this, particularly in Udaipur where the ruler would visit his family cenotaphs at Ahar, just outside the city. Here he would pray, and place garlands on each of the marble *chhatris*.

In the midst of many Hindu festivals come Muslim celebrations, some shrines attracting thousands of Muslim pilgrims from all over Islam. The anniversaries of the death of such saints as Sheikh Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer, and one of his chief disciples, the Sufi saint Khwaja Shah Hamiduddin Nagauri at the Tarkashin or Atarkin shrine in Nagaur, are occasions for a great influx of Muslims.

Biggest of all the Rajasthan Muslim festivals is the six-day Urs commemorating the death of Chishti, with Hindus as well as Muslims participating. On the first morning, at five o'clock, a white flag is hoisted over the tomb by a direct descendant of the Chishti saint, the Sajjada Nashin. Four days later, at the same hour, the Jannati Gateway, 'Gateway to Heaven', is flung open for the only time in the year; the belief is that anyone passing through this gate seven times will be sure of having the gates of heaven opened to him.

During the course of the ceremonies the tomb is washed with rosewater and sandalwood paste, anointed with perfumes and covered with embroidered silk cloths, and for five nights henna paste is applied to the columns of the shrine, and *kalawa*, dyed thread, wrapped around the pillars supporting the canopy over the grave.

During the night a religious gathering assembles, with sacred readings and the distribution of sweetmeats. *Qawwals* (professional religious singers) chant spiritual songs on Sufism and the qualities of the Khwaja, and then comes a prayer for the eternal peace of the Saint's soul. About half-past one in the morning, the tomb is washed with rosewater and *qawwalis* are sung for another hour, during which tea is served; finally, at four in the morning, the service ends with more prayers and the presentation of bowls of squash and sandal paste to the congregation. While the *qawwalis* are sung, many spectators go into a shivering trance, crying aloud as they repeat phrases of the songs with the singers. This condition is known as *bal* (literally 'health'), and at times scores of such trances culminate in a highly emotional atmosphere. In 1963 it is said that some two thousand people stood up on their toes, remaining there for fifteen minutes, until the singers slowly eased their performance.

On the final day, about noon, musicians play joyously while fireworks and crackers are exploded. Ceremonial headgear is presented to the various holy men and a mourning service is held later in the day. During the course of the six days, one entire night is devoted to the reading of original sacred poems by their authors, including Hindu as well as Muslim poets from all parts of India.

trance Karni confronted Yama, the God of Death, asking for the boy's soul, but Yama told her that this was no longer in his power to grant as it had already been reincarnated. Karni swore then that none of the Charans should ever come under Yama's powers but that when they died they should inhabit the bodies of rats, and when the rats died they would resume life as Charans once again.

One might suppose that walking barefoot on the marble floor before the sanctuary or around it, where the entire area is a mass of moving rats, would be utterly repellent. But in fact the little creatures are intent on their own business, scurrying to eat the quantities of rice in the area immediately before the altar, tended by a turbaned priest. Dozens of rats gather around a metal bowl of sweetened milk, tails forming a lacy fringe as their heads dip into the dish. The unwary visitor who happens to injure or kill one has to make reparation by donating a gold or silver rat. The live rats are called *kabhas* and are said to be a unique species; during a local plague transmitted by rats, in 1927, nobody in the vicinity of the temple caught the disease.

Muslim shrines, although comparatively few, also hold an important place in Rajasthan. The tomb of the Sufi saint Khwaja Shah Hamiduddin, who died over seven hundred years ago in Nagaur, not far from Deshnoke, is not unlike many Hindu shrines with its high entrance gateway, kitchens for pilgrims and the tomb itself standing in the shade of a grove of trees.

The mosque in the tiny Muslim state of Tonk is of special interest because of its bold mixture of secular Mughal and austere Islamic styles of architecture. Dominating the small capital are the four high *minars* of the mosque, with its arched colonnades where classes are held in the shade. The façade of the building is elaborately painted to resemble inlaid marble, while the interior is more like a palace throne-room than the usually plain Muslim place of worship.

Most famed of Muslim shrines is that of the Sufi saint Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer, which Muslims call Ajmer Sharif – Holy Ajmer.

Khwaja Chishti was a Persian born in Seistan in 1142, a direct descendant of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet. He grew up in Khurasan where he witnessed the terrible massacres of Central Asian invaders, and decided to renounce the world, selling his ancestral home and joining a renowned mystic, Khwaja Usman Haruni. Haruni was a Caliph belonging to the Sufi school of the Chishtia order, Chisht being a village in Khurasan and one of the four seats of Sufism adhering strictly to Koranic law. The word 'Sufi' is taken from *suf* (wool), from which is made the heavy garment worn by Sufis as a mark of penitence.

For twenty years Chishti stayed with Haruni who finally appointed him Caliph, ordaining him as a missionary when he left for India in 1186. In a dream he had been instructed to carry out his mission in Ajmer and he arrived in that city during the reign of the famed Rajput warrior-diplomat, Prithviraj, then engaged in battles with Sultan Ghori and his armies who were invading India from Afghanistan. In fact, Chishti remained in Ajmer for the rest of his life, during which the city was captured by the Afghans; the Sufi missionary, however, calmly established a code of moral, social and intellectual conduct among his disciples and in 1236, at the age of 114, Muinuddin Chishti entered his cell for prayers for the last time. He had told

7) Tarkashin's or Atarkin's gateway at Nagaur, built in the early fourteenth century. The Sufi shrine of Sheikh Hamiduddin Nagauri lies beyond

his followers not to disturb him and they obeyed this injunction for six days. When they finally opened the cell door, they found the saint was dead, and it is in commemoration of those six days that the Urs is held for the same period annually.

Chishti's powers remained long after his death. More than three centuries later the Mughal emperor Akbar, who had no son despite his many wives, made the pilgrimage barefoot from Agra to the saint's tomb to pray for an heir. It was a member of the Sufi Chishti order, Salim Chishti, living at Sikri, who actually prophesied that the emperor would have three sons, and when in 1569 the first of these was born, he was named Salim after the Sikri prophet. Later Akbar built his city of Fatehpur Sikri on the red sandstone hill where the hermit had his cave. (Salim was to become the Emperor Jahangir.) Khwaja Chishti of Ajmer was honoured with a mosque which Akbar built by his tomb, and for his frequent journeys to Ajmer the emperor also built himself a palace in that city.

The saint's tomb is in the centre of the bazaar area of the old city and is approached through a high gateway with splendid silver doors; a second courtyard is entered through another great gate, the Boland Darwaza.

A number of buildings are housed within the enclosure, including an elegant mosque built by Shah Jahan, with a long inscription in Persian, and a smaller mosque constructed by Jahangir.

Opposite the main entrance to the tomb itself is a colonnaded veranda with black and white marble paving where many pilgrims, including Sikhs and Hindus, rest while awaiting the distribution of food. Among the trees in the courtyard are several more graves, including that of the saint's own daughter, Bibi Hafiz Jamal, and one of Emperor Shah Jahan's daughters, Chimni Begum, as well as that of a humble water-carrier who saved the Emperor Humayun's life by ferrying the defeated king across a river after his battle with Sher Shah Suri.

Inside the shrine itself devotees move slowly around the heavy silver double rails guarding the tomb with its gold-embroidered canopy, the crowds jostling to kiss the grille enclosing it.

The other important Muslim edifice in Ajmer is the Arhai (or Adhai)-din-ka Jhonpra, the 'Two-and-a-half-day Shelter', which Tod, enthusing over the 'gorgeous prodigality of ornament', wrote could vie with the noblest buildings in the world. This great mosque was originally a Jain religious college within a temple. Built in 1153, it was damaged by Muhammad Ghorî when he seized Ajmer. At that time, Ghorî took the remains of many surrounding temples, together with the ruined college (some estimate that parts of at least thirty temples were used), to build the mosque, which tradition alleges was miraculously completed in two and a half days.

Probably about 1200 Qutbuddin added a massive pierced stone screen of seven arches, exquisitely fashioned, in front of the original pillared hall where no two of the intricately carved columns are alike. Now in ruins, the mosque was originally even larger than the famous Qutb near Delhi, and has ten domes in a roof upheld by a hundred and twenty-four columns. Two delicate, broken minarets with Kufic and Tughra inscriptions from the Koran stand on the corners above the central high arch of the screen.

*If any worshipper do reverence with
faith to any god whatever,
I make his faith firm,
and in that faith be reverences
his god,
And gains his desires,
for it is I who bestow them.*

Bhagavad Gita

74 A silver tortoise (*Kacchawa*), donated by a worshipper, is embedded in the floor of the Brahma temple at Pushkar. Offerings of flowers are scattered on the tortoise