The Σούστα in the Aegean

Patricia Riak

The paper is an exploration of a Greek island dance. In the Aegean, the σούστα has been a dance of Greek island peoples, especially for those of the southern Aegean: the Dodecanese islands and Crete. This paper discusses the possible origins of the σούστα and locates it in the types of dances of the wider Aegean region. The paper is also an ethnographic exploration, the result of ethnographic fieldwork on a Dodecanesian island, Rhodes, constructing a picture of a local σούστα dance in a southern village of the island. The importance of the dance, it seems, was that it was a dance of love and an essential part of courtship which expressed the honour of love in the wedding ritual. This local variant of σούστα is not performed any more in the village. In this paper I will discuss how dance performances are involved in the definition of gender roles and in the construction of honourable love and courtship.

Introduction

The σούστα will be defined through an analysis of historical, folkloric, choreographic and socio-cultural literature in order to place it on the map of Greek dance. The analysis indicates the significance of the σούστα as an island dance of the Aegean region. The second part of the paper is an ethnographic examination of a localised version of
the σούστα performed on the island of Rhodes in the middle of the twentieth century, in the southern village of Kattavia. The Κατταβενή σούστα as recalled by local villagers was prominent in village celebrations and, more specifically, acted to bind young people into romantic relations during the γάμος (wedding), defining it as a courtship dance.

**Mapping the Σούστα**

The σούστα is part of a family of island dances in the Aegean, especially of the Dodecanese and Crete. It comes out of a particular dance culture which contrasts with mainland dance culture. The island dances are distinguished by couple dances, the frequent use of springing in the dance movement and quicker musical rhythm accompanying quicker dance movements. The σούστα is central to the culture of the Dodecanesian people and has a central place in formal, civic events and local village rituals. It has been argued that the dance was a pyrrhic war dance, and earlier, some would argue, a fertility dance, transformed into a dance of courtship and love. No longer a dance for men mimicking combat, it changed into a couple dance for men and women. Because the σούστα is a courtship dance, it is closely related to the Cretan μπάλος, an island dance for couples. One characteristic which links both Cretan σούστα and μπάλος is that couples break from the dance line to form couples who dance together in a number of dance forms.

**Definition of Σούστα**

Greek dance is often classified into two fundamental styles: one of the islands and the other of mainland Greece. The island dances are typically performed in a style that is bouncy and playful. The mainland dances are separated into styles performed in the mountain regions.

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1 The Κατταβενή σούστα is not performed any more during village celebrations.
and those of the plains and valleys. Dances of the mountains display proud movements using simple, firm steps combined with leaps. Movements in plains and valley dances include digging, stamping and running steps forward or backward in the direction of the movement (Petrides, 1975:2).

According to Loutzaki (1987), the island family of dances is made up of a pattern of related dance traditions which overlap in expression, execution and function (Loutzaki, 1987:55). The “island family” is then differentiated to create distinct variations called “dance idioms”, for example, those of the Dodecanese and Crete. Further differentiations take us to particular islands such as Rhodes. This is because although the dance idiom belongs to a larger choreological area, it manifests local peculiarities (Loutzaki, 1987:56).

In the Aegean, island dance culture is made up of a number of dance families:

Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aegean Region</th>
<th>Dance Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dodecanese Islands</td>
<td><strong>Sousta</strong>, Isos, Zervos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crete</td>
<td><strong>Syrtos</strong>, <strong>Sousta</strong>, Pentozalis, Maleviziotikos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Peloponese Coast</td>
<td>Syrtos, Balos, Karsilamas, Chassapikos, Servikos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argo-Saronic Islands</td>
<td>Syrtos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Mainland Greece and Euboea</td>
<td>Syrtos, Balos, Trata, Kangeli, Karsilamas, Chassapikos, Servikos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Sporades and E. Thessaly</td>
<td>Syrtos, Balos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thracian Sporades</td>
<td>Syrtos, Balos, Karsilamas, Chassapikos, Zeibekikos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Minor Coast</td>
<td>Syrtos, Karsilamas, Balos, Chassapikos, Servikos, Tsifteledi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Loutzaki, 1987:59

All sub-regions except the Dodecanese have the island dance of **συρτό** as their most performed dance. The Dodecanese sub-region has the **σούστα** as its most performed dance. The **σούστα**, though, is performed only in Crete and the Dodecanese.
There are four characteristics distinguishing the Aegean dances:

1. The dances are chiefly group dances, the most usual form being the open and closed circle.

2. The couple dance is performed by two men or two women or by one man and one woman. This characteristic is in contrast to the circle dances which predominate in mainland Greece. The couple dance is also usually an epilogue, the final movement to a circle dance. How this is achieved is through the dance beginning as a συρτό and being converted to a μπάλος.

3. There is the frequent σουστάρισμα (springing) from the knees bent position and the low leaps performed parallel to the ground. This opposes the stiff and ponderous steps and spectacular leaps which characterise the dance style prevalent on mainland Greece.

4. The variety of expression in the region is achieved by the different ways in which the common features are combined, and especially by differences in music. Music transforms the character of the dance from one locality to the next. Loutzaki (1987) gives the examples of the “free” μπάλος of Siphnos compared to the “plodding” μπάλος of the island of Mytilene or the “gentle” μπάλος of Naxos, or the several variations of σούστα on Rhodes, Simi, Kassos and other Dodecanesian islands compared to the σούστα of Crete. (Loutzaki, 1987:60). In all these cases, she argues, choreological differences between local musical traditions produce different morphological features of the dances.

I argue that the dances are not to be distinguished on morphological form alone. It is true that the “couple dance” form characterises the σούστα of Crete and the “circle dance” form the σούστα of the Dodecanese. However, there are also socio-cultural particularities
beyond the dance tradition which help to distinguish these forms of σούστα. Performers are social beings who give different meaning to the morphological elements in different socio-cultural contexts.

In the Dodecanese region, the σούστα is laden with historical meaning. The Dodecanese islands were the last region of Greece to be granted Independence finally becoming once again part of Greece in 1947. During independence Day celebrations on Rhodes, the σούστα was performed by all islands, indicating its importance as a regional dance. Even when the region was an Italian colony (1912–1945), the σούστα was performed in the Kremasti Dance Competition organised annually by the Italian administration. All villages would participate by sending a dance team to the village of Kremasti to perform σούστα. The village displaying the best performance returned with a prize. A prize was also awarded to the best σούστα dancer in the entire dance competition. The Κατταβενή σούστα was influenced by the dance culture of the neighboring island of Khalki. In the nineteenth century, a Khalkite icon of the Virgin Mary was (miraculously) found on (then) Kattavian land. Following this discovery, it was agreed by Khalkites and Kattavians that a monastery, Παναγιά Σκιαδενή, would be built where the icon was found. This eventually resulted in communal celebrations between the two areas, and the influence of Khalkite dance culture on Kattavians. Before island independence, the southern villages at the festival had an οντά (room) opposite the monastery which served as a refuge during the three days of celebrations. Khalkians shared the Kattavian οντά until they later built their own. Consequently, both village groups danced together until it was completed — the only two villages which danced together at the festival.

As well as its regional performance, the σούστα also dominated in local public festivals and rituals. The σούστα was the most popular dance during the Saint’s Day Festival as well as at weddings. During the Saint’s Day Festival, performers would dance in order to honour their patron saint or other saints. The σούστα, coupled with the κούπα, produced money for the village church. The κούπα was a bowl which was brought into the celebration by members of the church council to


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collect donations for the church while dancers performed the σούστα. The money collected went to the maintenance of the church, construction of public works and the wages of priests. During village weddings, the σούστα played an important role for the youth. Here the σούστα provided “public space” to young men and women to dance together.

Thus, the σούστα represented solidarity in times of historical and political change, as seen by its central role as a dance expressing Greek Dodecanesian identity in the period marking independence. It expressed religious eternity in the festival of the saint. It helped form the family in times of alliances and family values. It socialised youth in gender roles and provided young people with a legitimate means for courtship. These multiple functions of the σούστα, and the connection between dance and ritual, have many precedents (though this is not to say that theories of the ancient origin of dances such as the σούστα are true).

**The origins of Σούστα**

The earlier theory for the origin of the σούστα suggests that the dance was a fertility dance performed by medicine men of non-Greek peoples of ancient, pre-Mycenaean Crete. It had a magical function, to appease the earth goddess Rea for the growth of food. More recent interpretations link σούστα to the pyrrhic dance that had a military function in the training of young soldiers in combat in ancient Greece. However, during the early Christian period, this function disappeared when women began to dance it with men. Thereafter it was danced as a couple dance. Its motif altered from war to love. Another even more recent interpretation offered argues that the σούστα, as danced today, is associated with water and the sea, hence its predominance as a folk dance in the Aegean islands. In this interpretation, the dancing is said to represent the movement of the waves in the ocean and to have started as a sailors’ dance.
**War dance**

The military origin theory claims that the σούστα originates from an ancient Greek military war dance of Crete (Raffe, 1964:402; Petrides, 1975:57; Raftis, 1987:19). Petrides and Petrides describe the pyrrhic dance as a fighting line with the dancers very close together, forming a human shield (Petrides and Petrides, 1974:38). They would wind forward and retreat back. Raftis (1984) adds that it was performed as alternating offensive and defensive movement, as if in combat training. Raffe gives an account of “Xiphism,” which was the second of four parts to the pyrrhic dance. It was a mock fight between youths. When the dancers performed their standard movements of combat, they were disciplined by the musical rhythm into display. They made a stroke with a sword; threw a javelin or long spear; used a shield to ward off the blows; and used rapid footwork to dodge and avoid strikes (Raffe, 1964:409). Raffe tells us that this ancient military dance from the sixth century BC onwards in Athens was performed by the Έφοιβοι (Pyrrhicists) at the Greater and Lesser Panathenaea. In Sparta in the seventh century B.C. it was an important item in the military curriculum, taught to boys from the age of five. In the third century Athenaeus records that it had this same function for boys 15 years of age and up (Raffe, 1964).

The work of Lilian Lawler on ancient Greek dance indicates that the sousta may have originated from the island of Crete before it was fashioned into an armed dance. She finds no evidence that the dance of the Kuretes of Crete was ever a combat or war dance (Lawler, 1964:31). On the other hand, Petrides and Raftis claim that the pyrrhic dance was an armed dance with origins found in pre-Mycenaean Crete. Lawler argues that the pyrrhic dance of combat only really came to be known as a combat dance in Sparta, and then in Athens, during the Classical period and not during the earlier pre-Mycenaean period (Lawler, 1964:42).

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2 See further Rovik (1991) for a review of Lawler’s work. See also Lawler (1962) and Filton (1973).
Fertility dance

The σούστα could have originated from the dance of the Kuretes as both a magic and apotropaic dance (Lawler, 1964:31). The dance of the Kuretes (a non-Hellenic people of Crete) was essentially a dance characterised by leaps. Lawler argues that leaps do not necessarily characterise a war dance but act to induce the growing force in nature. High leaps, she argues, serve as sympathetic magic for the growth of tall food plants. The function of this dance has its roots in religion, not war. She also mentions that the Kuretes could have been a family of medicine men who practised this particular dance. The noise which was also involved during the dance of the Kuretes was used to frighten away evil spirits.

Dance of the sea

Another interpretation which has been given for the origin of the σούστα dance lies in geographical region. Petrides and Petrides argue that the movement of the dance is also symbolic of caiques setting out to sea, being swept back for a moment but moving relentlessly forward through the waves, just as they did in the seafaring communities of the Dodecanese islands, where the σούστα is predominantly danced. They claim that the dance conditioned men who served as sailors or marines to work together as a team for the numerous tasks on the ocean (Petrides and Petrides, 1974). This interpretation is persuasive. Although the σούστα has been documented for both mainland and island regions of Greece, documentation is stronger for the island regions. On the mainland the σούστα has been documented in the north-eastern regions of Thrace and Macedonia (Στράτου, 1979). In the island regions it is documented scantily for the Ionian islands (Κασιμάτης, 1957:145) but predominantly in the island regions of the Aegean. In the Aegean, the σούστα is documented in the northern-

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most island region of the north east Aegean (Κανελλάκης, 1890:193; Argenti, 1949:325), the central north Aegean of the Sporades islands (Λάμβρου, 1993:73) and the central Aegean of the Cyclades islands (Τρούλλος 1960:19). However, the dance remains a dance predominantly from the southern Aegean, from the Dodecanese islands and Crete.

Σούστα in dance typology: courtship dance

According to Petrides (1974) the σούστα as a courtship dance is thought to have originated in ancient Crete. From a pyrrhic dance it changed into the σούστα of Crete closely related to another Cretan dance called the μπάλος. According to Petrides, the love motif in the Cretan μπάλος shaped the movement of the Cretan σούστα. He argues that the Cretan σούστα is most closely related to the μπάλος dance which is also an island dance. The μπάλος, strictly speaking, is a couple dance of the Greek islands.


Petrides argues that the term μπάλος derives from the ancient Greek verb μπαλίζω which means to dance or jump about, and, ultimately, derives from the word μπάλος meaning to throw, in the sense of throwing oneself about. As a couple dance of the islands, its function is to act as a courtship dance and it is made up of traditional elements of courtship such as attraction, flirtation, display of masculine prowess and feminine virtue, pursuit, rejection and eventual capture or surrender (Petrides, 1975).7

Petrides and Petrides offer the opinion that the Cretan σούστα is now a courtship dance because the element of opposition in war dances easily transforms into the functions of a dance of love and courtship (Petrides and Petrides, 1974:94). Similarly, Crossfield argues that around A.D. 300 women began to dance the σούστα when it became a couple dance and the motif of love replaced war. She argues further that centuries later the dance became confined to a few islands in the Aegean especially Crete where it was given the name σούστα and where the love motif triumphed in couple dancing (Crossfield, 1948:13). Raff also argues that in its late form the dance is known as the σούστα and is found principally on Crete performed by one or two couples at a time (Raff, 1964:402).

The μπάλος can be found in a variety of forms. In the simplest form of μπάλος, one couple at a time dances through a series of spontaneous movements. In a more complicated repertoire, many couples dance but each as if they were alone. The μπάλος can also be introduced by another island dance called συρτό in which three or five people dancing the συρτό go into a μπάλος, leaving “the odd man out.” In its most complicated form, a number of couples are roughly spaced in two circles facing each other, or, in promenade position, go through various movements, the women moving with opposite footwork to men (Petrides, 1975). More specifically, Petrides argues, the Cretan σούστα is the Cretan form of μπάλος where a circle or a contra dance

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7 Wingrave and Harrold state that the μπάλος is a courtship dance and is probably of Venetian origin (Wingrave and Harrold, 1984:56-57).
formation is introduced. Dancers split up into couples but maintain their original formation and at the end link up (Petrides, 1975).8

The dance as it was in Kattavia

The following section introduces the σούστα in its ethnographic context during a period when it was central in village life on the Dodecanesian island of Rhodes. The village setting is the southern-most coastal village of Kattavia where between 1925 and 1940 the dance operated as a strong expression of village unity during the period when the region was an Italy colony (1912–1945). The σούστα in Kattavia village emphasized the love motif, especially during the wedding ritual.

Cultural motifs of Σούστα: distinct characteristics during Γάμος (wedding)

The σούστα was seen to comprise three basic elements which gave it meaning as a courtship dance. Each element was designated by an image of the dance, according to my Kattavian respondents. The first image was a spring, the second was a pair of discs (a press-stud) and the third was a horse and cart. The spring image referred to the jumping, as in a recoiling spring, in the σούστα which defined it as a jump-dance. Jump-steps, going forward and back, suggested a social tension between the profane (forward) and the sacred (backward) spheres. The profane sphere referred to the sexual dimension of male-female

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8 There are three forms of μπάλος. In the first form, men are located in the inner circle and women in the outer circle when, as couples, they are facing the line of direction. They either use regular handhold or hold with left hands while their right rests on their hip. They then take promenade position and dance with opposite footwork (man starts on left, woman starts on right). In the second form, couples are in an open circle chain with regular handhold and dance a συρτό before breaking up into separate couples. The footwork is the same. In the third form, couples are in an open circle chain with regular handhold. Only one couple at a time breaks from the circle and dances in the centre while others continue to do συρτό around them (Petrides and Petrides, 1974:13).
relationships, and the sacred sphere referred to the religiously sanctioned social order binding male and female.

The second image was of press-studs that function as they snap together. This image symbolised courtship function for men and women of the dance. The press-studs, male and female discs, signified the way young men and women bonded together as καβαλιέρος (male dancer) and κουστιέρα (female dancer) to form the ομάδα (dance unit). As men and women linked in the dance they also linked the sacred/moral and profane spheres. This was done in two ways. First, the profane was symbolically controlled by using a handkerchief so that men’s and women’s hands did not touch during the dancing. Secondly, the way in which men and women linked arms symbolised the Christian values of honourable marriage.

The third image was that of horse and cart. The male, as horse, was a virile performer as the lead dancer, drawing along other dancers in the performance. The horse and cart described the way which the κύκλος (dance circle) was controlled by the εμπρός (lead dancer [the horse]). Responsibility was placed on the male, as lead dancer, to control the performance and to display his own individual style of performance, separate from group control.

In folkloric literature, information about the dynamic features involved in dancing the σούστα is sparse. However, on occasion, folkloric literature has referred to certain characteristic features of the σούστα on the various islands of the Dodecanese and Crete which is also found in the Kattavian variant. The three main elements of the dancing action that I will now continue to explore are those most prominent in local usage. The folkloric literature supports my conviction that jumping, pairing and drawing along or tugging are the main defining features of the dancing action in Κατταβενή σούστα.

1. Jumping — the spring

The most basic characteristic of the σούστα was that it was made up of a series of jump-steps, characterising it as a jump-dance. The
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spring image refers to particular dance steps resembling the movement of a spring, jumping as it recoils after compression. Throughout the Dodecanese σούστα is invariably associated with this jumping manoeuvre as its basic action. Dancers were continuously jumping up and down, resembling the movements of a recoiling spring. Dancers of the σούστα performed with very fast and dynamic movements. Their steps were close temporally and spatially and quick in performance. Petrides notes that the term σούστα means a spring and refers to the up-and-down movement of the dancer, likening it to the jigging motion of a cart fitted with carriage springs (Petrides, 1975:94).

The jumping action and the quick, repeated movement meant that the σούστα was better suited to younger rather than older adults. It also suited the young because it was performed for a long period of time without a break, requiring great stamina. Furthermore, the central movement required that dancers must stand firmly upright with tensed muscles to be able to perform the recoil-type jumping steps successfully. Thus, the σούστα was a dance for youth signifying youthful vitality, and courtship.

Folkloric accounts of σούστα on other Dodecanesian islands show the characteristic jumping with slight variations in stepping. The jumping steps described by folklorists have five characteristics:

9 This view of the respondents is supported by NEAL, 1976; RPD, 1989; GED, 1989.
10 Petrides and Petrides state that the name of the dance derives from the Italian word susta which means spring. When the Italians observed the Cretans performing this dance they called it by its central characteristic which is the spring movement of the dancers (Petrides, 1974:38).
11 This view of respondents is supported by OEGLD (1977) which gives a more literal meaning of σούστα to the dance. The meaning posited is that of jumping upright. Subsequently, POGD (1995) defines σούστα as being a folk dance. Likewise the LEG (1988) mentions σούστα as a type of quick Cretan dance, this definition giving the σούστα as a type of dance a little more specificity.
12 Petrides states that the dance is performed in a bouncing motion on the balls of the feet, with many small and light steps as if dancing on tiptoe (Petrides, 1975:94).
quick, small, halved, raised and light.\textsuperscript{13} The fact that these descriptions include quick steps close together, small steps in one spot, half steps and steps with raised heels and light ankles all attest to the centrality of the jumping motion in the σούστα.\textsuperscript{14}

The jump-step in Κατταβενή σούστα was made up of three steps, one going forward and two going back. As individuals jump, they move in and out rather than sideways due to the forward-backward sequence of the three dance steps. For the dancers there was a central tension or ambivalence in the dance — a tension between the forward and backward movement. The ambivalence of two opposing spheres (profane and sacred) entailed different attitudes and was further reflected in different movement directions. The purpose of the dance is to resolve this ambivalence as a combined forward/back progression in the dance movement that respected the need for caution (sacred) but allowed finally for some progress toward sexual expression (profane). The step pattern emphasised the tensions between individual passion (sexual) and societal sanction (moral) and the dance helps to resolve these tensions.

2. Pairing

The σούστα was the central ritual dance of the Kattavian γάμος that united a young man and woman in marriage. Thus, the dance must have conveyed an important social function in the community, that of socially binding young couples during the rite of marriage.

For the dance to be socially binding, pairing was mediated through τιμή (honour). Many respondents mentioned that the σούστα was a τιμητικός χορός (honourable dance) because it legitimated courtship

\textsuperscript{13} The σούστα on Astipalea is a jump dance having the steps two forward and two back (Ταρσούλη, 1947:295). The Cretan σούστα consists of small steps and raised heels with the ankles “light,” implying readiness for the jump (Μπίκος, 1969:148). On Tilos, women take half a step forward, one step back and half forward again (Βινσέζ, 1983:87).

\textsuperscript{14} The σούστα on Patmos has the second step consisting of both feet jumping together (Σμυρνάκης, 1947:313).
publicly. Young men and women were seen to be honouring their families by performing σούστα and at the same time negotiating courtship activity through it. In this way, σούστα was a τιμητικός χορός because it was performed for family: the courtship process was one that was shared with family. Courtship then became central to family in dance because of honouring the sacrament of marriage as a family value. The fact that courtship activity occurred during the celebrations of a young couple marrying made the dance very socially binding.

**Male and female discs**

The second meaning associated with the word σούστα was denoted by a press-stud, a pair of small male and female discs (LX, 1990). This usage emphasised both the differentiation and the binding involved in the pairing of males and females and the sexual union that followed.

Two ways of linking achieved this binding process. One was the pairing of young men and women as ομάδες using a μαντηλάκι (handkerchief). Linking was the cross stitch style of linking arms which joined all ομάδες to form the κύκλος. Both these techniques are documented as occurring on other Dodecanese islands.15

**The Μαντηλάκι**

Τιμή, the act of honouring, was played out in dancing by avoidance of touching. This was achieved through the use of the μαντηλάκι — always coloured white like the bride’s dress to represent female virginity and purity and honour. To honour the young woman, the young

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15 For the use of μαντηλάκι, on the island of Kos, during the σούστα, handkerchiefs were held (Μπίκος, 1969:36). For linking of the arms using the cross-stitch pattern, on Kalymnos the σούστα is danced in this way (Metallinos and Schumaker, 1972–1975: 213). On the island of Tilos each woman gives her right hand extended to the chest to the following dancers and her left hand to the woman found on her left again (Βινσέζ, 1983:87). Thus, both these forms of linking the dancers are central characteristics of the σούστα.
man did not reach for her hand but offered his μαντηλάκι. Before the linking of the hands occurred for the performance of σούστα, a young man approached a young woman he would like to be his immediate dance partner in his ομάδα. When approaching her, he flicked out a μαντηλάκι in front of her and then invited her to dance. When the young woman accepted, she reached for the μαντηλάκι and got up to dance with him. So even before the σούστα began, τιμή may be observed with the use of the μαντηλάκι during invitation.

The invitation with the μαντηλάκι then set the scene for the linking of the hands on the dance floor to form the ομάδες. All dancers in a dance unit were said to be δεμένοι (tied) to one another. The act of being δεμένοι was achieved through the use of the μαντηλάκι — again to eliminate touching.

A dancer held the μαντηλάκι in the right hand and offered it to the second dancer on the left. They normally held the μαντηλάκι from the bottom right hand corner and the dancer to whom it was offered held the μαντηλάκι from the top left hand corner. When they then linked to dance, the μαντηλάκι served to link them at a respectable distance from each other — a distance which linked both their hands at two opposed corners — the man’s from bottom right and the woman’s from top left. The act of the two dancers holding from opposite corners reflected the τιμή that was adhered to throughout the dance.

Τιμή can be seen to represent female honour. Respondents stated that the μαντηλάκι had to be white in colour: no other colour was allowed. The colour was symbolic of purity, thus τιμή. As a bride was dressed in white so too the colour of the μαντηλάκι was white. The colour also symbolised virginity in this context, hence the elimination of bodily contact during the dance. This was especially relevant since the female performers were young, single and performing a courtship activity through performing σούστα. Thus, when a male invited a female to dance with the μαντηλάκι, he was effectively honouring her virginity by showing her the white handkerchief.

The expression of the sacred within the profane can be seen

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through the linking in this manner. The μαντηλάκι served to buffer or separate any “feeling” the dancers may have had toward one another by not allowing their skin to touch. The μαντηλάκι was an indicator of social control over the body in the midst of profanity (sexuality) which was expressed by the forward steps of the σούστα during the dance. The way the μαντηλάκι was incorporated as part of the dancing was an open display of τιμή.\(^\text{16}\) In particular, the μαντηλάκι acted as a kind of buffer to preserve the female’s τιμή.\(^\text{17}\) This rule of the μαντηλάκι was broken infrequently and secretly when the hand of a loved one was squeezed behind the μαντηλάκι. Respondents told me this is what happened when opportunity presented itself to those in love during the dance when they found themselves in dance positions where their hands were linked (female second to the left of the male in the κύκλος).\(^\text{18}\)

**Cross arm linking**

Once the hands of the dancers were linked by the μαντηλάκι, they proceeded to link their arms before the dancing began. The linking of arms followed a sequence where the right hand of a dancer linked to the left hand of the second dancer on their left. The left hand of the dancer linked to the right hand of the second dancer on their left.

\(^{16}\) Respondents mentioned that the σούστα was an honourable dance as performers used handkerchiefs, placing an emphasis upon “honour”. Honour was also evident when this dance was used along with the κούπα in the Saints Day Festival to help support the church in gathering funds for its maintenance. Thus, as an honourable dance, the σούστα was preferred as a dance to help generate activities of the village. Not only were caretakers of the monastery of Saint George and the village’s patron church of St. Paraskevi assisted through the κούπα but also the payment of the village school teachers was done through the κούπα.

\(^{17}\) The dancer to the right always offered to share their μαντηλάκι with the second on their left.

\(^{18}\) Consequently, a squabble may arise if a καβαλιέρος squeezed the hand of a κουστιέρα during the dance when it was not appropriate to do so. Some time after dancing, she may let her brother or fiancé know about the incident and an argument would then eventuate.
right. In this manner, the arms of the dancers criss-crossed while hands were linked across the waist of each dancer. The right arm of each dancer crossed behind the left arm of the dancer following them in the κύκλος.

The cross arm link was important, allowing the dancers to be locked together in order to dance the agile dance steps of the σούστα. Because the σούστα progressed forward and back quite quickly through a series of jump-steps, it was important for the body of the dancer to be linked in such a way that they would all be jumping synchronically. The cross arm link both fastened the arms of the dancer as well as fastening their bodies from the waist. A dancer would have his right arm crossed behind the left arm of the dancer before him and the left arm crossed in front of the dancer after him. The dancer’s waist however was fastened by the left hand of the dancer before him, holding the right hand of the dancer after him. In effect, the top half of the bodies of the dancers seemed to have been woven together through the cross arm link. This linking method also allowed the dancers to tense their bodies when jumping which helped to achieve synchronicity in the jumping movements of every dancer in the κύκλος.

It was suggested by my respondents that a religious dimension entered through the criss-crossing of arms when it was done in such a way as to display the sacred symbol of the cross. Becoming δεμένοι was performed such that the act of social bonding was also a religious symbol. The linking of hands and of arms to produce the symbol of a cross signified a sacred bonding of these young dancers to their community and legitimated the pairing of young men and women during the performance.

However, the cross-stitch pattern also contained a sexual innuendo. The arms holding ομάδες together crossed over the chest of each dancer. In dance positions where males were linked to females, the lower part of the male’s arm and hand was tightly fastened to the female’s breast. Clothing acted as a buffer like the μαντηλάκι.

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19 Petrides and Petrides describe this form of linking as the “basket weave hold” (Petrides et al., 2003).
3. The image of horse and cart: drawing or tugging the cart

The third meaning of the σούστα was suggested by the image of a two-wheeled cart being drawn by a horse. Masculinity was represented by the horse that provided a model for the male's performance as εμπρός. He had to be virile in order to attract a female partner in the dance. Drawing was performed by the εμπρός and it represented his control over the dance circle. Tugging involved creative skill of the εμπρός as a lead, manipulating the circle to perform in a manner representing his own design of the dance as εμπρός. The responsibility of the lead was to control the dance performance but he was also expected to display a personal style that reflected his creative abilities to design.

The horse and cart image represented the importance of the εμπρός as the controller of the κύκλος. Tugging was shared by all καβαλιέροι (male dancers) who led the ομάδες. Thus, the movement of the κύκλος was a shared male responsibility. The act of tugging was further emphasised when all dancers were linked by sharing μαντηλάκια, corresponding to the leather strappings or reins linking the horse to the cart. The symbols of the wheels and cart represented the dancing pairs to form the κύκλος.

Folklorists describe the characteristic of tugging in σούστα in the Dodecanese. In all these variations the εμπρός controls the dance and Petrides, 1974:41). Βαύδ-Βοβύ states that this particular link of dancers is known as γέστο in villages of northern Rhodes (Βαύδ-Βοβύ, 1973:173).

21 In Tilos, there are two to three men who drag the dance (Βινσέζ, 1983:87). These leaders create a curve or a smaller circle within the larger one (Μπίκος, 1969:148). On Crete, dancers performing σούστα dance steps on the spot. They jump lightly to then prepare for a more forceful jump which requires that they lead dance forward, depending on where the lead would like to go. The leader then guides them backwards and then to the right and then left and turn to each other to avoid a forceful step toward each other (Κουσιάδης, 1951:71). On the island of Leros, the κάβος (lead dancer) stamps his feet on the ground and performs small, low jumps that then lead him to squat. He then hits his legs and does circles with his right (Αγαλιάνου, 1989:53).
by manipulating the κύκλος into a spiral and leading the κύκλος forward and back, right and left. The virile individual performance of the εμπρός stood in contrast to the uniform actions of the rest of the κύκλος. He stood out as a dancer.

As well as controlling the κύκλος, the εμπρός had the ability to perform free-style in the dance performance, as the following will indicate.

Εμπρός as Σχεδιαστής (designer)

The εμπρός had to be καλός σχεδιαστής (a good designer) and it was important for his κουστιέρα to help him “design”. This was why she was chosen to be his immediate dance partner — to support and emphasise his design and dance as his partner within the ομάδα. Her duty to the εμπρός was to “give air” to his performance, to help him dance “on top of the music” as my respondents put it. Thus, one important aspect of being a καλός σχεδιαστής was to be δεμένος with a female partner who could best work with his dance movements to emphasise his σχέδιο (design). This teamwork between εμπρός and κουστιέρα worked around the idea of making the performance of the εμπρός “light”.

Although the entire κύκλος were light on their feet jumping forwards and back, the onus of the εμπρός was to make sure that he performed even more lightly than the rest of the κύκλος. He did this by adding his own variations along with the steps required for σούστα. These were called τσακίζματα/τσαλίμια/κόλπα. The εμπρός danced more steps than the κύκλος. This was why the κουστιέρα had to support the performance of the εμπρός. The more steps she was able to assist him to emphasise, the lighter his performance was. While the κουστιέρα danced with identical steps to the κύκλος, she had to predict the extra dance movements of the εμπρός and know how to support these movements. In essence, the κουστιέρα, like the εμπρός, had to be skillful in order to balance her own dancing which reflects the first dancer of the κύκλος with her movements that had to reflect...
The emprós. At the same time, it was important that the two did not
tire while he performed as emprós. If the emprós was not successful
in blending the steps of sousta with individual improvisation then it
was said that he could not schediasëi (design).

Every emprós had his characteristic style of dancing both with the
kúklòs and as a solo performer and was acknowledged by the village
folk for his dance style. The sousta thus allowed the emprós indi-
vidual expression. The sousta consisted of three steps but the emprós
could do many more so long as he did not break the synchronicity of
the required three steps for the entire kúklòs to follow.

It was critical that the emprós had chrónos (time-synchronicity). If
the emprós did not have chrónos, then neither did the other dancers.
If he lost the chrónos so did the kúklòs. He must “hold the time” even
in his extra free-style steps. Respondents stated that the emprós
must have danced “on top” of the music or dancers became áchronoi (“fall
out of time”).

Controlling the Kúklòs

The emprós determined the direction of movement for the omádes
through his lead performance while he was controlling the kúklòs.
Even when démënoi to his koustiéra, the emprós guided the circle into
a spiral, working the kúklòs inward to the centre of the dance space
as well as guiding the dancers outwards again. Thus, another way that
the emprós was considered a kálòs schédiastrí is by how well he
was able to manipulate the form of a kúklòs into a spiral shape by
tugging at the first half of the kúklòs and moving them inward after
him to form a spiral when the second half of the kúklòs followed suit.
Various spiral type forms may be designed by the emprós. One other
type involved only part of the kúklòs dancing in the form of a spiral
and quickly dancing out again with this repeated movement of going
in and out.

The design of his own steps and the design of the kúklòs were
two separate designs which the emprós had to balance well in his
performance. As well as making his own dance movement “lighter”

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Flinders University Department of Languages - Modern Greek: Adelaide, 195-224.

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than that of the entire κύκλος, he must also be able to create an over-
all design of the dance circle which was appealing to those who were
observing. Thus, although he was designing his own dance steps to
accompany the steps of σούστα for himself, he must, in the midst of
this, also create an external design according to how the κύκλος could
be shaped from the forward-backward motion of the entire dance.

Disengaging from the Κύκλος: free-style movement

The other design which the εμπρός created during his performance
was disengaging from the κύκλος and dancing on his own. It is a solo
performance of the εμπρός which crowned his prowess as a καλός
σχεδιαστής. Once establishing his control as both a “lighter” dancer
and a creator of the form of the κύκλος, he then disengaged to cel-
ebrate his own success as lead. When this occurred, the entire κύκλος
stood and danced on the spot to honour his solo performance while
he completed this solo σούστα dance (μοναχική σούστα). When he
engaged with the κύκλος again, the dancing continued as it had before
he disengaged.

The solo dance was called the μοναχική σούστα.22 It was performed
by the εμπρός when he disengaged from the κύκλος. When he was
performing alone with his μαντηλάκι he was performing μολιτά. In
effect, the εμπρός though solo was dancing with his μαντηλάκι. He
was seen to be dancing μολιτά referring to the accompaniment of
the μαντηλάκι. When using the μαντηλάκι in his performance of the
μοναχικές σκλίβες (lone circles), it was said by respondents that the
εμπρός would μολήβει or μολάει, that is, perform an action “with” the
μαντηλάκι. Even during this solo performance, the μαντηλάκι held
important meaning for the dance. The εμπρός in this dance position
continued to be defined through words which gave meaning to the
presence of the μαντηλάκι in the dance, even though he was in a solo
performance. According to my respondents the inclusion of the μαντη-

22 My current research includes an analysis of this dance as performed in the Rhodian
highland village of Istrios, during saint worship for the cure of illness.
λάκι in the solo underlines the importance of τιμή in every aspect of the dance.

Figure 2. Σούστα as love dance: the courtship process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images (symbols/metaphor)</th>
<th>Meanings (movement)</th>
<th>Courtship Process (individual/pair/group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Jumping</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discs (male and female)</td>
<td>Pairing</td>
<td>Couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horse and cart</td>
<td>Tugging, linking</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diagram displays an integration of three different levels of the courtship process, the individual dancer, the male-female pair and the group, each of which had its own special dynamic represented in dance movement. The first social category was the individual: the young, virile and active dancer. The second social category was the couple in the social process of courtship and marriage. The third social category was the group represented in the circle linking a community of young people in the ritual of marriage.

The individual was the first level of the courtship process for the dance where s/he was likened to the image of a bed spring. The jumping movements of the dancer symbolised the movement of a spring that recoiled very quickly. The dancers stood firmly and upright with tensed muscles performing the steps in a jumping motion. Thus, the individual who performed this dance was necessarily young and active. The fact that the spring was a *bed spring* also reveals an important connotation for “bedroom activity” which introduces the importance of sexual connotations noted by my respondents.

The pair was representative of the second level of the courtship process. They were likened to a pair of male and female discs sewn onto clothing in place of buttons. The pairings indicated in the dancing
revealed a conjoining of men and women together in the dance. Thus, the dancers who performed together were coupled according to a male-female combination in the ομάδα.

The group was the third level of the courtship process which was implied in the image of a horse drawing a cart. The movement of the κύκλος symbolised group activity where the εμπρός was tugging the rest of the κύκλος during the performance. This tugging motion of horse and cart was further explained by the leather strap that linked the two. This was symbolised in the σούστα by the linking of dancers through the μαντηλάκι, linking the εμπρός with all καβαλιέροι and κουστιέρες.

**Conclusion**

This paper has looked at the Κατταβενή σούστα as a communal courtship dance in several contexts. Historical and folkloric studies and interviews with respondents have been drawn on to place the Κατταβενή σούστα in the context of Greek dance over the centuries, the dances of the Aegean, and finally the dances of the Dodecanesian islanders. From this historical and regional contextualisation the distinctive characteristics of the Kattavian courtship σούστα have been defined. The characteristics combine form (the jumping, pairing and drawing/tugging movements and sequences) and meaning (the legitimation of courtship on the way to honourable marriage and the sacralis chain of profane gender relations).
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