

Despite their licentious life, the *almes* are taken into the harems to teach the young girls everything that will make them more pleasing to their husbands; they give them lessons in dancing, singing, charm, and all sorts of voluptuous pursuits. It is not surprising in a society whose morals place voluptuousness as the main duty of women, that those who make a profession of pleasing should be the teachers of the fair sex. They are invited to all the great feasts and when a husband wants to gladden the life of his harem he also calls them there.

Vivant Denon, *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte*, 1802, vol. I, pp. 154-6

A colony of Ghawazees, or dancing-girls, was here established, not exactly for the purpose of attracting strangers. They had chosen this secluded spot as a kind of academy, where the young and ignorant might learn the graceful arts and allurements peculiar to their strange community.

A fat, frowsy dame – accustomed, no doubt, of old, herself to exhibit with the light fantastic hip – was at once mistress of the coffee-house and superintendent of the chaste education of the infant Ghawazee. Two pupils, probably first of the first form, were shown to us, and ordered to repeat some of their lessons. They were quite a credit to the establishment, and, though barely ten years old, had little to learn, except passion. Like two lovely automata, they went through every manoeuvre of their elder sisters; but whilst the Arabs assembled swore with admiration and grunted out lascivious sighs, we could not help feeling saddened by beholding childhood thus profaned. The frowsy dame, who counted on being handsomely rewarded, watched our faces anxiously, and asked if we were displeased. New in the country, we made some objections, and were comically misunderstood. Had this accommodating lady been acquainted with Shakespeare, she would have compressed her answer into one phrase, –

'Younger than they are happy mothers made';

but, not being so learned, she entered into a variety of details, physiological and other, with which we could well have dispensed. Changing the subject, we inquired the origin of these charming children, and were told they had been bought from their tellah mothers. At the time I doubted the fact, and believed them to have been stolen; but sales of children are not uncommon in the villages,