

## Chapter 6

### THE VOICE OF SEX CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

Dancing produced strong reactions from travellers and the subject falls well between the last chapter and the next. European tradition led them to expect a romantic and voluptuous performance; European prudery led them to damn it; Eurocentrism led them to ridicule it. Douglas Sladen, who often produced lurid prose when writing about women, poured forth a string of invective against Jewish dancers in Tunis – and provided the title of this chapter.

I was rather disgusted that, whenever you asked what you ought to see in Tunis, people took it for granted that you would want to begin with the Arab *café chantant* and hip-dancing. I think these performances amongst the dullest and most revolting which the thirst for sight-seeing has ever persuaded me to sit out. There is no fun and no music in them, and I soon tire of the novelty of seeing Oriental musicians striking an earthenware drum with the edges of their hands, and whining with their voices a monotonous chant without words.

Nor is the music improved if the band is increased by twangers on one-string fiddles and screamers upon bamboo flutes, though the latter have the antiquarian interest of appearing on Egyptian monuments. One often sits listening to this sort of thing for an hour before the hip-dancing begins. The Arabs do not mind, because they feast their eyes all the time on the elephantine charms of the Jewish dancers.

The whole thing was disgusting to me, commencing with the Arabs themselves, who sat about the hall, transgressing the Koran by drinking alcoholic liquors, and leering at the Jewesses.

The Arab, when he sails down from the Kashbah in a fluttering