

Encyclopedia of Greek Art



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Revised Edition: 2014

ISBN 978-81-323-4785-9

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Published by:
The English Press
4735/22 Prakashdeep Bldg,
Ansari Road, Darya Ganj,
Delhi - 110002
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Chapter-1

Greek Dances



God Pan and a Maenad dancing. Ancient Greek red-figured olpe from Apulia, ca. 320–310 BCE. Pan's right hand fingers are in a snapping position.

Greek dance is a very old tradition, being referred to by authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch and Lucian. There are different styles and interpretations from all of the islands and surrounding mainland areas. Each region formed its own choreography and style to fit in with their own ways. For example, island dances have more of a "watery" flow to them, while Pontic dancing closer to Black Sea, is very sharp. There are over 4000 traditional dances that come from all regions of Greece. There are also Pan Hellenic dances, which have been adopted throughout the Greek world. These include the tsamiko, syrtos, and kalamatianos.

Traditional Greek dancing has a primarily social function. It brings the community together at key points of the year, such as Easter, the grape harvest or patronal festivals; and at key points in the lives of individuals and families, such as weddings. For this reason, tradition frequently dictates a strict order in the arrangement of the dancers, for example, by age. Visitors tempted to join in a celebration should be careful not to violate these arrangements, in which the prestige of the individual villagers may be embodied.

Greek dances are performed often in diaspora Greek communities, and among international folk dance groups.

Greek folk dances

Dora Stratou, Lykeion ton Ellinidon, Horeftikos Omilos Thessalonikis and many other professional groups exist around the world. Each consists of children and adults who continue to perform traditional dances to support the culture.

Peloponnese

Kalamatianos

The **Kalamatianós Dance** is one of the most well known dances of Greece. It is popular throughout Greece and Cyprus and is often performed at social gatherings. As is the case with most Greek folk dances, it is danced in circle with a counterclockwise rotation, the dancers holding hands. It is a joyous and festive dance; its musical beat is 7/8, subdivided into two sets of 3 and 4 beats. The steps are 12: 10 steps counterclockwise ("forward") followed by 2 steps clockwise ("backwards"). Depending on the occasion and the dancers' proficiency, certain steps may be taken as jumps or squats. The lead dancer usually holds the second dancer by a handkerchief, this allowing him or her to perform more elaborate steps and acrobatics. The steps of the Kalamatianós are the same as those of the Syrtos, but the latter is slower and more stately, its beat being an even 4/4.

History

The roots of kalamatianos can be found in antiquity. Homer, in the Iliad, describes three performances made around the spear of Achilles that depict a dance in an open circle.

The ancient Spartans had a dance called *ormos*, which was a syrto style dance described in detail by Xenophon where a woman led a male into dance using a handkerchief. Lucian states that the *ormos* dance was performed in an open circle and was done by young men and women. The men would dance vigorously while the women danced with modest movements. In the 19th century, this dance was called *Syrtos O Peloponisos*. It is believed to have acquired the name *kalamatianos* from the town of Kalamata in southern Greece; most Greek dances are commonly named after the villages or areas from which they are considered to have originated. Kalamatiano songs are many and popular - some of the more traditional kalamatiano songs are *Samiotissa* (The girl from Samos), *Mandili Kalamatiano* (Kerchief from Kalamata), *Milo Mou Kokkino* (My Red Apple), *To Papaki* (The Duckling), *Mou Pariggile To Aidoni* (The Nightingale sent me a message), *Ola Ta Poulakia* (All Birds), etc. An especially haunting example of the kalamatianos, *Mekapses Yitonisa* (Μ'έκαψες Γειτόνισσα), was recorded for the National Geographic Society's groundbreaking *Music of Greece* album, released in 1968.

Contemporary influence

The American jazz composer, Dave Brubeck, well known for his exploration of asymmetrical rhythms in his own music, used a variant of the rhythm of the kalamatianos for his *Unsquare Dance*, though the measures are divided into two groups of 4 followed by 3 beats rather than 3 followed by 4. The 1960s popular singer, formerly known as Cat Stevens, wrote and performed a song, *Ruby Love*, in 7/8 time with a distinctive Greek flavour. Stevens, who would later convert to Islam, has paternal Greek Cypriot roots. Near the end of the 2002 film, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the cast dances the kalamatianos to the song, *Orea Pou Ine I Nifi Mas* (Ωραία που είναι η νύφη μας) at Ian and Toulla's wedding reception.

Song lyrics

Milo Mou Kokkino a traditional kalamatiano song from Western Macedonia.

Lyrics

Μήλο μου κόκκινο, ρόιδο βαμμένο (x2)
Γιατί με μάρανες το πικραμένο

Παένω κ' έρχομαι μα δεν βρίσκω (x2)
Βρίσκω την πόρτα σου μανταλομένη

Τα παραθυρούδια σου φεγγοβολούνε (x2)
Ρωτάω την πόρτα σου, που πάει η κυρά σου

Κυρά μ' δεν είναι 'δώ, πάησε στην βρύση (x2)
Πάησε να βρει νερό και να γεμίσει

Translation

My red apple, my scarlet pomegranate,
why have you made me wilted and bitter?

I come and go, but cannot find you
I try your door, and it's always locked.

Your windows are always lighted
I ask your door, "Where is your lady?"

"My lady is not here, she is at the wellspring
She's gone to bring water".

Tsamiko

The **Tsamiko** (Greek: Τσάμικος, *Tsamikos*) is a popular traditional dance of Greece. The name literally means *dance of the Chams*. It is also known as **Kleftikos** (Greek: Κλέφτικος), literally meaning dance of the Klephts.

The dance

The dance follows a strict and slow tempo not emphasising on the steps, but more on the "attitude, style and grace" of the dancer. The dancers hold each other from each other's hands, bent 90 degrees upwards at the elbows. It takes a sturdy hand, especially if you are supporting the first or last person of the line (or circle) who will lean on you to perform high acrobatic leaps (usually kicking his right leg up as he takes off followed by the left (in a scissor-like motion), hitting the latter with the back of his hand before landing). The steps are relatively easy but have to be precise and strictly on beat. The dancer might even stomp his foot in response to a strong beat. There is some improvisation involved and many variations of the steps, depending on which area the dancers come from. Over time the dance has taken on many variations. It is danced in a circle to 3/4 rhythm. In the past, it was danced exclusively by men, but in modern times both men and women take part.

Tradition

Danced almost exclusively by men, this dance is strongly reminiscent of the 1821 era in Greek history.

Today Tsamiko is a popular dance in festivals and weddings, especially in the rural areas of Central Greece and Peloponnese, as well as Epirus periphery where a slower version is performed. Sometimes the dancers dress in the traditional Greek military uniform of the Evzones (Greek, Εύζωνοί). This dance is usually performed to celebrate national events (i.e. anniversary of the declaration of the start of Greek War of Independence in 1821).

Tsakonikos

The **Tsakonikos** or *Tsakonikos khoros* ("Tsakonian dance") is a dance performed in the Peloponnese in Greece. It comes from the region, chiefly in Arcadia, known as Tsakonia. It is danced in many towns villages there with little variation to the steps.

In Ayios Andreas, it is performed as a mixed dance in an open circle, with the hands held up (*thulotiko-agaze*, in Greek). The most popular songs for the *tsakonikos* are "*Sou ipa mana kale mana*" and "*Kinisan ta tsamopoula*".

The dance is performed to a 5/4 (3+2) rhythm in an open circle which slowly winds in upon itself, forming a snail-shaped design. This labyrinthine formation is, according to legend, linked to the Crane dance of Theseus in Greek mythology, who slew the Minotaur in the Labyrinth of King Minos. It has also been linked to the slaying by Apollo of the Python at Delphi.

"*Sou Ipa Mana*"

The *tsakonikos* is commonly danced *Sou ipa mana* (gr: Σου είπα μανά, Σου 'πα μανα μ' — "I said to you, mother")

Σου είπα μανά μ', καλέ μανά μ',
Σου είπα μανά μ', πάντρεψέ με.
Σου είπα μανά μ', πάντρεψέ με.
Σπιτονοικοκύρεψέ με.

Γέρον άντρα, καλέ μανά μ',
Γέρον άντρα μη μου δώσεις.
Γέρον άντρα μη μου δώσεις.
Γιατί θα το μετανιώσεις.

Γιατί ο γέρος, καλέ μανά μ'
γιατί ο γέρος τα λογ'ιάζει
γιατί ο γέρος τα λογ'ιάζει
και τα διπλολογαριάζει

Translation:

I said to you, mother, dear mother,
I said to you mother, marry me off,
I said to you mother, marry me off,
Make me the mistress of my own house.

An old man, mother, dear mother, An old man you should not give me,
An old man you should not give me,
Because you will regret it.

For the old man, my fair mother,
For the old man considers things,
For the old man considers things,
And then reconsiders them.

Ai Georgis

Ai Georgis is a dance from the village of Nestani in Arkadia, a region of Greece in the Peloponnesus which takes its name from the mythological character Arcas. The dance is performed and danced on the feast day of St George usually after Easter Sunday.

Dance

The dance is accompanied only by song. The men lead the dance and the women follow. Each of the male dancers holds a shepherds crook which has been entwined with green leaves and wildflowers. The hand holding the crook is bent at the elbows. The rhythm of the song is in 7/8 and in 2/4. The dance is made up of ten basic steps broken into four parts. The lyrics are about St George protecting the villagers from the hands of the Ottomans and about Ayia Sofyia.

Thrace

Karşılama



Karsilamas (Turkish: *karşılama*, Greek:Καρσιλαμάς) is a Turkish folk dance spread all over Northwest Asia Minor and carried to Greece by Asia Minor immigrants. The term "karsilamas" comes from the Turkish word "karsilama" meaning "face to face greeting"

The dance is still popular on Northwestern areas of Turkey, especially on wedding parties, festivals and so on, it also transformed itself into Zeybekikos dance in Greece. Name zeybekikos may be derived from another Asia Minor dance "zeybek" yet, the dance of zeybekikos as a form much more adopts Karsilama figures and creates mixed genre of dance in Modern Greece by having the Asia Minor figures from zeybek and karsilama.

Karsilamas is a couple dance that is still danced in what was the Ottoman Empire, from Persia to Serbia, and in the Macedonia and Thrace regions of Northern Greece.

Figures of the dance may vary from region to region but main theme is two people face each other, and music rhythmically controls their next moves. Traditionally people dance without any figure on their minds, just figures they have seen from their elders.

The meter is 9/8, and the basic move is danced in four small steps with durations 2,2,2,3 respectively. The style and mood (bouncy, smooth, lively, etc.) vary depending on the region.

Rumeli Karşılaması, Trakya Karşılaması, Merzifon Karşılaması, Edirne Karşılaması, Gümülcine Karşılaması, Giresun Karşılaması, Taraklı Karşılaması, Bilecik Karşılaması, Old Karsilamas (Παλιός Καρσιλαμάς), Pigi Karsilama(Πιγικί), Ayşe Karsilama (İskender