**Zeybek**

**Summary**

The zeybek is a genre of Turkish folk dance that is closely associated with the Aegean region on the west coast of Anatolian Turkey, although it is found in other regions as well. It can be seen as an early twentieth-century attempt to “modernize” (source) folk dance in Turkey. There are many versions of this dance; usually, the zeybek is performed by a solo male dancer, though it can also be performed by two or more males. Although less common, there are a few female zeybek dances. There is also a Greek form of the dance, as well as an urban form—the zeibekikos—that was brought to Greece by Greeks from Izmir (Smyrna).

**Contributions to Modernism and Modernization**

The Ottoman government sent Selim Sırrı Tarcan, one of the earliest researchers of Turkish folk dances, to Sweden in 1909 to study physical education, and there he was struck by the ways in which Swedish instructors choreographed folk dances in a “refined” (source) way. In 1916, he choreographed the zeybek, which he called Tarcan zeybeği, to appeal to a sophisticated urban Turkish audience. During the 1930s, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first President of Turkey, encouraged him to create a social ballroom dance that could be performed by a man and a woman. Atatürk also insisted that Tarcan zebeği should become the “Turkish national dance” (Öztürkmen 2002). Neither of these dreams was realized, as the modernization of the zeybek dance was never fully embraced in Turkey because of the nationalistic and ethnic appeal that staged traditional folk dances had for Turkish audiences.

The best-known version of the dance is performed as a solo, usually by a man wearing a striking and unique costume of short, embroidered baggy pants and a shirt, over which a short jacket and embroidered vest is worn. Two vestigial sleeves hang down from the dancer’s shoulders, giving the appearance of the dancer having wings. An elaborate headpiece, broad ornamental belt, and embroidered leggings complete the ensemble. The wing effect is not happenstance, for, as Turkish dance scholar Cemil Demirsipahi shows in his authoritative book on Turkish folk dance, the original intent of the solo dance seeks to imitate the movements of a bird (1975, 358-360).

The solo zeybek is performed slowly, beginning with an introduction in which the dancer uses tentative walking steps, as if testing the ground. Kneeling and swooping movements follow this introduction, with the dancer’s hands held out to the sides at shoulder level while he continuously snaps his fingers. In addition to the solo version of the dance, the zeybek has several variants: most notably pair and group dances. Group dances are often accompanied by solo versions by each of the dancers. The dance is most commonly performed to some version of a nona-rhythm: 9/8; 9/4; 9/2; or18/4, though Demirsipahi also notes rarer 2/4 and 4/2 examples (source).

**References and Further Reading**

And, M. (1959) ‘Dances of Anatolian Turkey’, *Dance Perspectives* (Summer): 1-76. (This short volume is a history and survey of the various types of dance, folk, classical and western found in Turkey.)

Demirsipahi, C. (1975) *Türk Halk Oyunlari*. [*Turkish Folk Dances*]. Istanbul: Turkiye Is Bankasi Kultur Yayinlari. (An encyclopedic coverage of all of the folk dances found in present-day Turkey.)

Öztürkmen, A. (2002) ‘Dance and Identity in Turkey’ in V. Danielson, S. Marcus, and D. Reynolds, (eds.) *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. Volume 6: The Middle East. NY and London: Routledge, 811-817. (An important article on the many ways in which dance constitutes an important aspect of Turkish identity. It covers the range of movement activities, such as the ways in which Sufi groups utilize movement, public entertainers in historical periods, and the current way in the government organizes folk dance to reinforce nationalistic pride.)

**Paratextual Material**

Photos exist in publications about Turkish folk dances. The And volume above has one. Dr. Shay does not have a photo of the zeybek created by Tarcan, however since he choreographed it during the period before 1923.

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