

the imaginary insect. Without stopping the dance, they quickly remove a first piece of their clothing and throw it down; then they throw aside a second piece, calling 'nahleh, nahleh', with gestures which express by turn the fear of being stung and the hope of soon getting rid of the enemy. After much fruitless searching, they end up with only one very light veil which they leave to float at the mercy of their movements. Little by little the dance becomes more lively, the figures animated and then, 'quite unintentionally', the last piece of the costume joins the others. Now the dancers draw near to each other, separate, cross over and turn back towards each other as though to incite each other to amorous encounters. They take pleasure in the most lewd poses; supple as reeds, they twirl around, then come back into position face to face; motionless, their body thrown backwards, arms stretched out, hands clenched, flesh quivering, they abandon themselves to the impressions which the paroxysms of passion produce on them; at this moment the music becomes gentler, it is no louder than the panting breath of the actresses and the tinkling of the gold pieces in their hair. Suddenly noticing their state with 'surprise', they pick up their veil with a gesture of modesty and wrap it around their waist, and the dance stops for a moment while small glasses of arak are passed around. The *ghawazi*, who are far from being over modest, come and begin talking familiarly with the guests whose favour they want to win or whose generosity they want to sting.

Then the dance begins again with new vigour; the flimsy scarf which is resting around their hips is removed and flutters in the air; the poses become more and more wanton; you would think that it was the ancient Bacchanalia celebrating an orgy. After some time they slowly put back their clothes without pausing in the dance.

When the show is finished, the artists come to sit among the spectators or on the knees of those whom they favour with their cajolery. The happy mortals who are the object of this distinction must, according to the rules of good form, moisten some small golden pieces and place them delicately on the forehead, the neck and bosom or the arms of those who have favoured them.

H. de Vaujany, *Le Caire et ses environs*, 1883, pp. 88-93

When the Reverend Charles Bell was in Cairo in the 1880s, he regarded the dancers with pity and compassion. However, he