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The Cult Dimension of Water in the Dance Events of the Greek Folk Tradition

Abstract:

Water, as a key element of nature with a multifaceted and multidimensional presence for man, occupies an important place in Greek tradition. This paper attempts to highlight the cultic dimension of water, as it is projected directly or indirectly in several dance songs connected with ritual dance practices of a magical-religious and divinatory character in the cycle of time and social life. The importance for this natural resource by the bearers of popular tradition, which is nowadays threatened due to increasing water scarcity, is not only celebrated in the transgressive customs of the cycle of life and time, but also in cases of drought or in transitional periods of time cycle, with dance being the vehicle for the expression of fertility and as well a deterrent action.

Key words:

folk dance events, water, dance songs

Introduction

Water, as a precious element of nature and a basic factor for the existence of life for all on the planet, has occupied an important place since antiquity until today in all cultures of the earth. Humans have acknowledged its importance, utility and relevance in their lives. To many civilisations the very source of life is attributed to water[1]. The various meanings

1 See Klaver, I. 2012. Siting Water and Culture. In Johnston, B., Hiwasaki, L., Klaver, I., Castillo, A.R., Strang, V. (Eds.) *Water, Cultural Diversity, and Global Environmental Change: emerging trends, sustainable futures?* Springer, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, pp. 9-20· Russo, K., Smith, Z. 2013. *What Water is Worth: Overlooked Non-Economic Value in Water Resources*.

and interpretations of the role of water may reveal ways of thinking and evidence relating to the way people lived in specific places and times, reflecting changes in different societies and cultures. Water is intrinsically related 'to the time, place, cultural particularities and customary manifestations of the society in question' (Anderson & Tabb 2002, 5-6). Following anthropologist Strang (1997, 178), who has assessed the meaning of water in many social groups: "Beliefs and values are acquired, inspired and transferred through a process of socialisation that creates a culturally specific relationship with one's surroundings. This process consists of several elements: constructing categories, learning a language, and acquiring and spreading cultural knowledge. Each involves interaction with the natural, social and cultural environment and contributes to forming individual and cultural identities."

In the light of these hypotheses, all human groups possess culture or create cultural forms and processes and socialise by reflecting on land, water and nature in certain ways[2]. Water used to be a source and symbol of life, it was 'material prima', it was: "The mother womb for seeds and vegetation, a symbol of an endless momentum, out of which everything is born and to which everything returns... An infinite source of power and life, it purifies, heals, renews and ensures immortality..." (Zora 1999, 17).

Its importance has been acknowledged by all ancient cultures, and it is associated with myths and rituals (Zora 1999, 17), thus constituting an object of cultic behaviour[3]. As Psychogiou (2017)[4] argues, *water*: "(…)With its chthonic origin and symbolic meaning, multiform water (as running or standing, snow, ice, crystal, rain, hail, cloud, fog, sea), like all symbols, it is ambiguous, ambivalent: positive and desirable when it controlled, flowing, clear, temple (fresh), and lucid; adverse and undesirable, when uncontrolled, impetuous, and turbid, stagnant, or polluted, in which case it must be worshipfully tamed and its positive effect magically evoked."

Palgrave McMillan, New York · Barber, M. & Jackson, S. 2014. Autonomy and cross-culturalism: historical interpretations of Australian Aboriginal water management in the Roper River catchment, Northern Territory. J. Roy. Anthropol. Inst. 20, 670-693· Palmer, L. 2015. *Water Politics and Spiritual Ecology: custom, environmental governance and development*. Routledge, London.

2 See Barber, M., Jackson, S. 2011. Indigenous people, water values and resource development pressures in the Pilbara region of north-west Australia. *Aust. Aborig. Stud.* 2, 32–49, and Head, L.M., Trigger, D., Mulcock, J., 2005. Culture as concept and influence in environmental research and management. *Conserv. Soc* 3(2), 251–264.

3 For water and its symbolic connotations in various religious customs see: Iliadi 1949, 165-187, 199-210, 374-382.

4 https://fiestaperpetua.blogspot.com/2017/01/water-in-greek-wedding-ritual-songs.html

In all cultures, water is "the mirror of nature", a natural mirror, the serene and clear one that reflects reality when the water surface is still. Its clearness is the necessary condition for its function, i.e. as an essential source of life, while the clarity, the transparency of water is the primary and essential condition "of all its symbols, of those signifiers that speak of life itself as "great good and first" and at the same time as "the eye of nature" (Kovani 1995, 42). In the view of Gratsia & Papathoma (1999), the abundance and velocity of the flow was associated with abundance, fertility and evolution. Similarly in all cultures the alertness, glossiness and purity of water is associated with its "actuatory and purifying function[5]." Its cleansing and healing properties have linked it to purging and healing, attributing magical dimensions to it.

People's dependence on water, its life-giving quality and the polysemy of its functions in Greek folk tradition, "has made it, as is natural, one of the main symbols in people's ritual life. A symbol of happiness, fertility, abundance, and purification, 'zidoron' water is not missing from important traditional rituals of both the cycle of life and the cycle of time" (Nitsiakos 1997, 63).

Water has been associated with numerous beliefs, legends, myths and fairy tales as well as with customs, traditions and rituals. Several dance songs praise its importance, highlighting its special properties, directly or indirectly linked to a multitude of customary practices and beliefs of a devotional, magical and divinatory nature. It is found in rites of passage in the cycle of life and time, but also in cases of drought, or of divination, and in transitional periods of the season. The dance being the vehicle for the enunciation of the genitive and abominable dimensions of the whole ritual.

Methodology

The material for the present study was drawn from primary and secondary sources: a) field work, interviews with open-ended questions and b) relevant papers in scientific journals and conference proceedings, websites and folklore archives.

5 See Kovani, 1995· Eliade, 1981

Ethnographic data

Water in the daily life of agents in traditional societies

Starting from the daily life of stakeholders of the traditional society in earlier times, the tap "was the centre of the 'small' social life of the countryside" (Zora 1999, 19), so it is no coincidence that all the streets of the villages lead to the water fountain. This is where women would go every day to get water (to fill their pitcher) and where they could chat with their fellow villagers and hear the latest news of the village. Besides, it is one of the few places where single girls are allowed to visit either alone or accompanied by others. Carrying water from the tap is traditionally a female task, which, among others, helps young girls socialise and fit in, when it comes their peers.

In the most remote fountains, these young ladies will meet the young men to love. Such songs indicatively: "Malamo, when you go for water I go to the fountain and wait for you", "My fountain, my golden fountain, how do you hold all this cold water", "My stone fountain with its dew on the water"', "Forty fountains with water and eighty-two wells", "Tonight I lurked under the bright moon for my love to pass, to come and draw water", "The hen hawk headed off for water", "Just some water, lady Vangelio, some cool, clear water."

In public fountains, mainly if provided with proper facilities, the washing of clothes took place, too. Washing thick clothes (the "mantani" wooden rug looms, kilims, etc.) was done near springs or rivers or lakes, public wells and water presses, where it was plenty of water. Also, relevant songs/ verses: "Vlach woman doing washing down the river (…)", "Down in the stream in the willows two or three brunettes art washing." Public fountains, common to the neighbourhood or even the whole village, had a major importance. The water pitcher played a decisive role in transporting water. The "Nikolos" dance from Western Macedonia — namely, the region of Siatista in the prefecture of Kozani — is performed in a distinctive way, largely capturing women when they used to struggle to cross from one mountain to another—those overlooking Siatista—to find water. This dance is a symbol of grabbing the pitcher with which 'they used to carry the water, on the path that leads to the mountain near the cold-water tap'[6]. Moreover, there are also dances referring either directly or indirectly to water. Several dance forms and in the context of customary practices are structured by songs referring to water, such as "Down to

6 See in http://gym-siatist.koz.sch.gr

St George in the cold water...", "The platanus-tree water...", "Ksirosteriano water", by Thanassis Skordalos, meaning *dry-cistern* water (…), etc.

The communal public baths[7] played an important role to the life of the community, mainly frequented by women. 'The women's hammams were also places of recreation and gossip. Songs and jokes and pleasantries would resonate (...)' (Fragaki 1977 in Meraklis 2004, 50). This explains, according to Meraklis (2004, 49), its 'transfiguration into a centre for the performance of basic acts, which ensured everything a society needed to prosper: prosperity, fertility, etc.'

Water in Rite-of-Passage Customs of the Life Cycle

Moving on to such customs of life, water in all its forms is an important element during human life and is found from the first bathtime of a newborn baby to old age. In Greek tradition, "the supreme ritual act of purification and sanctification through water is baptism" (Nitsiakos 1997, 64), which for the Christian is the supreme act of purification and sanctification of the body and the soul from the original sinor *[the Fall of man]*. According to Varvounis & Sergis (2014, 201-202), "all ritual purifications with water aim at re-enacting (in a figurative way) the timeless moment of Creation, symbolically repeating the birth of our world."

The marriage ritual also constitutes a set of magical-symbolic acts and words ("blessings and songs"') (Psychogiou, 1999), which, apart from their significance regarding kindness, constitutes, as a passport custom, the most critical phase of community reproduction, since the newlyweds make a passage from the social group of the unmarried to that of the married (Skouteri 1984, 121). Most of the wedding customary practices focus on the bride, with the bride's bath being one of the important phases of the ritual with the purpose of its magical invocation to awaken and transmit to the marriage and especially to the bride its properties linked to fertility:

"The waters are flowing; the taps are running.
the nobility is running to go see the bride
and the noblewomen shall examine her.

7 For more on public baths, see: Katsargyri-Markezini I. 2014. *Baths and Hammams in Mytilene: Social and Cultural Practices (late 19th - late 20th century) Contribution to the Folklore Study of Water Usage and Physical Cleanliness*. Doctoral thesis. University of Ioannina, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History and Archaeology.

-My dear bride, mine own proud bride
Haven't you also learnt to take pride of place?"

The fountain tap/ faucet plays a key role in wedding rituals both before and after the wedding ceremony. The movement of the fertilising water through the ring, a magical act to induce eugenics that symbolises the sexual intercourse of the bride and groom, is mentioned: "Two o'clock after midnight on Saturday the bride and her relatives shall depart. And I would want those folk to wend to the village fountain. There I wanted the bride to put her ring on the fountain's faucet so the water would run through and pour itself into the jug. With this water, would I like the bride to wash herself in the morning" (Psychogiou 1999, 50).

In other regions, the bride-to-be takes from the tap and carries home in a container "unpolluted water" which, it is believed, contains the fertilising and life-giving values of the primeval water. This magical water will be used for the "wedding bath" to convey its beneficial properties to the bride's body. The song says:

"Bring water from the spring and laurel from the mountains
to bathe our bride who is an only daughter.
Bring crisp water from the cold fountain
to bath our bride so she bids us farewell."

After the wedding, the bride in particular visits the new fountain, to offer gifts of appeasement to her and her spirit and to receive unpolluted water, to magically sprinkle the groom, thus empowering him through a fertility mediation, with the eugenic power of water. It says:

"Send me, mother, to fetch water
with a touch of basil
with the pitcher of gold
to bring it to you fresh
and sprinkle your son with it. (...)"

Water in Rite-of-Passage Customs
in the Year's Cycle - Wellness Events

In many parts of Greece, customary acts on New Year's Eve are found that aim to promote well-being and good health. Usually, the heads

of the family [in Greek: *archigoi*] make a sort of housewarming at home [*podariko*], after having taken the so-called "silent water"/ "amilito nero" from the village fountain and always in accordance with a certain ritual (Aikaterinidis, 1999). They believed that as water flowed similarly, goods and wealth would flow abundantly throughout the year (Varvounis, 2018)[8]. Offerings to the fountain, as a cultic customary practice, were also customary on other occasions, such as the first loaf of wheat taken of the first crop and the first loaf of bread at marriage (Aikaterinidis 1999, 44). The Sarakatsans at Christmas took the "silent water", while in Farassa, Cappadocia, Turkey they would perform this on Epiphany holiday (Varvounis, 2018).

The "silent water"' in the villages of the prefecture of Pella, Central Macedonia was taken on May First. As far as the fund-raising customary events are concerned, it should be mentioned that they vary from one place to another, but they contain "underneath their seeds" the stimulating and fertilising quality of the second critical phase for the community's survival, which is Springtime (Zografou 2003). They are mainly associated with the banishing of winter and the awakening of nature. In contrast to winter festivities, in the ritual dance practices of the spring cycle, female fertility and the fertility of nature are equated (Puchner 2016). As far as folk beliefs are concerned, nature is equated with woman, and even in her most productive age, which is why the presence of girls predominates. This does not mean, of course, that single boys or even the whole community itself are excluded in certain cases.

Moreover, passages between different seasons to another are also marked through the "Lambri Kamara" (Holy Easter chamber) song, danced on Easter Tuesday in Megara, in the square of St. John the patron saint of Dance ("Dancer"), along this song:

"Holy Easter arch and let it pass, this shall be St. George's end,
Fetch your little sickles for the summer has arrived.
You can't tell me what to do, that I love, otherwise I'm going to die.
Megara town is pretty on Tuesday at St. John's church
When all sorts of strangers visit and stare around
Oh, my poor, poor, world, I didn't have fun with you enough."

8 See in Varvounis, 2018, on http://ikivotos.gr/post/7556/grafei-o-m-g-barboynhs-to-amilhto-nero-sta-ethima-ths-ellhnikhs-la-khs-latreias

"Lambri Kamara" is a custom that takes place every Tuesday of Easter in the square of St. John the Dancer, in which the "dance of the trawler" is danced exclusively. It is a circular dance danced only by women, who are handhold, held crosswise by the wrists (Syrkou 2006, 143). According to the oral tradition, where the chapel of Agios Ioannis was built, there was a well where girls would go get their water. The road that led to the well, the dragon's lane (Drakodromos), as they called it, was believed to be haunted and anyone who passed by it at night would fall ill or go mad. For this reason, the Megara locals, wanting to banish the evil, asked the Ottoman governor to allow them to build a church above the well. They were granted permission on the condition that it be built in one day, from sunrise to sunset. Together, men and women carried the stones hand in hand and managed to complete it in one day. The trawl dance is performed as a commemoration of the women's dance, which took place after the completion of the building of the church of St. John of Galilee by the so-called "Choreutaras" ("great dancer") (Zografou 2001; Makriyanni 2019).

In many regions during Epiphany Day, after the consecration of the waters, it is customary in many areas to rinse agricultural tools and icons in springs and rivers (Megas 1956 in Aikaterinidis 1999, 44). On the Epiphany Day, the men of Kostilides would throw a man into the water of the river. "The act of wetting the river water was considered a kind of christening that symbolized renewal and aimed at ensuring health for all inhabitants.... It also provided for the fruitfulness of the fields and an increase in the number of animals" (Lantzos 2006, 26-27).

On the first Ascension Day in the Ionian Islands the 'the pitcher breaking custom is practiced. People open the windows and "unleash" pitchers with vigour. This customary practice makes believers involved in the Resurrection of Christ. The people of Corfu Island hurl from their balconies their "botides" pitchers, which usually have two handles. In fact, to make a bigger noise, they fill them with water so that they break louder[9]. In Cephalonia Island, on the first Resurrection, the dance of the pitcher is also danced, where the girls dance holding their flower-decorated pitchers on their shoulders. The dance of the pitcher is also found in Cyprus in the song "Drag me mother to the water so I bring you some cool water (…)."[10]

9 https://www.inkefalonia.gr/koinonia/12171-gerasimos-sot-galanos-to-spasimo-tis-stamnas and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lTYffD4j0w

10 See spectacle on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFgcKaVvZOQ

In areas where there was water shortage, inhabitants eagerly searched for new sources of water, a reality captured in various traditions. According to these traditions, the only water source in the area is controlled by a dragon who does not allow people to use the water for personal use, for their land and for their livestock. Kamilaki (1999, 174) argues: "These traditions are of particular interest not only for their magical-religious content, but mainly for their socioeconomic aspects, which they reflect, when we pull back the veil of myth. Dragons, or ghosts, that mankind tries to appease with bloody sacrifices, allude to quarrels to the point of death over the sharing of the waters, which take place above all between relatives, including brothers and sisters, for the domination of the waters and claiming one area of land."

The feast of Saint George (23 April), which is known to have "a prominent place in the Greek people's folk worship" (Aikaterinidis 1968, 129), is the beginning of the summer semester for the rural and pastoral population. It is no coincidence that April is also called "Agiorgitis"" or "Agiorgatis". Given that the feast of the saint 'coincides with the time when nature in Greece is in bloom' (Mega 2012, 220), so similarities with other spring festivals, such as First of May, are found and for this reason 'many customs of this day are of the kind that are performed during the passage from one season of the year to another' (Mega 2012, 220-221).

In Skra village in Central Macedonia, the first water of spring is associated with the festivity of Saint George[11]. According to popular belief, the water that runs at dawn before the day of St. George is considered the first running water of spring, after the end of winter and when one season succeeds the other. It is believed that St. George, who "riding a white horse on a white horse with a pole kills the Lamia ghost and sets the water free"[12] (Papageorgiou 1992, 26). This saint figure is the sponsor of this "youthful water" or "water of health".

The "Panigiraki" in Arachova is also a "spring wellness event", one of the '"rite-of-passage customs", incorporated in the festival of Saint George, a landmark of the year marking the change of seasons, the passage from winter to spring (Laskou & Nikolidakis 2006, 182). The festi-

11 Saint George's Day is celebrated on 6th May, in accordance to the Old Calendar, in Orthodox Churches. More about the celebration of Saint George in different cultural contexts see: Blagojević 2018, 7–8.

12 St George is the dragon killer, "the hero of the tale who kills the beast with his pole and saves the king's daughter, who has fallen prey to the beast, in order to let the water of the statehood run" (Megas 2012, 219). This element of the myth was also passed on to the cult customs of many other areas in Greece.

val of St. George in Arachova is a three-day celebration, which includes competitive, cult and dance customs.[13] Romaios (1956, 186) writes: "In Arachova of Mount Parnassos on the holiday of Saint George, the dragon-killing saint, there is a festival, and it is customary for the young women to go to the neighbouring fountain and sing a local variation. Immediately after the verses about the dragon, they released the water from the reservoir, which until that moment had kept it closed. They show by this custom that the girls' request was answered by the dragon. Today the event is performed in front of the stone fountain of St George and the 'little panegyri' is sung by girls, wearing sigunia folk dresses, along with with the three 'slender girls'/ 'liger*é*s".

Almost all Arachovites (people from Archova region) dress in traditional costumes and gather in the courtyard of the church of St. George. The elders, accompanied by the davul drum and the bagpipes, dance the "Panegiraki", the unique dance of Arachova: "The feast is held up high in Saint George's". At the cult event[14] at the tap fountain in Arachova on the feast of St. George: "The dragon having seized the water is portrayed, as the water is meant to be cut off at the stone vaulted tap fountain of St. George' and the girls sing 'Panigiraki' ('little feast') song. The water starts flowing again when the girls sing the pleading verse: "Of all things, my dragon, shall the water drink the feast."

Then, water pours from the tap. The event at the tap fountain: "It has preserved a completely ritual-like character, associated with ancient beliefs. It is an act of imitation of something very desirable, such as water provision in spring (…). People aimed to facilitate the coming of spring, so as to control and direct nature after winter's hibernation. The uninterrupted periodic repetition of these was dictated by the anxiety of agricultural society to ensure normality in the functioning of nature. The fear that unless these events were repeated, something bad would happen and the rhythms of nature would be disturbed, probably ensured their longevity"[15] (Laskou & Nikolidakis, 181-182).

A similar celebration is found in Neo Souli, Serres, and according to Aikaterinidis (1969), both events, that in Arachova and in Neo Souli in Serres, are the only ones in Greece reflecting the release of water on Saint George's Day. There too, Agios Georgios is celebrated on 24 April (the

13 For more see. Laskou V - Nikolidakis E. The festival of Arachova and Greek tradition. A study of the song and the customs. Arachova: 2006.

14 see. Romaios K., The cultic happening of Arachova, Archive of Thracian Treasures, Volume XI, Athens 1954, p. 254-255 and vol. XI', 1953, p. 349-350

15 For the longevity of customs see. Meraklis M. Folklore Issues, Athens 1989, p. 256.

Tuesday of "Diaconisimos" (Bright Week) through a divine mass, followed by a procession that turns into a circle around the village boundaries ending up at the chapel of Agios Georgios. There, dances were followed by dances to the music played by zurna ('zournades') and davul instruments. The dance begins singing: 'the festival is born at the Saint's, Agios Georgios.' (Aikaterinidis 1969, 136-137).

According to this custom: "Once there was a fountain over there and water ran. And the beast would come and stop it from flowing. And if they wished for a daughter, it would eat her off and drain the water. One day they brought a maiden. They decorated her, and St. George saw her. The lamia beast comes out, it was growling (…) as soon as it started growling the Saint takes the pole and pulls out the beast and kills it, and so he saves her. Now, we celebrate every year. We incarnate St. George (…)" (Aikaterinidis 1969, 145-146).

Moreover, in Leonidio, Arkadia, the presence of a huge snake-wall in the plain, which did not let anyone pass, is still played out in the narratives of the inhabitants, referring, as the previous references, to the importance of water protection as a source of life and survival of the community[16]. The musicologist Simon Karas (1996), based on the obvious serpentine formations and its 'peonic' rhythm beats, claimed that the "Tsakonikos" dance, native of this area, represents the struggle of the god Apollo with Python, the serpent of moisture, disease and epidemics. The 'Tsakonian' dance, imbued with traditions where strong symbolisms nestle, refers to protecting water as a source of life and survival of a community. Besides, it refers to the means of its protection, moves through selected kinetic shapes and embodies relationships in space and time where —among others —the community recalls its ancestral myths and history and manages its past in present context (Hilari & Zografou, 2016).

In areas where there was water scarcity, inhabitants anxiously searched for new sources of water, a fact that is reflected in various traditions. According to these traditions, the only water source in the area is controlled by a dragon or "drakon" [in Greek] who does not allow people to use the water for personal use, for their land or for their

16 For the tradition about the snake in Leonidio see: Lekkos M. 1920. *On Tsakonians and the Tsakonian Dialect*. Athens: Papapavlou and Sia; Anastasia Chilari. 2009. *Local and national identity in motion: the paradigm of the Tsaconian dance in Leonidio, Arcadia*. Postgraduate thesis, S.E.F.A.A.- E.K.P.A.; Anastasia Hilari & Magda Zografou. 2016. Dance and embodied memory in a small town of Kynouria: St Nikolas; Snake and Tsakonikos Dance. *Papers in Ethnology and anthropology*, No 27, 16: 7-20. For the incorporation of this tradition in Tsakonikos dance see: Hilari & Zografou, 2016

livestock. Polymerou-Kamilaki (1999, 174) argues that: "These traditions are of particular interest not only for their magical-religious content, but mainly for the socio-economic dimensions they reflect, when we draw back the veil of myth. Dragons, dragons and ghosts, which man tries to appease with bloody sacrifices, allude to quarrels to the death over the sharing of the waters, which take place above all between relatives and brothers and sisters, for the domination of the waters and the claim to a particular area."

Nature is "the uniquely infinite source of allegorical and symbolic discourse" (Kovani 1995, 38), where "each and every natural element as a symbol constitute one microworld, a figurative semantic connected to an experience that reaches all levels of existence (…)."

One of the best-known wellness events[17] is the "Perperouna" or "Pirpirouna" custom[18], found in several regions and under various names and is associated with drought and dryness. Rain has been associated with various rituals in many traditional societies close to nature. Blagojević points out the similarity of this ritual with the Serbian "dodole" ritual for summoning rain (Blagojević 2024, 39).[19] Rituals based on the "rain dance" of the Plains Indians (Kraus 1980; Zografou 2003) were aimed at inducing rain to help people and their crops survive. The rain rituals are a religious practice, intrinsically linked to the people's culture and expressed in beliefs and practices, myths, folk songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, sacred sites and objects, as a way of "Praying for rain". This practice is associated with abundance in relation to one good, to life, harvest, and fertility. "Perperuna" showcases phytomorphic disguises, where decoration with greenery and flowers is all-present. Puchner (2016, 34) argues that "Perperuna, a girl dressed in green, who goes around all the Orthodox Balkans (as a dodola or paparuda) from house to house singing the song begging to God for rain, while the housewives in an act of analog magic sprinkle it with water, so this drips as if it started raining indeed." According to Kyriakidis (1990, 15), it is an ancient custom, which is associated with inducing rain during periods of drought,

17 According to Zografou (2003, 261), wellbeing folk dance events are 'those dance systems that are performed in the context of a relatively closed community life and are structured by spontaneous and interconnected symbolic dance acts of magical-religious purpose. They also form or belong to a defined etiquette, are governed by a strict convention, adhere to an established ritual even when repeated, bridge crucial phases of the year, have a spatio-temporal/calendar constraint, are passed down traditionally and mark the identity of the group.'

18 For the "Perperouna", see: Loukopoulos 1938; Stamouli-Saranti, 1939; Kavakopoulos, 1993; Naki, 2004; Ispiridou, 2010; Megas, 2012

19 More about "dodole" ritual see: Blagojević 2009, 80–81.

especially in summer months. And Lukatos (1992) adds that "the custom of perperuna is a kind of 'cultic fund-raising', performed for the common productive good."

The girls gathered, dressed a little girl in a white dress and decorated her with greenery. They would also take a couple of containers of water and a bunch of herbs and walk around the village, singing:

"Perperuna is walking around, begging God
to bring the rain, a softy rain.
god, drench us with some rain, soft-a-rain,
soft of a rain, one fine, good rain.
one rain, a good rain and another, a better one
to make be the wheat and the grass of this earth.
To allow those folk to grow and flourish and enrich the world
Wheat, cotton and cool herbs.
Plenty, plenty of water, so it shall pile and gather.
Tons of water, tons of wine."

Whoever they met on the street was sprinkled with water and sung to. In every house they arrived, the housewife would go out and wet the grasses of Pirpiruna. The Pirpirouna would shake, and drops would fall on the ground, just like the rainfall. According to Kavakopoulos (1993, 227) 'it is danced like a ritual dance to cause rain' in the words of the song 'Pirpirouna is walking around (…)'. It is found in many areas, such as Petra, Aigeiros in Rodopi, Eastern Thrace, and Roumeli. Similar was the custom of 'Barbara' found in Peta of Arta. In Kymi, Evia, the custom of 'Piperia' is found, which took place in the summer, to rain and water thirsty corn. A similar customary ritual is mentioned by Megas (2012, 229-230) in Xirochori, Evia.

Water in divination customs

The presence of water in oracular customs is evident in the custom of Cledon, which is found throughout Greece with slight differences across regions and takes place on the evening of the eve of the Birthday of Saint John (24 June). The feast of St. John the Cledon (aka 'Riganas', or 'Rizikaris') on June 24 is one of the biggest summer celebrations in Greek tradition. Loukatos (1992: 47) describes it as one of the most 'ceremonial'

processes in our present-day folk tradition. A folk divination process, it reveals to unmarried girls the identity of their future husband.

According to Aikaterinidis (1999, 45), "it consists of a series of individual customary actions, dominated by the silent water, which provides its essential ritual aspect". According to the custom, on the eve of St. John's Day, the single girls gather in one of the village houses and assign one or some among them to bring the 'silent water' from a well or a tap fountain. The water is put into a clay pot, into which each girl throws an object (a green or red apple, a piece of jewellery, a key, etc.). The container is then covered with red cloth and tied tightly with a string and placed on a roof or other open space, where it remains all night under the starlight. The young girls then return to their homes to sleep, and at night they shall dream of their future husbands (Lucatos, 1992).

On St. John's Day, and before the sun comes up, the container must be brought back inside the house. In the afternoon, single girls and married women as well as relatives and neighbours usually gather again to play the role of witnesses to the divination process. The water-bearing young woman sits in the middle of the gathering and retrieves one by one from the jar the items corresponding to the "root" of each girl and another. Meanwhile, someone who is supposed to have poetic or divinatory talent recites random "mantinades" poems or rhymes, all at once. The mantinada that corresponds to each girl's item is considered to 'foretell her future' and is commented on by the others. At the end of the whole process there is a treat and a dance. [20] Upon the girls' return home, they pay attention to which name or word they hear first in the street to associate it with their luck that night.

Conclusion

Rural societies perceive nature as sacred and are imbued with a 'deep ecological awareness'. This makes them realise the relevance of water in their lives. Beliefs about springs - holy springs, fountains that bring fertility or immortal water are linked to magical and symbolic acts at crucial phases in the life of the bearers of the tradition (such as marriage, birth and death) and in agricultural production in the year cycle. Given the ever-increasing water scarcity today, the practice of worshiping water, as expressed in folk dance practices, can be a source of understanding of

20 See Tsirigotakis A. 2001. Custums in Krete. The Kledon and its mantinades. Pirgos Monofatsiou and https://candia.wordpress.com/culture/cretan-traditions/klidonas/

the multifaceted dimension of this precious natural resource. Similarly, a similar treatment of this commodity in today's setting can be understood.

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Анастасија Хилари

Културна димензија воде у плесним догађајима у грчкој народној традицији

Вода, као кључни елемент природе са вишестраним и вишедимензионалним присуством за човека, заузима значајно место у грчкој традицији. Овај рад покушава да истакне културну димензију воде, која се директно или индиректно пројектује у неколико плесних песама повезаних са ритуалним плесним праксама магијско-религијског и гатачког карактера у годишњем циклусу и друштвеног живота. Значај овог природног добра код носилаца народне традиције, који је данас угрожен због све веће несташице воде, не слави се само у трансгресивним обичајима животног и годишњег циклуса, већ и у случајевима суше или у прелазним периодима годишњег циклуса, при чему је плес средство за изражавање плодности и апотропејских димензија читавог ритуала.

Кључне речи: народне игре, вода, плесне песме