

Dancing and Singing in the wedding ritual Case study from Arkadia-Greece

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Abstract: Through rituals and rites people has always tried to prevent evil and to find divine favor. This paper focuses on the examination of the existence of symbols in the marriage ceremony. More specifically, it examines the existence or not of dancing and singing in the weddings of Prastos in Arcadia, during the period 1945 to the early 1990s. Due to this reason, methodologically, the collection of ethnographic data was carried out the on field ethnographic method and is based on the use of primary (field research and participant observation) and secondary sources (bibliography and archival ethnographic research). VanGennep's theoretical shape of rites de passage is used to analyze the ethnographic data. As a result, the 'symbols' of dance and song exist either in conjunction or alone. The threefold character of the dance depends on the mood of those involved and on the customary context.

Keywords: Greek traditional dances, rites de passage, Prastos, Tsakonia, threefold character of the dance.

1. Introduction

Through rituals and rites people has always tried to prevent evil and to find divine favor. Thus, they invested and they continue to invest the most important rites of passage with various 'symbols'. These ritual symbols (words or phrases or gestures or clothing or places or images or foods or objects or dances or songs or the gender of the participants) convey the meanings of the ceremony and convey messages about the identity of both sides, individuals and the same time the whole community (Turner, 1967; Tambiah, 1979; Schechner, 1988; Schultz & Lavenda, 1990; Papataxiarches, 1997; Psychogiou, 1999; Bowie, 2006; Chrysanthopoulou, 2008; Hendry, 2011; Salamon & Goldberg, 2012; Avdikos, 2017; Androulaki, 2020). In the case of the wedding ritual, these symbols acquire fertile properties, aiming to activate the human bodies in order to achieve the enhancement of the fertility of the wedding couple (Psychogiou, 1999).

According to the anthropologist VanGennep, all societies are governed by rites of passage, which are completed through three phases (VanGennep, 2016). The first is the stage of separation from a social situation. In the second stage of the transition, actions are taken for the actors to acquire a new position/role/identity. The third stage is that of incorporation into a new social situation/new role (Turner, 1967, 1982; Nitsiakos, 1990; VanGennep, 2016; Avdikos, 2017).

This paper focuses on the examination of the existence of symbols in the marriage ceremony. More specifically, it examines the existence or not of dancing and singing at the weddings of Prastos in Arcadia during the period 1945 to the early 1990s.

Due to this reason, methodologically, the collection of ethnographic data was carried out the on field ethnographic method (Buckland, 1983,1999; Giurchescu, 1999; Felfoldi, 1999; Kaeppler, 1999; Thomas, 2003; Kyriazi, 2011; Wulff, 2013; Gkefou-Madianou, 2017). More specifically, the ethnographic method was conducted in Prastos, the researcher's native culture, during the period 2018-2022 and is based on the use of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources refer to the data collected from the field research in the form of the interview (open-ended questions for a semi-structured interview and free discussion too) and the participant observation with simultaneous recording and video recording of the resident informants (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1987; Schultz & Lavenda, 1990; Gkefou-Madianou, 1997, 2017; Kaeppler, 1999; Tompson, 2002; Pigiaki, 2004; Emerson et al, 2007; Heyl, 2007; Plummer, 2007; Kyriazi, 2011). The secondary sources refer to the data collected based on the bibliography (Thomas & Nelson, 2003) and archival ethnographic research (Gkefou-Madianou, 1999). VanGennep's theoretical shape of passport rituals is used to analyze the ethnographic data.

2. Ethnographic data

For the habitants of Prastos, the period of time from the day the parents closed the consulate until the eight day, that is the Sunday following the wedding, is considered as wedding. This whole period was full of customary activities, which were accompanied by dancing, singing and banqueting. Through the field research and the participant observation, it was seen that VanGennep's theoretical shape of the tripartite distinction of

rites of passage is also confirmed in the case of weddings in Prastos with dance and song are playing an essential and decisive role for the smooth outcome of the ritual.

The stage of separation began when the girl's father began the consul process, culminated on Saturday night with a feast (banquet, dance and song) at the home of the bridegroom and the bride respectively, and ended the next day, the day of the wedding, on moment when the bride and the groom were leaving their house in the direction of the church. The most important moment of this stage was the custom of "lousmata" and shaving the groom, which interrupted the dance. The "lousmata" took place in both houses, followed by sad songs such as:

*Pray for me, my mother, in my lousmata (baths) now.
I wish my daughter/son that you live and get older
Pray for me, my father, in my lousmata (baths) now.
I wish my daughter/son that you live and get older
Pray for me, my siblings, in my lousmata (baths) now
My sib I wish you to be happy and the Holy Mary near you.
[Ευ(χ)κήσου με μανούλα μου τώρα στα λούσματά μου.
Με την ευ(χ)κή μου κόρη/γιόκα μου να ζήσεις να γεράσεις.
Ευ(χ)κήσου με πατέρα μου τώρα στα λούσματά μου.
Με την ευ(χ)κή μου κόρη/γιόκα μου να ζήσεις να γεράσεις.
Ευ(χ)κηθείτε μου αδερφάκια μου τώρα στα λούσματά μου.
Με την ευ(χ)κή μας αδερφή/έ με γεια σου με χαρά σου και η Παναγιά κοντά σου].*

thus confirming the important role of song in the separation stage.

When the custom of the "lousmata" was completed, the dance began again, giving those present a feeling of joy and validating the ritual that preceded it and at the end of which the groom's departure for the bride's house began. In both houses, for both the bridegroom and the bride, there was a feast with wedding songs and songs praising the graces of the newlyweds, in the rhythm of syrτος and kalamatianos, usually sung without the accompaniment of musical instruments.

During the transition stage, the typical sacrament of marriage was celebrated in the church. This stage included the coronation, the 'dance' of Isaiah and the 'song' by the singers. Immediately after the ceremony, the dance was moved either to the church yard, if the wedding had been celebrated in Ypapanti, or to the square, if the wedding had been celebrated in Taxiarches church. There, the groomsman was the first who started the dance by "dancing" the newlywed couple and always following the dance code of Prastos. Then the father of the groom "danced" them, then the mother of the groom and then the father of the bride and her mother. In the end, their brothers "danced" them and then anyone who wanted joined the dance. The whole village had access to this feast, which was held outside the church or in the square after the coronation.

As soon as the dance in the square was over, the wedding reception was moved to the groom's house and there began the third stage, that of incorporation. The reception of the bride by her mother-in-law was done with dance and songs such as:

*Come out groom's mother and bride's mother-in-law,
to see your son as newlywed, and the bride that he brings you...
[Έβγα μανούλα του γαμπρού και πεθερά της νύφης,
να δεις το γιό σου νιόγαμπρο, τη νύφη που σου φέρνει ...]*

or

*Come out, my mother, to see the partridge that I brought you.
Partridge and dove, the priest's daughter.
Spread flowers in the yard, my mother.
Let the bride pass, the little priest's daughter...
[Έβγα μάνα μου να δεις πέρδικα που σου 'φερα,
πέρδικα και περιστέρα του παπά τη θυγατέρα.
Στρώσε μάνα μου καλή με λουλούδια την αυλή,
να περάσει η νυφούλα, η μικρή παπαδοπούλα]*

After the above stages and songs, the couple has now passed from the social role of single to that of married, and the incorporation of the newlyweds into their new situation becomes evident in part through the process of the wedding reception, consisting of banqueting and dancing. The feast opened “with sedentary songs (kathistika)” (Eleni Arachovitou. Interview by Georgia Stathopoulou in May 2021) and then there was the dance with their honor to have the slow songs. The predominant dance was the syrtos and in between the tsamika were also danced. The repertoire of songs was based exclusively on local songs, the selection of which was made by the singers-relatives and the instrumentalists. The groom would dance in front a tsamiko and the bride a slow syrtos. Near the dawn of Monday, when the guests were already tired from much dancing and singing, the 'games' began, such as “Vergo” and “the miller”. Then, the dance started again for a while and the end of the wedding feast came with the imitative dance “Pos to trivoun to piperi” followed by the “Trio” and “Tsakonikos” dances. The stage of the integration of the young people was completed in the second time, at the feast set up in the bride's house for the eight days. Wine, food, dancing and singing without musical instruments sealed the new couple's full integration into the local community.

3. Discussion

In conclusion, from all the above it seems that in the context of marriage in Prastos, during the period under investigation, the 'symbols' of dance and song exist either in conjunction or alone. Without song and dance there is no wedding said Styliani Kontomourtou (Interview by Georgia Stathopoulou January 22, 2022). Dance and song were essential elements of the wedding ritual, smoothing the transition from one stage to another. The songs expressed joy and sadness, extolled the beauty, gentleness, virtues and qualities of the bride-to-be and were intended to admonish the bride according to the new role she was called upon to assume (Nitsiakos, 1990; Kyriakidis, 1922). In addition, wedding songs gave wishes for well-being, bliss and fertility (Kyriakidis, 1922). Through the wedding songs, the purpose of marriage can be seen, which is none other than procreation, and even more so the desire for male children (Nitsiakos, 1990; Kyriakidis, 1922), which is confirmed by the engagement song “se touta ta patomata” [On these floors].

*On these floors and in the new houses
May there always be joy and festivities
May the newlyweds live many years
To make nine sons, and one daughter.
Their sons be studied and their daughter to become teacher
[Σε τούτα τα πατόματα και στα καινούργια σπίτια
Πάντα χαρές να γίνονται και πάντα γλέντια να 'ναι
Τ' αντρόγυνο που γίνεται χρόνια πολλά να ζήσει.
Να κάνει τους εννιά υγιούς, τη μια τη θυγατέρα.
Οι γιοι του να 'ν' γραμματικοί και η κόρη τους δασκάλα].*

On the other hand, the dance that was present at each stage of the passport ritual functioned independently of the song. At the separation stage, while there is a lot of singing, it seems that the dancing was limited due to the high emotional charge of the relatives. During the shaving of the groom and the “lousmata” of the bride and groom there was only singing and without dancing. The dance started as soon as the “lousmata” and shaving were finished. On the contrary, in the stage of transition and integration, dance and song were identified and went hand in hand. In the transition stage inside the church, only the couple danced with the Isaiah's dance, and in the square, the couple danced together with the main actors of the ritual (best men, parents, relatives and fellow villagers). At the integration stage they danced with all their relatives to fully formalize and seal their integration into the new social situation.

This particular ethnographic example shows that there is a strong relationship among dance, song and marriage ritual. The threefold character of the dance (dance, music and speech) can be analyzed into three possible pairs theoretically: a) music and dance (without speech), b) music and speech (without dance) and c) dance and speech (without music). In this case study from Greece it seems that the threefold character of the dance depends on the mood of those involved and on the customary context. Panagiota's phrase will be used as a conclusion: “*Marriage is a mystery. And dancing is like a mystery. It had substance*” (Panagiota Lambrou. Interview by Georgia Stathopoulou March 24, 2021).

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Author Profile



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