

# ENCYCLOPÆDIA IRANICA

EDITED BY

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Center for Iranian Studies  
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Volume VI

FASCICLE 4

**COTTON II—ČŪB-BĀZI**



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**CŪB-BĀZĪ** ("stick game": also *raqs-e cūb* "stick dance"), a category of folk dance found all over Persia (Hamada) and distinguished from other types of folk dance by the fact that the dancers carry sticks, which they strike together. Some writers have suggested that these dances may all have originated in stylized combat (Al-Faruqi); they may also be related to the sword dances or *jangī* dances described by Medjid Rezvani (pp. 189-90).

There are two types of *cūb-bāzī* in Persia. The first seems more directly related to stylized combat; although some of the movements are rhythmic, no particular pattern is followed in hitting the sticks. It is danced only by men, in pairs before an audience. This form of *cūb-bāzī* is found primarily among the tribes of southwestern Persia, the Lor (Baḳtīārī, etc.) and Qašqā'ī (Mobaššerī, p. 71; Beck; Friend, unpublished field notes, 1975; Gorguinpour, personal communication, 1987). Because it is competitive, aggressive, and dangerous only experienced dancers perform it; unskilled dancers are likely to receive broken hands and legs (Enjavī, I, pp. 75-76). In the Qašqā'ī version the two men dance in time to a musical accompaniment (usually played on the *karnā* and *naqqāra*). Each assumes a distinct role, one as the attacker, the other as the defender. The attacker, wielding a short, thin stick, dances around the defender, who holds a long pole upright. After circling his opponent for some time the attacker suddenly strikes at his legs with the stick. The defender tries to ward off the blow, which must be aimed below the waist, with the pole. The attacker has one chance to strike; whether he hits or misses, he must then change places with the defender. Usually, once each of the pair has had the chance to play both roles, either a new attacker comes in, or both players leave, and a new pair enters the game together. A khan may be the attacker but usually does not defend, except against one of equal rank; a servant or other lower-

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class man would replace the khan in the role of defender. The game can become fairly heated when it is played at a large gathering or between members of different tribes (Gorguinpour, personal communication, 1993). The *čub-bāzī* is thus both a dance and a show of skill and bravery; participants are judged by their abilities in the combat aspect, as well as by their grace in executing the dance movements (Gorguinpour, personal communication, 1987). The dance is performed in similar fashion by the Baḳtīārīs, among whom it is also known as *tarka-bāzī* "twig dance" (Mobaššerī, p. 71; Kelkī, pp. 39-40). Dances of this kind typically form part of the wedding celebration. In some regions they are also included in celebrations connected with events in the calendar cycle. For example, in Arāk, southwest of Qom, the *čub-bāzī* is part of the *nāqālī* ritual performed on the fortieth day of winter (10 Bahman/30 January). Groups of men called *nāqālī* go from house to house and enact certain rituals that are believed to bring fertility and good fortune; as they enter the courtyard of each home they begin the rituals with the *čub-bāzī*, accompanied by music on the *sornā* (clarion) and *dohol* (drum; Enjavī, I, pp. 73-77).

The second type of *čub-bāzī* is less an improvised competition than a form of social recreation; the movements of the dancers and the striking of the sticks follow definite rhythmic patterns. It can be danced in pairs (as in Bojnūrd; Hamada) or in a circle (as among the Baluch; Mitchell Allen, unpublished field notes, 1974; idem, personal communication, 1987) and may include women, as well as men. In this type each dancer carries a stick approximately 18 inches long and executes a basic step, striking the sticks of the other dancers, as well as his own, while moving to the rhythm of the music. Although defined patterns of movement and rhythm are followed, there is room for individual improvisation within that framework (Hamada, pp. 111-12; Allen, field notes, 1974). Similar dances are included in celebrations of events in the calendar, for example, the old ritual of *qīšdān čīkām* (lit. "I have come out of winter") as performed in Marand in Azerbaijan. This ritual heralds or brings about the end of winter in Esfand (late February and early March), just as the weather begins to warm. It includes performance of the *čub-bāzī* in which one man dances with two sticks, striking them together to the rhythmic accompaniment of the *daf* (q.v.; Enjavī, II, pp. 20-22).

The first type of *čub-bāzī* has analogies in the *taḥtīb* (stick combat) dance of Upper Egypt (Aisha Ali, personal communication, 1987). For the second type the closest parallels are in Central Asia and Afghanistan (Schuyler), Pakistan (Maswan), and India (Banwari; Leona Wood, personal communication, 1987). In fact, similar dances can be found all over the world (see, e.g., Sachs, pp. 122-23, who defines two basic types of stick dance by whether each dancer carries one stick or two, the latter type being considered the older).

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