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Macedonian Ethnochoreology – a Problem of Continuity

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Resulting from a lack of dedication and coordination among scholarly, educational and cultural policies, ethnochoreology in Macedonia seems to constantly remain in an initial stage of some sort. The value system of the state administration in Macedonia has still not recognised the differences between academic and amateur forms of creating and transferring knowledge about traditional and folk dances (especially in the last 17 years, when the state has been going through continual transition from one value system to another). It has therefore been a true feat to systematise all initiatives for the stabilisation of ethnochoreology in Macedonia as a scholarly and applied discipline. It has been institutionalized on several occasions, but these attempts were as short-lived as the enthusiasm of their initiators.

The foundations of ethnochoreology in the Republic of Macedonia have been laid by several foreign and domestic scholars,¹ researchers and Macedonian folk dance enthusiasts. As late as 57 years after the establishment of the scholarly/research Department of Musicology and Choreography in 1951 (later, in 1969, renamed the Department of Folk Dance and Music) within the Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje, and 18 years after starting the Ethnomusicology Department at the Music Academy of the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje,² there is still a discrepancy between the living folk tradition and the folk dance scene, on the one hand, and the accumulated *knowledge* of them on the other.

Hence, this review of the different initiatives for studying the traditional dances and their stylisations, as well as the transfer of knowledge about

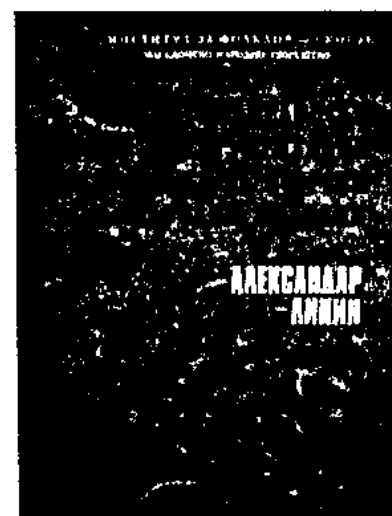
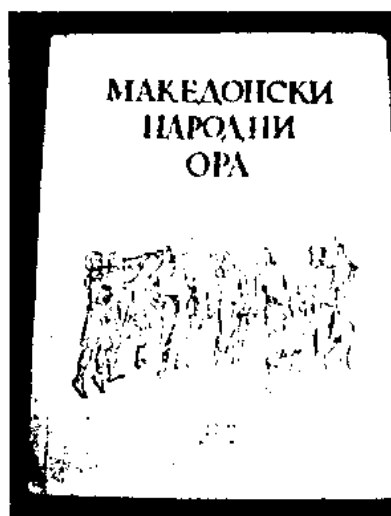
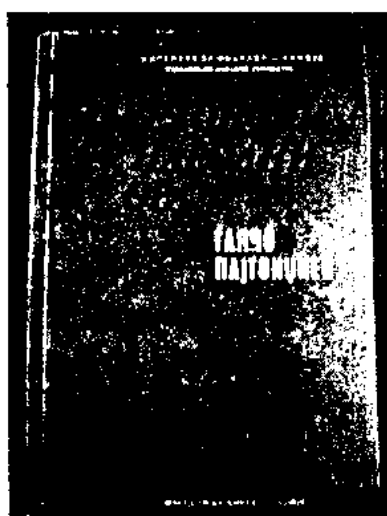
them, will focus on two diverse aspects:

- Scientific/research activity and
- Forms of transmitting knowledge about traditional and folk dances in Macedonia.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON DANCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Due to the unfinished processes of collection, systematisation and ideal-typic description of traditional dance culture in Macedonia, the folkloristic approach still predominates in the exceptionally small number of academic/research papers on the subject.

In 1951, the Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje became the first institution to scientifically study the traditional and folk dances. The first researchers primarily focused on field research and classification of folk dances, working quite intensely in the period between 1966 and 1979. Out of this fund, within the *Orska i instrumentalna narodna tradicija* (*Dance and Instrumental Folk Tradition*) series, nine books were published, as well as various studies in the journal *Makedonski folklor* (*Macedonian Folklore*) and in the anthologies of the Folklorist Union of Yugoslavia, in which directly and indirectly, Macedonian folk dance was analytically/descriptively treated.³ Four of these books were exclusively dedicated to the Macedonian dance tradition,⁴ while the remaining five indirectly complemented the knowledge on Macedonian folk dances, dealing with topics on the instrumental music tradition.⁵



Books from Dance and Instrumental Folk Tradition edition

Macedonia's ethnochoreology pioneer was Gančo Pajtondžiev, the first dance researcher at the Folklore Institute in Skopje. He wrote two books, the first of which is a co-authored volume with Živko Firfov promoting a mutual system of kinetography of traditional dances.⁶ This fourfold system is the first creative attempt in the Macedonian scholarly community to create a special way of recording traditional dances.

Later on, in a study of Eastern and North-Eastern Macedonian dances,⁷ apart from describing his own kinetographic system, Pajtondžiev also analyses some 106 Macedonian dances and a registry of 222 traditional dancers and amateur folk instrumentalists.

His limited system of visualising the specific dance forms provided the grounds for two more initiatives upgrading the idea of kinetography of dances. Both treated the Mijak *Teškoto* dance. One of these is Mile Brzanov's 1961 attempt to write down the *Teškoto* in a complex system using not only the five-lined staff and a rhythmic line for the drum beats, but symbols for minutes and seconds as time units as well.⁸

The second attempt is that of Mihailo Dimoski, G. Pajtondžiev's successor at the Folklore Institute, who adopted the Laban-Knust kinetography system⁹ in the late 1970s, and who, for the requirements of his 1977 book *Makedonski narodni ora 2 (Macedonian Folk Dances 2)* covering the repertory of the Tance (Dance) State Ensemble, attempted to complement the notation of the rubato dances with drum beats precisely counted in time units.

In this most active period of the Department of Folk Songs and Dances at the Folklore Institute, the ethnochoreologist Mihailo Dimoski began an intense international initiative investigating the methodology of collecting, documenting and studying of dances in Romania (1969), the Czech Republic (1979), Germany (1977/78/79), and occasionally in Croatia and Slovenia.

Since 1977 the Institute has begun working on a project-based system, so that the folk dance researcher Dimoski was involved in regional projects,¹⁰ projects treating the Macedonian diaspora,¹¹ and, of course, individual projects.¹² Since the end of 1979 to the present there have been no projects entailing ethnochoreological research at the Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje.

Outside the Institute, traditional dances have occasionally been the focus of interest by the ethnologists from the Museum of Macedonia (Vera Kličkova and Milica Georgieva,¹³ Vlado Bocev¹⁴) and the professors of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (Galaba Palikruševa,¹⁵ Ljupčo Risteski,¹⁶ and Jelena Cvetanovska¹⁷).

The professors of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering at the St Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje also made an exceptionally interesting attempt to create a three-dimensional dance database.¹⁸ In this experimental attempt,¹⁹ three Macedonian dances, the *Aramisko*, *Beranče* and *Berovka* were simultaneously represented with Laban-Knust Kinetography, a textual description and a 3-D visual presentation.

With the support of the Ministry of Culture, two independent, though large and crucial, projects have been realised. The first is that of Professor Elsie Ivančić-Dunin, who in the period between 1988 and 1989, with the help of a professional dancer, the doyen Stanimir Višinski, filmed the stage repertory of 93 folk groups in Macedonia.

Dances in Macedonia is a 100-hour video collection, the first video collection of Macedonian folk dances since World War II and the second collection of dances from Macedonia ever produced. As a whole, it is a testimony to the folk dance tradition in a crucial moment for the Macedonian state, the period immediately preceding the independence of the Republic of Macedonia (this year, in fact, marks the 20th anniversary



Cover of the book *Orata vo Makedonija – scenski del: Tanec / Dances in Macedonia – Performance*
Genre: Tanec²⁰

of the production of this collection). Part of it has been used as the foundation of the book dedicated to the only state dance ensemble, Tanec, published in 1995 under the title *Orata vo Makedonija – scenski del: Tanec / Dances in Macedonia – Performance Genre: Tanec*.²⁰

Of great significance has also been a project by the Composers' Union of Macedonia, *Multimedijalna enciklopedija na makedonskiot muzički folklor (A Multimedia Encyclopedia of Macedonian Musical Folklore)*, in which dances are covered in a separate chapter, together with other folk-music genres²¹.

Despite the inventive individual initiatives creating intense and active relations between society and dance (but solely as independent initiatives), there is a lack of systematic dedication and ongoing support from the state institutions.

THE TRADITIONAL DANCES IN MACEDONIAN EDUCATION

Traditional and folk dances in the Macedonian education system have been present both in the formal and informal networks for transferring knowledge about the tradition.

1. The formal, or institutionalised, mode of knowledge transfer after World War II has made an important impact on the authenticity of traditional dances, transforming them into so-called “folk ballet” or a gymnastic creation.

a. Various sources indicate that the introduction of Macedonian dances in formal education began in the 1930s through the 1936 *Programme and Method Instructions* for gymnastics courses in all eight classes of high-school education.²² In this historical period, when Macedonia was annexed to Serbia within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the pan-Slavic Falcon Flights Gymnastic and Athletic Clubs included dances in their gymnastic exercise routines for certain festivities.

b. After World War II the same concept for the school curricula was incorporated in the educational system of the Macedonian state in physical education courses for the primary school, high school and higher education.

c. The Faculty of Physical Education included 70 popular dances, 15 of which are practically studied nowadays, in the rhythmic gymnastic and dance course.

d. Another institution introducing traditional dances, called *folk dances*, was the Ballet Department at the Ilija Nikolovski – Luj State Music and Ballet School in Skopje (1956/57),²³ which inappropriately named the course “Folklore.” It is sometimes extremely difficult to classify the activities related to traditional and folk dance in Macedonia due to the wide usage of the term “folklore” as synonym for “folk dancing,” “folk dance teaching,” “folk dance studies,” or “folk dance research.”

e. The educational system in Macedonia marked a short but systematic attempt to treat traditional dances in great detail as part of the ethnochoreology course at the Music Academy at the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje.

Professor Olivera Vasić from the Music Academy in Belgrade laid the foundations for students to study ethnochoreology in their final years during the academic years of 1993/94 and 1994/95, which systematically covered traditional dances, both in theory and in practice.

f. Following this successful attempt, in the academic year of 2001/2002, a special department for professional traditional and folk dancers was established at the Ballet Department of the Ilija Nikolovski – Luj State Music and Ballet School, but this time with a rather scarce and confusing curriculum created without consulting expert researchers from the field.

g. On similar grounds, at the newly established Goce Delčev University in Štip, a separate Department of Ethnochoreology was formed in 2007, which certainly deserves praise, but as of the time the paper went to press, we have not been allowed to view a single formal document.

2. On the other hand, there is the institutionalised, though informal, transfer of knowledge about folk dances. The system of one professional folk dance ensemble and some 130 amateur folk groups within the so-called “folk amateurism” is the largest folk-dance community in Macedonia. In it, teachers from the major cultural/artistic associations (KUDs) transfer their practical knowledge about current stylisations and authored choreographies to dancers from the smaller folk groups.

3. Another appealing and widely distributed form of knowledge transfer are dance seminars, the target group of which, in the period between 1974 and 1988/89, were foreign researchers, choreographers and dancers. The most relevant seminar was the Croatian Educational Board Summer School, during which traditional dances from all over former SFRY were studied, divided into six ethnochoreological zones.²⁴ Macedonia was presented in the so-called *Vardar Zone*, and the lecturers/teachers were Rada and Stanimir Višinski, as well as Mihailo Dimoski on occasion.

CONCLUSION

Folk dances have strong supporters among the Macedonian public; it is still a living and dominant dance culture. There are numerous initiatives, forms and individuals that in some way contribute to the process of fostering one of the most recognizable Macedonian labels, so it would make perfect sense if the state wished to trademark the Macedonian folk dance. Is there, however, an academic/scientific community to accomplish that? The failure to recognise ethnochoreology as a separate discipline and its continual marginalisation by educational and cultural policies is the main reason we cannot currently claim that there is an organised academic/scientific community of ethnochoreologists in Macedonia. It would be unjust, therefore, to systematise the achievements this discipline has made in 60 years and at the same time to predict its perspectives. It is quite discouraging to realise that there are no more than 10 published books on folk dances in Macedonia, or that there is currently no more than a single researcher continually dedicated to this issue, as well as no institution concerned with keeping this discipline alive.

Nevertheless, the future of ethnochoreological thought is for the time being seen in a newly established institution within the Ministry of Culture known as the Cultural Heritage Protection Office (2005), in which dance is treated as intangible cultural heritage, and ethnochoreology as an applied discipline has been left little room to provide the appropriate scientific and artistic treatment of traditional dance as part of the process of protecting cultural heritage.

Notes:

¹ A direct influence on laying the foundations and the development of Macedonian ethnochoreology was also made by Danica and Ljubica Janković, Stojan Džudžev, Mane Čučkov, Živko Firfov, Gančo Pajtonđiev, Valens Vodušek, Niko Kuret, Ivan Ivančan, Elsie Ivančić-Dunin, Olivera Mladenović, Olivera Vasić, and Mihailo Dimoski.

² At the Department of Ethnomusicology at the Music Academy of the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, every four years ethnochoreology is studied in a specialised course.

³ Ethnochoreology in Macedonia has so far treated only Macedonian dances. Although since 1971, within the Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje there has been a Department of Minority Cultures, but except for Elsie Ivancic-Dunin's *Gypsy Wedding, Dance and Customs*, 1971, and Ivona Opetčeska-Tatarčevska's *Svadbenite obredni igri na Vlasite od Gorna Belica, Struško (Ritual Wedding Dances of the Vlachs of Upper Belica, Struga Region)*, *Ethnicities and Cultures in the Balkans – International Conference in Trojan, Bulgaria 23th - 26th Aug, 2000, Vol. 2, Sofia, 2000*, p. 125, hardly any published academic studies on the dance traditions of the minorities in Macedonia exist. Fostering of dance diversities has become the responsibility of folk group dancers, but not the academic community.

⁴ Živko Firfov, Gančo Pajtonđiev. *Makedonski narodni ora so koreografski znaci i terminologija [Macedonian Folk Dances with Marked Choreographies and Terminology]*, Kočo Racin, Skopje. 1953; Gančo Pajtonđiev, *Makedonski narodni ora [Macedonian Folk Dances]*, book 1, Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, Skopje, 1977; Mihailo Dimoski, 'Orskata narodna tradicijana Makedoncite od s. Ajvatovo (Solunsko) i nejinite karakteristiki' ['The Folkdance Tradition of the Macedonians from the Village of Ajvatovo (Thessaloniki Region) and its Features'], *Makedonski folklor [Macedonian Folklore]*, Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, IV/7-8, 1971, p. 295-309; Mihailo Dimoski, 'Metro-ritmičkite strukturi na orata vo Makedonija' ['The Metrical/Rhythmical Structures of Folk Dances in Macedonia'], *Makedonski folklor [Macedonian Folklore]*, Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, IX/18, 1976, p. 79-90; Mihailo Dimoski, 'Rusaliskite običaj i igri od s. Sekirnik (Strumičko) – The Semik Dances and Customs from the Village of Sekirnik (Strumica Region)'] *Makedonski folklor [Macedonian Folklore]*, Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, VII/13, 1974, p. 165-182; Mihailo Dimoski, *Makedonski narodni ora [Macedonian Folk Dances]*, book 2, Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, Skopje, 1977; Mihailo Dimovski, *Metodološkite postapki pri istražuvanje i prezentiranje na narodnite ora vo Makedonija [The Methodological Process of Researching and Presenting the Folk Dances in Macedonia]*, 24. ZDFJ Congress, Piran, 1977, SUFJ-SED, 1977, p. 319-322; Mihailo Dimoski, 'Podatoci za orskata tradicija vo Kruševo' ['Records of the Folkdance Tradition in Kruševo'], *Anthology of the XIX SZFJ Congress, Kruševo, 1972, Skopje, ZFM, 1977*, p. 39-42; Mihailo Dimoski 'Narodnite ora i orskata tradicija vo Berovsko' ['Folk Dances and Folkdance Tradition in the Berovo Region'], *Makedonski folklor [Macedonian Folklore]*, Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, XIII/26 1980, p. 111-118; 980, III-118; Mihailo Dimoski,

'Nekoi karakteristiki na lazarskite obredni igri vo SR Makedonija' ['Certain Features of the Lazarus Ritual Dances in the SR Macedonia'], *Papers from the XXIII SUFJ Congress*, Slavonski Brod, 1976, Zagreb, SUFJ-DFH, 1981, p. 211-220.

⁵ **Aleksandar Linin**, *Makedonski instrumentalni orski narodni melodii* [*Macedonian Instrumental Folkdance Melodies*], Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, Skopje, 1978; Džimrevski Borivoje, *Čalgiskata tradicija vo Makedonija* [*The Čalgija Tradition in Macedonia*], Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, Skopje, 1985; Džimrevski Borivoje, *Gajdata vo Makedonija* [*The Bagpipe in Macedonia*], Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, Skopje, 1995; Džimrevski Borivoje, *Šupelkata vo Makedonija* [*The Pipe in Macedonia*], Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, Skopje, 2000; Džimrevski Borivoje, *Gradskata instrumentalna tradicija vo Makedonija* [*The Urban Folk Instrumental Tradition in Macedonia*], Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, Skopje, 2005.

⁶ The first manuscripts using Gančo Pajtondžiev and Živko Firfov's system were published in *Makedonski narodni ora* [*Macedonian Folk Dances*], Marko Cepenkov Folklore Institute, Skopje, 1953.

⁷ **Gančo Pajtondžiev**, *Makedonski narodni ora* [*Macedonian Folk Dances*]; the *Orska narodna tradicija* [*Folk Dance Tradition*] edition, book 1, Makedonska kniga, Skopje, 1973.

⁸ **Mihail Brzanov**, 'Problem transkripcije galičke igre *Teškoto*' ['The Problems with Transcribing the Galičnik *Teškoto* Dance'], *Zbornik na trudovi od rabotata na XIII Kongres na SZFJ vo Dojran 1966 godina* [*Anthology of the Papers from the XIII SZFJ Congress in Dojran 1966*], published in Skopje, 1968, p. 509-513.

⁹ The Laban-Knust dance notation was also introduced (for a very short time) as a unit in the curriculum of the ethnochoreology course at the Music Academy in Skopje in 1993 till 1995.

¹⁰ *Sovremenata sostojba na folklorot vo titovveleško i Titov Veles* [*The Contemporary State of the Folklore in Titov Veles and its Surroundings*]; *Sovremenata sostojba na folklorot vo Kumanovo i kumanovsko* [*The Contemporary State of the Folklore in Kumanovo and its Surroundings*], *Sovremenata sostojba na folklorot vo ohridsko-struškiot region* [*The Contemporary State of the Folklore in the Ohrid-Struga Region*].

¹¹ As part of the *Istraživanje na folklorot na našite sonarodnici vo stranstvo* [*Research into the Folklore of our Compatriots Abroad*] project (1977-1979), in 1978 Mihailo Dimoski and Gjorgji Gjorgjiev went on a research trip among Macedonians living in the US and Canada.

¹² Some of which were the following: Mihailo Dimoski's video documentation of the traditional song and dance festivals in Ohrid, Bitola and Dolneni, the preparations for the book *Makedonskite narodni ora od Zapadna i Jugozapadna Makedonija* [*West and Southwest Macedonian Folk Dances*], the collaboration with Rada and Stanimir Višinski, professional dancers, for the lectures on the Vardar ethnochoreological zone in Bađija, Croatia, which resulted in the anthology by Elsie Dunin, Mihailo Dimoski, Stanimir Višinski *Makedonski narodni plesovi* [*Macedonian Folk Dances*], Zagreb, 1973.

¹³ **Vera Kličkova i Milica Georgieva**, *Svadbenite običaji od seloto Galičnik* [*Wedding*

Customs in the Village of Galičnik], the Ethnology Museum Bulletin, Skopje, 1965, p. 95–186, Vera Kličkova's ethnographical films *Galička svadba* [*The Galičnik Wedding*], *Veligdenski igri* [*Easter Dances*], etc.

¹⁴ As a visual anthropologist, Vladimir Bocev, in his ethnological films on the *Džomolars*, the *Vasiličars*, and the *Kurban*, makes a valuable contribution on the living dance tradition.

¹⁵ **Galaba Palikruševa**, *Derviškiot red Halveti vo Makedonija* [*The Khalwati Dervish Order in Macedonia*], the Štip Popular Museum Anthology, book I, 1958-59, Štip, 1959, p. 105–119.

¹⁶ **Ljupčo Risteski**, "Posmrtni ora" ["Dances for Death"], *Makedonski folklor* [*Macedonian Folklore*], Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore, No. 53, 1999.

¹⁷ **Jelena Cvetanovska**. *Igri so smrtta* [*Dances with Death*], Matica makedonska, Skopje, 1999.

¹⁸ **Slobodan Kalajdžiski, Vladimir Trajković, Dančo Davčev** – *Object-Oriented Modeling of Spatio-Temporal Dance Data*, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science Department, St Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, 2002-2004.

¹⁹ www.actapress.com/PDFViewer.aspx?paperId=26259

²⁰ Thanks to the EVIA Digital Archive <http://www.indiana.edu/~eviada/>, this collection has reached the digitalisation stage and has been heavily prepared for Internet use.

²¹ The materials from this project are still awaiting publication.

²² **Danica and Ljubica Janković**. 'Rad na narodnim igrama kod nas i u drugim zemljama' ['Working on Folk Dances in Our and Other Countries'], *Narodne igre* (*Folk Dances*) VIII, 1952, p.291

²³ **Lidija Lazarevska, Ilija Nikolovski**. *Luj State Music and Ballet School (1945-1995)*, Skopje 1995, p. 26.

²⁴ Several seminars of this sort have been established in Macedonia: in Struga, Oteševo, Bitola, out of which lecturers in the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan emerged, the most renown of whom include: Georgi Tomov, Atanas Kolarovski, Pece Atanasovski, Vase Robev, Elsie Ivančić Dunin, etc. They have acquired their knowledge on stylised dances primarily in their dance practice within the Tanec State Ensemble.