

MOREŠKA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN AND ORIENTAL WORLD

ALEXANDER LOPAŠIĆ
University of Reading
United Kingdom

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Folklore of many Mediterranean societies has been influenced by long-standing Christian-Muslim contact and conflict. One of the results of this contacts is the well-known sword-dance and play called Moreška. The Autor deals with the Moreška play as a part of a complex spreading across the Mediterranean and recorded for the first time in Lérida in Spain in 1150. Once also well-known in S-Croatia, it is performed on the island of Korčula until the present day. Moreška is also discussed as a part of the Folklore of Dalmatia and of the Mediterranean in general and considered as a part of the long and changeable history of Dalmatia and as such of the Mediterranean world and culture.

Milovan Gavazzi, the leading Croat anthropologist, whose centenary we are celebrating, also studied outside influences on the cultures of S-Eastern Europe. For example in his: *Die Schichtung der romanischen Kulturelemente Südosteuropas* (in *Das Romanische Element am Balkan*, III Grazer Balkanologentagung 1968, Graz, 1968), he mentions the play and sword-dance *Moreška*, the main elements of which originate from the Western, mostly Mediterranean, Romance area of culture (Gavazzi, 1978, p. 171). Furthermore, he connects the *Moreška* with the old custom of selecting a "village king", found among the islands of Kvarnero and the Dalmatian island of Korčula, which was accompanied by battle scenes and sword-dances (Gavazzi, 1988, p. 196-7).

It is certainly true that the sword-dance and play *Moreška* comes from the Western Romance world of Spain which, however, has also been a part of Muslim Spain for about 700 years. The *Moreška* is clearly related to the long-standing contact and conflict between the Muslims and Christians in the Mediterranean. As we have considerable literature on the subject, even if scattered in many obscure publications, it is worth looking at the origin, importance and spread of that colourful Mediterranean play and dance still performed in the island of Korčula and Dalmatia, of which Korčula is a part.

Sword-dances must have been part of the entertainment at many Muslim courts on both sides of the Mediterranean; these would, in due course, enter into the repertoire of Christian neighbours and opponents, who saw in such plays and dances a repetition of their long-standing fight with Muslims in different parts of the Mediterranean world.

We certainly know that at Lérida, in Northern Spain, close to the river Ebro, the long standing frontier between Christian and Muslim Spain, the *Moreška* was recorded in 1150. It took place in the local cathedral on the occasion of the betrothal of Petronilla, Queen of Aragon, coupled with the expulsion of the Moors a year earlier (Foretić V., Ivančan I., Palčok Z. etc., *Moreška*, 1974. p. 9; Ivančan I., 1973, p. 291).

From their landing in Spain in the early 8th cent. the fight between the two worlds, Muslim and Christian, never ceased until the early 19th cent., at which time the North African pirates were still a nuisance to many Mediterranean islands and isolated coasts.

The annual performance of the *Moreška* was a reminder of the long standing conflict between the Christians and the Moors, between the West and the East, between two civilizations.

In Corsica, where it was still performed around 1780, it commemorated the real crusade to regain the lands taken by the Muslims, and the conflict demonstrated the force of that crusade and the fervour of faiths in conflict. It recalled the attack of the Saracens again on the ancient Corsican capital Alaria. The leader of the Muslims was called Osman, and chief of the Christians was Ugo Collona. The two groups of performers would consist of 160 dancers, representing the Christian and Saracen armies who would march against each other for four hours accompanied by the music of a single violin. Their costumes were in silver or gold and they were all armed with sword (Galanti, 1942, pp. 93-6).

Well-known also was the feast of the Madonna delle Milizie in Scigli in Southern Sicily, where the conflict took place between Conte Ruggero of the Sicilians and the Moorish leader Belcane; the Christian victory is won with the help of the Virgin who enters the battle on a white horse (Galanti, 1942, p. 47).

The festival was supposed to commemorate the conflict which took place in 1091, in which Conte Ruggero (or Ruggiero in Sicilian tradition) participated. The text is in the Sicilian dialect and the leaders are called Scupidda (Ruggiero) and Vola-Vola (Belcane); the festival was performed on Sabato Sitiensis (the Saturday before Palm Sunday). It ends with the leader of the Muslims being taken prisoner by the Sicilians (Galanti, 1942, pp. 69-73).

In Malta the *Moreška* was danced on the Saturday (Sabato grasso) before the Carnival, during which one of the knights of the Grand Cross of the Order of Malta went down among the people who surrounded the balcony of the Grand Master of the Order and granted permission for Carnival. The dancers were dressed in white and were armed with swords and shields (Galanti, 1942, pp. 91-2).

The *Moreška* was known and performed in Genoa where it was danced accompanied by martial music of the Saracens and the sound of clashing swords. The two groups represented sailors and citizens of Genoa and recalled the many attacks by the Saracens on Genoa in the 10th cent. It was known by the name of *battere la Moreška* (Galanti, 1942, p. 82).

It was also performed on the island of Elba and, according to Zuccagni-Orlandini (1842, p. 85, 88-89), it was an old custom and in the early 19th cent. rarely performed. It was a fight between Christians and Turks and formed part of a religious feast in which two groups of dancers were armed with scimitars, daggers and pistols and dressed as Turks and ancient Romans.

Moreška was also known in Venice of the 16th-18th cent. where it was performed on Maundy Thursday on Piazza San Marco under the name of Forza di Ercole, which was a competition between two Venetian parishes, Castellani and Nicolotti, between whom long-standing rivalries existed. There were plays, competitive games and the demonstration of various skills. After Ercole a *Moreška* known as *Saracinesca*, a battle-dance with swords, daggers and sticks, was performed. Later on it became a part of the opera *Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi, performed in the 16th and 17th cent. (Galanti, 1942, p. 112; Malamani, 1896, fasc. 4).

Because of its exotic and oriental character the *Moreška* was widely danced in Renaissance Italy between the 15th and 18th cent. It achieved considerable popularity among the Venetian and Neapolitan nobility and included elements related to Negro culture, since they were imported in large numbers as servants, adding to the colour and wealth of the two rich ports and the splendour of two courts, that of the Aragonese in Naples and that of the Doges (Moresca, UTET, 1989, p. 972).

The Renaissance introduced new elements to the dance and the original Christian-Muslim conflict was replaced by heroes and mythological deities, giving the *Moreška* dance a more modern look. The *Moreška* was danced at the court of the Gonzaga at Mantova, as we know from a letter written by Isabella d'Este about it in 1493, as well as on the occasion of the wedding of Lucretia Borgia to Alfonso d'Este in 1501. It survived in Modena in 1639 as a fierce battle between 16 fighters armed with swords and daggers (Galanti, 1949, pp. 42-53).

Under this influence the *Moreška* formed part of the plays by Marin Držić and Djono Palmotić in Ragusa, where it became a battle-dance, loosing its original representation of Christian-Muslim conflict. This tradition, however, survives until the present day on the island of Korčula, where it is performed every year on 27th July to commemorate the fighting between Turks and Christians which lasted for several centuries. In Korčula it is first recorded in the 18th cent. (1700, 1721, 1683 and 1743) and relates to the local village heads Riva and Zuana (Foretić, 1964, pp. 155-65). The older traditions are connected with Venice as Korčula was a part of Venetian territory (it was already under Venice in 1000, and then became permanently so between 1420-1797). There was also a tradition that Korčula sailors participated in the Spanish Reconquista.

The popularity of the *Moreška* in Korčula accompanied emigrants from the island, and it was even performed by *Moreška* dance-groups among Korčulans in the United States (Foretić, 1964, p. 166). In the 19th cent. it was performed with great success at the court in Istanbul as a colourful sword-dance. It created a sensation when it was performed in the traditional way in Split in 1926.

The traditional and best known *Moreška* in Korčula is a play, a battle-dance and a contest between the king of the Moors and the White king (Osman, Ottoman emperor) for a slave girl called *Bula*, who is first taken by the king of the Moors and then liberated by the White king who is the victor. The dance group consists of 24 Moorish dancers and 24 Turkish dancers, dressed in red and black. *Bula* is dressed in white and wears white trousers. Under the Korčulan influence the dance was performed in Split for the festival of St. Theodor, Patron of the City Korčula. The language used was the old ikavski dialect from Korčula (*Moreška*, n.d. pp. 2-9).

The *Moreška* was danced in other Dalmatian cities, so in Zadar we have a record of the dance dating from 1807, when it was performed on the occasion of the Austrian takeover, or for the birthday of the Emperor Ferdinand. It was also performed in Trieste in 1763 and 1846, to recall the long-standing conflict between the Ottomans and Dalmatians. In Budva (Boka Kotorska) a performance was recorded in 1806 on the occasion of the birthday of the Russian Emperor Alexander; the dance was then entitled: *Prikazanje bojniem kolom nazvanim Morescha* (Foretić, 1964, p. 167-9, 171, 173-4, 181).

We can now reach some conclusions, regarding this dance, and should first emphasize the importance of the *Moreška* in the whole Mediterranean cultural area, connecting it with the long-standing conflict between Christians and Muslims for the supremacy of the Mediterranean. Eventually it became a colourful part of Mediterranean folklore.

As far as Korčula and Dalmatia were concerned, the *Moreška* demonstrated the close relationship between Dalmatia and the rest of the Mediterranean; it clearly indicated the connection of Dalmatia with Renaissance Italy, which also existed in many other aspects of literature, art and the spread of Romanesque civilization.

Few words, however, should be said about the old custom of "selecting a village king", which played such an important role among Croats of Dalmatia and the islands. Some believed that the custom is a reminiscence of the actual election of Medieval Croat kings which took place in Dalmatia. Indeed, some details of the ceremony like crowning with a brass-crown, throne made of stone or a feast offered to villagers and "subjects" remind us of a real enthronement ceremony. One of such elections was recorded from Tučepi near Makarska as late as 1921. It was recorded as early as 1271 in Trogir where the election included a sword-dance like the *Moreška* from the island of Korčula and Lastovo.

The date, however, is different as the Trogir election took place around Easter and the "election of a village king" was usually between Christmas and Epiphany or during Carnival. Here we are reminded of an old European tradition of "king of beans" in England or *Bohnenkönig* in German-speaking world originating from the Roman *Saturnalias* during which a slave or a person condemned to death enjoyed royal privileges for a short period (See: Gavazzi, 1988, pp. 196-200).

All this certainly demonstrates how old some of these traditions are becoming, in the end, an integral part of Dalmatian culture and ethnography.

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MOREŠKA U KONTEKSTU MEDITERANSKOGA I ORIJENTALNOGA SVIJETA

Sažetak

Folklor brojnih mediteranskih kultura i društava pokazuje mnoge elemente dugotrajnog susreta i sukoba između kršćana i muslimana u tom dijelu svijeta. Jedan od tih elemenata poznati je ples s mačevima i igrokaz zvan *moreška*, koji se izvodi od srednjega vijeka do danas na otoku Korčuli kao sjećanje na sukobe s Osmanskim carstvom i muslimanskim svijetom.

Autor razmatra *morešku* kao dio kompleksa raširenog po cijelom Mediteranu. *Moreška* se prvi put spominje u Léridi u sjevernoj Španjolskoj godine 1150. prigodom proslave izгона Maura iz toga dijela Španjolske. *Moreška* se može pratiti u drugim dijelovima Mediterana, od zapada prema istoku, kao npr. u važnim središtima poput Genove, Napulja ili Venecije ili na otocima Korzici, Elbi, Siciliji, Malti. *Moreška* je također bila raširena u južnim hrvatskim krajevima, npr. u Splitu, Zadru, Trogiru, Dubrovniku, Boki kotorskoj, a najpoznatija je na Korčuli gdje se izvodi do današnjeg dana.

Autor analizira *morešku* kao dio dalmatinskog folkloru, ali i kao dio folkloru čitavoga mediteranskog područja. Na kraju razmatra *morešku* kao dio duge i promjenjive povijesti Dalmacije i kao sastavni dio njezina folkloru i kulture.