

Comparison between dionysiac female dance in ancient Greece and dervishes' ceremony from Middle Ages to nowadays in Turkey
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Nowadays the dervishes who dance in Konya and others places in Turkey in remembrance of the Mevlevî brotherhood ceremony, do it in a trance. In Ancient Greece, the Maenads who danced for Dionysos also tried to fall into a trance. Only men perform the first dance and the second dance is a female dance, but sometimes Maenads can play with Satyrs. The philosopher Mevlânâ, who lived from 1201 or 1207 AD to 1273 AD, created the first dance in the Middle Ages. It was called "sêma", from Semsettîm or Sems, the name of Mevlânâ's friend who disappeared in 1247 AD. In Old Persian, the name "sêma" means "sun". Then the "sêma" dance was practiced until the abolition of the Mevlevî brotherhood, by Mustafa Kemal in 1925 AD. Nowadays, a ceremony for the anniversary of Mevlânâ's death, on the 17th of December, in Konya, is allowed¹. And more than that, on other days, some dancers in Turkey always reproduce these dances and ceremonies, and so try to live according to Mevlânâ's idea. The maenadic dance was executed in ancient Greece by women in dionysiac mythology, then in bacchic cult since the archaic period² and it was practiced during all of Antiquity. To fall in trance, dervishes and Maenads use an original technique, where the turn is very important, but it is not the same technique and not the same quality of trance. We have no experience of dervishe dance. We saw it only two times. The first time in a performance in Aix-en-Provence in 2002, and the second time in Turkey, in Göreme's Valley in 2008. We completed our understanding of this dance by discussion with the staff of the Mevlânâ Museum, in Konya, and by books. But we have experience of maenadic dance because we practice it regularly and we wrote articles about it³.

¹ See A. Popovic et G. Veinstein, *Les voies d'Allah. Les ordres mystiques dans le monde musulman des origines à nos jours*, Fayard, 1996 ; E. Vitray-Meyerovitch, *Konya ou la danse cosmique*, J. Renard, 1990.

² H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos, Histoire du culte de Bacchus*, Payot, Paris, 1951 ; M. Daraki, *Dionysos*, Paris, Arthaud, 1985 ; C. Acker, *Dionysos en transe, La voix des femmes*, L'harmattan, Paris, 2002 ; A. F. Jacottet, "De la ménade à l'initié, la femme dans la sphère dionysiaque", in R. Frei-Stolba, A. Bielman, O Bianchi (ed.), *Les femmes antiques, entre sphère privée et sphère publique. Actes du Diplôme d'Etudes Avancées, Universités de Lausanne et de Neuchâtel, 200-2002*, coll. Echo n° 2, Peter Lang, Berne / Berlin/ Bruxelles, 2003 ; A. F. Jacottet, *Choisir Dionysos. Les associations dionysiaques ou la face cachée du dionysisme*, éditions Akanthus, Kilchberg / Zurich, 2003.

³ Delavaud-Roux, "Danse et transe : la danse au service du culte de Dionysos, approche et méthode de reconstitution" *Transe et Théâtre (Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale du GITA, Montpellier 3-5 Mars 1988)*, Cahiers du GITA, N° 4, Décembre 1988, pp. 31-53. ; Delavaud-Roux, "L'enlèvement des ménades ou la naissance du "pas de deux" dans la danse

Can we see the resemblances and the differences between the two dances ? We start by study of the place of the turn in the two dances, then we will compare the patterns of the two dances and their music, and finally we will try to understand the original trances of theses dances.

I- The place of the turns in dionysiac female dance and in dervishes' ceremony

In the two dances, the turns has a very important part for the trance. They help the dancers lose their landmarks. It is possible to very quickly lose your landmarks if you do nothing with your head. And in opposition, classical dancers in ballet do not want to lose their landmarks in the turn, so they do a special movement with their head : the head must be dissociated from the body and the eyes stare fixedly at a point ; in the turn, the head turns after the body and quicker than the body to arrive before the body. If the classical dancer wants to make six turns, he must do this movement six times with his head. But the dervishes and the Maenads wanted to fall into trance. They searched dizziness and so they turned without special movement of their head. In the dervishes' ceremony and in the dionysiac cult, the dances were going on during for longer, sometimes for hours. If the technique of the turn without movement of the head is the same in the two dances, the position of the body, the steps and the gestures were not the same.

The steps are always the same in the dervishes' dance. The dervishes' dance is done in a circle and, during almost the chorography, the dancers must stay at the same place. The left foot is the axis of the movement and in the turn, the right leg always envelops the left leg, a little as in "tours envelopés" or in "assemblés soutenus en tournant" in ballet dancing, but the movement is more complex. Take a look at the description of Erdogan Erol : «*The left foot of a*

grecque antique", *EYKRATA : Mélanges offerts à Claude Vatin*, Travaux du Centre Camille-Jullian, 17, Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1994, pp. 45-56. ; Delavaud-Roux, *Les danses dionysiaques en Grèce antique*, Publications de l'Université de Provence, Aix en Provence, 1995 ; Delavaud-Roux, "Communiquer avec Dionysos : la danse des Ménades à travers l'iconographie des vases grecs", *L'expression des corps : gestes, attitudes, regards dans l'iconographie antique. Colloque du RUOA*, 2004, Lydie Bodiou, Dominique Frère, Véronique Mehl (ed.), Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006, p. 153-163 ; Delavaud-Roux, « Promotion of diversity in the choreography : an original dance, using voice and mask, in the beginning of the *parodos* of Euripides' *Bacchae*, v.64-86», *XXth world congress on Dance Research, Athènes 25-29 octobre 2006* (Publication in DVD) ; Delavaud-Roux, Dire Dionysos dans la *parodos* des Bacchantes », *Amadis. Dire Dieu*, 8, 2008, p. 11-29 ; Delavaud-Roux, « Le rôle des cheveux dans les danses des Ménades », *Le sens du poil. Anthropologie/mythologies de la chevelure et de la pilosité. Actes du colloque transdisciplinaire*, Brest, 31mai-2 juin 2007, ed. par B. Lançon (sous presse).

semâzen was name as direk (post) and his right foot was named as çark (wheel). The left foot was never lifted up from the ground and the knee was never bent. The right foot was lifted up to the level of the left knee, the body was revolved 360° with the left foot as the center, and the right foot was placed to the same spot where it was before. This way, the body made a tour around itself, which was called çark atmak. This action could be done in 180° turns which were called yarım çark (half turn). The beginners were first taught yarım çark before tam çark (360° turn). This exercise would continue until a semâzen could spin his body without the help of the nail. Holding the direk (left foot) stable while whirling was called direk tutma»⁴. In the Middle Ages, a man who wanted to integrate the Mevlevî brotherhood, began to learn the dance, as a novice, after a retreat, which lasted 18 days. To keep his axis during the turn, he put a nail (which was fixed in the ground) between his toes, and that way, tried to pivot. Dervishes used to perform with bare feet but this practice evolved⁵. Old photographs show dervishes who wore white woolen socks. And the dervishes started to wear black çorap mest (light, soleless boots) after 1960. Nowadays, to learn the dance, the pupils go barefoot⁶ but later, when the dancers give performances, they wear çorap mest.

In the dervishe ceremony, the body is always straight up, with the head bent on the right side. In the bacchic female dance, the body could be in several different positions : straight or bent, bent forwards, sideways, or backwards, and the position of the head could be very different. The turn is not done only on one direction, with the same leg. The Maenads can turn to the left or to the right. The steps are various. The Maenads can turn with enveloping one leg, or by little steps of the two feet in the same place. They can so do series of half turns as in the “déboulés” or “tours chaînés” in ballet, but with half-toe going not as as high as than in ballet. They are not required, as the dervishes, to stay in the same place in a circle.

In the dervish choreography, the arms are often in the same position : the both arms on the side, the right arm higher than the left, the palm of the right hand turned to the sky, the palm of the left hand turned to the ground. Before taking this position, the arms are bent and crossed on the breast and the hands touch the shoulders. Then the arms, still bent, go down (touching the waist) and then go up (touching the cap) before taking the typical position we have already described. In the female dionysiac dance, the gestures are more varied. The arms are stretched or bent, to front, back or aside. The dervishes' hands never hold anything but the Maenads can hold music instruments (*tympanon, krotala*), or vases, or their *himation*, or their *thyrsus*.

⁴ Erdogan Erol, *Mevlânâ's life, works and the Mevlânâ Museum*, translated from turk by Olcay Kabar, Konya, 2005, p. 70.

⁵ E. Erol., *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁶ See pictures in E. Erol, *Op. cit.*, p. 70-71.

II- The costumes, the patterns and the music of dionysiac dance and dervish ceremony

First, let's look at the headdresses and the costumes. The dervishes always have short hair and wear a little cap (sikke). We can see 4 types of sikke⁷. The Maenads wear no hat but sometimes a *kekruphalos*, and other times nothing. Their hair is free or attached, short or long. When the Maenads' hair is attached, it is sometimes with a headband, or with ivy, or with a snake. Maenads don't wear shoes but always go barefooted. The dervishes and the Maenads' costumes are also different : the Maenads wear *chiton* and *himation*, and sometimes only a *chiton* ; the dervishes wear a black coat, a white long skirt, a white blouse, white boxer shorts, but before dancing they take off their coat. They always wear flexible boots, black or white⁸. In the two dances, the costume is composed of long clothes, but we see later that the costume of the *sêma* dance is very symbolic and important for the trance.

In the two dances, the participants fall into trance, but they do not do it the same ways. The patterns and the music of the two dances are very different.

Let's look at the patterns of the dance. The maenadic dance is a female choreography. Sometimes, they can accept men in their dance, but they are not ordinary men, they are Satyrs. And sometimes the Maenads can push the Satyrs away. So it is a female dance but sometimes it becomes a mixed dance. In dervish ceremonies, women are never accepted as dancers. So it is a male dance and it is more restricted than in ancient dionysiac dance.

The two dances used quick movements but the energy of theses movements is not the same. All the movement of the *sêma* dance are continuous, unceasing. The energy is very different in Maenads' dances : there are often interruptions in the movement. Some movements can be unceasing, then later become abrupt. In the dervishe ceremonies, men always dance with very small steps, but in ancient female dionysiac dance, the steps were various, small and big. If the *sêma* dance is based on the turn, dionysiac female dance is not based only on the turn. In Maenads' choreographies, we can find other steps than turns : simple steps, running steps, steps without turn but with the body bent in several positions (to front, side, or back), little jumps, big jumps⁹, and falls. The turns

⁷ E. Erol, *Op. cit.*, p. 130-131.

⁸ See pictures in E. Erol, *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁹ In Euripides' *Bacchae*, there are more words about simple steps, runs, jumps, postures with the body bent, and falls than words about turns, cf. M.-H. Delavaud-Roux, *Les danses dionysiaques en Grèce antique*, Op. Cit., p. 43-44.

are important because the women loose their landmarks but the steps with abrupt bend of the bodies back can give the dizziness, which is necessary to fall in trance. All these movements are combined to fall progressively in trance and the trance is not based only on the turn.

It is very difficult to compare the music of the two choreographies. We are familiar with the music of the dervish ceremonies because some traditional tunes are still played and we can listen to them on CDs or DVDs. We have some pieces of ancient greek music but no tune of dionysiac music has been preserved¹⁰. So we can imagine the music only by the descriptions of ancient greek text, in the pictures of ancient greek iconography, and through the rhythms of ancient poetic or theatrical plays, which were in connection with Dionysos.

We can try to compare the instruments. In the two choreographies, the principal instrument is a wind instrument, the *aulos* in the dionysiac dance, the *ney*¹¹ in the *sêma*. *Aulos* and *ney* are not exactly the same instruments but they are both reed instruments. Also, there are percussions in the two dances : *krotala*, *tympanon*, rhombs, and cymbal in dionysiac dance ; the *tef* (little tambourine with cymbal) and the *kudüm* (little drum) in the *sêma* dance. And overmore, only in the *sêma* dance, do we find string instruments, as the *kemençe* (ancestor of violin), the *ud* and the *rebap* (types of guitar). We know, by listening, that the instrumental music was more important than in ancient Greece where the vocal music was predominant. In ancient maenadic dance, women's voices were high (not only because these were women's voices but because the women's heads were bent back) and in opposition to the low sound of the phrygian *aulos* and the *tympana*¹².

We can compare the rhythms. We know by Euripides' *Bacchae* that the favourite dionysiac rhythm was the ionic, which can be transcribed in 3/4 bars. And we know by Plutarch, *Amatorius*, that an other rhythm was used for the dionysiac dance, i.e. the trochaic rhythm¹³ which is transcribed by some scholars in 6/8 bars. For the rhythm of the *sêma* dance, we cannot study the texts, which were used in the ceremony because we do not know oriental languages and we do not know the metrics of these languages and the rules of their poetry. It is very difficult to understand the rhythms of the *sêma* dance, only by listening,

¹⁰ CDs *Musiques de l'Antiquité grecque. De la pierre au son*, Ensemble Kérylos avec la participation des choeurs de l' ALAM, Direction Annie Bélis, 1993 and *Musiques de l'Antiquité grecque. De la pierre au son*, Ensemble Kérylos, Direction Annie Bélis, K617, 1996.

¹¹ There are several types of ney, along the length and the width of the pipe, and the number of the holes, cf. *Mevlâna et Konya*, Istambul, 2002 (translated from turc), p. 36.

¹² A. Bélis, "Musique et transe dans le cortège dionysiaque", *Transe et théâtre : actes de la table-ronde internationale (Montpellier 3-5 mars 1988) chaires du GITA*, n° 4, décembre 1988, p. 10-29, cf. p. 19-20

¹³ Plutarch, *Amatorius*, 16, 12 ; Plato, *Laws*, VII, 790d-e ; see A. Bélis, *Op. cit.*

because there are very complex and difficult to hear for a western ear. After the performance that we have seen this year in Göreme's valley, we saw the partitions of the musicians : the rhythm of the instruments were not the same : 28/4, 8/4, and 9/4. After this experiment we were convinced to have no musical ear !

For the harmonies of the two musics the comparison is too difficult. We know the mode for dionysiac dance was the Phrygian mode, but we have never heard a bacchic melody, so we cannot compare with the tunes of the sêma dance. But beyond the problem of the music, we can compare the quality of the trance in the two choreographies.

III- Maenads and Dervishes' original trances

Maenads and dervishes do not dance for the same reasons. Maenads want to get in touch with Dionysos. They want to commemorate some very painful events of Dionysos' life, as the *diasparagmos* of the little Dionysos Zagreus by Titans, but not only that. They can so express the joy to be with Dionysos. Dervishes danced on the anniversary of Mevlânâ's death in remembrance of Mevlânâ's first dance¹⁴. In 1244 AD, Mevlânâ met the dervishe Muhammed Semettin, or Sems, who came from Tebriz (Iran). They did a retreat together in the cell of the convent during 40 days. After, Mevlânâ's friends were jealous of Sems, and Sems left. After his disappearance, Mevlânâ was very sad and danced, turning in the same place : it was the sêma dance. But after, Mevlânâ learned that Sems was in Damas, and Sultan Veled, who is Mevlânâ's son, went to Damas and persuaded Sems to come back. Sems accepted but some years later, in 1247 AD, he disappeared again and never came back. So the sêma dance became more important and was practiced in Mevlevî brotherhood.

The Maenads' trance is not quiet. It is not like the Anastenarides' trance¹⁵ in northern Greece nowadays, even if in this ceremony for Constantin and Helen, there is the sacrifice of an animal and the dance is conceived as a therapy. When they were in trance, the Bacchants were able to play with wild animals, like snakes, fawns, panthers, and lions. Then after they practiced *diasparagmos*

¹⁴ *Mevlânâ et Konya*, Istambul, 2002 (translated from turc), p. 36 : the first sêma dance was performed in Bagdad, capital of the abassid state, at the XIth century AD, i.-e. 200 hundred years before Mevlânâ's birth, but was not a spiritual dance in this period. It was Mevlânâ, who integrated this dance in a religious ceremony and who gave to this dance a spirit to lift up the soul.

¹⁵ On the Anastenarides' trance, which is more quiet than Ancient Maenads' trance, see F. Schott-Billmann, *Danse, mystique et psychanalyse : marche sur le feu en Grèce moderne, La recherche en danse*, Association Danse-Sorbonne / Chiron, 1987, p. 104 : "un état extatique sans spasmes ni agitation motrice, une transe maîtrisée". See so p. 26-28 and p. 41.

and *omophagia*, i. e., they cut them up alive and they ate them raw. It was exactly the opposite of the civic sacrifice where the animals were always cooked. The practice of *diasparagmos* and *omophagia* is certainly in memory of the *diasparagmos* of the young Dionysos Zagreus by the Titans, and some aspects of the maenadic dance were connected with this mythology¹⁶. The Maenads lose consciousness and dance until exhaustion, then they fall.

The dervishes' trance is connected with Mevlânâ's philosophy and monotheist religion. It is very quiet. There is never violence or force. It is an altruistic act to give harmony to the world. Let's listen to Erdogan Erol :

«While a semâzen was taught how to whirl, he was also taught how to outstretch his arms. First the arms were crossed on the chest with the right arm passing over the left, and the hands were put on the shoulders with hands open and fingers slightly apart. Then the hands were left down slowly. Touching the body and the sikke (dervish headgear) with the outer sides of the hands, the arms were extended. As the semâzens whirl, the right hand is raised with the palm turned upwards and the left with the palm turned downwards. This posture of the hands is explained symbolically as “We are a means. We take from God and give to man” or “We flow into the heavens and pour onto the earth”. The head of a semâzen is slightly bent to the right with the face somewhat to the left and the eyes are narrowed looking towards the thumb of the left hand. The sikke (headgear) of a Mevlevî dervish is the symbol of his “gravestone”, his tennûre (service clothes) is the symbol of his “shroud” and his hirka (cloak) is the symbol of his “grave”»¹⁷.

In conclusion, we have two ecstatic and collective dances connected to the religion, polytheist religion in Ancient Greece, monotheist religion, in medieval Turkey, but these two dances are very different in their spirit. The sêma dance is an altruistic act for humanity and expresses harmony. The female dionysiac dance, even it is collective, is a series of individual acts to get in touch with Dionysos. So, the energy of the two dances is not the same : very abrupt and

¹⁶ We can ask if the wild animals were really used in dionysiac cult or if it is only a male fantasy about women. For the idea of a fantasy, see Oppian, end of IIth BC, *On the hunting*, 230, with a story about the panthers, which were not animals but women dancers for Bacchus. H. Jeanmaire, *Op. cit.*, p. 262-263, thinks that it was not possible really to use panthers, leopards or lions for the dionysiac cult. But it was possible to take fawns or goats for sacrifice. The *omophagia* was really practiced, cf. inscription from Milet, 276-275 BC, in Solokowski, *Lois sacrées d'Asie Mineure*, 1955, n° 48. Nowadays, we can see similar rituals in brotherhood's Aïssaoua in North Africa. On this brotherhood, see V. Lièvre, *Danses du Maghreb d'une rive à l'autre*, Paris, 1987, p. 69-72 and A. Boncourt, *Rituel et musique chez les Aïssaoua du Maroc*, thèse de doctorat de 3e cycle d'anthropologie et d'ethnologie, Université de Strasbourg, 1980.

¹⁷ E. Erol, *Op. cit.*, p. 72

strong for the Maenads, very soft for the dervishes. More than that, the dervishes do not use accessories to get in trance, but the Maenads use animals and the end of the bacchic dance is the sacrifice of the animal with diasparagmos and omophagia.

NB : addition for the second version of DVD : Mrs Serpil Murtezaoglu, Assoc. Prof. in Turkish Music State conservatory (Istanbul Technical University) have said to me that the partitions I have seen are not pieces of traditional music but pieces of classical composers.