

It is by no means the case that dance, which with us is as esteemed as music, holds the same position in the opinion of the Arabs. They believe this art is stigmatized with a kind of shame; a man could not indulge in it without dishonour, and it is only tolerated among women. This seems a very strict judgement but before condemning it, it must be realized that in the Orient dance is not an imitation of war, as with the Greeks, or a combination of pleasing attitudes and movements, as in our country, but a lewd representation of the most audacious love. It is the type of dance which, taken from Carthage to Rome, heralded the decline of the republican morality there. Later revived in Spain by the Arabs, it remains there called the *fandango*. Despite our liberal ideas, it would be difficult to describe this dance without shocking the reader. It is enough to say that the dancer, arms outstretched, with a passionate air, singing and accompanying herself with castanets, stands in one place and performs movements of the body that even passion takes care to hide in the shadow of the night.

C.-F. Volney, *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie*, 1959 (1st edn 1787),
p. 392

A respectable Mahometan, who should indulge in dancing, would disgrace himself in the estimation of his countrymen. The women, however, value themselves upon excellence in this exercise, and practise it without scruple, reckoning it their duty to contribute to the pleasures of their husbands, by every little art in their power. When by themselves, too, in an assembly consisting only of women, on occasion of a marriage, or any other solemnity, they vie no less than before their husbands, in dancing.

A person from Tripoli related to me in what manner the women of that city amuse themselves upon festive occasions, and I have good reason to believe, that the same customs prevail also in Turkey and Arabia; however, I do not pretend to be absolutely certain; for it is impossible to meet with an eye-witness of those amusements. My Tripoli acquaintance had his information from his wife, who ingenuously told him whatever he asked.

No woman would presume to appear in an assembly, if she were not handsome and magnificently dressed. If the entertainment happens to be in the house of a family of rank, fifty of the greatest beauties in the city assemble, all dressed out in great splendour. In their train, they bring out their handsomest slaves, who attend in a separate room, to take care of the coffers containing their mistresses'