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Mad Dance: From Bacchus to Rock

Bacchic dance, a remarkable element of ancient culture, held an important place in the Dionysiac cult from early times.¹ It frequently attracted poets, artists, sculptors and even historians. Though the Bacchantes sank into oblivion over centuries, the practice of mad dance used to rebound in powerful bursts at different times and in different cultures. In this regard, my attention was attracted by medieval Europe, occasionally inundated by strange mad dance, and by modern-day rock festivals.

Dance, in general, is an ancient form of art. By dancing primitive men would 'celebrate' almost all important life events – birth, date, wars, health recovery etc., would invoke rain, sunlight, fertility, would talk to god. The multiple functions of dance have generated diverse definitions: it is believed to be an improvised evolvment of the sex impulse,² or corporal manifestation of communication,³ expression, deep and powerful

¹ Allusions to Bacchic dance date as early as Homer's *Iliad*. When describing Achilles' shield, Homer mentions that Hephaestus' depicted a dancing floor, choros, which had been fashioned by Daedalus in Knossos for Ariadne (*Il.*, XVIII, 591-592). According to the mythological tradition, Dionysus returned Ariadne to Crete after she had been taken away by Theseus. As in the Homeric description the shield featured a whirling dance of young girls and boys, scholars believe that the dancing floor arranged for Ariadne must have been intended for Bacchic dances. See Gordeziani R., *Greek Literature, Hellenic Epics, Lyrics, Drama*, Tbilisi 2014, 28 (in Georgian); Latacz J., *Einführung in die griechische Tragödie*, Gottingen 1993, 30 ff.

² Ellis H., *The Dance of Life*, Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin Company 1923.

³ Van Camp J., *Philosophical Problems of Dance Criticism (Dissertation)*, Temple University, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International 1982.

emotions.⁴ The numerous scientific definitions have only one point in common: dance is a set of rhythmical body movements mostly performed to music. There is a big variety of dance types, styles and forms. One of them is religious dance, which is described as a fossilized form of ritual involving aimless rhythmical body movements of a group of people united by a common belief.⁵

There are groups of people across different nations that develop religious sensations through ritual dance. They find dance most convincing and satisfying of all other movements and become initiated into divine knowledge through dance. Rhythmical movements stimulate religious ecstasy in modern day Muslim Dervishes, American shakers, Hasidic Jews and Siberian shamans.

Bacchic dance must have had the same function in the cult of Dionysus. The dancers were eager to experience communion with the divine. Thus they forgot for a while earthly concerns and taboos. Individuals, humiliated and frustrated by the daily life, had an opportunity to free themselves in Bacchic rituals. Freedom was the essence of the Dionysiac cult – freedom from age or sex constraints, from aggressive state institutions.⁶

Dionysiac cult dance was basically the core element of Oreibasia,⁷ which is attested in many sources.⁸ Bacchantes would worship Dionysus

⁴ Blacking J., Kealiinohomoku J. W., *The Performing Arts: Music and Dance*, Bristol: Walter de Gruyter 1979.

⁵ Иванов В., *Эллинская религия страдающего бога, Эсхил, Трагедии*, Москва 1989, 388-389; Burkert W., *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz 1977, 67-168.

⁶ Nadareishvili K., *Women in Classical Athens and Greek Tragedy*, Tbilisi 2008.

⁷ Oreibasia was an archaic Dionysian ritual, a nocturnal procession of Bacchantes performed every other year in mountains (Paus., 8. 23. 1; Ael., *Var. Hist.*, 13. 2; Firm. Mat. Err. Prof. Rel. 6. 5) in the cold of the winter solstice (Plul., *De Primo Frigido*, 18, 953 D). According to Pausanias, women would walk up Mount Parnassus (8 000 feet) (Paus., 10. 32.). Plurach describes an event when thyiads' procession on Parnassus (ταῖς θυιάδων – ἡ θυιάς, ἄδος – thyiads (ἡ θυιάς, ἄδος) is another name of Dionysus' female worshippers) was prevented by a snowstorm and a rescue team was sent to save them. Their garments turned crystal from frost (Plul., *De Primo Frigido*, 18, 953 D). Even in Plutarch's times, this ritual was performed in many places across Greece (Plul., *De Primo Frigido*, 18, 953 D).

⁸ A. TrGF III 57; S. Ant., 152, 1154; S. OT 1093; Eur., *HF.*, 680-687, 889 ff., Eur., *Ion*, 1079, 1084; Eur., *Hel.*, 1312 ff., 1345; Eur., *Ph.*, 655, 788-791, 1756; Pratin., TrGf I 4 F 3, 1. 5. 17;

by dancing and would dance until they fell. Moving around the same circle at a frantic speed with one's head thrown back is a typical scene of a Bacchic dance. It was accompanied by music, song and yells. The participants of this procession were in a state of altered consciousness, which was important in the cult service and was qualified as a religious sensation (Epict., III 21, 14). According to Plutarch, night Dionysiac rituals caused full transformation of an individual. The participants lost consciousness and were unable to manage their actions (Plul., *Mul. Virt.*, 13. 249E). According to Iamblichus, at this time human actions did not comply with human categories. They were unaware of what they were doing (Iamb., III. 4-6). Loss of individuality was considered to be the only way to experience god. One's personality faded away in mass mania triggered at the service.⁹ The surviving information about the Dionysiac mania is rather scarce¹⁰ and only leaves room for assumptions over what processes might have been taking place in people during the ritual.

An ecstatic condition can be easily induced by a variety of either combined or individual stimulants. Time-proven means include alcoholic drinks, hypnotic suggestion, rapid breath, specific smoke inhalation, mu-

Pratin, TrGf II 629, 6; Philod. Paian 8 ff., 19 ff., 40, 133 ff., 146 ff. In the tragedy *Semele* by Diogenes of Athens, 'dance' is used as a synonym of 'orgy' (Diog. Ath. TrGF I 45). Dance as a part of the Dionysiac procession is also mentioned by Plutarch: 'Sacrifices, choral dances, and many of the sacred ceremonies usually held on the road, when Iacchus is conducted forth from Athens to Eleusis, had of necessity been omitted...' (Plul., *Alc.*, 34. 4).

⁹ Доддс Э. Р., Менады (Греки и Ирациональное), Санкт-Петербург 2000, 389-390; Иванов В., 1989; 317-320; Gurchiani K., *Dionysian Mysteries and their Reflection in Euripides' The Bacchae* (dissertation), Tbilisi 1999, 53-57.

¹⁰ Der Neue Pauly, *Enzyklopädie der Antike, Das klassische Altertum und seine Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Stuttgart 3, 950 ff.; Gordeziani R., 2014, 285 (in Georgian). Ecstasy (ἔκστασις) is the term that later replaced mania and, in my opinion, is the most adequate designation of a human condition during the Dionysiac cult service – 'be outside oneself' (Plot., 6. 9. 11; Herm in Phdr. p. 103 A). In an ecstatic, i. e. maniacal state, the line between inner and outer processes disappears. Man is detached from reality and does not respond to external stimulants, is overwhelmed with the sensation of happiness, bliss and delight. He resembles a 'vessel' filled with cosmic content, crosses the lines of individuality, losses his personality and joins the world, the absolute, the deity. See Spoerri Th. (Hrsg.) *Beitrage zur Extase*. Basel: Karger 1968; Josuttis H., Leuner H. (Hrsg.) *Religion und die Droge*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1972.

sic and narcotic drugs such as mescaline, lysergic acid and other psychotropic alkaloids.¹¹

Undoubtedly, the Dionysiac dance was one of the ways to induce ecstasy. Neurophysiologists believe that apart from rhythmical movements, the ecstatic state was also brought by the high physical strain which the women developed through running around, whirling and powerful shaking of head, also by remarkably low temperatures and oxygen scarcity. The high level of physical strain might have caused low blood glucose and adrenaline release, while oxygen scarcity affected neuronal activity and brain metabolism, which could have led to intoxication and hallucinations. Modern scientists qualify Lydian maenads' account of milk, wine and honeys streaming from the earth (Eur., *Bacch.*, 146-147) and Theban women's analogical miracles¹² as ecstatic hallucinations. The condition must have been further intensified by vigilance, as the rituals were performed at night and affected the participants' circadian rhythm. The simultaneous effect of several factors could have easily induced mind alteration in the women.¹³

Ecstatic dance was always performed in a group. The worshippers of Dionysus always danced in a thiasos (Eur., *Bacch.*, 56, 75, 115, 136, 680; Arph., *Ran.*, 15-66, 327; Plul., *De Primo Frigido*, 18. 953 D, Hdt. 4. 79, D. 18. 260). This dance even spread to polises, which is quite natural, as the Dionysiac mania was a collective event and triggered collective behavior mechanisms: contagion, imitation and suggestion. The collectiveness of Dionysiac mania was reflected in myths, literature and historical writings.¹⁴

¹¹ Lewis I, *Ecstatic Religion*, Harmandsworth 1971, 39.

¹² Theban bacchantes would strike a thyrsus against a rock and a stream of water would sprang forth, they would push a thyrsus into the ground and wine would come out or would scratch the earth with their fingers and milk would pour out (Eur., *Bacch.*, 704-710).

¹³ Graf F., *Milch, Honig und Wein: Zum Verstandnis der Libation im griechischen Ritual*, in *Perennitas: Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich*, Rome 1980; Bremmer J. N., *Greek Maenadism Reconsidered*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik (ZPE)*, Bd. 55, Bonn 1984, 280.

¹⁴ Neither mythical Dionysus not his worshippers ever experienced solitude. See Burkert W., *Greek Religion* (trans. Raffan J.), Harvard University Press 1985, 161-162. In the very first written source, the Homeric *Ilaid*, Dionysus is surrounded by mad women (nurses) (Hom., *Il.*, VI, 132-133). See Gordeziani R., 2014, 283-284. In vase paintings Dionysus often appears in the company of nymphs, sileni, satyrs and Pan. See Kerenyi K., *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, Princeton Univer-

As mentioned, this type of dance was not limited to the ancient world. It expanded in time and space and later covered entire Europe. However, at that time, it was not a conscious imitation of Bacchantes. To put it simply, Medieval Europeans were recurrently overwhelmed by fits of spontaneous, nonstop mad dance.

According to medieval chronicles, this strange dance 'epidemic' first erupted in a small German city of Kelbig in the 11th century (1021).¹⁵ Later, the mad dance gripped not only Germany but England, France, Luxemburg, historical Netherlands and Italy. The outbreak was the most ferocious in the 13th-17th centuries. It was believed that the dance was sent by Saint John the Baptist or Saint Vitus. The dancing processions were mainly performed at the churches of St. John and St. Vitus and very often started on their commemoration days. Hence the names St. John's Dance and St. Vitus' Dance.¹⁶

In Italy dancing fits were called tarantism as their etiology differed from the European dance epidemic. The name tarantella was associated with a

sity Press 1976, 6th-century vase, fig. 39/A and B. Lets us recall Proetus' three daughters, who were driven mad by Dionysus and the mad Argive women (Apollod., 2. 2. 2, Hes. fr. 20). In Euripides' *The Bacchae*, mania afflicts all Theban women. They turn mad all of a sudden, leave their houses, rush to Mount Cytheron and jointly perform various actions (Lydian and Theban women perform ring dances (χορός/χόρευσις/χορεῖω Eur., *Bacch.*, 21, 63, 114, 220, 379, 680, 862, 1143), whirl on the same place (εἰλίσσω Eur., *Bacch.*, 569), shake their heads/ throw their heads back (ῥίπτω Eur., *Bacch.*, 865) and run at a surprising speed. They cross fields like birds and run across mountains and valleys in a blink (Eur., *Bacch.*, 665, 748-749, 1090-1094). Pausanias too describes how mania gripped the city (Paus., 7. 21). Crowd is a characteristic feature of the cult of Dionysus. See Burkert W., *Antike Mysterien: Funktionen und Gehalt*, Munchen 1990, 47-48; Dianosashvili N., *The Phenomenon of Mass Madness in Bacchae* by Euripides, *Phasis. Greek and Roman Studies*, 2012-2013, 15-16, 386-396.

¹⁵ Waller J., *A Forgotten Plague: Making Sense of Dancing Mania*, the *Lancet*, V. 373, 2009 (February), 625. Eighteen people surrounded a church and would not let the priest officiate the Christmas mass. They would dance hand in hand, would clap hands, jump and yell. The chronicler writes that the infuriated priest cursed them to dance nonstop for the whole year. And truly, they danced almost till next Christmas, hardly able to control their hands and legs.

¹⁶ Midelfort H. C. E., *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, Stanford 1999, 32; Bartholomew R. E., *Little Green Men, Meowing Nuns and Head-hunting Panics: A Study of Mass Psychogenic Illness and Social Delusion*, USA, McFarland & Company 2001, 132; Marks R. W., *The Story of Hypnotism*, USA: Kessinger Publishing 2005, 201; Waller J., 2009, 625.

south Italian tradition that dance either prevented the bite of tarantula, a poisonous spider especially widespread in the province of Taranto, or in case of bite, prevented the penetration of the poison into the blood.¹⁷

St. Vitus' and St. John's dance and tarantella only differed in terms of location, name and the related beliefs, while the symptoms were the same. Like the Bacchic dance, all of them were collective and epidemic, involving dozens, hundreds and even thousands of participants.

The medieval dancers, like Bacchantes, were in the state of altered consciousness. They were unable to manage their body. The eye-witnesses describe the dances as shows: "while they danced their minds were no longer clear' or 'they went raging like beasts over the land."¹⁸ Otherwise, it would be impossible to dance unceasingly with sore and bleeding feet. People danced nonstop for hours, days, weeks and even months, yelling, roaring, laughing, howling, writhing, foaming at the mouth. They were sexually excited, suffered from pain and seizure and hallucinated. They danced to loss of consciousness and would fall powerlessly to their peers' feet, like a Lydian woman in *The Bacchae* (Eur., *Bacch.*, 136). In the Middle Ages, this strange dance would often end in human deaths.¹⁹

The European mad dance was accompanied by music, like the Dionysiac cult dance by sounds of drum and flute. Scientists believe that the accompanying music had the same function as dance movements: drive the dancers into ecstasy. Drums (tympani) activated certain grid cells in the brain and caused excitement. The rhythm gripped and governed the dancers. Flute (aulos) might have had a likewise exciting effect.²⁰

¹⁷ Carpitella D., In the Fundamental Study of Tarantism by E. de Martino, La terra del rimorso, Milano 1961, 365; Bartholomew R. E., Tarantism, Dancing Mania and Demonopathy: The Anthro-Political Aspects of 'Mass Psychogenic Illness', Psychological Medicine, vol. 24 (2), Cambridge University Press 1994, 281-306; Midelfort H. C. E., 1999, 39.

¹⁸ Cited in Backman E. L., Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine (trans. Classen E.), London: Allen & Unwin 1952.

¹⁹ Hecker J. F., Die Tanzwuth, eine Volkskrankheit im Mittelalter: nach den Quellen für Aerzte und gebildete Nichtärzte bearbeitet (trans. by Babington 1888), Berlin: Enslin 1832, 132 ff.; Midelfort H. C. E., 1999, 32; Bartholomew R. E., 2001, 126; 136; Waller J., Looking Back: Dancing Plagues and Mass Hysteria, The Psychologist 22 (7), UK: British Psychological Society, 2009 (July), 644-647; Waller J., 2009, 624-625.

²⁰ Midelfort H. C. E., 1999, 37; Waller J., 2009, 624-625.

As mentioned, yells were not alien to medieval dancers either. Similarly to Dionysiac $\epsilon\upsilon\omicron\iota$, south European dancers would occasionally cry out a-hi.²¹ The repetition of these syllables would bring on them sensation of freedom and would also cause rapid breath. Thus, it too can be seen as an ecstasy-inducing technique.²²

1374 and 1518 witnessed the greatest outbreaks of mad dance. In 1374 it gripped entire Germany, historical Netherlands and North-East France. Thousands of people danced for weeks on.

“From Italy it spread to ... Prusia, and one morning, without warning, the streets were filled... They danced together, ceaselessly, for hours or days, and in wild delirium, the dancers collapsed and fell to the ground exhausted, groaning and sighing as if in the agonies of death. When recuperated, they swathed themselves tightly with cloth around their waists and resumed their convulsive movements. They contort their bodies, writhing, screaming and jumping in a mad frenzy. One by one they fell from exhaustion...” – Benjamin Lee Gordon wrote.²³

After several decades, an abbot from a monastery near Trier once again called people for dance, which continued for 6 months nonstop, generating fatal spinal and rib fractures.²⁴

In 1518 the mad dance gripped Strasbourg. About 400 people were involved. According to the chronicler, daily deaths would reach fifteen. Fatal outcomes were frequently caused by heart attack.²⁵

What was the cause of this strange phenomenon called either collective mental disorder²⁶ or collective hysterical disorder²⁷ or mass madness.²⁸ Opinions vary: according to the most popular theory, it must have been

²¹ Carpitella D., 1965, 365.

²² Bremmer J. N., 1984, 280.

²³ Gordon B. L., *Medieval and Renaissance Medicine*, New York: Philosophical Library 1959, 562.

²⁴ Backman E. L., 2009, 625.

²⁵ Backman E. L., 1952.

²⁶ Kaplan H. I., Sadock B. J., *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, vol. 2, Baltimore, MD: Williams and Wilkins 1985, 1227.

²⁷ Carson R. C., Butcher and Mineka S., *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, New York: Harper Collins 1998¹⁰, 37.

²⁸ Comer R. J., *Fundamental of Abnormal Psychology*, New York: W. H. Freeman and Company 1996, 9.

caused by ergotism – poisoning from infected rye, as in those times people would mainly consume molded rye.

Others interpret it as a posttraumatic stress disorder associated with large-scale calamities. This may be particularly true for 1374 and 1518 dance epidemics preceded by a disastrous flood in the first case and crop failure in the second, resulting in inconceivably high prices on grain. Syphilis broke out, leprosy and plague reappeared.²⁹

The medieval mad dance is also seen as pilgrims' practice, a deviant behavior of a religious sect, which was spread to the local population.³⁰ According to a different opinion, the European population of those times had superstitions and expectations of dance curse, a fear of raging souls capable of visiting a dance curse upon humans. These beliefs could have spread to Europe through naval routes.³¹ As concerns tarantism, it is described as a regional version of mad dance stemming from local traditions.

Despite various theories, this strange occurrence remains unexplained. The mentioned opinions are only assumptions that may invite counterarguments: 1. Frequent floods in the Middle Ages caused high levels of humidity, which contributed to the molding of cultivated grain, especially rye. The economic slump compelled people to consume molded cereals. Convulsive ergotism could in fact cause hallucinations, spasms and shivering but it is highly unlikely to induce wild movements lasting weeks or months. As concerns gangrenous ergotism, it results in the decomposition of extremities but has nothing in common with dance movements;³² 2. Neither mind alteration alone can account for mad dance, though the high level of distress may also cause the loss of individuality and increases a likelihood of spontaneous trance; 3. Pilgrimage was widespread in medieval Europe and the dance could certainly be part of

²⁹ Hecker J. F. C., *Epidemics of the Middle Ages* (trans. from German by Babington), London: The Sydenham Society 1844, 87.

³⁰ Bartholomew R. E., *Rethinking the Dance Mania*, *The Skeptical Inquirer* 24(4):42-47 (July-August). *Gender Issues; Medicalization of Females; Deconstruction; St. Vitus' Dance*, 2000.

³¹ Waller J., 2009, 644-647.

³² Ergotism is poisoning by alkaloids produced by ergot, a group of fungi infecting rye. There are two types of argotism: convulsive and gangrenous. Convulsive symptoms include painful seizures and spasms, while gangrenous symptoms are blisters and dry rot of the extremities. See Eadie MJ., *Convulsive Ergotism: Epidemics of the Serotonin Syndrome?* *Lancet Neurol., PubMed.*, 2003 Jul; 2(7): 429-434.

their ritual behavior; 4. It is likewise possible that several instances of this wild practice could have given birth to superstitions and fears that they would recur; 5. Doctors' ideas about Italian poisonous tarantulas are nowadays found unconvincing.³³ There are poisonous spiders in other countries as well but tarantella is only performed in Italy. Moreover, according to medieval chronicles, most of the dancers did not even mention spider bites but directly joined the dance at a certain time.

I believe each factor could have a role in the mad dance epidemic. The dance used to be started by a group of individuals but would spread to a large part of the population, evidently, under the influence of all the three mass behavior mechanisms. Contagion and suggestion provoked spontaneous involvement, while imitation was a conscious behavior. Medieval chronicles describe structured dances: e. g. participants of dance processions would tie up their garments and would leap, clap hands and appeal to St. John the Baptist.³⁴ In 1375 and 1376 processions, couples were followed by single participants in a row. They danced, jumped and hugged each other.³⁵ In 1518 a special stage was arranged and professional musicians and dancers were hired to keep the emotional impulse.³⁶

The prerequisite for all the three mechanisms is susceptibility to being 'infected' with collective sensations. The susceptibility of medieval Europeans was determined by the posttraumatic stress, superstitions about the dance curse and people's awareness of the mind alteration risk after a tarantula bite, while ergotism and pilgrimage with strange rituals were triggers of ecstatic dance. In fact, dance was regarded as a 'contagious' disease and at the same time, as a treatment against it – a punishment and a way of redemption. Those caught by the virus of dance could only be healed through dance. This belief predisposed them to a euphoric dance at least once a year.

As mentioned above, the dance epidemic was spread in Europe till the mid-17th century. It recurred only once in Madagascar in 1840,³⁷ while

³³ Bartholomew R. E., 2000.

³⁴ Jean d'Outremeuse's chronicle *La Geste de Liege* cited in Bartholomew R. E., 2000.

³⁵ Slichterhorst's chronicle, cited in Backman E. L., 1952, 210.

³⁶ Waller J., 2009, 625.

³⁷ Sharp L. A., *Social Change, Social Protest: The Dancing Mania in Nineteenth Century Madagascar* (paper presented in the session on "Charisma" at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association) US, Washington 1985.

tarantism was observed at random and on a smaller scale in Italy up to 1959.³⁸

Finally, outbursts of tarantism developed into an annual festival. The Hellenic oreibasia must have taken the same path before spontaneous hysterical outbreaks transformed into an acceptable practice and a special time and space was devoted to it. The Dionysiac cult framed this hysteria as an organized ritual and gave it a shape and direction.³⁹

What happens in this regard in our contemporary world? What is the repercussion of the Bacchic dance in the 21st century? Does it take place anywhere? If yes, what does it look like? The state of public at modern rock festivals can be likened to Bacchic dance. "Drink, drugs, ecstatic loss of self in illusion of every kind (especially drink and madness), violent dance, crowds, theatrical spectacle and violence: as a summary of sixties rock, Dionysus couldn't be better. There he was, mad, Greek and ancient,"⁴⁰ Ruth Padel writes as she explores the relationship between rock and Greek myth.

According to rock historians, rock ideology rests on the Dionysian, which is the most irrational, wild and mad impulse.⁴¹ Bacchic leaps, rhythmical twitches and sharp movements, whirling, hadbanging, yells, cries and roar are common at rock festivals. The archaic Dionysiac practice of dismembering animals is replaced by tearing of clothes, which happens almost at every concert.⁴² Rock not only borrows but even promotes lax sexual norms typical of the Dionysiac cult. Sexual revolution is commonly associated with the origination of rock. According to Bob Larson, low frequency vibrations of bas-guitar accompanied by weird lighting affect the cerebrospinal fluid, which in turn has a direct influence on endocrine glands and disturbs the balance of reproductive and adrenal gland hormones. Besides, the blood insulin level significantly alters causing the loosening of moral brakes below the permissible threshold or their

³⁸ Bartholomew R. E., 2001, 134.

³⁹ Додас Э. П., 2000, 390-392.

⁴⁰ Padel R., *I'm a Man: Sex, Gods and Rock'n'Roll*, UK: London, Faber & Faber 2000, 186.

⁴¹ Palmer R., *Dancing in the Street*, BBC Books 1996.

⁴² Padel R., *Ozzy Osbourne, a Black Sabbath vocalist, had the habit of biting off a living bird's head before a concert, 2000.*

complete loss.⁴³ Wild yells of thousands of sexually aroused girls remain a characteristic feature of rock concerts and festivals.

Another characteristic of rock concerts is mind-alteration. The most popular psychoactive substance at rock festivals is LSD. The combination of LSD and rock gave birth to the so-called psychedelic rock. Jefferson Airplane, Soft Machine and The Yardbirds are psychedelic groups. The Beatles' album *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* is considered to be psychedelic and a song from this album, *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds*, is believed to promote LSD. The Rolling Stones too recorded a psychedelic album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*.⁴⁴ However, it is not necessary to take LSD or any other narcotic drugs to induce mind alteration. Similarly to Bacchic dances, lights, music and rhythmical movements can easily drive people into ecstasy. Even at present, people with altered consciousness dance to the fall at rock festivals and concerts.

Rock originated in the 1960s, which was the age of protests against reality, the age of revolution in collective *weltanschauung*. Rock too was a protest music aimed at acquiring total freedom through destroying any kinds of frames, norms and constraints, whether religious, family-related, administrative, political, economic or military. Such moods were triggered by the posttraumatic stress caused by two world wars, several dictatorships, racial and national problems and ideological pressure. Rock became the main event of those years. Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Joe Cocker, Bob Dylan and others turned into international icons.⁴⁵ They had a power over people, like Dionysus in the ancient world. Our contemporary rock concerts trigger the same spontaneous and unconscious behaviors as the Dionysian festivals and dance epidemics in medieval Europe. The Dionysian continues to prevail and break out as a temporary 'switch-off' from the rational.⁴⁶

As we can see, the behavioral 'symptoms' of the Dionysian, as well as their triggers, have persisted over centuries. Whether in antiquity, in the Middle Ages or in the 20th century, mad dance outbreaks are invariably associated with social frustration and spontaneity and occur as the

⁴³ Larson B., *Rock & Roll: The Devil's Diversion*, McCook, Neb: Larson 1967.

⁴⁴ Padel R., 2000, 222, 252-253.

⁴⁵ Palmer R., 1996.

⁴⁶ Latacz J., 1993, 31; Gordeziani R., 2014, 285 (in Georgian).

awaking of something latent but constantly present in humans. The only difference lies in the intention of these mad behaviors: in ancient Greece, the Bacchic dance was seen as a path towards divine communion, in the Middle Ages it was a treatment against dance itself, while now it marks defiance and revolt against reality.

Abstract

Bacchic dance, a remarkable element of ancient culture, held an important place in the Dionysiac cult from early times. It frequently attracted poets, artists, sculptors and even historians. Though the Bacchantes sank into oblivion over centuries, the practice of mad dance used to rebound in powerful bursts at different times and in different cultures. In this regard, in the paper the attention was attracted by medieval Europe, occasionally inundated by strange mad dance, and by modern-day rock festivals.

What happens in medieval Europe and in our contemporary world? What is the repercussion of the Bacchic dance in the 13th-17th and in the 20th-21st centuries? What do they look like? And what is the difference among these dances? There are the questions examined in the paper.

The behavioral 'symptoms' of the Dionysian, as well as their triggers, have persisted over centuries. Whether in antiquity, in the Middle Ages or in the 20th-21st century, mad dance outbreaks are invariably associated with social frustration and spontaneity and occur as the awaking of something latent but constantly present in humans. The only difference lies in the intention of these mad behaviors: in ancient Greece, the Bacchic dance was seen as a path towards divine communion, in the Middle Ages it was a treatment against dance itself, while now it marks defiance and revolt against reality.