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Dance as a Dedicative Practice in *Anastenaria* Ritual**Abstract:**

The present paper deals with dance of Costilides in Aghia Eleni (St. Helen) in Serres (Northern Greece) and, more specifically, with anastenaria ritual. Approaching dance as local people's votive offering to Saints (i.e. Saints Constantine and Helen) during which anastenaria dancers seek for Saints' reciprocal assistance, we draw upon concept of patronage organization as a complex relation between 'protectors' and 'followers', and argue that an anastenaria dance is a much more than a mutual exchange; it's rather a means of challenging complex social relations. Ethnographic data was collected in fieldwork. The conclusions drawn from analysis show that people dance to establish social relations in order to be empowered while being in situations such as conflicts and negotiations, inclusions and exclusions.

Key words:

Anastenaria, Dancing icons, dedicative practice

Dance amongst other structured movement systems, according to Kaeppler, consists "product of action and interaction" which is "system of knowledge socially constructed" imbued with cultural meaning related to authority and prestige amongst others (Kaeppler 1978). Talking about dance in Hawaii Kaeppler argues that "movement is a surface manifestation of the underlying structures of a society" and stresses that "ritual movements performed for the gods... can serve as metaphor of a sacred text".

While taking place, *anastenaria* ritual is a folk worship honoring Saints Constantine and Helen (whose day is on 21st May). This ritual consists of a group of 15-20 men and women who are called *anastenaria*¹.

¹ According to informants of this research *Anastenaria* means "those who sigh" because they sigh "ah, ah", meaning the anastenaria group. *Anastenaris* (*man*) or *anastenarissa* (*woman*) are the members of the group. When people refer to the anastenaria ritual that happens on 21st of May they used to call this event *anastenari*. Danforth (1995) mentions, that according to his informants, there is also another word for their shouting 'tsirizo' (*peep*) and connects *anastenaris* with *an* (non-) *astenaris* (without strength, weak) someone who is not weak any more (ibid 1995, 82, n.2).

According to our informants, in this group there are: their leader, who is always a man and who is called *archianastenaris* (lit. “the first/leader of the *anastenaria*), and the “twelve” *anastenarides*, who consist of twelve chosen and respectable persons within the *Costilides*, who are their board in some way and “*in charge of the group’s administration*”. This group of people, amongst others, dance on fire barefoot holding “dancing icons”². While dancing on burning coals people believe that the *anastenaria* dancers “*are caught by the Saint*” (i.e. Saints Constantine and Helen); that is, “the *anastenaria* are seized by the spirit of the Saints and that’s why they are protected from burning themselves” as informants stress. A similar perception is also discussed by Sklar for Tortugas focusing on their Lady of Guadalupe, “dark Virgin”. There is a correspondence between the statue of the Virgin and the self image of the dancers. This is the main reason that *Costilides* believe that “*anastenaria are especial and act as representatives of Saints and ask their help for different reasons*”. For instance, when everyday life problems of vital importance occur, such as an epidemic, the local community asks the group of the *anastenaria* for assistance.

Drawing on Kaeppler’s pioneer concept for an anthropological perspective on dance study this paper deals with *anastenaria* dance as a dancing system in *anastenaria* ritual which facilitates a dedicative practice as a metaphor of social relations. However, these relations in *anastenaria* ritual are not stable and static but are challenged by *Costilides* in several ways. Following ethnographic data in this paper we focus on dance in *anastenaria* ritual as a dedicative practice which mediates social relations and establishes them through inclusions and exclusions.

‘Dancing with Saints’, as it has been argued by several folklorists in an amount of remarkable descriptions of the *anastenaria* dance is a ‘continuum’ of a ritual practice where Saints (protectors) wake demands from the faithful (followers) (Χουρμουζιάδης 1961; Κυριακίδης 1927; Μέγας 1962; Κακούρη 1963; Μιχάηλ – Δέδε 1988-90; Αικατερινίδης 1993; Arnaudoff 1917). The main point is its powerful effects of miracle-working on local people, and, eventually, local people’s offerings as a mutual exchange. Although, these essays have contributed greatly with an important corpus of information, they have yet to address the issue of dance and examine it, despite the fact that the ritual itself is based on specific kinds of dance, as we will analyse later in this study. Specific interest about dance started at the late 80’s (Billmann 1987; Torp 1989) and especially for the function of dance in *anastenaria* worship (Λάντζος 2003).

Further more, fruitful essays have been written from an anthropological point of view with remarkable arguments (Danforth 1978; 1989; 1998). Comparing rituals and therapy in his pioneer work, Loring Danforth stud-

² “Dancing” icons are of special manufacture those used by the *anastenaria* during dance performances and illustrate Saints Constantine and Helen.

ied *anastenaria* as a system of religious treatment where people metaphorically move from illness to health cultivating solidarity and union with their community, thus re-establishing social cohesion in it (Danforth 1989, 189-190). During this transformational procedure, Danforth stresses that the *anastenaria* dancers manage their social relations focusing on family's tensions (Danforth 1989, 22). Danforth comments on the significance of this practice for confrontations and negotiations in people's relations between 'weak' and 'powerful' people either inside or outside their community.

Describing the religious framework, he points that the *anastenaria* dancers act as representatives of the patron saints (Danforth 1989, 92), mentions Cambell's influential analysis (1964, 341-346) of the relations between people and saints in Greece. Despite the fact that he provides an illuminating idea of "burning" as culturally constructed and bound that results in acceptance or prohibition due to *anastenaria*'s discourse (Danforth 1989, 212), he highlights *anastenaria* ritual as source of political and economical power (Danforth 1989, 224) for *Costilides*, opening the path for exploring the relations between social and cultural aspects in this ritual.

Boissevain, in his influential analysis of patronage in Sicily – where he discusses about the complex relations between 'protectors' and 'followers', mentions the relations between people and saints as well, arguing that these relations are established because of patronage system too. More specifically, Boissevain clearly states, referring to Campbell's study as well, that "there is a striking functional similarity between the role of saints as intermediaries between God and man, and the mortal patron who intercedes with an important person on behalf of his client" (Boissevain 1966, 18-33).

The aforementioned analyses had been precursors of a later discussion about the engagement of religion and politics through an established and activated relation of 'material and divine worlds' (Dubisch 1995, 65). The relation between material and divine in *anastenaria* ritual is shed light upon by Loukatos and Zografou, who present in a brilliant way the significance of icons and how powerful they are. On the one hand, Loukatos claims that "the saints themselves participate in the dance through their icons" (Λουκάτος 1960, 47). On the other hand, Zografou focuses on the relation between *anastenaria* dancers and Saints and comments that the relation is that of affinity and this is obvious both from the fact that the Saints (i.e. Saints Constantine and Helen) are called "Grand-fathers"³ and from the symbolic way that icon is held (Ζωγράφου 2010).

³ Both the *anastenaria* and the faithful call as Grandfathers only the "dancing" icons of the Saints Constantine and Helen, as they avoid mentioning their name for reasons of respect.

Thus, icons and *anastenaria* dancers act as representatives of the specific Saints (Saints Constantine and Helen) establishing and activating a range of relations. Recently, Pipyrrou (2010) elaborates how “dance can hold a specific agency which indexes a variety of different relations... empowering people”. Exploring polysemic nature of ritual of the Madonna della Consolazione she focuses on people’s engagement in a range of important for their lives social relations due to their participation in a ritualistic dance, Tarantella, in Reggio, in Sicily (Italy).

Recently, Zografou and Pipyrrou’s (2011) elaborating on dance in Pontians due to celebration of Panagia Soumela argue about *dance that can articulate*

“social, hegemonic, and structural relationships providing scope for human agency in choreographing transgressions of symbolic borders and thus securing personal and collective interests”.

Drawing upon aforementioned concepts we’ll argue that through *anastenaria* dancing is established and activated a ‘complex system of relations between ‘protectors’ and ‘followers’ following Boissevain, where ‘representatives’ of the patron saints (i.e. Saints Constantine and Helen) and ‘followers’ interweave them with dance having different intentions and purposes. I argue that there is much more than a mutual exchange; but it is rather a case of challenging complex relations.

Starting by a briefly presentation of our methodological tools, we’ll further make a historical overview of *Costilides* and we will gradually elaborate on *anastenaria* dance focusing on the “dancing icons”, the practice of *anastenaria* dance and finally we’ll provide a specific case study which provoked our thought for this paper.

Researching in *anastenaria* dancers

The present study is based on ethnographic data that was gathered from primary and secondary resources (Κυριακίδου -Νέστορος 1981, 1993; Sklar 1991; Bucland 1999; Λυδάκη 2001). On the one hand, primary sources were a long-lasting fieldwork, during which there was observation and participation in *anastenaria* dance performances, which were also enhanced by testimonies of informants referring to the villages of *Costi* (a village in North Eastern Thrace, as discussed in the next sub-section) and Aghia Eleni (lit. St. Helen) in Serres. On the other hand, secondary sources were written sources⁴ (i.e. local, national and international bibliographical

⁴ More specifically, research started in 1985 and under a more systematic and intensive way in 1997 until 2002. Long-lasting fieldwork provides comparative

references). More specifically, research started in 1985 and under a more systematic and intensive way in 1997 until 2002. Long-lasting fieldwork provides comparative analysis that can substantiate conclusions or, in contract, can confute concepts based on occasional comments and lacking notes while cross-reference of data contributed to the reliability of the participatory observation (Λυδάκη 2001, 147-152).

The analysis of this ethnographic data follows theoretical tools of oral history where memories of people's daily life are treated as a research field of social history (Thompson 2002, 18-19). Presence "there" due to fieldwork as well as active participation contributed to understanding meanings, significations and events (Γκέφου-Μαδιανού 2011, 241-242, 277). Long-lasting participation in the specific community's life cultivated a gradually acceptance of our presence (Vassilis Lantzou presence) from the *anastenaria* dancers and gave us the opportunity to have several discussions with them at a deeper level.

Great help in our (Vassilis Lantzou) gathering ethnographic data was our contact with musicians, some of whom have been playing their instruments and have been singing in several dance events of *anastenaria* worship for decades. Those musicians were taught by the first generation musicians who came as refugees from *Costi*, and had been playing and dancing with them in the past. Sharing music traditions of the 'old' and the 'new' homeland, these people have become "key-informants" being and have been of a great value for the 'living culture' of this community. As some of these musicians are kin to one of the authors (Vassilis Lantzou), they helped us overcome some difficulties we had to face in our contact with some of our informants who were not at first cooperative due to their mysticism, by mediating between these hesitant and mystical informants and us. Trying to keep their secrets to themselves, these people were usually responding by saying "I don't know"! Later, after musicians mediation, we had the opportunity to have a very good discussion with them. Additionally, we recorded with digital camera several times dance events that were part of the *anastenaria* ritual, after we had got their permission.

Now as far as secondary sources are concerned, they are available bibliography which was based of archive ethnographic (Λαμπίρη-Δημάκη 1990; Γκέφου-Μαδιανού 1999; Thomas, J. and Nelson, J. 2003) and historical methodology (Adshead and Layson 1993) and contains analysis, evaluation and interrelation with published bibliography. For this paper, bibliographic research took place in Greek National Library, Gennadiou Library, Greek Parliament's Library, and Research Centre of Greek Folk

analysis that can substantiate conclusions or, in contract, can confute concepts based on occasional comments and lacking notes while cross-reference of data contributed to the reliability of the participatory observation (Λυδάκη 2001).

Studies as well as in private libraries. Archive research took place in Archive of Thracian Folk and Language Thesaurus, in Thracian Centre and Thracian Studies as well in Greek Folk Association, Historic and Folk Association in Serres – Melenikou, in private archives, conferences and symposiums proceedings as well as in newspaper and journals.

Study of an extended local, national and international bibliography tends to provide a better and deeper understanding through a multi-leveled examination and a penetrated look. Furthermore, the compilation and examination of ethnographic and bibliographical data aimed to gather (compare and contrast) dates so that confusion and misunderstandings are avoided, whenever feasible. Use of different theoretical keys, information and analyses gradually provides in triangulation in social research (Λυδάκη 2001, 147-152).

Refugee sons and refugee ‘Grandfathers’ in the new homeland.

The folk worship of Saints Constantine and Helen was initiated, localized and developed at a village called *Costi*, a small area of the region of Sozoagathoupoli in North Eastern Thrace, on the mountains of Strandza. This place used to be called also ‘Small Haemos’. It was called “Blind Region” as well, because it was surrounded by high and unapproachable mountains which made communication with the surrounding areas rather difficult (Χουρμουζιάδης 1961, 145; Μαγκριώτης 1969, 264).

Due to political circumstances (i.e. the Balkan Wars of 1911-12 and World War I), the residents of *Costi*⁵ exclusively Greeks – called *Costilides* – were forced to expatriate themselves violently by the Bulgarians in 1914 – Signature of Neuilly sur Seine treaty (27/11/1919), where was mentioned the population exchange between Boulgaria and Greece (Χατζηαναστασίου 1999, 73-74), and – after having wandered to various places – their majority took a refuge and settled down permanently at the village of Kakaraska in Serres, which later was renamed to Aghia Eleni (St. Helen) in 1924 (Βακαλόπουλος 1995, 46).

After the settlement of *Costi* refugees in 1924 – they came to Greece with the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in 1923 – up to 1947 every 21st of May (the day when Saints Constantine and Helen are venerated by the Orthodox Church) the ‘*anastenaria*’ worship was taking place secretly in those refugees’ houses. This happened because those people were afraid of being persecuted by the Greek Orthodox Church, since the *anastenaria* worship (i.e. fire-walking) was and is still considered a cult. Well-known *konakia* – kind of shrines where their holy icons are placed and where people perform *anastenaria* ritual until today – are in Lagadas of wider region of Thessaloniki, Meliki in Imathia, Kerkini in

⁵ Nowadays Costi belongs to Bulgaria.

Serres, Mauroleyki in Drama and, finally, at Aghia Eleni (lit. St. Helen) in Serres too. Aghia Eleni was the place of settlement of not only a lot of refugees from *Costi* but also of the *archianastenaris* (i.e. the leader performer of the *anastenaria* ritual). Those refugees carried with them the tools for offering. What is very significant in this place (i.e. Aghia Eleni) is that the refugees found a source of water and the faithful believed that it was *agiasma* (lit. holy water), a signal of the Saints to their prayers. That is why Aghia Eleni is considered the ‘centre’ of *Costi* refugees’ *anastenaria* worship and ritual. This fact also exerted a great influence on my research (Vassilis Lantzou) with the result that I directed the efforts of my research to Aghia Eleni people and their dance practices in ‘*anastenaria*’ worship and ritual.

Nevertheless, *anastenarides* (lit. male performers of the *anastenaria*) were still afraid both of local residents and local Greek Orthodox Church’s responses to their worship, since, as mentioned above, their worship/ritual was (and still is) considered a cult. They were so worried about what could possibly happen when local people could see them dance with religious icons on fire, and were so afraid of being accused as idolaters, persecuted and forcefully displaced that they did everything in secret. They were *xenoi* (both foreigners and strangers) not only because they came from another land but also because they seemed to have beliefs and customs ‘foreign’ to the mainstream Greek Orthodox Church.

Saints Constantine and Helen are perceived as part of the *Costilides* life. Being their Saints in *Costi* as well as in their settlement in Greece, the Saints themselves became refugees as well (Zografou and Pipyrou 2011), such as “refugee *Panayia*” is a term first employed by Filon Ktenidis (Φίλων Κτενίδης (1950) and elaborated on by Giorgos Vozikas (2008). Saints Constantine and Helen, the ‘Grandfathers’, as *Costilides* (lit. those who come from *Costi*) used to call them, were much more than ‘religious personas’. They were regarded as kins, ancestors (Zografou and Pipyrou 2011), connecting the past and the present of *Costilides* generations. Discussing the interrelatedness between the past and the present in *Costilides*, Dantforth argues that the *anastenaria* dancers celebrate their memories providing the preservation of the past, thus being linked with it (Danforth 1998, 202).

Subsequently, several important social and economic changes⁶ were taking place in Greek society during the 1950s influencing once again *Costilides*’ turbulent lives. The rapid transformation the Greek society was going under at that time resulted in the isolation of villages (Μερακλής 1983, 18). Meanwhile, it provided enough uncertainty as people had to

⁶ Social changes related to the establishment of urban way of life through institutions such as education, health services, transportation, science and technology, media, amongst others.

follow a new way of life that they were unfamiliar with it. These drastic changes and fast developments were occurring in an ‘unprepared’ social context that was coming from a catastrophic decade of successive wars for Greece (i.e. the Balkan Wars [1911-1912], World War I, the Asia Minor Disaster [1922]). At the time, there was a fluctuating interest in the *anastenaria* worship and ritual, including different purposes producing several conflicts grounded on the ‘openness’ of the road by the Grandfathers.⁷

Dancing with the Saints: The icons

‘Dancing icons’ are central in *anastenaria* ritual. That is, icons of Saints that are used by *anastenaria* in order to perform ritual. Without these icons people can not perform their worship, as it happened in 1954 when ecclesiastic authority had confiscated the ‘dancing icons’ a few days before the honoring day of the Saints (21st of May) in order to prevent an idolatric event as they approach *anastenari*.

It is well-known that far from being just gazed at and venerated, icons constitute a complete system of ritual behaviors amongst Orthodox Christians. The faithful believe that icons are not just a material, wood or gold but rather that the depicted holy figure has his/her personality and will. Additionally, the idea that saints continue to exist and work miracles through their icon is prevalent (Ημελλος 1975-76, 60-64; Kretzenbacher 1976, 57-58). Providing linkages between human and divine, icons can be found not only in churches but also in houses. They are also crucial for the construction of a group’s social identity of a group, that is, they become refugees’ spiritual center in their new homeland (Hirschon 1989, 30-31) or their ‘genealogy’ (Danforth 1998), repeating social origin (Dubisch 1995, 87-95).

At this point, we find necessary to make a brief historical overview on the use of icons by the Orthodox Christians and some conflicts surrounding them. Icons were firstly made by the early Christians, dating back the 1st century A.D., and continued to be made during the Byzantine period. The first icons depicted distinguished priests and monks so as to be known by the future generations and keep their memory (Sinasi 1989). In the course of the centuries, the use of depicted representations increased significantly, until 726 A.D. when the iconoclastic controversy broke out – a “war” between those who wanted to venerate the icons (iconolaters) and those who opposed to that practice (iconoclasters). This controversy lasted until 843 A.D., when iconolaters prevailed. Many human lives were lost during that period and a large number of icons were destroyed. Abuses and

⁷ This is explicit also in Danforth’s work.

exaggerations on behalf of many Christians, who worshiped the icons instead of honoring them, are reported – among others – as the reason of the persecution against icons (Γκότσης 1995, 20). The victory of iconolaters was achieved in 787 AD with the 7th Ecumenical Council (Πάλλας 1968, 165), but the hostility against icons kept until the definite restoration of icons in 843. The first Sunday of the Great Lent has been declared as the day of the Orthodoxy celebrating the “restoration of icons” (Kenna 1985, 367- 368; Ware 1963, 39) and prayers are read for the iconolaters, while their opponents are anathematized (Linner 1999, 116).

According to iconolaters, icons help the faithful understand of the reality they try to express (Τσιγγελίδης 1984, 88-89). Citing Patriarch Fotios, Cavnos notes that icons teach like written testimonies, while in several cases they are livelier than the latter and, therefore, superior to any written document as an educational means (Καβάρνος 1977, 31). The visible and the invisible, the material and the spiritual merge to an undividable unity: the icons (Βασιλειάδης 1988, 413-417). The faithful believe that icons do not only to represent or convey the divine power they illustrate; they rather contain it (Kenna 1983, 346). The person(s) (i.e. the Saint or Saints) depicted in the icons is (are) by grace present, and thus the faithful may meet the depicted person(s) with his/her senses (Μεντιδάκης 1997, 226).

More specifically, the icons⁸ of Saints Constantine and Helen that the *anastenaria* dancers hold during their rituals are the central elements of the *anastenaria* worship and ritual. These icons are powerful religious symbols for both the members of the *anastenaria* company and the rest of the faithful from the local community; they are “the backbone of ritual” through their “strong simulation, material side and sentimental charge” (Χρυσανθοπούλου 2008, 326). On the belt – that is, on the silver strip that icons have just below the middle – it is carved when the icon was made and who is the *akrabas* – that is, the heir, or, in other words, the person who took the initiative so that this icon was made by offering the largest or the whole amount of money. In fact, there is no exclusive owner of the icons and for this reason they are called *sychoriakes*, meaning that they belong to the whole village.

“Dancing icons”⁹ illustrate Saints Constantine and Helen with the Holy Cross between them. In the background there is a cross reading “έν Τούτω νικά” (in Latin: in hoc signo, vinces). Sources report that the phrase “Έν Τούτω νικά” (“Έn Touto nika”) was seen by Constantine and his army written in the sky together with a brilliant cross that was standing in front of the sun (Καισαρένσης 1982, 215). This phenomenon, at the moment he

⁸ According to informants of this research these icons were made in Constantinople (Instabul, Turkey).

⁹ Their dimensions are around forty centimeters in height and thirty centimeters in width.

was in a mental and spiritual excitement took huge dimensions in Constantine's fantasy because it showed in a supernatural, miraculous way that Christ, Lord of the Cross, would be from then on his defender and patron (Jones 1962, 107-108).

In the middle of the lower part of the icon, there is a cylindrical handle of approximately ten centimeters, called *maniki* (lit. sleeve), which is used by the *anastenaria* dancers to better hold and manipulate the icons while dancing. Because of this handle there are circular holes on the pews, so as to be better supported. In fact, this handle is such a characteristic feature for *anastenarides* (male *anastenaria* dancers) that the icons bearing it are called "dancing" icons so as to be distinguished from those that are not "dancing" because they do not have a handle. As for the "dancing" icons of *anastenarides*, the testimonies of both the older *anastenarides* and the rest of the villagers make quite an impression when they claim that in the old days St. Helen was illustrated in the icons holding her dress with her right hand, while having her right foot slightly raised as if she were dancing (Χουρμουζιάδης 1961, 145; Μέγας 1961, 475; Μέγας 1988, 476-477).

The "dancing icons", which are also called "*Chares*" (lit. "graces"), are covered by aprons: covers made of red velvet. Various effigies – dedicative objects, votive offerings of the faithful to the Saints – are sewed on the aprons. These are metallic plates, usually of silver, illustrating hands, legs, babies, etc, representing the reason why people ask the Saints for help.

Metallic offerings are silver because according to popular belief it is with silver that the wishes and the guesses come true (Αντζουλάτου-Ρέτσιλα 1984; Φλωράκης 1982; Καρποντίνη-Δημητριάδη 1988; Αλεξιάδης 1987; Kriss and H. Kriss-Heinrich 1955; Teske 1980; Kriss 1964). Additionally, it is as well known as the typical suggestion of the fortune teller gypsy: "Cross my palm with silver and I'll tell you, or, cross my palm with silver and I'll tell you your future" (Λεκάκης 2001).

Aprons substitute icons in the various dance rituals of *anastenarides*, as they are believed to possess the power of the saints. Moreover, the icons bear knots which are formed with the *amanetia*, which are kerchiefs, and perceived as an extension of and equal to the icons on which they are tied in order to "tie evil in a knot".

Until about the 1950s, the members of the local community considered a necessity and their obligation to worship the *anastenaria* icons in every important occasion of their lives. For example, after the sacrament of marriage has taken place, the newly-wed have to venerate one of the *anastenaria* icons held by the *anastenaria* dancers, when the dancers

dance at any rate before going to the house of the groom, should they want to live happy lives.¹⁰

Another example is when one invites the *anastenaria* group to a house where there is a patient so to dance for his/her recovery. During the whole dance of the *anastenaria* rituals, the *anastenaria* dancers (or *anastenarides*) place an *amaneti* (a red kerchief; it is singular of the word *amanetia*) on the shoulders of the patient. Moreover, the icons that “enter in the dance” bear small metallic bells because it is believed that the noise produced by the *anastenarides*’ movement while dancing rives the evil away. People believe that *anastenarides* are considered that they can work miracles through dancing by holding the dancing icons. Holding the ‘icons of Saints Constantine and Helen’ or the kerchiefs, the *amanetia*, *anastenarides* and *anastenarisses* (male and female *anastenaria* dancers respectively) are perceived as an extension, equal to icons, ensure the presence of the patron Saints, thus making their dance powerful. Under this perspective *anastenaria* dance as well for “bending” either a place as it is their village, a house or the fire, either a person, when somebody is ill or an animal for a disease or for a sacrifice in their rituals. Their passion for life is transubstantiated in movement enacting a system of complex relations in Costilides’ community (Λάντζος 2003).

Dancing with the Saints: Anastenaria dance

Ensuring the presence of the patron Saints, *anastenaria* dancers dance in order to intermediate between ‘protectors’ and ‘followers’. Their dance as a votive offering becomes powerful in different cases and for several reasons. In every case the *anastenaria* dancers prepare themselves “*to be asked by the Saint to dance*” so the Saint “*opens the road*” for taking offerings. These dancing offerings are imbued with their hopes and prayers facing several inclusions and exclusions through contradictions and tensions. *Archianastenis* (i.e. the leader of the *anastenaria* dancers) and his group are in charge to interpret Saints’ will. For this reason is believed that they can be in “*communication with them (the Saints)*”. Their dance as a dedicative practice mediates the relations between the Saints and the community, thus they are generally respected by the rest of *Costilides* not only during rituals but also in the everyday life of the community.

Let us see how this relation is constructed.

Anastenaria dance acts as an escalated dedicative practice begging from *anastenarides*’ votive offerings, that is their “*dancing with the*

¹⁰ We got to know this information by many couples who did the same to Saint Helen, such as Dimitris and Efrepiia Lantzou. According to the informants, this custom stopped in the 1950s..

Saints” in the *konaki* in front of a few *Costilides*. This is gradually shifting in “*dancing with the Saints*” outside the *konaki* and around the village followed by the rest of *Costilides*. This pageantry later in night is moving around the fire where *anastenaria* are dancing on fire viewed by everyone inside and outside their community. Finally, *anastenaria* are guiding *Costilides* and others on “*dancing with the Saints*”. That is, they are arranging people’s votive offerings to Saints on *apolyxis* dance (closing dance of the ritual). *Anastenaria* votive offerings are basically divided in their personal offerings and in mediating people’s offerings as representatives.

Due to these actions are created several linkages in different ways. It is well addressed the connection between space and dance, as Νιτσιάκος argues about the celebration of St. Paraskevi at Perivoli in Grevena. As he focuses on there is a connection between the social with the cultural highlighting the historicity of space and the symbolic dimension of dance. More specifically, Νιτσιάκος notes that “the locus where the dance is performed is a locus charged historically and culturally and functions as a symbol of a specific identity and a spirit of a community, a sense of ‘common’ belonging (belonging together) (Νιτσιάκος 1995, 150). Bending the village, a house, a person, an animal in different occasions, either bending the fire in ritual *anastenaria* dancers establish their presence as representatives. Connecting different layers of *Costilides*’s social life due to space and time they compose the historicity of their community in Aghia Eleni with their celebration of their collective memory of *Costi* where dancing with their ancestors is not only a symbol of their identity but is a means of their contemporary claims.

The engagement of religion and politics has been already well addressed (Dubisch 1995). However, we would like to focus on Boissevain’s concept as it makes our argument more clear. According to Boissevain there are linkages between “the role of saints as intermediaries between God and man, and the mortal patron who intercedes with an important person on behalf of his client” (Boissevain 1966, 30). Boissevain points out that there is a role of representative between ‘powerful’ and ‘impatient’ which establishes complex relations as the patronage system in Sicily. In our case it is clear that *anastenaria* hold the role of representative between Saints and *Costilides* enacting a range of social relations that are more complex than the sense of reciprocity or mutuality that seems to exist on the surface of this ritual covered by “keeping someone her/his word”. Let’s see how this is shaped.

Before the elaboration of our argument we’ll give some details about *anastenaria* dancing repertoire following our ethnographic data. According to our informants, the dances that were performed in *Costi* and constitute the current repertoire of the *anastenaria* in Aghia Eleni of Serres (Λάιτζος 2003) are *Agitikos* dance (the dance of the Saints; *aghios* means saint in

Greek), *Sourvikos* dance¹¹ (*sourvika* means that one speaks so fast that one can understand him/her), *Stratas*, road dance (dance that is performed on the road) is performed during dance rituals that take place on the roads around the houses of the village¹², dance on fire and *Anastenarikos* dance or *panigiriotikos* (festivity dance).

As far as their morphological issues are concerned, analysis shows that these dances, on the one hand – except for *anastenarikos* or *panigiriotikos* – have musical metre 2/4 (1/4+1/4). Dance movements are composed in sequence of isochronous movements of 1/4 rate each: $r^{1/4}+l^{1/4}+r^{1/4}+l^{1/4}$, as well of not isochronous movements: $(r^{1/4}+l^{1/8}+r^{1/8})-(l^{1/4}+r^{1/8}+l^{1/8})$, for r = right foot and for l = left foot. On the other hand, *anastenarikos* dance has musical metre 7/8 (3/8+2/8+2/8). Hand hold of dance is among palms and hands are strained (down) and foot move towards a 12 movements' composition: $(r^{3/8}+l^{2/8}+r^{2/8})-(l^{3/8}+r^{2/8}+l^{2/8})-(r^{3/8}+l^{2/8}+r^{2/8})-(l^{3/8}+r^{2/8}+l^{2/8})$.

These dances except for *anastenarikos* or *panigiriotikos*, which are danced by the group circularly, are performed 'individually', either by one or more members or even the whole *anastenaria* company at the same time. What is significant in these dances is that *anastenarisses* (the female *anastenaria* dancers) are allowed to dance 'individually'; this is the only situation during which local community allows women to dance "alone" (not accompanied) in public.¹³ However, within the *anastenaria* ritual, *anastenaria* dancers – males or females – are believed to have been invited by the Saints meaning that even though they dance 'individually' are not 'alone'; they are rather accompanied by the Saints. This companionship in

¹¹ *Sourvikos* dance is not always performed in *anastenaria* dance rituals. When performed, it is always after *Agitikos* dance and is accompanied exclusively by instrumental music. When musicians usually see that some dancers cannot be relieved from their 'religious pathos' during the *Agitikos* dance, then they play *Sourviko* dance which has a different melody, with a quicker tempo. As a result, *anastenaria* dancers dance more rapidly with intense and narrow movements, holding icons that they move actively up and down. Sometimes, they speak so quickly so that what they say makes no sense. In this case, it is said that they speak *sourvika*. *Sourvika* in local language means quick.

¹² According to musicians, *road dance* or *stratas* has two melodies that alternate in order to break the monotonous hearing. About this I was informed by musicians Reklos Demetrius (1915), Strikos Ioannis (1922), Lantzou Demetrius (1930), Dragoulis Georgios (1935), Strikos Nikolaos (1936), Koukos Spyros (1970) and all.

¹³ Up to 1950s, women who participated in dances performed in public space had to be accompanied either by their husband or by a close relative. If not, they were verbally abused and bad rumours circulated for them. We know this testimony from Gimias Sotiris (1901), Lizos Georgios (1906), Troulianos Marinos (1905) e.t.c., Reklos Demetrius (lyrist, 1915), Strikos Ioannis (lyrist 1923), Strikos Nikos (lyrist 1930), Lantzou Demetrius (lyrist 1930).

dancing is a ‘continuum’ articulated step by step where every single dancing performance has its place.

Dance movement patterns that are performed derive from their common dancing movements focusing on companionship of the Saints, leaving aside dancers’ competence. This is rather indicated by the Saints’ will to “open the road” for dancing in the konaki and gradually guiding dancing on the fire. As informants emphasize, the critical moment for every *anastenaris* (the individual *anastenaria* dancer) is his/her dance on fire that is on burning coals barefoot in front of everybody’s eyes, and this occurs gradually according to the Saints’ will.

The dance on fire, arrests people’s attention, and is understood as the escalation of *anastenaria* ritual. The *dance on fire* is always performed at night. The *anastenaria* dancers dance barefoot on burning coals “without getting burned” as they say. It is well-known also as the phenomenon of ‘firewalking’. More specifically is used to be called as ‘phenomenon of *akaia* (no burning) and *analgesia* (no pain)’ by specific scientists that have studied it (Μπαλλής και άλλοι 1979, 245-250; Βλαστός 1953, 321-331; Κωνσταντίδης 1953, 167-174).

Dancing on fire is allowed only to those *anastenaria* dancers that are “invited” by the Saints; otherwise, one that dances without the Saints’ invitation “gets burnt”. First on fire goes the *archianastenaris* dancing barefoot shouting “*staxti na genei, staxti na genei*” (that is, “let it become ash” in Greek), and he dances across the fire (with the burning coals). Then he gets again into the fire from the opposite side in order to make the sign of the Christian Cross. After he has made the sign of the Cross on the fire by walking on it and “opens a channel” – as it is said, then the rest of the *anastenaria* dancers get into the fire and dance until they quench it. Never has any of the *anastenaria* dancers get out of the fire before the fire is totally quenched and has turned into ashes.

As it is evident, during the *dance on fire*, *anastenaria* worship and ritual reach a climax. *Anastenaria* quench the fire with the Saints’ assistance “who act of behalf of good”, and they are believed to “burn evil forces to ashes”. That’s why as mentioned above, *archianastenaris*, when getting first into fire, shouts “let it become ash, let it become ash”. An *anastenarissa* (a female *anastenaria* dancer) Despoina Liourou, a refugee of first generation, used to say that “with the dance on fire she forces the bad daemons out”.¹⁴ When the *anastenaria* dancers accept the “invitation” by the Saints, they shout “*People, light the fire so that Constantine gets in*”. This shouting denotes *anastenarides*’ complete identification with Saint Constantine who “gets into” the fire with them because of the icons

¹⁴ We know this testimony by her son Stamatis Liouros who is *anastenaris* as well continuing his family attendance in *anastenaria*.

they hold. Actually “*they don’t get in fire (anastenaria) before Constantine gets in (firstly inside them and then in fire)*”.

It is obvious that dancing on fire is a powerful performance empowering people within *Costilides*. Occupying this respectable position, the *anastenaria* dancers can establish a wide range of complex social relations within their community, starting from the fundamental announcement about the Saints’ will to dance. Within this relation system, the *anastenaria* dancers are those who choose who is going to be included and who is not going to be included in this dance, “*always according to the Saints’ will*”. They have the power to do so because of their really hard tribulation which is mutually related to their social status.

As Danforth (1998, 209-211) presents so well, burning is not related to people’s foot but rather to their personality and their relations to the *anastenaria* dancers. Believing in *anastenaria* means accession to the *Costilides* community. As it is very important for a *Costilis* (one of the *Costilides*) to provide his/her origins from *Costi*, “*dancing with Grandfathers*”, which are refugees too, and achieving their acceptance for his/her dancing on fire is a very strong evidence, probably the most powerful one for his/her participation in community’s sense of belonging. People who get burnt are *persona non grata*. On the contrary, people who don’t are respectable and can solve their financial and family problems; they can assume a respectable status.

After the dance on fire, the *anastenaria* dancers, holding the icons and the *amanetia* (the kerchiefs), dance circularly the *anastenarikos* dance around the ash of the burning coals. In this dance the whole *Costilides* community can participate. *Costilides* seek for their participation in this dance since they believe that it is “*for good*”. Participation in this dance signifies for the dancers of the *anastenarikos* Saints’ blessing and protection, which is believed that are going to follow them the whole year around and be spread to their village, their homes and to themselves through their dancing bodies.

In this dance take part mostly those faithful who have vowed¹⁵ the saints their participation in the apolysis dance (the closing dance of the ritual) in order to venerate and celebrate them; they also pray to the saints to help them find a favorable solution to some of their serious problems in return. This is escalated when people promise as a votive offering their participation in the dance and ‘*keep their word*’. According to informants, the problems for which they ask the Saints’ intervention are mainly of health and social-financial nature. People put a special emphasis on the fulfillment of their offerings, believing in and praying on Saints’ reciproci-

¹⁵ The votive offering involves a very personal relation between the man who vows and the spiritual being he addresses to.

ty and solidarity. First in the dance comes the *archianastenaris* (the leader of the *anastenaria* dancers), who is close to the second dancer. Both hold the *amaneti* (the red kerchief), and the *archianastenaris* gradually offers his place, while dancing, to others *anastenarides* and *anastenarisses* (male and female *anastenaria* dancers respectively); the rest of the people dance following them. It is conspicuous that this performance is a powerful means which both empowers people and distinguishes the *anastenaria* dancers from the rest of *Costilides*.

It is obvious that in order to deal with the difficulties of their lives, people need to face each other and make a variety of negotiations amongst themselves. The story that follows illustrates, in our opinion, the deep social interconnectedness of these relations, which are established so that people can compromise with certain situations or not. It seems that this context is not as stable and unchanged. Instead, it is much more complex, fluid and ambiguous and a lot of things are challenged. This becomes more explicit especially when not unusual things happen, such as when someone does *not* “keep his word”.

Challenging relations: “Even a saint needs to be threatened”.

According to *anastenaria* dancers the ritual starts with *agitikos* dance (i.e. that of the Saints) which is performed “*by the Saints themselves*” and not by them. The *agitikos* dance is the only one among *anastenaria* dances that is accompanied by songs referred to the Saints Constantine and Helen. These songs are drilling strong religious prompt not only for members of the *anastenaria* company but also for the faithful who are present. The *agitikos* dance is the first dance that is performed when “*they [the anastenaria dancers] are possessed by the spirit of the Saints*” and is indispensable performed in every *anastenaria* dance rituals.

Furthermore, the *anastenaria* dancers as they say are relieved from their strong religious pathos (passion) through the *agitikos* dance. They specifically say that “*dance disencumbered them*”; they feel that “*a weight is lifted from them*”. It is believed that during the *agitikos* dance *anastenarides* have the opportunity to express their worship sentiments to the Saints, give their thanks to them on for their protection on behalf of the community, and to seek for their assistance. *Anastenarides*’ role as representatives of the Saints is imbued by a range of wills, obligations, conflicts and negotiations between their company and their community. This is obvious as *anastenarides* believe that behind any blessing or infliction that burst into their village, it is the hand of their protectors Saints, and community people believe that behind any ‘signs’ sent by the Saints there are the *anastenarides*. If we consider that the *anastenaria* dancers are ‘possessed’ by the Saints, it seems that this relation is a highly complex one, not just an ‘open-hearted’ one. We can suggest that due to their pain

(Dubisch 1995, 99-115) through their dance performances, the *anastenarides* challenge any kind of oppression.

Let us see what happened in the *konaki*, during a pause between dance rituals in the 1992 festivities of the village of Aghia Eleni, featuring a person from the *anastenaria* group.¹⁶ Platonas – a 55-year old man, married, a father of two children, a peasant – had been *anastenaris* for about 25 years at the time. He was together with the rest of the *anastenarides* at their usual position, that is, on the right side of the *konaki* (the musicians are on the left, and in the middle dance takes place) in front of the pew, where the icons are placed. He seemed thoughtful and looked as if something had been troubling him. Suddenly, he began to cry and complain to the “dancing” icons saying: “*If you don’t do me the favour, I will never touch you again*” (meaning to dance with them). Then, an older *anastenaris* intervened and said to him: “*Platona, stop! You shouldn’t tell the Grandfathers such words*”; and the complaining *anastenaris* replied: “*even a saint needs to be threatened*” and wondered loudly: “*I do them the favour (meaning the “dancing” icons) when they call me to dance on burning coals, don’t I?*”

As Platonas informed us later, the reason he reacted in such a way was due to a serious health problem of a member of his family; he had long expected the help he had asked for from the icons in return, since for many years, when the icons “called” him to dance with them, he was always willing to dance with them, thus honouring and venerating them. However, when he asked the icons to help him with the problem he had been facing, they had yet to respond to his requests; instead, he felt that they had abandoned him.

If Platonas was staying silent ‘threatening’ the Saint in his personal prayer, no one could ever be part of his expectations. By presenting his ‘weakness’, he introduced his colleagues and some community people to his problem. Loosing his self-control, Platonas became a tool for seeking help. His refusal to dance leaving ‘without companion’ his ‘Grandfathers’ was a way to challenge the Saints’ relation with their ‘representatives’, meaning not only Platonas but also the community people. If the Saints cannot protect him, then they have no power as ‘protectors’ and, subsequently, loose their followers. Platonas, a former powerful *anastenaris*, called up his personal and social efficacies to deal with his ‘weakness’. His conflicting performance indicates his intention to challenge Grandfathers’ ‘reciprocity and solidarity’ towards him and his community, as those who ‘do not keep their word’ for a cause.

It is conspicuous that the *anastenaria* ritual is not just a celebration of the past, a locus of hope for miracle working or a kind of lineal model

¹⁶ The scene has been recorded in a video tape on 21st of May in 1992.

exchange. Furthermore, the *anastenaria* dancers are engaged in a system of relations where the fulfillment of different needs is challenged many times. People are vowing to dance as fulfillment to ‘Grandfathers’ asking and seeking for protection. Dance is not a mutual exchange but rather is activated towards challenging social relations providing an unstable, fluid and socially constructed locus including conflicts and negotiations where one can deny dancing – that is, to fulfill one’s votive offering (as Platonas did) – as one sees that one is not protected. Representatives and mediation through dance consist of a complex social system of relations based on several kinds of needs of both ‘protectors’ and ‘followers’ which are extended to local community too.

‘Dancing’ icons and *anastenaria* dancers act as representatives of the Saints and have considerable power within this framework, with different intentions and purposes, in several relations, expressing all these multi-levelled relations through dance. Dancing with the ‘Grandfathers’, regardless the social contradictions, empower people resisting on impedimenta confronting conflicts and negotiations, inclusions and exclusions.

When the word is not kept dance can not start, meaning that things can be challenged and nothing can be taken for grounded highlighting the complex interactions that dance can enact in rituals.

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Мимина Патераки

Плес као пракса посвећења у анастенијском ритуалу

У овом раду, бавимо се плесом *костилидес*, из места Агиа Елени (Света Јелена), близу града Сера (северна Грчка), и, још одређеније, анастенијским ритуалом. Приступајући анастенијском плесу као својеврсној заветној жртви, коју локално становништво приноси свецима (св. Константину и св. Јелени) од којих заузврат очекује помоћ, третирамо концепт *патронске организације* као комплексну везу *заштитника* и *следбеника*. Такође, тврдимо да анастенијски

плес не представља само узајамну размену, већ и изазов сложеним друштвеним односима. Анализа етнографске грађе прикупљене на теренском истраживању довела нас је до закључка да људи плешу да би успоставили друштвене односе који ће их оспособити за конфликте и преговоре, односно укључивање и искључивање.

Кључне речи: Анастенариа, *плешуће иконе*, пракса посвећења