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Spurious Revival and Dance Events: the Case of the Anastenaria Worship in Kosti, Bulgaria**Abstract:**

The socio-religious phenomenon of the anastenaria worship was manifested initially in Kosti, which now belongs to Bulgaria, through the dance events which members of the anastenaria group performed, holding the icons of Saints Constantine and Helen. In 1914, because of political changes that occurred in the area, the Greek inhabitants had to be forcibly expatriated and settled in a village in northern Greece, in Agia Eleni in Serres, which is the modern center of anastenaria worship. In the abandoned homes of the Greeks in Kosti, Bulgarian families settled and formed a new society, which had nothing to do with the anastenaria worship. On 1st August 2009, the municipality "revived" the anastenaria worship in Kosti. The present essay studies: first, the way the anastenaria worship was manifested in Kosti until 1914 and, later, in Agia Eleni in Serres, and second, the process of its "revival" in 2009 in Kosti as well as the reasons that caused this "revival". The data collection was based on ethnographic fieldwork (observation, interview) along with written sources. The conclusions drawn from the data analysis shows that, in Kosti, the anastenaria worship, until 1914, was an integral part of the customary and religious behavior of the community. The same situation still exists today in Agia Eleni in Serres as well. While, on the contrary, the "revival" of the anastenaria worship that took place in 2009 in Kosti is described as spurious because it was never a part of the customary and religious behavior of this particular local community.

Key words:

Spurious revival, anastenaria, Kosti, religious behavior

Introduction

It has been observed that in several cultural events, after the influence of certain conditions, their performance stopped and, for a while, died out completely. And they rose again from the love of those who had maintained their memory in their soul and, above all, they had maintained emotional ties with them. The revival of the cultural events occurred because they exercised a fascination on their new organizers, who, through them, wanted to be nostalgically connected with the past and not because the revival had some practical value in their lives. So, they were somehow artificially reborn, because the prime reason for their creation and existence ceased to

exist.¹ Therefore, we can say that their “recall” to life is due to the phenomenon of global folklorism, which notes a remarkable propagation in our days due to the love of man for the past and his tendency to be attracted by every kind of exoticism.² We observe, then, that the revival of a cultural value is directly related to the local community who lived it in the past and it was an element of its collective identity.³ However, though, in 2009 a “revival” of the anastenaria worship was took place in Kosti while it was never part of the community’s religious behavior.

The anastenaria worship was done in honor of Saints Constantine and Helen and was previously taking place in a small region of the Sozoagathoupoli province in Northeastern Thrace in the mountains of Strantz, offshoots of Small Haemus, which was called “Blind Province” because it is surrounded by high and inaccessible mountains, which made communication with the surrounding areas quite difficult.⁴ The center of this particular worship was the largest village in the area, the Kosti. Ecclesiastically, it belonged to the Diocese of Sozoagathoupoli and Vasiliko and all the Black Sea.⁵ It was inhabited exclusively by Greeks⁶, whose number totaled about 3000 and it had 550 houses.⁷ In 1914, because of the political changes that occurred in the area, the Kostilides were forced by the Bulgarians to be violently expatriated and most of the families, along with the archianastinari and the icons of the patron saints, settled in the village Kakaraska in Serres, which was renamed Agia Eleni and is the modern center of anastenaria worship. The anastenaria worship was performed by a group of

¹ On the phenomenon of the revival of traditional forms of folk culture see Meraklis M., *Folklore Matters*, Athens 1989, pp. 111.

² On the phenomenon of global folklorism and exoticism, see Meraklis M., *ibid.* p.111.

³ The collective identity “is based on the notion of “we” as opposed to the others, the “foreigners” and is shaped by the common experiences, the adventures and the history of this social group” See El. Alexakis, “The negotiation of the collective identity among Greek Vlachs of Kefalovryso (Metzitie) in Pogoni” in *Identities and diversities*, “Dodoni” (2001), p. 165.

⁴ See A. Chourmouziadis, *On the anastenaria and any other paradoxical customs and superstitions*, Istanbul 1873. Reprint: *Thrace Archives*, 26 (1961) p. 145 and I. Magriotis, “Cultural Notes of the 40 Churches Prefecture”, *Thrace Archives*, 34 (1969) p. 264.

⁵ Vafidis N., Ecclesiastical Provinces of Thrace and the file 434 of the Library of the Parliament on Thrace, *Thrace Archives* Vol. XX, Athens 1955, pp. 82, 85. See also Hatzigeorgiou P., Agathoupoli of Northeastern Thrace, *Thrace Archives* Vol. XXIX, Athens 1963, pp. 368, 369.

⁶ Vakalopoulos K., *The Greeks of Northern Thrace and the Thracian Black Sea*, Thessaloniki 1995, p. 46.

⁷ Daniilidis D., “Vasiliko of Northeastern Thrace”, *Publications of Thracian Studies Association*, Athens 1956, No. 48, pp. 6.

about 15 to 20 people, men and women, which were called anastenaria, and is expressed through the various dance events, which are closely and inextricably linked with it. Giving a brief definition, we would say that as a dance event we can describe a manifestation, a simple or complex ritual, during which dance has an important contribution to the things that take place, becoming the key factor of the whole ritual, because it works as a link between various the phases of the event, but also because of the importance that the participating people attach to the “dancing”.⁸ The anastenaria, while performing the dance events, hold their sacred religious symbols, the sacred icons of their patron saints Constantine and Helen and the amanetia (holy kerchiefs). These icons that the anastenaria use in their dance events are of special manufacture and are called the icons that “dance”.⁹ These particular icons are the main axis on which all the dance events of the anastenaria worship are supported and “revolve”. Without the use of these icons no dance event is performed. Proof of this is the confiscation of the icons by the local ecclesiastical authority in May 1954,¹⁰ a few days before the feast day of the saints, having as a result that the dance events were not performed by the anastenaria group that year. On 21st May, the feast day of their saints, the members of the anastenaria group, along with several people, gathered at the konaki and because the icons of the patron saints were missing from their place, broke into tears and sobs. The rituals began again since the local ecclesiastical authority was forced to return the icons after litigations.¹¹

In 2008, the mayor of Kosti, along with some members of the city council, visited Agia Eleni in Serres during the three-day festival (21st to 23rd May) and watched the process of the celebration of the anastenaria worship. The next year, on August 1st, 2009, the local municipal authority of Kosti decided to “revive” the anastenaria worship in the same place where it was celebrated for the last time in 1914, that is 95 years ago, by the then Greek inhabitants of Kosti. This time period of August is outside the established for centuries celebration of anastenaria worship, held every year on

⁸ Lantzos V., Social transformation and dance events: The case of the mami (midwife) or babo day in *Ethnology Volume 13*, Greek Society for Ethnology, (2007), p. 181.

⁹ Their dimensions are about forty centimeters tall and thirty wide. They depict the Saints Constantine and Helen with the Holy Cross between them. At the center of the bottom part, they have a cylindrical handle of about 15 cm, which is called sleeve, and it serves to hold and handle them better when they dance.

¹⁰ The confiscation of the icons was done because the Church of Greece does not agree with the use of icons in dance because it considers the dance events of the anastestaria as pagan.

¹¹ This information is known by all the elder informants, since many of them went as witnesses in the court, and also see Chatzinikolaou A., “The icons of the anastenaria”, *Thrace Archives*, Vol. 19, 1954, p. 331.

21st May during the feast of Saints Constantine and Helen, even today, in the places where the refugees from Kosti settled. And, besides that, when the purely Greek population of Kosti was forced to leave the village, the Bulgarian state installed Bulgarian families from various parts of Bulgaria in the Greek homes and formed a new society, which had not, and neither has anything to do with the socio-religious phenomenon of the anastenaria worship. Nevertheless, the local municipal authority decided the “revival” of the anastenaria worship. But I consider this revival as spurious¹² because it was never part of the customary and religious behavior of this particular local community.

The present essay studies: first, the dance events through which the anastenaria worship was manifested in Kosti until 1914 and, then, the dance events through which it is manifested today in Agia Eleni in Serres and, second, the process of its “revival” in Kosti in 2009, and the reasons that caused this “revival”. The data collection was based on ethnographic fieldwork (observation, interview), held in Agia Eleni (since 1992 and continues till today) and in Kosti (2009), in combination with written sources.

The dance events through which the anastenaria worship was manifested in Kosti until 1914

According to the informants of the first and second generation refugees who settled in Greece, as well as the study of the extensive literature, the dance events which were held in Kosti within the framework of the anastenaria worship were divided into two categories. The first category involved those dance events that took place on specific dates and at specific places, and the second category involved those dance events that took place in extraordinary circumstances, when various problems of vital importance arose for the community. The first category of dance events was directly linked to the eight-day festival of the village, which lasted from 21st May until 28th May and was in honor of Saints Constantine and Helen, and was the culmination of the ecstatic anastenaria worship in Kosti. The preparations of the festival began on 27th October with the “day of the slave”¹³ and ended the day before May 20th. During this time, several dan-

¹² Regarding the term spurious revival cf. Filias B. *Society and power in Greece. The spurious urbanization*. Athens 1985, Gutenberg. Meraklis M. *Folklore issues*, Bouras, Athens 1989, pp. 64, Dimas I., Tyrovolas V., Koutsouba M., *Greek Traditional Dance*, Athens 2010, p. 102.

¹³ It was called “day of the slave” because on this day the residents who wanted to help in the organizing of the festival went to the konaki of the anastenaria and declared it, that is, they promised themselves, they were “enslaved” to the saints. After they formed a group, they wandered with their animals in the village and gathered grains, cereals, nuts and money. They sold these goods and they spent the mo-

ce events were always held at specific dates and specific space-place. So, every year on January 17th, 18th and 19th, in the konaki¹⁴ of the anastenaria, there was a three-day celebration, which was also called “winter festival”¹⁵ in honor of St. Athanasius.¹⁶ This celebration was associated with the festival on 21st May because during this, the anastenaria group raised money for the purchase of the bulls that they were going to sacrifice on the feast day of the Saints.¹⁷ All three nights of this festival, the members of the anastenaria group danced inside the konaki of the anastenaria onto hot coals, in the properly designed space that existed in front of the large fireplace of the konaki.

On 2nd May, the pre-celebrations of the festival began at the agiasma¹⁸ (holy spring) of St. Constantine, which was at the end of the village¹⁹ inside a “Kouri”²⁰. In the afternoon, then, because of the celebration of the translation of the relics of St. Athanasius, a lot of people gathered in the village square, and the anastenaria group as well, whose members held the

ney raised mainly for the purchase of the bulls that they sacrificed on 21st May, the feast day of the Saints.

¹⁴ Konaki was the special building where the anastenaria group gathered to perform the ecstatic worship to their patron saints. The special icons of Saints Constantine and Helen that the anastenaria held during their dance were kept in the konaki. The musical instruments, the lyre, the bagpipe and the tabor that accompanied the dance of the Anastenaria were also kept in the konaki all year round and were considered sacred.

¹⁵ This data I know from informants of the first generation refugees. See also M. Michael Dede, “Anastenari (The coolness of the fire)”, *Thrakika* 6 (1988-1990) 47.

¹⁶ Saint Athanasius, apart by anastenarides, was especially honored by the other inhabitants of the village, as well as the inhabitants from the greater region of Agathoupoli and Vasiliko, who belonged in the same ecclesiastical and administrative region as Kosti. It is noteworthy that, in this celebration, no reference was made to St. Athanasius through the songs, nor was there any icon of him at konaki.

¹⁷ The meat of the bulls, which were slaughtered by the archianastenaris on the feast day of the Saints, was distributed raw to all the families of the village.

¹⁸ Agiasmata are springs whose water is considered by believers to be holy with therapeutic and miraculous properties. They are mainly devoted to a saint whose name they have and usually in Northeastern Thrace, they are in idyllic locations and sacred forests. See Elp. Stamouli-Saranti, “From the agiasmata of Thrace” *Thrakika* 18 (1943) 219. Agiasmata are places and forms of worship. See M. Varvounis, *Aspects of the everyday life of the Byzantines from hagiographical texts*, Herodotus publ., (1994) 97-98.

¹⁹ As it was ascertained by the fieldwork in Kosti, the agiasma of St. Constantine still exists in the same location today.

²⁰ “Kouria” were called, by the people of Kosti, the sacred forests-groves which were dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helen.

icons of Saints Constantine and Helen, and the procession began, with the musicians at the front playing their lyres, bagpipes and tabors, which ended up at the area of the agiasma. There, inside the small building, which still exists to this day²¹, the anastenarides and anastenarisses placed the icons, lit candles and incensed. After that, people poured water from the agiasma over themselves and they started dancing and having a good time with traditional dances and songs from Kosti. The members of the anastenaria group, after a series of ritual processes such as: lighting candles, incensing, meditation, prayer and religious songs focusing on St. Constantine, came to ecstasy and holding the icons and the amanetia danced sacred religious dances. Of course, all these dance rituals were done with some distance between them so that the rhythms would not be mixed up. From this day on and until 20th May, the eve of the feast day of Saints Constantine and Helen, both the secular dances of the celebrators and the ecstatic-worship dances of the members of the anastenaria troupe, were repeated in the agiasma every night.²²

Apart from the celebration of the village's agiasma, another big celebration also took place, which was directly connected to the great feast of Saints Constantine and Helen because it was its most important foreword. On the last Sunday before 21st May, the families from Kosti and the surrounding anastenaria Greek villages (about 15 in number) began with a procession accompanied by music and came together into a long canyon that was called Vlachovo and in the Tripori spot, in order to celebrate. Some men went ahead, holding candles and incense in their hands, followed by the musicians with the tabors, the bagpipes and the lyres and, after them, the priests, along with the members of the anastenaria groups of each village, who were holding their sacred religious symbols, the icons of Saints Constantine and Helen and the amanetia. At the end of the procession the families followed. Every family brought a lamb for the sacrifice and the necessary things for the celebration that followed.²³

In Tripori, there were many springs with water and a big "Kouri". Each village had its agiasma, its sacred spring, as well as its own hut in

²¹ This fact I know from the autopsy which was conducted during the fieldwork in Kosti.

²² These data come from informants and especially the musicians, see also D. Petropoulos, "The Anastenaria", *Thrace Treasure Archives*, 5 (1938) 138, see also A. Chourmouziadis, *ibid.*, 147 and S. Kyriakidis, "Anastenaria" *Great Greek Encyclopedia* 4 (1927) 580. The custom of the people to celebrate and dance at the agiasma of a saint on the day that his memory is celebrated existed throughout the region, such as the Vasiliko, which belonged in the same ecclesiastical and administrative region as Kosti. See D. Daniilidis, "Vasilikos in Northeastern Thrace", *Publications of Thracian Studies Society* 1 (1956) 4.

²³ See D. Petropoulos, *ibid.*, p. 138, Chourmouziadis A., *ibid.*, p. 147 and Kyriakides S., *ibid.*, p. 580.

which they placed the icons of its Saints. The priests chanted blessings, every priest in the agiasma that belonged to his village and the archianasteneris of each village, with solemnity, took water from the agiasma, as he had the right to, and he offered it to the people to wash their face and drink. The archianastenerides of all villages were under the orders of the archianasteneri of Kosti, whom they accepted and respected as a leader and obeyed his instructions. In the huts, they lit candles and incense, they bowed before the icons and many celebrants came with reverence, not to the priests, but to the anastenerides, who were close to the hut, in order to confess and seek forgiveness for their sins. Then, the priests blessed the lambs destined for the sacrifice. In this way, the first part of the ceremony ended.²⁴

Now, the second part followed the dance. There were two dances, one by the celebrants, who danced local traditional dances and the other by the members of the anasteneria group, who danced their religious-ecstatic dances. In the beginning, the anastenerides and anastenerisses danced holding the amanetia but when their ecstasy heightened enough, they took the icons of Saints Constantine and Helen from the huts and entered the secular dance of the celebrants and offered them to bow before them.²⁵ But because this celebration was directly connected to the patron Saints of the village, not only the ecstatic dance of anasteneria group, but the secular dance of the celebrants, as well, functioned as a key factor for the “return of the debt” to the honored persons, for communion and communication, which, with the entrance of the sacred icons in the dance of the celebrators, strengthened even more. At that moment, the dancers of the secular dances, through the icons, felt strongly the presence of the saints in the dance, because the icon brings people into direct connection with the grace and the hypostasis of the person depicted.²⁶ Basil the Great said: “the value of the icon passes from the prototype”²⁷, through the icon, our soul meets and unites with the depicted person.²⁸ Ioannis Damaskinos emphasizes that “people treat the icons as they would like to treat the depicted”.²⁹ Therefore, some of the people who participated in the secular dance or watched as spectators, when the members of the anasteneria group offered them the

²⁴ See A. Chourmouziadis, *ibid.*, p.p. 147-148, D. Petropoulos, *ibid.*, p.138 and K. A. Romeos, “Folk worships of Thrace”, *Thrace Archives* 11 (1944-1945) 9-10.

²⁵ On the entrance of the anasteneria with the icons in the secular dance see also A. Chourmouziadis, *ibid.*, p.p. 147, 148, and D. Petropoulos, *ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁶ On the connection between the icon and the believer see *Brotherhood of the Timios Prodromos Holy Monastery in Kareas*, “Etimasia” publ. (2000) 17.

²⁷ *Brotherhood of the Timios Prodromos Holy Monastery in Kareas*, *ibid.*, p.18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.19.

²⁹ See G. Zografidis, *Byzantine philosophy of the icon*, Ellinika Grammata (1997) 290.

icons to bow before them, came to ecstasy and they also turned into new anastenarides and anastenarisses. These people were “inspired by God” and, according to the local dialect, they said that they were “captured by the saint” or “the icon calls the pure man” and trembled, they were occupied by convulsions and fainted. The other anastenarides incensed³⁰ them and when they regained consciousness, they got up and danced holding the icons of the Saints.³¹ In other words, in these cases, the dance events that took place in the Vlachovo canyon, with their contribution to the emergence of new members in the anastenaria group, functioned as a means of perpetuating the anastenaria worship.

The first generation refugees, who experienced the dance events in the Vlachovo canyon, said characteristically that “the Earth shook from the dance”.

On the evening of 20th May, the eve of the great feast of the Saints Constantine and Helen, the dance events of the main festival began, which lasted eight days. During this eight-day celebration, the members of the anastenaria group gathered every evening in the konaki and after a series of dance rituals, they ended up in the village square and danced on fire.³² Meanwhile, the crowd of celebrators amused themselves daily with secular dances, which they put up in the square and in the agiasma of the village and were a necessary component of the festival.³³ The last night of the festival the members of the anastenaria group gathered at the konaki, where, along with the people, danced secular dances of the local repertoire. The atmosphere that prevailed in this dance phase, according to the informants, was cheerful and festive. This is confirmed by A. Chourmouziadis, who clearly describes the festive atmosphere that prevailed. Specifically, he states that, in the konaki, they ate and drank and enjoyed themselves with music and dance.³⁴ This last stage was also called “dance of joy” because the

³⁰ Incenses were used by the ancient people and, among them, the Greeks as well, in order to achieve catharsis, purification. The purification was based on the notion that only the pure man could come into contact with the divine. See M. Loukopoulou-Patichi, “Folklore elements' in “Helen” of Euripides”, Reprint from the magazine “Pages from Fokida” Fokida Studies Association, Amfissa (1993), pp. 33.

³¹ I know the data about the celebration of Vlachovo from the elder informants, see also A. Chourmouziadis see, *ibid.*, p. 148, see also D. Petropoulos, *ibid.*, p.p. 138, 139, and K. A. Romeos, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³² About the dance of fire see Lantzov V., “Is “the anastenaria dance” a survival of mantilatos dance of Thrace: Myth or reality?” in *Etnološko-antropološke sveske (Papers in ethnology and anthropology)*, No 6/2011, pp. 96-99.

³³ This data comes from most of the informants. See also A. Chourmouziadis, *ibid.*, 151.

³⁴ About the cheerful atmosphere that prevailed in this dance phase in the konaki see A.Chourmouziadis, *ibid.*, p. 152. Also, Sotirios Gimias (born 1897 in Kosti)

members of the anastenaria group, only then, at the end of their dance journey that lasted many days, celebrated and enjoyed themselves, unlike the other phases that preceded and which completely lacked the element of enjoyment and entertainment.³⁵ In this last part of the festival, they enjoyed themselves from joy and satisfaction because the Saints made them able to do their “duty”, that is, to participate in the religious part of the festival that preceded, and, especially, to dance on the fire with the help of the Saints. Since the festival of their patron saints started, they hadn’t enjoyed themselves at all and that’s why they said: “Now we must be happy and enjoy ourselves like the other people”.³⁶ Besides, “dance has been the most charming enjoyment for all people, civilized and uncivilized, and pleases both the saint and the sinner”.³⁷ According to the testimony of the elders and the musicians, the feast in this phase of the festival lasted until the morning of the next day and was done inside and outside of the konaki of the anastenaria and, apart from the anastenarides and anastenarisses, a lot of people participated as well.

With the “dance of joy” the canvas was fully completed and formed, on which the entire dance activity of the anastenaria group and of the ordinary people was written, within the framework of the anastenaria worship of the festival in Kosti. In general, the eight-day festival in Kosti, with the great diversity of the dance events that characterized it, was one of the most important events of the year because it took the community out of the rhythms of everyday life and of the productive time.³⁸

The second category includes those dance events that had no calendar restriction and were performed in exceptional situations that arose in the community. Like, for example, when epidemics and epizootics broke out. Then, the local community resorted to the anastenaria group to ask for help. In these cases, the members of the anastenaria, holding their sacred religious symbols, the icons of the patron saints Constantine and Helen, and accompanied by a lot of people, formed a procession headed by the musicians and wandered in the streets of the village and when they came to

watched this feast with the secular dances in the konaki of the anastenaria and described it to me in detail in 1992.

³⁵ Apart from the informants, M. Michael Dede also refers to the dance of joy, “Anastenari (The coolness of fire)”, *ibid.*, p. 49, of the same author, “The anastenari: Psychological and sociological considerations”, *Thrakika* 46 (1972), p. 101.

³⁶ On the entertaining character of the “dance of joy” see also M. Michael Dede, “Anastenari ...”, *ibid.*, p. 49, of the same author, “The anastenari, Psychological ...”, *ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁷ See Inagiat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound*, (translation: Anastasia Nanou-Tsakali), (1992) 78.

³⁸ Cf. V. Nitsiakos, “Dance and symbolic expression of the community. The example of the Kinik’dance (Perivoli in Grevena) in “*Dance Society*”, Cultural Center of Konitsa (1994) 35.

crossroads, they danced in a circle in order to drive out the illness and to protect the residents because they believed that the illnesses enter the village from these spots and the people get sick. The same thing happened when the animals got sick. In this case, the procession that was formed ended up outside the village, in the places where the animals grazed, and the members of the anastenaria group danced holding the icons of the saints to exorcise the evil. The same occurred in periods of drought. Again, a procession was formed in the same way and ended up outside the village, in the countryside where the crops were, and the anastenaria group danced with the icons of the patron saints asking them to rain.

Also, in the building of a new house, during the placing the foundation, the landlord invited the anastenaria group to dance. This was because, according to the beliefs of the community, when the members of the anastenaria group danced, they considered that they were “possessed” by the spirit of the saints and, therefore, they believed that the saints were present and asked them to have the house, as well as its future tenants, under their protection. The archianastenis also expressed his opinion, whether the way the foundation was carved is right and advisable, so that when the house will be completed, it will not disturb the neighbors in any way and, thus, the potential future arguments were avoided. In other words, the archianastenis and the whole group, in general, approved or rejected the design of the house. Their opinion, and this is important, was always taken into account by the future owner of the house.

The dance events related to patient treatment are of a particular interest. So, if a family had a member who was gravely ill, then they invited the anastenaria group in their house to dance, in order for him, with the help of the saints, to get well. The anastenaria, after taking the sacred “dancing” icons of the patron saints and the amanetia from the konaki, in a procession and with the accompaniment of musical instruments, visited the patient. The family of the patient received the anastenaria with candles, incense and with a lot of reverence. The beginning of the ritual dance that followed was performed by the archianastenis, crossing the patient, who was at the center of the room, with an icon and placed an amaneti on him. Then, the musicians played and sang songs whose words referred to the patron saints. The anastenaria, under the influence of the sacred songs and the sacred music, as well as the strong presence of the religious symbols, the sacred icons and the amanetia, were “possessed” by the holy spirit, that is, they came to ecstasy, for the attainment of which, also contributed the fact that the ecstatic state was permanent in them in dormancy and under such conditions, it was very easy to emerge. When the anastenaria came to ecstasy, they danced around the patient, who was lying. When the family members of the patient saw the anastenaria dancing in ecstasy, they believed that they were “possessed” by the spirit of the Saints and thought that the Saints were “present”. That is why they stood up and devoutly prayed

to the saints to help the patient get well. M. Meraklis states that the ordinary villager, because of the credulity that stemmed from his ignorance, evoked the metaphysical forces for his rescue and extended his redeeming credulity into the realm of miracle.³⁹ One way of invoking a metaphysical force was the sacred religious dance. An action derived from the primitive societies, where people danced to banish the disease.⁴⁰

We therefore observe that the anastenaria group in Kosti, with the contribution of the ecstatic sacred dances, exercised a social action in the everyday life throughout the year. Thus, because of the high esteem and the warm support of the majority of the residents of the community, the extra-ecclesiastical anastenaria worship managed to be preserved within the bosom of Orthodoxy and, despite the persecutions of the church, it formed into an intact folk worship, close to the official religion and closely united with it, did not get the second place at all.⁴¹

The dance events through which the anastenaria worship is manifested today in Agia Eleni in Serres

As mentioned above, most families from Kosti, along with the archianastenari and the icons that “dance”, settled in Agia Eleni in Serres, which was the center of modern anastenaria worship. However, though, compared to the Kosti, significant changes have been noted in the dance events through which the anastenaria worship is expressed in Agia Eleni. Of all the dance events that take place on specific dates and at specific spaces-places in Kosti, the following take place today in Agia Eleni: The winter festival held every year on 17th, 18th and 19th January in the konaki of the anastenaria, where every night, in front of the big fireplace, in the specially designed area, they dance on fire. The dance events that take place in Kosti during the eight-day festival today in Agia Eleni, have been reduced because the festival now lasts three days (21st to 23rd May) and all dance events take place inside the konaki, except the dance of fire, which is performed in its courtyard, while in Kosti it was performed in the village square. Therefore, the first day, the members of the anastenaria group gather in the konaki and perform their religious duties, to their patrons Saints Constantine and Helen, in their own special way: That is, after the impact of the music

³⁹ See Meraklis M., “The man of the city”, *Folklore* Vol. XXIX, 1974, pp. 76-77. Cf. Gasouka, *Social-Folk Parameters*, Philipoti publ., 1999, pp. 169.

⁴⁰ See Koukoulas Leon, “The dances of primitive people”, *Nea Estia*, Vol. 66, 1959, pp. 1484, 1601. It is also reported that the Pythagoreans made use of dance for therapeutic purposes. See Lambropoulou V., *On nature: Dance Harmony, Ideotheatron* 1999, p. 58.

⁴¹ See K. Romeos, “Folk worships of Thrace”, *Thrace Archives* 11, (1944-1945), pp. 16-17.

and the religious songs which refer to the saints, they come to ecstasy and dance holding the icons and the amanetia. The dance inside the konaki lasts almost all day, but with breaks in between. When it gets dark, and after reaching the height of the spiritual tension that their religious passion creates, the archianastenaris leads the anastenaria out in the courtyard and they dance barefoot, with the icons of the saints, on the lit coals until they put out the fire. On the second day of the festival, that is, on 22nd May, the anastenaria group does not dance on the fire, but wanders with the icons in the houses of the village to spread the blessing of the saints. On the third day, the members of the anastenaria group perform their religious duties in exactly the same manner as the first day. However, since it is the last night of the festival, after the dance of fire, the members of the anastenaria group gather in the konaki, where along with the people, perform the dance event which is called “dance of joy”, as it happened in Kosti.

In the dance of joy, the anastenarides and anastenarisses dance, along with the people, secular dances of the local repertoire without using the icons of the saints. Today the “dance of joy” has a short duration (it lasts one hour at the most) and then the participants go to the village square where a general celebration has already been put up with the use of powerful microphone installations, organized by the community authority. And with this feast, the circle of the festival in Agia Eleni closes, which is the main form through which the anastenaria worship is manifested today.

According to what has been mentioned above, we notice that today those dance events, which in Kosti took place on specific dates in the natural environment, in the kouria (sacred forests) and the agiasmata (sacred springs), do not take place in Agia Eleni. This is due to the fact that the natural environment in Agia Eleni is completely different from that of Kosti. Mainly, there are no “kouria” with agiasmata, into which various dance events of the anastenaria worship were performed in Kosti. This, though, had as a result that the several dance events which, in Kosti, took place inside these “sacred” places, may not take place in Agia Eleni because the space-place is an important parameter on which the human presence and creation is inscribed.⁴² The form of the natural environment also determines the mental idiosyncrasy of people and the form of their culture.⁴³ Moreover, the cultural activity of a society is also based on the dialectic relationship between man and nature.⁴⁴ Therefore, changes in the natural space

⁴² See M. Varvounis, *Folklore Ephemera*, typoshito publ. (2001) 363.

⁴³ On the influence of the natural environment on culture see S. Gikas, *New Philological Dictionary*, Savalas (2002) 297.

⁴⁴ On the influences that the natural environment has on people's lives and culture, see B. Nitsiakos, *Traditional Social Structures*, Odysseas (1993) 15, see also D. Zakythinou, *Introduction to the History of Culture*, Stegi tou viviliou publ. (1955) 19-23, and M. Meraklis, *Greek Folklore. Social Constitution*, (1984) 15-17.

automatically mean changes in the cultural system, with which it is connected, as well.⁴⁵ Generally, people today have lost touch with nature, “they have lost their ceremonial attitude towards nature, the attitude that allowed them to include nature in their relationship with God and with each other”.⁴⁶ The lack of ceremonial attitude towards nature in the relationship between modern people and the divine, in conjunction with the general lack of “ecological ethos” that characterizes our times, has also affected the anastenaria worship and has contributed to the extinction of those dance events, for the development of which, the natural environment was a prerequisite.

As far as the dance events which took place in Kosti in exceptional cases are concerned, they continued taking place in Agia Eleni until, approximately, 1960. Subsequently, they received significant influence from the social transformation that occurred in the Greek society in the 1950s. In this decade, the process of transformation of the Greek society, through which we have a complete restructuring of the social and economic structures that characterize it, is culminated. These rapid developments contributed to the gradual decline of the elements of popular culture⁴⁷ and, thus, to the change of the function of the dance events that surround the anastenaria worship.⁴⁸ This is because the dance events, along with the music and the singing, are subject to the same forces of change. Therefore, any change in the culture, brings change to the dance events as well.⁴⁹ For example, the social changes have resulted in the gradual decline and eventually the elimination of the function of the dance events that were performed for the treatment of patients. Specifically: After the end of the Civil War in Greece in 1949, the Greek government began to provide its citizens with health care. Therefore, the residents of this particular community were not dependent only on the help of the Saints, when they had to deal with a disease and from 1950 and on, they began to seek treatment in organized clinics and hospitals. Also, the Greek state, in the 70s, established the institution of rural doctors in the villages, and as a result, residents had immediate access to a doctor in order to be treated.

⁴⁵ See M. Varvounis, *ibid.*, p. 363.

⁴⁶ On the relationship between man and nature in our era, see A. Kourkoulas, *Religion and Environment*, 2002, p.56.

⁴⁷ On the decline of the elements of popular culture see M. Meraklis, *The Modern Greek Culture* (1983), 17-18, __ *Folklore Matters* (1989) 204.

⁴⁸ On the influence of social changes on dance events see N. Bazianas, *For Our Folk Music Tradition*, (1997) 236-238, see also M. Varvounis “Folk events and tourism: The case of Kadi in Samos”, Records of 1st Conference, Komotini (1994) 51-56. and V. Filias, *Sociology of Culture: Basic Demarcations and Directions*, Vol. I, Papazisis publ. (2000) 238.

⁴⁹ See A. Royce, *The anthropology of dance*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London-The Historical Perspective, USA (1980) 103.

Thus, the changes that have occurred in the natural environment and the socio-economic field resulted in reducing of the number of the dance events which take place today in Agia Eleni, compared to Kosti. However, although the number of the dance events was limited, the dances that accompanied them, and which are an essential ingredient, are all still danced today. The dances that are danced in the dance events, through which the anastenaria worship is manifested today in Agia Eleni in Serres are: The Agitikos, the Sourvikos, the dance of the Street, the dance of Fire and the anastenarikos or panigiriotikos Syrtos.⁵⁰

The “revival” of anastenaria worship in Kosti

The first generation refugees passed on their love and nostalgia for Kosti to their descendants, who began visiting it in order to do their duty, as they say, that is to visit the land of their ancestors and to worship in the church of the village which, while it was dedicated to the Saints Constantine and Helen, when the Bulgarians settled in Kosti, they dedicated it to Cyril and Methodius. Also, the Kostilides (people from Kosti) visited the agiasmata outside Kosti in the Vlachovo Canyon in the Tripori spot, in a natural landscape of exceptional beauty, and celebrated as they did before. These visits of the Kostilides began around 1970 and in the last decade they take place almost annually. However, the following phenomenon was observed: the various individual visitors and, mainly, the organized groups from various foreign universities etc., which visit every year the konakia of the anastenaria in Greece to observe and study the custom of the anastenaria, began to follow the Kostilides in the annual pilgrimages that they do in Kosti and celebrate with them in the area of the agiasmata. Thus, apart from the Greeks, many foreigners began visiting the area regularly as well, resulting in the inclusion of Kosti and the area of the agiasmata in the tourist guides of the region. This development shows in a vivid way how a place can become a tourist attraction when promoted with the right promotion as a tourism product.

The local municipal authority placed a large sign in Greek and English in the area of the agiasmata, which in Greek mentions the following:

“Here is the home of Anastenarides, the holy place of the rite of fire. Both the Bulgarian anastenarides and the immigrant anastenarides in Greece came from this place and continue to gather here. They do it every year on the Sunday before the feast day of Saints Constantine and Helen.”

⁵⁰ For more information on these dances see Lantzou Vas., “Is the anastenaria ...” in *Etnološko-antropološke sveske (Papers in ethnology and anthropology)*, No 6/2011, p.93-101.

If we take a careful look at this sign, we see that the Kostilides, who were forced to flee as refugees in Greece, are referred to as immigrants. Certainly the concept of refugee is totally different from the concept of immigrant. We notice, in other words, that an attempt for the distortion of reality is made by the local authority. In the interviews conducted with the members of the local authority, the question why in the sign that exists in the region of the agiasmata the Kostilides, while they were forced to be expatriated, are mentioned as immigrants, was asked. The answer given was that the Greeks fled to Greece and left the village with their will.

The question why the municipality decided to attend the dance rituals of the anastenaria in Agia Eleni, was also asked. The answer that was given by one of its members was as follows:

We were watching for several years the descendants of the Kostilides coming from Greece to visit this particular region of the agiasmata. And from the discussions we had with them, they told us that their ancestors had a big celebration in the area of the agiasmata and that in the village square, during the celebration, they lit large bonfires and the anastenaria danced on fire with the icons of Saints Constantine and Helen. They also told us that, even today, the anastenaria in Agia Eleni, in the village festival, they do the same. Thus, on 21st May 2008, we decided to visit your village in Greece and, indeed, we were amazed by the beautiful festival that you did and by your hospitality. And this year (that is, 2009), we decided to do the same as well. Tomorrow we will light a fire in the square and we found someone who agreed to dance on it. And in order to have a lot of people tomorrow, apart from the dance on fire, we will have matches of Greco-Roman wrestling, wrestlers from nearby villages will come, that is why we chose Saturday because it is a holiday and it is convenient.

Indeed, that is what happened, in July 2009 the municipality advertised, through the media of the region, that in Kosti, on Saturday 1st August, the custom of the anastenaria worship will be celebrated for the first time. This information was transmitted to me in Greece by some friends of Greek origin who lived in the coastal towns of Agathoupoli and Vasiliko in the Black Sea, which are the closest to Kosti.⁵¹ I met these friends informants

⁵¹ These specific Greek informants are native inhabitants of Bulgaria and in the population exchange that took place in 1919 between Greece and Bulgaria, under the Treaty of Neuilly, did not leave for Greece and because they know the Bulgarian language, they helped significantly in the interviews conducted with the villagers.

in the repeated visits I made to Kosti and the broader region, through the trips I made as a board member of the Association of Greeks of Eastern Rumelia (Northern Thrace), aiming at the cooperation and the assistance of the Greeks in these particular towns, especially when they found themselves in a very difficult financial condition after the collapse of the political regime in Bulgaria in 1989. Apart from myself, the information was spread to other Kostilides as well and after forming a group of about twenty people, we decided to visit Kosti to watch the performance of this dance event. Indeed, two days prior to 1st August, 2009 we were in Kosti. There, from the discussions we had with the residents, they informed us that only one "anastenaris" will take part in the performance of the custom and that he is not from Kosti, but he is kirmas, that is half Bulgarian half gypsy (roma).

On the afternoon of 1st August a lot of people began to swarm and the taverns and grill houses of the village, as well as the square with the visitors' cars, were crowded. The festivities began with wrestling matches between athletes of the region's sports clubs. The matches took place behind the square in a plot with natural grass, accompanied by the music of musical instruments, bagpipes and tabors. Just before it got dark, the wrestling ended and on one side of the square they lit a small fire, which, after about half an hour, it was almost extinguished and they lit it again. On the other side of the square, opposite the fire, there was a microphone installation on a platform and a traditional orchestra began playing, while a young boy, about 15-16 years old, was singing. When we heard the tune of the zonaradikos dance, our group spontaneously got up first and danced and, then, Bulgarians also came into the dance, men, women, young, old, all mingled together in no particular order, until the dance occupied almost the whole area of the square. At some point, the dance stopped and the people began to head for and crowded the area where the fire was. There, the space was demarcated by piles, which were connected together with a rope and formed a small circle with a diameter of about 5-6 meters. What would happen in this demarcated space could only be seen by the spectators who were in the first rows and the rest, who were the vast majority, could not see anything.

After a while we heard the sound of the bagpipe and the tabor and a small procession was approaching and the sound of the musical instruments was getting louder. This small procession consisted of two people, each holding a candle, two musicians, one of which played bagpipes and the other the tabor, and a man, who was barefoot and was wearing a traditional Bulgarian costume, followed. When the procession came into the demarcated area where the fire was, the barefoot man, with the arms crossed at the chest, looked at the sky as if he was praying and then began to dance over the faded fire. The way he danced did not, among others, remind anything of the Greek anastenarides. And, not only did he not extinguish the fire, as the custom requires, but, at some point, he stopped dancing and

directed to a representative of the municipality and asked to give him the money they agreed in order to continue dancing, which was not done, and, as a result, he defiantly abandoned the area without putting off even this weak fire, as it is required by the ritual of the custom. After this travesty celebration of the event, all the people who came from Greece felt bitterness because we thought that what we watched was a sacrilege for the important event of the anastenaria worship, which our ancestors performed with reverence in the old days in Kosti.

In the next three days, interviews were taken again by the municipality and by the villagers, through which it became clear that the “revival” of the anastenaria worship was done for touristic and cultural reasons. Tourism is a global socio-economic phenomenon which has its base in the human need for recreation, for contact with nature and for the acquaintance with foreign places and cultures.⁵² The local government has realized that the unique natural environment that the Kosti has, in conjunction with the celebration of the anastenaria worship as an important cultural value, is a tourist product quite beneficial for the local economic development. The projection of Kosti as a place of the anastenaria worship promises thrills through specific choices, in accordance with the principle of tourist demand, and it also requires a suitable background, which in this particular case is the dance event of the dance of fire, which triggers the imagination so much so as to convert the place into a tourist attraction.⁵³

Besides the tourist exploitation, the “revival” of the anastenaria worship is also due to cultural reasons, because tourism, apart from being a consumer good, it is also a cultural activity.⁵⁴ Therefore, the municipality seeks to construct a specific cultural identity for the local community based on the image of the “exotic Other”. And in order to accomplish that, it attempts the “revival” of the authentic past of the anastenaria worship, which naturally belongs to the former Greek inhabitants of Kosti, within a gaudy present. The cultural identity of a place may consist of a multitude characteristics, among these are the local customs and traditions, as well as the dance events. Therefore, this identity is particularly important for the tourism industry and the impacts it receives from tourism are equally important.⁵⁵

⁵² Pavlogeorgatos Ger., Konstantoglou Mar., “Cultural tourism: The case of Greece”, in *Cultural Industries: Processes, Services, Goods*, edited by Vernicos N., Daskalopoulou S., 2005, p. 59.

⁵³ On how a place is converted into a tourist attraction see Hitccock Michael, Bali: *Tourism Culturel et Culture Touristique*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1994.

⁵⁴ See Hennig C., *Reiselust. Touristen, tourismus und urlaubskultur*. Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1997.

⁵⁵ Pavlogeorgatos Ger., Konstantoglou Mar., *ibid.*, p.60.

The anastenaria worship that is performed in honor of Saints Constantine and Helen does not mean anything special for today's residents of Kosti. Besides, as it was mentioned above, the church of the village, which had been dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helen, was dedicated to Cyril and Methodius and they consider them as patrons now. And apart from that, the "performance" of the dance of fire, which is an important and integral part of the anastenaria worship, in the month of August and, all the more so, in combination with Greco-Roman wrestling, shows that it was an invention that resulted in the creation of a nascent cultural hybrid and that the local community has nothing to do with the anastenaria worship because it is not part of their religious behavior. We observe, that is to say, that the anastenaria worship was put exclusively at the service of tourism. However, anything that is put at the service of tourism, it is converted into a marketable product.⁵⁶ Therefore, the revival of the anastenaria worship in 2009 in Kosti is described as spurious. While, on the contrary, in Agia Eleni in Serres, the anastenaria worship continues being a socio-religious phenomenon and exercises a strong religious suggestion on the anastenarides and the anastenarisses, which has its life-giving roots, as stated by themselves, inside Christianity and is expressed through the sacred anastenaria dances, which survived until today because they are consistent with the traditional religious behavior of the community.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the data analysis show that in the old days in Kosti, until 1914, before the Greek inhabitants were forced to abandon it, the anastenaria worship was an integral part of the customary and religious behavior of the community and it was manifested through dance events, which were classified into two categories. In one category are those dance events which were performed within the festival on specific dates and at specific places-spaces, and in the other category are those which were held in emergencies, when various problems arose, mainly epidemics and epizootics, which were of vital importance for the community.

The Kostilides, after their expatriation, apart from the sacred icons of their patron saints, also carried the anastenaria worship in their soul, which they "transplanted it" in Agia Eleni in Serres, which has been the center of the modern anastenaria worship. The dance events, which in Kosti, within the framework of the festival, were performed on specific dates in the sacred forests and the sacred springs, in Agia Eleni could not be performed because the natural environment in Agia Eleni is completely different. There are no sacred forests and sacred springs dedicated to the saints. So,

⁵⁶ Appadurai Arjun (edit.), *The social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 34.

those which survived are the ones performed in the konaki during the celebration that takes place on 17th, 18th and 19th January, which is also called the "winter festival", as well as those performed during the festival of the feast day of Saints Constantine and Helen in 21st May. Now, however, the festival, compared to Kosti, shrank from eight days to three. Therefore, on the first and the third day of the festival dance events are performed in the konaki, and at night, in its courtyard, the dance event of the dance of fire is performed. On the second day of the festival, that is on 22nd May, the anastenaria group does not dance on the fire, but wanders in the houses of the village with the icons in order to spread the blessings of the saints. Regarding the dance events which took place in Kosti in exceptional cases, in Agia Eleni they were still performed until, approximately, 1960. Subsequently, they received significant influence from the social transformation that took place in the Greek society in the 1950s. Therefore, the changes that occurred in the natural environment and the socio-economic field, had as a result the reduction of the number of the dance events which take place today in Agia Eleni compared to Kosti. However, even though the number of dance events was limited, all the dances that accompanied them and which were an essential ingredient are still danced today.

The "revival" of the anastenaria worship in 2009 in Kosti was done for touristic and cultural reasons. The projection of Kosti as a place of the anastenaria worship promises thrills through specific choices, in accordance with the principle of tourism demand, and it also requires a suitable background, which in this particular case is the dance event of the dance of fire, which triggers the imagination so much as to convert the place into a tourist attraction. Moreover, the municipality seeks to build a cultural identity for the community based on the image of the "exotic Other". And in order to accomplish that, it attempts the "revival" of the authentic past of the anastenaria worship, which naturally belongs to the former Greek inhabitants of Kosti, within a gaudy present.

The anastenaria worship which is done in honor of the Saints Constantine and Helen does not mean anything special for today's residents of Kosti. Besides, as it was mentioned above, the church of the village, which had been dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helen, was dedicated to Cyril and Methodius and they now consider them as patrons. And apart from that, the "performance" of the dance of fire, which is an important and integral part of the anastenaria worship, in the month of August and, all the more so, in combination with Greco-Roman wrestling, shows that it was a invention that resulted in the creation of a nascent cultural hybrid and that the local community has nothing to do with the anastenaria worship because this is not part of its religious behavior. We observe, in other words, that the anastenaria worship was put exclusively at the service of tourism. Therefore, the revival of the anastenaria worship in 2009 in Kosti is described as spurious.

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Vasilis Lancos

Lažno oživljavanje i plesni događaji: slučaj anastenarijskog obožavanja u selu Kosti, u Bugarskoj

Socio-religijski fenomen anastenarijskog obožavanja najpre se manifestovao u Kostima, koja sad geografski pripadaju Bugarskoj, kroz igranke koje su izvodili članovi anastenarijske grupe, držeći ikone dvoje svetaca, Konstantina i Jelene. Zbog političkih događaja koji su se odvijali u toj oblasti 1914. godine, grčko stanovništvo je prisilno preseljeno u Agija Eleni, selo u Seresu, u severnoj Grčkoj, gde se danas nalazi centar anastenarijskog obožavanja. Bugarske porodice su se nastanile u grčkim domovima u Kostima i stvorili su novo društvo, koje nije imalo ništa zajedničko sa anastenarijskim obožavanjem. 1. avgusta 2009. godine, opština je "oživila" Anastenariju u Kostima. Predmet ove studije: prvo, način na koji se anastenarijsko obožavanje održavalo u Kostima do 1914. i kasnije u Agija Eleni, u Seresu i, drugo, proces "oživljavanja" 2009., u Kostima, kao i razlozi koji su prouzrokovali ovo "oživljavanje". Zbirku podataka čine etnografski terenski rad (observacija, intervjui) i pisani izvori. Zaključci izvedeni analizom podataka pokazuju da je anastenarijsko obožavanje u Kostima do 1914. godine činilo integralni deo običajnog i religijskog ponašanja u zajednici. Ista je situacija u današnjoj Agija Eleni u Seresu. Nasuprot tome, "oživljavanje" Anastenarije u Kostima 2009. je opisano kao lažno, jer nikad nije bila deo običajnog i religijskog ponašanja ove lokalne zajednice.

Ključne reči: lažno oživljavanje, anastenarija, Kosti, religijsko ponašanje