

The origin of the Tsakonikos Dance

Abstract from the book of Philip Bekyros and Helen Tsaggouri "The Dance of Tsakonia"

Let's start with the current point of views for the origin of the dance that simultaneously give the answer to the question of what it presents. There are four:

The first and the most ancient point of view is that the Tsakonikos dance is a pyrrhic (war dance) dance. This point of view has been supported from local researchers and we refer to it for historical reasons. Against to this opinion it is undoubtedly, that metric the dance is paeon fourth, that means pentasimos not trisimos like the pyrrhio. Also by view it doesn't give the impression of a war dance, but a magnificent god dance. But a relative scientific document from the followers of this point of view doesn't exist.

The second point of view starts from Mrs. Dora Stratou's school and we can say that Mrs. Dora Stratou and her students have done serious studies on Greek dances. This school supports the Ionic Myth of Ariadne's clue (string), that means the representation of Theseus trying to get out of the maze. This opinion is adopted almost by all her students. According to the supporters of this school , Tsakonikos dance is the "crane" that Plutarch describes in "The Life of Theseus".

Leaving from Crete Theseus went to Delos. There he sacrificed to god and dedicated a statue of Aphrodite, which Ariadne had given him, he danced with the young people from Athens a dance, which they say that even today people from Delos still dance and which was a mime representation of the circles of the maze, in a rhythm which had successive movements and unfoldings. Dikearhos notes that this kind of dance is called the "crane" from the people of Delos. This dance was held around the Keratona altar which was surrounded by horns, which are situated on the left. They still say that he organized a race in Delos and that then for the first time he gave palm to the winners.

Robert Graves in his book " The Greek Myths " Vol.1 1955 Penguin books comments:

"...It was around this altar - or, according to another version, around an altar of Aphrodite, on which the Daedalic image had been set - that Theseus and his companions danced the Crane, which consists of labyrinth evolutions, trod with measured steps to the accompaniment of harps. The Delians still perform this dance, which Theseus introduced from Cnossus; Daedalus had built Ariadne a dancing - floor there, marked with a maze pattern in white marble relief, copied from the Egyptian Labyrinth. When Theseus and his companions performed the Crane at Cnossus, this was the first occasion on which men and women danced together. Old - Fashioned people, especially sailors, keep up much the same dance in many different cities of Greece and Asia Minor; so do children in the Italian countryside, and it is the foundation of the Troy Game..."

Also Mrs. Stratou in her book "The aspects of dancing"(Athens, 1966 page 17) refers to mother of the poet Andrew Senie. In Mrs. Senies letters there is information that in Constantinople, 200 years ago they performed a maze dance which was called Candiot or "la danse grecque". Mrs. Stratou identifies it with the today's Tsakonikos dance and it supports that Theseus brought it from Troizina and from Argolida it came to Kynouria. The most possible that with this myth the "chauvinists" people from Athens wanted to take part in all the cultural events.

The third point of view (and the most correct according to our opinion) supports that Tsakonikos dance as a maze dance, although it has the crane as a beginning it cuts it off and it presents the successful struggle of Apollo with the snake. That means that the Tsakonikos dance keeps from the crane the maze pattern of the dance but choreographically it presents the snakes movement.

The science of history and archeology has proved that Minoan Cretians had established colonies or they had already contracted commercial relations with the Aegean Islands and Peloponnese from the Mid Greek period. The local cultural elements were absorbed by Minoan influences and since they have put their tag to whatever foreign, they created their dynamic civilization, the Mycenaean, which wasn't late to seize as well (14th century BC).

The sacred dance of Minoan Crete was transferred during time of continuous contact and cultural exchanges of the two civilizations, at the east coast of the Peloponnese and it was maintained from the Achaeans of Laconia who took refuge in the inaccessible mountain Parnon as to avoid slavery and the roughness of the Dorians (1100 BC)

With the prevail of the Olympian gods the habitants dedicated their sacred dance to Apollo, which according to the archeological data, was the most dominant worshipped god of ancient Kynouria which remained from the ancient years. Moreover, let us not forget that Theseus before leaving from Faliro(a bay next to Piraeus) he prayed to Dolphin Apollo and that Delos is the birth place of this god and simultaneously the place where this dance was first danced. The main arguments for this point of view and which will be analyzed below are these: 1/ The metre. The tsakonikos dance is pentasimos from Crete and because of the long syllable place it is described as paeon fourth. 2/ The paiones or paianes according the classical philologist are hymns which thank Apollo and his sister Artemis (Diana). 3/ The aparaftharto of its maintenance it is imposed upon us to be considered as a worship dance. On the other hand ancient rhythms have survived in our folk songs for instance : the sirtos kalamatianos. But melodies clearly prosodic character haven't survived. 4/ Its choreography and especially the way the dancers hold each other doesn't differ from the way that the vertebra is jointed. This way in anatomy is called amfiarthrosis or imiathrosis and it allows limited movements. This creates the snake movement of the dance, with the least movement in the 3rd dimension (height).

The fourth point of view supports the native creation of the dance, its origin that means from the dance of the Caryatids which is danced in the town of Ancient Carya, today Arahova Laconias, the teaching from Pratina and its transmission in unsuspecting timing from Carya to Castanitza and from there to the rest of Tsakonia.

This point of view is easily opposed if we accept the doctrine : ex nihilo nihil, which means the refusal of the parthenogenesis in art. In addition the cultural fermentation in the Aegean Isles was very tense as in the prehistoric and historic period, so it is difficult to reject the Aegean Pelagitiki origin of this dance. Pratinas (end of the 6th century BC) on the other hand couldn't have invented the Tsakonikos Dance, since the maze dances were more former than it was.