

**Vassilis Lantz****Is “the anastenaria dance” a survival of mandilatos dance of Thrace: Myth or reality?****Abstract:**

This research attempts to highlight the importance of context in ‘reading’ the presence of a handkerchief in dance performances of Thrace. The data comes from a long research and fieldwork in areas of Thrace and at Aghia Eleni (St. Helen) in Serres, which is the modern center of the anastenaria worship. The data collection was based on the ethnographic method (Kyriakides, Nestor 1981: 66, 1993: 66, Sklar 1991: 6-10, Buckland 1999, Lydaki 2001), that is, it is based on primary and secondary sources. The data analysis has shown that the symbolism implied by different performative contexts in the reading of the presence of a handkerchief in dance performances in Thrace is to refute the influence of the theory about experiences as well as the comparative version which results from the reference to a single element of dance.

**Key words:**

Thrace, wedding, kerchief, mandilatos dance, Costi village, anastenaria group, anastenaria worship, icons, amaneti.

**Introduction**

The theory of survivals with all the cultural hierarchy may entail continue to entertain the thought of researchers even today in Greece. This theory put forth by E.B. Tylor has exerted an important influence on folklore studies and, with slight differentiation, he entertained the idea of the continuity of modern Greece from antiquity.<sup>1</sup> In a published text about dance in Greece it is cited that “*The dance of anastenaria is a revival of*

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<sup>1</sup> For the theory of survivals, see Kyriakidou-Nestoros Alki, *Λαογραφικά Μελετήματα 2*, [Folklore Studies 2], Poreia publishers, Athens 1993, p. 62. Kyriakidou-Nestoros Alki, *Λαογραφικά Μελετήματα 1*, [Folklore Studies 1], Nea Synora Livani publishers, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Athens 1979, p. 62-63, Politis Alexis, *Ρομαντικά Χρόνια. Ιδεολογίες και Νοοτροπίες στην Ελλάδα του 1830-1880* [Romanticism years. Ideologies and zeitgeist in Greece of 1830-1880], 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Etairia Meletis Neou Ellinismou editions, Athens 2003, p. see also Herzfeld Michael, *Η ανθρωπολογία μέσα από τον καθρέπτη. Κριτική Θεωρία της Ελλάδος και της Ευρώπης*, [English title: Anthropology through the looking glass. Critical ethnography in the ,margins of Europe], Alexandria publishers, Athens 1998, p. 73.

*the mandilatos dance of Thrace*”.<sup>2</sup> This position blurs the current reality concerning the presence, on the one hand, of *mandilatos* wedding dance of Thrace and, on the other hand, the *anastenaria* dance. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that despite the use of the kerchief as a common element in both cases, these dance events are connected neither in terms of structure nor in terms of meaning. *Mandilatos* wedding dance has to do with a dance that is included in a fertility event, like the wedding, in the stages of preparation and incorporation according to Van Gennep’s model,<sup>3</sup> whereas the *anastenaria* dance has to do with dance performances related to the divine.

Data for this study was gathered during a long fieldwork in areas of Western Thrace as well as in the village of Aghia Eleni (St. Helen) in Serres, which is the modern centre of the *anastenaria* worship and ritual. Data gathering was implemented according to the folkloric methodology (Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1981: 66, 1993: 66, Sklar 1991: 6-10, Buckland 1999, Lydaki 2001) and comes from primary and secondary sources.

On the one hand, primary sources refer to data coming from onsite research and fieldwork and, more specifically, from the information gathered from oral testimonies through conversations with the informants of the areas under study. Data is approached through oral history, through which the memory of everyday life is projected as a study field of social history (Thompson 2002: 18-19). During onsite research and fieldwork, my presence “there” contributed to my understanding of meanings and whatever was happening from a local view or an “insider’s point of view” (an emic view).<sup>4</sup> However, this long research and fieldwork was based not only on direct observation but also on first-hand experiences that provided me with deep, penetrating and multi-dimensional knowledge which, otherwise, would not have been accessible in one or several individual visits. Hence, the onsite ethnographic fieldwork was also of a “participative observation” character which I used as a data-gathering means in order to acquire knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The long-term participation in particular – wherever this was feasible – helped so that, on the one hand, my presence would better be accepted by the *anastenaria* group, and, on the other hand, a greater trust

<sup>2</sup> See Moutzali, A. «Ο χορός ως κοινωνική πράξη στην καθημερινή ζωή των Βυζαντινών», [Dance as a social practice in everyday life of the Byzantines], *Αρχαιολογία & Τέχνες*, [Archaeology and arts journal], issue. 91, 2004, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Van Gennep Arnold, *The Rites of Passage*, transl. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1960.

<sup>4</sup> On the value of natural presence, see Ghefou-Madianou, D., *Πολιτισμός και Εθνογραφία. Από τον Εθνογραφικό Ρεαλισμό στην Πολιτισμική Κριτική*, [Culture and Ethnography. From ethnographic realism to cultural criticism], Ellinika Grammata editions, Athens 1999, p. 235.

<sup>5</sup> On the onsite ethnographic research using participative observation, see Ghefou-Madianou, D., *ibid*, p. 241-242, 277, see also Agar 1980: 193.

between the researcher and the respondents would be established, thus making the extraction of the required information by the respondents a much easier task and, more importantly, getting the most honest answers possible from them.<sup>6</sup> However, the term “participative observation” is an oxymoron as it tries to reconcile the opposing notions of “observation” and “participation” and raises the following reasonable question: “How can a researcher be a participant and an observer at the same time, since the notion of “participation” requires a close relation to and awareness of the ‘observed subject’ (thus, the observer’s subjectivity), while the notion of “observation” requires a certain distance and objectivity”? The answer to the question is positive as the “participative observation” is “legitimized” provided that the observer has or has acquired the cultural knowledge of the community or the social group s/he studies, as long as s/he is not distinguished from the person observed; (see Herzfeld 1987, 1988, Ghafou-Madianou 1999: 246-247). Besides, all types of anthropological research (questionnaires, folklore film making, photography, collection of museum material, etc) require a certain level of involvement, as the researcher has to establish a good personal contact and establish a certain level of trust (Heider 1976: 8-9). Let alone that the difficulties are increased when marginalized groups, religious minorities or closed social castes are involved in the research object, as such is the case with the *anastenaria* group.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, special importance was given to the data coming from *anastenarides* (*anastenaria* dancers) so that the signification of their dance rituals and the use of kerchief can be investigated; this investigation was based on what they believe so as their functionality and purpose to be clear.

The research on *Mandilatos* dance began in 2004 and continued up to date, while the research on *anastenaria* worship began in 1985 at Aghia Eleni in Serres, but was further systematized and intensified from 1997 to 2002, the year of its completion.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the temporal comparative study

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<sup>6</sup> On the use of onsite research as a methodology tool on behalf of the researcher and his integration –as far as possible- in the community he is studying by gaining the trust and esteem of his informants, see Erixon, S., «Urgent – Ethnological tasks», *Ethnologia Europaea* 1, (1967), p. 163-169, as well as Zahariou-Mamaligka, El., *Οι παράδες της Σύμης, Οικονομική-κοινωνική-πολιτιστική όψη*, [The fishermen of Symi; An economic and socio-cultural view], Rhodes 1986, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> On the difficulties to gather material from the various closed castes, see Varvounis, M., *Συμβολή στη Μεθοδολογία της επιτόπιας Λαογραφικής Έρευνας*, [Contribution to the methodology of onsite folklore research], Athens. 2000, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> My research on *anastenaria* worship was realized within the framework of my doctorate thesis under the title “The functionality of dance in the circle of *anastenaria* in Costi village of NorthEastern Thrace and in Aghia Eleni Serron: A

was carried out so to establish conclusions or, on the contrary, to refute opinions based on random observations and incomplete or erroneous information. During the course of the research and fieldwork, the *anastenaria* dance events were filmed repeatedly in their entirety, while several traditional *anastenaria* songs mainly by lyra players were recorded and studied.

On the other hand, the secondary sources refer to the use of national and international literature based on the principles of archival ethnographic (Lambiri-Dimaki 1990, Ghefou-Madianou 1999: 343, Thomas-Nelson 2003: 25) and historical methods (Adshead-Layson 1986), including analysis, evaluation and integration of the published literature.<sup>9</sup> The study of extensive bibliography aims at a better and deeper understanding of the subject under examination through a manifold penetrative look so that the objectives of the present research are fulfilled. Moreover, all the data gathered from the onsite research and fieldwork were cross-referenced with written sources so that the reliability of the material is verified, thus offering an objective testimony relying on a synchronic and diachronic base.

### **The Mandilatos dance in Thrace**

*The Mandilatos* dance (lit. a dance danced with kerchiefs) is danced freely, that is, without the dancers holding hands; it has a rhythm of 7/8 ( $7/16=2/16+2/16+3/16$ ) and is danced throughout Thrace (Western, Eastern, and Northern) with minor differentiations and under different names. Even though danced in entire Thrace, this dance has the same music meter, the same movement patterns and the same function, the name *Mandilatos* is mentioned only in Western Thrace. The *Mandilatos* dance is primarily a wedding dance and is danced by dancers who either face each other (in pairs) or individually. Each dancer, a man or a woman, holds a kerchief with both hands from the two ends in a triangular shape.

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Comparative Study” at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Science of the University of Athens in 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, for the needs of the present study a bibliographic research was realized at the following libraries: National, Gennadius, Hellenic Parliament, Hellenic Folklore Research Center, and private libraries. Moreover, an archival research was realized at the archive of Thrace Folklore and Linguistic Thesaurus [αρχείο Θρακικού Λαογραφικού και Γλωσσικού Θησαυρού], the archive of Thrace Center and Thrace Studies Society [αρχείο Θρακικού Κέντρου και Εταιρείας Θρακικών Μελετών], the archive of the Hellenic Folklore Society, the archive of the Historical and Folklore Society of Serres – Melenikou (praise by the Academy of Athens), private archives, scientific conferences and symposia proceedings, as well as in newspapers and periodicals.

They hold it at the height of their eyes and wave it rhythmically right and left.<sup>10</sup> On the day of the wedding, the bride and the groom offered their relatives a kerchief as a present. When time comes, the relatives dance *Mandilatos* showing the kerchief in order to thank the couple.

Moreover, a procession led by the groom and the musicians starts from the house of the groom and - after having picked up firstly the best man and then the bride - ended in the church for the celebration of the wedding. On the way, each participant of this wedding procession holds a kerchief and dances *Mandilatos*.<sup>11</sup> After the celebration of the wedding, while dancing *Mandilatos*, the invited to the wedding take the presents and the bride's dowry to the house of the groom: Everyone holds an object in hands and wave it, while dancing in the rhythm of the dance, in the same way they hold the kerchiefs, and as they say, «συγκαθίζουν τα προικιά», meaning that “they put (the different objects of) the dowry together”.<sup>12</sup> After the celebration, those accompanying the newlyweds to the house of the groom dance *Mandilatos* holding kerchiefs, too. For the kerchief is so widely used in this wedding dance, the dance is named after it; that is *Mandilatos* (i.e. mandili > mandilatos, meaning dance that is danced with kerchiefs in Greek).

In the rest of Thrace, even though the people who dance this dance hold kerchiefs, the same wedding dance is not called *Mandilatos*; it has different names instead. Therefore, in Eastern Thrace, the dance that has the same function in transmitting the wedding custom is called “*sygkathis-*

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<sup>10</sup> On the way the dancers hold the kerchief when dancing, see also: Stratou, D., *Ελληνικοί παραδοσιακοί χοροί*, [Greek traditional Dances], Organismos Ekdoseon Didaktikon Vivlion (OEDB), Athens 1979, p. 98. Other researchers have also pointed out the use of kerchief in this particular dance and the way it is performed. See also Petropoulos, D. & Karakasis, St., «Λαογραφική αποστολή εις την περιφέρειαν Έβρου» [Folklore mission in Evros region], *Επετηρίς Λαογραφικού Αρχείου* 13-14 [Folklore Archive Annual Book] Academy of Athens, Athens 1962, p. 357. (350-371). For more information concerning the musical recording of the dance, see: Kavakopoulos, P., *Τραγούδια της Βορειοδυτικής Θράκης*, [Songs of NorthWestern Thrace], Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1981, p. 178. Also, idem, *Καθιστικά της Σωζόπολης Χορευτικά της Θράκης*, [Traditional *Kathistika* (sitting) songs of Sozopolis - Dance songs of Thrace], Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1993, p. 305.

<sup>11</sup> About *Mandilatos* dance in the wedding procession to the church, see also Moysiadis, P., *Ελληνικοί χοροί της Θράκης*, [Greek traditional dances of Thrace], Dioskouri editions, 1986, p. 62, 198.

<sup>12</sup> See rel. Dionysopoulos, N. (edit.), *Τραγούδια και Χοροί της Θράκης*, [Songs and dances of Thrace], Crete University Press and Democritus University of Thrace, disc, 1994.

tos”.<sup>13</sup> In Northern Thrace (Eastern Rumelia) and the villages of the wider area of Kavakli, the dance is also called “*sygkathistos*” or “*sygkathiarikos*” and is mostly danced on weddings. The name of the dance is compound, deriving from the words “syn” (=together, co-) and “kathizo” (= squat, sit, place) and has the meaning of “dancing together”, or it have got its name from the squats usually performed by men during the dance.<sup>14</sup> When the dance is performed after the bride’s dowry, the dancers hold the presents high showing them off waving them left and right, and – as the dancers claim - they “*sygkathizoun*” the presents, they place them together. It is most likely that, for this reason, dancers dance with the hands in the same position when they do not hold any object.<sup>15</sup> In the village Mikro Monastiri (lit. “small monastery), it is a custom the bride, before leaving for the church, to “*mandiloni*” – that is, to offer gifts, mainly kerchiefs [*madiloni*: its first part is *mandili*: kerchief] - to her relatives who “*sygkathizoun*”. In other words, bride’s relatives hold the kerchiefs showily between their hands and wave them in the rhythm of *Sygkathistos* dance, while dancing at the same time around the bride in order to return the honor, as in the particular local society the acceptance of a present and the offering of a service on the occasion of an event are considered a “loan” and have to be paid back with a service or good of the same value.<sup>16</sup> Of special interest is the dance of *Sygkathistos* at the village Ak Bunar when the groom’s mother dances around the car, carrying the newlywed to the house after the ceremony. More specifically, the groom’s mother makes three circles dancing *Sygkathistos* around the coach of the newlyweds holding a lit candle on her head, an egg and seeds.<sup>17</sup> It should also be mentioned that at the villages of the same area, *sygkathistos* dance is also prevalent during the celebration of a couple’s engagement, where there is a custom that a man and a woman dance face to face, holding the kerchief in the way described

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<sup>13</sup> See also: Psaltis, El., «Ο Θρακιώτικος Γάμος», [The wedding in Thrace], *Second Folklore Symposium on Northern Greece Proceedings*, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1976, p. 526.

<sup>14</sup> See Prantsidis, I., *Ο χορός στην ελληνική παράδοση και η διδασκαλία του*, [Dance in Greek tradition and its teaching], Ekdotiki Eginioy, p. 131,132. 2005, Eginio.

<sup>15</sup> See Prantsidis, I., *ibid*, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> See also Loutzaki R., *Ο γάμος ως χορευτικό δρώμενο*. [Marriage as a dance performance] *Η περίπτωση των προσφύγων της ανατολικής Ρωμυλίας στο Μικρό Μοναστήρι Μακεδονίας*, [The case of Eastern Rumelia refugees in the village of Mikro Monastiri Makedonias] Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation editions, 1985, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> See: Prantsidis, I., *ibid*, p. 133, See also: Loutzaki, R., *ibid*, p. 15.

above.<sup>18</sup> *Sygekathistos* dance is always accompanied by music but never by singing.<sup>19</sup>

In other areas of Northern Thrace, the same dance can be found under different names. At the coast of the Black Sea and, especially in the wider area of Mesimvria, like for example in the village Bana, the dance is called *Kallinitikos*. In this area too, the dance is danced with the name *Sygekathistos* only in weddings, and the dancers use kerchiefs. More specifically, the dance is danced by three single persons, two girls - the bride's friends who are called *Kallines* and after whom the dance is named - and a male, the groom's first cousin or friend who is called *Deveros*. The male is in the middle and holds the girls on his right and left with kerchiefs while dancing on the way, as the bride and the groom go to church followed by the wedding procession.<sup>20</sup> The same dance, with the same melody is also danced on several other occasions apart from the wedding and is called *Isia-apan*, but without the use of kerchiefs. At the neighbouring village Amino, the dance is called *Tsipnitsa* and is danced more lively with a peculiar bounce. At Costi village, the wedding dance with kerchiefs is called *Mandiladikos* because the dancers hold a kerchief (*mandili*: kerchief, in Greek) with both hands.<sup>21</sup>

### The symbolism of the kerchief in Thrace's customs

The kerchief is a stable element of folk and anthropological nature in the customs of Thrace. Depending on the colour, the decorative patterns and its artistic expression in general, it is often found in the customary behavior of this place pepped up with power and magic ability.<sup>22</sup> The kerchief is actively present from the time a person was born to his/her dying breath, in both joy and sorrow. The average person believes that the environment in which s/he lives is permeated by a supernatural power and tries to protect himself / herself or participate in it using the kerchief, which thus acquires a direct and manifold symbolism. According to V. Turner, symbol is "the smallest unit of the ritual maintaining the properties of rit-

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<sup>18</sup> See: Loutzaki, R., *ibid*, p. 10 (see also illustration 2).

<sup>19</sup> Loutzaki, R., *ibid*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> See: Lantzoz Vas., *Παραδοσιακοί χοροί και τραγούδια της Ανατολικής Ρωμυλίας* [Traditional dances and songs of Eastern Rumelia (Northern Thrace), CD booklet, International Organization of Folk Art, Athens 2001.

<sup>21</sup> An alternative name for the wedding by the residents of Costi, *Costilides*, is "dougouni", while in other villages of Thrace it is also called "hara" (joy, in Greek).

<sup>22</sup> See: Filippidi, E., «Το μαντήλι στον εθμικό βίο της Θράκης», [The kerchief in the customary life of Thrace], *Third Folklore Symposium on Northern Greece Proceedings*, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1979, p. 667.

ual behavior" (1967:19). "With their strong visualization, material side and emotional charge, symbols are the back bone of a ritual."<sup>23</sup>

Thracians use to tie the signs of engagement in a red kerchief (a gold coin and basil), because they believe that red symbolizes blood that is life itself. In other parts of Thrace, the golden embroidered kerchief validates the engagement, while the exchange of kerchiefs between the two families who decide to marry their children has the meaning of definitive agreement. The engagement kerchief with the embroidery and the initials of the names of the fiancés is placed in the icon stand for 40 days. In Northern Thrace, people are used to embroidering the year of marriage and the years of birth of their children. With this same kerchief, the mother ties the head of her firstborn child and then she keeps it until the death of the head of the family. Then, this kerchief is placed under the hands of the dead, and s/he will take it to his/her grave.

In other villages, the relatives and friends wish farewell to the dead with a kerchief, which they lay with the last goodbye kiss and which will be buried with the dead. In this funeral offering, the kerchief becomes the link between the alive and the dead. In the established memorial service, the family of the dead prepares as many kerchiefs as the invited who will pray with them for the rest of the dead's soul in church. These kerchiefs are distributed to everyone after the memorial service with the entreaty "do not forget him/her".<sup>24</sup>

Apart from their engagement kerchief, girls prepare the kerchiefs they would offer on the day of their wedding to the best man, the "*bratimi*" (mates),<sup>25</sup> and to their relatives and friends during the dance. The use of the kerchief as a gift on the days of engagement and marriage is such that this ceremony is called "*mandilomata*" (lit. kerchief offerings in Greek). At Costi village, people tie the kerchiefs both on the coach carrying the dowry and on the horns of the bulls that pull the coach. They also tie the kerchiefs on the musical instruments and on the wedding flag ("*flambouro*") on the

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<sup>23</sup> Chrysanthopoulou, V., «Εορταστικές τελετουργίες, συμβολισμός και ταυτότητα στις κοινότητες της ελληνικής Διασποράς», *Ανθρωπολογία και συμβολισμός στην Ελλάδα*, [“Celebration rituals, symbolism and identity in the communities of Greek Diaspora”, *Anthropology and symbolism in Greece*], Greek Society for Ethnology, Athens 2008, p. 326.

<sup>24</sup> See: Filippidi, E., *ibid*, p. 667, 668, 669, 672, 673.

<sup>25</sup> The mates, "*bratimi*", are the groom's best friends, who on the wedding day help in the smooth conduct of the ceremony. Since the wedding day, this friendship turns into a family relationship for life; the groom and the "*bratimi*" are called "*artlikides*" between them, while the groom's parents are called "*stavromana*" and "*stavropateras*" (mother and father of the cross). Also, see Gkogkidis, D., *Η προφορά τα ήθη και τα έθιμα της Ανατολικής Ρωμυλίας*, [The pronunciation, the customs of Eastern Rumelia], self-published, Koufalia Thessaloniki, 1993, p. 94.

wedding day.<sup>26</sup> At Kavakli village in Northern Thrace, the “*flambouro*” is called “*keska*”. It is a flag made of a white kerchief embroidered with red and white threads, which people tie on a staff on top of which they have already put a red apple. Then, they begin to dance with it. During the dance, the dance leader holds the *keska*. Afterwards, it is placed on the highest part of the house. According to the informants, the *keska* symbolizes the creation of a new family.<sup>27</sup> At the same village, upon completion of the wedding service, the two “*bratimi*” are the first to come out of the church and run to the groom’s house to announce his parents that the wedding is over, as, according to the custom, the groom’s parents should not be present during the nuptial rites in the church. Then, the groom’s parents would give a white kerchief to one mate and a jug of red wine to the other. The mates will then go back running to meet the wedding procession and will place the kerchief the groom’s parents have given them on the right shoulder of the best man; they will also give him to drink wine from the jug. The kerchief placement on the best man’s shoulder symbolizes the final approval of the marriage by the groom’s parents.

Of special interest is the symbolism of the kerchief in the dance event of “*gemato*” (lit. “full” in Greek) that is celebrated at the villages of the area of Mesimvria in Northern Thrace. This is a wedding custom celebrated on Thursday, two days before the nuptial rites, which always take place on Sunday. On that day (i.e. Thursday), the best man will bring the presents to the bride. More specifically, a procession will start from the best man’s house led by him and the musicians and in all the way along the participants dance. According to the ceremonial custom of this particular dance event, the best man can stop the procession whenever and wherever he wants and orders everyone to sit down. He will then tell such and such persons to dance calling out their names. He will usually call unmarried young men and women to dance in pairs, face to face. The dance they performed is *Isia apan* or *Karsilamas*. During the dance, the young man will extend his hand to get the kerchief from the girl’s lapel. In case the girl did not react negatively, in other words, if she allows him to take the kerchief, this act, taking place in public, means that the young man articulates that he likes the girl and that he wishes them to get to know each other better and that the girl has agreed to it. Therefore, the dance is the first step of their acquaintance, which will almost always lead to their engagement in short time and then to their marriage. The young men and women usually say that they participate in “*gemato*” in order to love and be loved.

The kerchief had also the function of unwritten law in popular law. In large livestock trade (oxen, cows, bulls) whenever a deal is made, a kerchief is tied on the horns of the animal, meaning that this transaction is

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<sup>26</sup> See: *ibid*, p. 669, 670.

<sup>27</sup> See also: Gkogkidis, D., *ibid*, p. 96.

valid. In Filippoupoli, the power of the kerchief is emphasized with the invocation to the sun to get dark:

Ἥλιε μου παρήλιε μου [My sun, my mock sun]  
 χρυσό μου παλληκάρι [my golden brave young man]  
 έβγαλε τα μαύρα σου [Take off your black (clothes)]  
 και βάλε τα χρυσά σου [and put on your golden ones]  
 χτύπα τα μαντήλια σου [beat your kerchiefs]  
 ν' ανάψουν τα καντήλια σου [To light up your candles].<sup>28</sup>

Especially in dance, the most important extension of the Greek dancer's body is the kerchief, as far as the objects are concerned.<sup>29</sup> It is an essential means of personal expression for the dancer and indispensable technical dance accessory, because the leading dancer, the "*protosyrtris*", will be held by the second dancer with the kerchief in the semicircular dance, and this will facilitate improvisation in his maneuvers. In several dances the kerchief is a necessary accessory, since they have to be performed with kerchiefs in hands.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the kerchief was used in the following case up to the 1960s: In the public circular dances, the group of men led the dance followed by the group of women.<sup>31</sup> According to the moral standards of the time, the last man of the male group had to hold the first woman of the female group with the kerchief, and they should also be close relatives or the woman be of a certain age.

### The dances of *anastenaria* worship

Initially, the worship of *anastenaria* was performed to honour Saints Constantine and Helen, while it used to take place in a small area of Sozogaathoupoli in North Eastern Thrace on the mountain of Strandza, branches of Small Haemos which was called "Blind Region" because it is surrounded by high and unapproachable mountains which make communication with the surrounding areas rather difficult.<sup>32</sup> Center of this particular

<sup>28</sup> Apostolidis, K., *Η της Φιλιππουπόλεως Ιστορία* [The history of Filippoupoli], Athens 1959, edition of the Eastern Rumelia Greeks Union, p. 570.

<sup>29</sup> See: Drandrakis, L., *Ο αυτοσχεδιασμός στον ελληνικό χορό*. [Improvisation in Greek dance] Athens 1993, p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> This occurred because of the patriarchal society.

<sup>32</sup> See also Hourmouziadis A., *Περί των αναστεναρίων και άλλων τινών παραδόξων εθίμων και προλήψεων* [About *anastenaria* and other peculiar customs and superstitions], Constantinople, 1873. Reprinted: Arch. Thrak. Laogr. Glos. This. 26 (1961) 145, as well as I. Magkriotis, «Πολιτιστικά Σημειώσεις Νομού 40 Εκκλησιών», [Cultural notes of 40 Ekklissies prefecture]. Thrak. Laogr. This. 34 (1969) 264.

worship is the largest village of the area: Costi. As far as the parish is concerned, it belonged to the Metropolitan church of Sozoagathoupoli and Vassilikos and the Black Sea.<sup>33</sup> It was inhabited exclusively by Greeks<sup>34</sup> whose number came up to about 3.000 and had 550 houses.<sup>35</sup> Due to political changes, the residents of Costi - called *Costilides* - were forced to expatriate themselves violently in 1914 and, after having wandered to various places, in 1924 the majority settled permanently at the village Kakaraska in Serres. This village was renamed to Aghia Eleni (St. Helen), and is now the modern center of the *anastenaria* worship.<sup>36</sup>

The worship of Saints Constantine and Helen was (and has been) performed by a group of 15-20 men and women, and it is expressed through sacred ecstatic dances and sacred religious symbols; that is, the sacred icons of Saints Constantine and Helen which this group of people owns especially for this purpose. The members of this group are called *anastenaria* (meaning “those who sigh”, otherwise, the “fire-walkers”, in Greek), because they sign hen they reach exaltation and shout “ah, ah”.<sup>37</sup> The *anastenaria* dancers are a kind of worship group who have their own special internal community organization. Their leader is always a man and

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<sup>33</sup> Vafidis, N., Εκκλησιαστικά Επαρχία της Θράκης και ο Φάκελος 434 της Βιβλιοθήκης της Βουλής περί Θράκης, [Parishes of Thrace and Folder 434 of the Library of the Hellenic Parliament on Thrace] *Thrace Archive*, vol. K' Athens 1955, p. 82, 85. See also: Hatzigeorgiou, P., Η Αγαθούπολης της Βορειοανατολικής Θράκης, [Agathoupolis of NorthEastern Thrace], *Thrace Archive*, vol. ΚΘ', Athens 1963, p. 368, 369.

<sup>34</sup> Vakalopoulos, K., *Ο Ελληνισμός της Βόρειας Θράκης και του Θρακικού Εύξεινου Πόντου*, [Hellenism of Northern Thrace and Thrace Euxine Pontus], Thessaloniki 1995, p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> Daniilidis, D., «Ο Βασιλικός Β.Α. Θράκης», *Δημοσιεύματα Εταιρείας Θρακικών Μελετών* [“Vassilikos of NE Thrace”, Publications of the Thrace Studies Society], Athens 1956, n. 48, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> In this village, as a natural consequence, the refugees bore many dance events through which the *anastenaria* worship was manifested earlier in Costi and which was an inseparable part of the customary community behavior. However, trying to adapt in the completely new environment, *Costilides* simplified and / or omitted many of these dance events for practical reasons. For example, in the plain of Serres - where their new village is situated - there are no “*kouria*” (sacred woods) with “*agiasmata*” (sacred sources) dedicated to the Saints, so they could not perform the respective dance rituals in exactly the same way as they did at *Costi* village.

<sup>37</sup> See Megas G., «Αναστενάρια και Έθιμα της Τυρινής Δευτέρας» [Anastenaria and Customs of Monday before Lent], *offprint from Laografia 19* (1961) 475; Idem, *Ελληνικές Γιορτές και Έθιμα της Λαϊκής Λατρείας* [Greek celebrations and customs of popular worship], Odysseas ed., (1988) 208. See also M. Michail Dede, «Το αναστενάρι» [Anastenaria], *Thrakika, second series 6* (1988-90) 57.

is called *archianastenaris*, but the “twelve” – consisting of twelve selected and respectable persons within *anastenaria* or *anastenarides*, who are their board in some way – are in charge of the administration of the group.<sup>38</sup>

The sacred ecstatic dances of the *anastenaria* dancers are accompanied by a certain religious ideology; when common people see the blank eye of the dancers, the paleness of their faces, and listen to their cries when the *anastenaria* dancers dance on burning coals holding the icons of the Saints and wear *amanetia* (i.e. sacred kerchiefs) without burning themselves, they believe that “they are caught by the Saint”, as they said; that is, that the *anastenaria* dancers are seized by the spirit of the Saints.

Robin Fox states that in the sacred worshiping dances of many religious rituals, when the dancers enter in such a trance, it is believed that they are identified with the spirit of the worshiped deity.<sup>39</sup> Whenever the *anastenaria* dancers dance ecstatically, people believe that the Saints are present and, for this reason the seated ones stand up, make the sign of the Cross and ask for Saints’ help.

As it is conspicuous, these dance forms are considered sacred and when in everyday life problems of vital importance occur, such as an epidemic on humans or animals, the local community will run to the group of *anastenaria* to seek assistance. In these cases, the members of the *anastenaria* group - after they have performed a series of ceremonial procedures in the *konaki*<sup>40</sup> - end up dancing ecstatically in the streets of the village holding the icons and the *amanetia* (sacred kerchiefs) to exorcize “evil”. We can therefore observe that the *anastenaria* company, combined with the performance of their sacred ecstatic dances, exerts an influence on everyday life of the community all year long. Thus, because of the great respect of and the fervent support from the majority of the residents of the community, the secular worship of *anastenaria* managed to hold into the bosom of the Orthodoxy - despite the persecutions of the Official Church (i.e. the Greek Orthodox Church) – and has been transformed into an inte-

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<sup>38</sup> I got the information about the “twelve” from several informants, see also M. Michail Dede, «Το Αναστενάρι, Ψυχολογική-Κοινωνιολογική Θεώρηση» [Anastenaria: Psychological-sociological approach, *Thrakika* 46 (1972) 110.

<sup>39</sup> On the element of ecstasy in religious dances, see Robin Fox, *Encounter with Anthropology*, Harmondsworth (1975) 200.

<sup>40</sup> According to the informants, *konaki* is a special place in a house (a kind of shrine), where the *anastenaria* group gather to perform the ecstatic worship to their patron Saints. The special icons of Saints Constantine and Helen as well as the sacred kerchiefs (*amanetia*) held by the *anastenaria* dancers during their dance are kept in the *konaki*. The musical instruments accompanied the *anastenaria* dance – i.e. the lyra, the gayda, and the davul – are also considered sacred and kept in the *konaki* all year long.

gral popular worship that, next to the official religion and bound to it, wouldn't take the second place in any way.<sup>41</sup>

The *anastenaria* dances performed by the *anastenaria* group at Costi village are the following:

The *Agitikos* dance

The *Sourvikos* dance

The Dance of the Street (*Dromou*)

The Dance on Fire (*Fotias*)

The *Panigyriotikos* (Festive) *Syrtos*.

When performing those dances, male and female *anastenaria* dancers hold both the icons of Saints Constantine and Helen they have for this specific purpose<sup>42</sup> and the sacred kerchiefs (the “*amanetia*”) that they consider as an extension of and equivalent to the icons. Regarding the sacred kerchiefs, I would like to point out the following: The sacred kerchiefs held by the *anastenaria* dancers are always given to them by the *archi-anastenaris* (the leader *anastenaria* dancer) and are always folded to the size of the palm in which they were placed; only a triangular part of the kerchief is left uncovered. Together with the sacred kerchiefs, the *archi-anastenaris* also gives the other *anastenaria* dancers a red rose or a green sprout in the winter. During the dance performance, never do the *anastenaria* dancers unfold the kerchief, unless they perform the *Panigyriotikos* (Festive) *Syrtos*, in which the crowd can participate too. They always hold it in their hand with respect together with the flower. Therefore, because of the use of icons and sacred kerchiefs (the “*amanetia*”), these dances are considered sacred.<sup>43</sup> The dances of the *anastenaria* worship are to be performed individually, either by a single person or by the whole group of the *anastenaria* dancers at the same time, except for the *Syrtos* which is danced in circle. In any case, this is the only time the local society allows a

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<sup>41</sup> See ref. Romeos, K., «Λαϊκές λατρείες της Θράκης» [Popular worships of Thrace], *Thrace Archive* 11 (1944-45) p. 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> The icons used by the members of the *anastenaria* group in their dance rituals, have a cylindrical handle of about 15 cm at the bottom in order to be able to handle them better.

<sup>43</sup> Sacred is considered “the person or object having divine, superhuman properties, the transcendental and the sacrosanct”, See: Vassiliou, Th. - Stamatakis, N., «Λεξικό επιστημών του ανθρώπου», [Dictionary of humanities], Gutenberg 2002, p. 183. According to Emil Durkheim, “in all religious beliefs, the phenomena are classified either as sacred or as sacrilegious (profane). In the sacred ones are included phenomena considered and experienced as exceptional, transcendental and outside of the everyday flow of things. In modern societies, the rationalization of culture has caused the shrinking of the notion of sacred”. See: Abercrombie N., Hill S., Turner S. B., *Λεξικό Κοινωνιολογίας*, [Dictionary of Sociology] for the Greek language: Pataki publishers, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Athens 1992, p. 170.

woman to dance by herself. In all other dance events, women participating in secular dances perform loosely in space and not in circle, and they should dance with their husband or some other relative. If not, then they are spoken ill of or called bad names.<sup>44</sup>

**The Agitikos dance:** This dance is called *agitikos* by the *anastenaria* themselves<sup>45</sup> [the word *agitikos* derives from “*aghios*”, meaning “saint” in Greek], because, as they claim, this dance is not performed by them, but by the saint himself.<sup>46</sup> The *Agitikos* is the first dance they perform when “they are possessed by the spirit of the Saint” and should be performed in all the dance rituals of the *anastenaria*. Regarding the *anastenaria* dancers’ “possession”, there are some theories. On the one hand, R. Firth argues that “possession” is by nature communication and without it communication is impossible;<sup>47</sup> in this case, “possession” denotes the presence of the Saint. On the other hand, K. A. Romeos notes that the *anastenaria* dancers open their souls and readily accept the Saints’ invitation to dance with them.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the *Agitikos* dance is characterized by an intense sanctification deriving not only from this leading “presence” but also from the Saints’ “participation” in the dance. For this reason the *Agitikos* dance is a key element of the religious behaviour of the *anastenaria* dancers and is based on – and this is particularly important – rules, doctrines, tradition, moral standards, convictions and, more importantly, beliefs that, although unseen, always express and produce a dynamic result.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, through the ritual and sacred nature of the *Agitikos* dance, the *anastenaria* dancers both worship the Saints and thank them, because they believe that the Saints protect not only them but also the entire village

<sup>44</sup> I got this information from the informants: Gimas Sotiris (1901), Lizos Georgios (1906), Troulianos Marinos (1905) etc., Reklou Dimitrios (lyra player, 1915), Strikos Ioannis (lyra player 1923), Strikos Nikos (lyra player 1930), Lantzou Dimitrios (lyra player 1930).

<sup>45</sup> See also: Michael Dede, M., «Το Αναστενάρι, Ψυχολογική και Κοινωνιολογική Θεώρηση», [Anastenaria: Psychological and Sociological Approach], *Thrakika*, vol. 46, 1972, p. 36, Papachristodoulou, Pol., «Τα αναστενάρια», [The anastenaria], *Thrace Archive*, vol. 15, 1950, p. 321.

<sup>46</sup> See also: Konstantinidis, K., «Ψυχολογικές και ψυχοπαθολογικές παρατηρήσεις εις την πυροβασίαν των Αναστενάρηδων και η πιθανή εξήγηση του φαινομένου της ακαΐας», [Psychological and psychopathological observations on anastenaria fire-walking and the possible explanation of the phenomenon of non-burning], *Thrace Archive*, vol. 18, 1953, p. 169.

<sup>47</sup> See: Firth, R., *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, London, 1967, p. 296.

<sup>48</sup> See ref. K. Romeos, «Λαϊκές λατρείες της Θράκης» [Popular worships of Thrace], *Thrace Archive* 11 (1944-45) p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> See Gkioultsis V., *Κοινωνιολογία της Θρησκείας* [Sociology of religion], Thessaloniki 1996, Pournara editions, p. 41.

from epidemics; they also believe that the Saints heal the sick.<sup>50</sup> The *anastenaria* dancers believe that behind every blessing or scourge that befalls on the village there is the hand of a supernatural being, that of St. Constantine, their patron Saint.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, through the sacred *Agitikos* dance, the *anastenaria* dancers find *catharsis*, that is, a release and relief from their intense religious fervour. More specifically, they say that “they feel relieved”, they feel that “a weight is lifted off them”.<sup>52</sup> Jane Harrison claims that exhilarating dancing relieves human emotions.<sup>53</sup> As soon as the *Agitikos* dance of the “*egkalesmenos*” (possessed, invited by the saint) *anastenaris* reaches its end and he ‘comes back’, he acts as if he hadn’t been there the whole time, but as if he had just entered the *konaki*. He greets all those present with the customary greeting: “Good evening!” This fact clearly shows that he returns from other worlds.<sup>54</sup> According to André Leroi-Gourhan, in exceptional rituals and ecstatic elevations, during which the subjects break into dances charged with great supernatural dynamism, one spark in all the universe is that the performer is carried away from his

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<sup>50</sup>See also, Papachristodoulou, P., «Τα αναστενάρια από νέα στοιχεία», [The anastenaria through new data], Thrace Archive, vol. 18, 1953, p. 161. We meet a comparative case with the popular worship dances of Farassa, Cappadocia, where the dances were strongly influenced by the Christian ideology. The faithful thanked and prayed to St. Vassilios to protect them from various illnesses and dangers in general; see Loukopoulos, D. – Petropoulos, D., *Η λαϊκή λατρεία των Φαράσσων*, [The popular worship of Farassa], Center of Asia Minor Studies, Athens 1949, p. 75.

<sup>51</sup> This information is known by the informants, see also, Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, Works, New York 1927, vol. 3, entry “God”.

<sup>52</sup> With reference to the relief of anastenaria from their religious fervour through the dance, see also: Megas, G., «Η έννοια και ο χαρακτήρ των Αναστεναρίων» [The meaning and nature of Anastenaria], *Nea Hestia*, vol. 95, Athens 1974, p. 90.

<sup>53</sup> See Harrison, Jane, *Ιερές τελετές και αρχαία τέχνη*, [English title: Ancient art and ritual], *Ethnology – Anthropology*, Iamvlichos editions, translation into Greek: Siafarikas Th., 1995, p. 56. A dance is considered enthusiastic when there is the element of enthusiasm. The term is used with its ancient definition, meaning possession of the human spirit by god, making humans fall in a state of ecstasy, inspiration, exaltation. States such as this are usual for dancers, foretellers, poets, musicians, etc. See Gkikas, S., *Νέο Φιλοσοφικό Λεξικό*, [New dictionary of Philosophy], Savvalas publishers, Athens 2002, p. 133–134.

<sup>54</sup> See Romeos, K., «Αναστενάρια: Η μουσική, το «εγκάλεσμα», ο χορός», [Anastenaria: The music, the “egkalesma”, the dance], *Thrace Archive*, vol. 19, 1954, p. 324-325.

everyday rhythmical circle, breaking the routine of the natural mechanism.<sup>55</sup>

**The *Sourvikos* dance**<sup>56</sup> is not always performed in *anastenaria* dance rituals. But when it is performed, it is danced as a sequel to the *Agitikos* dance and is never accompanied by singing. To be more specific, if the musicians see that some dancers are not relieved from their religious fervour by dancing the *agitikos* tune, they will play the *sourvikos*, a special tune with a faster beat, and the dancers will dance livelier, with sharper and slighter moves and many times they speak “*sourvika*”; that is, incoherently. This happens especially to the dancers who hold icons in their hands, and they shake them very lively up and down during the dance.<sup>57</sup>

**The Dance of the Street [Dromou]:** is performed by the *anastenaria* dancers who would fall in a trance during various gatherings which the *anastenaria* group hold in or outside the village, mainly for magical-religious reasons, whenever the local community asks for their help; for example, whenever there are outbreaks of epidemics, drought, etc. According to the musicians, the dance of the road or the street has its own instrumental tune, including two melodies that the musicians play alternately so that the music will not become monotonous.<sup>58</sup>

**The Dance on Fire [Fotias]:** This dance and the phenomenon of non-burning are the most impressive elements of all the ritualistic practices of *anastenaria* worship. The dance on fire always takes place at night. The intense passion, the dancers’ obvious ecstatic trance, the exclamations, the exciting music and the lit charcoals compose an “out worldly spectacle and

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<sup>55</sup> See Leroi-Gourhan Andri, *Το έργο και η ομιλία του ανθρώπου*, [English title: *Gesture and Speech*], vol. B’, National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation (MIET), Athens 2000, p. 116.

<sup>56</sup> *Sourvika* means “fast” in the local dialect. Compared to *agitikos*, whose sequel it is, it is danced faster and more lively and for this reason it is called *Sourvikos*. From a certain point of view, the word may be deriving from the Slavic word “*Surd*”, which means frenetic, excited. See Romeos A.K., *ibid.* p. 14, Kakouri, K., *ibid.* p. 29, 183. Michael-Dede M. agrees with this interpretation; she mentions that she heard the *anastenarides* stressing the speed of the rhythm in *Sourvikos* dance, and she argues that the root “*Su*” means “speed”. See Michael-Dede, M., «Το Αναστενάρι: Ψυχολογική και Κοινωνιολογική Θεώρηση» [Anastenaria: Psychological and Sociological Approach], *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> See Petropoulos, D., «Τα αναστενάρια», [Anastenaria], Thrace Archive, Athens 1938, vol. 5, p. 140-141.

<sup>58</sup> I got this information from the musicians: Reklós Dimitrios (1915), Strikos Ioannis (1922), Lantzós Dimitrios (1930), Dragoulis Georgios (1935), Strikos Nikolaos (1936), Koukos Spyros (1970), etc.

a paradoxical hearing”<sup>59</sup> The *anastenaria* dancers perform the dance on fire barefoot<sup>60</sup> (known as fire-walkers) on lit charcoals without getting burnt; that is, they present the phenomena of non-burning and of *analgesia*, this being the prevalent term used by the specialists who have studied it from time to time.<sup>61</sup> Only those *anastenaria* dancers who have been “called upon by the Saints can dance on fire because, as it is believed that those who dance without the Saints’ approval will get burnt. The first to step onto the fire is the *archianastenaris* (lit. the leader of the *anastenaria* dancers) who yells «στάχτ’ να γέν’, στάχτ, να γέν’» (let it burn) and dances across to the other side, and then he steps in again from another point, so as to form the sign of the Cross. After making the sign of the cross onto the fire, and “opening a path”, as it is said, the other *anastenaria* dancers step onto the fire and dance until stomping it out. The *anastenaria* do not pull back until the fire is put out and only ash is remained. The dance on fire is the culminating event in the *anastenaria* worship, which - from the point of view of the science of religions - is based on the dualistic belief of the existence of the spirit of good and evil. The *anastenaria* dancers believe that by extinguishing the fire with the help of the Saint represent the spirit of good, and they turn into ash the power of evil, that is: the illness of human beings and domesticated animals, adverse forces of nature and misfor-

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<sup>59</sup> See Ekaterinidis, G., «Αναστενάρια: Μύθος και Πραγματικότητα», [Anastenaria: Myth and reality], Reprinted from *Serraika Chronika* [Serres Chronicles] journal, vol. 11, 1993, p. 15

<sup>60</sup> According to many testimonies, bare-footedness was obligatory in many sacred mystic or orgiastic ceremonies. On an inscription from Kios, it is cited that the all women who dance the *dance of baskets* in the orgiastic worship of Artemis should be “πάσαι ανειλίποδες”, that is, without sandals, barefoot. See rel. Romeos A.K., *ibid*, p. 63. Bare-footedness according to the universal perception symbolizes power and purity gained through contact with Mother Earth. See Vartholomeou V., «βιβλιοκρισίες», *Λαογραφία* [Book reviews, Folklore], vol. ΔΕ’, 1987-1989, p. 415.

<sup>61</sup> Related to the phenomena of non-burning and analgesia, see Ballis, Th., Beaumanoir A., Ksenakis Ch., «Αναστενάρια: Νευροφυσιολογικές παρατηρήσεις», [Anastenaria: Neurophysiological observations], *Iatriki Epitheorisi Enoplou Dynameon*, [Hellenic. Armed Forces Medical Review]. vol. 13, issue 2, Athens 1979, p. 245-250, Vlastos, M., «Πιθανή επιστημονική ερμηνεία των φαινομένων της πυροβασίας-ακαΐας», [Possible scientific interpretation of the phenomena of fire-walking – non-burning], *Thrace Archive*, vol. 18, Athens 1953, p.: 321-331, Konstantinidis, K., «Ψυχολογικές και ψυχοπαθολογικές παρατηρήσεις εις την πυροβασίαν των Αναστενάρηδων και η πιθανή εξήγησι του φαινομένου της ακαΐας», [Psychological and psychopathological observations on anastenaria fire-walking and the possible explanation of the phenomenon of non-burning], *Thrace Archive*, vol. 18, 1953, p. 167-174.

tune in general.<sup>62</sup> That's why the *archianastenaris* (the leader of the *anastenaria* dancers), as mentioned above, when stepping onto the fire, first yells «στάχτ' να γέν', στάχτ' να γέν'» (let it burn) – that is, “let turn evil (any kind of evil) into ash”.<sup>63</sup> Despina Liourou - the respectable *archianastenarissa* (the female leader *anastenaria* dancer), a first generation refugee - claims that: “with the dance on fire she tramples over the evil spirits”.<sup>64</sup> The *anastenaria* dancers strongly tend to get identify with their patron Saint. The ecstatic trance, the enthusiasm, the rhythmical music, the dancers' bare-footedness linked with ecstatic states of mysticism, and especially the orgiastic<sup>65</sup> dance of fire directly linked to the ecstatic state of the *anastenaria* dancers, have a great contribution to this end.<sup>66</sup> While being in trance, the *anastenaria* dancers receive the “*egkalesma*” (inner calling from, possession by the Saint) of the Saint to dance the *Agitikos* dance. So, they usually shout: “Άναψε κόσμε τη φωτιά να μπει ο Κωνσταντίνος”, meaning “Let everyone light up the fire for Constantine to enter”.<sup>67</sup> This fact shows their full identification with St. Constantine, who “gets into” the fire with them through the icons they held. “The *anastenaria* will not enter the fire themselves, but St. Constantine, who is inside them, will enter instead”.<sup>68</sup> D. Loukatos argues that through the icons, the Saints

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<sup>62</sup> See also Kakouri, K., *ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> See also Papachristodoulou, P., «Τα αναστενάρια», [The *anastenaria*], *Arch. Thrak. This.*, vol.20, 1955, p. 366.

<sup>64</sup> I got this information from her son, Stamatis Liouros, who is also an *anastenaris* upholding the family tradition. See also: Margioris, N., *Ξυπόλητοι χορεύουν στη φωτιά*, [They are dancing barefoot on fire], Athens 1980, p. 93.

<sup>65</sup> The term orgiastic dance is not used with its present sense, but with the ancient one, meaning the infinite enthusiasm and ecstasy of the dancers, as they seek to be united with divine through mystic worships and rituals held with great sanctity and pomp. The presently known sense of the word “orgy” was given by the fathers of church after the predominance of Christianity in order to slander those who participated in orgiastic ceremonies because these were not Christian. They used to break and totally destroy the statues of the idolatrous gods those ceremonies were addressed to, which resulted in the destruction of ancient art masterpieces. See: Megas, G., *Ελληνικές Γιορτές και Έθιμα της Λαϊκής Λατρείας*, [Greek celebrations and customs of popular worship], Odysseas ed., Athens 1988, p. 205-206, as well as: Kallergi Dido, *Τα Αρχαία Μυστήρια*, [Ancient mysteries], Ideotheatron, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> See: Megas, G., [The meaning and nature of *Anastenaria*], *ibid*, p. 92.

<sup>67</sup> See also: Boudouris, A., «Τα αναστενάρια», [Anastenaria], *Makedonia* newspaper, June the 15<sup>th</sup> 1950; see also: Kakouri, K., *ibid*, p. 24, and Papachristodoulou, P., «Τ' αναστενάρια, οι καλόγεροι, σεϊμένιδες, πιτεράδες...», [The *anastenaria*, the monks, seimenides, piterades...], *ibid*, p. 314.

<sup>68</sup> See: Michael Dede, M., «Το Αναστενάρι, Ψυχολογική και Κοινωνιολογική Θεώρηση», [Anastenaria: Psychological and Sociological Approach], *Thrakika*,

themselves participate in the dance of fire.<sup>69</sup> K.A. Romeos cites that “the icon “invites” the pure man”, who is a sensitive person and opens his/her soul to the Saints’ will and accepts willingly their invitation to dance with them on the sacred fire.<sup>70</sup> The dance on Fire is considered the best evidence that the dancer is chosen by the Saint, that s/he carries the Holy Spirit and deserves the general respect, because s/he dances on lit charcoals without his/her bare feet getting burnt.<sup>71</sup>

**The Panigyriotikos (Festive) Syrtos Dance:** Of all the religious dances performed by the members of *anastenaria* group holding their sacred religious symbols, the icons and the *amanetia*, only the *Festive Syrtos* is danced in circle together with the crowd. Only now that all the people participate in the *Syrtos* dance do the *anastenaria* dancers unfold the *amanetia* (the sacred kerchiefs). The dance has its own distinct instrumental tune and is never accompanied by singing, while it is only danced in the dance rituals performed during the feast and, that is why it is called *panigyriotikos* (festive). The first who lead the dance is called *progodos*.<sup>72</sup>

By performing the *Festive Syrtos*, the dancers make the “zosimo” (encirclement, belt) of the village, which is a magic protection.<sup>73</sup> More spe-

vol. 46, 1972, p. 133. See also: Filias, V., *Κοινωνιολογία του Πολιτισμού*, [Sociology of Culture], vol. 1, Papazissi publishers, Athens 2000, p. 441.

<sup>69</sup> See ref. Loukatos D., «Ο χορός στη Λαογραφία μας» [Dance in our Folklore], *Nea Hestia*, vol. 67, Athens 1960, p. 47.

<sup>70</sup> See: Romeos, A.K., *ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>71</sup> See: See Megas, G., *Ελληνικές Γιορτές και Έθιμα της Λαϊκής Λατρείας* [Greek celebrations and customs of popular worship], p. 206.

<sup>72</sup> I know this information from the senior lyra player Reklos D.; see also: Petropoulos D., «Λαογραφικά Σκοπέλου-Πέτρας (Ανατολικής Θράκης)» [Folklore of Skopelos-Petra (of Eastern Thrace)], *Thrace Archive*, vol. 8, 1941-42, p. 166.

<sup>73</sup> In older times, the simple man believed in the existence of invisible powers, which were entering the settlement and the private places they lived in and that these powers had a negative effect causing various mortal epidemics on men and animals. In order to protect themselves, they turned to various magical entrenchments of the vital space with plowing, crossing and “zosimo”, drawing various imaginary or real preventive circles, as the “encircled spaces”, according to their beliefs, separate the human, sacred and protected from the evil. See rel. Lagopoulos, Al., «Ανθρωπολογία του χώρου: «Ζώσιμο» και «σταύρωμα» του χωριού στην Ελλάδα», *Ελληνικός Παραδοσιακός Πολιτισμός: Λαογραφία και Ιστορία*. [Anthropology of space: “Zosimo” and “crossing” of the village in Greece], *Greek Traditional Culture. Folklore and History*. Conference in the memory of Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, Thessaloniki 2001, p. 91. See also, Lekatsas, P., *Η καταγωγή των θεσμών, των εθίμων και δοξασίων*. [The origin of institutions, customs and beliefs], Athens 1951, p. 93, 100. In Costi, the “zosimo” of the village was made by the *anastenaria* group, who performed the *anastenaria* dances holding the icons and the sacred kerchiefs of their patron Saints.

cifically, on the last day of the 8-day feast in honour of Saints Constantine and Helen,<sup>74</sup> the members of the *anastenaria* worship in procession - holding the icons and the sacred kerchiefs, and followed by the crowd - go around the entire village. On every crossroad, they stop and dance the *Festive Syrtos* together with the crowd in order to “encircle” the specific spot, because as they say, they believe that the good and the evil spirits get in and out of the village from these spots”.<sup>75</sup> The *archianastenaris* (the leader of the *anastenaria* dancers) leads the dance holding an unfolded *amaneti* (sacred kerchief) with the second dancer, while he offers his place to other *anastenarides* (the *anastenaria* dancers) to lead the dance. The *Festive Syrtos* is also performed with the gathered crowd around the ashes after the dance on fire where, as it is believed, the “evil” has been captured. In this case too, according to the accounts, because the members of the *anastenaria* group hold the sacred religious symbols - that is, the icons and the sacred kerchiefs (*amanetia*) - the dance is considered sanctified, therefore the crowd will try to enter the dance in order to obtain, as it is believed, the blessing and protection of the Saints. K. Romeos mentions that “the *syrtos* dances, in case of a sacred feast, are considered the most appropriate worship dances that should be performed “just for good luck”, so that the year would prove even better”.<sup>76</sup>

All the aforementioned dances are still performed up to date by the *anastenaria* group within the context of their various dance rituals, at the village Aghia Eleni in Serres which is the modern center of *anastenaria* worship. However, compared with Costi, its magical-religious nature and social objective have shrunk, because, since the 1950s Greece has undergone major social and cultural changes mainly due to the development of education and technology. Hence, the local society’s worldview has been differentiated. For instance, if today someone falls ill, his/her family will

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<sup>74</sup> The feast begins on 20<sup>th</sup> May, that is, on the eve of the celebration of the Saints, which is on 21<sup>st</sup> May and lasts until 27<sup>th</sup> May.

<sup>75</sup> About the “*zosimo*” in Costi village, see also Kakouri, K., *ibid.*, p. 28, Hourmouziadis, A., *ibid.*, p. 151, 152, Petropoulos, D., *ibid.*, p. 141, as well as Papachristodoulou, P., «Τ’ Αναστενάρια του 1954» [The Anastenaria of 1954]. *Thrace Archive*, vol. 305. Megas, G., «Μαγικά και δεισιδαίμονες συνήθειαι προς αποτροπήν επιδημικών νόσων», [Magical and superstitious customs in order to prevent epidemics], *Year book of the Folklore Archive of the Academy of Athens*, 1943-44, p. 28. On the procession of icons by the inhabitants of a settlement in order to protect it, see also: Theophilos (Bishop of Campania), *Ταμείον της Ορθοδοξίας*, [Fund of Orthodoxy], Venice 1780, chapter NE’, p. 130.

<sup>76</sup> See: Romeos, K., *Λαβύρινθος, περιοδικό σύγγραμμα λαογραφίας*, [Labyrinth, journal on folklore], vol. A’, Athens 1974, p. 55.

not invite the *anastenaria* group to heal the patient through dance,<sup>77</sup> as it was the case in the past, but they will resort to a physician for cure.

In the performance of the aforementioned dances accompanying the *anastenaria* worship until our days, we observe that apart from the sacred icons, they also make use of the sacred kerchiefs (the *amanetia*). The sacred kerchief, known as *amaneti*, is not a means of dance expression; it is rather identified with the worshiped Saint and it is an object that materializes the Saint. When dancing with the kerchief (the *amaneti*), a sacred object, as the *anastenaria* consider it, the *anastenaria* dancers' dance aims at their worshipping the Saints, and their dance is the means to achieve this purpose.<sup>78</sup>

### Conclusions

Summing up the aforementioned, we could conclude that *Mandilatos* *anastenaria* worship dance are two different dances with different purposes in the use of the kerchief. On the one hand, *Mandilatos* dance – under different names, but with the same rhythm of 7/8 ( $7/16=2+2+3$ ), the same movements and the same function - is the prevalent wedding dance and is danced throughout Thrace. With *Mandilatos*, people/the dancers “dance” the dowry that is carried to the groom’s house and with the same dance the bride’s and groom’s relatives “dance” with the kerchiefs given as gifts to them by the newlyweds. For this reason, this ceremony is called “*mandilomata*”. When people go to pick up the bride or the best man for the church, they dance holding a kerchief (*mandili*). The name of the dance as *Mandilatos* is only found in Western Thrace. In Eastern and Northern Thrace this specific wedding dance is not named after the kerchief, even though it is used to the same extent and with the same meaning; instead it can be found under the names of *Sygekathistos*, *Kallinitikos*, and *Mandiladikos*, as discussed earlier in this work.

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<sup>77</sup> The *anastenaria* group perform certain dance rituals when called to the house of a patient. More specifically, they place the patient in the middle of the room and put a sacred kerchief (*amaneti*) on his/her shoulders. The *anastenaria* sit around the patient and the musicians would sing various songs referring to Saints Constantine and Helen. After a while, the *anastenaria* come to a trance and dance the *Agitikos* dance holding the icons of their patron Saints and the *amanetia* (sacred kerchiefs). The members of the patient’s family seeing the *anastenaria* dance ecstatically believe that they are “possessed” by the spirit of the Saints and that the Saints are “present”. For this reason, they stand up and pray to the Saints respectfully asking for the patient’s healing.

□ See: Drandrakis, L., *Ο αυτοσχεδιασμός στον ελληνικό χορό*. [Improvisation in Greek dance] Athens 1993, p. 40.

On the other hand, in *anastenaria* worship the use of the kerchief has a purely religious character. The sacred kerchief, known as *amaneti*, is considered equivalent to and extension of the icon of Saints Constantine and Helen. It is identified with the worshiped saint and it is an object materializing the saint. The members of the *anastenaria* group, when dancing with the kerchief, a sacred object as they consider it – aim at worshipping the Saints and their dance is the means to achieve this purpose. Apart from the *anastenaria* group, the other people (i.e. the community people) consider kerchiefs to be sacred and for this reason they seek to participate in the *Festive Syrtos* to have – as they believe - the Saints’ blessing and protection, as this particular dance is considered sanctified because the members of the *anastenaria* group hold sacred kerchiefs during its performance.

Finally, with this work, it is attempted to delineate the importance of the context while one reads and interprets the presence of the kerchief in the dance performances of Thrace. The different symbolism denoted by the different performance contexts comes to refute the influence of the theory of survivals and any comparative interpretation deriving from the reference to a singular element of the dance.

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Vassilis Lantzos

### **Ples Anastenarija je prežitak tračkog plesa mandilatos: mit ili realnost?**

Ovo istraživanje pokušava da naglasi značaj konteksta u „čitanju“ prisustva maramice u izvedbama tračkih plesova. Podaci su prikupljeni u dugom istraživanju i terenskom radu u oblastima Trakije i u Agia Eleni (Sveta Jelena) u Seru, gde se nalazi moderni centar anastenarijskog obožavanja. Prikupljanje podataka je bazirano na etnografskom metodu, to jest, zasnovano je na primarnim i sekundarnim izvorima. Analiza podataka je pokazala da je sugerisani simbolizam u čitanju prisustva maramice u različitim izvodačkim kontekstima u plesnim izvedbama Trakije u funkciji opovrgavanja uticaja teorije o iskustvima kao i komparativne verzije koja proizlazi iz upućivanja na jedan jedini element igre.

**Ključne reči:** Trakija, venčanje, maramica, ples mandilatos, selo Kosti, anastenarijska grupa, anastenarijsko obožavanje, ikone, amaneti