

Introduction

In order to understand why Macedonians dance some of the dances that they dance, some understanding of geography and history are important. First of all Macedonia is hemmed in by its neighbors. There is Greece to the south, Bulgaria to the west, Serbia to the north, and Albania to the east. Even greater Macedonia which included much of Greece and Bulgaria and parts of Albania can be considered to be hemmed in. It is impossible to consider Macedonian dance without considering the infusion of other dances from its neighbors. Secondly Macedonia had been a part of the Ottoman Empire for 500 years. This precluded much communication and commerce with the western nations. It is as if time stood still for that many years. (See map, next page, as printed in "The Politics of Terror" by Duncan M. Perry, 1988, ISBN 0-8223-0813-4. This is while Macedonia was part of the Ottoman Empire in 1903.)

Folk culture such as music and dance know no boundaries. What may be Greek to some people is Bulgarian to others. Most cultures take what they like from other cultures and call it their own, even if those other "accursed barbarians" are historical enemies.

I start this out in this manner, because most of the dances that we consider Macedonian are in reality danced by Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Croatians, Albanian, as well as Macedonians. A case in point is the dance Chamiko. This is a dance beloved by many Macedonians. It was my father's favorite dance. He would embellish it with many of his own favorite motifs. To Greeks, however, it is a Greek dance that was historically danced by the freedom fighters that liberated Greece from the Ottoman Turks (klephts). What the Greeks do not know is that this dance is really Albanian, named after the Albanian tribe called tsamia. The same intertwined history may be said about virtually every other Balkan dance.

Some dances have been handed down for many generations. Others have more recent histories. Whatever may be said about communism, one thing cannot be taken away from it. In all of the socialist countries, the communist governments promoted the preservation of folk cultures. This started out with the formation of the Moiseyev dance ensemble in the Soviet Union and continued to every country within the soviet sphere of influence. Within the former Yugoslavia, ensembles were formed for Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia. The Tanec Ensemble of Macedonia was electrifying in its early days (1950s). The alumni of this ensemble went on to teach those folk dances to the rest of the world. These alumni included Atanas Kolarovski, Petre Atansovski, Simos Konstandinou, George Tomov, and many others. These alumni were exceptional dancers. In fact Atanas Kolarovski, a choreographer of Tanec and now in his 80s, still teaches dances and can out dance others half his age. Many of the Macedonian folk dances that were introduced by Atanas were in reality choreographed by him to Macedonian songs that were popular. These include Vrni se Vrni, Belasicko, Ivanica, Star bel dedo, and others. These dances are popular with American folk dancers but in general are unknown to ethnic Macedonians. This syllabus will include dances that are mainly danced by ethnic Macedonians whether they reside in North America or overseas, or whether those dances are "owned" by other nationalities.