

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Eugène Giraud
(Paris 1806 – 1881)

La Danseuse du Caire

Signed lower left: *E. Giraud*
Gouache and pencil on paper
48 x 31 cm. (18 ¾ x 12 ¼ in.)

Provenance:

Zizi Jeanmaire (1924-2020) and Roland Petit (1924-2011), Geneva.

Literature:

Zizi Jeanmaire – Roland Petit, Un patrimoine pour la danse, Paris 2007, p. 43, no. 1.

Exhibited:

Geneva, Musée Rath, *Zizi Jeanmaire – Roland Petit, Un patrimoine pour la danse*, April to August 2007.



Formerly owned by the ballet dancer Zizi Jeanmarie and her choreographer husband Roland Petit, Eugène Giraud's study relates to one of the artist's best-known paintings, *La Danseuse du Caire* of 1866 (fig. 1). The painting, and this associated gouache, depict a *Ghawazi*, a type of Egyptian dancer, performing the traditional female solo dance known as the *raqs baladi*, which focussed on a swaying of the hips.

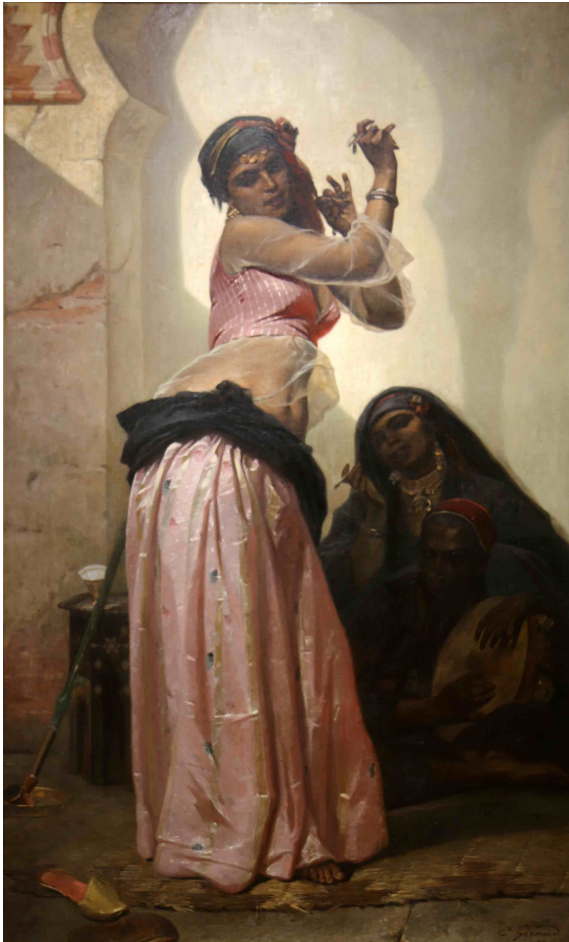


Fig. 1, Eugène Giraud, *La Danseuse du Caire*, 1866, oil on canvas, 210 x 165 cm, Musée d'Art de Toulon

Exemplifying much of the 'exoticism' of the 'mysterious East', so sought after by many of the early male travellers to Egypt, the *Ghawazi* were regularly described in the travel literature of the mid-19th century. As William Prime wrote in 1857, 'the Ghawazee have been celebrated by Egyptian travelers in numberless chapters; there is scarcely a book on Egypt that does not contain more or less poetry of their beauty and gracefulness'.¹

The *Ghawazi*, considered to be of a low class, were professional dancers for hire, performing unveiled in the streets at festive occasions, as well as to private parties. In the travel literature they were often placed in counterpoint to the *Awalim*, a class of educated female courtesans who specialised in singing and poetry recitation, whose name comes from the Arabic *ālīma*, meaning 'to be learned'. The distinction between the two types of dancers was not always understood by foreigners, with the term *Almée*, the French transliteration of *Awalim*, coming to denote all dancers in Western literature and art.²

¹ William C. Prime, *Boat Life in Egypt and Nubia*, New York 1857, p. 400.

² Or *Almeh* in English.

Edward Lane was the first to write at length of the *Awalim* and the *Ghawazi* in 1836 in his *Manners and Costumes of the Modern Egyptians*, making clear the distinction between the two. Of the *Ghawazi*, he states that ‘their dancing has little of elegance; its chief peculiarity being a very rapid vibrating motion of the hips from side to side’.³ Lane goes on to describe their dress, consisting of diaphanous trousers known as a *shintiyán* and a shirt of semi-transparent gauze known as a *tób*. He also says that ‘the tips of their fingers, the palms of their hands and their toes and other parts of their feet, are usually stained with the red dye of the henna’.⁴

Giraud’s *Ghawazi* corresponds to Lane’s description, although the artist travelled to Egypt in 1847 and so would have had the opportunity to see a *Ghawazi* first hand. Giraud was probably also inspired by his friend Gustave Flaubert’s account of his meeting in 1850 with a *Ghawazi* he called Kuchuk Hanem. Flaubert’s description of Kuchuk Hanem provides one of the most vivid records of the male European in pursuit of a preconceived romantic notion of Egypt.⁵



Fig. 2, Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Dance of the Almeh*, 1864, oil on panel, 50 x 81 cm, Dayton Art Institute

Following these mid-19th-century travel accounts, *Ghawazi* came to be subjects of predilection for some of the leading Orientalists, such as Jean-Léon Gérôme (fig. 2) and Leopold Carl Müller (fig. 3). Gérôme had shown his *Dance of the Almeh* (in reality it is a *Ghawazi* depicted) at the Salon of 1864 to both acclaim and outrage, with the eroticism provoking complaint in some quarters. Though perhaps not as overt as Gérôme’s image, Giraud’s depiction of a *Ghawazi* certainly possesses an obvious sensuality meant to appeal to the imaginations of a European audience, even if the costume itself is described with

³ W.E. Lane, *Manners and Costumes of the Modern Egyptians*, London 1836, p. 385.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ F. Steegmuller (ed), *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour*, London 1972.

some accuracy. Well-known at the time, Giraud's *Ghawazi* was widely circulated as an engraving and is an important example of the phenomenon of the Egyptian dancer in European cultural life from the mid-19th century.



Fig. 3, Leopold Carl Müller, *The Almeh's Admirers*, 1882, oil on canvas, 77 x 126 cm, Private Collection