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Village Fairs (*Panigyria*), Dance and Social Groups in the Village of Faraklita, Kefalonia, Greece

The aim of this project is to understand the small community of Faraklita, a village on the Ionian island of Kefalonia, Greece, by studying the village fairs (community festivities in honour of individual saints) of *Agia Paraskevi* and *Profiti Iliia* and their dance practice. Dance constitutes a major element of the village fairs. The observation of the dancers at each fair leads unavoidably to the question: to which social group do they belong to. The participation of inter-families in the village fair and the dances that take place, reveal a coexistence and competition between two social groups as defined by their family origins.

Key words:

Village fair (*panigyri*), Dance, Dancers, Belong to, social group, family origin

Introduction

In Greece, the village fairs are an important part of social/religious life in almost every village (Haland 2011, 111-151; Alexakis 2009, 353-356; Panopoulou 2008, 436-459; Nitsiakos 2003, 160-169; Danforth 1995; Caraveli 1985, 259-286). The village fair is a community celebration in honour of a saint in conjunction with food and dancing performed primarily outdoors in the confines of a churchyard. The occasion of the village fairs are either closely tied to the general celebrations of the Greek Orthodox Church, such as Easter, or to the localized celebration of a village's Patron Saint or Saints depending on the number of churches supported by the village community. The celebrations normally begin with a morning religious service, continue with a midday meal and conclude in the evening with dancing. A community and the village fair exist in parallel. A community apart from being a social and economic reality has cultural elements with a strong symbolic dimension (Cohen 1995). The community gives people a sense of belonging, a consciousness of common historical destiny, and a collective perception of events. As will be shown below, a village fair and its dance practice are not just a field of action, but social and cultural practices through which the social groups crystallize their relationships and the community formulates and re-formulates its identity over the course of time.

The island of Kefalonia is located in the Ionian sea, in Greece, and the village of Faraklata has about 400 permanent residents. Researching dance as part of the wider context of the fair, questions are spawned that need to be answered. The question of 'who are the dancers?' leads to the unavoidable question: 'to which social group do the participants belong to?' This forms the basis for the study of the topic. In other words "the relation of the group to others" (Cohen 1995, 54) is explored. The investigation of this relationship forms the beginning of the unravelling and understanding of Faraklata. It is examined the evidence of social setting and organization at the village fairs of *Agia Paraskevi* and *Profiti Iliia* where the religious and social coexist (Zografou 2003, 246) and dance¹ is an integral part (See, for the study of dancing in relation to the village fair in Greece Alexakis 2008, 165-178; Kavouras 1992, 47-70; Kosmatou 2010, 159-179; Nitsiakos 2001, 21-26 and 2003, 105; Zografou 2003, 240). The villagers have a saying, '*a fair without dancing is not a fair at all*'. The dancing is researched not only as a product of itself, but also as an integral part of the activity that belongs to (Cowan 1990, 18; Royce 1977, 12-13). The dancers are approached not only as bodies that perform a dance (Ness 1992, 6) in a particular time and space, but also as participants in a larger gathering (wedding, dance, festival, etc.) and within the society at large (See, for the study of dance in relation to the society it belongs Alexakis 2008, 43-70; Dabrowska and Bielawski 1995; Kaeppler 1999, 13-25; Kosmatou 1999; Koutsouba 1997; Lantzou 2007, 179-211; Loutzaki 1985, 97-128; Nitsiakos and Laitsios 1994, 33-54; Snyder 1984, 22-30; Torp 1989). This overall approach reveals social and cultural complexities, ideologies and opinions.

The field work was undertaken during the period 2008-2010. The basic method of appraisal was oral history and individual recollections of current issues and past events. The data collected from villagers' 'life experiences' (Van-Boushoten 2002, 23) reveal the community's organization, religious and cultural activities. In addition, other sources of information were historical items found in libraries and general Archives of Kefalonia, to compliment the villagers' data.

The above festivities of Faraklata village have been part of the villagers' social lives for well over two hundred years. Their long-term existence, reveal their alliance with social structures and values. The organizing of the festival of *Agia Paraskevi* is undertaken by the main village church of '*St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary*' and that of *Prophiti Elias* by the second largest church in the village named '*Saint Nicholas*'.

AgioDimitriotes (Member of St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary Church) and AgioNikoliotes (Member of St. Nicholas Church)

The village of Faraklata is divided into five inter-families: The Lambiratiki, the Pollatiki, the Simatiki, the Tzouganatiki, and Panorazatiki. According to the verbal history of the village, it was founded by four brothers: Lambiris, Polos, Simos, and Tzouganis from where the first four inter-families derive their names. Lambiris-Lambiratiki, Polos-Pollatiki, Simos-Simatiki and Tzouganis-Tzouganatiki. Each inter-family consists of groups of families each with their own distinct

surnames. As an example, the Lambiratiki inter-family consists of families with surnames such as Lambiris, Marinakis, Kosmatos, Spanos, Lourantos, Moratos, Kounadis and Parentis. The fifth inter-family, the Panorazades, immigrated from the nearby village of Razata and took their name from the village they come from. 'Panorazades' is made up of families with surnames, such as, Loukatos, Razis, Kroussos, Zambaftis, Alexandratos, Vardaramatos, Marinis and Menegatos.

To the west of the village high street is built the church of St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary, '*one of the larger church constructions in Kefallonia*' (interview) and the main village cemetery orientated in an east-west direction. In the outskirts of the village is located the chapel (ksoklisi) of Agia Paraskevi which belongs to the church of St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary. Originally on the outer north-western edge of the village is the site of the church of St. Nicholas, it is now more centrally located due to new building construction and natural expansion after the devastating earthquake of 1953. In the backyard there is a small inoperative cemetery and around the church, Panorazades built their homes. In the outskirts of the village is located the chapel (ksoklisi) of Profitis Ilias, which belongs to the church of St. Nicholas.

The first four inter-families mentioned are parishioners of St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary, and referred to as 'Agiodimitriotes' and consider themselves as the original and superior inhabitants of the village. Whilst the fifth inter-family, the 'Panorazades', are members of St. Nicholas and are called 'Agionikoliotes', and they perceive themselves as the latter arrivals of the village which also includes the founding of their church. It is significant to mention at this point that no family of the village is recalcitrant with their involvement of the inter-family and church community structures.

The social 'superiority' of the Agiodimitrotes is supposedly reinforced by the myth for the justification of the construction of the chapel of Agia Paraskevi. This myth also reveals the social status of certain families in the community. According to the legend, a female member of the Lykoudis family (Lykoudena) found an icon of Agia (St.) Paraskevi under a bush. Lykoudena is a member of the Agiodimitriotes from the Pollatiki inter-family, and when she found the icon she was toiling away in her husband's vineyards in a region where only other Lykoudis family members had landholdings. The woman took the icon and returned to her home, placing it outside in her garden where she intended to build a shrine in honour of Agia Paraskevi. The next morning the icon was nowhere to be found in the garden it had somehow returned to its original location in the vineyard. The woman retrieved the icon and again placed it in her garden. The following morning the icon had returned to the vineyard. These events repeated themselves a further three times. The unexplainable movement of the icon was interpreted by the villagers and the woman as a divine command as to where a chapel in honour of Agia Paraskevi should be built. As a result a chapel was built within the confines of the landholdings of the Lykoudis group of families and a bell tower was erected outside the woman's house to appease her initial desire of building a shrine to Agia Paraskevi.

This fabrication of a legend by utilising the mystic properties of the church, helps the community accept that the church is managed by particular families. In

addition, the management of the chapel by the families bearing the surname Lykoudis, receive a special social recognition which serves as a means of enhancing their social standing and perception of economic independence. Moreover, the existence of the myth conveys the historic age of the building and of the St. Paraskevi's village fair. As a result, in the mindset of most villagers, they see the village fair of Agia Paraskevi as the original festival that dates from the beginnings of the village settlement. Through this village fair, inhabitants see themselves as belonging to the society. In contrast, the village fair of Prophetis Ilias was established at a much later date, and is not linked directly or indirectly to a mythical event or to a particular family group within the inter-families. The running of the chapel Prophetis Ilias is managed on a rotational basis or in conjunction by almost all the families of the Panorazades family. All Panorazades families have an equal say in the running of the chapel. The wider area around the chapel belongs to the Panorazades family as it is inherited to the sons of the family only. The ownership of Panorazades land brings forth an exclusivity of social worth within the overall framework of the community as a whole. Despite their long-term peaceful coexistence with Agiodimitriotes, Panorazades maintain their identity through the ownership of the land and the maintenance of the church. Although substantial rhetoric emanating from both groups gives the impression of a united community front, under the surface however, a definite sense of difference still survives and this is borne out by the fact of holding competing village fair on the same day.

This separation between families and the interfamily divisions of the families with differing surnames, apart from the oral testimony of informants (Thompson 2002,31), is also substantiated with written archival material. While seeking information at the Prefecture of Kefallonia archives on the histories of the two churches an entry dated 1857 was found concerning a Spyros Lambiris, an Agiodimitriotis, who had written to the church powers complaining about his omission from the church electoral rolls during the election of church wardens for St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary (General archives of Greece/Prefecture of Kefalonia 1817-1866 en. 98). In both churches electoral rolls were also found that included surnames of the men who represented each family (General archives of Greece/Prefecture of Kefalonia 1817-1866 en. 98 and en. 101). For example Spiros Lourantos (name), son of Vasilis (name), and Themistoklis Lourantos (name) son of Athanasios (name). In the same list one can find the names of people who don't reside in the village but their families are members of the church. Members of the same church are called 'co-brothers' (*sinadelfi*). I have also researched St. Nicholas' two registry tomes (Register of St Nikolaos 1734-1872) and St. Dimitri's five registry tomes (Register of Agios Dimitrios 1752-1845) of entries for weddings, christenings and funerals and found that the majority of surnames recorded still exist today. When the godfather or godmother is Agiodimitriotes is listed as Faraklos (someone who originates from the village Faraklata)². Having examined the two registries which have entries dating back well over two hundred years I have not come across any individual or group of families that have changed from one inter-family to another or chosen to exempt themselves and live in isolation of the village social structure. The difference between the two church groups and the superiority of the members of Agios Dimitris church does not originate from a church hierar-

chical inequality. Both churches have their own wardens and priest from the village. The churches are open for service on Christian official ceremonies or according to the villagers' needs. Therefore the differentiation comes from the 'base', the members of the church, than from the church authorities.

The two churches are maintained by donations/bequests of money, property and produce (wine, olive oil, etc.) as well as personal offers of labour. The churches are run by wardens, who are elected every two years and their election is strictly on a interfamily basis. For example, St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary elects four wardens one from each of its four interfamilies, while St. Nicholas elects three from within its group of interfamilies. The wardens see to the daily running of the churches and their outlying chapels. The two groups of wardens are also charged with the responsibility of organizing the two fairs held on the same day, Easter Monday, for exactly the same religious celebration.

The Village Fairs of Agia Paraskevi and Prophiti Lias and Social Organization. The Association of Religious and Secular Element.

A village fair which has its origins intrinsically linked with the celebration of a church and/or a patron saint, has the ability to expose the unity between families and/or interfamilies that have a connection to the church. The village fair is the common entity that links their past, present and future and constitutes their identity and social memory (Nitsiakos 2003, 165). Over the course of time, events have strengthened the bonds linking the individual families and interfamilies. These events having taken the form of religious festivals, social gatherings, etc., have all relied upon the church as their focal point. The church is therefore not only the organizer of an event but also an advocate for the existence, continuity and history of the group(s), and so, it can be said that the various rituals 'manage the past, the present, and future' (Panopoulou 2008, 436-437). The same happens in the village of Faraklata. The religious ground combined many times by the secular element like the occasions of village fairs, constitutes the central point of creating group cohesion. The daily life and main events like wedding, name day etc, cultivate social relations but they referred at a part of the village people. Only the religious feasts (for example, in honor of a saint, Christmas, Resurrection) are for the whole community and as a result a major number of people participate in them and strengthen their relations. The ritual of the two village fairs, as described below, are repeated year in year out, on the same specific day, at the same sites, and with very subtle changes to their execution, and are an orchestration of the events to enhance one groups standing in the community, social recognition and diversity over the other.

The Easter Monday morning religious service marks the beginning of both fairs. At about noon the religious element of the village fairs comes to a close and the secular side, the midday feast and the dancing, takeover the festivities. The fair at St. Paraskevi gives greater emphasis to the church service and the preparation and decoration of the setting. A festive atmosphere is evoked at both chapels by stringing small Greek national flags around the chapel forecourts and the inside of the church halls, a task usually performed by the male wardens. The wives of St.

Dimitri's wardens collect wild violets with double blooms, found only in the village, and adorn the interior of the chapel and especially around the icon of the resurrection of Christ. St. Paraskevi wardens will engage a chorus of chanters from Argostoli, the island's capital, to accompany and enrich the ceremonial liturgy with their chanting and thereby 'increase' the prestige of their festival. The meals provided at the two fairs comprise of the same assortment of foods (meat on the spit, bread, red eggs, feta cheese and wine). The limited size of the church halls, dictates how many can be accommodated within their confines. The wardens of Prophitis Ilias consider their hall as adequate for their purposes, of course this is due to their smaller congregation.

At Agia Paraskevi however, the hall is reserved for the likes of the priest, church wardens, chanters, patrons of the church etc., the remaining attendees are seated at tables placed around the outside of the church hall. The villagers who are seated outside, eating their meals and drinking their wine, eagerly await for those inside the hall to break out in song. This is the queue for the remainder outside to join in the singing of hymns and traditional Kefallonian songs. Thus, the combination of the meal and the sing along creates a communal sense of 'us'. This feeling of belonging to a group that has organized a successful feast with song develops a sense of pride which extends to their heritage as Kefallonians, and the distinct style of Kefallonian hymn singing and musical culture (See, for the Kefalonian song and psalm Debonos 2000, 119-133; Mesoloras 2000, 187-199). The midday meal includes a tradition that has the wardens distribute to all the attendees items of feta cheese, bread and wine. It is the custom to dispense these items of produce from a style of basket used during the grape harvest. The reason why these baskets are used has been lost with time. I can only surmise the reason for their use, is, during the grape harvest when these baskets are filled to overflowing, will leave an impression of an image of abundance and economic prosperity and thereby encourage the villagers to partake in this part of the festivities.

It is evident that the two congregations choose to hold simultaneous religious and secular festivities to establish and maintain a social position within the village community. The ritual itself consists of symbolic actions and events designed to coerce interactions between the two competing groups for the title of premier church group, interfamily, family, etc. The decorating of the icon with the wild violets, the dispensing of the produce instils a sense of satisfaction in the Agiodimitioties as to whose fair was the better organized, presented and executed.

The third and final element of the day's festivities is the musical and dance settings, this phase of proceedings draws the greatest number of participants from the village. St. Paraskevi's musical and dance setting is the most popular among the two and lasts until the evening. It is rare to find members of one congregation taking part in the other festivity. The dances preferred by the villagers are mainly indigenous (originated from the island of Kefalonia) such as *Balos*, *Divaratikos* and *Mermigas*. Moreover their dance repertoire includes dances which are known and danced in the whole of Greece like *Sirtos* and *kalamatianos* in addition to foreign dances (no indigenous or other Greek dances) such as Waltz or Tango.

With the passage of time, the social base having broadened through simple contact with nearby villages, the taking of spouses from different villages, the acceptance of an extended family mode external to the village, etc., has diminished the religious and raised the secular use of the two chapels. Two new festivals were instigated one on the 6th of July at Agia Paraskevi, and the other on the 20th of July at Prophet Elias, and made accessible to all who wish to attend. With both festivals, the secular and in particular the dance outweighs the religious element but the secular element cannot exist without the approval of the religious element as owner of the settings. The close proximity of Prophitis Ilias to Argostoli, with its easier access, and added to the organizational zeal of the Agionikoliotes, combine to produce the better village festival of the summer period. The summer festivals are organized as vehicles of entertainment with their appeal extending beyond the boundaries of the village in which they are held. It is the dance element that makes them special and attracts many people from different places. The dance element is considered so important that Agiodimitrotes proposed to Agionikoliotes to stop organising their Easter fair as their dance activity wasn't attended by many people. Nevertheless Agionikoliotes refused to cancel their Easter fair and continue celebrating Easter as always.

Conclusion

The villagers' collective memory of the past and present expresses 'notions about themselves and identity' (Vougiouka 1999, 205) a self confirmation of their identity as inhabitants of the Faraklata village. Their badge of acceptance as a village member is directly linked to the church to which they are affiliated to, St. Dimitri-Virgin Mary or St. Nicholas, both being Greek Orthodox Churches. In the Faraklata village, the 'bond resulting from their religious identity' (Hirschon – Filipaki 1993, 335) is considered more important than class. In other words, their association with a particular church strengthens and stabilizes their identity and orders their social and cultural standing. The villagers, as individuals, may couple their symbolic identity to a church, as either *Agiodimitrotes* or *Agionikoliotes*. Religion therefore, manifests and shapes the social context of this society. By using religion as the foundation stone for the building of social relationships, it draws individuals into its sphere of influence and so a series of social practises or tenets with the passage of time become common law (Dimitriou – Kotsoni 1993, 264).

Village fairs and dance activity involve people who clearly belong to one or another church so that the 'belonging' of the participants shows evidence for the organization and composition of the community.

Translated by author

Notes

1. Dance is used as a means of describing a set of rigidly adhered to set of movements with a distinct beginning and end accompanied by music, song or both and are given a label such as *hasapiko*, *kalamatiano*, etc.
2. For example: '1742 December 6. The baptism of a child whose father is Athanasios... given the name Angouletta and godmother the wife of Christoforos.... *inhabitant of Faraklata* and parish priest Andreas Kroussos' (GAK – Nomou Kefalinias 1734-1845).

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Варвара Н. Косматоу

Црквено-народни сабори, фолклорне игре и друштвене групе у селу Фараклата на Кефалонији /Грчка/

Ово истраживање је спроведено у сеоској заједници Фараклата на Кефалонији /Грчка/, а засновано је на изучавању процеса извођења фолклорних игара и ширег контекста чији су оне део. Конкретно, спроведено је изучавање фолклорних игара као саставног и виталног дела двају црквено-народних сабора (прослава, углавном у част једног светитеља), у овом случају – Св. Петке

Кључне речи:

сеоски вашар (панађур), игра, играчи, припадање, социјалне групе, породични обичаји

и Св. Пророка Илије, који се (парадоксално) не одржавају на дан прославе истоимених светитеља, већ паралелно истога дана, у понедељак по Ускрсу.

Овде није вршено испитивање морфологије самих игара, већ је интересовање било усредсређено на почетно и основно питање: ко све учествује у фолклорним играма. Неизбежно, ово питање је довело до истраживања тога ко све учествује у ширим активностима чији део представљају фолклорне игре, тачније – на самим саборима. Истраживање је обављено у периоду између 2008. и 2010. године, и као главни метод коришћено је усмено предање, а употребљени су и историјски архиви и аудио-визуелни материјали.

Одржавање два паралелна сабора открива присуство две друштвене групе, од којих је свака привржена једној од две велике православне цркве у селу: Св. Димитрију – Благовести (којој припада црква Св. Петке) и Св. Николи (којој припада црква Св. Пророка Илије). Поред свакодневног заједничког бивствовања и суживота, ова подељеност постоји и превасходно се огледа у припадности сваке породице једној одређеној цркви, као и у разграничењима која се првенствено односе на животни простор и врсту усева, а могу се видети и приликом разних световних и духовних прослава, као што су сабори, а самим тим и кроз фолклорне игре. Дакле, једна свеобухватна и обједињена студија фолклорних игара и њиховог ширег контекста открила је постојање двеју друштвених група у селу Фараклата, које се налазе у потрази за сопственом егзистенцијом и спознајом.