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## *Proceedings*

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Athens, Greece, 24-28 July, 2002

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## DANCE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A SYMBOL OF SOCIAL INFERIORITY IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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Western women of the 17<sup>th</sup>, the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries—periods in history when travel to regions of the Ottoman Empire or outside of Europe, was considered an exclusively male experience—found ways to surpass the prejudices of their western societies. Women travelers, primarily from England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Austria and America traveled, explored, visited, resided and worked in regions of the East that were considered, according to the female accounts, “proper and safe for dynamic men only!” They traveled to different regions of the Ottoman Empire, penetrating the harems and all the gendered dichotomized spheres. The first hand female accounts reveal that: a) Dance and any form of physical activity or movement were symbols of social inferiority. b) Dancing, singing and the playing of musical instruments were the exclusive duties of female islamized slaves who were part of the harem’s elite slavery system, and had been trained for this purpose, and not only! They were also the concubines of their owners (masters). c) No man, no adult male-- Moslem or non-Moslem-- could watch the female harem dancers or be entertained by their music or their songs, other than their one and only owner (master). d) Free Moslem men and free Moslem women never danced (the men and women who were not islamized slaves, but free-Moslem subjects of the Sublime Port). f) Men never danced. f) The two sexes, men and women, never danced together.

The personal accounts of western women travelers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, to Asia Minor, Greece, and other subjugated areas of the Ottoman Empire, as well as those of the harem inmates themselves, reveal that the harem dancers, singers and musicians were all islamized slaves, in other words formerly captured and enslaved non-moslem women and children. The women who cultivated music were islamized slaves, whose talents were recongnized as children and who were trained (in the harems) to use their artistic abilities and education to amuse and distract their owners: their master, their mistresses, and in general the women of the harem’s higher pyramidal hierarchy, including their female visitors or female guests.

The Ottoman Turks considered dancing and any other form of physical activity, a symbol of social inferiority. Although they enjoyed watching their ‘inferiors’ entertain them, they never joined in. Their conception of a beautiful body was totally different from that of western society. Fat was beautiful. The “lady travelers” (1717-1895) who entered the harems, describe the harem inmates as “fat”, not obese, but “very fat”, “immoderately fat” and “extremely fat”. Women travelers, such as Anna Vivanti, who stayed and visited several harems on the island of Crete and in Constantinople, in 1865, observe that physical activity and exercise were considered an element that represented the lower socio-economic classes and an open declaration that they did not own slaves to serve them. The inability to move about gracefully was considered a social privilege that belonged to only the higher classes. Harem women had difficulty in standing up, getting up and moving around. They were unable to walk gracefully due to their indolent life, the lack of exercise and their excessive weight. When they walked, they literally dragged their feet!

They usually died at a young age due to the harem’s polluted and unhealthy atmosphere (narghile and cigarette smoke, narcotics in their tobacco), drug overdose, the lack of physical activity, excessive food consumption and the psychological results of confinement etc.



## THE MEANING OF THE TERM 'TEAM' (OMADA) IN THE EPIC CYCLE

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In order to examine the dynamics of the group, researchers, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, distinguished its characteristics and formulated operational and functional definitions, such as, "a group is a number of interactive and sociometrically related individuals" (Festinger *et al.*, 1950), or "a circle of individuals that act similarly and simultaneously, due to a common or mutual consciousness or awareness" (Oppenheimer, 1923). Johnson and Johnson (1987) concluded that "a group is two or more individuals in face-to-face interaction, each aware of his or her membership in the group, and each aware of their positive interdependence as they strive to achieve mutual goals". This study examined the meaning of "omada" (team), in the consciousness or conception of the ancient Greeks, through the epics of Homer and Hesiod, as well as the Greek Grammatology.

For instance, during the Trojan War, the chariot crews were made up of smaller teams, as far as the number of its members was concerned. In the battle of Troy two brothers were in the same chariot in front of Agamemnon "...the two being in one chariot, and together they were seeking to contain the swift horses" (Homer, *Iliad* 11, 1999). The word 'together' supports the team effort of the two men.

Hesiod (257, 1999) uses the word tumult (omadon=όμαδον) as a synonym for team, in order to describe the soldiers engaged in combat, which are illustrated on the Shield of Hercules. "And when they had satisfied their souls with human blood, they would cast that one behind them, and rush back again into the tumult and the fray." Used as a synonym for team, in the Hymn to Apollo (The Homeric Hymns, 336, 1998) is the term gathering, (omighiris=ομήγηρις) which describes the musical entertainment of the Olympian Gods, as team members. "Thence, swift as thought, he speeds from earth to Olympus, to the house of Zeus, to join the gathering of the other gods;...". Homer in the *Iliad* (Homer, *Iliad* 23, 1999), during the Trojan War, describes the two-member chariot team and their different roles. "Twin brothers they were—the one drove with sure hand, while the other plied the whip." An entertainment team which inspires the spirits of gods and men are the nine muses described by Hesiod (*Theogony*, 1999) who exhibits their common characteristics, their purpose and their functions. Of particular interest is the small team of girls that usually met to play, sing and collect flowers, as depicted in the Homeric Hymn to the goddess Demetra (The Homeric Hymns, 417, 1998). Persephone relates to her mother, Demetra that she was playing with her friends when Pluto came and abducted her and took her to Hades. "All we were playing in a lovely meadow, Leucippe and Phaeno and Electra and Lanthe Pallas who rouses battles and Artemis delighting in arrows: we were playing and gathering sweet flowers".

Derived from Greek grammatology, evident is the composition of teams, during the epic cycle period. The ancient Greeks were conscious and aware of their team incorporation and their roles. However, the meaning of team ('omada') is not defined. A series of versus in the Greek language contain synonyms of the word 'omada' (team), and another series of versus describe the activities of individuals, acting with a common conscious, such as the soldiers, the chariot members, the entertainment and game groups etc.

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