

## **An Overview of the Dances of the Middle East: Relation to Current American Belly Dance**

- **What is a Cultural Presentation on Belly Dance**
  - Overview of
    - Countries, Peoples and Cultures
    - Basic History and Geography
    - How does this tie to BD in America
    - This is not meant to be an exhaustive look at any one area, but a brief discussion of different aspects to suggest avenues of further research to you.
  
- **Origins of Belly Dance**
  - Lots of beautiful stories
    - Goddess dances
    - Motherhood rituals
    - Sisterhood bonding in the harem
    - Dances for the Sultan
    - Ancient Egypt
  - Unfortunately, not a lot of evidence for any of them. To follow a dance form, you need a set of the following:
    - Written descriptions
    - Artistic depictions
    - Oral histories
    - Video representation is \*best\* - but too recent to be of much use
  
  - So what do we know?
    - Similar dances have been described as entertainment in historical literature – but primarily in texts from the past approx. 500 years and we can't be sure they are what we consider belly dance.
    - Artistic representations abound from the 1700s to 1900s, but most of them fall under the rubric of orientalism, even if not within its heyday. This makes their accuracy somewhat suspect and, while the dances do appear to be what we would call belly dance – we can never be 100% sure. (Refer to packet)
    - Oral histories trace the dancing back for at least 8 generations, but beyond that, the details tend to become very sketchy at best. Still, the problem of what did their

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dances actually look like. If direct transmission, this is a better idea than the others alone.

- Video! We have video beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> C and continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup> C that documents the dance and can be reliably traced to modern belly dance.
  
- What does that mean?
  - Actually, it means that there is a pretty strong case for belly dance type movements being performed in the Middle East during the past 500 years, if not longer. (to nearly 2000 years if you use the contract for the castanet dancer Isadora in 165 AD, Greece )
    - It isn't 100% and it won't be, but in historical terms, there is a preponderance of evidence supporting it.
  - BUT – none of this evidence points to the reasons for the dance other than entertainment for the most part. Isolated texts give information on childbirth rituals or dancing as seduction, but none can be considered definitive.
  - SO – we have belly dance in history. Where did it come from and how did it spread?
  
- **Middle Eastern Countries and influence**
  - Located in packet is overview of some of the influences from countries in the Middle East (Refer to packet)
  
- **Egypt** – considered by many to be the location with the largest place in belly dance history
  - Ghawazi
    - A detailed account from Edward Lane 1836
    - Exiled for a time to Upper Egypt in 1834 due to edict banning public dancing and prostitution
  - Saiidi
    - Culture of the Fellahin (common people) of Upper Egypt in the Saiidi region.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> official appearance in the US was at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exhibition, though there are reports that dancers had been present at previous Fairs as well.
    - Multiple cultures from around world represented. Dancers were part of Egypt and the Bedouin Camp.

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- **Orientalist images**  
(Refer to packet for details)
  
- **Modern styles (50 years): Continuing evolution of belly dance**
  - American
    - Famous dancers: Morocco, Dahlena, Mesmera, Salimpours, Delilah, Cassandra, Dalia Carella
  - Egyptian
    - Modern nightclub type shows: Badia Masabni (Casino Opera 1930-1940s)
    - Famous dancers: Farida Fahmy, Najwa Fouad, Fifi Abdou, Soheir Zaki, Samia Gamal, Nadi Gamal, Tahia Karioka, Naima Akef, Dina, Lucy
  - Turkish
    - Famous dancers: Ozel Turkbaz
  - Lebanese
    - Famous dancers: Amani
  - American Tribal Style
    - Famous dancers: Fat chance, Gypsy Caravan
  - Tribal Fusion
    - Famous dancers: Ultra Gypsy, Urban Tribal, Rachel Brice
  
- **Questions and Comments?**
  
- **Resource and Suggested Reading List in packet**
  
- **If you would like to see representations of costuming from different regions, see me after the lecture to view some materials on costuming styles.**
  
- For more information on any of these topics, please feel free to contact me at [mahsati@mahsati-janan.com](mailto:mahsati@mahsati-janan.com).

**Belly Dance Vocabulary**  
A partial list of important terms

<p><b>1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition</b> Known for the appearance of the “Bedouin Camp” and dancer described as “Little Egypt”</p>								
<p><b>Al-Jadid</b> New, modern</p>								
<p><b>Al-Turath</b> Heritage or old-style, classic</p>								
<p><b>Andalus – musiqa andalusiyya</b> Andalusian music, used to reference Arab-Andalusian musical influences</p>								
<p><b>Assuit</b> A type of fabric originally created in Asyut, Egypt. It is made of a fine mesh (usually cotton) with metal strips (often silver) woven through the mesh into designs and then beaten with a mallet or other object to soften the metal into the cloth. Most of the assuit available in the US was from the 1920s, but modern assuit is being created in Egypt today. The modern assuit is generally much more crude and less ornate than the antique assuit.</p>								
<p><b>Awalim</b> Learned or wise women. Word generally used in Egypt through the 1800s to describe females musicians, singers and dancers (generally considered more respectable).  Also known as: almeh.</p>								
<p><b>Baladi</b> Local, home country</p>								
<p><b>Banat Maazin</b> Last remaining performing family of Ghawazee in Egypt. See also: <b>Ghawazee</b></p>								
<p><b>Bedlah</b> “Suit”- generally refers to the bra/belt costuming style</p>								
<p><b>Bedouin</b> A nomadic people in the Middle East composed of many tribes with differing customs Also known as: <b>Badawi</b></p>								
<p><b>Countries of the Middle East</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: center;">Country</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Region generally assigned</th> <th style="text-align: center;">Cultures and Influence on American Belly Dance <small>(Primary ethnic group refers to the groups with influence on modern belly dance – Arab not mentioned as it is the most prevalent ethnicity in the Middle East)</small></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Afghanistan</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Eastern</td> <td> <p>Primary ethnic groups: Pashtuns, Tadjiks, Farsiwan, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kirghiz, Hazara, Balutchis and Nuristani</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Items from all of the Afghani cultural groups have been adopted by American Tribal Style and Tribal Fusion dancers,</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Country	Region generally assigned	Cultures and Influence on American Belly Dance <small>(Primary ethnic group refers to the groups with influence on modern belly dance – Arab not mentioned as it is the most prevalent ethnicity in the Middle East)</small>	Afghanistan	Eastern	<p>Primary ethnic groups: Pashtuns, Tadjiks, Farsiwan, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kirghiz, Hazara, Balutchis and Nuristani</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Items from all of the Afghani cultural groups have been adopted by American Tribal Style and Tribal Fusion dancers,</p>
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		<p>though very little of the Afghani dance heritage has been absorbed into belly dance.</p> <p>Dancer to contact: Helene Eriksen</p>
Algeria	Maghreb	<p>Primary ethnic groups: Ouled Nail</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: The Ouled Nail were one of the first cultures contacted by the West, in this case the French, to perform movements we commonly associate with modern belly dance. These movements and some of the costuming of the Ouled Nail have been incorporated into modern belly dance. American Tribal Style and Tribal Fusion dancers have adopted jewelry and some costuming style from the historical records of the Ouled Nail.</p> <p>Dancers to contact: Helene Eriksen, Aisha Ali</p>
Bahrain	Arabia or Gulf	<p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Gulf and Khaliiji style (See Saudi Arabia for more details)</p>
Egypt	Mashreq	<p>Primary ethnic groups: Ghawazi (Ghagar/Nawar), Saiidi (Fellahi of Upper Egypt)</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Ghawazee and Saiidi style movements have been incorporated into nearly all styles of modern belly dance. Ghawazee influence is considered to be one of the roots of modern belly dance.</p> <p>Dancers to contact: Habiba, Helene Eriksen, Cassandra Shore, Aisha Ali, Morocco</p>
Iran	Persian or Gulf	<p>Primary ethnic groups: Persians, Kurds, Balutchis, Mazandarani, Luri/Bakhtiaris, Gilakis, Azeris, Qashqa'i, Afsharis, Turkmen, Täbris, Isfahan and Kowli</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Persian dance has been incorporated in the forms of hand movements and certain story dances from Iran, as well as some costuming elements. Persian dance is sometimes included as folkloric by belly dancers as are some Bandari movements.</p> <p>Dancers to contact: Laurel Victoria Gray, Helene Eriksen</p>
Iraq	Levant	<p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Badawi/Bedouin style (See Lebanon for more details)</p>

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Israel	Levant	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Badawi/Bedouin style (See Lebanon for more details)
Jordan	Levant	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Badawi/Bedouin style (See Lebanon for more details)
Kuwait	Arabia or Gulf	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Gulf and Khaliji style (See Saudi Arabia for more details)
Lebanon	Levant	<p>Primary ethnic groups: Bedouin/Badawi</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Costuming and trance dances often adopted by tribal style belly dancers as well as modern cabaret style dancers. A specific style of Lebanese belly dance has emerged in the last 100 years.</p> <p>Dancers to contact: Amani of Lebanon</p>
Libya	Maghreb	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Berber, Tuareg styles (See Morocco and Tunisia for more details)
Morocco	Maghreb	<p>Primary ethnic groups: Berber, Tuareg</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Numerous folkloric dance items from the cultures in Morocco have been incorporated into modern belly dance, including tray dances and Guedra. Guedra is a trance dance initially from the Tuareg that involves very specific ritualized movements to place the dancer in a trance state. Also commonly included in belly dance repertoires are costuming and dance elements associated with the Sheikhat dancing women from Morocco.</p> <p>Dancers to contact: Aisha Ali, Morocco, Helene Eriksen</p>
Oman	Arabia or Gulf	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Gulf and Khaliji style (See Saudi Arabia for more details)
Palestine	Levant	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Badawi/Bedouin style (See Lebanon for more details)
Qatar	Arabia or Gulf	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Gulf and Khaliji style (See Saudi Arabia for more details)
Saudi Arabia	Arabia or Gulf	<p>Primary ethnic groups: Khaliji</p> <p>Primary influence on Belly Dance: Khaliji or gulf dances have been included both as folkloric dances and as recognition movements when dancing to music with Khaliji style rhythms. Costuming is generally a very ornate and long thobe worn with hair long and loose. Movements include swaying, dancing with the fabric from the thobe, hand movements and head/hair tosses.</p>

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		Dancers to contact: Cassandra Shore, Helene Eriksen
Syria	Levant	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Badawi/Bedouin style (See Lebanon for more details)
Tunisia	Maghreb	Primary ethnic groups: Tunisian  Primary influence on Belly Dance: A version of Tunisian folkloric dance is often included by belly dancers in their renditions of a balancing dance that focuses on the ability of the dancer to balance a water jug while performing characteristic Tunisian dance steps.  Dancers to contact: Laurel Victoria Gray, Helen Eriksen, Cassandra Shore
Turkey	Anatolia	Primary ethnic groups: Turkish, Rom  Primary influence in Belly Dance: Turkish dances spread throughout the Middle and Near East during the Ottoman Empire. A specific style of Turkish belly dance has emerged in the past 100 years. A number of common costuming items can be traced back to Ottoman origins (which influenced the clothing of the Ghawazee of Egypt as well). Items of Turkish costuming and style have been incorporated by modern belly dancers. Also much of the Rom influence in modern belly dance can be traced to Turkish roots.  Dancers to contact: Helene Eriksen, Dalia Carella, Morocco
United Arab Emirates	Arabia or Gulf	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Gulf and Khaliji style (See Saudi Arabia for more details)
Yemen	Arabia	Primary influence on Belly Dance: Gulf and Khaliji style (See Saudi Arabia for more details)

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<p><b>Dances of the Middle East (Characteristics)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abstract Art – usually non narrative</li> <li>2. Improvisation</li> <li>3. Small, articulate movements</li> <li>4. Serial Structure</li> </ol> <p><b>Source:</b> Al-Faruqi, Lois Ibsen <i>1978 Dance as an Expression of Islamic Culture. Dance Research Journal 10(2).</i></p>
<p><b>Dances of the Middle East (Nomenclature)</b></p> <p>Raqs, Raqs al-Baladi, Raqs al-Sharqi, Raqs al-Misr/Masri (Egypt), Raqs al-Araby, Belly Dance, Danse du Ventre, Danse Orientale, Raqs al-Assayah</p>
<p><b>Dances of the Middle East (Related Dances and Locations)</b></p> <p>Tunisian, Egyptian (Saidii), Turkish, Greek, Persian, Algerian (Ouled Nail), Morocco (Shikhat), Egyptian (Ghawazee), Raqs al-Sharqi (multiple origins)</p>
<p><b>Dances of the Middle East (Types)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Solo improvisational dance, such as <b>Raqs al-Sharqi</b></li> <li>2. Combat Dances, such as <b>Tahtib</b></li> <li>3. Chain Dances, such as <b>Debke</b></li> <li>4. Religious Dances, such as <b>Whirling (Dervishes)</b></li> </ol> <p><b>Source:</b> Al-Faruqi, Lois Ibsen <i>1978 Dance as an Expression of Islamic Culture. Dance Research Journal 10(2).</i></p>
<p><b>Debke</b></p> <p>Middle Eastern group dance involving quick, intricate footwork. Generally performed in the Levant region/</p>
<p><b>Egyptian National Folkloric Troupe</b></p> <p>One of two national folkloric troupes in Egypt. Official state -funded troupe</p>
<p><b>Fellahi</b></p> <p>Referring to people or music considered to be based in the country/rural areas</p>
<p><b>Finger Cymbals</b></p> <p>Small metal percussion instruments fastened to the thumb and middle finger. Also known as: <b>Sagat, Zills</b></p>
<p><b>Ghawazee</b></p> <p>People in Egypt who are traditionally employed as dancers, singers and other performance artists. They are believed to have traveled to Egypt as a nomadic people and settled near Cairo. They are less common in modern Cairo, but one family, the Banat Maazin, still perform publicly. Also known as: <b>Ghagar, Ghaziya</b></p>
<p><b>Guedra</b></p> <p>Trance dance performed traditionally by the Tuareg (blue people) of Morocco that involves very specific ritualized movements to place the dancer in a trance state.</p>
<p><b>Hagalla</b></p> <p>Coming of age dance traditionally performed in the Levant region and in parts of Egypt. The dance involves a solo dance by a woman and a line of dancing/singing men.</p>



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<p><b>Instruments (Music)</b> Stringed: Oud, qanun, bouzouki, saz, baglama saz, rebab, tanbur Woodwind: ney, mijwiz, mizmar, arghul, suffarah Percussion: mihbaj, def/tar, riqq/tambourine, doumbek/darbuka, zills/sagat</p>
<p><b>Iqa'at</b> Musical term somewhat equivalent to “meter”</p>
<p><b>Khaliji</b> Dance from the Saudi and Gulf regions. Costuming is generally a very ornate and long thobe worn with hair long and loose. Movements include swaying, dancing with the fabric from the thobe, hand movements and head/hair tosses. Also known as: <b>Khaleegy, Khaligi</b></p>
<p><b>Layali</b> Musical term for vocal improvisational singing, similar to mawwal</p>
<p><b>Levant</b> Generally comprises the area from Jordan, Northern Palestine, Southern Syria, Southern Lebanon and other surrounding locales</p>
<p><b>Maghreb</b> West – generally used to refer to Morocco, Tunisia, etc.</p>
<p><b>Male Dancers</b> Historically, male dancers have been known as Batcha (Persia), Koçek (Turkey), Qawwal (Arabian) and provided entertainment in areas where gender divisions of leisure time were enforced.</p>
<p><b>Maqam</b> Musical term somewhat equivalent to musical scales, but differing in that each maqam is also characterized by a mood or feeling.</p>
<p><b>Mashreq</b> East – generally used to refer to Egypt</p>
<p><b>Mawwal</b> Musical term for vocal improvisational singing, similar to layali</p>
<p><b>Middle East</b> Region of the world characterized by cultural and political boundaries. Usually considered to include the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Arabian Peninsula through Turkish, Arab and Persian lands to Afghanistan. Historically includes both Near and Middle East and areas influenced by the Ottoman Empire.</p>
<p><b>Middle East</b> Traditionally applied by western Europeans to the countries of SW Asia and NE Africa. Thus defined it includes Cyprus, the Asian part of Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, the countries of the Arabian peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait), and Egypt and Libya. This definition is sometimes expanded to include portions of Afghanistan, Morocco, Tunisia and other Near East and North African areas.</p>

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<p><b>Mohammad ‘abd al Wahhab</b> Famous Egyptian composer in the al-Turath style who was one a proponent of al-Jadid style</p>
<p><b>Nawar</b> A people in Egypt often confused with the Ghawazee/Ghagar. Historically considered to have been a nomadic people who settled in Egypt.</p>
<p><b>Orientalism or Orientalist Fantasy</b> Western proclivity to exoticize the cultures of the East. Also a movement in art and literature characterized by eroticisation and colonialist attitudes.</p>
<p><b>Ouled Nail</b> The Ouled Nail of Algeria were one of the first cultures contacted by the West, in this case the French, to perform movements we commonly associate with modern belly dance.</p>
<p><b>Raqa al-Sha’abi</b> Another name for Egyptian folkloric dances See also: <b>Dances of the Middle East (Nomenclature)</b></p>
<p><b>Raqs</b> Dance See also: <b>Raqs al-Sharqi, Raqs al Assayah, Raqs Beledi</b></p>
<p><b>Raqs al-Assayah</b> Form of Raqs al-Beledi indigenous to the Saiidi region of upper Egypt, but adopted by Middle Eastern style dancers worldwide in folkloric performances. This dance involves movements with a cane and traditional Saiidi dance step. Thought to be a derivative of Tahtib. See also: <b>Tahtib</b> (men’s dance)</p>
<p><b>Raqs al-Juzur</b> Another name for Tunisian dance with a water jug or pot balanced on dancer’s head</p>
<p><b>Raqs al-Sayf</b> Another name for sword dance. This dance has not been traced to a particular culture, but is used to show the dancer’s skill in balancing.</p>
<p><b>Raqs al-Seniya</b> Another name for Moroccan tray dance.</p>
<p><b>Raqs al-Shamadan</b> Dance generally performed as part of Egyptian weddings involving a procession (zeffa) and a dancer who balances a shamadan (candelabra) on her head as she performs.</p>

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<p><b>Raqs al-Sharqi</b> Oriental Dance, Egyptian Style, belly dance See also: <b>Dances of the Middle East (nomenclature)</b></p>
<p><b>Reda Troupe (Firqah Reda)</b> One of two national folkloric troupes in Egypt. Founded and trained by Mahmoud Reda.</p>
<p><b>Saidii</b> Referring to culture and people of Upper Egypt or to a common rhythm used in this music. Origin location of: <b>Raqs al-Assiyah</b> and <b>Tahtib</b> Rhythm generally noted as: D t DD t</p>
<p><b>Shamadan</b> Candelabra balanced by dancer, generally used when performing in a Zeffa</p>
<p><b>Tahtib</b> Men's combat dance using staves. Generally performed with 3 sections (processional, rapid dance with musicians, dance-combat) See also: <b>Raqs al Assayah</b> (women's dance) <b>Source:</b> Al-Faruqi, Lois Ibsen 1978 <i>Dance as an Expression of Islamic Culture</i>. Dance Research Journal 10(2).</p>
<p><b>Taqsim</b> Improvisation (primarily musical) by melodic instrument, voice, or percussion</p>
<p><b>Tunisia – Mal'uf</b> Familiar or customary, particularly in relation to music and culture</p>
<p><b>Tunisia – Rashidiyya</b> Tunisian State Music Ensemble, also used colloquially to indicate any traditional music ensemble</p>
<p><b>Zar</b> Trance ritual dance.</p>
<p><b>Zeffa</b> Wedding procession generally led by a dancer performing with a Shamadan</p>

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## Middle Eastern Dance References and Suggested Readings

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# An Overview of the Dances of the Middle East: Relation to Current American Belly Dance



Mahsati Janan © 2005

BAMEDA November 6, 2005

# Orientalist Images in Art: Dancers of the Middle East



1846 Dancing Girls of Cairo



1890-1923 Cairo Dancing Girl



1858 Egyptian Dancing Girl



1860-1890 Cairo Almah

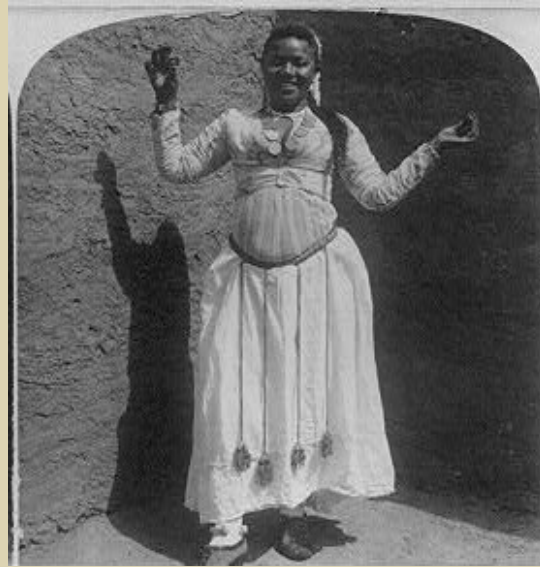
Orientalist Images such as these attempted to portray Middle Eastern Dancers, but often relied on non-Middle Eastern women as models or on staged portraiture that may not be entirely accurate.

(Images courtesy of US Library of Congress)

~ Orientalism ~  
Photography



1893 Egyptian Dancing Girl  
(reported to be from Chicago Exhibition)



1896 Arab Dancing Girl



1900 Orientalist Cigarette Ad



~ Orientalism ~  
Detail from Paintings

