

Ottoman Remnants in the Music/Dance Repertoire of the Indigenous (Native) Population of the Serres Prefecture of Eastern Macedonia

Although the Turks of the Ottoman Empire officially vacated the Serres region in 1913, almost one hundred years later they remain in a variety of ways. Their influence can be seen, heard, or felt in the language, music, dance and traditions, as well as vocabulary and toponyms.

One such tradition, the *Kechekia* (τα Κετσέκια), contains all the aforementioned influential elements. This custom, unique to the village of *Pondismeno*, began during the Ottoman occupation when the village was known as *Erneköy* or *Eriköy*. The title of the custom appears to come from the Turkish word, *köçek*, used for the men who attired themselves in female clothing and danced for the sultan's court and at some public events, and is similar in many respects to the *Köçekler*.¹

Indeed in the *Kechekia*, the participants dance wearing various elements of women's clothing and jewelry. The commands of the *tsaousis* (τσαούσης, çavuş), the director of the event, are sometimes given in Turkish, i.e., when he wants the dancers to repeat a particular movement, he will say, *bir daha*=once again. Even the name used for the finger cymbals played continuously during the event, *çalpara* or *çarpara*, is Turkish, derived from Persian. The musicians accompanying the event with the Macedonian form of the *lyra* (λύρα) and the *daire* (νταίρε), at times will sing in Turkish as well as Greek, Bulgarian or Romanes.

While there is no written history of the custom in *Pondismeno*, most informants agreed that it seems to have its roots in Ottoman times. One informant related its history as told to him by his father. According to him, several handsome young men of the village dressed as women one year during carnival celebrations, covering their heads with scarves, and allowing only the eyes to remain visible. They knew the Turks in the village appreciated pretty women, so they decided to tease them by dancing provocatively for some of them as they accompanied themselves with finger cymbals. When the young men removed their scarves and the Turks saw they were actually men, one called out "Chek, chek". The informant told me the young men thought the Turk meant for them to leave, which they did.

The word, *çek*, however, does exist in Turkish; it means to pull. Had the men not already pulled their scarves from their faces revealing their gender, it would be possible to say that is, perhaps, what was meant. However, the scarves, according to the informant, had already been pulled aside. Most likely the Turk

¹ See Hunt, 2008.

said *köçek*, a natural exclamation for Turks upon seeing men dancing while dressed as women.

In addition to the *Kechekia*, the general music and dance repertoire of the indigenous population of the Serres region is rife with Turkish titles. Considering the centuries-long occupation of the area by the Ottomans, this seems only natural. Sahinidhis (Σαχινίδης) writes, "The long duration of the Ottoman Empire caused the coexistence of many peoples of the Balkans with the Turkish people and has as a result the intermixing of their cultures with simultaneous transmission and assimilation of various dance and other culture elements." (undated: 92)

At current *paniyiria* where wrestling matches occur, one still hears the melody of the *Giouresh Havasi* (Güreş Havası), rising and subsiding with the intensity of the matches just as it apparently did during Ottoman times. Musicians of the Serres Prefecture can be heard playing this tune not only in their own region, but also in other prefectures, in southern Bulgaria at times, and even occasionally in Turkey. As it is the same melody in neighboring countries, both Bulgarian and Turkish musicians are frequently invited to play along with local musicians from *Flambouro* at the large *paniyiri* in *Nigrita*.

The races on foot or horseback that also occur at *paniyiria* are accompanied by the *Kousi Havasi* (Koşu Havası) increasing in speed as the participants draw near and the race ends. This melody also remains from the Ottoman occupation, and is commonly used in the Serres Prefecture as well as other parts of Greece, and in neighboring Bulgaria and Turkey. Before any of the racing or wrestling activities begins at *paniyiria*, musicians make the rounds of the villages playing as the local officials collect money and other gifts for the celebration. The traditional accompaniment for this activity, the *Indilia*, is yet another Ottoman melody.

A variety of songs, dances and melodies are traditionally played at weddings in the Serres region, one of which is the table song (επιτραπέζιο), *Dailer-dailer* (Νταϊλέρ-νταϊλέρ). At times it was even sung in Turkish. It would be rare to hear it sung today although I have heard it played at each wedding celebration I have attended in *Flambouro*.

Of the 350 or more dance names mentioned by indigenous inhabitants of the villages during my thirty years of researching in the region, over half were Turkish names or variants thereof. Many, if not most, of those dances and the accompanying music have disappeared from the contemporary repertoire and are remembered in name only. Some of them were never danced by the current and most recent older generations, but were recalled by them as having been seen when they were children, or heard about from parents or grandparents.

Approximately fourteen percent are still danced today and many of those appear to be on the brink of disappearing.

One dance performed in the majority of the villages is *Gaida* (γκάιντα, gayda); it was mentioned in more than half of the eighty villages with indigenous populations with which I had contact. Although the same name is heard repeatedly, the dance varies from village to village. The basic melody is quite recognizable as "*Gaida*" in each instance, and yet there are subtle differences not only in the dance but also in the manner in which it is played, at times causing people to feel uncomfortable with it when played in villages other than their own, and sometimes saying they cannot dance to it. It is not "their" *Gaida*.

Another often-heard name is *Arap Havasi* (Arap Havası), encountered in more than twenty-five percent of the villages involved in this study. The name also appears in the music/dance repertoire of neighboring southern Bulgaria. To date I have heard two different melodies with this name in the Serres region as well as been informed of at least three different dance motifs, two of which I have witnessed. Peycheva and Dimov mention two variants in the Petrich region of Bulgaria. (2002: 380) The name appears in Turkish music as *Arap Oyun Havası*. The only recording I have heard with this title does not resemble either of the two melodies from Serres. According to Metin And, well-known Turkish ethnographer, the dance is part of the camel plays and is performed by one man in blackface, astride a broom. The form I have yet to observe in the Serres region is a dance of mimicry, also performed with a broom. It was mentioned in several villages but appears to have disappeared from their repertoires.

At one time, more than twenty-five percent of the villages also had music for a dance titled *Arnaout* (αρναούτ, arnavut), *Arnaout Havasi* or variations thereof. Although mentioned in many villages, I have observed it only in *Skotoussa*, where it is always danced to one particular melody. It is unknown if this is the same melody that was played in the past in other villages. The name also appears in the dance repertoire of southwest Bulgaria.

While it is a rather simple kinetic motif in *Skotoussa*, Edward Jones gives a description of the dance with that name as he observed it in the 19th century in Constantinople that differs greatly: "It is danced by Albanians in full armour. The dancers form a string by interlacing their arms, and moving round, seem to pass in review before their leader, who displays occasionally much agility in springing and turning, but no grace; on the contrary, his style of dancing possesses all that wildness which characterizes the national manners of the Albanians, the movements of his body as well as his gestures being powerfully distorted, while a great noise is produced with his feet..."² This in no way resembles the dance still performed in *Skotoussa*.

² Quoted by Metin And in 1976: 16. See bibliography.

In 1994, Mitsos Hintzos, a renowned *zournas* player from *Iraklia*, asked me if I had ever heard of a dance, which with his accent sounded like *Jigous* or *Jigoush Havasi*. I had not, and he did not elaborate on it except to say it used to be danced in the region. In 1999, his brother, Zisis, another *zournas* player, asked me if I had ever encountered the name in my research. He also indicated it was a dance no longer performed, and had disappeared from the repertoire about forty years ago. While he said he knew the melody, he indicated there were no longer any *daouli* players who could beat it correctly. At a later date he said the rhythm is 9/8, but with difficult accents. At that time he also mentioned an alternate name; it sounded like *Byoug Drama*. While researching in *Iraklia* once again, this time in 2001, another *zournas* player, Yorgos Dholaplis, mentioned a dance with the same name, *Byoug Drama*. He said it means μεγάλι Δράμα (large, great or big *Drama*). It was then I realized this was their pronunciation of the Turkish word, *büyük*, meaning large or great.

Turkish dance research colleagues have mentioned a dance called *Zigos*, *Zygosh*, *Cigos*, etc., and have sought my help in trying to obtain information about it. They tell me Turks who lived in the *Drama* region learned it from the Greeks there. While dances with some form of these names appear in the repertoire of various Turkish ensembles, it seems they have very little information regarding them.

Until very recently I had no opportunity to hear this music. However, while visiting with a colleague at the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, I received a gift of a few cds, one of which had the song as played by Turkish musicians.

Kabadayi (*kabadayı*) is a name heard in several villages. The name refers to a rather tough and/or daring young man. Interestingly enough, one *zournas* player, the father of the two brothers previously mentioned, who was quite a famous musician of his generation, added his own name to this title causing it to be referred to as *Nikos Kabadayi* in some villages. Both the music and dance appear to have disappeared from the repertoire.

Seryani is a popular dance very much a part of the current repertoire, especially in the southern villages of the prefecture. It is the favorite dance of *Nigrita*, *Terpni*, *Nikoklia* and several other villages. The title derives from the Turkish word, *seyran*, meaning to stroll, promenade or walk about. Indeed the dance is slow, performed to a variety of melodies and could easily be described as a "walking or strolling-type dance".

The name of a once popular dance for men was heard in several variants in villages mainly in the western region of the prefecture: *Chaydan Ashe*, *Chaydan Havasi*, and *Chaydan Ashaya*. Of these three, only the last had meaning for Turkish colleagues. According to them it means "down to the stream", or "below

the stream". The same or similar melody appears to have been used for other men's dances with variants of the name *Daoular Chalar*, i.e., *Daoulari Chalar*, *Daoularum Chalar*, *Chalar Davul*, *Chaldar Daoulari*, as well as *Vouroun Daoulari*. However, according to Zisis Hintzios, aforementioned *zournatzis* from Iraklia, the correct name is a combination of some of the above: *Daoulari Chalar Chaidan Ashaya*, loosely translated as "the daoulia are resounding down by the stream".

Approximately one-third of the villages either still performs or performed at one time in the past, a dance titled *Aydin* (Aydın) or a variant thereof: *Aydini*, *Ayduna*, *Aydinova*, *Aydin Havasi*, etc. In the villages where it has been observed, the same melody is played in each. However, the same kinetic motif is seen in many other villages with different titles, usually *Ormanli* or *Ormanli Havasi*, as well as *Selanik* in a few villages. For the dances with these titles, the melodies differ from that used for *Aydin*. Nevertheless, during an interview in *Vamvakofyto* in 1984, one informant said the dance is called *Ormanli* but the song is *Aydin*.

The above-mentioned name, *Selanik* or *Selianik*, was the Ottoman word for Thessaloniki. While in the previous reference, the dance is similar in kinetic motif with *Aydin*, *Ormanli*, etc., that particular melody is used elsewhere for other dances. In *Varosi*, the old section of the town of *Sidhirokastro*, an entirely different dance (kinetic motif) is performed, also titled *Selanik*. This melody is popular in many villages for dancing *Karsilamas*. It also appears in the Bulgarian repertoire and is still played in Turkey.

Karadaa (Kara dağ) "Black Mountain" in Turkish is another very popular dance in the Serres region. At one time it, too, was danced in more than twenty-five of the villages. Although it has disappeared from the majority of those repertoires, it is still performed in *Vamvakofyto*, *Melenikitsi*, *Haropo* and a few other villages. In each instance, the melody is the same and specific to this dance.

Because of the once extensive music/dance repertoire of this region, many more titles should be included here. Some were encountered in only one village; others were met several times. The majority is no longer danced and musicians either no longer remember the melodies or perhaps never knew them. Here are a few more of the more than 150 Turkish titles I have encountered in this region: *Uch Ayak*, *Ali Koch*, *Dili Havas*, *Karaisou* or *Kara Yusuf*, *Sheytan Havasi*, *Tsingene*, *Mamudi* and *Yamushak Mamudi*, *Alay Bey*, *Suleyman Havasi*, *Haznatar Havasi*, *Taushan Havasi* and many, many more.

A few of these wonderful melodies have been recorded and are, therefore, preserved. Unfortunately, a great many more have been lost.

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