Reviewed Article:

The Forgotten Movement – A (Re)construction of Prehistoric Dances

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Dancing has always been and still is an integral part of the lives of individuals and communities around the world, and it forms part of the cultural identity of all traditional societies. Unlike the arguably small role it has in modern urban societies, dance had much greater role in the lives of individuals and communities of ancient and recent past (Maletić, 1986, pp.14, 41), as well as it still has in many of contemporary tribal communities (Marshall, 1969, pp.357–358; Biesele, 1978, pp.165–169; Katz, 1982, pp.3, 34; Maletić, 1986; Whitehouse,

1995, pp.21-22). In those contexts, dancing took place in numerous social and individual occasions and it was considered to be not only a form of entertainment but also one of the main means of communication with all aspects of one's outer and inner environment (Lange, 1976, pp.90-91; Maletić, 1986, p. 86; Garfinkel, 2003, p.67). Therefore, dance is an extremely interesting phenomenon, but due to its intangible nature it is still a rare topic in archaeological research.

> “ ...we find that there is a lot of potential in researching and recreating dance in the archaeological context. Besides having an important role in the social and psychological development of human race, the dance has always been an extremely attractive spectacle for all types of viewers...

However, after studying archaeological artistic depictions, historical descriptions and contemporary ethnographic examples as the main research sources for the history of dance and dance movement and its development in the context of early human history, we created a conceptual reconstruction of prehistoric dances. It was presented in the form of an educational dance performance with the goal of presenting the archaeological heritage through a possible vision of dances and dance movements from a number of selected prehistoric periods: Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Bronze Age.

The choreographies were based on two main factors: the poses and formations recorded on the images of dancing depicted on prehistoric pottery (mostly form Near Eastern and European sites), and dance moves of contemporary traditional communities which were chosen on the basis of potential similarities with presumed prehistoric communities. Since ethnological research has shown that members of communities from different parts of the world who perform the same daily activities, and thus move in the same or at least a similar manner, often perform similar or even identical dance moves (Maletić, 1986, pp.167-168), the sources from all around the world were taken into account. Given the intangible nature of dancing, as well as the scarcity of specific data regarding the period of prehistory, in the creation of this reconstruction there were many things inevitably left to interpretation. However, the idea was to create a display that would, based on the existing knowledge of the dance and the mentioned period, at least present a credible possibility.

In order to find the musical background, the available sources were studied and a newly composed music with characteristics that approximately corresponded to our knowledge about the music of Neolithic, Chalcolitic, and Bronze Age societies was used. The clothing of the dancers was made based on the basic notions about the clothes of communities from Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age periods and it was decorated with characteristic motifs of particular cultures (Neolithic Sopot culture and Chalcolithic Vučedol culture) that were recorded on ceramic vessels and figures (See for more http://cexa-zg.org/costumes.html). Various pieces of jewellery were made as direct replicas of existing artefacts. The performers

were solely amateur dancers with varying degrees of various dance knowledge and degrees of skill, which provided an unexpected touch of authenticity to the final result.[1]

The performance was named *The Forgotten Movement*. While presenting it to the audience, each choreography was preceded by a short educational textual introduction, which was read aloud and accompanied by images. Besides educating the general audience, the goal of this project was to draw attention to the importance of dance and dance movement in early communities as well as to highlight the potential of their analysis. The programme was extremely well received by the audiences, which confirmed its potential for further development.

In continuation, the grounds upon which this interpretation of prehistoric dances was created will be presented. Three dances were created which were intended to be set in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Bronze Age of the area between Sava, Drava, and Danube.

1.Neolithic Harvest Dance - a celebration of the completed harvest

The Neolithic period provided most of archaeological data related directly to dance, since the majority of prehistoric depictions of dance that were found and studied so far were recorded on Neolithic pottery, rock drawings, and figurines from Near East and Southeast Europe (Garfinkel, 2003).
Based on the knowledge of contemporary folkloric communities and some of the historical ones, certain general features of harvest dances from most parts of the world can be pointed out: use of both vocal and instrumental music accompaniment, group dancing in all spatial formations, a generally cheerful atmosphere and – very often – presence of various vegetation, magical and sexual motifs, with the latter mirroring the fact that the fertility of the land is linked to the fertility of people, especially women (Maletić, 1986, pp.96, 116-117, 121, 235).
Therefore, the “Neolithic harvest dance” was conceived of, as a celebration of the completed harvest season and a ritual with the purpose of ensuring a good growth of new crops and fertility of the land and people. It was performed by a group of young men and women.

Elements used:

Circle (See Fig. 1)

The most dominant choreographic formation used in this dance is a circle because it is the most common spatial organization of dance seen on archaeological artefacts and the amount of such depictions from Neolithic period suggests that dancing in a circle constituted the most important part of social and religious rites in the ancient Near East and southeast Europe from eighth to fourth millennium BC (Garfinkel, 2003, pp.41, 89). In the circle, all dancers move equally and are on equal terms in relation to the centre of the circle and to each other,

which creates a sense of unity and reflects the state of Neolithic communities where there was no prominent social stratification (Garfinkel, 2003, p.41). The same feature can be seen in circle dances of more contemporary rural communities from all over the world (Maletić, 1986, pp.14, 197). Most circle dances are connected with magic and social activities. The circle is the space in which the ritual takes place, the external world is excluded by the closed circle and every individual who dances in it expresses respect for the supernatural powers to which the ritual is dedicated (Lange, 1976, pp.83-84). Also, moving in a circle is often a reflection of cosmological movements that mostly have a cyclical form, such as change of seasons, lunation, sowing time, and harvest (Garfinkel, 2003, p.89; Garfinkel, 2010, p.212; Soar, 2010, p.151) (See Fig. 2).

Opposing lines

The formation of two opposing lines, male and female, that are constantly moving towards and away from each other is the oldest and most typical form of group dances with an allusion to sex life (Maletić, 1986, p.124).

Grounded movements

Most movements used for this dance are based on heavily leaning weight on the ground in order to express the connection with earth that gives birth to crops and feeds people.

Symbols of “vegetation magic”

Girls perform gestures that mimic movements of sowing and harvesting crops, while boys perform high jumps and lift legs very high as they step, thus invoking a good crop growth. Both elements are a form of the so-called "vegetation magic", a very common element in dances of agricultural communities around the world – equally among African tribes as in the Balkan folklore, for example (Maletić, 1986, pp.95-96, 315-316; Maletić, 2003, pp.132, 164) (See Fig. 3 and 4).

Horizontal Hip Figure Eights

Girls perform this movement – today most common in the oriental dance[2] – as a symbol used to emphasize human fertility that lies in women's hips.

2.Bronze Age Coming-of-Age Dance - an initiation rite of a young girl

The Bronze Age depictions of dance from the area of Europe and Near East are much scarcer in comparison to the Neolithic data, amounting arguably to only a handful of artefacts (Dimitrijević, Težak-Gregl and Majnarić-Pandžić, 1998, pp.205, 209; German, 2007). Due to this lack of specifically dance-related artefacts, the construction of a dance performance set in this period was based primarily on contemporary ethnographic sources and free interpretation of their possible connection to the existing archaeological artefacts – clothes, jewellery and figurines from the Bronze Age of Carpathian basin / Pannonian plain.

Coming-of-age rituals and initiation rites exist in all human communities and are one of the oldest rituals practiced by the mankind. They symbolize the transition of a young member of the community to the adulthood, which is usually linked to their readiness to start his/her own family. In many communities, a significant part of such rituals is dancing. It can be done in a group or individually, depending on the traditional form of the ritual. The forms are extremely diverse so it is difficult to point out a lot of common features. However, the physical endurance during long-lasting and sometimes demanding dance is most often important for both sexes since it is a reflection of the physical and psychological strength upon which the survival of both the individual and the community depends. Many male initiation dances thus contain combat and athletic elements and the ritual sometimes requires passing through painful physical efforts, while women's rituals more often emphasize the girl's beauty and vitality (Maletić, 1986, pp.117-121, 274-275). Following the latter fact, the main reason for placing this kind of dance in the Bronze Age were rich female graves from this period found throughout the Pannonian plain (Gimbutas, 1965, p.228; Neugebauer, 1994, pp.86, 88, 152; Grömer, 2010, pp.335-341) (See Fig. 5).
The dance was conceived of as an initiation rite of a young girl who dances to celebrate her reaching puberty and thus becoming eligible for marriage. She first dances alone and then three young men join her.

Elements used:

Grooming and the Apotropaic Circle

The dance is preceded by a small ceremony where the girl enters accompanied by a group of older companions – one of them adorns her with jewellery, while others walk around them in a circle. The first element is inspired by a number of similar patterns in the European and world folklore in which an older person (or more) prepares the young one in a symbolic and/or practical way for some kind of transition ritual. The element of the protective circle was used since, according to traditional beliefs around the world, evil spirits especially prey on people in crucial moments of their life and therefore they are in need of special protection – that very often being a protective circle around the "endangered one" (Maletić, 1986, pp.118, 128, 287-288) (See Fig. 6).

Bird motif

After the girl first dances alone, she is joined by three young men who circle around her while holding a specific pose with arms sharply thrown behind their back, as in imitation of wings of a bird circling around its prey. This pose is an element from the Albanian folk dance shota in which men thus mimic birds wooing their mate (Albanian Folklore, 2015) and was chosen because of the multitude of Bronze Age artefacts with bird motifs (some of which are even rendered as a compound of a human body and a bird's head) (Srejović, 1997, p.237; Guba and Szeverényi, 2007). Since those human-bird depictions most likely represented some very

specific elements of beliefs of Bronze Age communities of these areas, it is possible that dances like shota, in which the dancers imitate birds, are perhaps the remains of very similar ancient beliefs (See Fig. 7).

Dancing in front of and in pair with the opposite sex

This element emphasizes the strong link between coming of age and reaching sexual maturity, a trait inherent to all the traditional societies of the world, past and present (Maletić, 1986, pp.123-125) (See Fig. 8).

Lively movements with focus on the hips

The girl's dance moves partly draw attention to her hips which are an important aspect of her fertility and they are very vivid in order to express zest and joy[3] as well as to showcase her physical endurance. The latter element is present in countless traditional and folkloric dances in which the main protagonist is a young woman because in rural communities the body strength is an important indicator of how the person will deal with the tasks that wait in the more or less difficult conditions under which the community lives (Maletić, 1986, pp.118-119). This is equally visible in certain African (Maletić, 1986, pp.119, 128; Varga Dinicu, 2013, pp.22, 51), North American (Maletić, 1986, p.118), Middle Eastern (Varga Dinicu, 2013, p.54), and Romani peoples (Silverman 2003, pp.125-126) as well as in the Slavic folklore in which, for example, it is always of vital importance for the Bride to dance a lot on her wedding thus proving that she will be reliable and strong wife, mother and housewife (Maletić, 1986, pp.280-281, 283-285).

3.Magical-Religious Ritual - inspired by the Chalcolithic Vucedol culture

Magical-religious ritual dances exist in all primitive cultures and consist of a very wide range of dances because those that are characteristic of various occasions such as harvest, weddings, and combat, can also have a magical-religious character. Regarding the dances in which the magical-religious aspect is the prominent factor, the forms are as diverse as the communities that practice them (Maletić, 1986, pp.68-69). The most common feature that can be pointed out is the performer falling into ecstasy and/or trance and often one of the performers (sometimes the soloist) has a special authority in the community – as the shaman or some other knowledgeable elder (Maletić, 1986, pp.105-115).

The third dance of the performance was therefore conceived of as an abstract ritual, inspired by the extremely peculiar Vučedol material culture (Dimitrijević, Težak-Gregl and Majnarić-Pandžić, 1998, pp.140-150). There is only one artefact of this culture found so far that could be interpreted as a depiction of dance (See Fig 10), therefore this performance was also constructed primarily through a free interpretation of known features of the Vučedol period. The performance represents the community seeking blessing from the natural forces at the time of the equinox, on the occasion of changes in the sky and the construction of a new

house in the village. It is performed by a shaman and seven girls.

Elements used:

Spinning and trance

Kneeling, the shaman falls into trance while circulating the upper body and producing sharp twitches of the torso. Spinning is a specific movement that exists in countless folkloric and traditional dances around the world. It contains in itself the element of a circle, the eternal symbol of all life and natural cycles in the eyes of Man as well as a symbol of protection from evil forces. Rhythmic rotational movements, often accompanied by hyperventilation and exhaustion, are also one of the common actions employed to transform the mind into trance. They affect the sense of balance and cause dizziness which can eventually alter the state of consciousness (Lange, 1976, pp.66-67; Garfinkel, 2003, pp.42, 89). This element was chosen because according to research, a vast majority of the societies in all parts of the world had one or more institutionalised, culturally patterned forms of altered states of consciousness which leads to conclusion that trance is a psychobiological capacity available to all societies and the vast majority of societies have used it in their own particular ways and have done so primarily in a sacred context (Bourguignon, 1973, pp.9-11).

Hand gestures

The shaman also performs some hand and arm gestures, intended as the invocation of blessing from the earthly elements. Rituals and dances in which the hands are placed in special positions exist in many communities (Garfinkel, 2003, p.30) but in this particular case the inspiration was the Touareg ritual *guedra*[4] (Varga Dinicu, 2013, pp.63-67). The hand gestures are not the same as in *guedra* although their intended purpose is similar: directing energy from the sky to the earth and vice versa.

“Adorant” position

Both the shaman and the seven dancers raise their arms that are bent at the elbow at the right angles. This position is the most common arm position recorded on the prehistoric depictions of human figures found in the Near East, southeast Europe and in North Africa and in recent studies it is being increasingly interpreted as a depiction of a dance pose (Garfinkel, 2003, pp.32-33). One such example comes also from the Vučedol culture (Hoffiller, 1933, p.12, Table 9:7; Durman, 2000, p.160) (See Fig. 9 and 10).

Reflection of a characteristic motif

The spatial organization of the dancers is based on one of abstract motifs recorded on numerous examples of Vučedol pottery (Durman, 2000, figures 18, 23, 38-40, 62, 98-99) (See Fig. 11)

Stamping

The main characteristic of the dance performed by seven girls is the stamping of the feet which is the only musical and rhythmic background they have. This element was chosen on the basis of a folk custom recorded in the 20th century in both Africa and Balkans: when building a house, the new earthen floor is heavily stamped upon while dancing on it, in order to make it firm (Maletić, 1986, pp.165, 317). Since one of the reasons conceived for this dance ritual was an "inauguration" of a new house in the village (and earthen floors are a common find at Vučedol culture sites (Dimitrijević, Težak-Gregl and Majnarić-Pandžić, 1998, pp.140-150), the same motif was used.[5]

Rhythmic background

The musical background of this choreography was different than the ones used for the previous two. No already existing musical tracks were used but an entirely original rhythmic background was designed solely for this piece. The only musical accompaniment for the shaman was drumming and for the girls it was the stamping of their feet and the rattling of anklets around their ankles. The rhythm in the first part of the display was primarily designed to correspond to limping movement. It is the rhythm played by the drum to which the shaman enters and performs all the gestures and rotations while the pace accelerates. The same rhythm is later stamped by the girls but they also perform some other rhythmic patterns such as the strikes in series of 12 and 4, intended to show the awareness of the division of the annual cycles. Another big rhythmic pattern prevails in the second part of the girls' performance and that is the archaic rhythm of a folk Balkan dance *Nijemo Kolo*, "the Silent Circle" (UNESCO, 2011). According to the ethno musicians that were consulted, it is one of the most archaic rhythms that still exist in the folklore of these areas and therefore it was chosen for this choreography.

Conclusion

In conclusion, three major stages of this project can be pointed out. First is the research, which was carried out with the intention of collecting information from all the available sources. The second was the creative process of making choreographies and fitting them to the appropriate musical background, which was based on the combination of gained knowledge about the nature and forms of dance in early societies and an already existing knowledge of dance and human movement in general and its connection to the music. For this stage it was necessary to narrow down the field of interest and to decide which particular type of dance of which particular archaeological period in which particular geographic area we want to recreate since that was the initial idea upon which all the movements and formations of every choreography were to be built (as well as the clothing of the dancers).

Finally, the third stage was the presentation to the public. Since the initial idea was not only to entertain with a mere dance show but also to educate about the role and nature of dance in

early societies as well as about the more or less local archaeological heritage, for each choreography there was a short spoken introduction, accompanied by images, about the time period and the type of dance that follows.

This kind of presentation proved to be very successful in the case of museum events since the audience, mostly did not know what to expect from something labelled as a “dance-educational performance” and were generally very interested and entertained by what they saw. However, in the case of a performance at the street antics festival on a city square, spoken introductions proved to be rather redundant. The venue and the audience there were much bigger, the audience was more varied and therefore more easily distracted so they mostly showed interest only in watching the dance performances. Therefore it became evident that in some venues, although the reception of the dance performances may be very good, there is no real room for the educational element.

As a final thought, we find that there is a lot of potential in researching and recreating dance in the archaeological context. Besides having an important role in the social and psychological development of human race, the dance has always been an extremely attractive spectacle for all types of viewers and therefore, when done well, it can be a truly winning example of re-enactment of a wide range of both prehistoric and historic periods.

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1 This was due to the fact that they did not execute the dance moves in the same manner as well trained professional dancers would - near-perfectly harmonized and showing the same strength and skill - but there were slightly noticeable differences in the skill and manner of dancing of each performer, which altogether made them look more like a community that lives together and practices dance mostly through participation in community events, rather than like a professional dance ensemble whose skills in movements and performance emerge as a result of significant amount of training and rehearsals.

2 Here the term "oriental dance" (raqs sharqi in Arabic, oryantal dansi in Turkish)refers to the most widespread folk dance of the Middle East, a social dance that uses various hip movements, and is still done today in its local forms in Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, while some movements characteristic of this dance can also be found in dances of Southeast Europe, in countries such as Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Albania (Varga Dinicu, 2013, pp.97-136; Maletić, 1986, pp.278-279).

3 This element is inspired by the hagala - a traditional semi-ritual dance of the Sahara nomads that, according to some sources, in its most original form was performed by a young girl as she enters puberty (Varga Dinicu, 2013, pp.51-52).

4 *Guedra* is always performed by a woman, who is rhythmically rocking while making sharp hand gestures that symbolize the blessing of the past, the present, the future, the sun, the earth, the water and the wind. It is a benevolent ritual aimed at permeating all those present with peace and kindness (Varga Dinicu, 2013, pp.63-65).

5 As it can be seen in the case of many other folklore dances, the intention behind this particular element can also be to express the connection with the fertility and spirits of the soil (Maletić, 2003, p.132).

Link(s)

Short video compilation of the Forgotten Movement performances

Keywords living history
theatre
presentation
dance

Country Croatia

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FIG 1. DANCING IN THE CIRCLE WITH HIGH JUMPING MOVEMENTS. PHOTO F. LAZIĆ

FIG 2. PAINTED POTTERY, CHIGHA SABZ, IRAN, 6TH MILLENIUM BC (GARFINKEL, 2003, P.185).

FIG 3. MOVEMENTS MIMICKING SOWING AND HARVESTING WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PERFORMING HORIZONTAL HIP FIGURE EIGHTS. PHOTO F. LAZIĆ

FIG 4. HIGH LEG LIFTS. PHOTO F. LAZIĆ

FIG 5. A GIRL DANCING ALONE. PHOTO A. MRAZEK

FIG 6. GROOMING AND THE APOTROPEIC CIRCLE. PHOTO A. MRAZEK

FIG 7. YOUNG MEN CIRCLING AROUND THE GIRL IN A „BIRD POSE“. PHOTO F. LAZIĆ

FIG 8. DANCING IN PAIR. PHOTO A. MRAZEK

FIG 9. FORMATION OF FIVE DANCERS WITH ARMS BENT UPWARDS. PHOTO F. LAZIĆ

FIG 10. INCISED POTTERY WITH AN ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURE, VUČEDOL, CROATIA, 3RD MILLENIUM BC (DURMAN, 2000, P.80).

FIG 11. INCISED POTTERY ORNAMENTED WITH A CHARACTERISTIC MOTIF, VUČEDOL, CROATIA, 3RD MILLENIUM BC (DURMAN, 2000, P.131).