

## Dance and Pythagorean Symbolism: A Case Study

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| Eleni Filippidou<sup>1,2\*</sup> | Georgia Paraskevi Gerogianni<sup>2</sup> |

<sup>1</sup>School of Physical Education and Sport Science, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

<sup>2</sup>STAPS, University of Sorbonne Paris Nord –French College of Greece ‘IdEF’, Athens, Greece

\*[filipele@phed.uoa.gr](mailto:filipele@phed.uoa.gr)

### ABSTRACT

The research field of this paper is the community of Limni, which is located on the island of Evia in Greece. The aim of this research paper is to study the symbolic dimension of the Kamarachti dance from the Limni of the island of Evia in Greece. In particular, the paper attempts to highlight the symbolic characteristics of the dance under study, in order to determine the reason for its performance during the Easter period, throughout which many rituals related to the regeneration of nature are performed, that is this paper attempts to determine its function. Data was gathered through ethnographic method as this is applied to the study of dance, while its elaboration with the comparative method. The Kamarachti was recorded and analyzed using the Laban notation system and the morphological method. Finally, the symbolic function of Kamarachti was interpreted on the basis of the Pythagorean philosophical tradition. From the data analysis was found that the Kamarachti dance in the community of Limni on the island of Evia, on the basis of its symbolism, emerges as the protector of a magical process that aims at the rebirth of nature. This dance, with its magical and laxative properties and powers, avoids any demonic imposition, in order to ensure the euphoria of the earth.

### KEYWORDS

dance; symbolism; Pythagorean; ethnographic research; Kamarachti dance.

## INTRODUCTION

Dance is a multifaceted phenomenon, which has been approached research from various perspectives (Sarakatsianou, 2011). One of them angles, which the dance was approached was its symbolism. So, various researchers have dealt with the symbolism of dance in the context of ritual practices, in a purely theoretical approach or at a folklore level.

The research field of this paper is the community of Limni in the island of Evia. The community of Limni is located in the coastal area of the northern Evia gulf in Greece and today is the seat of the municipality of Mantoudi-Limni-Agia Anna (former name: municipality of Elymnion). Due to its natural configuration and the involvement of the locals with shipping, the Limni shows historical and cultural peculiarities in relation to the surrounding areas. From the historical years it was an important passage to and from the Sporades, because it is located between the straits of Lichada (in the north) and Evripos (in the south). In fact, bibliographic reports confirm that the Limni is built on ancient Elymnio (Bellaras, 2000). An important event in the history of the community was the settlement in 1922 of four thousand refugees from Marmara in present-day Turkey (Bellaras, 2000; Fafoutis, 2001).

Kamarachti is a dance that was danced in the community of Limni, before World War II, during the Easter period (Gerogianni, & Filippidou, 2021). The inhabitants of the Limni danced it every year during this period, as they believed that if they did not do it, it would

bring negative results to the community. Today, however, this dance has ceased to be danced, as the inhabitants of the community have stopped believing in superstitions, with the result that the dance has lost its functionality. In addition, in the post-war period, teachers in schools taught mainly "pan-Hellenic" dances (Dimas, 1987), with the result that local dances were marginalized. For the above two reasons, the Kamarachti dance is now a museum genre. However, despite its marginalization and subsequent "museumization", it is considered the dance that characterizes the community of Limni.

The paradox is that although all the inhabitants support the above fact and know when the dance was danced, none of them knows or remembers why they danced it at that time. Why was the Kamarachti danced at Easter, before World War II, and not all year round? Why the inhabitants did they think that if they did not dance it, this event would have a negative impact on the community?

In order to answer our concerns, it was deemed appropriate to study dance based on its symbolism. Based on the above, the aim of this research paper is to study the symbolic dimension of the Kamarachti dance from the Limni of the island of Evia. In particular, the paper attempts to highlight the symbolic characteristics of the dance under study, in order to determine the reason for its performance during the Easter period, throughout which many rituals related to the regeneration of nature are performed, that is this paper attempts to determine its function. However, the symbolic function of dance will not simply be studied on a folklore level, nor will it have a theoretical approach, but will be studied through the Pythagorean philosophical tradition.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The methodological process of the research consisted of three steps, a) data collection, b) analysis and c) interpretation. Data were gathered through the ethnographic method as this is applied to the study of dance (Buckland, 1999; Sklar, 1991) and based on primary and secondary sources.

More specifically, primary sources refer to data gathered through fieldwork that was carried out at the region of island of Evia, and especially at the community of Limni from June 2010 up to December 2020. Oral history was used as a method, through which everyday memory is projected as a quest of social history (Thomson, 2002). Secondary sources refer to the review of the related bibliography (Lampiri-Dimaki, 1996) that had been collected through archived ethnographic research (Gefou-Madianou, 1997; Stocking, 1992) and includes analysis, evaluation and integration of the published literature (Thomas & Nelson, 2003).

Laban's notation system (Hutchinson, 2005; Koutsouba, 2005), was used to record the Kamarachti dance, while for the analysis of its structure and form, as well as its codification, the structural-morphological and typological method of analysis was used, as it is applied in the Greek Traditional Dance (Karfis, 2018; Koutsouba, 1997, 2007; Tyrovola, 1994, 2001). Finally, the symbolism of the Kamarachti dance and more specifically the symbolic meaning and the secret features of numbers 3, 4 and 7, as well as the figures of circle and cross, which are appeared in the ritual are interpreted according to Pythagorean philosophical tradition (Tyrovola, 2006, 2012).

Specifically, the relevant arguments are developed on the basis of the fundamental principles of Pythagorean numerology presented in the most comprehensible way, using primary bibliographic references from the saved works (biographies and treatises) of important forms of Pythagorean and neo-Pythagorean philosophy, such as Nicomachos Gerasianos, Iamblichos, Porphyrios, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius et al., from indirect or direct references to other later Pythagoras philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, as well

as to neo-Platonists, such as Stoaios, Proclus and Plotinus. At the same time, Greek and international bibliographical references (secondary sources) are used, coming from contemporary scholars of Pythagorean philosophy.

In particular, the interpretation of the data was based on the principles of philosophical research (Thomas & Nelson, 2003; Dimopoulos & Tyrovola, 2008; Tyrovola, 2012), and historical research (Hobsbawm, 1998). Philosophical research was developed in the context of critical exploration and evaluation with the aim of examining reality through the use of stochastic procedures rather than practical tools of empirical science. Philosophical research has followed by the process of stochastic technique, which is necessary in measuring and analyzing concepts and values as they are perceived by humans (Thomas & Nelson, 2003; Dimopoulos & Tyrovola, 2008; Tyrovola, 2012).

Historical research has been based on the identification of relevant primary and secondary sources. In particular, it was based on the critical examination and reading of written sources that give us information about the past, treated as an attempt to restructure and interpret the past for the purpose of interpreting the present (Braudel, 2001). Important parameter in historical research was the use of the "context rule" (Thomas & Nelson, 2003), that is the comprehension of a word or a phrase, depending on what precedes or follows and not just their understanding with their modern use by the scholar (Thomas & Nelson, 2003). Alongside, an attempt was made to create generalizations, i.e. complex statements, that offer against Mandelbaum (1977) the 'opinion' of the scholar on multiple pieces of data. After all, as he claims, if a study of the past did not produce such generalizations would not be history (Mandelbaum, 1977).

### ***The Kamaracti Dance and Its Symbolic Dimension***

Kamaracti is a dance that we find with the name of Kamara dance in various island, mainly, areas of Greece (Gikas, 1975; Rigas, 1970), in which refugees from Asia Minor have settled (Skiathos, Samos, Aliveri of Evia, Limni of Evia etc.). In the Limni on the island of Evia, the dance is called Kamararacti and took its name from the lyrics of the song that accompanies it. The song of Kamaracti refers to the bridge of Arta and is sung all over the Balkans. In fact, only in Greece, we find it in 333 variations (Efthmiou, 2014).

In the community of Limni the dance was danced during the Easter period. Specifically, it was danced from Easter Sunday until Thomas's Sunday and was danced only by women, who sang antiphonal and danced the dance. This was the case before World War II. During the war the dances and the customs stopped, of course, and after the war there were changes in their structures, as there were changes in the economic, social and political conditions in the region. Regarding the Kamaraktikos dance, after the war, the participation of men in it was observed, who danced with the women or alone. Also, its performance was observed in periods other than Easter, without, however, losing its sacred character (Picture 1).



**Picture 1.** The Kamaracti dance on Easter day

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Specifically, after the war, Kamarachtikos was danced at Easter, at the community's religious festival, on May Day, but also after church every Sunday. Today, dance is a museum genre, as it has ceased to be danced at various community dance events, but is only presented by local cultural clubs on the stage. Probably, for the above reasons, the reason why they danced it during the Easter period, before the war, no longer exists in the consciousness of the inhabitants, a fact that is the aim of this paper.

In order to symbolically study the characteristics of the Kamarachtikos dance, we must first make a recording of the dance with Laban notation system (Shape 1), to classify its components (Table 1) and to identify and codify its dance form (Table 2).

Labanotation

μαντήλι

♩

1/4 □ = ♩

**Shape 1.** The Kamarachtikos dance notation before World War II

**Table 1.** Concise table of the component elements of Kamarachti dance before World War II

PARAMETERS	KAMARACHTI DANCE
Choreography	Two basics dance phrases that are repeated.
Kinetic unit	Basic dance phrase constantly repeated.
Steps	Moderate with supports on the sole.
Handle	X (cross handle)
Use of space	Circular shape, open circle with direction to the right. Group dance characterized by the participation of many people.
Dancers' position and gender	Women
Rhythmic pattern	4/4
Rhythmic organization	Moderate and stable.
Musical accompaniment	Antiphonal song
Method of interpretation	Moderate movements.
Dance form model	Bilateral dance form

**Table 2.** Enriched kinetic type of Kamarachti dance before World War II

$AB/\epsilon\upsilon\Phi$ $F1 \ \& \ F2, \ 4/4 \ (2+2)$ $(\mu\mu), \ \alpha \sim 120, \ =$ $MF/Pt.$ $\equiv / I_{\mu} / I_{\rho}, \ \cup, \ W, \ \Delta\Gamma,$ $Ox, \ Ak. \ \curvearrowright$	$XD.1 = X1 \ [\delta^{2/4} + (\delta) \alpha_2^{2/4}] + X3 \ [\alpha^{2/4} + (\alpha) \delta_2^{2/4}]$ $+ X3 \ [\delta^{2/4} + \alpha^{2/4}] +$ <p style="text-align: right;">----- x5 -----</p>
	$XD.1 = X1 \ [\delta^{2/4} + (\delta) \alpha_3^{2/4}] + X3 \ [\alpha^{2/4} + (\alpha) \delta_3^{2/4}]$ $+ X3 \ [\delta^{2/4} + \alpha^{2/4}] +$ <p style="text-align: right;">----- x5 -----</p>
	$[ \{XD1x5\} + \{XD2x5\} ] .x$

Observing, recording and analyzing the Kamarachti dance, it is found that it is a **bilateral** alternating dance form. Both dance phrases consist of **three** meters, that is **three** kinetic motifs of **4/4**. In each kinetic motif correspond to **two** movements of **2/4**. The dance also has a slow to moderate rhythmic conduction and is a **circular** dance that is danced in the shape of an open circle with a **cross** handle.

It is therefore established that this dance has certain morphological characteristics. These characteristics are the bilateral dance form (2), the musical measure (4), its movements in each kinetic motif (2), its structural shape (3), its cross handle (X) and its shape (circular). So we understand, on the basis of the above, that in the Kamarachti dance dominate the numbers 2,3 and 4, but also the shapes of the circle and the cross. From the archaic years, the above numbers and shapes are associated with the sacred, as revealed by the plethora of related references found in mythology, religion, mysticism, magic and later folklore (Tyrovola, 2007). Therefore, it seems that their presence in this dance is not accidental.

On the basis of the Pythagorean philosophical tradition let us see what the above characteristics mean. One of these features is its shape. Kamarachti dance is danced in the form of an open circle. The circular is the most basic shape in Greek traditional dance.

Circular dances for all the ancient peoples were considered particularly important. As a rule, it was danced either around an altar or around a sacred symbol, thus creating the

meaning of the magic circle. In particular, in primitive societies at the center of the circle there was the worshiped deity or its representative, that is the magician or the priest, who directed the whole magical process (Filippidou, Koutsouba, & Tyrovola, 2019, 2020; Panagiotou, Papadopoulou, Nikiforidis, & Zacharis, 2000; Tyrovola, 1999). According to Lambropoulou (1986) and Tyrovola (1999, 2012), the circle contains the ideas of "agglomeration", "give and take" and "containing" and as a mysterious symbol protects the sacred space while, at the same time, aims at purification and the removal of evil (Tyrovola, 1999).

Another characteristic of Kamarachti dance is its cross handle. According to Tyrovola (2012), the shape of the cross is a combination of the Pythagorean cube and the Pythagorean sphere. In terms of its symbolism, the cross is a heptatic symbol, which contains the numbers 3 and 4, for those numbers there will be a reference below. The cross handle has the effect that the dancers come in a closer relationship with each other and thus enhance the realization of their wishes (Filippidou, Koutsouba, & Tyrovola, 2019, 2020; Panagiotou, Papadopoulou, Nikiforidis, & Zacharis, 2000; Tyrovola, 1999).

Kamarachti dance consists of two dance phrases. The duo, for the Pythagoreans is both even and odd, it is male and female. For them, the number two represents the first stage towards the path of creation (Filippidou, Koutsouba, & Tyrovola, 2012; Tyrovola, 2006).

The Kamarachti dance is structured on the basis of the dance type "sta tria" (in three), consisting of three kinetic motifs. Three is considered the number of the triangle, one of the most representative symbols of the triune deity and is considered to have power and magical properties (Tyrovola, 2006). Also, the odd number three in the Pythagorean system prevails over the even number in the composition and displays a whole that has a beginning, middle and end. Aristotle considered the number three as the number of the Universe, since "Trittis" reveals the three concentric circles or worlds of the Universe, that is, the physical, the human and the divine (Aristotle, 1989; Tyrovola, 2001, 2006, 2012, 2013). At the same time, he argued that this sum symbolized the ultimate reality, the highest perfection and was believed to include all arithmetic, geometric and musical harmonies (Aristotle 1989). The number three according to the Pythagoreans is considered fertile (Filippidou, Koutsouba, & Tyrovola, 2012, 2019, 2020; Tyrovola, 2006; Veikos, 1988).

Finally, Kamarachti dance has a musical measure of 4/4. The number four according to the Pythagoreans expresses the completion of all things ( $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ) giving the number ten or otherwise Pantelia' (Tyrovola, 2006). The foursome constitutes perfection as expressed in the cycles of time and constitutes the completion of the group (Filippidou, Koutsouba, & Tyrovola, 2012, 2019, 2020; Tyrovola, 2001, 2006). The foursome is called by the Pythagoreans "the greatest miracle" and "god otherwise way" from the trinity (Nikomachos, 2009; Tyrovola, 2012). And that's because, on the one hand, in the trinity the first perfect becomes visible, but in the foursome all are included worldly natures according to the principle of causality and, secondly, why the numbers 3 and 4 reduced respectively to the combinations of triangle and cross, symbols with strong mystical reference (Iamblichus, 1998; Smyrnaeus, 2011; Tyrovola, 2012, 2013). For the Pythagoreans, everything, both physical and numerical, was completed in the progress of one to four. They expressed it with the four seasons, the four elements (earth, air, fire and water), the four vital musical intervals and the four types of planetary of movement (Filippidou, Koutsouba, & Tyrovola, 2012, 2019, 2021; Iamblichus, 1998).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this research paper was to study the symbolic dimension of the Kamarachti dance from the Limni of the island of Evia. In particular, in this paper was attempted to highlight the symbolic characteristics of the dance under study, in order to determine the reason for its performance during the Easter period, throughout which many rituals related to the regeneration of nature are performed, that is, in this paper was attempted to be determined the function of the dance.

In order to achieve this aim, it was deemed appropriate to use the Pythagorean philosophical tradition for the interpretation of the data, in order to establish the symbolic characteristics of the Kamarachti dance. From the analysis of the data it was found that this dance has specific morphological characteristics, which enable it to function symbolically during its performance.

In particular, the three meters' motif of the dance is associated with the sanctity and metaphysical interpretation of the number three, symbolizing fertility, as well as the bilateral form that symbolizes the path to creation. Furthermore, the four-note musical measure of the dance symbolizes the completion and its cross handle helps to enhance the realization of the wishes of the participants. Finally, its circular shape symbolizes the removal of any demonic influence.

All of the above are symbolic expressions of magical beliefs, which seek the mediation of divine power. Therefore, it is understood that, Kamarachti was danced to achieve a desired goal. Considering that the period of his performance was Spring and that the numbers 2, 3 and 4 that appear in the dance, based on its symbolism, symbolize fertility, it is found that what was sought in Kamarachti was the rebirth of nature, which in turn, would contribute to the abundance of goods and therefore to the well-being of the participants.

In conclusion, the Kamarachti dance in the community of Limni on the island of Evia, on the basis of its symbolism, emerges as the protector of a magical process that aims at the rebirth of nature. This dance, with its magical and laxative properties and powers, avoids any demonic imposition, in order to ensure the euphoria of the earth. This, it seems, was the reason why the inhabitants of the community wanted to dance it in every year, without exception. In fact, although today they do not know what the dance symbolized and for what reason they was dancing it, and although it is only danced on stage, this dance still retains an importance in the memory of the inhabitants.

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