

Arguments of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

DANCE IN THE MACEDONIAN SACRAL TRADITION

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1. Objectives of the dissertation, delimitation of the topic

The objective of the dissertation is the examination of the Balkan chain and circle dance treasure. Within the area of the Balkan, the research focuses on the culture of the southern Slavic language speaking Orthodox ethnic group, and within this on the Macedonian folklore. Although the Hungarian ethnographic literature has already discussed several areas of the Balkan culture, and this topic is known in the field of dance research too, the synthesis-like elaboration of the ethnographic particularities of the Macedonian area was so far not realized in Hungarian language publications.

The Macedonian culture forms an archaic unity within the Balkan area, and in comparison with the Serbian and Bulgarian culture, the traditions of Macedonia are less known and researched in Hungary. *Professor Elek Bartha was the person who called my attention to the research possibilities of the Macedonian area, and I would like to use this opportunity to thank him.*

The writer of the present paper has been dealing with the practical issues of dance since her youth. As a music theory, dance history and religious education teacher of the Dance Academy, the writer has been long concerned with the relationship of dance and rituality, as well as with the separation of dance from Christian religion in the course of European history. While learning the Balkan dance, the writer was impressed by the rhythmical and esthetic richness of the Balkan chain dance treasure, therefore she focused on the Balkan folklore, which constitutes a residual area from the point of view of dance tradition, and within this area she focused on the Orthodox territories, on the Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian folklore, which at the present are in an earlier phase of development.

The chain and circle dance tradition, which preserved the earlier culture of dance history, seemed a proper area to realize, by the examination of ritual dances, the mapping of the relationship between archaic levels of dance and folk myth, as well as the supposed relationship between dance and Christian belief elements.

The examination of the chain and circle dance tradition is performed on three levels. On the first level the rich dance culture of the Macedonian chain dance treasure is placed according to formal and musical particularities of the entire Balkan chain and circle dance region. The second level includes the presentation and interpretation according to customs,

and the third level is an analysis, within holidays, based on form (motivic, plastic, rhythmic and dynamic) and meaning.

A wider material is build around this topic of dance examination, which so far synthetically has not been discussed in the Hungarian literature. Its first sphere is the detailed description of the customs, and determination of its archaic layers and today's condition. A wider sphere is the detailed exploration of ethnographic particularities of the Macedonian folklore within the framework of the dissertation.

The main topic of the dissertation, that of Macedonian folklore area, extends to the territories of the Hellenic Republic and Republic of Bulgaria, but in its present phase, the examination focuses only on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. Within this territory, the dissertation does not deal with the traditions of the Macedonian population that during the Ottoman Empire was converted to Islam. The dissertation focuses only on the traditions of the Orthodox population.

In the description of the customs, there are detailed presentations of such living customs of the Macedonian tradition that have been alive until the end of the 20th century, which in the Hungarian literature are not known or just a little known, but you can find some about which neither the Balkan, nor the Macedonian folklore research did not publish any results. The regional dictionaries of certain regional groups appear in Hungarian for the first time.

Along the elaboration of certain customs of the Macedonian folklore, the two main purposes of the dissertation regarding dance research and dance anthropology are known too, but the approach of the examination is different from this. The purposes are the following: 1. Exploration of ritual dances that in the Macedonian tradition are considered residual area, examination of the relationship of the dances and archaic levels of the folk myths. 2. Answering the question: are there Christian dances among ritual dances? These approaches are known in dance research, dance anthropology research, but in the dissertation the approach of the examination is different from this.

The examination of dance rituality is a new approach, the examination is launched from the direction of folk myth and it tries to connect the results of folk myth research and dance research, and while searching Christian meaning, certain question are examined from the point of view of theology. Folk myth research, theology and dance research results, which

tried to present synthesized results, have occurred so far in the publications of folk myth researchers.

2. Outline of the applied methods

a. Learning the language

As the anthropological method recommends, the first phase of integration in the community that is to be examined was learning the Macedonian language. This meant integration into the entire (considering the territory of the Macedonian Republic, it means two-million people) community, as it will be seen below.

To learn the language, I joined the community of the few hundred people that speaks Macedonian today in Hungary. Most of the members of this community arrived to Hungary as refugees during the Greek Civil War, they lived in minority in Greece. The majority of the relatives of the refugees, who were children when they escaped, live today in the Macedonian Republic, so as Hungarian residents they are strongly connected to today's mother country.

The other way of entering into contact with the Macedonian community was related to the first phase of learning the language. This was possible by getting to know the Macedonian Language Lectorate (having a past of several decades) of the Slavonic Philology Department at the Eötvös Loránd University, the lector and her contacts being employed in Hungary, as well as the Macedonian ambassador who has a good relationship with the lectorate. The good relationship meant, on the one hand, the beginning of common, long-term, productive, scientific, science promoting and cultural projects, on the other hand, by daily contact, the integration into a Macedonian community in Hungary.

Together with the lectorate, we contacted the University of Skopje, Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore and its Ethnology and Anthropology Institute and the Tanec State Ensemble, which later was the ground of scientific collaborations.

The perfection of the language skills, organization of common projects and the preparation and execution of the target field work, between 2011 and 2014, usually two times per semester, meant a two-weeks stay in Macedonia.

For me it was possible to get a deeper insight into the Macedonian culture and language by attending the *International Seminars of the Macedonian Language, Literature and Culture* organized at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje in Ohrid. Participation in the seminar was supported by the Macedonian Republic, the targeted

Macedonian field work was supported by the Hungarian Campus Hungary program, and I would like to use this opportunity to thank their help.

b. Integration into the examined community

During the stay in Macedonia and Hungary, integration into the Macedonian community was realized parallel to each other. As a field researcher, during my Macedonian travels it happened many times that I was a mediator between the Macedonians living in Hungary and in Macedonia. Integration into smaller, targeted communities led to integration into the greater communities due to the connection network that interweaves Macedonia.

The one year long stay on the targeted field, which was not possible, was substituted by the targeted short field work, short returns, continuous communication with the data providers via the Internet and the connection with Macedonian community of Hungary that has close relationship with the mother country. This assured continuity of information collection and the continuous communication indicated my place in the Macedonian population that has diverse relationship.

The community that fled from the Aegean Macedonia provided an interesting examination field that falls beyond the topic of the dissertation. They arrived from the Greek minority into a foreign country while they were children, and joined the minority in Hungary, where the majority culture is the Hungarian. I made several reportages with them in the course of which the particular situation deriving from the problems of the Macedonian history could be outlined, as well as the reflection of this particular situation in the everyday thinking of the Macedonian minority of Hungary.

In Macedonia, the integration started with communication with the scientific professional community. It is important due to two reasons, on the one hand, due to research in literature and to get to know the scientific results, and on the other hand, because in Macedonia, due to historical delays and later urbanization, the urban people did not break away from the countryside. About half of the population of the Republic of Macedonia lives in Skopje, but many of them have a real estate in their home village, where they return for the bigger holidays. Many of my researching and data providing connections produce high quality vegetables, have wineries or do agricultural work. We find archaic phenomena in today's urban common life too, like the ritual hospitality.

Therefore, the preparation of the targeted fieldwork in Macedonia was well-established with my urban stay and it made possible for me to get to know the place of the

archaic customs that still exist in this area, which was possible only on the basis of the connections because certain customs are not present in the ethnographic researches.

The targeted short field works took place in the following locations: *Kičevo* city and its neighborhood, *Makedonski Brod* city and *Porece* Region, in the neighborhood of *Radoviš* Region and in close vicinity of Saint John Monastery of *Bigorski*, in the *Mijak* Region. In the course of the rural field work, due to the good communication capacity of the population, data collection was most effective in form of *informal discussion*. I realized the field work the following ways: I got to know the data providers in advance, during the time of certain holidays I stayed there one week and did two reportages at each holiday, at later visits I *asked questions*, and during my stay in Hungary I asked question by using the Internet.

My relationship with the Macedonian folklore had two sides. Besides data collection, I started to organize programs that promote the Macedonian folklore and research with the Macedonian Language Lectorate of the Slavonic Philology Department at the Eötvös Loránd University. To promote the Macedonian language and folklore research in Hungary, and to store and publish the collected materials, we created the digital Macedonian Folklore Database composed of digital materials and book collection. It is based on the 500 ethnographic, ethnology books and on the photos and video recordings made during the Macedonian field work, certain field work reports, field work abstracts and abstracts of interviews. The database contains about 2000 items.

The creation of the Macedonian folklore ensemble of Budapest was to promote the Macedonian folklore. The Ohrid Macedonian Folklore Ensemble was founded and is led by the writer of the present dissertation. The work within the ensemble helps the relationship with the Macedonian folklore in a practical way. Besides this, it is a place to keep in contact with the Macedonian community, the members of which are active participants of the dance events organized by the ensemble. The ensemble helps in preserving and researching the Macedonian folklore. The items of the Macedonian Folklore Database are placed on the webpage of the ensemble and they are continuously uploaded to this place. (<http://www.macedon.hu>)

c. Return

I returned to *Kičevo* for the holidays, and I could travel to the other field work locations when there was no holiday. Besides this, I met and discussed with data providers at other places, which provided new data. Here I have to mention, that I obtained information about the

today's living custom of Lazarus Day in *Injevo* village (*Radoviš* Region) from a data provider who lives in *Kičevo*, in the other part of the country.

In the course of the Macedonian field work, and the collecting activity performed in the Macedonian community of Hungary, I became friends with several members of the communities. The data collection and promotion of Macedonian folklore in Hungary led to positive reaction from the respective communities. It has manifested verbally, as well as in writing: the letter of the *Kičevo* folk ensemble saying thank you, and the honors awarded by the Macedonian Embassy for preserving the Macedonian language and folklore in Hungary.

d. The examination

The examination was realized according to the calendar holidays of the Macedonian tradition. The aspects of holiday selection were the rich traditions, and within these mainly ritual singing and dance tradition. Ritual singing, originating from the times the Slavs entered the Balkan and still existing on Macedonian territories, forms an inseparable unity with certain customs. It can be observed that ritual singing lives together with customs and dies out with them too. A few of these texts were translated by me, some of them were translated into Hungarian for the first time, and some of them are cited from my own publications.

Regarding the main purpose of the dissertation, those interesting holiday customs that have no referential and time related relation with Christianity were not examined. These were the *Dodola* and *Rosalia*. The games with masks in the middle of winter are discussed only in relation to the *koleda* custom, the date of which is related to Christmas.

The locations of the field work were such regions and villages that have preserved their archaic holiday customs until today. On the territory of the Republic of Macedonia the archaic customs existed in the nineties of the last century, but today many of them do not exist anymore. The holiday traditions that are alive even today, are followed by the population too, but these are still the areas of field research because they are slightly explored.

The selected customs and locations of the field work are the following:

1. the *koleda* and the *badnik* evening in *Stip* and in its neighborhood
 - a. due to its relation with *koleda*, the *dzoloma* is a mid-winter dramatic custom in villages around *Kavadarci*, mainly in *Begniste* village
2. Epiphany in the neighborhood of *Kičevo*, mainly in *Lavcani* village
3. Lazarus Day related holiday in the neighborhood of *Radoviš*, mainly in *Injevo* village
4. Easter in *Porece*

5. George Day in *Mijak* Region

The collected database of the field work *related to the material of the dissertation*: 500 photos, 100 video recordings, 8 interviews, field work diaries, notes about observations and notes about questions, as well as manuscripts from data providers and researchers. Besides this, the dissertation used the published data of ethnographic researchers and their publications. To examine the customs, the following were used as well: theses of university students, publications of local researchers shared on the world wide web, the short films and reports of the Macedonian media presenting traditions. The last two resources provided information about the koleda of *Stip* and about the *dzoloma* of *Begniste* village.

The European dance research was characterized for a long period of time by certain formalism, but today research focuses on deeper referential and content related examination. The writer of this dissertation is sure, that interpretation of a dance cannot be taken out from its surrounding custom, and due to its deep relationship with the meaning of the custom it can be interpreted if we try to understand the given custom system (dance is only one organic part of it) as much as possible. Therefore, the dissertation examined in details the customs of certain holidays and their elements.

Dance examination starts from the layers of meaning that forms the background of the custom. The dissertation examines the dances, as well as certain motion games and ritual motion systems. The most important points were: determination of the function, attitude towards customs, the content of the elements before Christianity and Christian elements and their comparison with meanings of the dance. In the course of the examination, besides the original questions, two more issues were explored: how much does the ritual dance fit into the meaning system of the holiday and what kind of correlation exists to that.

3. Argument-like enumeration of the results

1. Based on its particularities, the Macedonian folklore area can be divided into two parts along the flow of the Vardar, to the eastern and western part. The separate historical development can be observed in several ethnographic particularities, in dance tradition and in folk customs. This influenced the territorial distribution of the Epiphany and Lazarus Day tradition. If we consider the western *Mijak* and *Brsjak* Region, the determination of the regions in the Macedonian literature is clear, while in the eastern part it raises questions. In the 19th century, the eastern part was economically and intellectually more developed than the

isolated western part. (The dissertation did not examine the neighborhood of Ohrid.) Of the five discussed regions, four are close to each other, in East and West Macedonia, while the 5th region is found in a particular place, in the region of the *Mijak* ethnic group. The culture of Macedonia was influenced by Islamization, today the number of Islamic population is high. Of the discussed territories, this phenomenon manifests strongly in the tradition of the *Mijak* Region. Today the population of the Macedonian villages is reducing, which started already in the 19th century, and it became stronger after the Second World War. But the population did not leave these villages, during the bigger holidays the residents return.

2. In Macedonia, today you can find renewed, surviving holidays with transformed functions, but they still kept their archaic function. In the latter ones, the following manifest: particularity of Macedonian folk myth and strong presence of layers originating from times before Christianity.

3. The Macedonian dance tradition forms an integral part of the dance traditions of Balkan Slavic Orthodox territories, it shares common features with them. Besides this, the dance tradition is different in its form from the dance tradition of the Bulgarian and Serbian territories, and within the respective area it shows common features too. These are the following: anti sun wise direction, and in case of chain dance treasure the *open* circle and exclusive occurrence of chain dance form. Only rare, mainly ritual exception of the former one can be found, while the latter is a general rule.

4. The archaic customs preserved ritual dances, motion systems and faded motion games with ritual meaning. A mid-winter *dzoloma* dance, the motion scheme of the *badnik* evening, the *oro* of the Saint John godfathers-in-law, the motion activity of the *Lazarkis* have all preserved their ritual nature until today. The Easter games with ritual opening and closing dance and the George Day around the fire dance and ritual movements preserved their ritual function as a living custom until the second part of the last century. The procession of water request and the *oro* tower are renewed customs, while the *koleda* of *Stip* have been preserved until today, but they have lost their original ritual function. Most of the dances with ritual meaning are related to layers before Christianity, but you can find among them dances with Christian meaning.

5. The dances that preserved their ritual function in the tradition of the calendar holidays, are integral parts of the structure of the holiday. The ritual dances connected to the holidays and the motivic and plastic features of ritual motion activities (that cannot be considered as dances), correspond to the system that places into structure the layers before Christianity, the Christian elements of the given custom, as well as their apartness and integration.

Compliance can be observed to a high extent and in case of certain holidays if we analyzed the ritual dance or motion system, we could highlight certain features of the relationship of the before Christianity and Christian elements of the respective holiday. Two specific examples of this are: the *oro of Epiphany* and the *badnik* evening motion system, in case of which, if we had reversed the direction and we would have started from the examination of the dance and motion system, we would have arrived to the layers of meaning of immersion-recreation, self-giving and the sacrificial rite nature of the *badnik* evening.

The fact that in the time and space of the rites the dances and motion systems are located in ritually emphasized time and space, shows the close relationship of the rites and the dance. In many cases, *the dance itself* creates the magical or sacral space, and in case of two dances, we can speak about the role creating and terminating the sacral time. Besides this, the dance has the main role in several rites.

The community role of the holidays related, non-sacral dances can be observed, and the process of sacralization can be traced, (Bartha) for example, in case of the *koleda* of *Stip* there is fire consecration or there are church blessings of the *Pokrst* procession.

A characteristic of folk myth is to *spur into action*. (Bartha) In this view, dance and ritual movement is a phenomenon similar to folk myth, which compared to the changing interpretation of customs, custom contents and custom objects is similar to deeper constant layers, it is a phenomenon that spurs into action, so it *spurs into motion*.

6. By examining the dances preserved as living customs, or present in verbal memory and in recorded folk traditions, the close relationship of the dances to the rites can make dance research (by examining the preserved ritual dances of the integral Balkan Slavic Orthodox tradition, mainly the Macedonian tradition, which shows historical delays) capable of achieving scientific results referring to the old layers of folk myth.

7. If compared to the Hungarian dance tradition, in which today we can speak only about the traces of ritual dances, (Felföldi, Ratkó) the Macedonian dance tradition presents more dances embedded in living customs, which have preserved their ritual role. Among them you find layers related to: agrarian rite, (*koleda*, *dzamala*, magical movements of *badnik* evening, Easter *kamila*) vegetation cult, (Lazarki, *oro* tower, gating game, herb collecting dance of George Day and around the fire dance, ritual rolling about and swinging) and to sun cult (*koleda*, *dzamala*, around the fire dance of George Day). (Ujváry, Risteski) In case of the dances of several holidays, you can observe superficial connection to Christianity, (song of *Pokrsti* procession, going around the church during gating game) meaning the approaches to Christianity, (sacrifice of *badnik* evening, collection of catkin at Lazarus Day, which can be related to church, blessing of the trees during the procession, the opening *oro* of the Easter games relates to the time of the liturgy and to the space in front of the

church) or deep meaning integrated into Christian belief (moment when the fire of badnik burn out can be connected to Christ's sacrifice, the baptizing oro of Saint John godfathers-in-law). Special attention should be paid to Easter game series of Porece, belonging to agrarian cult and presenting elements of the antique Dionysus cult. The game series include the scene indicating and game closing dance. It has common elements with the theme of mid-winter masked men. (Ujváry) The *carry away of the bride* element is the original form of the Hungarian tradition of spring *tag* type of game. Thus, this element of Hungarian tradition originates from the agrarian cult. The gating game has an interesting content, that of *referring to infinity*, (Ratkó) and besides this, the form of the movement suggests the motion picture of the growth of vegetable sprout or branch, therefore it can be classified into the group of vegetation cult. (Ujváry).

According to the above, if we compare in the five holidays the myth layers identifiable on the basis of the dance and rite motion dictionary, we get that at Christmas, the Christmas Eve with the badnik sacrifice is an approach to Christianity, the koleda has no Christian meaning, but comparing it to other holidays with masked men, it is a less specific pagan holiday close to Christmas. Besides the old belief elements, the Epiphany emphasizes baptism and Manifestation of the Lord, which have deep Christian meanings. The Lazarus Day, which originates mainly from the vegetation cult, slightly approaches to Christianity by its blessings and activities taking place in the area around the church. The Easter relates to the vegetation cult due to its gate holding and oro tower, and besides these we find some antique layers of meaning too (indication of the scene). The motion activities of George Day refer to the vegetation cult, and these activities have no Christian meanings at all.

8. The Epiphany oro, the dance with a layer of meaning integrated in Christian belief is emphasized, and we receive an answer to the question: Could a Christian dance exist in the ritual dances of the preserved Macedonian tradition? The answer is *yes*. This means that comparing to the Hungarian and Western-Europe tradition, in which the relationship of dance and Christian sacredness terminated, we can examine the features of the existing Christian ritual dance in a living tradition.

9. The main formal feature of Macedonian dance tradition is the anti sun wise, open circle movement, proceeding right from the position of the dancer, which is a constant dance form of the Macedonian geographical territory. Its constant nature is emphasized by the fact that the opened form does not change even if the ritual meaning would require it. It is a characteristic of the whole Macedonian tradition, that the dances and movement of the examined holidays integrated mainly this form, whether we mean ritual, non-ritual, pagan or Christian dance. The examined dances and movements present the actual layer of meaning of

certain holidays in the totality of the symbolic system related to this form (Eliade, Ratkó). In case of the Epiphany oro, this layer of meaning does not manifest at any other dances. Besides this, in the meaning of this oro two symbol systems are connected: 1. the meaning of water and the meaning of 2. continuously repeating circle movement proceeding anti sun wise. The meanings emphasized in the totality of two symbol systems are: in case of water it is the rebirth by complete immersion, in case of the dance form they are the eleven times repeating, exactly the same, equal circles of Saint John godfather-in-law, leading the eleven archaically related unities as a priest, which relates to the sacral role transmission reoccurring in the cyclicity of the year.

The participants are completely aware of the layers of meaning of dance and holiday and they experience it deeply. Therefore, here the real sacral feature of the holiday and the existence of the *homo festivus* participating in the customs can be observed. (Bartha, Nyíri)



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List of publications related to the dissertation

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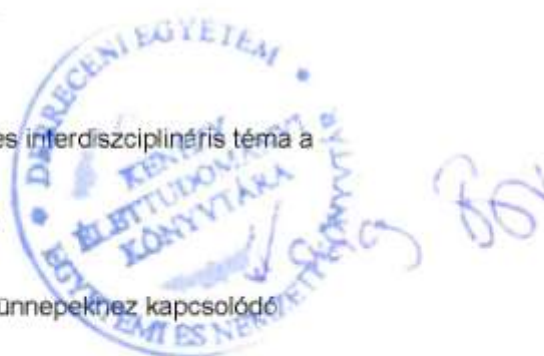
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