

ROUND DANCE TRADITION OF BELGORIE: THE SEMANTIC AND CULTURAL ASPECT

TRADICIÓN DE BAILE REDONDO DE BELGORIE: EL ASPECTO SEMÁNTICO Y CULTURAL

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ABSTRACT

The accumulated rich archival material on the musical folklore of the Belgorod region actualizes the problem of the semantic analysis of round dance songs as the dominant genre of the region's traditional culture. In this work, based on expeditionary materials and researchers' publications, the choreographic forms of round dances (circular karagods, tanks, figured tanks) of the Belgorod region are identified and described. The general scientific research methods within the framework of comparative, logical and statistical analysis are utilized. The systematic approach to research used in the process of modeling dance culture contributed to the reconstruction of the three-part picture of the world, captured in the dance in many versions.

Keywords: Round Dance Songs; Composition; Choreography; Semantics Of Round Dance Movements; Semantic Aspects; Dance Culture.

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RESUMEN

El rico material de archivo acumulado sobre el folclore musical de la región de Belgorod actualiza el problema del análisis semántico de las canciones de danza redonda como el género dominante de la cultura tradicional de la región. En este trabajo, basado en materiales expedicionarios y publicaciones de investigadores, se identifican y describen las formas coreográficas de las danzas redondas (karagods circulares, tanques, tanques figurados) de la región de Belgorod. Se utilizan los métodos generales de investigación científica en el marco del análisis comparativo, lógico y estadístico. El enfoque sistemático de la investigación utilizado en el proceso de modelado de la cultura de la danza contribuyó a la reconstrucción de la imagen del mundo en tres partes, capturada en la danza en muchas versiones.

Palabras clave: Canciones de baile redondo; composición; coreografía; semántica de los movimientos de baile redondo; aspectos semánticos; cultura de la danza.

INTRODUCTION

A traditional dance is a kind of unique text that reflects the culture of a particular ethnic group. The dance that belongs to the musical forms of art is rooted in imitation, and dance gestures based on the category of mimesis are in possession of expressing the content and their being perceived (Kapanadze, 2006; Aristidou et al., 2019). The mimetic nature of ritual dances is expressly developed in the study of the entire semiotic complex of the ritual, including play, music, folk song, poetry, “In dance culture, the main means of interaction and communication of people is the most ancient language – non-verbal, based on mimesis, which is embodied with the help of the main means of sign formation: shaping and composition, rhythm, meter, dynamics” (Giannoulakis et al., 2018; Portnova, 2021).

Among scientific findings, there is a large number of definitions of the round dance genre. Kapanadze gives the following definition, “... the term “round dance” (“khorovod”) is used to denote a certain type of game action, in which participants join hands and, forming a ring, slowly move in one direction or another while singing songs. in the middle of it, one or more enact the story of the song” (Kapanadze, 2006; Joshi & Chakrabarty, 2021).

It should be noted that in various song traditions, singing and dancing in a ring is very specific and different in its form of existence (Rallis et al., 2018). But there are very few works dedicated to the study of this genre in the context of certain musical dialects.

On the whole, this study attempts to investigate the semantic and cultural aspect round dance tradition of Belgorie.

METHODS

The general scientific research methods within the framework of comparative, logical and statistical analysis are utilized to meet the study’s aims. Substantial contributions to this field of research are made by Mikhailova, (2014), the author analyzes the musical style of round dance songs, their poetic content.

The scholar establishes that in the Kursk region a circle dance is represented by two forms of existence, “tank is a round dance of a predominantly dance character with developed choreographical constructs and many figures, and circular karagod is a kind of dance based on the individual skill of the dancers”. The main difference between these forms lies in the musical accompaniment, “tanks were performed to the very participants’ singing, and karagods were often performed to musicians’ playing”.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The variety of round dance forms and songs on the territory of the Belgorod region is explained by the presence here of three large musical and ethnographic style zones: Belgorod-Kursk, Belgorod-Oskol, Belgorod-Voronezh. In the tradition of the Voronezh-Belgorod borderland, the round dance genre is represented by various forms of existence: round dance songs per se performed while doing tanks; “karagod” songs, accompanied by vigorous dancing and without it; song-games or game walk-arounds.

As a rule, they performed “karagods” on the enormous road. In “caragod” people gathered in the evening from all parts of the village and went to the “wide street” to sing, dance and just talk.” Both old and young people gathered in “karagod”: girls, boys, newly married couples. The only condition that existed was that they never took their children with them. From each street they gathered in the “wide” street, walked around in a separate “karagod”. At first, they could walk several circles, while simultaneously performing different “karagod” songs, and then converge in a common circle. Here you could also hear lingering songs and ditties to the accordion accompaniment.

According to the respondents, the first “karagod” of the year was started after Easter. However, only psalms were sung during Lent, and on “permitted” holidays, such as the Annunciation, Pussy Willow Sunday, they sang Lent songs. So, in the village of Podseredneye, Alekseyevsky District, Belgorod Region, on Easter day early in the morning they went to church, then broke their fast and then went out into the street. In every street, they first sang the song *Ty Zarya Moya, Zoryushka* (“Ты, заря моя, зорюшка”)

The timing of the performance of round dance songs in the local tradition is mainly due to the poetic content and covers the entire annual cycle. However, the same text in different villages can be timed to coincide with different seasons. For example, the song *Na Gore Na Krutoi* (*На горе, на крутой*) / *In a steep mountain* in the village of Bolshe-Bykovo, Krasnogvardeisky district, Belgorod region is a “winter” one, in the village of Ilovka, Alekseyevsky district, it is “maslenichnaya” (it is timed to Maslenitsa festival); *Na Pole, na Polyane, Vysokom Kurgane* (*На поле, поляне, высоком кургане*) / *On the field, the clearing, the hill* in the village of Bolshe-Bykovo, in the village of Lower of Krasnogvardeisky district is a “spring” song; *Poshepchi, Solovushek v Sadu* (*Пошепчи, соловушек, в саду*) / *Whisper, the Nightingales, in the Garden* in village of Podseredneye of Alekseyevskiy area is “spring”; *Ya Dumala, Podumala Moloda* (*Я думала, подумала молода*) in the Malo-Bykovo village of the Krasnogvardeisky district is “spring”; the song *Zarya Moya, Zoryushka* (*Заря моя, зорюшка*) in the village of Kazatskoye, Alekseevsky district is dated for the feast of seventh Thursday after Easter; in Malo-Bykovo of Krasnogvardeisky district, the village of Podseredneye of Alekseyevsky district – for the Trinity; *Ni Travyshka, Ni Trava* (*Ни травушка, ни трава*) / *Neither grass, nor grass* in the villages of Malo-Bykovo, Lower Pokrovka, Podseredneye is “troitskaya” (it is dated for the Trinity); *Starooskolsky Stan* (*Старооскольский стан*) in the village of Berezki, Alekseyevsky district – “troitskaya”; *U Nas Na Gore Yablonka* (*У нас на горе яблонька*) in the village of Ilovka of

Alekseyevsky district is “semitskaya” (it is timed to the feast of seventh Thursday after Easter; *Gogol, Gogol (Тоголь, гоголь)* in village of Berezki of the Alekseevsky district is “troitskaya” (it is dated for the Trinity); Vishen’ye, Oreshen’ye (Вишенье, орешенье) in the village of Khlevishche of the Alekseevsky district is “troitskaya”.

In the local tradition, the “karagod” songs are of two types: accompanied by vigorous dancing and without it. An integral part of the local “karagods” is “peresek” – a special collective improvisational dance with energetic heels tapping. Initially, only men came out to “tap heels” in “karagod”, and only later, women began to dance it. Dancing, a woman must make everybody see her, her outfit and how she dances.

A positive connection between the dance rhythm and the melody rhythm of the Belgorod “karagod” can be traced at the level of musical composition. The melody verse is usually based on a combination of two rhythmic periods (see Example 1):

Example 1.

The Round Dance Song of the Village of Ilovka

Alekseyevsky district of the Belgorod region

А Ты, Донушка (А ты, Донюшка)

In the territory of the Kursk-Belgorod borderland, round dance songs are the central genre. They penetrate through and structure in particular way the entire annual cycle of rituals and holidays. The very performers give them different names in accordance with the situations in which these songs are performed: “karagodnye”, “tanochnye”, “goveyenskie”, “gulbishnye”, “gulenskie”, “postovye”, “ulichnye”.

The round dance songs of this region are also distinguished by the richness of choreographic compositions. A characteristic of this region is a female dance under the dialect name of “tank”. “Tanks” were a festive procession of girls and women through the village. They walked around in early spring – on thawed patches, and in autumn – on pastures, meadows. The composition of “tanks” is based on a common circle formed by pairs of participants. The opposite pairs alternately go out to the center of the circle, and return to the place of the previous pair. The dances were accompanied by special “tank” songs. The main participants in the local “tanks” are girls and women, as well as male walkers, distinguished by their skill in dancing and knowledge of tradition. The rest of the residents were spectators of the festive dance (Khomushku et al., 2019).

A variety of local round dances are “shirinki”. The “shirinki” procession is a round dance walking timed to coincide with the celebration of Krasnaya Gorka (Low Sunday). The tradition of walking “shirinki” is recorded in the villages of the Psel River basin (Kursk-Belgorod borderland). This action was a general gathering in a circular chain. The round dance (khorovod) derived its name from its main attribute – “shirinki” / “ширинки” (towel, embroidered towel / рушник, вышитое полотенце). The procession was strictly regulated. The movement started from the western part of the village. On the last street they chose two of the most beautiful towels (“shirinki”). They were carried by men known as “khozuns”. Each of the towels (“shirinki”) was stretched by “khozuns” over their heads on an outstretched hand. “Khozuns” started up walking “shirinki” (round dance) and closed it.

The round dance itself was a string of pairs of girls and women. The whole procession was directed

to the place of general holiday festivities. At the designated place, a “karagod” was formed around which another, larger one, “grew”, then another one. “Karagod” consisted not only of the participants in the “shirinki”, but also of the people accompanying it. Spectators stood near the round dance – the remaining villagers. Those included the elderly, children, and those who could not dance or sing. The festivities had been lasting until the night (Ladik & Perkova, 2019).

A *Shirinki* Map
in the village of Vyshniye Peny, Rakityansky region of the
Belgorod region

The poetic content of round dance songs covers a wide variety of topics related to social, family and personal living. The songs delineate characters, human relationships, express folk wisdom. One of the central images of round dance songs is the street in which the traditional play was actually performed:

V nas na ulitse udol
Stoyal gorod zemlyanoy
Da syoyal gorod zemlenoy
Da steny kamennai
Verki barkhatnai
Lavki travchatai
Pech muravchataya
(В нас на улице удоль
Стоял город земляной,
Да стоял город земной
Да стены каменнай
Верхи бархатнай
Лавки травчатаяи
Печь муравчатая...)

However, the leading theme of karagod songs is the theme of love. The songs’ lyrics tells about the acquaintance of a boy and a girl, draws various romantic entanglements, and tells about rifts in relations between them. In such songs, one can note a fairly wide spectrum of relations between boys and girls: the extolling of a girl and a boy, the creation of a young couple in a song, a groom’s choice, the theme of parting with a beloved, etc (Mikhailova, 2014).

The variety of choreographic forms registered in the territory of the Belgorod region makes it possible to single out a number of iconic models, at the level of semantic analysis, comparable to the dance culture of the indigenous peoples of Siberia.

As noted by a number of experts in traditional dance culture, an essential condition for doing circular ritual dances was their performance for a long time, until the participants were completely exhausted, often ritual syncretic actions in different peoples could continue for several days. For example, ritual circle dances of the indigenous peoples of Siberia and the North were performed from three to nine days. (Buksikova, 2009 p. 56). The *Yehor* circle dance of the Buryats was lexically associated with the imitative mimetic movements of the Mother-beast of the taiga peoples - marals or deer as a woman, being a symbol of the Sun.

The connection with the ancient oriental cosmogonic theories of birth – the creation of the world and the solar nature is confirmed by the figures – the symbols of karagod and the characteristic elements of its choreography (Joshi & Chakrabarty, 2021). Musical intonations are the basis on which the movements of the hands of the participants of karagod are expressed, and the rhythmic structure of the song and the form of the stanza determine the rhythmic pattern of the movement of the legs. During the karagod dancing, women’s hands are in three main positions: they are lowered down, raised to the level of the head, and “play” above its level (Giannoulakis et al., 2018; Oparina et al., 2020). This hand movement is not accidental: it is contingent on the ideas of our ancestors about the universe in the form of a three-part (three-tiered) picture of the world where everything was interconnected (Aristidou et al., 2019).

As G. G. Pocheptsov notes, “There are three components of different semiotic nature in ritual: ritual (symbolic action); mythological representation; verbal formulas. In phylogeny, ritual action was the first semiotic process that formed mythological representations and language. The language of symbolic actions both in the history of an individual person and in the history of all mankind precedes the verbal language and serves as the basis for its assimilation. In contrast to semantic unidirectionality of movement in ritual, movement in dance is multifunctional. Dance, the oldest of the arts, grew out of ritual and spellful gestures, but it went further, absorbing other, less utilitarian functions than those of ritual and magic” (Pocheptsov, 1997)

The figural palette in the round dance tradition of Belogorie is multifunctional and polysemantic. It has preserved the most ancient ritual walks, traditional drawing, sacred movements associated with building a three-tiered picture of the world, which contributed to the harmonization and sacralization of not only all participants in the round dance performance, but also the space around them. The most ancient figural elements of connection with ancestors were translated by the ring dancer “hozun-skakun” with his movements, who “either danced” like a man, “sometimes jumped” like creatures of another world, in ritual practice those were the disguised old men and old women, representing the world of their ancestors (Portnova, 2021).

The movements of the cheer-leader of “karagod” consisted of intricate improvisations, including a rich palette of Russian male traditional dance. He demonstrated his physical dexterity, endurance, being proficient at choreographic techniques – either with his hands wide-raised, bending down in front of the girl-dancer, or jumping up suddenly. The local community refers this dancing to “a stroke of the wing”, which generally corresponds to the imitation of bird plastic. Indeed, their hands, spread out to the sides like the wings of a huge bird, symbolized the flight of the solar bird of the demiurge, which had different names in different traditions, but had the same functions associated with protective magic, the protection of the sacred borders that secured the entire family. The semantics of these imitative-associative mimetic movements goes back to the ancient cult of birds and animals among the Slavs.

CONCLUSION

It should also be noted that the round dance tradition of Belogorie has retained its unique inimitable coloring not only due to the semantic richness of its elements in which there is a connection with the most ancient mythological ideas, the cult of especially revered animals and birds, an inextricable living connection with ancestors, but also due to the fact that it has accumulated the creative component of this ancient ritual performance, combining the main elements of folk culture of the ethnos in a syncretic unity.

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