

The current celebrations of the centenary of the arrival of Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan in the West provide a splendid occasion for introducing English-speaking readers to Theo van Hoorn's *Recollections of Inayat Khan*, an indispensable source in the history of Western Sufism that was hitherto accessible only in Dutch. Translated and edited by H.J. Horn, a searching introductory study examines Theo's engaging essays on a thematic basis so as better to understand the man and his Sufism. The book also offers hundreds of notes intended to identify all of the places, people, and events mentioned by Theo. A lavish selection of photographs completes an unprecedented evocation of the celebrated Summer Schools of Suresnes under the leadership of Inayat Khan and his brother Maheboob. The pictures alone fully justify the modest cost of this book, which was made possibly by generous financing from the Nekbakht Foundation.

H.J. (Hein or Jack) Horn (1940) is a Dutch-Canadian, Yale-trained art historian who taught at the University of Guelph from 1972 to 2004 while writing books on Jan Vermeyen (c.1504-1559) and Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719). In matters Sufi he thinks of himself as a disciple of Shaikh-ul-Mashaik Mahmood Khan.

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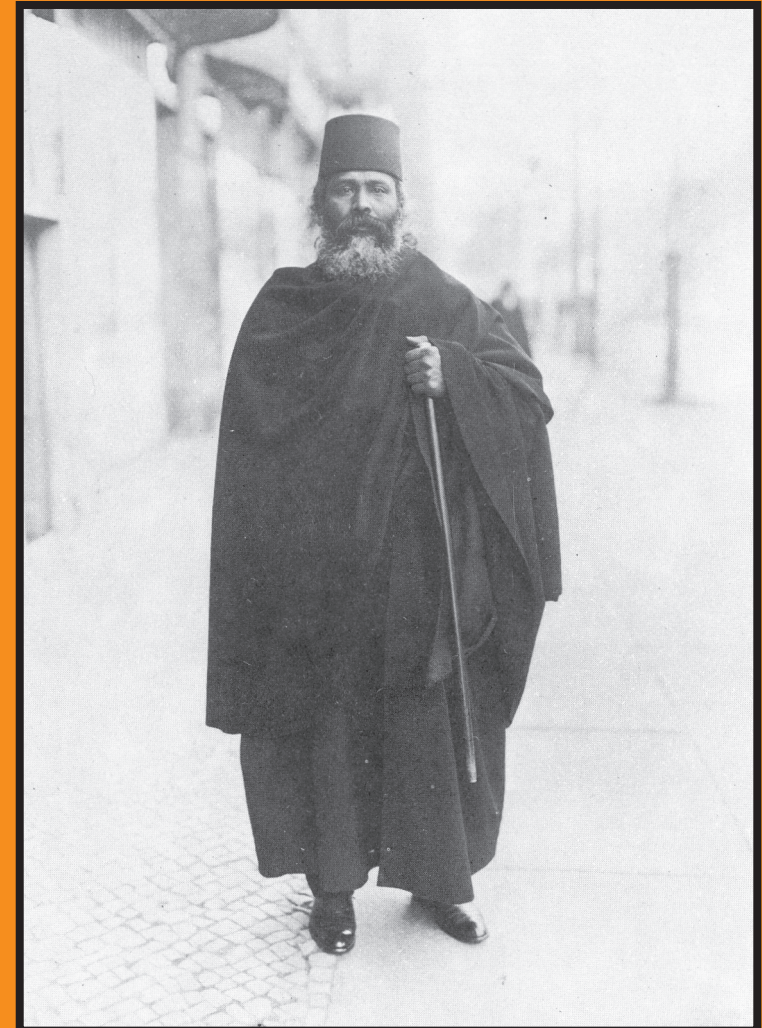
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Recollections of Inayat Khan and Western Sufism

By Theo van Hoorn



Translated, Annotated and Introduced by Hendrik J. Horn

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Theodoor van Hoorn (1887-1957) was an Amsterdam accountant and former Baptist who thought of himself as a rational man of action with a unique insider-outsider perspective on the Sufi Movement. Initiated by Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927) in Suresnes, near Paris, in the summer of 1924, Van Hoorn wrote most of his memoirs in a rural area south of Amsterdam during the so-called “hunger winter” of 1944-45. The jewel in the crown of Theo’s *Recollections* is his loving picture of the Master, or Murshid, at the Summer Schools of 1924 to 1926, but his work also contains an important “milieu study” (to use Theo’s own words) of Murshid’s followers, or mureeds, as well as a several illuminating autobiographical vignettes and an idiosyncratic attempt to relate Sufism to Western figures such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

In general, Van Hoorn’s memoirs excel at observation but not at historical analysis. He reports, for example, that his fellow Sufis quarrelled incessantly, but he makes no attempt to identify the agendas underlying the endemic discord. Ignoring the crucial distinction between the core concerns of Inayat Khan and the peripheral pursuits of his wealthy Theosophical followers, Theo assumed that the heterogeneous Sufi Movement he encountered in 1924 had been envisaged by the Master from the outset. In addition, Theo appears to have been oblivious of Murshid’s seminal London publications of 1914 to 1920, in which he repeatedly insisted that Sufism is not a religion, that he was neither a prophet nor a “World Teacher”, and that the final universal revelation belongs to Muhammad.

Such historiographic considerations remain ancillary to the main purpose of this book, which is to introduce a new generation of readers to the unforgettable hours that Van Hoorn spent in magical Suresnes with his fellow mureeds and his beloved Murshid. We experience the stifling heat, fragrant dusk, sultry nights, and waxing moon. We hear the plopping of falling apricots, the squeaking of folding chairs, the rumbling of the last night train, the tapping of rain on the chestnut leaves, and the rustling of the wind in the ivy. We see the adults and children, their dress and movements. We hear them converse or cry out at play. Most of all, we see and hear Inayat Khan in many different situations. He can be personable, kind, attentive, thoughtful or intro-

spective in daily discourse, but also penetrating in a meeting of minds, joyful at a reunion, elated at a theatre performance, and an accomplished actor himself when the point of one of his stories requires it. Inayat Khan was “my Murshid” to other mureeds, but only with Theo can we repeatedly experience what it was like to be in his close presence. Only someone with Theo’s unique combination of acute observation, dazzling memory and matchless tenacity could have managed this *tour de force*.

Initially Murshid sits before me, motionless and inscrutable. Then suddenly something happens that may well be considered entirely comprehensible and very natural by the more deeply initiated, but that for me will remain the greatest wonder that I experienced in Sufism. Hardly have I directed my thoughts of everything I have to say to Murshid, and to express them through my eyes, and Murshid undergoes a gradual and unmistakable transformation. The intensity with which he at first directed his thoughts at me, begins to decrease slowly and changes into a quiet expression of sympathetic attentiveness and absorption.

And a great wave of satisfaction and gratitude comes over me. I have the feeling that I am fully understood. This gives me the courage to repeat my thoughts that I had really come that night only as closure to all the blessings that I had been allowed to experience; not to ask for more but entirely to give thanks for what Murshid had given me since we were first together. And I still see Murshid before me as a trusted friend with whom I wished to share my joy concerning unexpected and undeserved happiness.

Then at last I have the feeling that I have said all I have come to say. And because I have already asked so much of Murshid’s time, I expect that he will now bring our meeting to a close. But Murshid remains motionless even now, completely enveloped in deep peace, and I think I understand him.

And then, before closing his eyes, Murshid sends me a long look of farewell. Little do I suspect at this moment that it is a genuine farewell, a farewell until a reunion in a better world.



From *Recollections of Inayat Khan and Western Sufism*