
Review by Athena Katsanevaki

Fracile’s work opens a field of comparative ethnomusicological research among the musical traditions in the Balkans based on a rhythmometric analysis of these musics. Fracile derives his potentials from his personal fieldwork as well as from extensive archival research. Whatever the oppositions of the reader would be regarding more specific conclusions or rather say whatever the scientific discussions initiated in the text of this book might be it is exactly this reason that this monograph becomes a special and important contribution to the field of comparative ethnomusicology on the basis of the musical form.

One might consider that an important motive for the research contacted by Nice Fracile were previous works and researches conducted by other researchers in the Balkans like Bela Bartok’s Brailioiu’s Radulescu’s, Baud-Bovy’s and Georgiades’s focusing on specific areas:

First Radulescu’s conclusions about Choreios Alogos in Rumanian music also in Greece and elsewhere in the Balkans, also the work of Bela
Bartok in different areas in the Balkans. The most important first conclusions and observations by Constantin Brailoiou on the Aksak rhythm and the syllabic giusto as well as “le rhythm infantin” the children’s rhythm together with the observations by Baud Bovy on the Epitrit and its serious contradiction with Georgiades. A contradiction based on Georgiades’s view on the musical meaning of the static rhythm and the musical meaning of Alogos Dactylos (irrational dactylic meter).

Fracile’s attempt is motivated by the existence of common rhythmic motives and forms which create a continuous inner flow which one would name a repetitive meter.

The “coincidence” and identification of many such motives which are based on rhythmic shapes created by the two basic rhythmic durations a first one shorter and a longer which is two times the first one makes a binary relationship, similar with that of the binary relationship of the short and long duration of the ancient Greek meters. While it orientates the writer to systematic classification of these “coincidences”. Such a classification becomes very useful and important in order to initiate the systematic comparative work on the question of rhythm and the ways of its creations especially in the area of the Balkans.

But I would consider even more important his view on the importance of these rhythmic forms and their relation to the poetic meter as well as the transition of these rhythmic forms related to special types of verse (for example the octasyllabe found in different areas of the Balkans) from one language to the other just because of their special relation to these verses.

In other words the functionality of the rhythmic forms of poetic verses like octasyllabe (4+4) as a vehicle for an interference of the Balkan traditions with each other. The rhythmic forms which are due to the shape of 4+4 in octasyllabe for example can be common in many traditions and might help to other kind of transitions. Nonetheless Fracile observes a flexibility considering the way musical metrical foot of the melody applies on the meter of the verse or (the other way round) the poetic meter and verse to the musical metrical foot and meter.

He also observes the importance of syncopation or as he names it the “dotted iamb” in the Hungarian and Slovakian songs.
Especially important is his point about the “formal units” in the traditional melodies. He points that when a melody is based on a metrical foot then it presents a similar musical metrorhythmic texture throughout the musical strophe. The structure of the *palmos* and the accent in these melodies are defined exactly by this type of the metrical foot.

Fracile observes that among the archaic ritual songs in many areas of Southeastern Europe there exist similar metrorhythmic forms with a similar structure as a verse but not with the same musical accent. If the verse is of another poetic meter and the melody of another one (metrorhythmic type) there is no correspondence between the lectical and musical accent. I believe that this point permits us to come closer to a deeper research of the peculiarities of the musical cultures in the Balkans introducing basic questions for such “outside contradictions”. Fracile’s work as he himself points at the end of his conclusions (see p.201 in the English summary), studies rhythm as a structural basis for the composition of the melody. He also points out that metrorhythmic units are handed down as components of group identities. Even in the case that the melodies are differentiated he believes that metrorhythmic units continue to sound as a musical experience and consciousness among the people and the members of a culture. For this reason he considers the continuity of the classical meter from antiquity till today among the national or smaller ethnic groups in the Balkans a normal process.

Fracile’s work initiates comparative studies of the musical form on the basis of an extensive archival research. I believe that it opens the next step which would be a creative collaboration among the local ethnomusicologies on the basis of collaborative fieldwork in combination with the classification of theoretical perspectives and the repertory of the musical cultures in the Balkans.