



The Dangerous Lives of Public Performers: Dancing, Sex, and Entertainment in the Islamic World

Anthony Shay

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From the kordax dancers of ancient Greece, to the pantomimes of ancient Rome, to the slave-girl singers in Caliph Baghdad, to the dancing boys in present-day Afghanistan, and the belly dancers in Egypt, professional entertainers in the Islamic world endured low social status, were regarded as sexually available, and if male, bore the stigma of effeminacy. Located at the margins of society, yet highly visible because their bodies were on display, public entertainers were often used by the elite classes to police public morality and enforce rigid standards of masculinity through the negative trope of his or her tainted profession. In covering this long historical framework and the wide geographic area - from the ancient Mediterranean world to the modern Islamic Middle East, including India and Pakistan - Shay explores and repairs the careers, artistic performances, and legacies of these individuals, who endured brutish, often short lives that were characterized by public humiliation, and who were forced to produce entertainment and art for, and have sex with, any and all patrons.

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