

## MYSTIC AND URBAN DANCES AND CEREMONIES



**Pre-Islamic Iran was a vast Middle Eastern Empire extending from borders with India to the East to include Asia Minor in the West.**

**Great cities were the center of significant cultural development, and commerce brought continued exchange of ideas, mystic beliefs and legendary tales of heroic actions. They form the foundation on which numerous current religious, mystic or simply urban ceremonies and traditions are founded.**

**In this site we will share broad samples of continued traditions still practiced today as an introduction to a highly significant contribution to World culture.**

**Mystics, poets, philosophers, scientists, musicians and artists have left a fascinating legacy in the lives of many Iranians today. Our mission at the National Iranian Folklore Society was to search for living examples of those treasures. Our objective is to share a simple compilation of materials collected to stimulate those interested.**

**Please feel free to contact us. We will make sure to open lines for sharing and documenting the information we receive.**

## MYSTIC CEREMONIES

### The Whirling Dervishes

#### Simple Introduction



The Mevlevi Order is a Sufi order in Konya (modern day Turkey but in his time part of the Persian Empire) founded by the followers of Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi-Rumi, a 13th-century philosopher and mystic.

Rumi was the son of a renowned Sufi scholar, and it is more than likely that he was introduced to Sufism from a young age. Sufism is a branch of Islam primarily concerned with developing the spirituality, or more precisely the inner character, of a Muslim. Rumi turned while dictating his verses and Dervish was the door through which Love and God were reached. Thus the turning movements of the believer to reach that spiritual ecstasy that could only then receive the Masnavi (chanted in typical Islamic style) The Konya Dervishes have toured the World and have many followers in many Western countries. Sufism, as such is a philosophy of Peace.

During my research in Iran I was introduced to several other mystic practices that used the Masnavi as their inspiration. Some Sufis believed in more intense rhythmical movements that eventually allowed their minds to reach ecstatic understanding through kneeling, head and torso rhythmical movements, their turbans removed and their long hair flowing in waves of increasing speed. As some reached ecstasy they rose and removed from a wall sharp instruments with

which they injured their bodies; piercing their tongue, abdominal tissues and more. In attending a ceremony in Kurdistan, I was an honored guest, provided with tea from a samovar, as I sat cross-legged on a rug. These actions were performed in front of me and with full consciousness and firm conviction. This long ceremony lasted over two hours during which a slow start increased in percussive intensity to finally end in repose, as the chanting concluded the ceremony. No blood had been lost and no scars were evident.

I was not allowed to film, so my visual memory of the event is what I have.

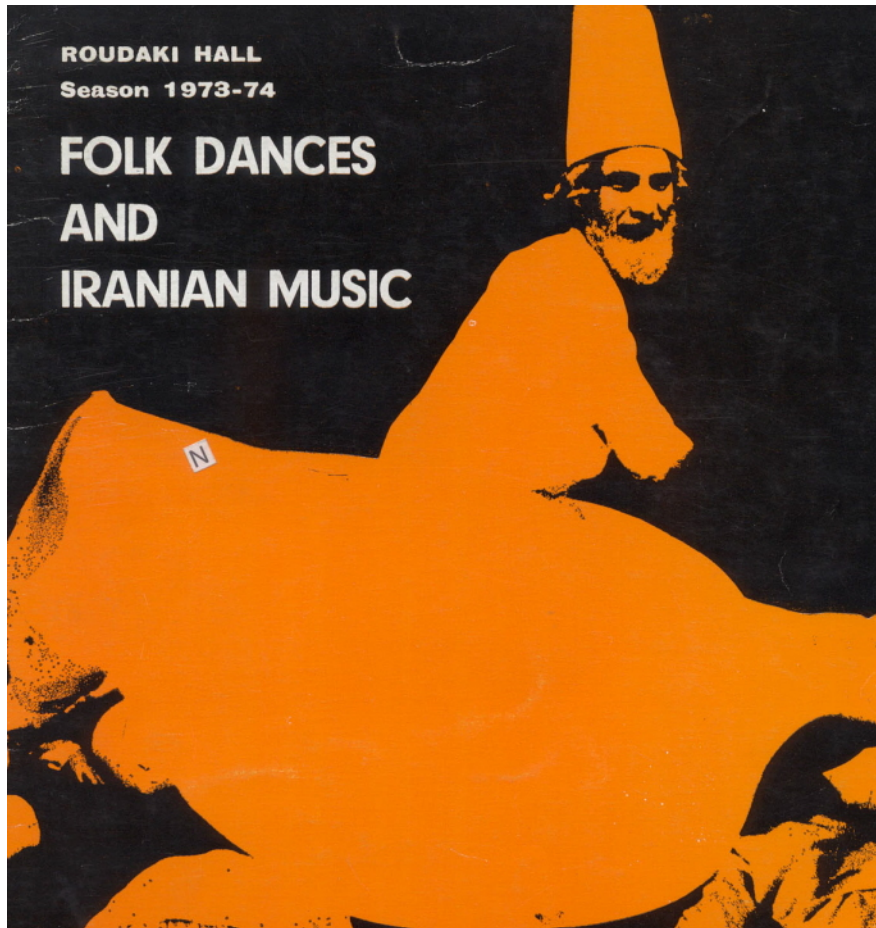
In Baluchistan, the large province in South Eastern Iran, I found a real tradition of dance, one of the most fertile in the nation, with many beautiful and different dances. Not far from the town of Saravan we were invited to attend a Sufi ceremony. It was held in the evening in a domed hall. This ceremony was clearly derived from the Konya practices but movements were inspired by tribal dances I recognized from filming in the surrounding areas. Some men knelt in a wide circle as the leader slowly commenced his ritual to be joined by others performing a continuously evolving wave with increasing tempo as they circled the area. At the climax they fell to the ground and lay, as if transfixed. In the ensuing quiet. The a single voice chanted the Masnavi and a lone flute accompanied the Moulana's teachings.

This became one of our signature performances.



ROUDAKI HALL  
Season 1973-74

**FOLK DANCES  
AND  
IRANIAN MUSIC**

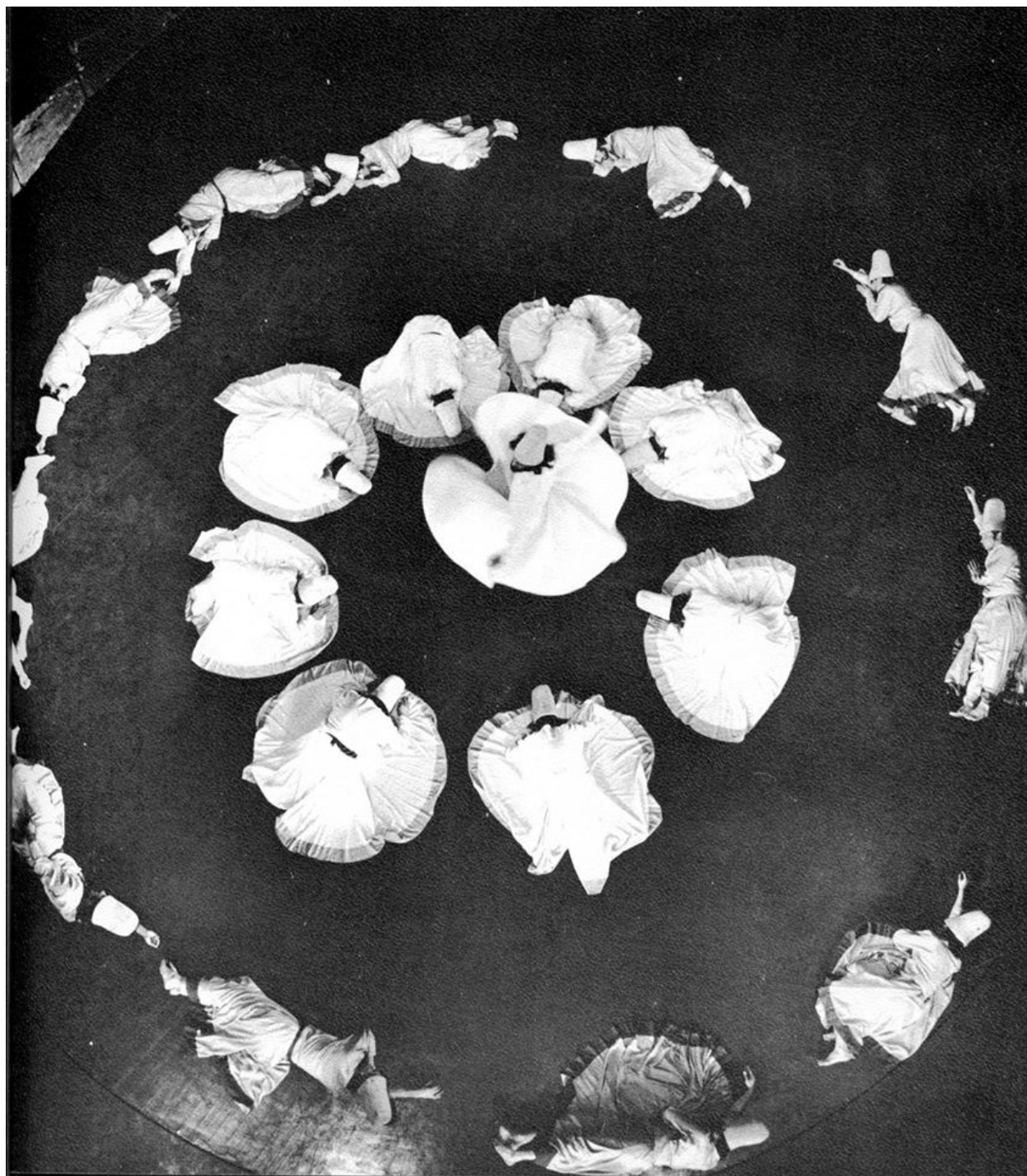




**Ali Maddadi**  
**will be remembered for his deeply-felt interpretation**  
**as the leading Dervish**







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# **ZURKHANEH**

## **THE HOUSE OF STRENGTH**

**The home of Chivalry -The Pahlavan , physical and spiritual achievement.**

**In an hexagonal space a low enclosing barrier provides a pit where men regularly arrive to practice a centuries old routine of physical exercises that will develop their muscular strength, stamina and control, and also, through specific chants, instill in their minds the principals of honor and determination.**





## **ZAL AND RUDABEH**

**Based on the epic poem of Ferdowsi**

**Created by Robert de Warren in 2001**



## Scene from the Zurkhaneh Ritual

<https://youtu.be/RqoSJVGyegw>







# URBAN KHEIME SHAB BASI IRANIAN PUPPETS

Transposed to a full theater performance

Mahalli Dancers of Iran played the characters from traditional puppet theater.

Puppetry was used to voice comments on socio-political issues. Often accompanied by recitation and music expressed through theatrical means.















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## **KHOLI - GIPSY TRIBES**

### **KHUZESTAN**

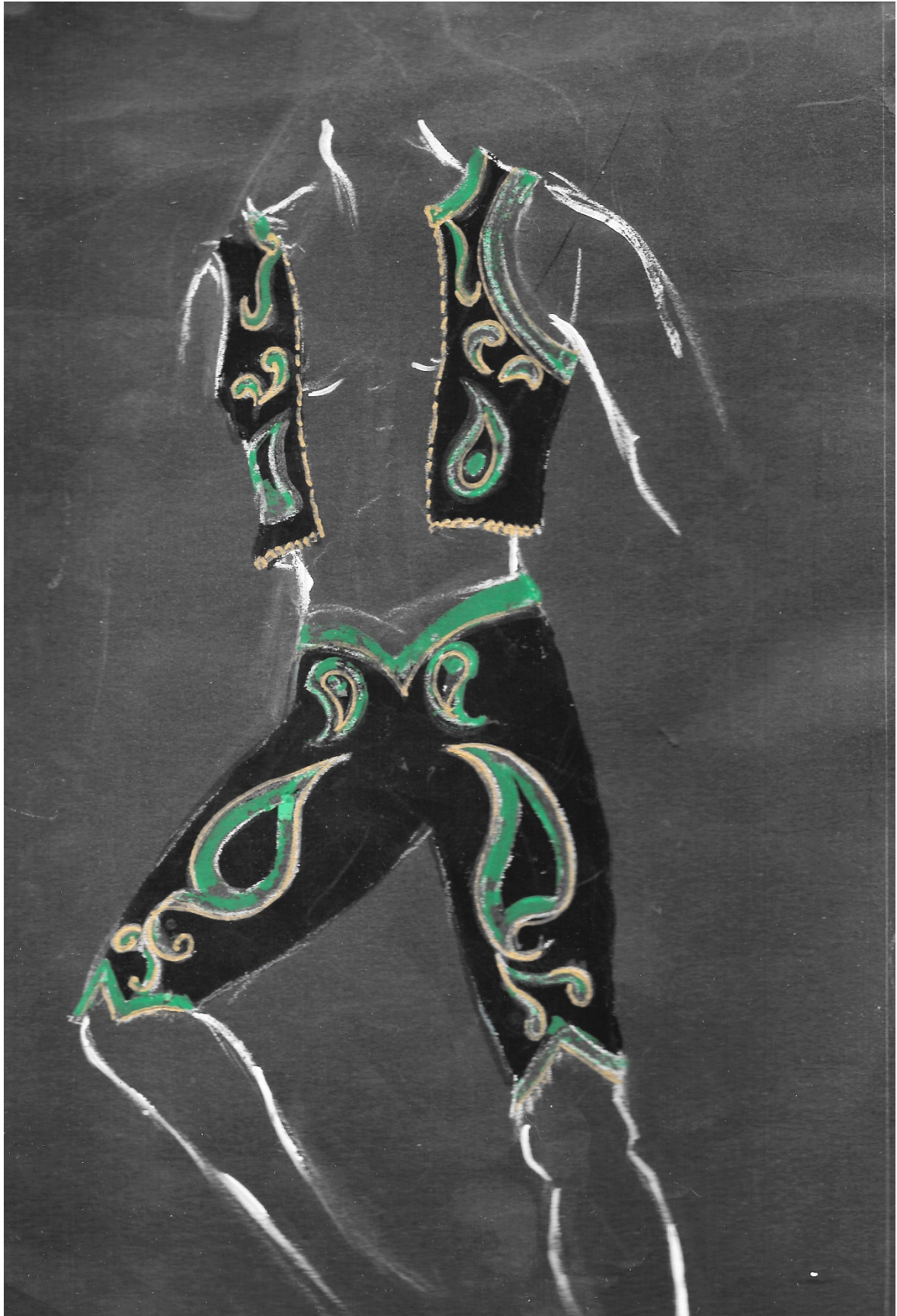
**Nomad tribes originating from Central Asia were imported by various Shahs to serve as makers and providers of simple products local residents did not produce. They were settled in the outskirts of important cities and peddled their wares to its population.**

**Their ancient traditions were influenced by local culture to produce interesting dances; full of temperament and character.**













Kowli Ruzestan 1975  
Robert de Warren

Other community ceremonies celebrated

## Birth, Circumcision and Death

We welcome information regarding these ceremonies.

As an illustration;

In Sanandage, Kurdistan, I registered, as part of a funerary service:

The family of the deceased accompanied their departed in a slow procession as he was carried aloft to the interment site. Sad music, chanting and percussion were played during the halting steps leading to the burial place.

On completion of the burial, the music changed to a happy and hopeful tune as participants each raised a metal cup of wine in a toast to the departed and a prayer for their own continued health and happiness, as they returned home with a jaunty optimistic step.

### A Noruz (New Year) tradition in Azerbaijan

At sunset villagers would gather on the banks of a river in a prayer for God's blessings during the coming months. Each carried a half walnut in which a small candle had been set. Lighting the candle and placing it gently on the waters resulted in a stream of flickering flames floating downstream, bearing each individual's hopes for the coming year.

These traditions were enacted onstage during the various *tableau vivants* that became representative of Iran's multifarious cultural treasures presented by The Mahalli Dancers.



**Robert de Warren was invited to create a dance scene for the opening ceremony of the Seventh Asian Games. This event also marked the inauguration of the ARYA MEHR STADIUM and other facilities in the Olympic Village.**

**Tha Mahalli Dances of Iran were represented in a “live carpet” design with almost two thousand tribal dancers prepared for the occasion.**

**The Zurkhaneh was also part of this impressive presentation of popular expressions steeped in history.**



**It took three months to prepare this spectacular demonstration**





**Tribes are recognized by their very distinctive clothing and accessories.**







**A proud Shah observed the ceremony  
performed for a crowd of one hundred thousand**



**Two hundred participants of the Zurkhaneh**

**NOTE: This document is but a small part of the many complex traditions registered in almost ten years of systematic research. Now we diligently continue the task of recuperating or recreating the archives destroyed during the Islamic Revolution**

