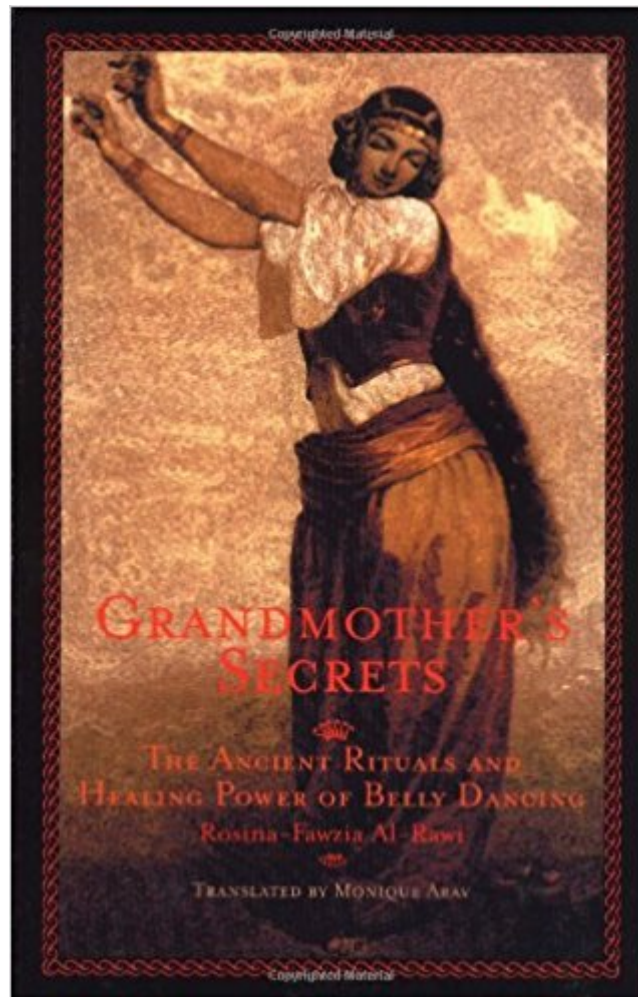


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Grandmother's Secrets: The Ancient Rituals And Healing Power Of Belly Dancing



Synopsis

Al-Rawi has written a strikingly graceful and original book that blends a personal memoir with the history and theory of the dance known in the West as belly dancing. She conveys in this book not only the history and technique of grieving and mourning dances, pregnancy and birth dances, but the spirit of these age-old rituals, and their possibilities for healing and empowering women today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Step into a women's world of black abayas, large gatherings of women and children chatting, drinking tea, eating Arabic sweets-and dancing. "Excitement always reached its peak when one of the women got up to turn on the music, tie a scarf around her hips, and slowly sway into another world, dancing for us. All attention focused on her, tension grew in the bodies of the other women. They stood up, their eyes filling with an old, so far forgotten knowledge as they began to spur on the dancer-'How beautiful is the shape of her eyes, blessed be Allah!' 'Hold your head high, proud Fatima!' 'Look how softly her hips are circling!' The onlookers clapped in rhythm and trilled shrilly, conveying their enthusiasm...."Written by a woman raised in the Middle Eastern culture of Baghdad, the book begins with Rosina's stories of how her grandmother introduced her to dance as a young girl, where dance pervaded their lives. She gives a fascinating multi-cultural history of women's dancing, advocates attaining awareness through dancing (doing any movement), and then describes each movement with its benefits, from head to toe. "The art of expressing moods, states of mind, and experiences through dancing is based on movements and shapes that are meant to

strengthen the body, keep it flexible, and prepare the dancer for life."The content is excellent and the writing style is engaging. There are black-and-white photos throughout. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

As a veteran belly dancer (since 1981) and a teacher of the dance, I had mixed feelings about this book. The opening section, consisting of anecdotes about the author's childhood, was fascinating to read. Each anecdote was told to present a lesson. The second section, on the history of women's dance, was light in content. It was okay, but anyone who wants to know about the history of the dance won't find much here. The third and fourth sections, suggesting how to use belly dance movements for personal growth, healing, and spiritual fulfillment, are the real meat of this book. The author provided new ways of looking at familiar movements. An experienced dancer who is looking for new dimensions to the dance will probably enjoy this book very much, as I did. The exercises provide a source of creative inspiration as well as contributing to an overall feeling of well being. However, a beginner who is hoping to find a book that will teach her how to become a belly dance performer will find this book disappointing. While some of the exercises are based on moves that would be used in a performance, others are not. There is no information about what kind of music to use, and no suggestion of how to combine moves into a show. The biggest negative to this book is that it doesn't differentiate between the author's ideas about historical fact and how various moves might be used in ritual. For example, when describing "The Veil Dance", the author says "A woman dances the knowledge of the new living creature that can be born from her. She dances the eternal return of life; even without children, she dances this awareness of life that comes to her from the rhythms inside. She dances Eros beyond the loving embrace; she dances the place in-between, the time between birth and death that is called life." Interesting. The historical fact is that the modern Egyptian practice of beginning one's raqs sharqi performance holding a flowing piece of fabric (ie, veil) arose when a Russian dance coach named Ivanova instructed Samia Gamal to enter with a piece of fabric as a way of improving her arm carriage. The author's narrative can provide fertile inspiration for a dancer seeking new sources of creative inspiration for her performance, so it's legitimate to put these ideas out there. But I wish she would have acknowledged them to be her own interpretation rather than letting the reader believe she's stating historical fact. I actually enjoyed the book very much, but I gave it only 3 stars because of my concern it will mislead readers about the history and ethnic context of the dance.

This book has its good points and its bad points. The first section (stories from the author's

childhood) is lovely. I only wish it were longer. The second (the "history" of women's dancing) was a weakly-argued and poorly-supported rant. And while I am inclined to agree with many of her conclusions due to my own opinions and biases, the author didn't make much of a case on her own. Most of what she presents as fact is really conjecture. The third section attempts to introduce middle eastern dance movements, but the descriptions are not specific enough to follow unless you already know the move. Pictures would have helped; the book has several, but they don't illustrate the moves (with the exception of the hand posture photo, which was excellent). Not that you can learn any dance form from a book, but this one is unusually unhelpful. This section isn't entirely useless, though. If you're already enrolled in a class, it can give you another perspective on the movements you're learning. I've always found it helpful to have them explained another way. The fourth section is a description of some dance occasions (birth, weddings, etc.) and the dances that accompany them. However, the descriptions are short and vague, and by this point in the book, I don't quite trust the author anymore, so I'm wary of the authenticity of what she has to say. I seemed to have bashed this book, but it has its place. The stories in the first section were certainly worth reading. And while it didn't actually teach me anything, this book helped me to add a sort of meaning to my dancing; it gave me a focus and attitude that helped transform what I was doing from just exercising to actually dancing. And that is a valuable and important thing. However, the language is VERY New-Agey. I've hugged my share of trees, but it got to me after a while. If you don't have a good tolerance for that kind of thing, skip this book or only read one section at a time ... END

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