

Batsheva de Rothschild - Using Big Money for Modern Dance

Giora Manor

During the last year of his life Giora Manor worked on a book about people who did not dance themselves but influenced dance in the 20th century. We were close friends. He was my dance critic during my dancing days and later my colleague in founding and editing the dance magazine "Dance in Israel". Before his death he talked to me enthusiastically about his forthcoming book. He died before he could finish the book. I am happy to publish the chapter about Batsheva de Rothschild. The chapter is published as it was written. Ruth Eshel

The Rothschilds are an old and venerable Jewish family of bankers who began building their empire from their home base in Frankfurt - the city where most of the big German banks have their headquarters today. Using their sons who had married and moved to various European capitals, they built up the local and international branches of the House of Rothschild, one of the oldest financial establishments in Europe. The Rothschilds lent huge sums to kings and emperors and were involved in financing many large enterprises, including the building of the Suez Canal.

Salomon-Mayer, who founded the Viennese branch, became a close friend of Prince Metternich and financed the building of the first railway line of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1822 he was granted a title for his help to the government of the monarchy and became "de Rothschild."

In 1845 Edmond de Rothschild was born to the Paris branch of the family. He became the chief benefactor of Jews who came to settle in Palestine, at that time (the second half of the 19th century) a province of the Ottoman Empire. These Jews were escaping from the increasing anti-Semitic pogroms of Eastern Europe. Edmond de Rothschild founded the wineries at Ziron Yaakov in the north and Rison Le Zion, south of Jaffa. Both wine cellars are prospering and active still. (All this is not at all surprising if one remembers that in France today "Chateau Mouton de Rothschild" is one of the most prestigious wine labels.) He donated money to many "good causes"; and among the Jews his sobriquet was "the Well-Known Benefactor".

What has all this family lore of the de Rothschilds to do with the account of those who influenced the development of dance in the 20th century? In 1916 a daughter was born to the Paris branch of the family, named Bethsabée. The not very common

Hebrew name (Batsheva in the original Hebrew version) was the name of one of King David's wives. She became his wife after he observed her bathing naked one day on a roof close to his palace. Her unfortunate husband was the general Uriah, one of the commanders of King David's army. Coveting his young wife, King David sent Uriah to war, so that the officer would be killed in battle and the king could then marry his beautiful young widow. Undoubtedly not a very nice story.

Bethsabée grew up and wanted to study biology at the Sorbonne. She obtained a degree, but her heart belonged to the visual arts, especially to artistic dance. Hitler's conquest of France in 1940 made necessary the Rothschilds' last-minute flight and brought Batsheva to New York. There she enrolled as a private student at the studio of Martha Graham in the early 1940s.

She certainly was no brilliant pupil of modern dance. She was a very thin girl, no great beauty; and would dress, despite her wealth, in cheap dresses bought on New York's 14th Street for a few dollars. Robert Cohan, one of Graham's leading dancers, had been in the services during the War; and after demobilization, returned to the Graham Company as a soloist and resumed teaching at the school attached to the company. He describes his meeting with Batsheva de Rothschild: "As I came out of the boys' dressing room after a class, I noticed one of the girls emerging from the ladies' dressing room. What made me look closer was not her figure but rather a huge, beautiful jade necklace, which covered her chest. She noticed my interest and said, 'This jade is one of the few things I managed to save from our house in Paris when Hitler conquered France...' And I realized, this girl was not just any old Rothschild, but belonged to THE Rothschilds..."

In the 1940s and 1950s, Graham was becoming the central power in the new dance movement in the USA; but her name was still known only among the small group of dancers, mainly in New York (and to a certain extent in California), who were experimenting with dance forms other than classical ballet. Even great choreographers like Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman or Jose Limon would be able to present their works in New York just once a year, in a "season" lasting a week or two. Nobody had funds for anything on a bigger scale.

One year in the late 1940s, whoever was in charge of Graham's finances and business affairs, realized that there would not be enough money to hire a theatre and all the necessary lighting and sound equipment for the forthcoming New-York season. The

rumors about the possible cancellation of the annual New York season reached the dressing rooms and caused much concern among the dancers and the students.

One of the students, Bethsabée de Rothschild, decided to do something about the situation. She asked Martha how much money would be needed to hold the New York engagement. She told her. Batsheva simply took out her checkbook and wrote a cheque for the sum needed. She was, after all, "one of the real Rothschilds"...

This act of generosity, proving her deep interest in modern dance and in Graham's revolutionary new style, brought them together. The relations between them continued to develop after that. De Rothschild offered to underwrite the first large-scale foreign tour the Graham Company was to undertake in 1951. As a sort of preparation for the European public - which was totally ignorant of American modern dance - B. de Rothschild wrote and published a book entitled "La Danse Artistique aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique" in 1949. It was really a brief essay illustrated with many black and white photographs.

Rothschild undertook to finance the spring and summer seasons in Paris and London. But on the day of her first performance in Paris, Martha injured her knee badly. At that time, Martha danced all the main roles in her works herself. There were no understudies until she began reluctantly to pass some of her own roles to younger dancers in her company in the 1960s. Therefore, as a result of her injury, the entire tour had to be cancelled.

Batsheva picked up all the bills resulting from this disaster, including all Graham's medical expenses; and reimbursed the impresarios who had spent all the money needed to prepare such a tour. This was a test of loyalty perhaps only a real Rothschild could pass.

In 1956, the film director Nathan Kroll approached Graham with a project. In the film she was to talk about her art and some segments of her best creations were to be incorporated in the final cut. This quite straightforward plan met, as was to be expected, with all kinds of objections by Martha. Finally with cunning, persistence and luck the shooting took place. The result is the perhaps the best Graham film, entitled "A Dancer's World". The recordings of her works "Appalachian Spring" (funded by "Channel Thirteen") and "Night Journey" was made (according to Agnes de Mille, "Martha", p. 342) with the financial help of de Rothschild.

De Mille also writes that after recording most of the film, "Kroll was left with a magnificent remnant. Lee [Leatherman, Graham's company manager] and Craig were helpless. They kept repeating: "She [Martha] says she won't; she says she can't possibly." Finally she relented. There was no more money left for concluding the production. "So Kroll went to Bethsabée de Rothschild and asked her to put up the money to finish the film." [ibid p.343]. The final version of the film was dedicated: "For Bethsabée de Rothschild" [Leroy Leatherman: "Martha Graham", Faber and Faber, 1961-1962]

When in the 1950s the State Department realized that the arts - especially the non-verbal ones - could serve as a boost for the relations between the U.S.A. and the rest of the world (which required quick mending after what had happened to American prestige due to the disastrous Korean War), the possibility of dispatching American artists abroad, especially to Asia became a practical project. The bureaucratic shaping of this project and the long deliberations which preceded it are described in "Dance for Export - Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War" by Naima Prevotz (Wesleyan University Press, 1998)

Strange as it may seem, the first dance company to go abroad on a U.S. government financed tour was that of Martha Graham. In the meantime, Bethsabée had become a close friend of Martha and she was asked to join the tour to, Asia. The tour was to take the company to many countries in South East Asia, and end up in Israel. One may suppose that adding Israel (at that time no close ally of the USA) to the tour had something to do with de Rothschild.

As the tour was an official one, financed and organized by the State Department, everyone had to have a "job". So Bethsabée appears in the program with the title of "wardrobe mistress". Being a very conscientious person, on the eve of their first performance abroad Bethsabée took hold of an ironing board and a hot iron and proceeded to ruin a new pair of lycra tights. Martha tactfully told her that her responsibilities should be of a rather more administrative sort, leaving the actual handling of the costumes to the staff.

As Robert Cohan, one of the star dancers in the Graham Company tells the story: "At each airport we would disembark at, we were met by a posse of press photographers. And Martha would always present Bethsabée as Ms. De Rothschild. The reporters would look at Bethsabée for two seconds and concentrate on Martha again. But when we finally landed at the Tel Aviv airport at Lod, when they realized they were in front of a genuine Rothschild the cameras kept clicking. Perhaps Bethsabée also registered the difference. She realized that her name was a name to conjure with in Israel..."

Anyhow, she decided to take up residence in Israel, bought a flat in Tel Aviv and soon came to live there.

Probably no one, neither she herself nor the dance artists of Israel, realized what a decisive moment that was for the future development of dance in the Jewish State.

Connecting Israeli Dance to New York

When Batsheva de Rothschild "discovered" Israel for herself at the end of her Asian tour with Martha Graham, it wasn't her first visit to the country. But her attitude had changed. She settled in Tel Aviv, and being a practical person she looked for possible options and actions which would contribute to the art of dance in Israel.

In the mid-fifties, Israeli dance was in a difficult situation. It was a time of passing the torch from one generation to the next. In

1919, the first boat from Odessa arrived at the Jaffa harbor with new immigrants to Eretz Israel. It brought several artists and writers who would become central personalities in the new Jewish culture that would grow and develop in Palestine in the 1920s. Among them was Baruch Agadati, who became that culture's first modern dancer. Being first of all a painter, he brought with him the influence of modern Russian abstract painting and early expressionism. One should keep in mind that in Russia, avant-garde theatre, dance and, of course, music, had flourished before World War One and continued to flourish until all these new forms were banished when Stalin took power after the demise of Lenin in 1924.

Agadati was the first but not the only dancer to immigrate to Palestine under British rule. The Jewish population was tiny - no more than 50,000-60,000 inhabitants. The Arab-Palestinian population had no theatrical dance tradition at all. But their ethnic dance did to a certain degree influence some of the Jewish modern dance artists who came to live in the land during the 1920s and 1930s. Most of them came from Austria, Germany and other Middle European countries, and brought with them European Modern Dance, then sometimes called "German Dance" for lack of a better name. Though some classical ballet teachers arrived, ballet was rejected by most of the Jewish immigrants as "reactionary", middle-class and inappropriate for a society of pioneers.

The leader of the modern dance artists in the country was the Viennese dancer, choreographer and teacher Gertrud Kraus (1903-1977). She came to perform as a guest artist in 1930 and 1932, and finally settled in Tel Aviv in 1936, when she realized that the Nazi regime was a threat to the lives of all European Jews. She founded a studio of her own and performed her remarkable dance creations with a group of her students. Several times the creations were also performed at concerts of the Palestine Orchestra, founded by Bronislaw Huberman and conducted by the great conductors of the time, such as Arturo Toscanini.

After the Second World War ended and dance companies from abroad were able to tour the country again, the isolation ended. The first information about American Modern Dance filtered through. The name Martha Graham did not mean much yet to the modern dancers in Israel. Then the first Graham-trained dancers arrived, such as Rachel Emanuel, Rena Gluck and Rina Shacham. The attitude they represented was radically different from that of Kraus and her contemporaries. What they brought from New York was, first of all, a high regard for technique, and the systematic technical approach of Graham, Humphrey and their contemporaries.

Gertrud Kraus, being a super-sensitive and intelligent artist, felt (long before her dancers realized what was happening in the world) that what she had built on - the Central European expressionist modern dance that had developed from von Laban, Mary Wigman and their colleagues in the 1920s - was suddenly "old fashioned", passed, yesterday's modern dance.

The fundamental difference between European modern dance and what had developed in the 1940s in the U.S.A. was the basic

attitude to dance technique. The European -and for that matter, Israeli - dancers, who had all been educated by artists who grew up in Europe, had no dance technique as such. They created their dances from within their soul, from their feelings, instinctively. Their muscles and joints had to do what their feelings demanded and their sense of artistic form required. In America, on the other hand, modern dancers had tried to develop movement technique and enhance the technical, systematic virtuosity and prowess of the dancers.

Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey had each developed a teaching method, a syllabus suiting their style of dance. Humphrey using her "fall and recovery" principle and Graham her "contraction and release", mainly of the pelvis, which became her trade mark.

In the 1950s Israeli dance was in the doldrums. The first generation of modern dancers were becoming too old to perform themselves; and among their dancers and students were very few real choreographers of outstanding creative talent. De Rothschild quickly realized that two things would be needed to revitalize modern dance creation in Israel: first, a budget to finance choreographic experimentation; and second, to send young dancers to study in the U.S.A., mainly at the Julliard School and the Martha Graham School in New York. Being a practical person, she wasted no time and created a foundation to give bursaries for study abroad as well as for financing the production of experimental work in Israel. Many of the beneficiaries of this fund later became the dancers of the Batsheva Dance Company, in the early 1960s.

Founding the Batsheva Dance Company

When de Rothschild made her decision to found her own dance company in Tel Aviv, she did it properly. Until then, all dance companies in Israel were ad hoc ensembles of students, with no real salaries, performing sporadically and mainly presenting the choreographic works of their teachers. The only exceptions were Sara Levi's Inbal Dance Theatre, founded in 1951; and The Lyric Theatre, which was run by Anna Sokolow, who used to come every summer and teach. In 1962 Sokolow gathered together the best dancers available, among them some who had studied in New York - mostly on grants from de Rothschild's foundation.

Sokolow was among the three or four top creators of new dance in the USA, and her group offered the dancers an opportunity to perform high quality modern American dance. The group showed only Sokolow's own works and only in the summer months, when she was free to travel without interrupting her teaching in New York. The dancers had no real remuneration from the Lyric Theatre, and to pay the rent they appeared mainly as dancers in the musicals produced by the impresario Giora Godik, such as *My Fair Lady* and *The King and I*. This was their bread-and-butter; Sokolow's works, their artistic challenge and nourishment.

De Rothschild proceeded systematically. She persuaded Graham to become the artistic head of the planned new company, and

to send some of her leading dancers to Tel Aviv to adjudicate at the auditions held in Tel Aviv in 1963. The new company, for the first time in Israel, was to be a permanent one, with modest but guaranteed salaries, a proper technical staff, an artistic director and an administrative manager. In its program notes, de Rothschild was to be listed as "producer".

Most of the group chosen by the Graham representatives and by Martha Graham herself, were young Israeli dancers who had received bursaries and grants from Batsheva's foundation and had returned to Israel after concluding their studies in New York. In addition, there were other Israeli youngsters, who had danced with folk dance groups and decided to become professional artists. All of 1963 was dedicated to training the dancers chosen and reaching them the Graham repertory which was to become the basis of the Batsheva Dance Company. It seemed a strange decision to name the new company "Batsheva", after the first name of its founder and benefactor, as if it were a hairdresser's salon or a grocery store. But today the name Batsheva is known worldwide. But the most intriguing question is: why was Martha Graham willing to spend so much energy and time in Israel, a little country of the Middle East, though she herself isn't even Jewish?

She was not only a close friend of Batsheva, but she owed her a great deal, and felt a deep obligation towards her benefactress. Batsheva had not only helped to finance her "seasons" in New York. In fact, the house in which Martha lived in New York had been purchased by de Rothschild for that purpose, as Agnes de Mille writes in her biography of Graham. (Agnes de Mille: Martha, 1991) They had become close friends, or perhaps Batsheva the ardent admirer and Martha the "idol". Two additional aspects underpinned this symbiotic relationship: Batsheva always was attracted to women and though Martha was supported by several wealthy people throughout her life, she had never enjoyed the help of such a steady and generous Meacenas.

Becoming the artistic director of the Israeli company was Martha's way of repaying her debt. A decade later, when Batsheva had founded her second dance company in Tel Aviv, the Bat-Dor Company (about which more later), she entreated Martha to allow her to stage her Circe, and was willing to pay full royalties. It wasn't easy for Martha to refuse, but she did not give her consent. As I was told by one of the people involved in this unsuccessful negotiation, Martha said that the Bat-Dor dancers would be unable to do justice to her choreography, and she felt she had already paid what she owed.

Among the artists who came to Tel Aviv in 1963 were Robert Cohan. Linda Hodes, Ethel Winters and others who continued their work with the Batsheva Company for years to come, until 1975, when the rights to perform the Graham canon were withdrawn.

Linda Hodes settled in Israel after marrying Ehud Ben David, and in the early 1970's became the artistic co-director of the company, together with Kaj (Sjelling) Lothman. Robert Cohan was for many years artistic adviser to Batsheva.

A New Era in Israeli Modern Dance

In November 1964, a year after de Rothschild's company started its activities, a series of performances took place at the Habima National Theatre in Tel Aviv. The whole program consisted of works by Martha Graham and creators who had danced in her company. It was a splendid new beginning for modern dance in Israel, after a low ebb which lasted about 15 years. Batsheva's inaugural program was as follows:

Daughters of the Garden, chor.: Donald McKayle; M,: Ernest Bloch; Set: Araon Adar

The Pass , chor.: Robert Cohan; m.: Eugene Lester

Herodiade, chor.: Martha Graham; m.: Paul Hindemith; set: Isamu Noguchi; c.: Martha Graham; 1.: Jean Rosenthal

Celebrants, chor.: Robert Cohan; m.: Carlos Surinach: set: Arnon Adar

Park, chor.: Robert Cohan; Eugene Lester; set: Walter Martin; c.: Arnon Adar

The Learning Process, chor. : Martha Graham; m.: Halim El-Dabh

Errand Into the Maze, chor: Martha Graham; m.: Gian Carlo Menotti; set: Isamu Noguchi

Fun and Fancy, chor.: Ethel Winter; m.: Paul Bowls; set: Arnon Adar

The reaction of the audience and the press was enthusiastic. The Israeli public had already seen Graham's work danced by the original company, so it was a real gamble to perform these works, some of them Martha's masterpieces, by the mainly inexperienced Israeli dancers. Among the women there were already established dancers, such as Rena Gluck and Rina Schoenfeld; but some of the men in the young company had come from folk dance groups and hardly anyone had studied in New York.

A very positive aspect, a result of de Rothschild's ideas, was the commissioning of "native" Israeli designers, light designers, and later also Israeli composers. Some of these were later asked by Graham to work for her in future creations for her company in New York and became her steady collaborators and personal friends. Among them were sculptor Dani Karavan and musician Mordecai Seter.

Formally, Martha was Artistic Director of the Batsheva Company for only a few months. The artistic leadership was offered to Robert Cohan. But what de Rothschild was prepared to pay him was an "Israeli size" salary, which by American standards was unacceptable to him. Finally, Jane Dudley, a former Graham dancer, took over as Artistic Director, but resigned after one season.

What was most surprising was the meeting of Graham's way of moving as at that time already codified in her "method" and the typical Israeli rough energy, directness and lack of discipline, which drove the visiting choreographers crazy but added a "savage" tangy taste to the works. As Jerome Robbins once said to me in an interview when he came to work with Batsheva on his

Moves in 1969, "Usually the companies I work with are terrified of me; not the Batsheva dancers, of whom I am afraid..."

Errand Into the Maze is one of Graham's "Greek" dances, a duet from 1947 based on the Theseus situation. But the one having to face the Minotaur in his labyrinth is a female figure, danced originally by Graham herself. It is, really about conquering one's inner fears. The Batsheva version had Rina Schoenfeld, who is tall and slim, an elegant virtuoso type in the female role, quite different from the intense, smaller figure of Graham. The Minotaur, a menacing bull, was danced by Moshe Efrati, a swarthy, rather violent dancer, a type of dancer completely absent from Graham's company. The contrast between the tall slender Rina and the dark-haired, menacing Minotaur added an exciting new flavor to this powerful work in its Batsheva version.

A real test of this came several years later, when in 1970 and again in 1972 Batsheva went on tour and had the chuzpah to perform her works in New York, at the City Center, so to speak on Graham's home turf. The New York dance critics were enthusiastic. Not one of them chided the Israeli company for "bringing coals to Newcastle". Baroness de Rothschild's gamble had paid off. By the way, all her life she hated being addressed or described by her aristocratic title, though she often behaved in a haughty, egoistic, quasi "royal" autocratic manner.

Classical Technique and Falling in Love

The daily classes the dancers took - or not, when some of them would decide to stay in bed for another hour or two in the morning - followed the Graham Method as it had crystallized during the years since Martha had begun teaching and choreographing in the 1930's. The class always begins on the floor with stretches and the contraction and release which became the hallmark of the Graham method.

There are apocryphal anecdotes about students being dismissed from her New York studio in the 1940's because they had clandestinely attended ballet classes. Actually, as I was told by several former Graham dancers (such as Anna Sokolow and Jane Dudley) she did not object to that sort of unorthodoxy. According to Jane Dudley, she also encouraged her dancers in the first years of their work with Graham to experiment and try choreographing their own works, as opposed to the fairy tales about her fierce defense of her method that one comes across in so many dance history books.

During the early years of the Batsheva Company the daily classes were mostly given by the visiting artists from Graham's school and company in New York. The company's ballet mistress was Ruth Harris, an expert on jazz dance, who had danced in Kurt Joss' company in the 1930's and had fled from Germany to the USA and later came to live in Israel

De Rothschild thought that her dancers needed some classical ballet lessons to improve their basic technique and perhaps even their discipline. At that time Jeannette Ordman, a ballet dancer

from South Africa via London, arrived in Israel As a new immigrant out of a job, she was working as a dentist's assistant. Rothschild asked her to give ballet classes to the company. Ordman was very pleased to teach the Batsheva dancers ballet technique several times a week. Today it is common for modern dance groups of all styles to take ballet classes on a regular basis. But in those times there still was a traditional distrust by modern dance artists towards classical ballet.

Jeannette Ordman and Batsheva de Rothschild became great friends. After a few months de Rothschild announced that she intended to make Ordman the artistic director of her company and to let her choreograph for Batsheva. Unfortunately, Ordman had no experience of modern dance, and knew next to nothing of Graham's method and style. She had never risen to starship in the ballet companies she had danced with, and creating choreography was quite beyond her.

The original group of Batsheva dancers was composed of artists who had minds of their own. And they were rather vocal in stating their opinions in the usual Israeli hearty style. After trying to convince Batsheva that it was unacceptable for them to have an artistic director without any experience in modern dance, they staged a protest and decided in a meeting that they would leave the company if Ordman was appointed.

There were attempts by the producer and owner of the company to split the group of her leading dance artists by negotiating with each one separately and offering "goodies" in exchange for accepting Ordman as choreographer and artistic leader. But this divide and rule policy did not work. De Rothschild realized she could not win the controversy without losing her company, because the most vocal and determined opponents to Ordman's appointment were the stars.

Already in the 1965 season, the company's dancers were given time and a modest production budget to prepare dances of their own, using members of the company. The first ones were Rina Sheinfeld (Jephta's Daughter; music: Mordecai Seter' set: David Sharir) and Oshra Elkayam-Ronen (Adam & Eve, music by Heitor Villa-Lobos).

Next season (1966) saw the premieres of Rena Gluck's Women in a Tent, to music by Merdecai Seter and set by Danni Karavan. Both Seter and Karavan would later be invited repeatedly by Graham to create for her own company. Later in the season, works by Oshra Elkaym-Ronen, Shimon Braun and Ehud Ben-David were premiered.

During the 1967 season Ordman choreographed two (!) works, namely Run the Rig and The Unanswered Question [the latter not to be confused with Anna Sokolow's The Question (1964) to music by Webern]. Both were easily forgettable works of an inexperienced choreographer. De Rothschild would have surely seen the unsuitable level of Ordman's choreography, had she not been blinded by a great and deep love she developed for Ordman.

Bat-Dor Dance Company Is Born

De Rothschild was a very practical person. She realized that without the essential stars of her Batsheva company there was no future in her project of bringing American modern dance to Israel. But she also did not wish to frustrate the artistic ambitions of her protégée Jeannette Ordman.

In the activity of the catalysts of dance we are tracing, nearly always there is a fusion of the love of dancing and private sexual emotions. The realistic concern for the future of the Batsheva company, and the totally unrealistic attitude towards the creative talents of Ordman, resulted in a solution made possible by the large sums of money de Rothschild had at her disposal: the founding of a second dance company in Tel Aviv, which would give Ordman her opportunity to be artistic director, prima ballerina as well as choreographer-in-chief.

In 1967, just three seasons after the inauguration of Batsheva Dance Company, the baroness' second company, Bat-Dor, was founded. This was to be a modern company, but one based on traditional ballet training, perhaps not one to produce Swan Lake, but to present new works in up-to-date classical ballet style. The new company, with Ordman at its helm, was endowed with new studios and its own theatre with a capacity of about 400 seats on a fashionable street in the center of town. This complex on Ibn Gavirol street also served the Bat-Dor school, where classical ballet as well as modern dance was taught, with Jeannette Ordman head mistress. The school became one of the best in Israel, later adding a branch in the southern town of Beersheva.

Two companies are better than one. So it seemed all was well, the wolf no longer hungry and the sheep hale. From now on, the central offices of both companies were at the Bat-Dor premises. It seemed an elegant solution for a thorny problem, made possible by the Rothschild fortune. But the idyll was not to last long. After a year or two, the Batsheva Company budget began to contract slowly but steadily. It was clear which "daughter" (bat means daughter in Hebrew) was the favorite and which the lesser one in the eyes of the founder and financier of both.

While Batsheva was the most popular dance company in Israel and presented works by the leading choreographers of the time, among them Norman Morrice, Jose Limon, John Butler, Glen Tetley, Pearl Lang, and of course Martha Graham, the repertory of Bat-Dor was at first dominated by second-rate works by Ordman. The younger Bat in its early years wisely invested in inexperienced choreographers of great promise, such as Lar Lubovitch who created his famous Whirligogs for Bat-Dor in 1969.

The budget for Batsheva became tighter and tighter. There was an underground struggle going on between the two companies. The situation finally came to a head in 1972-3, soon after the Batsheva Company had a critically very well received season in New York. But possibly this sweet success precipitated the looming crisis. De Rothschild announced that for the 1974 season, "in order to save money", her two companies were to be

merged. In other words, Bat-Dor was to swallow up Batsheva, and once more Jeannette Ordman would have the final word in all artistic matters in both companies. This would be the end of Batsheva as an autonomous company.

The Right to Kill Your Own Offspring

The process of terminating the autonomy of the Batsheva Company by its founder came to an abrupt end in the summer of 1973. De Rothschild announced that due to financial problems, she was unable to underwrite both her companies. In order to minimize her financial contributions, henceforth there would be a merger of Bat-Dor and Batsheva and most (but not all) of the Batsheva dancers would be invited to join the new framework. This would be a way of getting elegantly rid of the most outspoken "rebels".

It was clear to anyone involved, that this actually meant the end of Batsheva - and this in spite of its brilliant repertory, its international success, and its leading role in modern dance in Israel. De Rothschild knew that her "simple", so-called economic decision was going to raise fierce opposition from the Batsheva dancers. So as to prepare for the fight, the General Manager of the company, Pinhas Postel was offered a fat raise in his salary, if he would resign and agree to come and work for Bat-Dor. But Postel decided to leave his work altogether rather than help in this scheme.

De Rothschild and Ordman were surprised by the storm their announcement raised, in Israel as well as abroad. Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins, Glen Tetley and many other world-famous choreographers who had worked for Batsheva sent furious telegrams. The protests in Israel were in all the papers. Leah Porath, the Chairperson of the National Arts Council, understood that she was the one who must step in and save Batsheva, the most important dance company in Israel.

All the dance writers in Israel published their opinions, with hardly anyone accepting the decision to "unite" the two "Bat" companies, apart from Dora Sowden, dance critic of the Jerusalem Post, who had become closely involved with Bat-Dor. The unpopular proposal found its way into the editorial pages of the dailies. The present writer also published his negative opinion of de Rothschild's wish to terminate the excellent company she had founded with the help and cooperation of Martha Graham in 1963.

Through her press officer, she asked me to visit her in order to talk about my article. So I came to her office for a talk. The meeting began unpleasantly. She was used to talking to everybody as if they were her servants, which I wouldn't accept. So I got up to leave. Batsheva realized she had crossed the line, apologized and asked me to sit down again. "How could you write I had no right to terminate the existence of the company I had founded and am financing?" she asked imperiously. My answer was as follows. "Let's assume you gave birth to a child. After some years you did not want it any more. So you killed the infant. Do you imagine the police would not come to arrest you? You founded the company and sustained it. But after ten years it has a right

to live and you as its 'parent' have no right to kill it." That was, more or less, the end of our conversation. I believe Batsheva de Rothschild understood the argument. At least she did not argue with my opinion.

But probably no one had seriously discussed the practical consequences of the fusion of de Rothschild's companies. I tried to persuade Pinchas Postel not to resign, as he was the only person who knew all the contracts and connections. Without them, Batsheva wouldn't be able to function, even if the Ministry of Education and Culture offered a preliminary budget, and prepared a new financing plan for the next season. Leah Porat, the chairperson of the National Council for Culture and the Arts, was prepared to make Batsheva a publicly financed institution. But there remained the problems no one - least of all de Rothschild herself - had thought about, namely what would happen to all the contracts, to the performing copyright of the works in the repertory, what would happen to all the lighting and sound equipment and the costumes in the company wardrobe. Several of the set-designers and composers who had worked for Batsheva company, such as Danni Karavan, became members of a public committee for solving the crisis in the Israeli dance world.

De Rothschild was persuaded to be magnanimous and in the end of the negotiations she agreed to let Batsheva continue using the rehearsal premises for another year or two, as well as getting the costumes and all the performance rights to the works in the repertory for a symbolic fee of one dollar. Thus the company was saved and began to adapt to the new working conditions.

This was of course not the end of hostilities. Until the 1980's a choreographer who worked for Batsheva was automatically excluded from choreographing for Bat-Dor. The first for whom this rule was broken was Robert Cohan, who was asked to create for both companies while he was at the helm of the London Contemporary Dance Company.

Marta Graham in Tel Aviv

The early 1970's were a most difficult period in the life of Martha Graham. She suffered from severe alcoholism, and her age and her worsening arthritis prevented her from appearing on stage. Her friend de Rothschild had bought a house in New York, which she put at Graham's disposal, so at least she would not have to worry about where to live and how to pay the rent.

In 1973, Pinchas Postel, then general manager of Batsheva company, had a brilliant idea: how about inviting Graham to Tel Aviv and proposing to her to create a new work for Batsheva? Postel is a man capable of conceiving new surprising ventures but not a person who had studied dance history. So one may assume he did not know that Martha Graham had never created choreography for a company not her own. The only exception was in 1959, when George Balanchine asked her to join him in choreographing a new work for the New York City Ballet based on music by Anton Webern. "It was a most unexpected, even bizarre, request, considering Balanchine's well-known scorn for the modern dance and Lincoln

Kirstein's inveterate hatred of it." (Agnes de Mille: *Martha*, Random House, 1988; p. 344) The resulting work was *Episodes*, the first episode by Graham and the second by Balanchine. Graham chose to deal with the last moments in the life of Mary, Queen of Scots. The piece was given only a few times before it vanished into the shadows of dance history.

The Batsheva company was still fully owned by de Rothschild, so Postel discussed his stunning idea with her. She agreed to finance the project should Martha Graham agree. The negotiations took place by phone between Tel Aviv and New York. Apparently Ron Protas, who was in charge of Martha's affairs saw the possibilities in this venture, which would bring Martha back into creating, travelling abroad and staying with friends as a means of recuperating and recharging her batteries.

Martha decided to create a Biblical dance, involving all the super-figures of the Old Testament. As her collaborators she chose her old colleagues and close associates she had worked with before: the musician Mordecai Seter and the designer Dani Karavan.

The focal point of her work was Jacob's dream. The costumes, all in primary colors of white, red and gold, designed by Martha herself, were magnificent. The stage was dominated by a huge ladder. The male characters were mostly - as Martha liked her men to be - scantily clad, to show off their magnificent bodies. The scope was philosophical, the aesthetics grand. Clearly Graham was still an artist of first magnitude, despite her frailty. The success of *The Dream* in Tel Aviv was lukewarm. [Graham reworked her piece for her company in New York under the title "Point of Crossing" in 1975.] But from the point of view of the history of modern dance, just as Martha and Batsheva changed the course of modern dance in Israel in the 1960's by the founding of the Batsheva dance company, Martha's coming to create in Tel Aviv contributed to the development of modern dance in Israel 20 years later.

Martha hadn't worked with the Batsheva dancers for several years and did not know them well, at least not the young ones. The "veterans" such as Ehud Ben-David, Moshe Efrati, Linda Hodes, Rina Schoenfeld, Rena Gluck had all ceased to perform with the company. Graham's arrival in Israel persuaded all these rather spoiled stars to apply themselves to learn the new parts. It was noblesse oblige, one simply couldn't say "no" to Martha. So she came to watch company classes in order to decide on who would create which role. Among the youngest dancers there was a strikingly beautiful and charismatic dancer, who had joined the company only a few months earlier after completing his compulsory army service. Martha gave him a central role in her dance, to the consternation of the "veterans". This was Ohad Naharin, the future artistic director of Batsheva company - the choreographer who again made Batsheva a dance company known all over the world, one of those who brought Israeli modern dance to the world's attention at the end of the 20th century.

Ohad was very pleased to be offered a scholarship at the Graham school as well as a stipendium at the Juilliard School in New York, all through the influence of Graham.

Twenty More Years of Struggle

After Batsheva de Rothschild severed her relations with Batsheva Dance Company she spent all her energy (and funds) on Bat-Dor under the leadership of Jeannette Ordman. Until her death in 1999, she lived in Afeka, a nice suburb of Tel Aviv, where she had built for herself and Jeannette two adjacent large villas with gardens and a swimming pool

In the 1950's and 1960's de Rothschild played an important role on the international dance scene by supporting Graham in her pioneering work, before it became "canonized" and world-famous. In the 1960s she single-handedly revolutionized modern dance in Israel. And due to her company, Batsheva, Israeli modern dance became known all over the world, at first as a company specializing in the performing of Graham works, and as an excellent interpreter of the works of many American and European international leading modern choreographers such as Glen Tetley, Donald McKayle, Norman Morrice and Talley Beatty. Her work and support for Graham enabled her to sign contracts with the best known artists.

The Batsheva Dance Company played a role similar to that of Nederland's Dan's Theatre in Holland and indeed all of Western Europe as a precursor of contemporary modern dance, which hardly existed in Europe after World War II. In Israel there was a continuing tradition of expressionistic modern dance, but in the 1950's most of its chief exponents were already retired and in any case well past their prime.

Repeatedly bringing Martha Graham and her company to Tel Aviv was an achievement in itself, and culminated in Graham becoming the artistic leader -officially for a short term but unofficially for many years - of the Batsheva company.

Bringing Graham to Tel-Aviv to create a new biblical piece for Batsheva, financed by Rothschild, of course, was to be the last initiative in that direction. From then on, the Batsheva company had to manage on the minimal government grant it got from the Ministry of Education (which at that time included the culture and arts administration). In 1974, the performance rights of all the Graham works were withdrawn. This was no special sanction, but followed the general policy of Ron Protas, who has succeeded in concentrating all of Martha's rights in his hands. When Linda Hodes, a former Graham dancer, and finally one of two Joint Artistic Directors (together with Kaj Lothman) of the Batsheva company returned to New York and re-joined the Graham organization, she too was in favor of terminating the special rights Graham had granted the Israeli company.

Probably, if the rift between de Rothschild and the company carrying her name had not occurred, she would have been able to prevent this, but in the mid-70's there were no longer any special relations between Batsheva (the lady) and Batsheva (the company).

What policy of licensing was preferable is a subject of controversy. As Protas and Linda Hodes put it, "if you wish to see Graham

works performed, you'll have to come to us." Protas and Linda Hodes even went so far as to forbid former dancers of the Graham company to say in dance class ads that they taught the Graham method. Such a policy is diametrically opposed to that of George Balanchine and his heirs. Balanchine was willing to grant performing rights to any well-known company worldwide, provided they contract Patricia Neary (and some other of his former associates) to oversee the final rehearsal and pay her for her work. This has resulted in Balanchine's ballets being seen on stages all over the world, while Graham's choreographies may be seen on film or video only.

Having lost the Graham performing rights through no fault of its own, the Batsheva Company had to concentrate on other works to make their repertory enticing and popular. Only in the 1980's, when Robert Cohan became artistic adviser and promising young choreographers such as Daniel Ezralow, Christopher Bruce, Mark Morris or Matthew Diamond were invited to create for it, did it regain some of the former glory and first class reputation it had enjoyed in its first decade. Another very important development was the annual return of Ohad Naharin from New York, where he lived and created, to Tel Aviv his alma mater. Naharin became the artistic director of Batsheva in 1990 and continued in this post until 2003, bringing the company to the cutting edge of contemporary dance in the world.

Through all these years de Rothschild concentrated on Bat-Dor. What prevented the flourishing of Bat-Dor was, I believe, the basic artistic attitude Ordman upheld. In her eyes, discipline and sweat is all; talent, creativity and the encouraging of young Israeli or foreign creators a mere by-product.

Many excellent choreographers were commissioned who came and usually restaged a finished work of theirs and created a new one on Bat-Dor. But once they left, Jeannette Ordman would "iron out the creative wrinkles" and leave the dance in an antiseptic frigidity of exact correctness devoid of excitement. As a dance critic, it happened to me several times, that one of the lead dancers or even the choreographer would ring me and ask me to attend a dress rehearsal or preview "unofficially", while the choreographer was still present, to see their work before the chemical dry-cleaning.

One of the major creators to work for Bat-Dor was the black American choreographer Gene Hill-Sagan. He told me more than once in confidence that in order to work for Bat-Dor he had to sign a contract that made it clear that his dance was to include a star role and a solo for Jeannette Ordman at least in one of two pieces he undertook to choreograph. As he is long dead, I think I may betray my pledge of confidentiality for the sake of setting the historical claims right.

Batsheva de Rothschild lived in Israel until her death, but had not become a full Israeli in the eyes of many. Perhaps it was her wealth that built a wall between her and many Israelis who came to deal with her. During the 1980's, when she was to be appointed as a member of the National Council for Culture and the Arts,

officials at the Ministry worried whether she was an Israeli citizen, a prerequisite for membership in that august body. It turned out she had Israeli citizenship and there was no problem.

To illustrate this identity duality here is an example: during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, a beautiful young dancer named Yair Shapira who had danced with the Kibbutz Dance Company and with Batsheva was killed serving in the armed forces during the war. His mentor and close friend, the choreographer Gene Hill Sagan, was devastated by the tragedy of a 20-year-old dancer dying on the slopes of Mount Hermon. He suggested to Bat-Dor this topic for the piece they had commissioned him to choreograph. And After... turned out to be a very moving requiem piece to music by Bach, and Ordman got a beautiful solo in the center of it. But Jeannette and Batsheva were vehemently opposed to dedicating the dance to the memory of Yair, as the choreographer wished. They had so little empathy for the tragic atmosphere in Israel after a war that left 2,650 dead that when some months later a memorial performance was organized in memory of Yair Shapira, Ordman refused to perform, as the event was a joint one of Batsheva Dance Company, the Kibbutz Dance Company and Bat-Dor, who had the dance dedicated to Yair's memory. So isolated were the two ladies from the country.

Bat-Dor had ups and downs during the 1980's and 1990's. It was one of the few Israeli dance companies to offer employment to dance artists who immigrated from the Soviet Union, it championed the cause of Panov and his wife Galina to get a visa to emigrate to Israel. When fire gutted the Bat-Dor theatre and studios, de Rothschild again rallied her still remarkable resources to rebuild it.

In one respect, Bat-Dor played an important role in Israeli dance: it has supplied most of the best dancers of all the companies from the graduates of its schools in Tel Aviv and Beersheva – especially the male ones.

As Batsheva de Rothschild grew older, she was worried about the fate of her company and school after her demise. Her family in Paris did not view favorably her generous spending on dance! In her last will she made sure Bat-Dor was left enough funds to survive her for at least three seasons. But the will was contested in court, and for more than a year the company could hardly operate.

Through her long years since founding her "second" company de Rothschild and Ordman made many attempts to get public funding from the Israeli authorities. Several times they were promised governmental support, as befitted an established dance company and an excellent dance school. But neither de Rothschild nor Ordman could grasp what a public institution required: a public board of governors. In spite of several attempts to form an executive committee, nothing came of it as the two ladies were not willing to let the members of the board decide on anything.

After being an important factor in the work of Martha Graham in the 1950's and 1960's and reshaping Israeli modern dance and

turning it into a factor in modern dance in the world, Batsheva de Rothschild spent her last 25 years running a second-rate company. A sad conclusion to a creative life.

Giora Manor was born in Prague in 1926 to a wealthy family of merchants. When Czechoslovakia was occupied by Nazi Germany, they purchased a piece of land in Yokne'am, intending to immigrate to Palestine. In 1939, the 13 year old boy arrived at Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek, ahead of his family. He was followed by a large container filled with furniture, but not by his parents and baby sister - who had been sent to an extermination camp. The Kibbutz became his home until his dying day.

His first love was the theater, and he participated in the play He Walked in the Fields at the Kameri Theater. He joined the IDF Nahal (Pioneering Youth) Unit and initiated the establishment of the Nahal Troupe, becoming its first commander. Later, he directed and taught at the Beit Zvi Stage Arts School, directed radio plays for Kol Israel radio station and became the station's theater critic. In 1970, he started writing for Al Hamishmar daily newspaper - on dance, of all things. At the time, Dov Bar-Nir was the paper's theater critic, and it was deemed unnecessary to have two theater critics. Thus, Manor was asked to write on experimental performances, and particularly on dance; thus, by chance, he arrived at what was to become his main life's work.

In 1975 he was asked to write about dance for Dvar Hashavua, and then decided that it was about time for Israeli dance to have its own professional magazine – founding the annual magazine Israel Dance (published from 1975 to 1990) together with Judy Brin-Ingber and later with Gila Toledano. Later, he founded the quarterly Israel Dance (published from 1993 to 1998) with Ruth Eshel. In 1979 he initiated an international conference in Jerusalem on "The Bible in Dance", and edited The Gospel According to Dance (1980) - a book on the subject published in the US by Dance Magazine. Giora Manor had become the "spokesperson" of Israeli dance abroad, and his texts started appearing regularly in magazines published in English and German around the world.

He was one of the founders and artistic adviser of the Dance Library of Israel and published seven books, including his biography, The Best of Times, The Worst of Times (1996). Among his books on dance were: Agadati – the Pioneer of Modern Dance in Israel (1986), The Life and Dance of Gertrud Kraus (1988), and Sara's Way: Sara Levi-Tanai and her Choreography (2002). He wrote regularly for DanceToday and was the dance critic for Yaron Margolin's Web-site, www.israeldance.co.il.

At the time of his death (2005), two other finished books were awaiting a publisher: Those Who Did Not Dance, about key figures in dance who did not dance themselves and yet propelled the dance world forward and a book on dance in ancient Egypt.