

52A

Recorded by Paul Bowles

At Zagora, Moroccan Sahara

November 27, 1959.

Music of the Draaoua

Moqaddem Mohammed ben Salem, leader

Zagora is some hundred and fifty miles south of Ouarzazat, in the Valley of the Oued Draa. Again the performers are all Negroes, and I should say of purer Negro stock than those of the Ait Ouaouzguite, who were already by our standards extremely dark Negroes. These at Zagora however were totally black.

The Draaoua are not a tribe; the term is a geographical one to designate the inhabitants of the upper Draa Valley (roughly from Agdz to M'hamid.) Generally speaking, all the Draaoua are Negroes of Sudanese origin, with sometimes a slight admixture of Berber blood. The Moroccans call them harratine (sing. hartani.) This particular group of musicians all live in Zaouia el Baraka, near Zagora.

The composition of the orchestra is as follows: one bendir (called tara here) two taarij (small ceramic drums) nine dfouf (sing. deff) two qsbahs and two swords. I include the last because in the numbers where they are used they form a legitimate part of the percussive design of the music. These sword-dances (sgel) of which there are six altogether, are extremely curious to watch. They are what one might call choreographed jousts, highly stylized, but performed with real swords. I have never seen a sgel anywhere save in Zagora. The line-up of musicians forms a backdrop and the two dancers, who require a good deal of space for their mock battle, perform in front of them.

On this tape there are Sgel no. 1 and Sgel no. 2.

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1. First Aqlal

2. Er Rreqba

3. Bou Arrojj

The deff is a percussive curiosity. It looks like a fairly thick sandwich about eight inches square, and consists of a square wooden framework around which is stretched tightly one membrane. I have never seen them used save by individual singers and storytellers in market-places (and with one exception these occasions were before World War II, in the early 'thirties); my inquiries always brought the explanation that the instrument came from the "Sahara", although no one ever specified that it was in common use in the region of the Draa. This session provided the only occasion when I have seen the deff used in numbers, as the percussive body of the ensemble. ~~It is particularly effective in the two dances called~~ In this group there were seventeen men in all. The moqaddem was extremely active; he sang, shouted, danced and clapped his hands. The two aqlals, the first of which is on this reel, particularly pleased me. They are both in 5/8 meter, and their syncopation is generally one of emphasis rather than of misplaced accents.

In Er Rreqba the singers in the line all wore agonized expressions on their faces; at the same time each man put his head on one side and pulled his left ear. I had no opportunity to inquire as to the significance of this gesture, and doubtless even if I had, there would have been no satisfactory explanation forthcoming. Usually such questions are answered by the sentence: "It's always done this way."

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1. Third Sqel
2. Second Aqlal

The Moqaddem here was most obliging; whatever I asked him and his men to do, he did quickly and with no objections or difficulties. It was a highly disciplined group of entertainers.

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1. Fourth Sqel
2. Fifth Sqel
3. Music for Two Qsbahs
4. Sixth Sqel

For the Fifth Sqel I asked the men to form a circle and move slowly around the microphone; I haven't yet had an opportunity to study the result; it seemed to me that the percussion would be given more variety that way.

The Music for Two Qsbahs is a failure; the qsbah players were not expert in any case, and deprived of the customary percussive bass they were obviously lost.

In the Sixth Sqel everyone was happy again. I was sorry to have disconcerted the group by asking for something which was not in their repertory, but they had been so obliging and cooperative that I had imagined I might possibly get something worthwhile from them by varying the combination. I confess it has very seldom worked, but when it has, the results have been worth the trouble.