



MENAT Dance in SCA Period

By THL Majda Anwar

Disclaimer: This class will touch on the role of enslaved peoples in the MENAT period as performing artists. I present this information to make sure your journey into a MENAT performing arts persona starts with this context.

—THL Majda Anwar



Dancer Persona Roles

- **Qayna (Qiyān)** – ‘singing slave girl’, earliest performers of Arabic music in the Islamic era, song, and poetry (Wright 2). It is important to note here that dance was not held in the same esteem and high art as song and poetry were.
- **Almeh** - while not a period term, refers to a “learned woman” with finely tuned skills in dance, music, history, poetry and more. The nadim and zarif court positions of the Abbasid court are speculated to be connected to the development of the almeh (Dr. George Sawa, PhD)
- **Köçek** - Male dancer, who “embodied notions of divine love and the ideal of beauty as a young male object of adult men's desires.” (Haynes) . Köçek: Turkish. Plural köçekler. typically a very handsome young male rakkas, or dancer, who usually cross-dressed in feminine attire, and was employed as an entertainer.

Caliphates at Glance

Empire/ Caliphate	Timeline	Court Language	Major Capitals in Period
Umayyad	661–750	Arabic / Andalusian Arabic	Damascus/Cordoba
Abbasid	750–1258 1261–1517	Arabic	Baghdad, Cairo
Fatimid	909–1171	Arabic	al-Mansuriya (Tunisia), Cairo
Ottoman	1299–1922	Turkish	Söğüt, Istanbul
Safavid	1501–1736	Persian	Tabriz, Isfahan





Pre-Islam Period

2nd century Hellenistic bronze statue from Alexandria. This fully veiled dancer has an upraised hip with a flat foot.

Title: Bronze statuette of a veiled and masked dancer

Period: Hellenistic

Date: 3rd–2nd century BCE

Culture: Greek

Medium: Bronze

Dimensions: 8 1/16 × 3 1/2 × 4 1/2 in., 65.6oz. (20.5 × 8.9 × 11.4 cm, 4.1 lb.)

Classification: Bronzes

Credit Line: Bequest of Walter C. Baker, 1971

Accession Number: 1972.118.95





Medieval Period

Umayyad Court 661-750

Historical Highlights:

- Dynastic Court
- Sunni Muslim
- 6th largest geographical expansion in history
- Defeated in Battle of the Zab, 750 to Abbasids
- Lone surviving prince, fled to southern Spain and founded Caliphate of Cordoba

Art & Cultural Highlights

- Built Dome of the Rock in 691
- Known as the “degenerate” caliphate in Islamic history (written by successors, biased perhaps?)
- Women were not veiled, were seen more equal in society



Dancing Women 700's AD
Qasr Amra, Fresco, Jordan



Dancing Women 700's AD
Qasr Amra, Fresco, Jordan



Observations:

- Fifth position split arms frame the body, in particular the hips
- Feet are crossing
- Looking down towards accented hip

Abbasid 750–1258; 1261–1517

Historical Highlights:

- Dynastic Court
- Shi'ite Muslim
- Attributed to establishing and spreading Islam at a wider scale
- Destroyed by Mongol invasion in 1258
- Fled to Cairo and set up a weaker caliphate from 1261-1517
- Mamluks ruled Cairo politically and with military power during same time

Art & Cultural Highlights

- Considered the Islamic Golden Age
- Scholarship – Medicine, philosophy, literature, art,
- Umayyad – spread land, Abbasid – spread Islam



Jausaq al-Khagani,
Samarra, Iraq.
836-839

Observations:

- Partner dancing
- Serving alcohol
- Swirling fabric
- Pearls
- Coin belt?



10th Century Description of Dance:

‘O Commander of the Faithful, the people of various regions and various countries differ in their dances, such as the people of Khurasan and others. And the rhythmic modes used in dancing are eight: the light, hazaj, ramal, light ramal, second light heavy and second heavy, the first light heavy and the first heavy).’”

~ al-Mas’udi, Muruj al-Dhahab, ed. C. Pellat, vol. 5, pp. 131-132 (Beirut 1965).

Fatimid bowl with female scarf dancer
12th century Fatimid period
earthenware painted over glaze with
luster H: 6.7 W: 26.1 cm Egypt Figural
representations, such as this
sensuous female dancer, played a
prominent role in lustre-painted
ceramics in twelfth-century Egypt.

Observations:

- Floorwork, similar to belly dancer's crawl
- Again, split 5th position arms
- Presenting opposing energy
- creating dynamic pose
- Scarf accessory





Carved Ivory
Plaque with
Dancer,
Fatimid Egypt,
11th Century.
Museo
Nazionale del
Bargello,
Florence, 80c
5.



199. Plaque with scarf dancer,
probably Sicily, twelfth century. Ivory.
Florence, Museo Nazionale

Observations:

- Again, split 5th position arms
- Presenting opposing energy
- creating dynamic pose
- Scarf accessory
- Feet movement indicate
travel
- Face angled down - shy,
coquettish



Early Modern

Ottoman 1299–1922

Historical Highlights:

- Peak under Suleiman the Magnificent
- Capture of Constantinople in 1453 (renamed Istanbul)
- Expansion due to the military prowess of the Janissaries
- Sultan was supreme ruler politically and religiously
- Non-Muslims mostly free to practice their religions without persecution

Art & Cultural Highlights:

- Lots of beautiful pretty shiniest that are documentable
- Ornate architecture, calligraphy, textiles and ceramics
- Contributions to medicine include forceps, catheters, scalpels
- Baklava parade



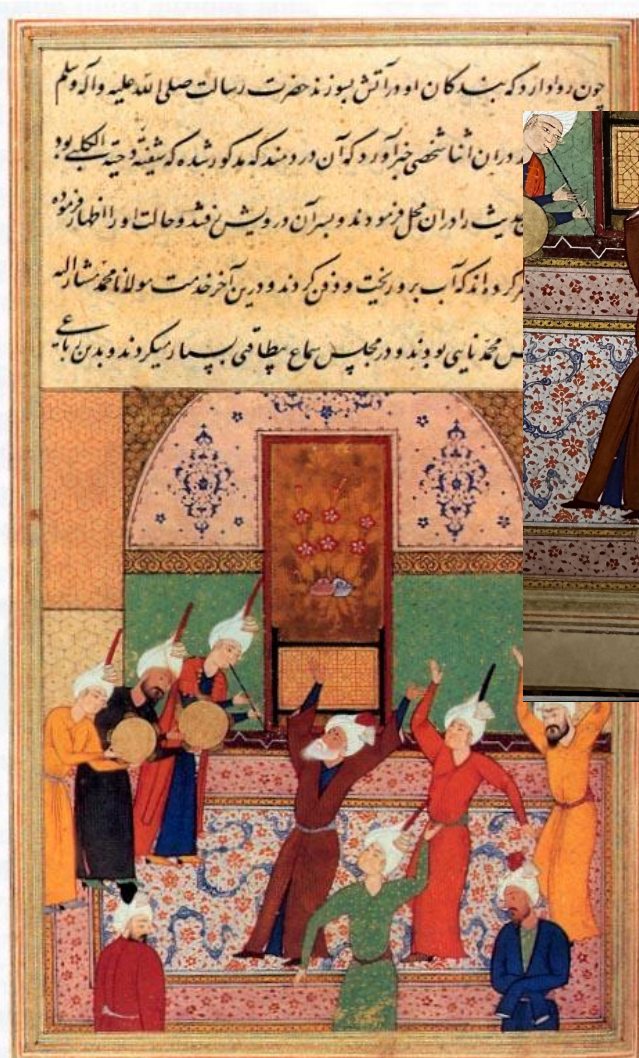
Köçek, 1720,
The Surname-I
Hümayun
(Imperial
Festival Book),
Turkey

While painting is
out of period,
the depiction is
of an event
within period.



Male Kocek Dancers





Observations:

- Ecstasy/ flow state
- Lots of travel movement,
- Arm split again in 5th, palms up, receiving

Safavid 1501–1736

Historical Highlights:

- Shi'ite (Twelver Shiism)
- Constant conflicts between Ottomans and Safavids, resulting in deeper split between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims
- The enemy of my enemy is my friend...Safavids and Europeans against the Ottomans

Art & Cultural Highlights:

- Leading artistry in the Muslim world
- Exquisite manuscripts such as the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp
- Detailed miniatures – collected together into *muraqqa*
- *The most coveted silks and textiles of it's time , ex: Ardabil carpet*
- Ornate palaces



Story of Rostam from Shahnameh,
(Epic of Kings), Iran



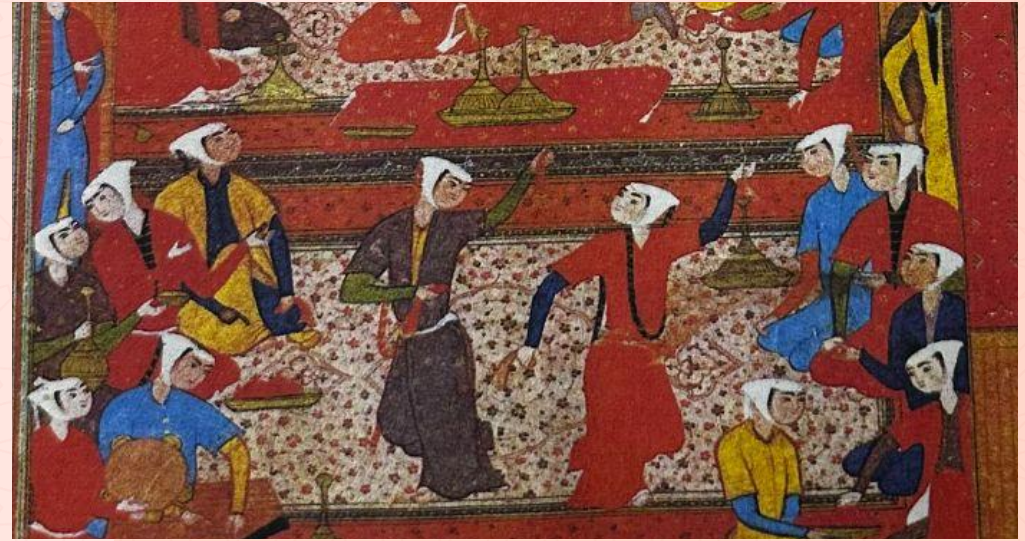


FIGURE 7: Yusupov (1983) # 71
 "Bahram in the Red Rose Palace"
 1560's—1570's
 Shiraz

Observations:

- Dancing together
- Communication between dancers - coordinated
- Palms down
- Scarves as props



FIGURE 8: Soudavar (1992) pg 111
"Timur Enthroned"
1507
Herat

Observations:

- Again, split 5th position arms
- Presenting opposing energy - creating dynamic pose
- Sleeves as accessory
- Feet movement indicate travel
- Face angled down - shy, coquettish
- Looking over and down towards hip?



FIGURE 3: Yusupov (1983) #77
"Shahzade Diverting Himself"
1560's—1570's
Shiraz

Observations:

- Private party setting
- Feet movement indicate travel
- Two soloists, communicating with musicians, not with each other



Observations:

- Private party setting
- Feet movement indicate travel
- Two soloists, communicating with musicians, not with each other
- Still coordinated

Story of Rostam from Shahnameh,
(Epic of Kings), Iran



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Thanks!

Do you have any questions?
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