

The Monthly Journal of the Society for International Folk Dancing.

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FIRST PRINCIPLES XIV: DANCES WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH - CONTD.

Perhaps the most remarkable phenomena about the time of the Renaissance were the dance-epidemics. These may have started as early as A.D. 600, but the first chronicles give the date as 1,000 A.D. Sometimes the dances seemed innocuous, but other times they became raging epidemics involving tens of thousands. The dancing started in the home, in open spaces, in the churches and other holy places. It occurred mainly before the picture of the Virgin Mary and less so before that of St. John the Baptist, St. Andrew, St. Bartholemew or St. Vitus. It was a hopping dance where the aim was to jump as high off the ground as possible. Without ceasing the dancing continued day and night with every conceivable movement, contortion and grimace. The dancers seemed in a daze - they knew not what they did. Towards the end of the dancing many developed ghastly pains and cramps, and many died as a result of their efforts in addition to the pains. Ironically enough, many of the saints before whom the people danced were supposed to help against various forms of disease and cramps!

Such epidemics have been thought to have been due to hysteria or to possession, i.e. by devils or demons. One of the most important causes assigned to these epidemics was ergot-poisoning. This was considered to be the worst scourge of the Middle Ages: it produced a burning feeling in the hands and feet, arms and legs - "St. Antonius Fire" - or cramps and hallucinations. The epidemics occurred in spring, especially in a wet spring which was the perfect weather for the spread of rye-ergot. The worst dance epidemic occurred in 1374 when more than 10,000 people died. These formed part of an Hungarian saints pilgrimage which took place every seventh year. The pilgrims consisted of Hungarians, Poles, Bohemians, Germans and Austrians, who travelled through South Germany, up the Rhine to Aachen then back via Cologne, Maastricht, Trier, etc. During this particular pilgrimage the pilgrims became infected before reaching Aachen, where the dancing began. Each nationality sang, in its own language, the same song in praise of St. John - the words were not always understood by listeners who thought the words were names of devils. The dance became known as St. John's dance.

Another epidemic occurred in 1578 at Strasbourg and has been described by Paracelsus as a dance before and around the alter consecrated to St. Vitus. The last known epidemic on Midsummer Eve (i.e. St. John's Eve) at Molenbeck, now a part of Brussels, in 1564, is well depicted in the painting by Pieter Brueghel the Younger.

In spite of the name, "epidemic dances", these were meant to be true angel dances before the Virgin Mary, performed with reverence and sincerity in hopes of increased joy and re-creation for the Holy One. The dances were also meant as faith-healing and exorcism, the ridding of the possessed of devils.

The sacred dances performed by men of the church appear to be free from magical significance. They were considered an outward demonstration of supreme bliss and happiness. There may have been part-mystical, part-magical thought behind this form of sacred dance,

the unfolding of the mysteries of the Resurrection, the harbinger of the final Resurrection and the victory over Death and Hell. The popular dances, wherever performed, appear to be bound up with mystico-magical aims. These were meant, not only merely to praise and show reverence to Our Lord, the Virgin Mary, or the Saint, but also to secure a mark of favour, happiness and success, a good harvest, health and joy, and, above all, freedom (through faith-healing) from suffering and disease.

Violet Cyriax

NORSE NOOS

Last month we dealt with King Yngvar. Onund was the son of King Yngvar, and he made roads all over Sweden and settled many districts. One day when riding through the valleys a landslide came down and killed him with all his followers. It was believed that this was the vengeance of the earth for his making of roads, Thjodolf sang:-

Perhaps the wood grown land which long had felt his conquering hand uprose at length in deadly strife and pressed out Onunds hated life.

King Ingjald the bad was the son of King Onund. It was the custom at that time, before entering in upon ones heritage to give an heir ship feast. This King Ingjald did.

He built a new and large hall to accommodate his guests with 7 high seats for 7 Kings and invited them from all over Sweden, 6 Kings came with all their retinue but King Grammar smelt a rat and stayed at home.

At the heirship feast the Kings were feasting in the new hall and Ingjald was at the upsal hall with his following. He sat on the foot stool as was the custom until the brager beaker was brought in for him to drink to the gods to pledge himself, to his people and to make a boast as to his kingship.

King Ingjald grasped a large bulls horn pointed with it to the four corners of the room and vowed to enlarge his kingdom by half.

Later, when all were drunk, he took his men to the new hall and burned it to the ground with the 6 Swedish kings and all their entourage.

Some years later he caught King Grammar at a feast unawares, surrounded the house and burnt him in it and all his men.

It was a saying that King Ingjald killed 12 Kings by treachery and he was known as King Ingjald the Evil adviser.

His daughter AAsa was of the same temperament and brought it about that her husband killed his own brother Halfdan. Halfdan's son was Ivas and he took an army to Ranninge where Ingjald and AAsa were at a feast.

When news came that they were surrounded King Ingjald felt that if he gave battle he would lose and if he tried to flee he would be caught on all sides so he and AAsa took a resolution: they drank till all their people were dead drunk, then set light to the hall and burned themselves and all their people in it. This was very celebrated and much talked of for a long time.

King Ingjald's son, King Olaf, fled from the district, his father's family being so unpopular. He felled trees, thereby earning the name Olaf the Tree feller, and settled his people in these clearances now known as Vermeland.

Many Swedish people fled there too, so that in time these once prosperous places could not support the population. Then came famine for which the people blamed Olaf, since the Swedes always reckoned their crops good or bad for or against their Kings. They believed that the deartimes must come from Olaf's being sparing in his sacrifices to the gods, so they gathered troops and burned him in his house at Venner as a sacrifice to Odin.

So says Thjodolf:-

The temple wolf by the Lake shores
The corpse of Olaf now devours
The clearer of the forests died
At Odins shrine by the lake side
The glowing flames stripped to the skin
The royal robes from the Swedes King
Thus Olaf famed in days of yore
Vanished from earth at Venners shore.

King Halfdan the Black was King of Norway Circa 840 A.D. His last wife was Ragnhild, a wise woman who dreamed dreams. She dreamt that she was in her herb garden when she took a thorn out of her shift and it stuck in her hand and grew till it became a great tree, the under part was red as blood, the trunk was green and the branches white as snow. There were many great branches and one grew so great that it seemed to cover the whole of Norway.

King Halfdan never had dreams and was much troubled thereby till he asked the advice of Torlied the wise. Torlied told him that when he wished to dream he took his sleep in a swine sty and then he always dreamed. King Halfdan did likewise and dreamed that he grew the most beautiful hair. It was in ringlets and fell around him even to his knees. Some ringlets were small, some long, all golden, but one ringlet surpassed all others in size and colour. It was said that these dreams betokened the fame and honour of all his kindred and that the most beautiful branch and the longest ringlet betokened King Olaf the saint.

King Halfdan's son by Ragnhild was Harold Haarfager, Harold the Fair Haired, of whom more anon.

DEMONSTRATION NOTES

On April 2nd the team went to Kingsmuir School, West Hoathley, Sussex, to give an afternoon of demonstrating and teaching. This is a small residential school with only 40 pupils of greatly varying ages, and with the girls outnumbering the boys. They are keen dancers and their teacher, Will Green, had already taught them one or two of the dances which he had learnt from us. He was anxious that we should teach as many dances as possible, and the children were certainly keen to learn. They proudly showed us two Scottish dances which they had practised for our benefit. In order to help pay our expenses I had agreed to repeat our afternoon performance in the evening at a Country Dance held in the village. So after vegetarian supper at the school we went to a lovely old barn - oak beams and minstrels gallery and enormous fire cauldron in a windowed and seated alcove in which logs blazed a welcome. This certainly was the right atmosphere for our

dancing and we really enjoyed ourselves. Again the audience was responsive. Some of the older pupils from Kingsmuir had been allowed to come, and other young folk had walked four miles from a neighbouring school, and there was a nice smattering of village folk. It was quite an exhausting day, but, as I have said before in these notes, very rewarding.

Our second demonstration this month was on Saturday, April 16th, for the International Friendship League at Epsom. This was a social especially arranged for us, as we were unable to accept a demonstration on their usual meeting night. We had three-quarters of an hour to fill with showing and teaching dances, and obviously we could have gone on much longer as far as the audience was concerned. For the first time our demonstrations included two Spanish items which Margaret Harris and Charles Steventon danced for us - very well indeed - and which certainly added extra variety. Ken Ward nobly stepped into the breach caused by our musician's late arrival, and played "Kolomyka" for our opening dance. His accordion, known to the team as "Josephine", is obviously going to be a popular addition. My grateful thanks to all the team for making it a very successful evening.

MARGERY LATHAM.

GENERAL MEETING

A General Meeting of the Society will be held at Imperial College, Prince Consort Road, S.W.7. on Thursday, May 12th next, at 7.30 p.m. In view of the fact that extremely important business will be discussed, all members are urged to make an extra-special effort to attend.

WHITSUN

There are still a few vacancies for the Society's weekend at Henley-on-Thames at Whitsun. If you would like to fish, boat, bathe, walk, dance or laze, book now before it is too late. Bookings and enquiries to Jack Richardson or Joan White.

MEMBERS ABROAD

Greetings to all members, thanks for letters and news-sheets which have arrived. It is very interesting to read them, even more so since I am not in England. I will try and send information on dances when I come across them. I am sending this time a cutting from a Russian Magazine about a Siberian dance group. As you can see it has some lovely costumes. I have translated the article so that if it is suitable for the newsletter you can send it on.

If there are particular dances or costumes that are of interest to you, let me know, as it is easier to deal with something specific.

When I was in Warsaw recently I managed to see the famous Polish Folk Dance and Song Ensemble "Mazowsze". I have heard many tales about its beauty and how well they dance and I was not disappointed. The music was supplied by a large orchestra, since the hall was about the size of the Albert Hall although a different shape. They almost needed police to keep the crowds in order, since it was being performed one day.

The programme consisted of dances and songs alternating and many of the dances were accompanied by singing which added to the charm, the choir standing at the back. The whole cast was about 150, I estimate, and, apart from the finale, only 8 or 12 couples were dancing.

Among the dances performed were Polka, Mazur and Oberek; other names escaped my ears, and there was no printed programme. The singing and dancing were both of a very high standard and the choreography very ingenious.

The ensemble is financed by the government who encourages the development of folk-culture. As a by-product of the formation of this group, many other smaller groups have been inspired to take a pride in the performance and enjoyment of folk-dancing. There are several leading ensembles, some of which are amateurs. The Stuzelcik Groups in Kodz, for example, is composed of workers from the factory whose name they bear and they dance and rehearse in the evenings. I have not come across any local groups yet, but hope to as soon as I get settled. I got married on 19th February in Gdynia to Nina Malicka. I shall probably be in Gdynia for some time. Best wishes to all.

David Rutter,
UL. Swietotanska 139/
Gdynia, 134,
Poland.

Translation of an article on Siberian Songs and Dances
by A. Medveder by David Rutter.

Many beautiful songs are born in the extensive Siberian plains. These songs are very old and the whole history of the Siberian people is reflected in them. In one song the first fight of the Siberian Cossacks against Ottoman Ermak is described; in another the revolution and civil war and building a new life.

The Omsk National Choir demonstrates the very rich songs of Siberia. It was formed 4 years ago from people who had special talent in singing and dancing. This creative youth ensemble quickly gained popularity. In the programme of their show are lyrical melodies and epic songs, which are the basis of Siberian life, impetuous and joyful, youthful, full of life and the beauty and poetry of Siberian Dances.

ON ILKLEY MOOR

During the Xmas Holiday I was approached by the Dance Chairman of the National Association of Organisers and Lecturers in Physical Education (NAOLPE) as to whether it would be possible to give a scientific lecture on, and teach folk dancing to physical educationalists at a dance conference to be held at Ilkley, April 1-7th. At that time it could not be envisaged how many would be interested in European dances, apart from English, Scottish, Irish, Free Expressionism and American Square.

I contacted Bert Price with a view to enlisting his services. A further meeting was held with Miss Thorpe, the Chairman, and Miss Muriel Webster, one of the co-editors of the Ling Dance Handbooks. At first it was felt that each of the three of us could deal with our selected country's dances on one day: Miss Webster, Portuguese and Greek; Bert, Polish and Ukrainian; myself, Scandinavian; two classes per day and one scientific lecture as a combined effort of the three of us.

However, this idea had completely to be changed as the members asking for European dances exceeded all expectations: of the 360 present, 180 wanted our classes - and many had to be turned away. This resulted in our having to be available all three days and give two classes daily (each to a different group). In addition there were

nightly socials and dance demonstrations. In all, Bert and I taught 18 dances. To assist in the teaching and to be of use to all in the evenings, Frank Hawkins help was also enlisted and proved to be a great success.

Our reception was fantastic, and, I venture to suggest, unparalleled in the history of the Society. The first evening we demonstrated Hopak, Krakowiak, Oberek, Daldans and Swedish Schottische just to whet their appetites. Later in subsequent evenings we taught a few Austrian and Estonian dances and, the final evening, apart from each group showing one dance learnt at the course (Bert's did Krakowiak and mine, Swedish Schottische) we danced Sadala Polka and Bert and Frank did Oxdans.

I took with me costumes from several European countries: my old Swedish jewellery, books, postcards and music which formed a room for exhibition purposes on its own. I would like to thank most gratefully the following for loan of costumes: Lucille Armstrong for Portuguese; Aili Eistrat for Estonian; Dorothy Hadjisty for Norwegian; Phillip Thornton for Balkan; and the Polish YMCA for Polish. In addition I took Ukranian, Russian and Swedish costumes. This was also enthusiastically visited. Bert wore Polish and I Swedish costume throughout the day, which added to the "National" feeling of our groups. We had so many requests for the music and descriptions of all the dances that we are now putting them into booklet form, while the NAOLPE Secretary has had so many requests for a further dance conference at a date much nearer than in four years time that it is possible we may be asked to participate again comparatively shortly.

The reason for my accepting the original invitation was that such a conference would doubtless prove of the greatest importance to folk-dancing as a whole and ourselves in particular. All the members attending teach dancing at schools or colleges. These teachers will now teach our authentic way of dancing throughout the British Isles and, knowing of the Society's existence, not only would ask for advice, but, like Oliver Twist, ask for more.

VIOLET CYRIAX.

FRENCH WEEKEND

It is with great pleasure that we are able to announce that Jeanine Mourrain and her cousin have accepted our invitation to visit the Society on the weekend of June 24th-26th, to teach us some of the dances of the Vendée and other provinces of France. Jeanine is a leading member of the Martells group: Les Danseurs et Chanteurs du Marais Vendéen.

The full scope of the weekend has not yet been formalised, but it is envisaged that we will hold a French class on the Friday at Carlyle School and two further classes at Cecil Sharp House on the Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

It is hoped that all members will attend at least two of these classes and that most will come to all three. A small charge will need to be made to cover the cost of bringing these dancers from France, but if successful in this venture we can go ahead with further ventures in the future.

May we make a plea that no country weekends be organised at this time?

SPANISH CLASSES

We have also arranged that Mrs. Lucille Armstrong will teach some Spanish and Portuguese dances in the summer term. All members know how exciting Lucille's classes are, and we make a plea for large classes on the nights when Lucille is with us.

FINNISH CLASS

On May 11th we have arranged for Miss Ethel Gustaffsson to come to the class and teach some Finnish dances. We have some Finnish dances already in our repertoire and hope that Miss Gustaffsson will impart the Finnish style to our approach to their dances.

MAY PROGRAMME

Classes and Dances at Carlyle School, Hortensia Road, Chelsea, S.W.10.

Time: 7.30 - 9.30 p.m.

Music: Barbara Duleba

Tuesdays:

May 3	Members' Party	M.C. Jack Richardson
10	Kolo Class	Phillip Thornton
17	Spanish Class	Lucille Armstrong
24	Kolo Class	Phillip Thornton
31	Spanish Class	Lucille Armstrong

Wednesdays:

May 4	Estonian Class	Aily Eistrat	M.C. May Hendrie
11	Finnish Class	Ethel Gustaffsson	M.C. Tony Bostock
18	German Class	Joan White	M.C. John Hughes
25	Austrian Class	Heinz & Ilse Striegel	M.C. Bob Symes

Fridays:

May 6	No class
13	English Class by E.F.D.S.
20	Swedish Class by Dr Cyriax
27	No class

Scottish Classes by Marie Le Fort. Churchill Gardens Estate, Pimlico.

Sundays 3.30 - 5.30 p.m. (Except Whit-Sunday, May 29th)

Dances at Queen Alexandra House, Kensington Gore, S.W.7.

Time: 7.0 - 10.0 p.m.

Music: Mourie Pfeffer

Sunday	May 1	M.C. Simon Guest
	8	M.C. Roland Minton
	15	M.C. Len Sawyer

Dance at Cecil Sharp House, Regents' Park Road, N.W.1.

Time: 6.30 - 9.30 p.m.

Music: Wallace Collection

Sunday May 22 M.C. Larry Howells

Note the change of date. There will be no dance on Whit-Sunday, May 29th.

1. The first class is for the purpose of...

2. The second class is for the purpose of...

3. The third class is for the purpose of...

4. The fourth class is for the purpose of...

5. The fifth class is for the purpose of...

6. The sixth class is for the purpose of...

7. The seventh class is for the purpose of...

8. The eighth class is for the purpose of...

9. The ninth class is for the purpose of...

10. The tenth class is for the purpose of...

11. The eleventh class is for the purpose of...