**Agnieszka Jeż (Warszawa)**

**Paying for Music – Money as an Object in the Traditional Greek dance**

**The present text was written within the Harmonia project “Objects in traditional Modern Greek dance”, which is generously sponsored by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (project no.: 2013/08/M/HS2/00447).**

Money as an object in the traditional dance in a physical sense is **manifested in two forms: as coins and banknotes**. Its first **natural meaning** results from its physical form and in this way it appears in dance. The second meaning, so called **non natural meaning**, given by the society in a contractual way, is perhaps much more interesting for us and it is **connected with the functions** money has in the dance situation. The primary role is an **economic** one, as an equivalent of goods, mean of payment given to musicians in exchange for their play by a person (or a group of people) ordering a dance or participating in a dance-event. The second role is very significant, it is **the social function:**  **the creation of the status** of individual units which represent a family community. Therefore one can assume that it **plays a role of a communicative medium** within a specified group. One of my informers put it accurately: ‘*Money is the way of telling something’*.

Money, thanks to its **symbolic associations**, is the transmitter of many socially desirable values, and therefore has sometimes **a ceremonial (ritual) function** ( during a wedding, when it is given to a newly-wed couple in many ritualistic ways). The symbolic meaning of abundance does not have to be reflected in the real value of the donated sum at all. Lastly, money may appear in a function not connected with payment, playing a **decorative role**, most frequently as an element of the outfit (and here we have the *colaina* necklace; in this case one can speak of its musical, rhythm-generating function as well, close to the role, which the percussion instruments play during a dance). Some of the customs, especially connected with the wedding, in which money appears, can also be very spectacular (like the custom called *tsouri* )– so we can speak here about the decorative function as well. From the **technical point of view** in the dance money does not seem to play a significant role, but its appearance in some dances (especially the ritual wedding ones) became a part of tradition and is a side effect of its primary ritual function.

**A concept of a gift in a traditional community and its function in a dance-event**

In a traditional village community in Greece **money appeared quite** late because of naturally **isolated** local groups inhabiting **islands** as well as places difficult to reach in the **mountains**, so typical for the Greek landscape. In the period preceding the Second World War it happened that people paid for music with something different than money; most often these were their own food products (i.e. olive oil), or farm produce. In many places in Greece the concept of **gift** and **reciprocity,** which has not been entirely substituted by money transactions, is still incredibly significant. In case of dance-events, it can be both musicians’ play and the payment for it. In a traditional community the **subjectively perceived value** of the exchanged object (material or not) was also crucial both for the giver and the receiver. The objective value was of a lesser importance, and was sometimes difficult to calculate and was usually regulated, especially in the family and ceremonial customs context, by a local convention.

One important remark: Starting from the very beginning, in Greek communities the traditional accompaniment of a dance was the **human voice** most of all. Till today people dance to and order songs, not dances. And there were women who sang for the most part and were never paid for this (which would be almost equal to an insult). We can observe a **process of substituting a female voice with instruments, which were nearly strictly the domain of the men’s world,** took place gradually and did not lead to entire elimination of the practice of dancing to singing.

Musicians were **recruited only from their own community** there and**playing** musical instruments was usually **an additional occupation**, secondary to work and family duties, something that today we would define as a **hobby**. (There is a popular saying: *Musician cannot feed the family).* The payment could appear spontaneously as **an expression of an outstanding gratitude** from the receiver, who was the dancer ordering a song. **It was not a payment in the contemporary meaning of the word but a gift**. The gift resulted from **joy** (*hara*) and expressed both **emotions and economic status, imagination, spiritual condition,** defined by the Greeks as *kefi.* The **rejection** of such a gift would be offensive and would mean **a refusal of participation in a relationship.** The payment understood this way was **deprived of economic logic**; it was rather a gift for the players, caused by the outburst of emotions connected with a dance-event.

Considering the question of paying for music, we should raise the issue of **status of a musician in a society**. The process, which the status of a musician underwent, is also interesting. The change was gradual and was supported by the **professionalization of play and growing competition connected with crossing the border of a local community** (when musicians from neighbouring places were invited). **The mass-media** started to play the leading role in this process at a certain point (radio, television). Playing for a community different from the local one was connected with the necessity of payment. The amount of earnings **was never stable and predictable**, as it **depended on many factors**. Situations when players **did not receive the expected payment** for their work happened occasionally. Dealing with such a delicate matter depended on local customs and the attitude of the players. Sometimes musicians **continued to play** (as one of my informers said: “the most important things to me are music and whether people enjoy themselves”), sometimes they **stopped playing**, however, if the dancer did not pay, or paid too little. One of the informers claimed that if the payment is not satisfactory to the musicians, they **play for a shorter period of time** (and presumably also **with less commitment**). The trend described on the island of Chios, where the musicians change their money and… give change for playing an ordered “piece” seems to be completely new and still rather exceptional. Generally, it seems that in a traditional community the message concerning the **necessity of paying was legible to all**. According to one of the informers, the inhabitants of the village usually knew that they had to pay, some saved for that cause in case of lack of them they knew that “**He who has no money, does not go to *panigiri****”*. On the other hand, communities driven by other rules, in which social exclusion of this kind was unacceptable, also existed. Moreover, even if one did not have the right sum of money at disposal, there always was a possibility that someone from the family or a friend would pay.

Apart from musicians recruited from local communities, **the** **Romani** are an incredibly significant group. The Romani bands are particularly popular on the continent, whereas on Greek islands only the local instrumentalists play. The Romani, living on the outskirts of villages and bigger agglomerations, were – according to our informers – “both **inside and outside the society**”. Their **status was usually assessed as relatively low**, visibly strange and separate. The Romani undertook various works and, as the informers claim, “had enough time for playing”. The word “Romani” sometimes meant just “musicians” in everyday language. Jane H. Cowan turned attention to a peculiar dehumanisation of this group in the eyes of the community, which was also expressed in the language. They are described by the word *organa* (instruments). Such “instrumentalization” she ascribes to the hierarchic social structure, in which the Romani were situated low but the terminology seems to be common and occurs also there, where only the local community performs as musicians (Karpathos, Crete). For some Romani playing was the only source of income and they were just perceived as “**those who play for money**”. As ”strangers” and musicians who were always paid, they also had influence on further commercialisation of music by participation in performances in ethnically mixed bands.

**The amount of money**, which the players received, was most of all **connected with the status of a musician** in the community inviting him. The research has shown that local differences are so significant here that it is always necessary (especially in case of Greece) to refer to local sources. Some reports confirm **the respect** **which was shown to good instrumentalists, including the Romani**; other confirm the low status of the players. In case of individual musicians the following elements were assessed: **knowledge of the local repertoire and preferences of the individual community members, ability to play loudly (it was important if the event took place in open space), physical endurance (connected with the necessity of playing for many hours without any rest), ability to improvise and “adorn” songs (ability to create *mantinades* particularly valued by listeners), and lastly – ability to build relationships with people**. The last one seems particularly significant and could have been expressed by the unique bond created by a dance-event. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the common impression was that the act of payment confirmed the prestige of the payer not of the musician, most of all.

Dance (or rather a specific song) was always ordered by a **dancer taking the first place** in the procession. It is commonly believed that it was “only him who danced”, **gave the tempo, direction, improvised figures, whereas the rest of dancers performed basic steps**. In a village community it was an incredibly important situation. The first dancer had an opportunity to present his skill, strength, endurance and imagination, but also to **socially negotiate his status**. Usually it was also a moment for a young man, when he had a chance to **present his qualities as a potential life partner**. Women in a traditional community rather could not lead a dance, although there were some exceptions. It was not a common practice for women to pay for a dance, a man, however (someone from the family most often), could pay for them and invite them to a privileged place in the procession. So also for the girls, whose dance was paid, it was a solemn moment which they waited for a whole year. Dancers were aware of having a unique opportunity which could not happen again, therefore it was incredibly important that a dance went well. **A unique relationship, which at that time connected a dancer with musicians, was of great importance.** In dancers’ opinion a good instrumentalist was able to intuitively adjust the tempo of the play to the skill and endurance of a dancer, laid stress on his figures and style, by maintaining eye contact with him, or by observing his legs. That contact could also have other forms, such as in the situation mentioned in one of the interviews, when a musician hit the lyre with the bow, showing this way his appreciation for the artistry of a dancer or he stood up to honour him. Such gestures were appreciated by dancers and they usually influenced payment. Dancers, on the other hand, had a repertoire of gestures at hand, which they used to regulate individual elements of a dance (dynamics, figures). **So the most important show took place between the first dancer and the leader of a band -** one of musicians playing the leading melodic instrument (clarinet, sometimes violin on the continent, on islands – tsambuna or lyre). The act of paying also gave dancers an opportunity to raise their own status through the increase of payment. It was possible to pay in an ostentatious way to show wealth, generosity or imagination, or in a more discreet way (i.e. into a pocket), to hide poverty. It even happened that musicians (which was earlier agreed) returned a part of money, which was paid to show off in front of the community

**Ways of payment for playing music**

In a traditional community **ordering a song was connected with the moment of payment**. There are many ways, in which money was usually given. One of them was **throwing it on the floor** under the feet of the orchestra members (in some places this custom was only reserved for the Romani bands). This custom was described **as *asimono****,* a term originally referred to gilding silver on an icon. One of the informers recalled other term here: *chrisono* (from the word: gold). It was usually allowed to let money lie on the ground so long that those present could estimate the amount, and the generosity of the payer at the same time. There was a custom in Crete that musicians could not collect money before they finished playing, which generated some loss (banknotes taken by the wind or coins collected by children, etc.). Sometimes a special person was appointed (a child most often), whose task was to collect money from the ground and put it aside. One of the most interesting customs is so **called *tsouri,***described on the island of Simi, where *the guests e guests offer money, throwing it towards the violinists, making a “fire” by throwing silver coins onto the spot when the couple is dancing*. It is one of the situations where money next to its main role, plays also a decorative one., which gives it a remarkably spectacular character.

Money may also be put in one **particular place**. It can be a tray**, a basket, a bottle or a jug** exposed by the musicians. Putting coins or banknotes into **musicians’ pockets** is also a common practice, from where the earnings are transferred into a bigger sack belonging to all members of the band. An interesting custom is **throwing coins into instruments**, i.e. into a lyre, or into a tsambouna bagpipe. Other ways are throwing money **under a shirt, inserted behind one’s ear, into a hat, or under it, and the most spectacular – sticking licked banknotes onto the instrumentalist’s forehead**.

The sum, earned during their work, was shared among musicians. Whether the rate was the same for everyone, or not, depended on local customs. Many a time the biggest sum was given to the one playing a melodic instrument). In contemporary bands it is the singer most often (previously absent in a band). Sometimes the **age, experience** **and fame** of the players decided on the share, there are different opinions here, however: usually in such situations the oldest musician was appreciated the most, depending on his experience and the skill to play, but it also happened that younger ones were valued because they could endure many hours of playing. In most cases, however, they were paid equally and it happened that no one could have been distinguished by higher earnings. There might have been a **disagreement while earnings were shared**; resulting from a purposeful or accidental hiding of money by individual musicians . Generally the bands depended on their previous agreements on their earnings and apart from disagreements (fuelled by alcohol) sharing was collision-free.

**Money as a ritual object at family celebrations**

Apart from its function as a medium of payment, the **ritual role of money** is incredibly significant. Instead of being a charge**, it is a gift**, **an expression of relationships** between people within a particular community. This phenomenon can be observed particularly during **family celebrations, especially weddings**. Coins and banknotes appear there as symbols **of wealth and abundance** which were elements of wishes to a newly-wed couple. A dance-event is a perfect moment when a family and a local community may give their gifts, so no wonder that giving money became a ritual and a constant element of some wedding dances to such extent, that coins and banknotes can be given a specific, technical role in a dance. That happens in case of *fumistos* (a wedding dance) or *koupa* (where a man pays for dancing with a woman by throwing money to a chalice).Another custom of *kubaros* (best men) who collect money to a basket during a wedding also became a ritual.

One of the ways to give money to a newly-wed couple is the custom of **fixing coins or banknotes to the bride’s clothing, described as *ploumisma*** or already mentioned custom of *tsouri.*

In this presentation I tried to show the diversity of roles and meanings of money in a traditional Greek dance and its social, ceremonial, technical, or decorative functions. The dynamics of changes, which a traditional Greek community undergoes, is incredibly fascinating and is perfectly reflected in the usage of money. The richness of references and nuances, so characteristic for such diverse territory of Greece, sends us away to do further research and quest.