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## Kurdish Dance

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**KURDISH DANCE.** The Kurds are a nomadic people whose homeland (Kurdistan) and population (of some 10 million) are now divided among mountainous rural regions of Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Armenia; small numbers live in Israel and the Republic of Georgia, (and a separatist movement is headquartered in Paris, France). They speak an Iranian (a Persian) language, and some believe them to be the descendants of the ancient Medes. Without a state of their own, the Kurds place great importance on such cultural forms and identity markers as dancing.

Kurds perform four types of dances: group dances; solo improvisational dances; processional; and ritual and reli-

gious dances. The first two are the most popular and widespread types. Social dancing does not attract opprobrium among the Kurds, probably because the professional solo dancing that has been associated with moral laxity has never been practiced in their area.

On social occasions, such as weddings, dancing is a key form of entertainment; it may last many hours. Dancers are connected to one another by a variety of hand, shoulder, and belt holds during group dances. The dances, similar to the Arabic *dabkah*, have short repetitive choreographic phrases, punctuated by dips, rhythmic movements of the arms, stamping, and clapping. The lines and circles sometimes have up to one hundred dancers.

Music is usually provided by the *sorna* (a kind of shawm, an early form of the double-reed oboe) and the *dohol*, a double-headed drum that is beaten with sticks and played from the Balkan Peninsula east into China. The dancers often sing. More than forty dances are named in the musical literature (Dzalil, 1973). The group dances are part of a wide repertory of dances, step patterns, music, and movements that are also in the dance repertories of Turkey, Armenia, Greece, Azerbaijan, and the Pontic (Black Sea area), as well as among Iraqi Arabs and the Aramaic-speaking Christian Assyrians.

Solo dancing is also performed in festive contexts, often in the center of a circle of people who either clap or sing and watch. One or more dancers may improvise freely within the regional style. Kurdish solo dancing is not as elaborate as many of the improvisational styles found farther east. Processional dances have been reported, but no details are known of their choreographic form.

The majority of Kurds practice Sunni Islam and respect the prohibition of dance and music for religious ceremonies. However, as in many parts of the Islamic world, certain non-Sunni sects and groups do utilize movement within their rituals. For example, the Sufi sect among the Kurds use movement to achieve an ecstatic state; similarly, the Yazīdī, a group of Kurds living mostly in Iraq, utilize and revere ceremonial music and dance.

[See also Iran]

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