Vom Schäferidyll zur Revolution

Europäische Tanzkultur im 18. Jahrhundert

2. Rothenfelser Tanzsymposion

21.—25. Mai 2008

Tagungsband

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von
Uwe Schlottermüller, Howard Weiner und Maria Richter

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Für unseren Tagungsband wurde sie mit einem roten Halsband versehen:
Mit diesem Erkennungszeichen durfte man bestimmte Bälle besuchen, wenn
(mindestens) ein Familienangehöriger auf der Guillotine hingerichtet worden war.

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Inhalt

Vorwort / Foreword 7

Romana Agnel
The Origins and the Symbolism of the Polonaise 9

Giles Bennett
Elementarer Tanzunterricht am Dresdner Hof.
Louis Delpêch und seine *Leçons de danse* (1772) 17

Deda Cristina Colonna
The »Demoiselle« Behind the Score.
A Tentative Technical Portrait of Mlle Guiot as She appears in the Choreographies Bearing her Name in the Pécour-Gaudrau Collection 39

Anne Margrete Fiskvik / Egil Bakka
Vincenzo Galeotti's Norwegian Springdance – Stereotype or Fantasy? 53

Jane Gingell
The Triumph of Anti-Fashion.
How Conservatism Nurtured Innovation in 18th-Century Spain 71

Gloria Giordano
Two 18th-century Italian Choreographies discovered in the Cia Fornaroli Collection at The New York Public Library 83

Sabine Huschka
Die Darstellungsästhetik des »ballet en action«. Anmerkungen zum Disput zwischen Gasparo Angiolini und Jean Georges Noverre 93

Guillaume Jablonka
Zur Notation der Pantomime im »Ms. Ferrère« 107

Tiziana Leucci
From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.
The Construction of the Indian Dancer Character (»Bayadère«) on the European Stage (1681—1798) 115

MICHAEL MALKIEWICZ
Verhüllen und Entblößen.
Zur Darstellung der Erotik in Noverres Ballettszenaren 133

MILO PABLO MOMM
Jacques Dezais' *Premier Livre de Contre-Dances* (1726).
Eine neue Tanzsammlung als möglicher »missing link« im 18. Jahrhundert? 147

MARINA NORDERA
Getting through the French Revolution as a Female Dancer.
The Life and Works of Marie Madeleine Guimard 175

BARBARA SEGAL
Hornpipe and Hemiola. Dance Rhythms in Triple Time Country Dances 183

BARBARA SPARTI
An 18th-Century Venetian *Moresca*.
Popular Dance, Pyrrhic, or Regulated Competition? 197

KAJ SYLEGÅRD
Aimable Vainqueur – the Dance of the Century. An analysis of three versions 219

JENNIFER THORP
»Mr Kellom's Scholar«. The Career of John Topham 241

Zusammenfassungen / Summaries 253

Anmerkungen zu Workshops, Tanzabenden und Kurzauftritten 261

Quellenverzeichnis 273

From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Construction of the Indian Dancer Character (»Bayadère«) on the European Stage (1681—1798)[1]

TIZIANA LEUCCI

Madadöh, der Herr der Erde,
Kommt herab zum sechsten Mal,
Daß er unsersgleichen werde,
Mit zu fühlen Freud und Qual.
[…] Als er nun hinausgegangen,
Wo die letzten Häuser sind,
Sieht er, mit gemalten Wangen,
Ein verlornes schönes Kind.
Grüß dich, Jungfrau! – Dank der Ehre!
Wart, ich komme gleich hinaus –
Und wer bist du? – Bajadere,
Und dies ist der Liebe Haus.
Sie rührt sich, die Zimbeln zum Tanze zu schlagen,
Sie weiß sich so lieblich im Kreise zu tragen,
Sie neigt sich und biegt sich, und reicht ihm den Strauß […].

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Der Gott und die Bajadere, Indische Legende* (1798)[2]

Introduction

The Indian temple dancer, known by the generic Sanskrit term »devadâsî«[3], made her entry into the Western literary world at the end of the 13th century.[4] This came about when Rustichello da Pisa, Marco Polo's novelist cell-mate, noted down his Venetian friend's memories of Asia.[5] Since then, the majority of European travelers who visited India wrote quite extensively about its dancers, singers, and musicians. In their own countries the travelers' tales inspired quite a number of writers and artists to compose literary and musical works about them – such as poems, novels, plays, ballets, and operas. I have selected here some Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, German, and French sources which are important for our knowledge of Indian dancers in the West,[6] particularly for the creation of their character on stage. In keeping with the theme of the Rothenfels Symposium, I shall focus here on just a few works produced in Europe from the end of the 17th century till the end of the 18th century.

First, I would like to draw attention to the etymology of the French word »bayadère«, which is of Portuguese origin (»baylhadeira« or »bailadeira«) and means »female dancer«. This term was first used by 16th-century Portuguese travelers to refer to

Indian dancers performing in temples and at royal courts. In the 17th century, the word entered literary French by way of Dutch travel accounts.[7] Since then the term has been taken up by other European languages (German »Bajadere«, English »bayadere«, Italian »balliadera«, and Russian »bayaderka«) and adapted to define all types of Indian dancers, including »devadâsî«, as well as their theatrical character on the Western stage.

In this paper I will show that the image of the »bayadère« was shaped by a slow process of mutual interaction between the writings of travelers, the literary works of poets, philosophers, dramatists, and librettists, and the compositions of musicians and choreographers. All of them contributed a great deal to the construction of the »bayadère«'s theatrical features, which were cast mainly in cosmopolitan Paris, one of the major capitals of theater at that time. Though masks of »Indians«, »Persians«, »Turks«, and other »Orientals« had previously already been present at festivals, carnivals, processions, jousts, and banquets at Renaissance courts in Italy and other European countries,[8] it was from the 17th century onwards that the greatest number of operas and ballets on Indian subjects were composed in Paris, before being staged in other countries.[9]

The European portrayal of Indian »Bayadères« as wealthy courtesans, talented artists, and skilled priestesses of voluptuousness

Domingo Paes, one of the first Portuguese travelers in India, described the temple and court dancers in the Vijayanagar kingdom (the present State of Karnataka in the Indian Union).[10] Probably around 1520—1522, Paes wrote:

> They [the »baylhadeiras«] feed the idol every day, for they say that he eats; and when he eats women dance before him who belong to that pagoda, and they give him food and all that is necessary, and all girls born of these women belong to the temple. These women are of loose character, and live in the best streets that are in the city; it is the same in all their cities, their streets have the best rows of houses. They are very much esteemed, and are classed amongst those honoured ones who are the mistresses of the captains; any respectable man may go to their houses without any blame attaching thereto. These women [are allowed] even to enter the presence of the wives of the king, and they stay with them and eat *betel*[11] with them, a thing which no other person may do, no matter what his rank may be.
>
> Against the gates [of the king's palace] there were two circles in which were the dancing-women, richly arrayed with many jewels of gold and diamonds and many pearls […] Who can fitly describe to you the great riches these women carry on their persons? Collars of gold with so many diamonds and rubies and pearls, bracelets also on their arms and on their upper arms, girdles below, and anklets on the feet […] There are women among them who have lands that have been given to them, and litters, and so many maid-servants that one cannot number all their things.
>
> This hall is where the king sends his women to be taught to dance […] At the end of this house on the left hand is a painted recess where the women cling on with their hands in order better to stretch and loosen their bodies and legs; there they teach them to make the whole body supple, in order to make their dancing more graceful.[12]

The Dutch Calvinist missionary Abraham Rogerius lived from 1630 to 1640 at Pulicat, a coastal city located on the border between the present States of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. In 1651 in Leiden he published a book that was translated into French by Thomas la Grue in 1670. His work is very important for us since he states the reasons why the »devadâsî«, whom he called »whores«, and were known by all to be such, were present in temples during rituals, whereas no »sudra«[13], untouchable, or other »unclean« persons were allowed to participate. Rogerius claims to have received an explanation for this from a temple priest by the name of Padmanabhan, who apparently told him the following story, which later became a major »topos« in many European operas and ballets.

According to Padmanabhan, the god Dewendra[14] once took on human form and went to visit a prostitute to test her honesty. After negotiating the fee in advance, he gave her the money and spent the night with her (the author added that she »treated him very well«). In the morning Dewendra pretended to be dead, and the girl, thinking that he had really passed away, decided to have herself burned together with his body. The members of her family did their best to dissuade her, trying in vain to her convince her that, since he was not her husband, she had no obligation to be burned with him. Only when they realized that nothing could change her mind, they had the pyre prepared. Then, as she was about to jump into the fire, Dewendra awoke and told her that he had merely pretended to be dead in order to test her fidelity. Not only did he save her life, but he promised to take her with him to the »Dewendra-locon« (Sanskrit: »loka«, place), the heavenly place where the gods resided, both of them thus taking their places among the divine beings. Rogerius concluded the story by saying:

> Now, in view of such great respect for whores, it should not seem surprising that they desire such women to be at the service of their gods, and to also allow them to be so close to both *Wistnou* [Vishnu] and *Eswara* [Isvara-Shiva].[15]

Thomas la Grue, Rogerius' translator, remarked in a footnote that girls were consecrated to temples in order to serve the gods with their dancing. At the end of 13th century, Marco Polo had already reported that this was believed to be highly appreciated by the gods. Moreover, the dancers' way of life enabled them to collect religious merits and even attain salvation through their profession. La Grue added that the dancers took lovers only from among the upper-caste men; others, including wealthy Muslim and Christian noblemen, were not accepted as patrons, since this would have made the dancers look shameless in the eyes of the people. Surprisingly, the little tale related by Rogerius, in which the Indian custom of self-immolation of widows (»satî«) was for the first time associated with the consecration of girls to the temple, later had a great impact on European writers and artists, as will be seen below. Curiously, Thomas la Grue added the words *Le Théâtre de l'Idolâtrie* (The Theatre of Idolatry) to the title of the French version, making it sound as if the French translator anticipated the future success on the stage of the tale related above.

The French Presence in India

Following Portugal (1500), England (1600), and Holland (1602), France was the last European coutry to establish its own »Compagnie des Indes Orientales« in 1664, during the reign of Louis XIV. The French arrived in Asia in 1666, and stove against other countries for the commercial control of the Indian markets, later imposing their colonial dominion on India, as had others before them. 15 years after their arrival on the subcontinent, a »ballet de cour« titled *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* (The Triumph of Love) was performed in France on 21 January 1681 at the Royal Theater of Saint-Germain-en-Laye to celebrate the marriage Louis XIV's son with Marie Christine of Bavaria. The music was by the Florentine composer Gianbattista Lulli (Jean-Baptiste Lully), the libretto by Philippe Quinault, and the choreography by Pierre Beauchamp. A few months later, on 10 May, the ballet was re-staged in Paris. For this occasion Lully employed four French professional female dancers for the first time. Until then, members of the aristocracy and the royal family, included the king, had been the only interpreters of ballets at the French court. It should not be forgeten that Louis XIV became known as »Le Roi Soleil« for having played the role of the Sun in *Le Ballet de la Nuit* (The Ballet of the Night). Quite often the female roles were played by noblemen »en travesti«, wearing masks and woman's costumes. Another novelty here was the presence of »Indian roles«, divided into »Indiens« (male Indians) and »Indiennes« (female Indians), in the list of characters of the ballet.

As usual at that time, the subject of the *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* was taken from Greek-Roman mythological and heroic stories: Venus, the goddess of love, calls the Graces, the Nymphs, and all other divine and semi-divine beings to celebrate the glory of her son Cupid, the god of love, who with his power can subdue even the most reticent gods and heros. The ballet was made up of 20 »entrées« (scenes). At the beginning of the libretto we read:

> The Stage depicts a magnificently decorated place ready to receive the god of love, who will arrive in triumph: a great number of deities and a large number of various peoples have assembled and their places in order to attend this sumptuous performance.[16]

In the 12th scene, the god Bacchus enters in a procession, returning from his successful campaign in India:

> Bacchus, after having conquered and integrated the majority of the world's countries into his empire, and just when he is returning from his victorious conquest of India, where placed the people of that land under his laws, is himself conquered by the might of the god of love, and nothing can prevent him from falling in love with Ariadne as soon as he sets eyes on her for the first time. The *Indian* men and the *Indian* women accompanying Bacchus praise the power of Love.[17]

According to the libretto, the Indian characters perform some solo, couple, and group dances in praise of the god of love, accompanied by music and lyrics sung by the chorus. In the 13th scene, Ariadne enters the stage with her own procession of »Greek« dancers and meets Bacchus:

> The *Indians* following Bacchus and the Greek girls following Ariadne enjoy watching Ariadne and Bacchus falling in love.[18]

In this part of the ballet the pieces performed by the »Indian characters« alternate those of the »Greek girls«. Unfortunately, the libretto contains no other indications concerning the types of dances and how they were performed so that we are forced to speculate whether the choreography featured other »Indian« elements. I tend to doubt it, since at that time very little attention was paid to realistic aspects of the art of Indian dancing, and authenticity was not an aesthetic priority. The same goes for the props and stage decorations: by analyzing the drawings of the costumes and scenes, it is obvious that they largely followed the conventions and aesthetic tastes of the period. A few elements in the props and costumes, including the long veils worn by the female Indian characters, might suggest an »Indian« flavor.[19] The veil, along with »mussolina« and silk shawls, will later on play a major role in all the dances performed by the »bayadères« in operas and ballets.

Of particular interest is the first scene with the participation of a great number of »deities« and »various peoples« who, as a very distinguished audience of divine beings and foreign ambassadors, are gathered to praise the apotheosis of the god of love; a true form of »theater within the theater« with an evocative mirror effect by means of which actors and spectators, both »real« and »ideal«, »divine« and »human«, are united and reflected together all at one time. In an era in which expansion to other continents represented a source of prestige as well as political, economic, and military power, it is no wonder that the French court methaphorically celebrated itself and the »triumphs« and »conquests« in Asia of His »Solar« Majesty, Louis XIV, on the stage with *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* and *The Conquests of Bacchus*.[20]

That same year (1681) saw the publication of a book by the French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605—1689). Until then the Indian temple dancers had been known in France mainly through Italian and Dutch works translated into French. Tavernier described the Indian courtesans singing and dancing each Friday for the king of Golconda. At that time, Golconda was the capital of a prestigious and powerful realm in Central India. (Today it is a city located in the State of Andhra Pradesh.) Tavernier also provided a short description of the »devadâsîs«' daily duties in the temples:

> Every morning the idol is worshipped, and the girls dance round it for an hour to the sound of flutes and drums, after which all eat together and enjoy themselves till the evening, when they worship the idol again and dance around it a second time.[21]

A few years after *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* was staged, the French physician and traveler François Bernier (1620—1688) offered an interesting description of the Indian temple dancers from Puri (in the present Eastern Indian State of Orissa). Bernier, the personal physician of Prince Dara Shikoh, was a decisive factor in the fashioning of the Indian theatrical character in later French stage productions, despite his severe moralistic condemnation of the »devadâsî« system. In his book, published in Amsterdam in 1699,

he mentioned the ceremony in which young girls were consecrated to the temple of the god Jagannath and briefly referred to the oracle function of the temple dancers. He perceived the »devadâsî«, whom he also called »femmes publiques« (public women), as innocent victims of cruel religious superstitions, and portrayed the Brahmin priests as manipulating and wicked men, the essence of all evil. In Bernier's eyes, the Brahmin priests were the symbol of lust and greed. For this anticlerical French doctor, who was a great admirer of the rationalist philosopher Pierre Gassendi, this was a prime example of the use of religion to manipulate and subjugate people (»religio instrumentum regni«). This attitude toward the Indian priests officiating in the temple, whom Bernier suspected of sexually abusing the »devadâsî« and brain-washing the devotees with their »senseless beliefs«, later became a recurrent topic in many plays staged in France during the 18th and 19th centuries:

> These cunning [Brahmins] choose a young girl from among the most beautiful to become the bride of Jagannath (or so they say, or rather, what they make the idiotic and ignorant people believe); during the night they leave her inside the temple, where they have brought her with great ceremony, along with the idol, and make her believe that Jagannath will come to spend the night with her; and they request her to ask him if the year will be prosperous, and what sort of processions, festivals, prayers, and offerings he would like them to arrange for him; in the meantime, one of these impostors enters from a little door located at the back, and enjoys the girl, making her believe whatever he feels is good; and the next morning they take her on a triumphal chariot at the side of her bridegroom Jagannath from this temple to another of similar magnificence, and the Brahmins make her pronounce loudly to the people that which she heard from the mouth of Jagannath […] Before the chariot, and often in the temples of their idols during the festivals, the same public women can be seen dancing, assuming a hundred dishonest and extravagant postures which the Brahmins feel conform to their religion. In any case, there are many of these women who are famous not only for their beauty, but also for their dignity, and who have refused valuable presents from Muslims and Christians as well as from other foreign gentiles, so as if they were devoted only to the ministers, the temple priests, the other Brahmins, and those fakirs who are seated around, mostly on ashes, some completely naked with their horrible, witch-like hair and in a peculiar posture about which I'll say more later. But let us not spend any more time on such foolish things.[22]

Despite his critical attitude, Bernier could not deny the fact that the »devadâsî« were very beautiful and seductive women, and even if they assumed »dishonest postures« in their dance, their behavior and dignity were remarkable, as was their »devotion« to their Hindu patrons.[23] During his long stay in India, François Bernier also met the Venetian adventurer and self-proclaimed physician Nicolò Manucci (1639—1712?), or Manuzzi in the Venetian spelling, who had left his native city as a stowaway in a ship headed to the East when he was only fourteen. Of humble origins, he survived during his journeys in Asia by practicing various professions. He arrived in India in 1657 and was active, depending on the circumstances and often simultaneously, as soldier, doctor, mediator, emissary, adviser, diplomat, and secret agent. Thanks to his skills and his knowledge of Indian languages and political strategies, he worked for both Indian princes and European officers (Portuguese, English, and French). For long time he was in the

service of Prince Dara Shokoh, the son of the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan (1627—1658). In 1686, after living in Northern India, Manucci settled in the South, in Madras. There he continued his activities as a doctor and adviser, and became a close friend of François Martin, the French Governor of Pondichéry from 1674 to 1706, who advised him to write down his reminiscences. Manucci followed this advice and wrote a book titled *Storia do Mogor* (The History of Moghuls) in which he related his personal experiences at the royal court during the reign of the Moghul emperor Aurangzeb (1658—1707). The original manuscript was plagiarized by the French Jesuit priest François Catrou, who altered and published it in Paris in 1705, where it quickly became very popular. When Manucci learned of the theft, he immediately started to write a second, revised version in two volumes, this time augmented by exquisite painted miniatures of the Northern and Southern Indian schools.

Manucci described various aspects of life at the Moghul court. Although his predecessors were great patrons of the arts, Aurangzeb was quite strict and reticent toward performing artists.

Nevertheless, in spite of his uncompromising religious zeal, he could not forbid the performances of singing and dancing by the women in the royal harems. The Venetian portrayed the complex organization, the hierarchy, and the duties of these female artists, some of whom were chosen at a very young age and trained at the court, while others were brought there from conquered kingdoms. Many were of Hindu origin and represented various regional schools of musical practice. Their presence and activity in the Moghul palaces gave witness to the richness and dynamism of music and dance in the Moghul empire and at other Indian courts of the time, and of the exchange between the various artistic styles:

> In spite of Aurangzeb's having forbidden all music, he nevertheless continued always to entertain in his palaces, for the diversion of the queens and his daughters, several dancing and singing women; and even conferred special names on their mistresses or superintendents […].
>
> Each has under her orders about ten apprentices; and along with these apprentices they attend the queens, the princesses, and the concubines. Each one has her special rank according to her standing. The queens and the other ladies pass their time in their rooms, each with their own set of musicians. None of these musicians are allowed to sing elsewhere than in the rooms of the person to whom they are attached, except at some great festivals. Then they are all assembled and ordered to sing together […] All these women are pretty, have a good style and much grace in their gait, are very free in their talk.[24]

Manucci added that Indian courtesans, particularly those active in the royal palaces, where celebrated artists whose wealth (whether in goods, money, residences, jewels, lands, and revenues) »was more considerable than that of any European prince or aristocrat«[25] In the captions accompanying the images of Manucci's second volume, we read that South Indian »devadâsî« participated in temple and other socio-religious festivals by singing and dancing during the procession of the deities placed in chariots and palanquins, as well as at weddings.[26]

In 1735 Jean-Philippe Rameau's four-act opera-ballet *Les Indes Galantes*, on a libretto by Louis Fuzelier, was staged in Paris. In spite the title, India was not among the four countries of the »East« and »West« Indies (Turkey, Persia, Perù and North America) represented in the ballet. Only in the eighth scene of the third act, which depicts a »Festival of Flowers« in a luxurious Persian palace, can we perhaps glimpse the figure of an Indian dancer during the *Ballet des Fleurs* (Ballet of Flowers):

> On the stage are a number of swings decorated with lamps, garlandes, and flowers. Musicians play their instruments from the balconies, and slaves sing and throw petals. Charming concubines from various Asian nations are adorned by beautiful flowers in their hair and on their clothes: one is decorated with roses, another with jonquils, each of them wears a different type of flower.[27]

Three decades later, in 1766, a »ballet-heroique« in three acts set in India and titled *Aline, Reine de Golconde* was successfully staged in Paris. Michel-Jean Sedaine wrote the libretto inspired by Stanislas de Boufflers's book of the same name, which had been published in The Hague in 1761.[28] The ballet was revived in 1782 with the music composed by de Monsigny and choreographies by de Bandieri de Laval, Maximilien Gardel, Gaetano Vestris, and Jean Georges Noverre. The plot is a love-story between the young French couple Aline and Saint-Phar. As a result of several unfortunate events, the two lovers are separated. Aline is kidnapped by pirates and sold as a slave in Golconda, the same city that, along with its dancers, was mentioned by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in the previous century. The king of Golconda, after having seen Aline in the local market, immediately falls in love and marries her. The charming Aline thus becomes, as the title of the ballet suggests, the »queen of Golconda«. After the death of her husband, several Indian kings try to conquer the beautiful widow's heart and kingdom. Even a member of her own court attempts to usurp her throne. Meanwhile, a French delegation arrives at Golconda. Aline, in her veiled attire, receives their emissary in the royal palace. She immediately recognizes the foreign gentleman as her beloved Saint-Phar. Although charmed by the queen, he could not see her face, which was covered by a veil in acordance with the local Indian custom. Only after Saint-Phar has stymied the complot and captured the culprit (Aline's court minister) are the two lovers finally reunited. The ballet ends with an apotheosis of love in celebration of Aline and Saint-Phar's marriage. Unfortunately, in neither of the two versions of the libretto do any precise indications appear regarding the Indian »flavor« of the dances performed at the royal court of Golconda. We only know from a member of the aristocratic audience that the choreographies for the second version were particularly beautiful. Baroness d'Oberkirch attended the ballet at the Petit Trianon, the Queen's Royal Theater, at Versailles on 23 May 1782 and gave the following account:

> Though the music composed by M. de Monsigny was played well, the dances impressed me the most. What a degree of perfection was attained today in this voluptuous art! The scenery, too, was livelier and more realistic than I have ever seen before. All of us desired to be Aline in order to rule over such a lovely kingdom.[29]

Interestingly, in 1768, four years after the revival of Sedaine's *Aline, Reine de Golconde*, an authentic Indian dancer, most probably from Northern India, arrived in Paris and performed before the royal family. The French spelling of her name was reported as »Bebaiourn«. According to the chronicles of the time:

> The novelty of her dances impressed the entire city and the court, as did the exotic costume, the hand gestures, and the nimbleness of her gazelle-like movements. She became friends with Queen Louise, settled in France, and, becoming nun, entered a convent. In 1789, during the French Revolution, when all the monasteries were dissolved and their inhabitants evicted, she came out and, finally, became a teacher.[30]

It is quite possible that the exotic flavor of her authentic Indian dances, which seem at that time to have so greatly impressed the French audiences and the royal court, influenced the choreography of those operas and ballets on Indian subjects that were composed later in France.[31]

The complex and distressful situation of Indian widows, as well as their sacrifice on the pyres of their dead husbands (»satî«),[32] a custom described by almost all Western travelers to India even before Marco Polo, is a topic that appears for the first time on the European stage in Pietro Metastasio's opera *Alessandro nell'Indie* (Alexander in India). Premiered in Rome in 1730, with music composed by Leonardo Vinci, it tells the story of the Macedonian ruler's military campaign in India and of his love for the Indian queen Cleofide.[33] 40 years later, the wretched circumstances of Indian widows and the custom of »satî« were the main subject of the French drama *La Veuve du Malabar ou l'Empire des Coutumes* (The Widow of Malabar or the Empire of Customs) by Martin Antoine Lemierre, which was premiered in Paris in 1770.[34] Even though this play does not refer directly to Indian dancers, it is important for us because it focuses on the theme of »satî«, which later became associated on the stage with the character of the »bayadère«. The drama opens with the decision of the chief Brahmin to prepare the pyre for a young widow, followed by an animated dialogue the Brahmin and a young priest who opposes this practice. Both of them defend their own point of view, showing how the issue of the self-immolation of widows in India, as well as the economic and socio-religious reasons behind it, were well known at that time and much debated by Lemierre and other European thinkers of the Enlightenment. After a number of unfortunate events, the drama ends with the arrival of the French troops under General Montalban, who rescues the young lady. Montalban soon realizes that this is the same woman he had fallen in love with earlier, but because he was a foreigner, her parents had strongly opposed their relationship. Montalban finally marries her. And in name of the French king Louis XV, and for the progress of the Indian people, he also puts an end to the cruel custom of »satî«.

The anticlerical Lemierre remarkably portrayed here the character of the Chief Brahmin as an ambitious and cunning man who defends the ritual of »satî« not only out of respect for tradition, but also to protect his own economic interests and to execute his wicked plans to assume control of the city. Once more we have an example of »religio

instrumentum regni«. Though it follows what Bernier had written in the previous century, Lemierre placed less emphasis on the priest's sexual desires, and more on his intelligence and cruelty, depicting him here as a cross between an inquisitor and Moliere's Tartuffe, an embodiment of perfidy and greed. Reflecting the spirit of the era in which it was written, *La Veuve du Malabar* has its main characters discuss and argue about the human condition and the universality of human rights, just as Enlightenment philosophers and theologians in Europe were doing at the time. Compared to the heroes of earlier plays, who were either divine beings (such as Bacchus in *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*) or ancient conquerors (such as Alexander the Great in *Alessandro nell'Indie*), the character of General Montalban in *La Veuve du Malabar* finds himself in a story set in a precise historical context, that is to say, contemporaneous to that in which the author was living. Montalban arrives in India to establish a new order of power and justice (which is both a utopian conviction and a cunning pretext adopted by European countries to justify their colonial aggression in Asia and other continents). Ultimately, he ends up, like Bacchus and Alexander the Great, conquered by the invincible force of love by falling for an exotic Indian beauty.[35]

The manner of debating depicted in *La Veuve du Malabar* reflects the ideas shared at that time by the majority of French thinkers of the Enlightenment, who were themselves engaged in an anticlerical battle in their own country. They sincerely thought it to be their legitimate right to spread their message to the people of any nation, irrespective of the specific belief, in order to free them from all religious superstitions formulated and imposed by a class of corrupted clergy. This is why they strongly criticized the Brahmin priests of India, who enslaved their own people through religion. The Indian widow's dramatic situation and the Chief Brahmin's argument in favor of her self-immolation effectively synthesize the powerful rhetoric of the oppressors and the impotence and vulnerability of the oppressed. The portrayal of the temple priest and the Indian dancer, another dichotomy in addition to that of the Brahmin and the self-sacrificing widow, is quite interesting in this regard. We have already seen that in Bernier's accounts the Brahmins are considered lustful and greedy. As a result, »bayadères« have subsequently been perceived not only as very seductive women, but also as innocent victims of the priests' immorality.

Thus, with its exotic customs and religions, India became a subject of animated intellectual debate among the French thinkers of the Enlightenment. Even Voltaire (1694—1778) became interested in Indian culture after reading a supposed Indian text, titled *Ezourvedam*, in 1760. Revealed to be a falsification in 1782, *Ezourvedam* had been written by Jesuits in India for use in the Christianization of Hindus.[36] Voltaire, however, employed it to attack the Christian clergy in Europe. It was this text that convinced him that India, and not China as he had believed before, was the world's oldest culture and the fountainhead of all ancient religions, including the biblical. He compared contemporary Hindu beliefs with those of the European Christians of his time, judging both to be degenerated forms of a primordial, idealized religion that was later corrupted

by the abuses of the clergy and superstitious practices. According to Voltaire, the clergymen in India as well as in Europe made clever use of their power in order to keep their people subjugated by ignorance and fear. W. Halbfass summed up the controversy aptly:

> In his polemics against Christianity, it was vitally important for Voltaire to have chronological arguments at hand which he could use to counter the arguments of the orthodox believers, who clung to the Biblical chronology and, moreover, felt that if there was anything at all acceptable or of value in Indian religious thought (or that of other Asian peoples), then this must surely be some kind of forgotten or overgrown by-product of the Mosaic-Christian revelation. In any case, however, the fundamental priority of the Bible was to be presupposed. Among others […] Thomas La Grue [Rogerius' translator] argued along these lines for the priority of the Bible revelation. Even the great Newton became involved in the controversy and tried to defend the Biblical chronology. In this debate, Voltaire took a clear, even radical stand: India is the homeland of religion in its oldest and purest form; it is also the cradle of wordly civilization. In a section added to his *Essai sur les moeurs* in 1761 and under the immediate impression of his study of the *Ezourvedam*, he describes India as the country on which all other countries had to rely […] Even during the French Revolution (which Voltaire did not live to see), India was played in this manner against the claim of primacy and exclusivity of the Christian revelation.[37]

Two years after the drama *La Veuve du Malabar* was successfully performed in Paris in 1770, the French philosopher and historian Abbé Guillaume Raynal (1713—1796) published his *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* in Amsterdam. Sharing the ideas of Paul Thiry d'Holbach, Claude Adrien Helvétius, and Denis Diderot, he left the priesthood and became an outspoken anticlerical and anti-colonial thinker. His work reflects his ideology and, although it is a compendium of previous European travelers' accounts, contains a number of interesting hypotheses regarding the origins of the Indian religious institution of temple dancers. Although Raynal never visited India, his writings are still important for us. They mirror the image of the »bayadères« as it was perceived and understood in France by those intellectuals who, like him, had never traveled to Asia, but had become acquainted with, and vigorously debated about those female artists after reading the books describing their activities and functions in temples and at royal courts. Raynal's work represents a further development in the creation of the theatrical character of Indian dancers, whose most relevant features now started to »crystalize« in literature as well as on the stage:

> These dancers join in groups which are sort of »seminaries of voluptuousness«. In such communities, the best ones among them are consecrated to the richest and most frequently attended pagodas. Their duty is to dance in the temple and during the most solemn celebrations, and to serve the pleasure of the Brahmins […] The *bayadères*' dances are mainly pantomimes of love. The structure, the planning, the gait, the movements, the rhythms, the sounds, the cadence of such ballets, everything throbs of passion in the way desires and ardent feelings are expressed […] It is very difficult to resist their charms. The dancers are preferred to the more beautiful women kept secluded in the harem […] The modesty and the natural reserve of the beauties kept distant from society can never compete with the great respect and prestige given in India to the accomplished courtesans.[38]

In 1773 a book was published in Venice by the French author Ange Gaudar, who in defending the French style of dancing and vilifying that of the Venetians sarcastically described the tendency of local dance masters and choreographers to create »exotic« dances featuring »Asian« and »African« characters and costumes in preference to European.[39] Thanks to his polemics we know how dominant in the arts the predilection for things »Oriental« was in Venice at that time:

> Instead of jumping and skipping around on the stage like Chinese, Tartars, Indians, Moors, Africans, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, or Armenians, they [the Venetians] should present the dances of the various nations of our continent. Such ballets would at least be useful for showing the various fashions of the people who live in our countries and would contribute a great deal to making them known, since the costumes always reflect the character [of the people].
>
> *Note.* The majority of the local [Venetian] ballet masters study the dress of Oriental peoples, but they do not know that of our nations, and they would be very embarrassed if one were to ask them for a Breton or any other [European] dance.[40]

Seventeen-seventy-four saw the production in Florence of a »melodramma« titled *Tamas Kouli-Kan nell'Indie*, which was set during the Persian invasion of Moghul India in 1739. The music was by Pietro Guglielmi, the lyrics by Vittorio Amedeo Cigna-Santi, and the choreography by Antoine Bonaventure Pitrot. Two dances are indicated in the libretto: the first titled *Kouli-Kan*, and the second *Orfeo e Euridice,* a Greek mythological theme popular at the time. Even though it can be assumed that the first dance had an Indian flavor, no information exists concerning it. 22 years later, in 1796, another »melodramma«, titled *Gl'Indiani* (The Indians), was staged at the Teatro Venier in Venice. The libretto was by Mattia Botturini, the music by Sebastiano Nasolini. and the choreography of the first of the two »balli« performed during the intermission by the famous dancer Onorato Viganò. (Viganò's »ballo«, *La morte d'Ettore* [Hector's Death], obviously did not adher to the Indian orientation of the drama.) The story of this drama takes place in India at the royal courts of Delhi and Golconda. It tells of the loves and adventures of quite a number of characters whose names and deeds are borrowed and concocted from previous plays as well as actual historical persons. The characters include Alinda, based on the heroine of Sedaine's *Aline, Reine de Golconde*; Erissena, on one of the main female characters in Metastasio's *Alessandro nell'Indie*; and Oranzbeb on Auragzeb, the abovementioned Moghul emperor.

In 1774, Louis XVI sent the French naturalist Pierre Sonnerat (1747?—1814) on a scientific mission to Asia. Back in Paris, he published a book in 1782, the first part of which included a description of Indian dancers. His work was soon translated into German and English, and found distribution throughout Europe. Although it did not add much to previous accounts, it inspired a large number of authors, including the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In France, on the other hand, its reception was more controversial:

> Surat is famous for the *bayadères*, whose actual designation is *dévédassi*: the term *bayadères*, as we call them, derives from *ballaideras*, which is Portuguese for »women dancers«. They are

> consecrated to honor the gods, and follow them during the processions, and dance and sing before their images. A tradesman usually dedicates the youngest of his daughters to this profession, sending her to the pagoda before she comes of age. Such girls are taken care of by the dance and music masters: the Brahmins cultivate their youth and steal their first fruits; after that they become public women […] They dance and sing to the sound of the *tal* and *matalam*, which animate them, make them move, and regulate the rhythm of their steps. The *tal* is an instrument consisting of two types of cymbals, the first is made of pewter, the other of copper […] The *matalam* is a drum suspended by a cloth worn around the neck; it is played by both hands simultaneously, one on each side […] The movements of their eyes, just half-open, and the way they slightly bend their bodies and sweeten the sounds of their voices, promise the greatest voluptuousness […] The *bayadères* devote great care to their appearance and the way they adorn themselves when they accept an invitation: they anoint themselves with parfums, cover themselves completely with jewels, and wear precious clothes made of brocades woven with golden and silver thread.[41]

Seductive Dancer, Faithful Lover, and Redeemed Courtesan: Goethe's Bajadere

In 1789, the same year as the French Revolution, the Sanskrit and Prakrit drama *Sâkuntalâ* by Kâlidâsa was translated into English by Sir William Jones. It was soon published in other European languages and served to make people aware of the rich heritage of ancient Indian dramaturgy. A German version, translated from the English by Georg Forster, appeared in 1791. The lyrics made a great impression on the great German poet Goethe. The character of the young heroine, Sâkuntalâ, as well as the plot and the aesthetics of Indian drama soon found admirers among early Romantic writers and artists. They perceived these as new symbols of poetic freedom, more appropriate to their sensitivities and tastes than the heavy and bombastic formalism of Classicism, which still dominated the arts and literature in Europe at that time.[42] In 1797, Goethe, after reading Kâlidâsa's drama and the works of Abraham Rogerius[43] and Pierre Sonnerat, wrote the ballade *Der Gott und die Bajadere*: *Indische Legende* (The God and the Bayadère: Indian Legend) in only three days, from the 7—9 June. The poem was published the following year in Schiller's *Musenalmanach*. Goethe took the term »bayadère« from Sonnerat's book and Germanized it to »bajadere«.

The story, based on Rogerius, tells of the descent to earth of the god Mahadeo (Sanskrit: »Mahadeva«, Great God), who is to live as a human being in order to test the hearts of the people. Mahadeo meets a young »bajadere« and spends the entire night with her. The next morning she finds him dead in her arms. Without hesitation she decides to sacrifice herself along with his body. When the procession of priests and people brings the corpse to be burned, the distraught »bajadere« tries to take her place on the pyre. However the priests stop her, saying that she is just a »bajadere« and, not being his legitimate wife, has no right to commit »satî«. But the girl, adamant, jumps into the fire. Miraculously, her divine lover, who was just pretending to be dead, arises from the flames and, taking her in his arms, brings the »bajadere« with him to the gods.

This beautiful ballade ends with a moral:

> Repentant sinners are pleasing to the god;
> immortals lift lost children
> to heaven on flaming arms.[44]

It is quite obvious that behind the story of the Indian courtesan is that of the »repentant« and »redeemed« Magdalene.[45] Perhaps a major difference here is that in India at that time courtesans were not considered »sinners« who required redemption or forgiveness. Although we do at times find sarcastic comments concerning them in both Sanskrit and vernacular literature, they were not targets of moral judgement and condemnation, as is obvious from the words of the Brahmin priest quoted by Rogerius. On the contrary, due to their proficiency in the arts and poetry, their profession was considered prestigious and necessary for the maintenance of the socio-religious balance in this world. This is why courtesans were patronized and highly respected by kings, scholars, and local political and religious authorities, as documented by Indian and European sources.[46]

In his ballade, Goethe celebrates the redemptive power of true love, conceived as absolute devotion and surrender to the beloved one. The young courtesan, an expert in the secrets of seduction and eroticism, a practitioner of love as an art and a profession, is ultimately the one who, as a faithful Indian wife, does not hesitate to follow her lover into the fire after just one night. Like Rogerius, Goethe employs the figure of the courtesan as an example of the most sincere affection. Moreover, his association of the Indian dancer with the self-immolating Indian widow (»satî«) marks the birth of the »bajadere« as a true Romantic dramatic heroine. The ballade was soon set into music by Carl Friedrich Zelter (1798), followed by settings by Franz Schubert (1815) and many others.[47] Nevertheless, it was to take a few more years before Goethe's heroine made her first appearence on the European stage as the main character in a number of operas and ballets.[48] The charming and devoted Indian dancer was to win the hearts of artists, poets, and ordinary audiences throughout the 19th century. But that is another long and fascinating chapter.

Conclusion

Since the end of the 13th century, Indian dancers have attracted the attention of European travelers in Asia. Viewing them mainly as »seductive courtesans«, »skilled artists«, and »priestesses of voluptuousness« in temples and at royal courts, the travelers inspired poets, musicians, and choreographers in their home countries. A number of poems, plays, operas, and ballets informed the theatrical character of the »Indian dancer«, commonly known as »bayadère«. The French word »bayadère« comes from the 16th-century Portuguese term »baylhadeira«, meaning »female dancer«, and entered literary French in the 17th century via translations of the accounts of Dutch travelers.

Since then the term has been adopted by other European languages and used to identify all types of Indian dancers as well as their theatrical characters on the Western stage.

Originally a mere »exotic« curiosity alongside nymphs, Arcadian shepherds, etc., »Indian dancers« became part of the cortege of Bacchus, the divine »alter ego« of the French king Louis XIV, whose merchants were just then trying to expand their influence in India. In Europe, with increasing knowledge of Indian culture and religion, Indian women, particularly dancers and widows, soon also became the subject of animated debates in philosophical circles of the Enlightenment, where they were perceived mainly as victims of religious superstitions. On the stage, »Indian dancers« were continually present during the entire 18th century in every play on an Indian topic, but still as undifferentiated roles played by members of the »corps de ballet«. Nevertheless, in some dramas we find the first examples Indian female characters in leading roles, mirroring contemporary philosophical debates dealing with anticlericalism, colonialism, and the universality of human rights. Only at the end of the 18th century did different aspects of the Indian woman as dancer, courtesan, and devoted lover coalesce, establishing her major theatrical features on the European stage. Finally, immortalized by the famous ballade *Der Gott und die Bajadere* by the German poet Goethe in 1797, the »bayadère« soon became one of the first tragic Romantic heroines.

Notes

1 I would like to thank my Indian dance masters, the late »nattuvanâr« V. S. Muthuswamy Pillai and Kelucharan Mohapatra, the late »devadâsî« Pattammal and Nagamma, and the late »rajadâsî« Venkatalakshamma, who helped me to learn and appreciate the beauty of their art. I am also very grateful to Joep Bor (University of Leiden), Saskia Kersenboom (University of Amsterdam), Joan L. Erdman (University of Chicago), Amrit Srinivasan (IIT, New Delhi), James Kippen (University of Toronto), Françoise Delvoye (Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris), Laura Piretti (University of Bologna), Nicola Savarese (University of Rome 3), Philippe Bruguière (Cité de la Musique, Paris), and Veronique Bouilleur and Jackie Assayag (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris). I also wish to thank Navtej Johar Singh (dance scholar and choreographer, New Delhi) and the staffs of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; Bibliothèque et Musée de l'Opéra, Paris; Médiathèque Cité de la Musique, Paris; Bibliothèque Maison d'Asie, Paris; Bibliothèque Maison de Sciences de l'Homme, Paris; Bibliothèque Musée de l'Homme, Paris; Musée Dobrée, Nantes; Médiathèque Centre National de la Danse, Pantin; Biblioteca »Livia Simoni« Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan; Biblioteca Nazionale, Rome; Biblioteca e Raccolta Teatrale del Burcardo, Rome; Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome; Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale »Giuseppe Tucci«, Rome; Biblioteca Marciana,Venice.

2 GOETHE: *Sämtliche Werke,* Bd 4.1, p. 872—874.

3 »Devadâsî«: from the Sanskrit words »deva«, »deity«, and »dâsî«, »female attendant, servant«, »the deity attendant«. Generic term denoting a community of temple women and courtesans with various ritualistic and artistic tasks both in the Indian shrines and royal courts. »Rajadâsî« (the king's attendants) were generally called court dancers. See SRINIVASAN: *The Hindu Temple-Dancer*; APFFEL-MARGLIN: *Wives of the God-King*; KERSENBOOM-STORY: *Nityasumangali*; LEUCCI: *La tradition des Devadâsî*; LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères.*

4 In an recent article I suggest that the ivory Indian statuette found at Pompeii (first century C.E.) portrays a young dancer (LEUCCI: *Nartakî*). If my hypothesis is correct, this artefact can be

considered the first iconographic image of an Indian dancer found so far in Europe. See also *Ancient Rome and India* [CIMINO].

5 LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 20—25.

6 See BOR / VAN DER MEER: *De roep van de kokila*; BOR: *The Voice of the Sarangi*; BOUCHON: *L'image de l'Inde*, pp. 69-90, LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*.

7 The term »balhadera« was introduced to France in the French translation of the book *Histoire de la navigation* by the 16th-century Dutch traveler Jan Huygen van Linschoten.

8 SAVARESE: *Teatro e spettacolo*, pp. xxiiif.

9 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*.

10 See ibid., pp. 32—36.

11 A mixture of »betel« nuts, spices, leaves and other aromatic ingredients which is chewed by Indians.

12 SEWELL: *The Vijayanagar Empire*, pp. 241f., 264, 270, and 289.

13 Communities of people and professions belonging to low-caste groups within the Hindu socio-religious hierarchy.

14 »Dewendra«: from Sanskrit »Deva« (gods) and »Indra« (the god Indra; thought to be the king of the gods).

15 ROGERIUS: *Le Théâtre de l'Idolatrie*, pp. 219—221 (my translation).

16 QUINAULT/ LULLY: *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* (1739), p. 71 (my translation).

17 Ibid., p. 93 (my translation).

18 Ibid., p. 94 (my translation).

19 See LEUCCI: *Between Seduction and Redemption*.

20 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 53—55.

21 TAVERNIER: *Travels in India*, vol. I, p. 194.

22 BERNIER: *Voyages de François Bernier*, pp. 104—106 (my translation).

23 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 51—53.

24 Niccolao Manuzzi, venetian. Mogur India 1653—1708. Storia do Mogur. Übers. von WILLIAM IRVINE. New Delhi 1989, pp. 312—314.

25 *Storia del Mogol* [FALCHETTA], vol. I, p. 28 (my translation).

26 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 57—61.

27 RAMEAU: *Les Indes galantes* (2003), p. 121 (my translation). See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 71—73.

28 PETR: *L'Inde des romans*, p. 139.

29 OBERKIRCH: *Mémoires de la Baronne d'Oberkirch*, vol. 1, p. 206 (my translation). See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 73—75.

30 *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle* [LAROUSSE], vol. 2, p. 407 (my translation).

31 See LEUCCI: *La tradition des Devadâsî*, and LEUCCI: *Between Seduction and Redemption*.

32 See PIRETTI SANTANGELO: *Satî*; WEINBERGER-THOMAS: *Cendre d'immortalité*.

33 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 62—71.

34 See ASSAYAG: *L'Inde fabouleuse*, pp. 43—47; LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 75—81.

35 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 75—81, and LEUCCI: *Between Seduction and Redemption*.

36 On this topic, see *L'Inde philosophique* [MURR]; and HALBFASS: *India and Europe*, p. 46.

37 HALBFASS: *India and Europe*, p. 57f.

38 *L'anticolonialisme au XVIIIe siècle* [ESQUER], pp. 77—80 (my translation). See also LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 81—85; and LEUCCI: *Between Seduction and Redemption*.

39 See *Venise et l'Orient: 828—1797* [CARBONI].

40 GOUDAR: *De Venise*, p. 82 (my translation). See GOUDAR: *Osservazioni*; LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 68f.

41 SONNERAT: *Voyage aux Indes Orientales*, pp. 80f. (my translation). See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 90—92.

42 See SAVARESE: *Teatro e spettacolo*, pp. 145—238; THAPAR: *Sakuntalâ*.

43 Rogerius' book was translated into German from the original Dutch in Nuremberg in 1663. See HALBFASS: *India and Europe*, p. 46.

44 GOETHE: *Sämtliche Werke,* Bd 4.1, p. 874: »Es freut sich die Gottheit der reuigen Sünder; / Unsterbliche heben verlorene Kinder / Mit feurigen Armen zum Himmel empor.«

45 CROCE: *Goethe con una scelta.*

46 See SRINIVASAN: *The Hindu Temple-Dancer*; APFFEL-MARGLIN: *Wives of the God-King*; KERSENBOOM-STORY: *Nityasumangali*; LEUCCI: *Tândava e Lâsya*; LEUCCI: *La tradition des Devadâsî*; LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, LEUCCI: *Nartakî*; and LEUCCI: *Between Seduction and Redemption*.

47 *Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale* [BASSO], vol. I, p. 62.

48 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères*, pp. 95—99.