

COMPARATIVE ETHNOCHOREOGRAPHIC ASPECTS		Art History Keywords: dance, movement, human communication, origin, tradition, folklore, Albanian ethnochoreography.
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Abstract

The movement is the first non-verbal language among the forms of human communication. It is widely believed in scientific thought that the gesture was chronologically the first means that primitive people used to communicate with each other. Dance to our ancestors was an important spiritual food, later also religious. For the birth of dance, there are many versions of its origin, meaning and explanation. Due to the change in the historical, social, economic, climatic conditions, etc, nations, although they have preserved the main veins of tradition, have often reflected the change by modifying some aspects of the shapes, formations and characters of the jump, sometimes excluding from use functional and inappropriate non-creations, certain types of movements or figurations of certain dances, themes, dresses or even whole moving phrases. Albanian choreographic folklore or Albanian ethnochoreography are no exception. The Albanian language, in contrast to the Indo-European or Slavic languages, uses original terms in the denomination of popular choreography. Therefore, the words “**kcim apo kërcim**” (from the word itself meaning detachment from the ground) and “**valle**” (which is thought to derive from the word wave) are traditionally used. These words express originality and identity in the Albanian linguistic heritage. Our ethno-choreologist researchers during their numerous studies have highlighted the way and the very form of how figuration evolved in folk dances or dances. The Albanian folk dance and its early and original tradition sheds light on the history of ethnicity and ethnogenesis of the Albanians.

Introduction

The movement is the first non-verbal language among the forms of human communication. It is widely believed in scientific thought that the gesture was chronologically the first means that primitive people used to communicate with each other. Then came the sound, the union of which created the words, and the latter, spoken language. The connection of gestures with the movements of the body, their organization to convey emotions, sensations and certain emotional states such as joy, happiness, fear, love, hate, etc, led to the birth of dance. Consequently, dance as a combination of sign language, gestures and body movements is one of humanity's oldest spiritual and physical products. But, dance, so to speak, has a claim. It requires to be considered among the most essential and healthful activities we ever participate in. Our ancestors had dance an important spiritual food, later also religious, through which they glorified the gods of earth, water, fire, rain, sun, etc. Nietzsche, a very important and influential figure in 20th-century philosophy, said he would believe in only one God who can dance, a comment that goes alongside another of his claims that without music, life would be a mistake. The primitives, divided into different tribes, areas and settlements, had faith in the extraordinary power of dance. It was expressed in various forms and ways of movement and displacement in a certain space.

The dance, by its very nature, is less rationally controllable than other forms of communication. At the same time it is also potentially more powerful because it carries and transmits emotions, messages, energy and feelings, often indecipherable or abstract. This phenomenon makes the dance more instinctive than logical.

For the birth of dance, there are many versions of its origin, meaning and explanation. But one thing is well known: dance is one of the most important emotional manifestations of human beings including the organization of their movements.

The irresistible expression of our whole being may have been the first attempt, which made the people organize their movements. The main argument is that movement, as such, was born long before speech and sound, was born together with man. Suzan K. Langer in her research *Dynamic Images*¹ says that movement was the first image created, among the first goals of human nature, art and the first true dance. It can be said that the leap was born with the man (the movement of the baby in the womb, before his cries are heard). This is an argument, in favor of the communicative primacy of the movement, compared to other languages and means of human communication. We can stay on this indicative definition, while humanly we can say that dance in the past was often applied for the purpose of purifying the soul (Far East dances). "Historians consider the dance form that is today known as belly dance the oldest form. It originated 6000 years ago and was practiced by many ancient cultures".²

The beginnings of dance are known to exist not only in the civilizations of the Middle East and the Far East (in India), but also among the populations of Australia, Africa and America. "Researchers have interpreted the earliest prehistoric carbon paintings on the rock shelters of Bhimbetka, dating back to around 10,000 BC, as forms of Shiva dance".³ By studying the first dynasty of Egypt, around 3000 BC, archaeologists have unearthed findings in which people are identified by dancing or using "body language". Primitive people are thought to have practiced dance for whatever spiritual reason.

Undoubtedly, as in the spiritual heritage of all other populations, the Albanian ethnic dance has followed its historical trajectory in the anthropological aspect similar to the flows of world folk dance. According to different conditions and circumstances, Albanian people created, preserved and inherited dances with specific and original characteristics. The leaping elements inherited up to the present day are a living and uninterrupted proof of the continuity of our origin. The archaeological discoveries in the territory of the Republic of Albania confirm with factual materials (eg Lepenica cave, Apollonia Archaeological Park, etc.), traces of the first periods of development of human society. This is a further argument in favor of the thesis that Albanians inherit an authentic identity. Due to the change in historical, social, economic, climatic conditions, etc., populations, although they have preserved the main veins of tradition, have often reflected the

¹Langer, S. (1976). *The dynamic image: some philosophical reflections on dance*. *Salmagundi*, (33/34), (Pp. 76-82).
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40023844?refreqid=excelsior%3A3294e472fab505ede20bc32bd838c2aa>

²https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/which-is-the-oldest-dance-form/articleshow/4449656.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva#Pre-historic_art

change by modifying some aspects of the forms, formations and characters of the dance, sometimes excluding the use of non-functional and inappropriate creations, certain types of movements or figurations of certain dances, themes, dresses or even whole movement phrases. Albanian choreographic folklore is no exception. However, in general, the archaeological evidence in which the figurines of the dancers appear, for the most part resemble the poses and dynamics of some of today's Albanian folk dances (dancers with some devices, which are used as a rhythmic accompaniment in dance).⁴

The stop in this type of review is made after the belief is created "that the paths that the world ethno-choreology has walked have to do and can be applied to pre-Albanian societies, and that they can better understand the features of development in each nation".⁵

All the distinctive features and characteristics of the Albanian folk creativity make it distinct from the cultures, identities and traditions of other populations and nations. In its entirety, folklore, as part of the ancient culture of the Albanian nation, consists of several forms, ways and means of popular artistic expression. music, dance, song, fairy tales, folklore, costumes, playing folk instruments, etc., are undoubtedly the part inherited from generation to generation, of the age-long history of development and shaping of our national and cultural identity.

Traces of an early dance culture are undoubtedly found in ancient forms of dance which are thought to come from the earliest socio-economic formation, from the primitive community order. At the Albanians there are still found folk creations, ways and systems of dance, which convincingly testify to the continuity of an early and ancient culture. These are best evidenced by the archaeological finds discovered that belong to the material culture, such as drawn vases, terracotta, coins, paintings and various engravings.

The form of the circle dance, which is considered as the first image of man on earth and which, according to Lavson, is the oldest form of human dance, represents the richest and most fully conceived model in the analysis of the primitive social order. Therefore, the choreographic folklore itself, and not only, transmits elements that internally allow us to shed light on those first phases of human society, of which other proofs are lacking. In these ancient forms of dance, as much as the social order itself, dances dedicated to hunting and fire occupy an important place.

These dances are danced in a closed circle around an assigned center in most cases. Traces of this ancient culture with an object in the center can be found in the Lepenica Cave where a scene of a hunting dance is present.⁶

The Albanian language, in contrast to the Indo-European or Slavic languages, uses original terms in the denominations of folkloric choreography. Thus, the words "kçim or kërcim" (from the word itself meaning detachment from the ground) and "valle" (derived from the word wave) are traditionally used and they also express Albanian originality and identity in the linguistic heritage.

⁴ Selimi, S. (2006). "Baleti në Shqipëri". (Fq.22). SHBLU Tiranë.

⁵ Kondaj, A. (2015). "Estetika e folklorit koreografik dhe koreografisë së kultivuar". (Fq. 60). Tiranë 2015.

⁶ Selimi, S. (2006). "Baleti në Shqipëri". (Fq. 18). SHBLU Tiranë.

We recall that the most commonly used European name dance, dans, danza, tanz, tanjec, comes from the root "tan", which in Sanskrit means tension.⁷

The original names mentioned above represent in themselves two macrosystems in Albanian ethnochoreography, respectively the gegë *kcim/kërcim*, and the toskë *valle*. The dances are performed throughout southern Albania. Their characteristic is performance in group. They are generally sung and are rarely accompanied by musical instruments (harmonicas of Përmet, Delvina, Korça). In the dance, the role of the first to begin the dance, or the coryphes (the name derives from Greek antiquity, which means the one who leads the dance), is really very important. As people say, "the first starts it and the others give it back". Historically, the one who led the dance was a prominent leader or hero even in war.

While "*kërcimet*" or "*kcimet*", as they are called by the people) are practiced in the areas of northern Albania / Gegëri, and are characterized by a relatively free interpretation, within the provincial range.⁸ They are mainly associated with folk instruments, such as: drum, flute, tambourine, curle, ciftelia, etc. The dances often have a pronounced individual character. From the very meaning in Albanian, dancing is necessarily related to leaping, or detachment from the ground. Powerfuleleapings from the ground in some dances of Tropoja, Drenica (KS) or Malësia e Madhe (log dance), are part of a completely original identity of the Albanian flying dance.

Our wedding dances occupy a very important place in the fund of Albanian dance. They are mainly separated from the point of view of the gender, both in Gegëri and in the south of Albania, that is, in Toskëri. Among generations of Albanians, this rite has endured for centuries, being preserved in the memory of the people and transmitted with devotion. By collecting it, preserving it and studying it, we have the opportunity to learn and understand how a society, an ethnic group, people or a nation has progressed and developed, how it has lived its historical destinies, how it has represented them and reflected on them. Through the analysis of the past we understand better the present and at the same time lay the foundations for the future.

Folklore was also one of the expressions of the independent self-existence of the Albanian people and, at the same time, a powerful tool for the affirmation and consolidation of this self-existence, its originality and individuality of the national spiritual life.⁹ The dances of the Albanian tradition are numerous and various. They are individualized on the basis of numerous Albanian ethno-choreographic areas, relevant style, rhythm, dynamics, intensity, dancing figures, signs, spatial location, costumes and other characteristics. In addition to the differences, they also appear in the connection between them. Although each area has a unique dance style and distinct from the others, in Albania there are some areas where dances resemble or approach in structure, rhythm, color and energy.

⁷ <http://sanskritdictionary.com/?q=tan%22&lang=sans&encoding=iast&action=Search>

⁸ Bogdani, R. (2009). "Elemente të lashtë dhe unitarë të valles popullore shqiptare". Etnokoreografia II/1980-1987. (Fq. 252). Tiranë.

⁹ Uçi, A. (2007). "Folklori dhe letërsia e kultivuar, Estetika e Folklorit". (Fq. 174). A. Sh., Tiranë.

Popular culture and heritage are always a source of inspiration and inexhaustible cultivated art. The most important creators have often been connoisseurs, researchers or even archivists of the material and spiritual cultural heritage. The scientific study of our folkloric heritage is an obligation, not only for the knowledge of authentic popular culture, but also a help or inspiration for choreographers, composers, painters and sculptors, writers and artists in general. From this living and original material they have created their cultivated authorial art on the layer of the national tradition. In this way the original authorial creations, the value and continuity of our national tradition and culture have been achieved.

On the other hand, this creative nation always makes progress enriching the treasure of its culture through historical development and transformations, also as a reflection on them, filled with the most interesting and diverse artistic and aesthetic nuances. Along the same lines, it has preserved and inherited the structure of dance over the centuries, enriching it more and more with numerous figures, elements, figurative and substantial, moving and rhythmic. Our country is one of the countries with a very rich and diversified choreographic folklore, not only structurally, but also compositionally. Some of the most important factors that influenced the diversity and enrichment of our choreographic folklore, were the geographical conditions (rather harsh relief, with diversified climate), historical developments (being one of the oldest peoples of the Balkans, with a very rich in wars, battles and conquests of armies, empires and numerous civilizations, from east and west), as well as movements or social changes. As a result of this ancient tradition, in connection with these aforementioned factors, dance has become one of our worthy spiritual conductors, of nature and its beauties, of history with all the actions that accompanied it, of society, together with the processes of transformation that has endured, as well as with the characteristics of the living territory. This age-long culture and tradition, reflected more clearly in our ethnic dance, has been and is an irreplaceable treasure of this nation, which accompanied them in all the most important moments of their life, as an inalienable part of our national identity.

Various testimonies from authors, chroniclers, historians and artists confirm the fact that popular dances of various kinds have been played and performed among today's Albanians and their predecessors. The aesthetic values of this ancient culture have left an impression on illustrious personalities, chroniclers, historians and attentive passers-by of the Albanian lands, who have had the opportunity to follow them. One of them was Hobhouze.¹⁰ In his travels to Albania, he has seen the dances of this nation and wrote about them with admiration. While the great poet L. Bajroni¹¹ on one of his trips to Albania, calls as an unforgettable memory the image of Albanian folk dances, where, among other things, he identifies our folk costumes, which represent the perfect hand of our popular artist and the exquisite taste of him. They are very different, memorable, they remain in the mind of each person. We also recall here a portrait in a painting by Lord Byron himself, wearing an Albanian folk costume.

¹⁰ Hobhouze, J. C. Albania, Turkey in Europe and Asia to Constantinople (1809-1810). (Fq. 154).

¹¹ Bajron, L. Corteggio di Lord Byron Ton I Firenze 1832. (P. 115).

It must be said that the first testimonies come from reliable sources, such as ancient Greek-Roman authors, such as: Homer, Aristotle, Strabo, Xenophon, Luciano, Plutarch, Titus Livius, Cicero, Athenaeus, etc.¹² Let's mention here, for concretization, any report they made. Thus for example, Athenaeus, in the year 220 AD, among other things, referring to the Illyrian tribe of Mollos, says that: "they had a iambic dance known as "jambi mollos", which was a faster dance than dactylic type dances, simpler and slower".¹³

But for the ancientness of Albanian folk dance, in addition to the evidence of different natures, the Albanian folk dances speak for themselves, inherited from generation to generation. Examined from different perspectives, for example, from their structure, they prove to be original early creations. The researcher Nexhat Agolli, paraphrasing this aspect of Albanian folk dance, says: "Albanian dance proves the existence of an ancient pre-Albanian substratum. This substrate, as in all Albanian culture, is of an Illyrian character. But the influence of the Adstrates is not excluded, especially from the Paleo-Balkan people: the Hellenes, the Thracians, the North Macedonians. The substrate played the role of forming source for the Albanian choreographic fund. The Adstrates have left nuances, they have left traces and influences. Even in the choreographic tradition, the Illyrian-Albanian continuity is confirmed as an axis of development. "Other interactions are secondary."¹⁴ According to Agolli, "their identification has a scientific significance to elucidate the historical path of the Albanian epic dance".¹⁵ The researcher also adds that "for the needs of a correct scientific understanding of the relationship between the source and the impacts, it is necessary to make another difference". He thinks that "the traces of ancient cultures, which belong to the Paleo-Balkan people, although they can be distinguished from the original culture, are more assimilated within the Albanian ethnic background".¹⁶ This thesis actually supports the extraordinary variety of forms, shapes and structures of dances in the geographic space in which this population lives.

The Albanian ethnic territory is the space where Albanian dances are practiced. This land, as A. Buda testifies, "corresponds to a large part of the territory of southern Illyria, in which specific cultural characteristics were formed, which radiated into the interior lands of Illyria. Our ancestors lived in this area, those who were called "true Illyrians".¹⁷ Considering today the blurring of the borders of the Illyrian territories and those inhabited by Albanians, we note that the geographical map of the spread of Albanian male dance, e.g. in the geographic plan, is roughly defined in this way. On the north side of this geography, two of the oldest rituals, the lament and the sword dance, were practiced by our ancestors.

¹² Sokoli, R. "Vallet dhe muzika e të parëve tanë", Shtëpia qendrore e krijimtarisë popullore. (Fq.3). Tiranë 1979.

¹³ Cituar sipas "Folklori shqiptar", Dispenca I, Instituti i Folklorit, Tiranë 1974, f. 32.

¹⁴ Agolli, N. (1997). "Vallja shqiptare e burrave - Epika". (Fq. 18). Botimet Enciklopedike, Tiranë.

¹⁵ Po aty.

¹⁶ Po aty.

¹⁷ Po aty.

The rite of lament has been widely spoken by foreigners in the so-called "Old Albania"¹⁸ (Indro Montanelli). The lament is an authentic example of the traditional mourning of the northern Albanians, structured and presented in a surprising and very original "spectacle" form. "The lament"¹⁹ is probably one of the most ancient rites of our modern Europe which is drowning in its greatness, the inception. It is still alive, and not only in the lament of men, but in many other customs and traditions, without which the construction of national culture would be without foundation. The lament of men is only developed in the province known as Dukagjin.

"They perform the ceremony of the lament with such wisdom and precision as to drive someone crazy. The lament of the Albanians seems to be an ancient custom, also practiced by the people of Israel before Christ, which carried on the dead the "planctus magnus" as the Holy Scripture says".²⁰

While the second, *the sword dance*, is a very ancient dance, played by the Illyrians, according to the first testimony brought to us by Atheneus in his work *Deipnosophistae* (2nd century BC) "As warlike people, they sang battle songs accompanied by whistles and bagpipes, while the horn of the drink was passed from hand to hand and a fierce dance of arms was danced. "The Illyrians danced around with bare swords."²¹ Furthermore, the Turkish chronicler Ibn Kemal, speaking of the Albanians, says that "they sang and launched the sword dance, carrying them around naked and trying them out on each other as in a real war".²² From these testimonies it is evident that the Albanians inherited these qualities from their ancestors, namely the Illyrians. This dance is also found in the form of double dance and group dance. It is still played today in Malesia e Madhe, in the Dukagjini Plain in Kosovo, in Drenica in Kosovo, etc.

While on the southern side Albanian polyphony dominates, widely reflected in music and dance. The Labe dances represent one of the oldest dance formations, the circle ones. The first and oldest formation is undoubtedly the one in the shape of a circle, like the first human image (for the ancients everything had the shape of a circle, such as: sky, sun, moon, stars, etc.). Often the circle was used as a formation around a certain cult object or around a hunting object. This originally distant formation is linked to ritual dances, which belonged to the first pagan culture (summer festival-Elbasan).

After the aforementioned formation, historically and chronologically comes the formation in the "semicircle", since it is thought that the fissure of this same circle may have had ritual functions (the divided circle or semicircle is found in almost all the dances of southern Albania).

Then, the third one follows the formation on two parallel lines, as an organic evolution of inherited figurations, a reflection of the changes in the perception of the world and themselves from man in historical and social development.

¹⁸ Montanelli, I. (2004). "Shqipëria një dhe një mijë". (Fq. 22). Uegen, Tiranë.

¹⁹ For more look at Dushi, L. (2016). Doktoratur "Gjama e burrave ndërshqiptarë (Rasti i Dukagjinit dhe Mirditës)", Tiranë.

²⁰ Bardhi, F. "Relacione të vitin 1637, 1638, 1641".

²¹ Agolli, N. (1997). "Vallja shqiptare e burrave - Epika". (Fq. 19). Botimet Enciklopedike, Tiranë.

²² Po aty, f. 20.

In Albanian choreographic folklore we see this formation in some wedding ceremonies and in some folkloric creations of the area of Malësia e Madhe.²³ The long process of inheritance of many generations has created a strong and solid foundation for ethnochoreographic science. The Albanian folk dance and its early and original tradition sheds light on the history of ethnicity and ethnogenesis of the Albanians. By carefully studying the different formations, or positioning of the dancers (in a certain space) on the one hand, but also the artistic expression of our dances, on the other, it has often been concluded that they belong to certain periods or eras, expressions of antiquity of our people. In the varied repertoire of Albanian choreographic folklore, the formations speak of a very early tradition of human existence itself, of the first images of primitive people. Our ethno-choreological scholars during their numerous studies have highlighted the way and the very form of how figuration evolved in folk dances.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that traditional Albanian dances reveal over time, dynamics and territory, diversity and prominent identity, with characteristics and similarities within them, but also with easily identifiable diversities, but also in communication with other cultures, especially the ancient Balkans. It can also be seen that the laws of historical transformations seem very similar to other ethnochoreographic cultures.

This ancient and contemporary language of the human body has historically shown to play an important role between the forms and modes of human communication, manifesting itself as an instinctive inner impulse and as a spiritual need to convey individual feelings and emotions, as well as the influences of cultural substrates of our identity.

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²³ Bogdani, R. (1997). “Vallëzimi popullor shqiptar – Lirika”. (Fq. 57-68) A. Sh., Tiranë.

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