

PREFACE

Dance is one of the cultural topics that faces some of the greatest challenges in Iran. Culturally dance constitutes one of the richest and most extensive branches of art, having a long tradition and history. But in today's Iran, dance is automatically regarded by many people to be a political issue, even though dancers have no intention that it would be thought of in this way. In spite of the fact that Iran is considered to be one of the most ancient centers of dance culture, dance has still faced many challenges in its long history, particularly after the arrival of Islam. In today's Iran, dance is not officially forbidden, but it is also not openly permitted. In actuality, there is great deal of dancing that takes place in certain situations, such as at weddings, parties, and other types of private gatherings. Indeed, if the government grants approval at a particular time, then special dance types, such as tribal dances, can also be performed on the public stage. But it should not be forgotten that dancing always remains a pleasure with risks. The laws regarding dance are not fixed, and they can change from one day to the next. Choreographers and dancers regularly experience conflict with the authorities regarding such issues as music, dress code, and style of the dance. For the authorities, the most acceptable dance styles are folkloric and mystical dances, which would be performed only by male dancers.

Within particular segments of society, dance is believed to be a cause of immorality and a way to incite sedition. Such views can be attributed to beliefs of certain orthodox Shi'ite schools, which follow interpretations of some sections of the the Qorān and the Ḥadīṣ. Accordingly, any type of amusement or fun is regarded as futile entertainment, and is thus forbidden.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was the end of professional dance and ballet in Iran. As a result of the accompanying Islamic cultural revolution, all dance academies and companies were dissolved. Dance material that had been painstakingly collected by dance researchers and deposited in the local archives, was burned and destroyed. Most of the members of the dance academies and companies either emigrated to other countries or changed their professions.

In the first days of the revolution, the Archive of Rudaki Hall was attacked, an archive that was the most important repository for material belonging to the performing arts, particularly ballet, dance, and opera. This material included a large number of photographs, audio and video- material, as well as relevant administrative documents. Tragically, all of the material in the archive was burned in the yard of Rudaki Hall. Most of the remaining documents regarding dance were brought out of the country before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 by the people who were responsible in the dance institutions and who left Iran some time before 1979.

Since 1979, any activity involving the preservation, development, and promotion of dance is not supported inside Iran.

In March of 2014, Ursula Reichert, the director of Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag visited the institute of Empirical Linguistics at the University of Frankfurt, and because of my background in both dance and Iranian studies, she suggested that I write a book on

“Dance in Iran”. I then contacted Nima Kiann, the artistic director of Les Ballet Persans as well as a choreographer, dance researcher, and author of valuable articles on the history of ballet in Iran, to write one chapter for the book. I also invited Dr. Robyn Friend to collaborate with us to write another chapter on “Regional dances of Irān”. She is a dancer, choreographer, and dance scholar, who has written a number of articles about Iranian and Persian dance.

This volume is divided into three chapters. The first chapter contains the article by Robyn Friend on “Regional dances of Irān”. This chapter treats some of the regional dances and dance cultures in Irān, including those of northeastern Irān (Khorāssān), southeastern Irān (Baluchistan), southern Irān (Persian Gulf), southwestern Irān (Fars, etc.), middle western Irān (Kurdistan), northwestern Irān (Āzerbāijān), and northern Irān (the Caspian area).

The second chapter describes the history of dance in Iran from the prehistoric era to the present. This article presents various dance materials, including artifacts with dance scenes, book illustrations, wall paintings, historical resources such as travelogues and dance contemporary documents, and it describes the relevance of such materials in clarifying the ambiguous aspects of Iranian dance in its long history.

Nima Kiann’s chapter focuses on the hidden or lesser known aspects of Iranian ballet history. His article is based on research of material that includes Persian literature on Iranian dance; archived material of the Eastern Dance Forum, Les Ballets Persans, and various dance institutions in Europe; press material from the 1940s to the 1970s, including magazines and newspapers of pre-revolutionary Iran; interviews with cultural personalities and former members of the Iranian National Ballet Company; and autobiographies of individuals who were involved in the development of ballet in Iran.

During the writing of the present book, many people kindly extended help to us, which has been greatly appreciated. I am indebted to Ursula Reichert, who drew my attention to the important topic of this book and encouraged me in the production of this volume. I am grateful to the Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag in general for their cooperation and support. Special thanks are due to Gholamreza Sakhai, the former principal dancer of the National Folklore Organization of Iran, for providing the possibility of photographing his private collection and using the photos in the second chapter.

I also gratefully acknowledge all the practical help we have received in preparing the images of this book from Mahdi Khorsand. I am deeply indebted to Denise Bailey for her support in the editing of this book, done with admirable patience and professionalism.

Finally, a word of gratitude is due to Robyn Friend and Nima Kiann for their valuable articles and for their constructive cooperation throughout the reviewing and editing process.

Saloumeh Gholami
Frankfurt, January 2016