

NUBIAN DANCES & THE DANCES OF EGYPT



Egyptian Culture



- Archeological data reveals that Egyptian culture, political systems, ideology, religions, etc., originated in Nubia (in Sub-Saharan Africa).
- From there it spread to Southern Egypt, and then to Northern Egypt.
- Nubian culture spread North to southern Egypt in roughly 3300 BCE.
- The unification of Egypt in 3100 BCE was accomplished by king (or Pharaoh) Menes, also known as Namer.
- As a result of the unification, and in an effort to promote amicability among the diverse kingdoms brought together, Egyptian religion became polytheistic.

Monotheistic to Polytheistic

- The smaller kingdoms' gods were given a voice, and subsequently, an ideological and cultural stake in the new state.
- Nubian religions before the unification of Egypt were monotheistic.
- After the unification, the Nubian religion that Egypt adopted became polytheistic.
- Kings became divine kings who after death would take their place with the gods.



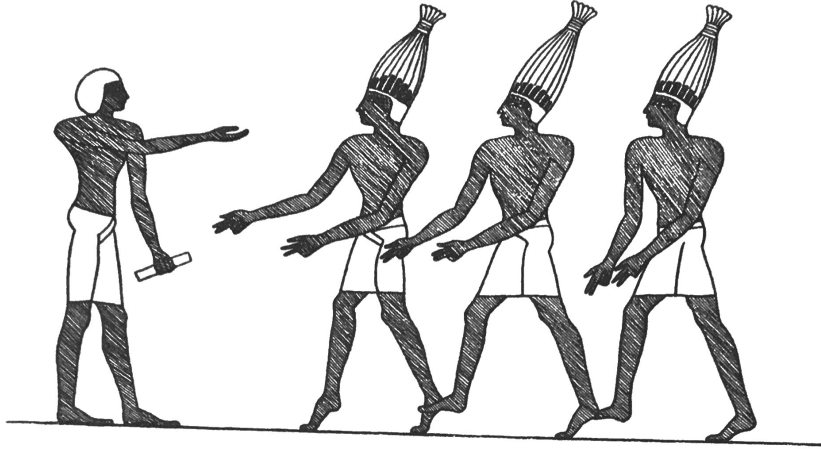


Fig. 59

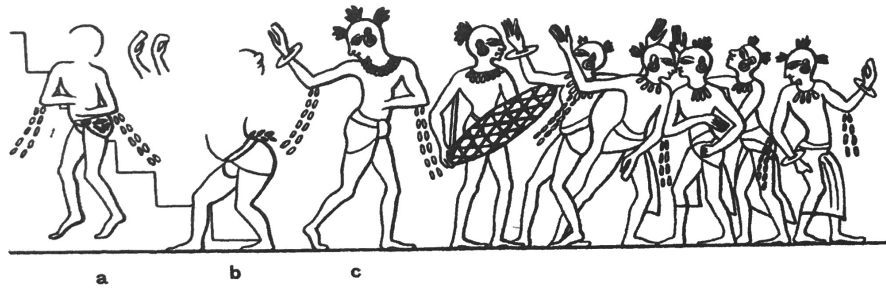


Fig. 60

Egyptian Dance Has Nubian Roots

- Therefore, it is important to note, that ancient Egyptian culture, including the dance systems, had Nubian foundations.
- Those dance styles were adapted to the circumstances in the newly unified Egypt.

Egypt: Period Genres

- Egypt underwent several significant periods.
- Scholars have placed these periods into genres.
- The period before the unification is referred to as the predynastic period.



The Old Kingdom



- 3100-2300 BCE is known as the Old Kingdom.
- During this period, it was believed the proper tombs for kings were pyramids.
- Step pyramids were invented first, followed by true pyramids later.
- This period witnessed the construction of the three largest pyramids ever built.
- They were built for Khufu, his son and grandson at Giza.
- The old kingdom ended with Pharaoh Pepi II's death.

The Middle Kingdom

- At the decline of dynasties and before the start of new ones, a period of chaos and disorganization occurred.
- Egypt experienced two such periods.
- They were called the First & the Second Intermediate Periods.
- The First Intermediate period began shortly after Pharaoh Pepi's death, from 2280 to 2050 BCE.
- The Middle Kingdom began in roughly 2050 BCE.



The Second Intermediate Period & The New Kingdom



- The Middle Kingdom ended in the 1780s BCE.
- Due to internal conflict and lack of strong leadership, by the 1790s, the Second Intermediate Period had begun.
- During this time of internal turmoil, the Hyksos, a people from Western Asia, invaded the northern half of Egypt.
- The Intermediate Period ended in the 1590s BCE, when Ahmose I defeated and drove out the Hyksos.
- Ahmose I restored Egypt's sovereignty, founded a new dynasty, and became the first pharaoh of the 18th dynasty and the New Kingdom.

Warning To The Wise

- Before we venture into the conversation about dance in Egypt, it is important to note a study into the culture of Egypt must be done with much discernment.
- 1) Despite countless discoveries, evidence for ancient Egyptian culture is still scanty.
 - 2) Egypt is in Africa. Although today it is dominated by people with Western Asian ancestry, the ancient cultures of Egypt were founded and built by Sub-Saharan Africans – Nubians.
 - 3) Some scholars are interpreting the culture of ancient Egypt utilizing standards and philosophies from European and other non-African lenses.
 - 4) Traditional Sub-Saharan culture provides clues to ancient Egyptian cultural tenets, but is not generally consulted.



The Particulars of Egyptian Dance

- Dance was an important profession in ancient Egypt.
- It was the dominant element in all theatrical drams, including the Ramesseum drama and the Edfu festival that will be discussed below.
- Professional dancers were either freelance or they were affiliated with a temple, estate, or royal lineage.



Social Groups In Egypt

- Over time, much that began as solely a priest and aristocrat class privilege, were eventually filtered down to the laymen.
- Pyramid/tomb building for the dead is a prime example.
- Therefore, dance making occurred in diverse social groups in ancient Egypt:

- Priest class
- Aristocrat/royal lineage
- Cultivators
- Hunters
- Metalsmiths
- Tailors/seamstresses



Types of Dances & Dancers

- The standard form of entertainment after dinner for the aristocrats was the all female dance ensemble.
- According to the discovered papyrus and tomb drawings thus far, this after dinner dance took place in the palace.
- However, no evidence has been unearthed that precludes the possibility that such events also occurred in the homes of the common folks.



The Funeral Dance

- Religious dance was a part of life before dance moved to its esteemed place in secular circles.
- For example there were all male funeral dance troupes called Muu (or Nu).
- The Muu represents the earthly water, and the Nu represents the celestial water.
- In other words, the Muu is the earthly reflection of the heavenly Nu.

Dance & The Transition

- The Nu was the divine waters that everything emerged from and returned to after death.
- Death was viewed as a transition.
- The Muu dancers wore tall reed head pieces to symbolize this relationship with the earthly and celestial waters.

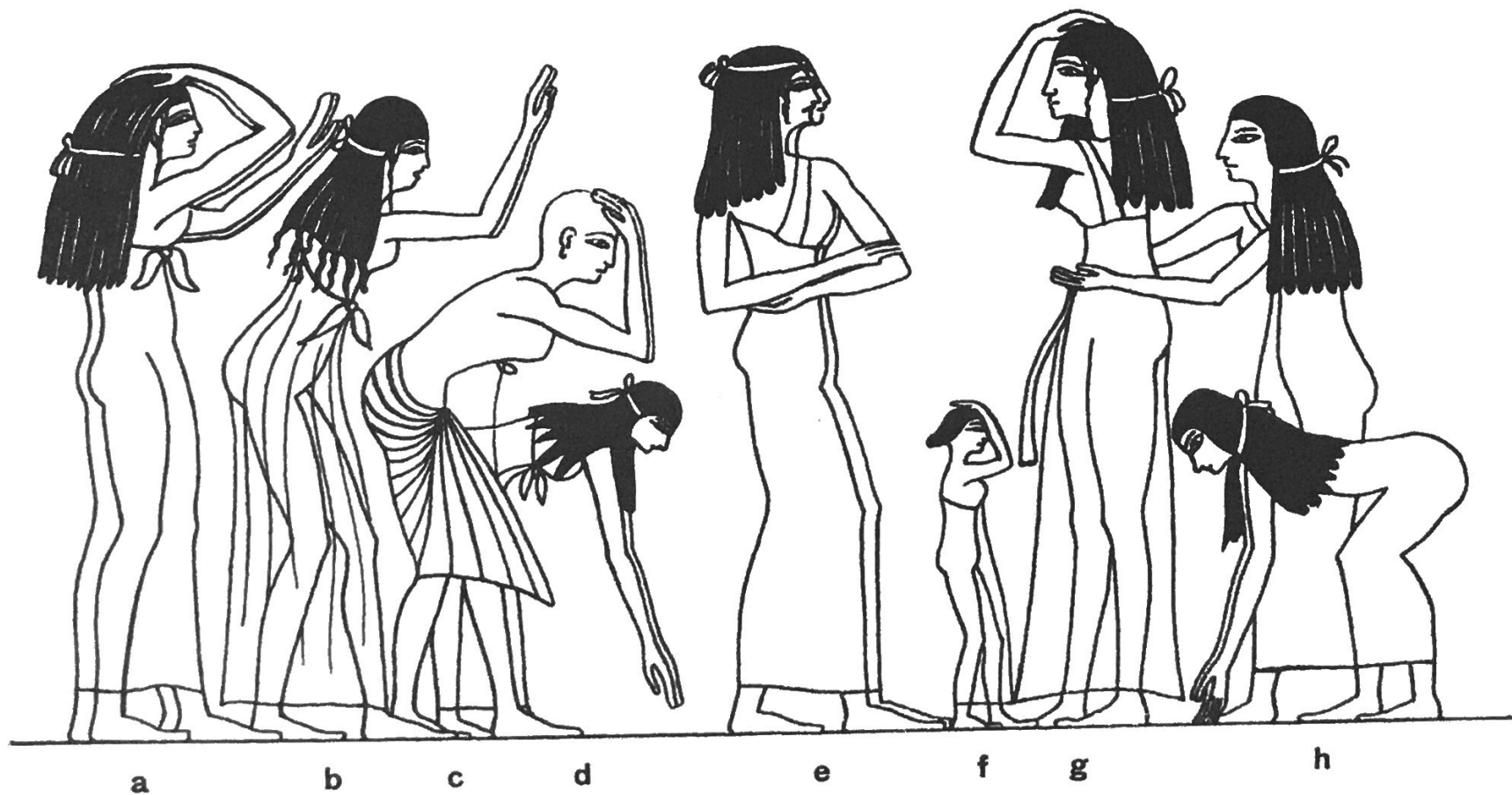


Fig. 66

The Significance Of Dance

- Dance in ancient Egypt was a prominent feature of festivals, and all theatrical presentations.
- Whether the occasion was sacred or secular was inconsequential, dance featured prominently in all.
- Sacred and secular rituals and ceremonies included dance.
- The rich, the poor, the aristocrat and the layman, all utilized dance as a significant part of their daily lives.
- A fitting example is the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus.

The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus

- Most if not all ancient dance theatre in Egypt was religious in nature.
- Although ancient Egyptian culture reaches far back into antiquity, the oldest documented sources of theatre dates to roughly 2600 BCE.
- The drama and the medium it is written on is called the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus.
- It was written during the Middle Kingdom, but it was preserved via oral tradition centuries or perhaps millennia before it was written on papyrus.



- The Ramesseum Drama is an account of the coronation of Senusret I.
- It was written by Ikhernofret, who was also the master of ceremony.
- The script of the coronation ritual is quite detailed and contains illustrations of scenes, dances, dialog spoken by actors representing various gods, stage directions, etc.



Edfu Drama



- The temple reliefs at Edfu contains a text of a religious drama that occurred during the New Kingdom.
- It was performed at the Heru festival while a statute of Het Heru was carried from her temple at Denderah to the festival at Edfu.
- In the text, Ballet scenes and symbolic dances were described.
- Staging directions for a large number of actors, props, statutes, backdrops, and even extras were also mentioned.



Views Of The Body

- Women dancers – and all other women – in ancient Egypt wore cowrie shells and waist beads.
- Waist beads are a traditional ornament worn by women in Africa under their clothes for various purposes – rites of passage, enticing their mates, healing ceremonies, etc.
- In ancient Egyptian drawings waist beads are often visible because the women are often scantily dressed.



Africa vs The West



- In ancient Egypt and other parts of Africa, the body was not viewed as a sexual object.
- The body was a common phenomenon in everyday life – everybody had one.
- This fact is important because ancient Egyptian drawings often included naked or sparsely dressed dancers.

Dance Training In Ancient Egypt

- Dance training in ancient Egypt is not generally depicted on tombs and papyrus discovered thus far.
- However, secular professional training probably occurred via an apprenticeship process.
- On a secular non-professional level, children probably began dancing very young emulating family members.
- Religious dance was probably taught in the Mystery Systems, as was other physical, intellectual, and spiritual skills.



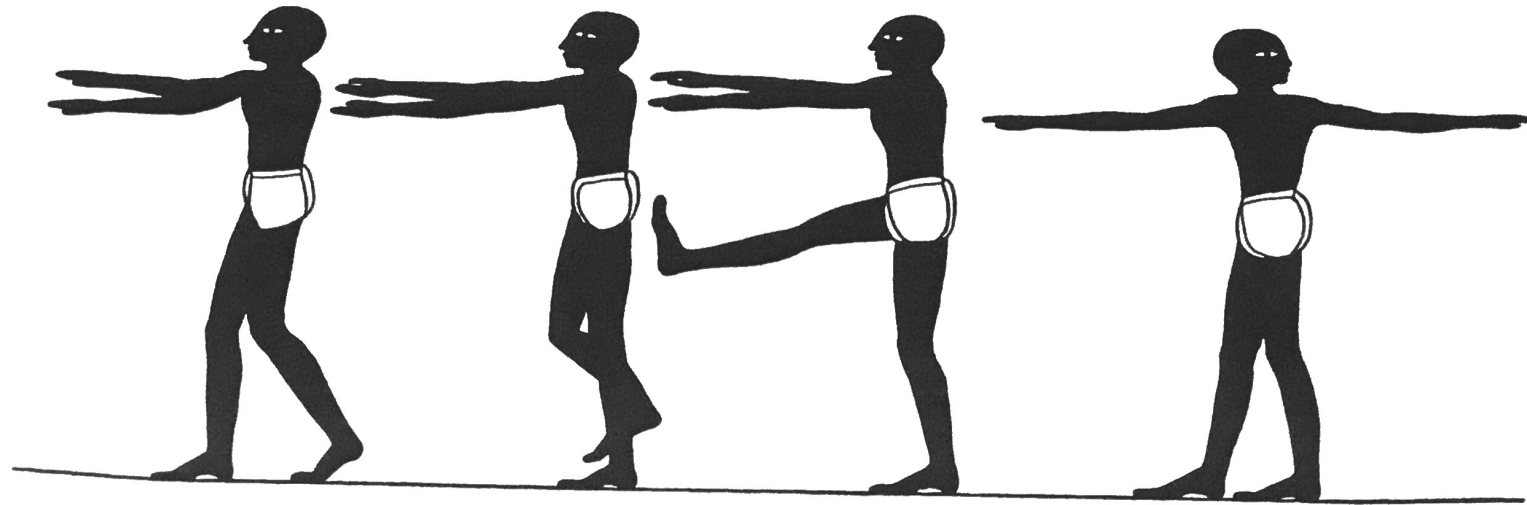


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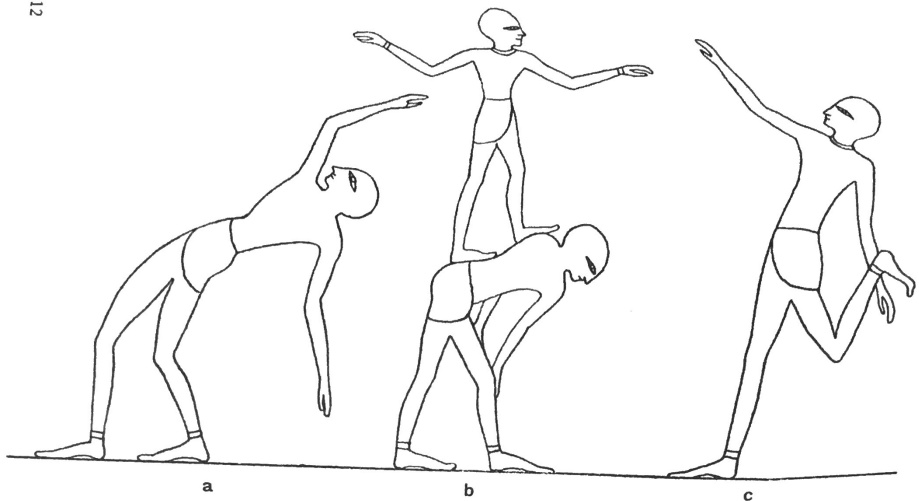


Fig. 29

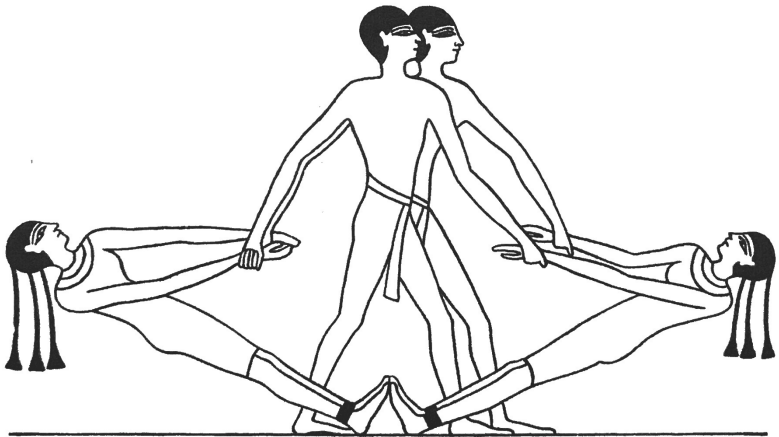


Fig. 30



Fig. 35

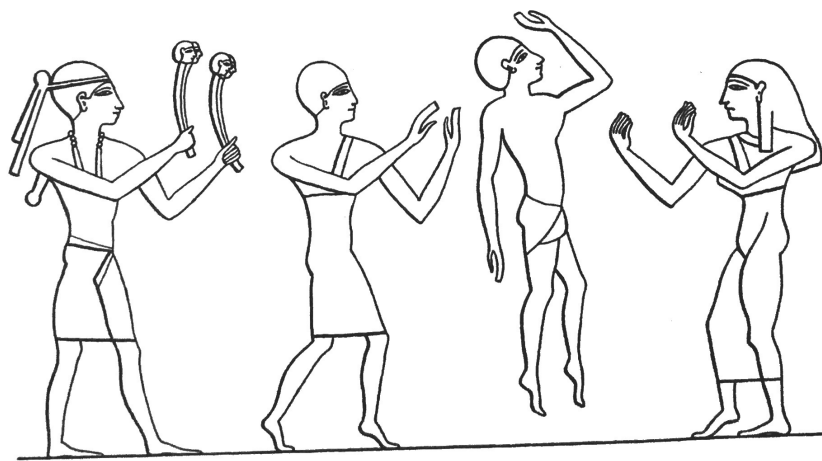


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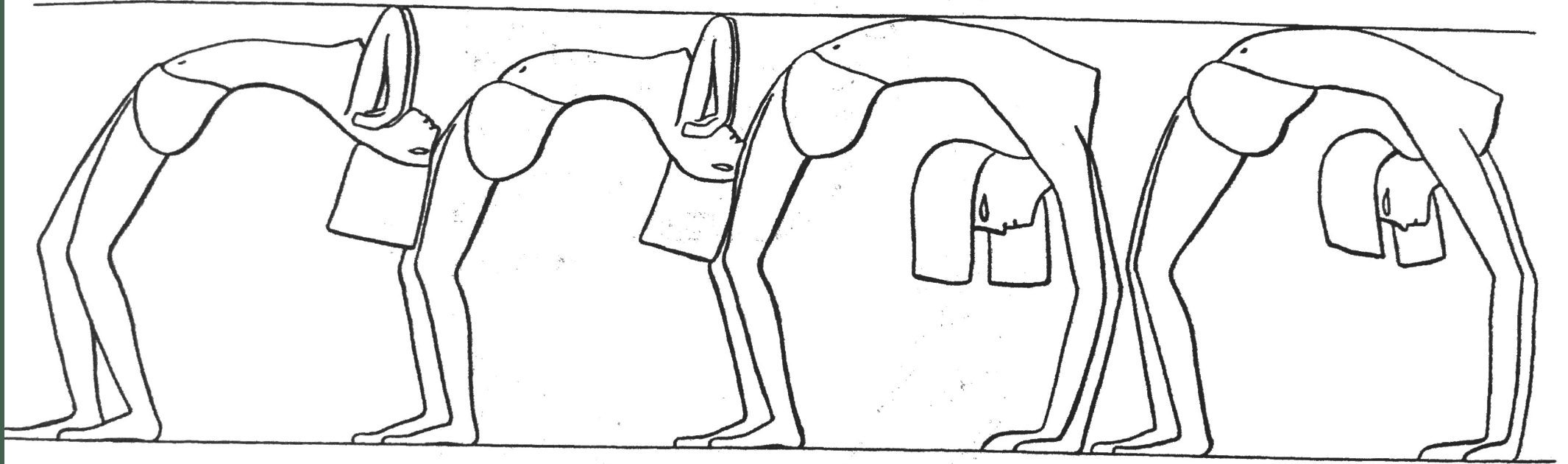


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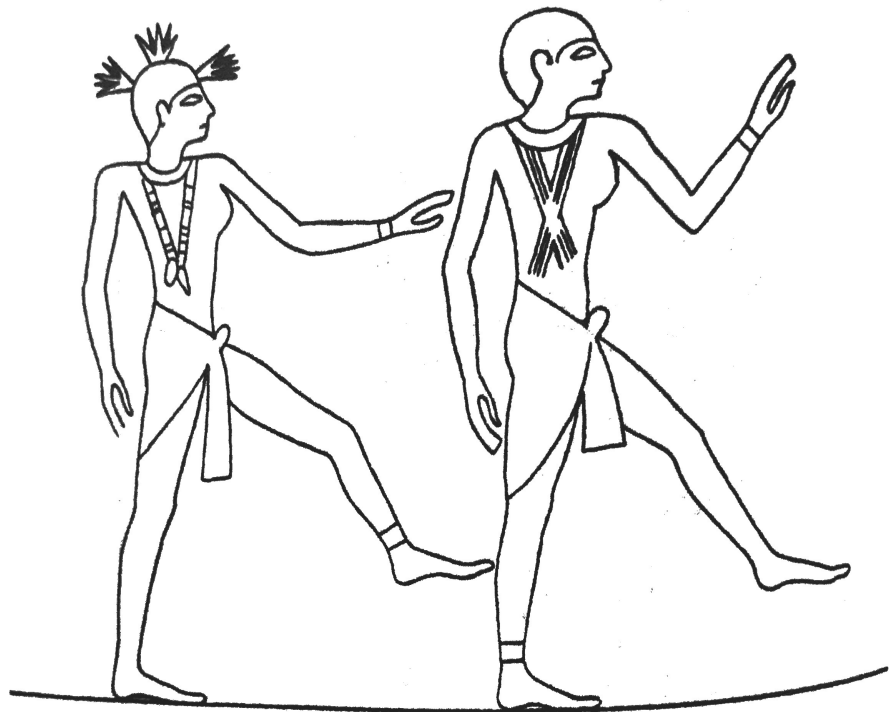


Fig. 7



Fig. 14

Dance Movements

- In addition to running movements, leaps, bends, etc., ancient Egyptian dancers are witnessed executing pirouettes.
- Question:
 - There are a group of scholars that believe classical ballet emerged from ancient Egyptian dance.
 - What do you think and why?
 - What are the ramifications of such a notion?

