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World History of the Dance (The Norton Library)

Curt Sachs

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This book is the most comprehensive history to appear before the public of the art which has been so fundamental an expression in every period of human history. It contains a discussion of the general types and characteristics of the dance, and also deals specifically with its forms and symbols from the Stone Age through classical antiquity, the middle ages, the 18th century, and the not so distant era of the waltz and polka, to the 20th century.

More inclusive than any other art, the dance has been associated with every phase of human life. In relation to their historical setting the author deals with the magic powers attributed to the dance, and such motives as fertility, war, marriage and health. We read that the Indian divorces his wife in the dance and, when he is ill, dances to dispel the disease; and that once in front of the Turkish soldiers sixty Greek mothers and girls danced the old *Romaiika* as they threw themselves one after another into the abyss. The book includes analyses of many forms of the art--sitting dances, dances of the hands, solo, group and couple dances--and a discussion of rhythm and melody in relation to the dance.

But it is not only because of its informative character that the book is distinguished. *World History of the Dance*, written with rare force and insight, communicates a feeling for its subject such as is seldom found in works of historical research. It is the author's understanding of the essence of the art, its exhilaration and power to break down the distinctions of ordinary life, that makes his book so rich a contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of the dance.

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