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Anthony Shay  
*Pomona College*

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**A Rainbow of Iranian Masculinities: *Raqqas*, a Type of Iranian Male Image**  
**Anthony Shay**

**Introduction**

*Raqqas!* **1** Dreaded epithet! The male dancer –the figure that embodies the lightning rod for the negative pole of masculinity and masculine behavior throughout the entire Middle East and Central Asia, and certainly in the Iranian world. I define the Iranian world as including Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia, tied together by the Persian language and culture. The raqqas defines effeminacy for many in the Iranian world, both historically and today, and those outsiders who traveled there over the centuries and reported and commented on what they saw. I describe and analyze these negative attitudes in *Choreophobia: Solo Improvised Dance in the Iranian World* (1999). Zainab Stellar in describing how dance is regarded by many conservative elements in Iranian society today, notes that dance “was seen as the worst possible behavior of an undisciplined body in public, and symbol of all vice” (2011, 235). **2** Stellar’s object was to describe and analyze how, “Despite all moral prohibitions, the genre of rhythmic movements (*harikati-i mawzun*) has brought dance to the service of Islamic theocratical culture in postrevolutionary Iran” (2011, 231). **3**

1. Raqqas (fem. Raqqaseh) is one of the few gendered Arabic words still used in Persian. So deadly an insult are these terms that the Iranian government, in attempting to attract respectable middle-class dancers to perform in their national dance companies, created the ungendered term “*raqsandeh*” to replace the tainted terms “*raqqas*” and “*raqqaseh*.”

2. Stellar, Zainab. 2011. “From ‘Evil-inciting’ Dance to Chaste ‘Rhythmic Movements’: A Genealogy of Modern Islamic Dance-Theatre in Iran.” In Karin van Nieuwkerk, editor. *Muslim Rap, Hallal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theater: Artistic Developments in the Middle East*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 231-256.

3. *ibid.*, 231.

In this essay, I will explore the male dancer in the Iranian world, and how he came to occupy this abject position. Lotfollah “Lotfi” Mansouri, the renowned opera director and producer, recounted at a dinner that I attended (January 27, 2002 Peyvand Organization, San Jose), how one day as a student at UCLA, he entered Schonberg Music Hall and heard opera for the first time. He was immediately enchanted, abandoned his medical studies, and entered the opera program for which UCLA was famous. His enraged father back in Iran called him, “raqqas!”, and never spoke to him again, in spite of the considerable success and fame that Lotfi had garnered in his newly chosen profession as head of both director of the San Francisco Opera and the Canadian National Opera, and guest director worldwide. Raqqas, male dancer, can be considered an insult in Persian implying effeminacy, sexual availability, and general untrustworthiness, enough to disinherit a son.

One of the Qajar princesses, Taj al-Saltana (1884-1936) in her memoirs (written in 1914) commented on the figure of the male dancer, that by implication suggests that her readers would understand very well the negative meaning she implies:

That night ‘Abdi Jan’s troupe had been called so that the harem occupants could watch the show. <sup>4</sup> Of course, you remember ‘Abdi well. Let me, nevertheless, give you a description of his looks. He was a lad of about twelve or thirteen, with large black eyes, languid and incredibly beautiful and attractive. His face was tanned and good looking, his lips crimson, and his hair black and thick. Renowned throughout the town, the boy had a thousand adoring lovers. Being a

dancer, however, he was unworthy of being anyone's beloved. (1993, 163) **5**

While all public entertainers were considered to be prostitutes, if the performer was male, he occupied the most abject position in Iranian society—that of a sexually penetrated male. (See Floor 2008, 279-368; Mathee 2000, 138-140; Najmabadi 2014, 126-133; Shamisa 2002, 9-14) He took what was considered to be the female role in sexual intercourse, and thus while the female played out her gender role, the male dancer betrayed his. It mattered not that he might, as an orphan or slave, not have any control over his fate, he served as that most useful personage: the societal scare figure to use for the voices of morality to police rigid masculine codes of behavior in the general population. The raqqas was exactly the person that one did not want to be. **6** The raqqas, because he was a public entertainer, and like Abdi Jan often well know, became symbolic of all that was not masculine. By no means was he the only figure to participate in homosexual relations.

It was not only male public performers who labored under social censure, female performers, too, suffer from these negative attitudes, as professional belly dancers will tell you. (See Nieuwkerk 1995, 1997 **7**; dvd *Belly Dancers of Cairo*, 2006 **8**) For Iran, historian H.E. Chehabi details the first female singer to appear in public, the famous Qamar ol-Moluk who appeared unveiled in 1924, for which he notes, “Qamar, who had received death threats, feared for her life. . .” (2000, 159). **9** However, this essay focuses on the male entertainers, specifically dancers.

4. Willem Floor, describing the male dancers, informs us that like Abdi, “These starboys [sic] were known as jan” (1971, 106).
5. Taj al-Saltana. 1993. *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity*. Edited with Introduction and Notes. Abbas Amanat; translated by Anna Vanzan and Ali Neshati. Washington, DC: Mage.
5. Floor, Willem. 2008. *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*. Washington, DC: Mage; Mathee, Rudi. 2000. “Prostitutes, Courtesans, and Dancing Girls: Women Entertainers in Safavid Iran.” In Rudi Mathee and Beth Baron, editors. *Iran and Beyond: Essay in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*. Costa Mesa: Mazda, 121-150.; Najamabadi, Afsaneh. 2014. *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. Durham: Duke University Press. Shamisa, Sirus. 2002. *Shahed bazi dar adabiyyat-e Farsi*. Tehran: Firdaws. 9-14.
6. I made the point in an earlier study (2014), that these negative attitudes originated in the ancient world, in which individuals who displayed their bodies in public were considered shameful, and that those who did so were also sexually suspect. I suggest that these attitudes found in Iranian society, and the Middle East generally were inherited from the ancient Mediterranean world and the interested reader can find a more detailed argument in that study.
7. Nieuwerk, Karin van. 1995. “A Trade Like Any Other”: *Female Dancers and Singers in Egypt*. Austin: University of Texas Press; Nieuwerk, Karin van. 1998. “Changing Images and Shifting Identities: Female Performers in Egypt. In Sherifa Zuhur, editor. *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 21-36.; Nieuwerk, Karin van. 2011. “Of Morals, Missions, and the Market: New Religiosity and ‘Art with a Mission’ in Egypt. In Karin van Nieuwerk, editor. *Muslim Rap, Hallal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theater: Artistic Developments in the Middle East*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 177-204.
8. DVD. “Belly Dancers of Cairo. Directed by Natasha Senkovich. 2006.
9. Chehabi, H. E. 2000. “Voices Unveiled: Women Singers in Iran.” In Rudi Mathee and Beth Baron, editors. *Iran and Beyond: Essay in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*. Costa Mesa: Mazda, 151-166.

## **Masculinities and Masculinity Studies**

Before one enters the congeries of masculinities in the Iranian world, and the place of the male dancer in it, one must ask why it has taken so long to give consideration to masculinity and manhood, to define and analyze it in precise terms in general in academia, not only in Iranian studies? Masculinity studies really began in the 1990s, well after feminist, gay and lesbian, and queer studies appeared, and was probably inspired by those important studies that approached the constructedness of gender roles and sexuality, questioning their “naturalness.” I would argue that American feminist scholar Peggy Phelan has provided us with at least a partial answer. In her study, *Unmarked* (1993), Phelan suggests that in any society, historically as well as in the present, men have been

10. Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London and New York: Routledge.

the default mode, that is “unmarked,” and served as the main focus of writing, and importantly, as the writers. Studies of masculinity and manhood in the ancient world and in the Islamic world, demonstrate that for centuries elite men were almost the sole scribes, historians, and determiners of the contours of idealized masculinity in those societies and which elements they included. They wrote about it frequently, for the loss of masculinity, a constant threat in their eyes, was ever-present. One had to be vigilant. Frequently, they skewered their rivals with insults to the rival’s masculinity (or lack thereof). (Shay 2014) **11**

Elite men muted the voices of women and other men. Feminism and feminist studies have challenged this domination, as feminist scholars worked to recuperate the presence of women in other times and places, and give voice to those who had been voiceless for far too long. Beginning in the late 1960s, gay and lesbian scholars enlarged their field of inquiry, and they too have contributed significantly to the field of gender and sexuality studies. As Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman note in the “Introduction” to their anthology, *Theorizing Masculinities*,

We wish to emphasize the plurality and diversity of men’s experiences, attitudes, beliefs, situations, practices, and institutions, along line of race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, region, physical appearance, able-bodiedness, mental ability, and various other categories with which we describe our lives and experiences. . . as the discourse about masculinities has emerged, gay studies has come to occupy a very central place” (1994, 4-5). **12**

11. Shay, Anthony. 2014. *The Dangerous Lives of Public Performers: Dancing, Sex, and Entertainment in the Islamic World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

12. Brod, Harry and Michael Kaufman. 1994. “Introduction.” In Harry Brod and Michael

Kauffman, Editors. 1994. *Theorizing Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1-10.

I follow this inclusive scope in this study in order to explore the spectrum of masculinities in the Iranian world.

Since the 1990s when the first masculinities studies began to appear (See for example Brod and Kaufman 1994 **13**; Gilmore 1990 **14**; Whitehead and Barrett 2001 **15**) some of the early scholars looked for cross-cultural “key” traits, such as “honor and shame” or “machismo” and as anthropologist Bruce Knaft suggested, some of these scholars were often reductive in their approach as well as their results. : ”Characteristics thought to be ‘key’ are inappropriately reified and then elevated as metonyms for ethnographic regions as wholes.” (1993, 9) **16** Masculinity was often identified by traits and behaviors such as “aggressive,” “violent,” “war-like,” “tough,” and “stoic” as cross-cultural and typical masculine traits and behaviors. And even though anthropologist David D. Gilmore has carefully stated that these traits are ubiquitous rather than universal, his reading of masculinity can often be simplistic: “I suggest that there is something almost generic, something repetitive, about the criteria of man-playing that underlying the surface variation in emphasis of form are certain convergences in concepts, symbolizations, and exhortations of masculinity in many societies but—and this is important—by no means all. . . a ubiquity rather than a universality” (1990, 3). **17**

13. Brod, Harry and Michael Kaufmen. 1994. “Introduction.” In Harry Brod and Michael Kauffman, Editors. 1994. *Theorizing Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1-10.

14. Gilmore, David D. 1990. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

15. Whitehead, Stephen M. and Frank J. Barrett, editors. 2001. *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity

16. Knaft, Bruce M. 1993. *South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, comparison, dialectic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

17. Gilmore. *Manhood*.

Less often do writers discuss self-control, restraint, and moderation as highly valued masculine traits in many societies, including Iran as Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar frequently points out to his son in the *Qabus-nameh*. I wish to create a more nuanced description with which to draw the contours of Iranian masculinities.

Many writers, like Gilmore, contrast masculinity to femininity; men's behavior to women's behavior. For example, Michael Kimmel, following Freud, calls "Masculinity as a flight from the feminine" (1994, 126) **18** Rather, I will, as Kimmel also notes (1994, 128), suggest the opposite: that men vie and compare their masculinity and manhood against other men, rather than women, in order to prove their manhood and masculinity in a sometimes zero-sum game. Unlike Kimmel, I suggest that it is not the feminine and femininity that most men fear, but effeminacy. This fear frequently extends to homosexuality because many individuals, across a spectrum of societies, link them together. In many minds, at least in the present day in societies like that of Iran, effeminacy implies passive homosexuality (*'ubna*), but also in the antique world writers expressed this linkage in condemning their rivals by calling them *kinaedos/cinaedus*. However, I will attempt to delink these two elements because the linkage is a social construction. By using figures like Baqi the Catamite, a warrior from the early sixteenth century, famous for his handling of a sword, and a companion to Sultan Babur, appears several times in the writings of the great Moghul ruler. Although he was clearly considered sexually passive, I want to stress his masculine aspect. In Babur's memoirs, the *Baburnama*, he was described as "powerful and manly with the sword" (2002, 284).



18. Kimmel, Michael S. 1994. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." Edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman. *Theorizing Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 119-141.
19. *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*. 2002. Translated, edited and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston. Introduction by Salman Rushdie. New York: Modern Library.

Many early writers in Greece and Rome, as well as several writers in the Islamic world feared that while effeminate men, such as the male dancer, marked as effeminate by his occupation and appearance, could be seen and identified and held up as a negative example, many sexually passive sexual men, like Baqi the Catamite could pass as masculine, manly men. The question of how to identify those who took the passive role in sexual intercourse if they publically acted in a masculine manner eluded ancient Greek and Roman, and medieval Iranian writers. They saw this as a danger to society.

The inability to detect homosexuals in their midst also heavily affected the American public in the mid twentieth century, especially after the publication of the Kinsey Report on the sexual behavior of the human male in 1948, which created a huge homophobic panic—suddenly homosexuality was not limited to a few overtly effeminate men, but frighteningly, could be present in “normal” appearing men, and in hitherto unimagined numbers. It had to be eradicated at all costs! The United States government, and local and state governments spent millions of dollars and man-hours in the FBI and police departments to hunt down and hound gay men and, to a lesser extent, lesbians during the Cold War, before the Stonewall Riots began to turn the tide in 1969. (See Johnson 2004 **20**; Cuordileone 2005 **21**)

20. Johnson, David K. 2004. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold war Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

21. Cuordileone, K. A. 2005. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. London and New York: Routledge.

In many societies from Ancient Greece and Rome to Iran, effeminate scare figures became established, and that figure in the former antique classical world (*kinaedos/cinaedus* in Greece and Rome), and the *raqqas* (or *bacheh raqqas* or simply *bacheh*) in Iran and Central Asia, was most frequently a young male dancer. Many writers in those societies taunted and insulted their rivals with the epithet, as we saw above. (See Shay 2014, 47-64) And yet, as we will see, that figure was often sexually alluring at the same time. **22**

A basic problem that existed concerning the definition of masculinity, or as I prefer, masculinities, is that it is often treated as “that which we all know” but are somehow unable to define with any precision. I attended a conference in which masculinity, queerness, and dance were discussed. **23** In paper after paper, masculinity, the societal gender default mode, was approached in just that way. No one attempted to define what he or she meant by masculinity in his or her presentations. It remained unarticulated throughout the conference.

A second problem in dealing with masculinity studies is that some writers “tend to treat it as if it is measurable. Some men have more of it, others less” (Brittan 1989, 1). **24** This compounds the issue because then masculinity is seen as timeless and universal rather than historically and culturally contingent. By contrast, I argue that masculine ideals, masculine standards and idealized masculine codes of behavior are historically

22. Shay. *Dangerous Lives*, 47-64

23. . Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) Conference: Meanings + Makings of Queer Dance: Embodied Pleasures in History, Representation and Queer Communities. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. February 16-18, 2012.

24. Brittan, Arthur. 1989. *Masculinity and Power*. New York: Blackwell.

and culturally contingent, malleable, and fluid. However, these ideologies and standards appear as “natural” and unchanging to many individuals who attempt to embody those idealized codes. Most individuals, for example, think that their sexual activities are “natural” (or deliberately unnatural for those proud of libertine propensities) rather than socially constructed, because they cannot picture themselves behaving differently. As Roland Barthes has suggested in *Mythologies* (1972), **25** many people believe their sexual behavior and preferences, as much else in the world and in their lives, to be innate and “natural.” **26** Masculinities scholar Todd W. Reeser and I see masculinities in a similar fashion and we agree on many aspects of what constitutes masculinity, however he states concerning his concept of models of masculinity, “By virtue of their theoretical nature, most of the models in these first chapters are more abstract than concrete, and part of the task of theorizing masculinity is to consider how these models filter down into the concrete” (2010, 6). **27** I take the opposite point of view that masculinities does not lend itself theorizing, precisely because of the difficulty of demonstrating the concrete.

Unlike femininity, masculinity is fraught. Across many societies, masculinity and manhood must be fought for and publically demonstrated through tests of physical and emotional strength, ritual hazing and even torture, and those who fail can be reviled. The

25. Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press.

26. Barthes states that in writing his essays, was . . . to reflect regularly on some myths of French daily life.. . a feeling impatience at the sight of ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history . . . I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there” (1972, 1). That would certainly include the idea that masculinity is “natural” behavior rather than socially constructed.

27. Reeser, Todd W. 2010. *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

male dancer, by all definitions, an individual who has failed those idealized gender roles, because he dances, often with effeminate gestures, and wears ambiguous clothing with both male and female elements. He therefore constitutes the scare figure who embodies an effeminacy that most men fear in Iranian and Central Asian society, in which the activity that is called “*bacheh-bazi*,” the watching and enjoying boy dancers and their performances, and sexual congress with them still exists in present-day Afghanistan.

I suggest that masculinity, in its diverse cultural and historical spectrum, does not lend itself easily to theorization, precisely because of its diverse manifestations. Rather, I suggest that it does lend itself better to what I call “contouring” because contouring a phenomenon as diverse as masculinity, for example, permits the student to hone in on the more precise aspects of what constitutes masculine behavior, manhood, and masculinities in a given time or place. Such an approach also permits us to have categories of masculine behavior, attitudes, and thought such as physical manifestations, emotional manifestations, and behavioral manifestations, as well as identifying, through belles-lettres literature and advice literature, like the *Qabus-nameh*, what ideal manhood looks like in various historical periods. **28** In this way, I suggest that certain aspects of idealized masculine behavior constitute historical continuities, while others manifest themselves as ruptures, between the antique Mediterranean world and the Middle East, particularly in masculine notions of gendered and sexual behavior. I suggest these continuities can be identified today. Gender and sexuality scholar David Halperin makes the critical point that “continuities are no less crucial to take into account than

28. Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar. 1082 [1951]. *A Mirror for Princes: The Qabus Nama*.

Translated from the Persian by Reuben Levy. New York: E. P. Dutton.

historical ruptures and that an adequate history sexuality needs to make conceptual accommodation for both” (2002, 17). **29** Historian Afsaneh Najmabadi (2005) has demonstrated this for Iranian society over a period of a century and a half, in which dramatic changes in masculine sexual attitudes and behaviors evolved and were changed, in large part due to social engineering, which I will address later in the essay. **30**

### **Effeminacy**

One of the first steps that I will make in delinking effeminacy from homosexuality is looking at the institution of pederasty in Ancient Greece. In Athens and other city-states, adult men and adolescent boys formed relationships, that included the sexual. These liaisons were not only about sex, but had important political and social implications for the participants and even for the entire city. The older lover (*erastes*) as part of his duty was to teach the younger partner (*eromenos*), how to hunt, survive in the outdoors, use weapons, athletics, how to behave in society, and to be brave and never shame his erastes by behaving in a dishonorable way—in brief: to be a masculine man. He took care during the sex act not to effeminize his younger lover. All of these scenes are depicted on numerous Greek vases. (See Lear 2015 **31** ; Lear and Cantarella 2008 **32**; Davidson 2007 **33**)

29. Halperin, David. 2002. *How to do the History of Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

30. Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2005. *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

31. Lear, Andrew. 2015. “Was Pederasty Problematized?: A Diachronic View.” In Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and James Robson, editors. *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*. London and New York: Routledge.

32. Lear, Andrew and Eva Cantarella. 2008. *Images of Ancient Greek Pederasty: Boys Were Their Gods*. London: Routledge.

33. Davidson, James. 2007. *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Bold New Exploration of the Ancient World*. New York: Random House.

34. Afary, Janet. 2009. *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Historian Janet Afary points out the many ways in which Iranian homosexuality echoes that of ancient Greece, “As in much of the Middle eastern and Mediterranean world, male homoerotic relations in Iran were bound by rules of courtship such as the bestowal of presents, the teaching of literary texts, bodybuilding and military training, mentorship, and the development of social contacts that would help the junior partner’s career” (2009, 80). **34**

I suggest that effeminacy, not femininity, constitutes masculinity’s other. The word “effeminacy” in Ancient Greece, as in the eighteenth century in the English language, had a different meaning from the contemporary one of acting like a woman or showing feminine characteristics: it meant a man who committed adultery and attempted to approach women and appeal to them. (See Jordan 2009) This behavior was evaluated in those societies as a man who was out-of-control, the ultimate womanly trait in their eyes. **35** It was, in short, a man who enjoyed the company of women too much, and wanted sexual access to women who did not “belong” to him.

The raqqas, on the other hand, defined effeminacy. He wore deliberately ambiguous clothing that had items of both male and female clothing, but his audiences had no doubt that this was a male dancer, and was attractive to many in his audiences as such. Many travelers discuss these dancers, and often emphasize their effeminate gestures and sexually seductive movements of their dances that were designed to arouse male audience members. **36**

34. Afary, Janet. 2009. *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*. NY: Cambridge University Press.

35. Jordan, John. 2009. “Pricked Dances: The Spectator, Dance, and Masculinity in Early 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England.” In Jennifer Fisher and Anthony Shay, editors. *When Men Dance: Choreographing Masculinities Across Borders*. New York: Oxford University Press, 181-213.

Since the male dancer, as we have seen was linked to effeminacy, and therefore in the view of many individuals, also to homosexuality. I want to turn briefly to that element. I want to caution the reader that when I use the term “homosexuality” it constitutes a synonym for male/male intimate relationships, sometimes sexual, sometimes affectional. What is important is that unlike the present time, historically most people did not have sexual identities, that is most individuals did not define themselves sexually, they did not self-identify as a gay man, lesbian or straight individual. This does not mean they did not have sexual preferences or find certain physical acts more pleasurable than others, but rather they did not have a modern sexual identity.

Sexual relations between men occupied many writings of both foreigners and Iranians. Historian Afsaneh Najmabadi in her study, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards* (2005) analyzes the ways in which gender roles and sexual behavior were deliberately socially engineered in the drive for modernization in Iran: “In the nineteenth century homoeroticism and same-sex practices came to mark Iran as backward; heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of ‘achieving modernity,’ ...” (2005, 3). Because individual’s sexual behavior feels “right” and “natural” to them, the process took over a century and a half. **37**

36. Some of the travel literature with descriptions of dance and dancers from across the region and several historical periods: Chardin, Jean, Chevalier. *A Journey to Persia, 1673-1677*. Mineola: Dover.; Clavijo, Ruy Gonzales de. 2009 [1582]. *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406*. Translated by Guy Le Strange, with a New Introduction by Caroline Stone. Kilkerran, Scotland: Hardinge Simpole.; Browne, Edward. 1984 [1983]. *A Year Among the Persians, 1887-1888*. New York: Hippocrene.; Schuyler, Eugene. 1876 [1966]. *Turkestan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkestan, Kokand, Bukhara, and Khuldja*. New York: Fredrick A. Praeger.

37. Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2005. *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

To be clear, mainstream Islam condemns homosexuality. Most Europeans in the premodern Christian world believed that Islam condoned this behavior, and some continue to believe this. However it existed, and in Persian, Ottoman, and Arabic literature was often celebrated. (See Shay 2014) Minoo Southgate describes and analyzes this phenomenon in the famous thirteenth-century poet Sa'di works: "Moreover, apparently Sa'di's contemporary readers found no incongruity between the autobiographic homosexual episodes of the 'Gulistan' or the deliberate obscenity of the 'Hazliyyat' on the one hand, and the devout homilies and the religious we see as an historic continuity of this attitude into the early twentieth century. Najmabadi 'prologue to the 'Bustan' on the other" (1984, 415). **38**. Thus, we see an historic continuity of this sexual attitude into the early twentieth century. Najmabadi notes that changing these sexual attitudes into heteronormative ones did not occur over night: "This profound heteronormalization of sensibilities was never fully 'accomplished' at the level of either gender or sexuality. . . . It took a century for many of these sensibilities to change" (2005, 55). **39** Changing what for many was 'natural' sexual behavior into what seemed 'unnatural' took time.

It is also important to note that in many societies, unlike the present day, most men did not have practice exclusively homosexual or heterosexual sexual activities. In Early Modern Europe as in the Middle East, many, if not most, men enacted what would be in the present day count as bisexual sex lives, not limiting themselves to either sex. It is also worth noting that while the ideal model was an older man acting as the active

38. Southgate, Minoo S. 1984. "Men, Women, and Boys: Love and Sex in the Works of Sa'di. *Iranian Studies*, Volume XVII, Autumn 1984, Number 4, 413-452.

39. Najmabadi. *Women with Moustaches*. 2005, 55



member and the younger man the passive role, real life is more untidy and the context would determine how individuals would sexually interact with others.

### **Iranian masculinities**

In this section, I want to trace masculine values and codes by focusing on two classes of males; the elite classes because literary documents such as advice literature provides us with detailed elements of what creates a model ruler and manly man. The other class that I look at are the *lutis* and *'ayyar* (pl. *'ayyarun*), an urban class that, in one form or another, have existed in Iran for centuries, at least since these figures have been noted in historical documents, fiction, and especially in the Iranian cinema, in which the *luti/jahel* figure, were depicted by famous actors like Behrouz Vosoughi and Naser Malek Moti'i. **40, 41** The literature that provides information extends early into the Islamic period, and to some degree, into the Sasanian pre-Islamic period with visual evidence of masculine behaviors such as hunting. In this way we can contrast and compare a wider scope of masculine behaviors beyond the elite male.

A place to start looking more specifically at the contours of Iranian masculinities is the *Qabus-nameh*, a famous medieval work of advice. In this collection of advice letters to his son, Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar proffers advice in diverse areas of life from how to drink wine and eat, to sexual activities, sports and amusements, and religion and statecraft. What I looked for in this delightful piece of Persian literature, was for both

40. Willem Floor in his article on the *lutis*, refers to their practices as *lutigari* to distinguish them from professional entertainers who were also known by that name. Floor, Willem. 1971. "The *Lutis*—A Social Phenomenon in Qajar Persia: A Reappraisal." *Die Welt des Islams*. 23 (1971, 103 – 120. I will use *luti*.  
41. Media Studies scholar Hamid Naficy devotes a full chapter to the "Tough-Guy cinema" one of the most enduring film genres in Iranian movie history. His account of the *luti* phenomenon jibes with mine, especially regarding the manifestation of masculinity that they evoke. See Naficy, Hamid. 2011. *A Social History of Iranian Cinema. Volume 2*. Durham: Duke University Press. See especially Chapter 5. Naficy notes, "the tough guys and their ideology (variously called (*lutigar*, *javanmardi*, or *foṭvvat*) are both ancient and complex. . . " (p. 266). I saw many of these films during my student years in Iran (1958-59). Naficy also notes that Behrouz Vosoughi was a *luti* wrestler who turned to acting. (ibid. 268).

historical continuities and ruptures. In 1082 Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar, a prince of Gorgan, in northeast Iran, advised his son under the section of the *Qabus-nameh* (sometimes translated as *A Mirror for Princes*) in a section entitled "On Taking One's Pleasure": "As between women and youths, do not confine your inclinations to either sex; thus you may find enjoyment from both kinds without either of the two becoming inimical to you" (1082 [1951], 77). We can safely count this as an historical rupture since few Iranian fathers today would pass on such advice to their sons. Other ruptures would include his advice on how to purchase slaves (1951,99-108), advising his son to never fall in love (1971, 71-76), or participating in "the science of astrology" (1951, 176-181).

However, even more interesting than the historical ruptures, one finds many continuities with many pieces of advice and exhortations that present-day fathers might give to their sons such as "showing gratitude to parents" (1951, 19-20), "acts of piety to be increased with increase of wealth" with a special emphasis on giving to the poor (1951, 9-11), "hospitality and the duties of a host" (1951, 61-66), of which I have personally been a happy recipient, and "on jesting and the playing of backgammon and chess" (1951, 67-69), among others. Threaded throughout this narrative, one finds the most vaunted masculine trait of moderation, restraint, and self-control, which Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar exhorts his son to always exercise. **42** In this way, Iran was a successor to the antique Mediterranean world, which emphasized those masculine traits.

42. Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar. *Qabus-Nameh*.

To Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar's detailed account, the courtier and famous writer *Chahar Maqala* (Four Discourses): "The most excellent of the kings of the age in nobility, possessed pedigree, doughty deeds, Nidhami-i 'Arudi-i-Samarqandi adds important qualities of masculinity in the famous judgment, statesmanship, justice, equity, valour and generosity. . . also in that upright judgment, clear understanding, strong resolve, and firm determination (1899, 8), and he adds, "the most excellent of the princes of the time [possessed] judgment, statecraft, knowledge, chivalry, swordsmanship, strength of arm, treasure and muniment!" (ibid. 9). **43** This advice literature allows us to view the contours of idealized Iranian masculinity because during that time part of the burden of the king was to embody idealized codes of masculine behavior, for which they were lauded in panegyric poetry. It also allows us to see the historical continuities and ruptures in masculine codes some of which persist to the present day. I specifically chose these two pieces of literature because I became very familiar with these exemplary works when I studied Persian literature in my undergraduate years, and I remembered how well they could illustrate the points that I am making in this study.

I want to stress two areas that will be difficult for those unfamiliar with the Middle East, in general, and the Iranian world specifically, to understand as masculine, manly behavior. While it is easy for non-Iranians to understand male interest in athletics, it is very difficult for them to understand the male interest in being a host and hospitality,

43. Nidhami-i-'Arudi-i-Samarqandi. (1899). *The Chahar Maqala, Four Discourses*. Translated by Edward G. Browne. n . l. (reprint) Kessinger Publishing.

which in the West largely falls to women. <sup>44</sup> Most men in the West leave hospitality to their wives or other female relatives, and historically it was a role in which women could shine, Dolly Madison being a famous hostess in the White House, as did Jacqueline Kennedy and Michelle Obama after her. This need for women to become the primary host became intensified after the bourgeoisie replaced the aristocracy as the main social actors in society at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Factories and other places of business required the men to stay in their places of business.

Even more difficult to understand is the intense love that men have for literature, and especially poetry, and that love for poetry indeed constitutes to this day, a masculine character trait. Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar devotes several pages for how to be a poet. While many countries have statues to royal, military, or political figures, my fond memory of Iran was how many statues, memorial structures, street names, and public squares celebrated the many poets found in the Iranian literary world. Iranians read and recite poetry at parties, they have evening parties (*shab-e sh'er*) devoted to reciting and listening to poetry, they often open business meetings with a suitable poem, they frequently recite poetry in the radio and television. Many Iranians have memorized

44. During the eighteenth century, elite women maintained salons, in which music and entertaining conversation occurred. This practice continued into the next two centuries. "Orchestrating and maintaining social relations was a key aspect of bourgeois life and a responsibility of the mistress of the house, who kept the lines of communication open to other households. Women of the petty bourgeoisie were well aware of this responsibility and proclaimed their social standing by holding salons on specified days and by paying and receiving calls. Emulation of the rituals of their betters knit the social fabric together" (p. 278) Martin-Fugier, Anne. 1990. "Bourgeois Rituals." *A History of Private Life. IV. From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*. Michelle Perrot, Editor. Arthur Goldhammer, Translator. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 261-338. As I viewed a PBS history of the White House Laura Bush, the former First Lady stated: "The most important duty of the First Lady is that of hostess" (September 10, 2016).

volumes of poetry and pepper their speech with famous verses to support important points they wish to make. This is not merely for elite men. Willem Floor notes that in the luti, “To rise in the group, one had to excel in *javanmardi* [manliness], and in poetry skills.” <sup>45</sup> During my time in Iran, I knew that many unlettered men would go nightly to the coffeehouse to hear the recitation of the *Shahnameh*.

It is important to emphasize here that the reason I stress the use of the notion of masculinities in the plural rather than the singular masculinity. R. W. Connell stresses the need for emphasizing “masculinities” in the plural. “With growing recognition of the interplay between gender, race and class it has become common to recognize multiple masculinities.” <sup>46</sup> He further notes, and I agree that there exists a dynamic hegemonic, usually elite, code of masculine codes and behavioral practices. “At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity. . . “ <sup>47</sup> This is because there are many differences between the activities of the elite and of the other classes.

In physical activities, elite men frequently played polo and went hunting in the pre-Islamic period as well as into the Islamic period. Pre-Islamic kings like the Sasanian Bahram Gur were famous for it. The sheer number of silver vessels from the Sasanian period depicting these activities is staggering, demonstrating that this is an ancient continuity of masculine activity that continued into the Pahlavi period for elite men. (See

45. Floor, Willem. 2010. “Luti.” *Encyclopedia Iranica* on line.

46. Connell, R. W. 2005. *Masculinities*. Second Edition. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 276.

47. *ibid.* 277.

Harper and Meyers 1981) **48** Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar advises his son how to buy a horse in a special section devoted to that topic. (1951, 112) **49** We will turn from the *Qabus-nameh* in which we find the elite codes of masculinities, to another group, the luti, which represent other classes.

Poor men, such as the *jahels/lutis* have been valorized as exemplars of masculinity, even hypermasculinity, and their presence in real life and in the Iranian cinema, all of which underscores the centrality of the luti figure in Iranian urban life. They serve to contrast with the masculine codes of elite men. Willem Floor in his article on the luti in the Qajar period, correctly identifies two major classes of individuals who come under the term "luti": entertainers and hypermasculine men who during my time dressed in a particular style and seemed to be a cross between a Robin Hood figure and petty criminals. (1971, 103). "In fact, the entertainment class, which consisted of two groups formed a category apart from the hooligans, luti or dashes as they were also called" (1971, 104). **50** One place in which the two categories met was the *pahlavans* (strong men) who performed feats of strength in public spaces and wrestlers (*koshti-gir*), who often performed in front of the public and so could be loosely subsumed under the designation of a public entertainer. **51**

48. Harper, Prudence O. and Pieter Meyers. 1981. *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period*

*Volume One: Royal Imagery*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Published in association with Princeton University Press.

49. Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar. *Qabus-nameh*, 112

50. Floor. 1971. "The Luti." pp. 103-104. Also Floor 2010. "Luti."

51. I saw *pahlvans* in the main square of Samarqand in 1987, lifting heavy weights for which the public would give the money. I viewed the *zur-khaneh* several times in Iran 1958-1959. While in Iran, most of the participants in the *zur-khaneh* exercises seemed to be working-class men, in Southern California several young middle class young men performed the exercises at a *No-ruz* gathering. And behaving very middle class, they wore shirts, unlike their stripped-down working class counterparts in Iran, who wore elaborately decorated breeches which reached from the waist to the knee.

Boy dancers often fell under the designation of *luti*, as well. Their behavioral opposites under the same name have long been a feature of urban life, under a number of different names, and display a very different masculine behavior. During my years in Iran, *lutis* were often called *jahel* (the ignorant one), this designation of *jahel* or *luti*, also had a more shaded meaning of a giving, deeply generous man, *lat va lut*, a *lat* is a notch below the *jahel/luti* designation, with a shade of meaning of a hooligan, many of whom were designated as *chaqu-keshan* (dagger carriers), indicating a dangerous aspect of their behavior. *‘Obash* is an even lower figure, indicating thuggish behavior. These tough guys, with their exaggeratedly masculine behavior, constituted an important role in the *filmfarsi* Iranian cinema that appealed largely to working-class audiences of the late 1950s. These men often served as guardians of their neighborhoods (*mahal*), an activity for which they were famous. These men often also worked out in the *zur-khaneh* a kind of gymnasium, in which the participants undergo performing a series of rhythmic exercises, sometimes bearing heavy weights, chains, and large wooden tumblers and shields, under the direction of the “*morshed*” who drums the rhythms on a large tympani-like drum as he chants poems from the *Shah-nameh*, the epic history of Iran, and signals the change in the exercises by ringing a bell. While Battesti and Kazemaini claim ancient origins for the *zurkhaneh* through the description of ancient Greeks of Persia, especially Xenophon (1968, 15) and Herodotus, however in its present form, as an urban institution, it probably dates into the Islamic period. (1968, 85). **52** Undoubtedly, the ancient Persians practiced athletics of various types, but we have no way of knowing exactly what they were. Battesti and Kazemaini claim that the *zur-khaneh* “plays the role

52. Battesti, T  r  sa and Kazem Kazemaini. n.d. *Le Zour Xaneh: Gymnase Traditionel Persan*. Tehran: Imprimerie PAD.

of the conservator of moral values, ethics and mysticism,” however underscoring my point of its development probably beginning in the Safavid period is that it celebrates Shi’ism and Sufism, but also a kind of chivalrous ethical code (*javanmardi, lutigari*) of protecting the weak and taking care of their neighborhood.

Historically, while a largely working-class institution, the zur-khaneh and the ranks of the luti also attracted other classes. “No doubt it were also these ideals, besides the gymnastic activities and their social gatherings, which attracted many respectable citizens, and we see a great part of the artisan and merchant class join the lutigar citizens, and we see a great part of the artisan and merchant class join the *lutigari* associations. Many members of the rich merchant class and even some princes joined the lutigars too” (1971, 112). **53** Thus, we can see that the zurkhaneh was an important part of male urban life into the present, even in the Iranian diaspora.

In the realm of physical activities, “Gambling and athletic bouts prevailed among them, but various games with animals, such as cock and ram fighting are also worthy of note. *The kabutar[kaftar] bazi* (raising and training pigeons, a very popular male activity in the Iranian world) is very widespread since that pastime was popular among the ‘ayyars too” (Floor 1971, 110). (ibid. 110-111). **54** In my time in Iran in the late 1950s, in appearance they were often severely dressed in black coat and trousers, a white shirt, and a black fedora, as I remember them, and as they appear in the many films depicting them. I mentioned that they had two opposing characteristics in popular culture: hooligan

53. Floor. “Lutis.” 110.

54. ibid. 110-111.



and chivalrous (*javanmard*) man, that epitomized working class ideas of masculinity, which I have contrasted against the elite ideals above. These faded somewhat throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, partly because the new urban scape of Tehran has changed with highrise buildings, and Floor argues that this type of men have become *basij*. **55**

I agree with Floor (1971, 113) and Battesti and Kazemaini (1968, 19-27) **56** that the *lutis* were most likely descended from the figure of the *'ayyar* (pl. *ayyarun*), who embodied many of the more lofty values of the *lutis* such as protecting their neighborhood and the poor and weak. During the period of the caliphate the *'ayyarun* were frequently depicted in the pitched battles between the sunnis and shi'ias that were a feature of urban life in Baghdad, but also making depredations on rich merchants. Sabari states that "During the four hundred years the movement of the *'ayyarun* had marked the public life of Baghdad. Their appearance begins in the ninth century during the war between the princes Amin and Ma'mun, during the siege of Baghdad (812)" (1981, 78). **57** Sabari notes that, like the *lutis* with multiple terms, the *'ayyarun* were often confused or conflated with the *shuttar* (runners sing. *shatter*) and the *fityan* (youths), so they "became synonyms" (ibid). Like the *lutis*, "various testimonies describe the attachment of the *'ayyarun* to the *Futuwwa* (*fotovvat*) and their values: courage, helping the weak, generosity, the ability to endure suffering, love of truth, hospitality" (1981, 91). **58** Regarding their sexual behavior, Floor states, "The *'ayyars* were also known as *Ahl-i Lut*. This term refers the supposedly homosexual relationship which existed among the *'ayyars*. [Floor claims *lut* derives from *lavati* (sodomy)] Now it is a known fact that

55. Floor. 2010. "Luti" Encyclopedia Iranica.

56. Battesti and Kazemaini. *Le Zur Xaneh*. pp. 19-27.

57. Sabari, Simha. 1981. *Mouvements Populaires À Bagdad À L'Époque 'Abbasside, IXe-*

*XIe Siècles*. Paris: Librairie D’Amerique et D’Orient Adrien Maisonneuve.  
58. *ibid.* p. 91

professional pahlavans avoided marriage, c.q. sexual intercourse with women, believing that this would sap their strength. This idea still prevails among pahlavans of today” (1971, 114). **59** I noted that belief was also common among Iranian wrestlers in the late 1950s.

These qualities that the zur-khaneh celebrates are not unspoken ones. The managers of the zur-khaneh explicitly remind their members of these values: “Thus, an exercise session provides an opportunity to remind those present whether athletes or spectators, of their social duties, duties that include generosity, mutual help, courage, loyalty, respect for elders, and keeping one’s word” (Rochard 2002, 318). **60** These constitute the idealized values of the luti. The bottom line of masculinity in the Iranian world, at its core, according to my friend Khosrow Jamali, who grew up in a neighborhood (Mowlavi) with many lutis, “garnering respect” (personal communication August 2, 2016). Thus, through the figure of the luti we can see the many ways in which masculinities were enacted across several social and class lines, and which masculine values could be found in each group.

### **Who is the *Raqqa*?**

In today’s terms, we can first define the boy dancer as an abused child. As an historical continuity from the Ancient world, into the Islamic world, both male and female dancers came into the world in a disadvantaged position. He or she was either an orphan, a slave,

59. Floor. “Lutis.”

60. Rochard, Phillippe. 2002. “The Identities of the Iranian Zurkhaneh.” *Iranian Studies*, Volume 35, Number 4, Fall 2002, 313-340.

a despised religious minority, or born into a family of public entertainers, which constituted one of the most despised occupational classes, often lumped into the criminal classes with no legal standing in medieval Baghdad. (Bosworth 1976, 1) **61** In addition to performing, which given the short, often brutish, shelf-life of the dancer, they frequently began performing as early as 8 to 10 years of age, after a period of rigorous training. They were frequently required by their owners or managers to engage in sex with the customers. In adulthood, most of them married and had children. We saw this disdain implied in the quote from Taj al-Saltana, whose own husband, historian Abbas Amanat notes, was besotted with a young male dancer upon whom he squandered a great deal of wealth, “but being a dancer he was unworthy of being anyone’s beloved.” Some of the ill repute that public entertainers endured stemmed from exposing himself or herself to the public gaze.

As historian Willem Floor notes, “Relatively little is known about them, because polite society and thus literary sources paid little attention to them. Entertainers were identified with the popular type of terms already imply, the performances, generally referred to as *ma’rekeh*, *hengameh*, or *tamasha*” (2005, 23). Dancing boys were a regular feature of these performances. Males also played female acting and comedy roles, known as *zan-push*, but these roles were played for laughs rather than seduction, and often by adult males. **62.**

61. Bosworth, Clifford Edmund. 1976. *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: The Banu Sasan in Arabic Society and Literature*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

62. The several times that I saw these in *siyah-bazi* and *ru-hozi* performances, the *zan-push* made little attempt to make themselves attractive to their male audience members, rather playing their roles for laughs. They frequently played in a manner that left no question that the *zan-push* was a mature men with over-the-top effeminate gestures and vocal register. Nevertheless, one of them told me he still had to fend off unwanted sexual attention. See also, Beeman, William O. 1981. “Why Do They Laugh?” *Journal of American Folklore*. , vol. 94, no. 374. 1981-506-526.

Chevalier Chardin, the famous French traveler to the Safavid court, characterized the dancing as, “. . . passion is represented by it in all its force, but which is detestable, are the lascivious and indecent postures, the delights and inabilities of which these representations are rife with and where they are able to do in manner contrary to what is virtuous. . . (quoted in Floor 2005, 42). **63** He is, of course, describing dirty dancing. “Singing and dancing boys also excited the men (and probably the women as well) with their lewd and alluring movements” (Floor 2008, 346). **64** Like many other Christian visitors from the end of the Timurid period to the early twentieth century, they enjoyed a frisson of pleasure viewing these erotic scenes and from exposing Muslim societies as licentious in contrast to Christian ones, especially describing the avid interest that men showed in the sexy dancing of beautiful young men. Turkish scholar Metin And, in describing similar dancing by dancing boys in the Ottoman Empire notes: “. . . foreign travelers have given much attention to this topic in their books and, although they emphasize the slack morality and obscene character of the dancing, they cannot hide from their description the breathless interest they took in these performances. (1959, 24). **65** The reader must keep in mind that Europeans frequently, not understanding the language, could not always tell if the performers were playing their dancing roles for laughs or seriously.

In appearance, the dancing boys should ideally be young and handsome, sometimes starting their career at 8 to 10 years of age, and ending with the appearance of a beard. However, I would offer the caveat that if the performer was truly attractive, but

63. Floor, Willem. 2005. *A History of Theatre in Iran*. Washington, DC: Mage.

64. Floor, Willem. 2008. *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*. Washington, DC: Mage.

62. And, Metin. 1959. *Dances of Anatolian Turkey*. New York: Dance Perspectives. Summer 1959.

also talented and could sing as well, they were popular, often into old age. Some observers state that they wore women's clothes. "Aubin says there were at least forty troupes of feminine dancers who performed in the *anderuns* [women's quarters]" (Mahdavi 2007, 493). **66** Looked at more carefully, the boy dancers always appeared in ambiguous costumes with elements of both male and female garb and hair arrangements; they were attractive as males and they were not impersonating women. The large male audience gathered in an Afghan teahouse to view the dancing in the 1970s, which I also witnessed in Bamyan in 1976, are agog with interest and fascination watching a dancing boy perform. (See dvd *Afghan Village*.) **67**

Their training was rigorous. They spent long hours, not only learning to dance, but to perform gymnastic and athletic feats, some quite dangerous, sing, play a musical instrument, and act. The more skills they had, the more valuable they were for their owners and managers. In the Iranian world they most often appeared in small bands. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from all descriptions and from Qajar paintings, we can see that the professional dancers, both male and female, performed daring athletic feats, which disappeared in the twentieth century. In Turkestan in the 1870s "The younger boys usually perform those dances which have more of a gymnastic character, with many

66. Mahdavi, Shireen. 2007. "Amusements in Qajar Iran." *Iranian Studies*, volume 40, number 4, September 2007, 483-500.

66. Mahdavi, Shireen. 2007. "Amusements in Qajar Iran." *Iranian Studies*, volume 40, number 4, September 2007, 483-500.

somersaults and hand-springs; while the elder and taller ones devote more to posturing, slow movements, and amatory and lascivious gestures” (Schuyler 1876 [1966] 69-70). **68**

As orphans and slaves, most remain nameless. We do know for example that Bagoas, the eunuch concubine of Darius III, was given to Alexander, the Great, whose lover he became. **69** We know that he was a dancer because Quintus Curtius Rufus tells us that returning from India, Bagoas won top prize in a singing and dancing contest. **70** Alexander kissed him in front of the Macedonian troops who cheered him on.

This source of boy dancers has not changed in Central Asia and Afghanistan in thousands of years, in 2000 Bruce Koepke states: “Bache bazi were mostly recruited from *kesbi* families, heredity performers, or were occasionally procured as orphans or runaways” (Koepke 2000, 96; **71** see also Sakata 2002 **72**; Slobin 1976 **73**; To view a dance see *Dancing Boys of Afghanistan* **74**, or *Afghan Village* **75**)

68. Schuyler, Eugene. 1876 [1966]. *Turkestan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkestan, Kokand, Bukhara, and Khuldja*. New York: Fredrick A. Praeger.

69. Quintus Curtius Rufus, Alexander’s Roman biographer writes, “. . . he was met by Nabarzanes, who had been give a safe conduct and who now brought alexander lavish gifts, including Bagoas, an exceptionally good-looking eunuch in the very flower of his youth. Darius had had a sexual relationship with him and presently Alexander did, too. It was Bagoas’ pleas that did most to influence Alexander to pardon Nabarzanes” (2004, 126: 6-522-23). Classics scholar describes Bagoas as “. . . a handsome eunuch of great influence at court who had been a sexual favorite of the Great King [Darius]. Alexander was evidently charmed by the courtier as well. . . [and] began an affair with Bagoas that would last the rest of his life” (2011, 223).

70. See Davidson 2007. *The Greeks and Greek Love*, 462, 473, 620; Floor 2005. *A History of Theatre in Iran*, 21

71. Koepke, Bruce E. H. 2000. “Covert Dance in Afghanistan: A Metaphor for Crisis?” In Mohd Anis MD Nor, editor. *Asian Dance: Voice of the Millennium*. Kuala Lumpur: Asia Pacific Dance Research Society. World Dance Alliance Cultural Centre, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 92-107.

72. Sakata, Hiromi Lorraine. 2002. *Music in the Mind: The Concepts of Music and Musician in Afghanistan*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

73. Slobin, Mark. 1976. *Music in the Culture of Northern Afghanistan*. New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology.

74. *The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan*. *Frontline*. April 20, 2010. Directed by Najibollah Quraishi.

75. *Afghan Village*.

Nameless young dancers, wine bearers, and other young performers were the focus of sexual interest of significant numbers of Iranian men from at least the medieval period (see Southgate below) into the twentieth century. These dancers and wine bearers were young and handsome. Those considered most attractive had an ambiguous appearance, midway between male and female. They were the most frequent subjects of amatory poetry, which contains adjectives that could be the same for males and females that is further emphasized by the ungendered nature of the Persian language. (Shay 2000) As Najmabadi states, in written sources, the same adjectives, such as moon-faced (*mah tal'at*), rose-faced (*gul rukhsar*), cypress-statured (*sarv qamat* or *sarv qad*), ruby lips (*la'l lab*), bow-eyebrows (*kaman abru*), etc. are used to describe male and female beauty" (2001, 89). **76**

Of course some of the early orientalist scholars were considerably embarrassed by this and attempted to change the male object of love to a female one. The famous Middle Eastern scholar Annemarie Schimmel commenting on this practice, translated the famous Hafez poem (*agar an tork-e shirazi*), "If that Turk of Shiraz would take my heart in his hand" (1992, 142), and tartly remonstrated, "we certainly do not find the 'charming maid of Shiraz'" (287). **77** This change of gender for the prudish scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was sometimes simply omitted by native ones: "The modern reader is puzzled by the disparity between the orthodox sentiments of the religious writings or the

76. Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2001. "Gendered Transformations: Beauty, Love, and Sexuality in Qajar Iran." *Iranian Studies*, volume 34, numbers 1-4, 2001.

77. Schimmel, Annemarie. 1979. "Hafiz and His Critics." *Studies in Islam*, January 1979, 1-33.

refined passion of the mystical poems on the one hand, and the lustful pornographic pieces on sodomy and seduction of boys on the other. The modern editor resolves the conflict by omitting the latter from the Kulliyat [complete works of Sa'di]. Faced with the same dilemma, English translators even in the tamer episodes of the 'Gulistan' turn boys into girls and change anecdotes about pederasty into tales of heterosexual love" (Southgate 1984, 415). **78**

Having been a public performer, and realizing the attitudes of many Iranians toward dance, which I call "choreophobia," I want to recuperate the performances of those who unknown dancers who preceded me. While the male dancer has largely faded from the entertainment scene in Iran, although not in the Iranian diaspora, they can be found in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and they can be seen on Youtube.

78. Southgate, Mino S. 1984. "Men, Women, and Boys: Love and Sex in the Works of Sa'di. *Iranian Studies*, Volume XVII, Autumn 1984, Number 4, 413-452.