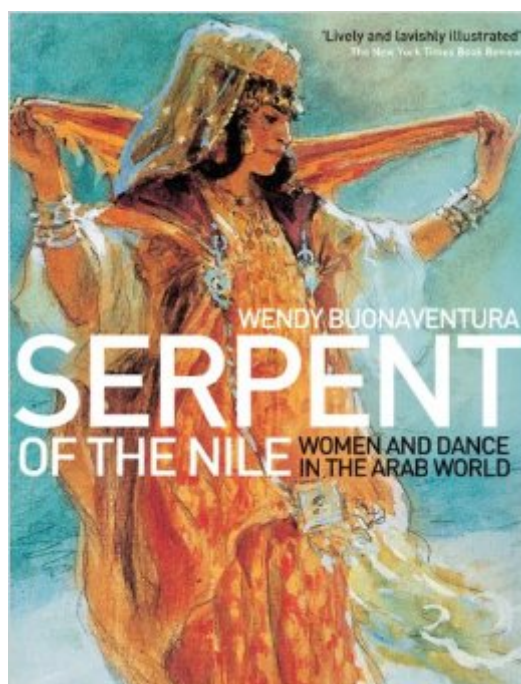


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Serpent Of The Nile: Women And Dance In The Arab World



Synopsis

Newly updated and reissued in an appealing new format, this classic book is a lavishly illustrated celebration of female dancers of the Arab world and their impact on the West. "I think it is the most eloquent of female dances, with its haunting lyricism, its fire, its endlessly shifting kaleidoscope of sensual movement." With these words, Wendy Buonaventura explains her own fascination with Arabic dance and gives the reader a thorough understanding of the origins, history and development of this ancient art, which has survived in the face of commercialism, religious disapproval, and changing times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wendy Buonaventura obviously loves raks baladi ("country" or folkloric belly dance) with a passion. As sometimes happens with authors passionate about a subject, she unfortunately treats her opinions as facts upon occasion. As a dancer, I love the glorious Orientalist pictures, early 20th-century photos and fascinatingly slanted accounts from Western travellers, and I love her feelings for the dance. It's a beautiful book to peruse, and you can get some marvelous ideas for theatrical costuming from it. But like the Orientalists she reviews, Buonaventura presents an exotic and monolithic Middle East, where Egypt represents this entire diverse region and where nothing changes over time. She also perpetuates the popular myth that this is a *women's* dance, whereas in truth both sexes dance at private functions, and in both Egypt and Turkey, men historically performed as well. (Western tourists just weren't interested!) Read this for its lovely artwork and, if

you're a dancer, for a feel-good spiritual connection with earlier dancers--but if you're interested in the subject of dance history, do some further research. And if you are involved in the Society for Creative Anachronism, PLEASE don't use this book for costume documentation. Egyptian clothing pre-1600 was very, very different.

I bought this book on the recommendation of my belly dance instructor, who's had a copy for years and says it's a "wonderful resource." I agree wholeheartedly: the author has amassed all sorts of information about the background of Middle Eastern dance, and the historical illustrations (many of which are from private collections) are superb: Dinet's paintings of Ouled Nail dancers made my head spin with costume ideas. But this volume isn't just for dancers: while dance holds the book together, the author has also created a fascinating study of the uneasy relationship between East and West. The influence has been mutual: Westerners have become obsessed with the seductive East, while Hollywood has had no small influence on Middle Eastern concepts of entertainment. She also discusses the ambivalent position of the professional dancer in both societies. While Middle Eastern women seem more comfortable with their bodies than Western women, both cultures have historically been conflicted (for religious regions) about the body and sensuality in general. Middle Eastern women may dance in the privacy of their homes for their own entertainment, but a woman who earns her living dancing is viewed with equal suspicion in both cultures. The illustrations range from the gorgeous (Gerome's beladi dancer entertaining Turkish mercenaries) to the dutiful (stiff studio photographs of early dancers) to the unintentionally hilarious (Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn are a hoot), and the printer renders them well. My only quibble: in the paperbound edition, the binding is so tight that some of the two-page spreads are hard to see as a whole (cf. the Plate Dance!). But in general this is a terrific book, and I'm glad it's back in print.

The quality and quantity of pictures in this book is wonderful and there is also some good information but unfortunately all the information is not very accurate and there are even many things that are not true. As a book this is nice to watch but as this book has become "a bible of belly dance" when other more accurate documents have been hard to find I can't rate this higher because readers tend to believe everything that is written here.

While organization is lacking, there are great sources quoted and information on a very interesting subject. This is a wonderful resource for costume ideas. But most of all it is a soft-cover coffee table book of illustrations and paintings of dancers of the Mideast. You may have to hide it to prevent

excessive wear!

I would like to second everything in Teresa Robert's review. This is a beautiful, wonderful book. But as an actual history of "oriental" dance it lacks nuance and complexity, which is partly due to limited evidence and the author's romantic attachment to the women-centered mythology about this dance. For instance, the text overstates the evidence for connections between the belly dance of the last 150 years and the practices of ancient, goddess worship in presumably more woman-friendly times. I share this same romantic attachment to the dance's feminist roots, but actual history is always more fought and complex. As a result the author over-generalizes and does a incomplete job analyzing the orientalism that feeds so much of the beautiful imagery she includes. In the end, this book is great resource for costuming, late 19th century orientalist accounts of the women's dance, and a vast range of old pictures & photos. Moreover it does a decent job with the early to mid 20th century history and professionalization of the dance. Just look to additional sources for a more well-rounded history, particularly for pre 20th century and regional dances/costuming. I still highly recommend this book to anyone interested in bellydance or orientalism. The images alone are worth the price.

I bought this as a gift for my Mom. She has been belly dancing for well over 25 years. She has traveled to Egypt and Morocco. She is in love with this book! Beautiful pictures, book was in great condition.

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