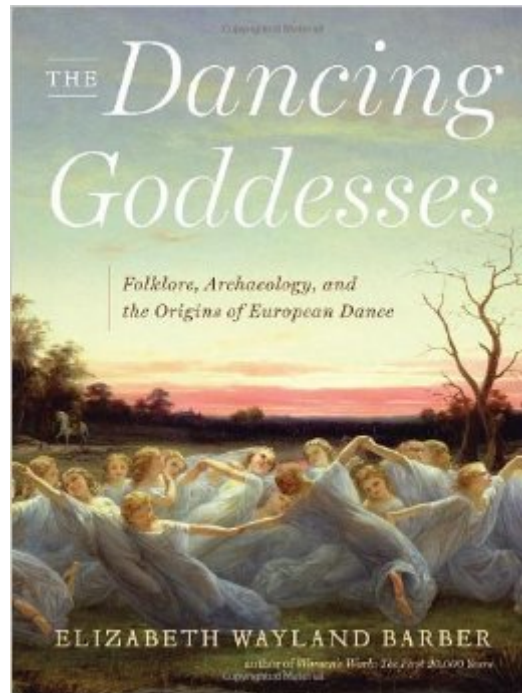


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The Dancing Goddesses: Folklore, Archaeology, And The Origins Of European Dance



Synopsis

A fascinating exploration of an ancient system of beliefs and its links to the evolution of dance. From southern Greece to northern Russia, people have long believed in female spirits, bringers of fertility, who spend their nights and days dancing in the fields and forests. So appealing were these spirit-maidens that they also took up residence in nineteenth-century Romantic literature.

Archaeologist and linguist by profession, folk dancer by avocation, Elizabeth Wayland Barber has sleuthed through ethnographic lore and archaeological reports of east and southeast Europe, translating enchanting folktales about these "dancing goddesses" as well as eyewitness accounts of traditional rituals—texts that offer new perspectives on dance in agrarian society. She then traces these goddesses and their dances back through the Romans and Greeks to the first farmers of Europe. Along the way, she locates the origins of many customs, including coloring Easter eggs and throwing rice at the bride. The result is a detective story like no other and a joyful reminder of the human need to dance. 150 illustrations and 9 maps

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Barber, Professor Emerita of Archeology and Linguistics at Occidental College, sets out to document the origins of dance in the region ranging from Crete through the Balkans to the Baltic. In the effort, however, she spans not only her native disciplines but also women's herstory, the social sciences, ethnology, and folkloristics to systematically explore the gestalt of agrarian culture, from folktales and ballads, herbalism and textile arts, to courtship and marriage rituals, as well as dance,

and proves that "'perishable' customs and beliefs can survive for millennia."Part I examines the functional origins of dance in the region of interest. Most important among these is the appeasement of the spirits, especially ancestors and the volatile spirits of maidens who had died before giving birth, as their fertility remained latent and transferable to the earth if placated, but their power could be destructive if not. Dance served as part of the rituals that marked time, often as sympathetic magic, inducing the earth to perform in various ways mimicking or responding to the actions of the dancers. It also established and affirmed the bonds of community that are so important to survival particularly in agrarian societies.Part II uses the folktale The Frog Princess to reveal the role of dance and women's arts to prove the bride's fitness for marriage and likely fertility. In agrarian cultures, fecundity was paramount to provide extra hands for labor and marriage often took place only after the bride proved fertile by pregnancy. (Christianity was largely an urban phenomenon and its valuation of virginal brides was limited in its influence).

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