

XI.—The Geranos Dance — a New Interpretation

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The dance known as the *geranos* was a chthonic maze dance, around a horned altar, in honor of a female divinity. It was probably Minoan in origin. Basic to most maze dances is a very old dance form which is an imitation of the crawling of a snake. The *geranos* was probably of this type originally. In some forms it seems actually to have been a snake-carrying dance. The word *geranos* may be from an Indo-European root **ger-*, meaning "to wind." The *geranos* form had a tremendous influence on the Greek dance, and may be traced through Roman, mediæval, and Renaissance times down to the present.

The most famous dance in all of Greek antiquity, and the one most familiar to students of Greek civilization today, is the *geranos*. The sheer bulk of the literature upon it is little short of appalling; and the hardihood of one who today presumes to add to that bulk, even with a modest study, is probably equally appalling. Nevertheless, it is a fact that, after some millennia of description, comment, and conjecture, the *geranos* dance remains an unsolved puzzle; and while puzzles endure, the curious will continue to try to solve them.

There are several references to the *geranos* in ancient literature. One of the most important of these is in the *Theseus* of Plutarch (21). The biographer says: "And sailing away from Crete, he (Theseus) landed at Delos; and having sacrificed to the deity, and having set up the image of Aphrodite which he had received from Ariadne, he danced with his youthful companions a dance which they say the Delians still perform, an imitation of the *περίοδοι* and *διέξοδοι* in the Labyrinth, contrived in a certain pattern of movement which had *παραλλάξεις* and *ἀνελίξεις*. This type of dance is called *geranos* by the Delians, as Dicaearchus attests. And he danced it around the altar of horns, so-called because it is made of horns, all taken from the left side. They say also that he set up a contest on Delos, and to those victorious on that occasion a palm was awarded for the first time by him."

Pollux (4.101) says that the *geranos* is danced *κατὰ πλῆθος*, one dancer beside another in line, with "leaders" holding the end positions on either side — *ἐκαστος ὑφ' ἐκάστῳ κατὰ στοίχον, τὰ ἄκρα ἐκατέρωθεν τῶν ἡγεμόνων ἐχόντων*. He says also that the followers of Theseus

were the first to perform the dance, that they danced around the Delian altar, and that they imitated in their dance their escape from the Labyrinth.

The mention of the two "leaders" is amplified by Hesychius. A γερανουλκός, he says (s. v.), is "the leader of the dance on Delos." The same lexicographer defines the *geranos* (s. v.) as "a dance," without further elaboration; and the *Etymologicum Magnum* (s. v.) glosses it merely as "a kind of dance."

Lucian (*Salt.* 34) mentions the dance by name, but refrains from discussing it on the ground that it does not form a part of the Graeco-Roman pantomimic dance, with which he is primarily concerned. Later, however (38), he says that the pantomimic dancer must be acquainted with the stories of "the wanderings of the island Delos, the travail of Leto, the Python's destruction . . ."; and he mentions the Labyrinth among appropriate mythological themes for such a dancer (49).

Pausanias (5.19.1), describing the decorations on the Chest of Cypselus, says: ". . . and Theseus is there, with a lyre, and beside him is Ariadne, holding a garland." The general context here is of a dance, but there is no detail.

Several ancient and medieval writers seem to have associated with the *geranos* the dance portrayed in the *Iliad*, 18.590–606. There youths and maidens, holding one another's wrists, first run lightly in circle formation, then form two lines which dance towards and away from each other.¹ A musician accompanies them on the lyre, and two tumblers whirl among them. The poet says that the dancing-place upon which they perform is "like that which once in wide Cnossus Daedalus made for fair-haired Ariadne." This description is echoed in other Greek writers, notably Philostratus (*Imag.* 2.10.18–22).

Scholiasts on the *Iliad*² say of this dance: "Departing after his victory, Theseus with the youths and maidens devised (ἐπλεκεν) in the gods' honor just such a dance in a circle as his going into and out of the Labyrinth had been." They add that Daedalus helped them to contrive the dance.

It should be noted, however, that the dance described in the *Iliad* is of an essentially different choreographic type from the dance

¹ Cf. Lillian B. Lawler, Διπλή, διποδία, διποδισμός in the Greek Dance," *TAPhA* 76 (1945) 59–66.

² Schol. Ven. A *Il.* 18.590 (Dindorf 2.179); Schol. Ven. B (Dindorf 4.202).

attributed to Theseus. The latter is a devious, winding, wandering dance; the former is a crisp, rapid circle dance, followed by a forward and backward dance of two lines in opposition to each other. Both types are well known to students of the dance.

Another commentator on the *Iliad*, Eustathius (1166), regards the dance described in the eighteenth book as identical with that of Theseus, and believes that Daedalus originated it for Ariadne. He says that the young men and women saved by Theseus from the Labyrinth were the first in history to dance ἀναμῖξ — men and women together, an arrangement not common in Greek dances. Eustathius considers the dance a synthesis of two major forms, the dance of war (as represented by the youths, carrying daggers) and the dance of peace (as represented by the maidens, wearing wreaths of flowers). He stresses the rapidity of the tempo. He adds that even in his own day (the twelfth century) many people, "especially seafarers," perform a winding, sinuous dance imitative of the twists and turns of the ancient Labyrinth.

In Lucian's treatise on the dance there is a section (12) which discusses a Lacedaemonian dance called ὄρμος. In it, youths and maidens alternate in a line, the youths dancing steps which will be useful in war, the maidens in modest and womanly fashion. Lucian interprets the name of the dance as denoting a "chain" or "necklace" of youth and beauty. Many commentators have equated this dance, the dance of the *Iliad*, and the *geranos*.³

A passage in Callimachus (*Del.* 300-313) is very important for our dance. The island of Delos resounds with song, says Callimachus, when Hesperus looks down upon it. Men sing old songs, and women dance. The sacred statue of Aphrodite is weighted down with garlands — the famous old statue "which once Theseus with the young people set up, when he was sailing from Crete." After they had escaped from the Minotaur and the devious Labyrinth, "around thine altar, O Lady, they performed a dance to the strains of the cithara, and Theseus led the dance."

Callimachus continues (316-324) with a slight variation of theme. All merchant mariners who sail near Delos, says the poet, go ashore upon the island, "whirl in a dance" around an altar there, and "bite the sacred trunk of the olive, holding their hands behind their backs." A scholiast upon this passage misinterprets Calli-

³ Cf. Joannes Meursius, "Orchestra," in Vol. VIII of Jacobus Gronovius' *Thesaurus Graecarum Antiquitatum* (Venice, 1732-37) s. v. ὄρμος.

machus, and says that the mariners beat the altar of Apollo with a whip. A somewhat corrupt gloss of Hesychius (s. v. *Δηλακὸς βωμός) speaks of the "running around the altar on Delos in a circle, and being beaten," and says that Theseus began the rite, in gratitude for his escape from the Labyrinth. Elsewhere⁴ I have shown that the ceremonial beating of the dancers and the biting of the sacred olive tree are ritual elements of the sailors' dances, and that their purpose is to avert evil from the ships. I believe that they have nothing in common with the *geranos* except the fact that both types of the dance were done near the altar of horns on Delos, by seafaring people.

In addition to literary and lexicographical comment on the *geranos*, we have the good fortune to possess several inscriptions found on Delos, dating for the most part from the fourth to the second century B.C., which have a bearing on the dance. From them we learn that the sum of ten drachmas was habitually given to the dancers of the *geranos*.⁵ Also, we learn that money was regularly allotted for torches, olive oil, and wicks for lamps for the dances — a fact which bears out Callimachus' statement that the dances were done in the evening. In addition, the inscriptions permit us to infer that the *geranos* was in early times danced in the month *Hekatombaion* (July), probably at the festival of Aphrodite,⁶ but that later it was performed at festivals in other months as well, and to other divinities. Also, money was appropriated for branches, and for *ῥυμοί* for the dancers.⁷ We shall return to the inscriptions a little later.

It is interesting to note that in all the references to the Delian *geranos* there is no mention of the significance of the name of the dance. It happens that *geranos* is the ordinary Greek word for "crane"; but in none of the descriptions of the dance is there any hint of pantomimic imitation of the bird. That the Greeks, and the Cretans before them, had bird dances of various sorts from very early times is attested.⁸ Also, in the Greek theater, in the dances

⁴ Lillian B. Lawler, "The Dance of the Ancient Mariners," *TAPhA* 75 (1944) 20-33.

⁵ Cf. Martin P. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste* (Leipzig, 1906) 381.

⁶ However, Émile Cahen, in "L'autel de cornes et l'hymne à Délos de Callimaque," *REG* 36 (1923) 18-21, thinks it was performed to Apollo from the first.

⁷ *IG* 11.2.144A.32; 11.2.203A.51; and *passim*. See also Th. Homolle, "Comptes et Inventaires des Temples Déliens en l'Année 279," *BCH* 14 (1890) 389-511.

⁸ Lillian B. Lawler, "The Dance of the Holy Birds," *CJ* 37 (March, 1942) 351-361.

accompanying certain choral odes, there would certainly be much use of bird schemata and gestures. This would be particularly true of the ode in Euripides' *Helen* 1478–1487, where the chorus pray that they may fly to Sparta as “Libyan cranes,” and of the ode in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 1143–1151, where the chorus sing of flying home, and then, with folded wings, of dancing there. But in its original form, at least, there is no evidence that the *geranos* was a bird dance at all.

Modern commentators have been much concerned over the matter of the interpretation of the name of the *geranos*. Some scholars have thought that the *geranos* dance reminded the Delians of cranes encircling their island in flight, before landing upon it. Others, including Scaliger, Vuillier, and Latte,⁹ thought that the dance was so named because of a similarity of the line of dancers to the lines of migrating cranes. It was often noted in antiquity that the birds in flight took a formation suggestive of the Greek letters lambda, gamma, delta, upsilon, or even phi. As a result, cranes were sometimes called by the Greeks the “inventors” of the alphabet; or their flight was said to have suggested the idea of the alphabet to Palamedes or to Hermes, who then “invented” the letters. Similar formations occasionally were used in other dances; and Oppian actually speaks of a flock of cranes as a χορός of dancers.¹⁰

Séchan¹¹ says that the dance was called *geranos* “either because the dancers advanced with head high and necks extended, waving their linked arms as if they were wings; or rather, more probably, because the most characteristic arrangement of the line suggested the idea of the triangular flight of a flock of cranes.” He thinks that at the apex of the triangle was the leader of the whole group, the γερανοῦλκός, and that the two ἡγεμόνες mentioned by Pollux brought up the rear of each of the two wings. He believes that the evolutions of the dancers were later interpreted as imitating the windings of the Labyrinth.

⁹ Julius Caesar Scaliger, “De Comoedia et Tragoedia,” in Vol. VIII of Gronovius' *Thesaurus* (see note 3), 1534B; Gastone Vuillier, *La Danza* (Milan, 1899) 18; Kurt Latte, “De Saltationibus Graecorum Capita Quinque,” *Religionsgesch. Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 13.3 (1913) 69.

¹⁰ Cicero, *Nat. Deor.* 2.49; Claudian, *Bell. Gild.* 475–6; Martial 9.14; Philostratus, *Heroica* 11.4; Hyginus, *Fab.* 277; Oppian, *Hal.* 1.620–622; cf. Ausonius, *Technop.* 13 (*Id.* 12.13) 25. Cf. also Lillian B. Lawler, “The Dance of the Alphabet,” *CO* 18 (April, 1941) 69–71.

¹¹ Louis Séchan, *La danse grecque antique* (Paris, 1930) 120.

Humborg¹² thinks that the dance was so named because the performers kept as close to one another as do cranes in flight.

Thompson and Gossen think that the dance imitated not the flight of cranes, but the real "dance" of the Demoiselle or Numidian crane, a graceful and delicate phenomenon which can be observed even among captive cranes. Keller is of a similar opinion, and implies that the connection with Aphrodite indicates a courtship dance.¹³

Weege¹⁴ thinks that the dance had "strong, distinctive movements." He believes these included a spirited swinging of the arms like the beating of wings, and proud strutting steps.

Recently Johansen¹⁵ has expressed the opinion that the movements of the dance reminded the people of Delos of the actions of cranes; and that since cranes were sacred birds on that island, probably to Leto, it is natural that the people should have given the bird's name to the dance.

The fact of the matter is that we do not know why the dance was called *geranos*. So far as we are aware, the Greeks themselves seem to have expressed no curiosity as to the name. It is possible that the word in this connection does not mean "crane" at all. It might be well to give some further consideration to the nature of the dance, to see if the original significance of the name can be determined.

It seems very definite that the dance belongs to the great group of wandering, winding, maze dances which are common to all early peoples, in all parts of the earth — dances of which the essence is not the attaining of any climax or end, but rather a continuous, never-ending twisting and untwisting. Several writers have noted this fact, and have discussed the dance accordingly.

A. B. Cook, in general following J. G. Frazer,¹⁶ connects the *geranos* with the Labyrinth at Cnossus, which he regards not as a building but rather as "an orchestra of solar pattern presumably made for a mimetic dance." He emphasizes the association of the art motifs of the swastika and the maeander with both the Cretan

¹² *RE*, s. v. "Labyrinthos."

¹³ D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (London, 1936) 75; *RE*, s. v. "Kranich"; Otto Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt* (Leipzig, 1913) 2.185; cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 10.59; also, Marjorie K. Rawlings, *The Yearling* (New York, 1938) 94-96.

¹⁴ Fritz Weege, *Der Tanz in der Antike* (Halle, 1926) 6, 24-25, 62.

¹⁵ K. F. Johansen, "Thésée et la danse à Délos," *Étude herménéutique* 3.3 (1945) 12.

¹⁶ A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (Cambridge, 1914-1920) 1.472-495; J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London, 1907-1918) 4.74-78.

Labyrinth and the sun. He believes that the dance was a mimetic representation of the progress of the sun; that it was performed every ninth year, by the crown prince of Crete, wearing a bull mask, and by the captive Athenian youths and maidens, who were then probably burned alive, as a sacrifice to the sun. Frazer sees parallels in the worship of Moloch in Carthage, and suspects Semitic influence in the ritual. He believes the "Minotaur" was a bull-headed image of metal, in which the young captives were roasted. He regards the whole ceremony as an octennial renewal of the solar fires. He points to similar rites among Indians, as a magical assisting of the sun during an eclipse.

It requires great temerity to suggest that such scholars as Cook and Frazer may be mistaken in a matter involving ancient religious ritual; but I think there are one or two points which they overlooked in this matter of the *geranos*. In the first place, the apparent path of the sun through the sky is not a wandering maze, but a mathematically precise pattern. We know that the Egyptians, and presumably the Minoans as well, had a dance mimetic of the movements of the heavenly bodies;¹⁷ but it is difficult to see how this could be a maze dance, performed by a wandering line of dancers. A dance of the heavenly bodies could be performed by a group of dancers each of whom moved individually, representing a particular planet in its orbit; or it could have a choreography exactly like that of the dance described in the *Iliad* — a rapid circle, representing the movement of the planets through the skies, followed by a dance of two lines in opposition, representing the apparent approach of the various planets to the earth and to one another, and their subsequent separation. Curiously enough, Euripides, in the *Electra* (467), speaking of the very shield of Achilles which forms the basis for the description of the dance in the *Iliad*, says there were depicted on it "ethereal dances of stars." If there was a solar or celestial dance in the Labyrinth, it may well have been similar to the dance of the *Iliad*.

In the second place, Cook and Frazer seem to have forgotten the fact that on Delos the *geranos* was done at night, by the light of torches and lamps. This would definitely establish the dance as chthonic.

In the third place, the dance seems to have an association not with the bull god, Zagreus or Dionysus or Zeus, but rather with a

¹⁷ W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Sacred Dance* (New York, 1932) 69-70.

female divinity. It is connected with Ariadne, we recall, and with an ancient representation of a goddess whom Plutarch identifies with Aphrodite. Later, the dance is associated with Artemis. Further, as Evans has pointed out,¹⁸ the association of Minotaur and maze was "an aftermath of Hellenic days"; and the *geranos* dance probably antedates the legend of the Labyrinth.

We have, then, a chthonic maze dance, around a horned altar, in honor of a female divinity. And, as performed on Delos, it is clearly a dance of victory, celebrating the overthrow of a great enemy.

Many students of the dance believe that back of, and basic to, most of the maze dances of primitive peoples of modern times there is an exceedingly ancient dance form which is an imitation of the crawling of a snake.¹⁹ A good summary of the development of this type of dance may be found in Curt Sachs' *World History of the Dance*.²⁰ It is still to be seen in such widely separated parts of the world as the western United States, Mexico, India, Africa, Madagascar, Australia, China, Ceylon, and Mallorca. The purpose of the dance varies somewhat from place to place. In some cases it is totemistic. In others it is a prayer to an earth or vegetation goddess. In others it is apotropaic, to ward off snakes, or evil in general. It is frequently performed at the burial place of a great hero; it may be no accident that in the *Iliad*, in the account of the ceremonial funeral dance performed for Patroclus (23.225), the word ἐπὶ ῥῶν is used — "crawling, as a snake" — and that in the *Andromache* of Euripides (1263), Thetis, bidding Peleus carry the body of Neoptolemus in procession to Delphi for burial, uses the word ἔρπε. In China a snake or dragon dance is performed at the New Year, and also as a victory celebration. In many lands a snake dance is sympathetic magic, a rain charm, because of the damp, slimy skin of the reptile, and because of the generally recognized similarity between the crawling of a serpent and the flowing of a river. This similarity is further emphasized by names and legends. In Greece,

¹⁸ Arthur J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos* (London, 1921-1935) 3.283.

¹⁹ Lack of space precludes any discussion here of the difficult problem of the maze or labyrinth itself; see W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths* (London, 1922); Erich Bethe, "Minos," *RhM* 65 (1910) 227; Humborg and Karo in *RE*, s. v. "Labyrinthos"; Evans, *op. cit.* (see note 18); Lars-Ivar Ringbom, "Trojalek och Tranedans," *Finskt Museum* 45 (1938) 68-106, in which the *geranos* is interpreted as a sort of May-pole dance; John L. Heller, "Labyrinth or Troy Town?" *CJ* 42 (Dec., 1946) 123-139.

²⁰ New York, 1937, 151-159.

a river was sometimes called Ophis or Drakon. The Orontes river was originally called Typhon, after the δράκων Typhon, who, struck by lightning, "cut the earth and formed the bed of the river" in his struggles to get safely underground. Rivers are often described as "winding, like a snake."²¹

In almost all civilizations the maze dance becomes metaphorical, and is said to represent such things as the progress of the dead in the realm of the shades, or the wanderings of a deity, or the trials of an initiate. In the Middle Ages, maze dances were used in churches and elsewhere to symbolize the tortuous path of a Christian as he seeks to avoid the evils and temptations of life, or a pilgrim's journey to the Holy Land. A Phrygian form of the dance in antiquity yielded the *Lusus Troiae* of the Romans—a display of horsemanship given by boys and young men, riding in maze-like patterns. This form of the maze dance survives in modern horse-shows, and a remote descendant of it is probably the "running a maze" figure common in gymnasium classes and on the stage to this day.

The possibility that the Cretans may have had a mimetic snake dance as part of the ritual of their Great Goddess would, I am sure, come as a surprise to no one. In fact, it would be very strange if they did not have such a dance. We know that dancing played a vital part in their rituals. Also, the importance of the snake in their religion is well attested. Glotz remarks that among them the snake was semi-divine; other scholars have expressed the opinion that the great Cretan goddess was originally a sacred serpent, and only after some time became anthropomorphic.²² The snake was apparently one of the forms in which the goddess revealed herself to her worshippers; and in Cretan art the goddess and her votaries frequently appear in conjunction with snakes, or hold snakes in their hands. In Egypt a great snake was the embodiment of the fertility goddess Rannut;²³ it may well be that a great python, brought from

²¹ Pausanias 8.8.4–5; Strabo 6.253, 9.424, 10.458, 16.2.7; Hesiod, frag. 38.2 (Rzach³); Plato, *Phaedo* 141E; cf. Erich Küster, *Die Schlange in der griechischen Kunst und Religion* (Giessen, 1913) 154–156.

²² Gustave Glotz, *Aegean Civilization* (New York, 1925) 249; *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings (New York and Edinburgh, 1922–1927), s. vv. "Serpent Worship" (J. A. MacCulloch) 11.402, 404 and "Aegean Religion" (D. G. Hogarth) 1.145. Cf. the stories of Rhea and Persephone in the form of serpents, Athenagoras 20.292, Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2.

²³ Hastings, *op. cit.* (see note 22) s. v. "Serpent Worship" (J. A. MacCulloch) 11.402.

Egypt, personified the Cretan goddess in the palace at Cnossus — perhaps dwelling in the “wild beast’s den” discovered not so long ago.²⁴ We recall that a python represented the earth goddess at the chthonian oracle of Minoan Delphi, before the coming of the Greek Apollo; and according to some accounts²⁵ it was female. Also, in parts of Greece influenced by Crete there are old legends of great serpents in sacred groves, at springs, and in other hallowed spots, fed by maiden votaries; and of a giant serpent, sacred to the city goddess, and likewise fed by maidens, on the Acropolis at Athens itself, from Minoan-Mycenaean times down to a late date.²⁶

It is interesting to note that many archaeologists see in the art motifs of the maze, the maeander, the chevron, and the spiral a conventionalization of a snake.²⁷ All of these motifs are highly characteristic of Minoan art. Also, Evans detected in another decorative motif common in Crete the markings of an adder.²⁸

I believe, then, that the Cretans may have had at certain festivals a solemn nocturnal serpent dance, performed around one of their characteristic horned altars, to invoke the presence of the Great Goddess. It may have been followed by an exhibition of a living python, thought of as the goddess incarnate. Some scholars think the Cretan Labyrinth was a series of caves,²⁹ and that a dance was performed through its devious passages. Other scholars think a dance was done to or from a sacred cave; Marinatos, for example, reads *πρὸς τὸ σπήλαιον* instead of *πρὸς τὸ παλαιόν* in Eustathius’ comment on the passage in the *Iliad* cited above.³⁰ It is a curious coincidence that the modern Greeks call the temple-cave on Delos “the dragon’s cave” today. In any case, the ritual must have been spectacular; and it would be small wonder if the terrified captives, viewing it, were profoundly impressed. It would have epitomized to them the dread might of the great Minoan empire.

I think it unlikely that the captives took part in the dance in Crete. In the first place, it is customary for participants in a dance

²⁴ James Baikie, *Life of the Ancient East* (New York, 1923) 394–395.

²⁵ *Homeric Hymn to the Pythian Apollo* 300–374.

²⁶ Aelian, *Nat. An.* 11.2.16; Schol. Aristoph. *Nub.* 508; Herodotus 8.41; Aristoph. *Lysis.* 758; Philostratus the Elder 2.17.6; cf. Cyprian, *Confessio* 1; Eudocia, *De S. Cypriano* 2.20–21 (MPG 5).

²⁷ Küster, *op. cit.* (see note 21) 3–18.

²⁸ *Op. cit.* (see note 18) 4.178–192.

²⁹ Humborg in *RE*, s. v. “Labyrinthos”; cf. also Schol. Ven. B *Il.* 18.590 (Dindorf 4.202).

³⁰ Spyridon N. Marinatos, “The Cult of the Cretan Caves,” *Rev. of Religion* 5 (Jan., 1941) 129–136.

mimetic of a sacred animal to be thought of as possessed of the spirit of the animal, and thus also of the divinity. This great privilege would hardly be conferred upon the alien captives. Nor would the dancers be slain. In some rituals a holy animal is put to death; but this seems not to have been the case with the snake in Crete. Furthermore, the tradition is definite that the captives were "fed to the Minotaur"; I believe that they were not killed in or subsequent to a ritual dance, but rather in ritual bull play — cf. the legend that Theseus engaged in athletic contests, and that Ariadne first saw him there (Plutarch, *Thes.* 19).

Upon the fall of Crete, evidently those who had been captives of the Minoans made their way to an island at a safe distance, and there celebrated their escape. There may be some significance in the fact that Delos was the traditional scene of the jollification. Recent excavations have confirmed the Greek legend that that island was occupied in remote prehistoric times by the Carians. These were a seafaring people, who apparently had a solar cult. They seem to have been driven out of the island by the Cretans. At any rate, during the period of Cretan supremacy the island was virtually uninhabited. Immediately after the fall of Crete, in about 1400 B.C., the island was again inhabited, apparently by Carians and other seafaring peoples, as if in joy at the deliverance from Crete.³¹ The Athenians displayed a great interest in the island for many centuries. From Mycenaean times on down to the Roman period Delos was a sacred island, associated primarily, though not exclusively, with a solar deity.

For the celebration of the escaped captives on Delos, a victory dance, making use of the very form of the enemy's dread ritual dance, would seem highly appropriate. A replica of the great snake of Cnossus, or even the skin of a python, may well have been carried in the dance, and subsequently burned. The ritualistic carrying of a large snake by a number of persons is not without parallel;³² and the dragging or carrying of dead animals or of animals' skins is familiar in Cretan art.³³

³¹ Strabo 14.2.27; André Plassart, *Exploration Archéologique de Délos*, Fasc. XI, "Les Sanctuaires et les Cultes du Mont Cynthe" (Paris, 1928) *passim*. A. R. Burn (*Minoans, Philistines, and Greeks* [New York, 1930] 102) believes that the completeness of the destruction of the palace at Cnossus indicates that the Cretans were hated fiercely by those peoples who had "trembled under Minos."

³² Cf. J. P. Vogel, *Indian Serpent-Lore* (London, 1926) 200, and Plates xxii and xxiii; Hastings, *op. cit.* (see note 22) s. v. "Serpent Worship" (J. A. MacCulloch), 11.401, 402, Frazer, *op. cit.* (see note 16) 8.316.

³³ Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1925) 20.

One significant point in this connection has not, I think, been made. Upon the fall of Crete, certainly many former captives of the Minoans escaped; why should the participants in the dance have been exactly fourteen in number? A dance line of fourteen people is very short. Apart from any consideration of mystic numbers which may have entered into the matter, I believe it is interesting that this number of people, standing side by side, is just about right to approximate the length of the largest snake known to man — the python of North Africa, which reaches a length of some twenty feet. (Newspaper clippings in my possession, showing the carrying of pythons and other large snakes by attendants in zoological gardens, substantiate this statement.) If our dance was indeed a python-carrying dance, fourteen people would be an entirely suitable number.

On Delos, the dance would have been performed to a divinity of the dancers' own religion; hence, Ariadne, who was probably a variant of the great Cretan goddess herself, is associated in the story of the *geranos* with the Greek Aphrodite, in her aspect as vegetation deity. Subsequently, the dance seems to have had some connection with the Carian Leto; at any rate, it was at times thought of as depicting her wanderings. There is a connection also with Artemis; and supplies for the dance were regularly kept in the Artemisium in the classical period.³⁴ The horned altar is obviously a borrowing from Crete; not until much later is it connected with Apollo.

Perhaps instrumental in the long retention of the *geranos* dance were various ancient legends of serpent-slaying. Apollo, we recall, slew the Python at Delphi, and, after having been purified in Crete, appropriated the Delphic oracle — in other words, the cult of a Greek deity superseded a Cretan serpent cult. At Delphi the mythological event was celebrated with a festival, at which there was a mimetic dance portraying the combat,³⁵ followed by contests — the Pythian games, reminiscent of the Delian games. A variant of the story (Pausanias 2.7.7) is to the effect that Apollo and Artemis together slew the Python, and went to Aegialeia to be purified, then later to Crete. Thenceforth at Aegialeia seven youths and seven maidens, on the festival of Apollo, went in procession to the river Sythas, carrying "the deities." They took them to the sanctuary of Persuasion, then back to the temple of Apollo. Also, as an after-

³⁴ *IG* 11.2.161B.7-8; 11.2.162B.5, 51; 164A.51, 199B.35-36, etc.

³⁵ Strabo 9.3.10; Schol. Paris. Clem. Alex., p. 92 (Klotz); cf. Plutarch, *De defect. orac.* 417F and schol. *ad loc.*; Pollux 4.84.

math of the Python story, the mongoose or ichneumon, the snake-killing animal, became sacred to Leto on the island of Delos (Aelian, *Nat. An.* 10.47).

In the ritual drama of the ancient Near East — notably at Ras Shamra, and among the Babylonians and Hittites — and also in Egypt, there was commonly enacted the story of the combat of a god, usually a deity of the sun or the weather, and a great snake, often the personification of a river or the sea, or of evil. In these rituals, the god is sometimes killed, but he always comes to life again, and is ultimately victorious. The snake, the god, and the combat, are portrayed in mimetic dance; and there is usually a victory procession in the god's honor.³⁶

We turn now to the word *geranos*. As the name of the dance, it may have been originally a different word from *geranos*, "crane." In some of the languages of India a word that denotes "winding one" is applied to both rivers and serpents.³⁷ Also, there is an Indo-European root **ger-*, defined by Walde and Pokorny³⁸ as "drehen, winden." It seems not unlikely that our word *geranos* may be an adjective built on this root. When referring to the dance, the word is always feminine; perhaps *δρχησις* is to be understood with it.

There were several very ancient cities named Gerena or Gerenia or Gerania, in various parts of Greece, Thrace, and Asia Minor; and, oddly enough, most of these have some connection with a river. Other names in *Ger-* are attested. A city in Apulia, called Gerunium in antiquity, is now called Dragonara.

At least one Gerenia (Strabo 8.4.4) had a cult of Asclepius, and another (Pausanias 3.26.8–11) had a cult of Machaon (son of Asclepius) and a famous cave. To Asclepius, of course, the snake was sacred; and some scholars think that the deity Asclepius originally *was* a snake. Also, as it happens, the inner part of the Tholos at Epidaurus, the most important center of the cult of Asclepius, is in the form of a circular maze. There is evidence of Minoan influence at Epidaurus.

In this connection a poem by Antipater (*Anth. Pal.* 6.287) is interesting. Three women dedicate a piece of weaving to the goddess Artemis; of them one, Bitie, says that she has woven "these

³⁶ T. H. Gaster, "Ritual Drama in the Ancient Near East," paper read at meeting of the American Oriental Society, Columbia University, April 25, 1946; cf. Frazer, *op. cit.* (see note 16) 4.105–112.

³⁷ Vogel, *op. cit.* (see note 32) 202.

³⁸ Alois Walde, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Indogermanischen Sprachen*, herausgegeben und bearbeitet von Julius Pokorny (Berlin and Leipzig, 1930) 1.593.

dancing maidens, and the devious streams of winding Maeander." In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8.162-167) there is an extended comparison of the Maeander river to the Labyrinth of Daedalus.

The *geranos*, then, is probably not a "crane" dance, but rather a "winding" dance. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that, centuries after the institution of the dance, when the real significance of the name had been forgotten, some bird figures may have been introduced into the dance, by a sort of popular etymologizing.³⁹ (Birds, of course, as well as snakes, were sacred to the Cretan goddess, and to several Greek goddesses as well.) If that was the case, the bird figures would probably be drawn from some of the mimetic bird dances of women which seem to have been a feature of both Cretan and Greek ritual.⁴⁰

Let us now consider briefly the evidence of the Delian inscriptions. They tell us that for the *geranos* there were supplied branches (to be carried in token of victory, obviously) and *ῥυμοί*, which apparently were renewed for each performance. The *ῥυμοί* have aroused much discussion. The word comes unquestionably from *ῥῥῶ*, "draw, drag." Most scholars think the word *ῥυμοί* denotes objects dragged or carried by the dancers, but they differ as to what they were. They have been variously interpreted as ropes to hold the dancers in place, or to guide them through the figures of the dance; as poles, for in other connotations the word sometimes designates the means by which beasts of burden drag a vehicle; as reminiscences of Ariadne's clue; as blocks of wood, because some of the inscriptions speak of *ῥυμοί* "for the altars," or "to cook the offerings"; as dried sticks to be rubbed together to kindle ritual fires. I believe that the word *ῥυμός* denotes a conventionalized replica of a snake, which was dragged or carried in the dance by a group of fourteen dancers, and then burned on the sacred fire. Other groups of dancers would carry the branches, upright in their joined hands, in the manner of the dancers on the vase of Analatos.⁴¹ Still other

³⁹ Some late etymologizing on the dance and on the *Lusus Troiae* may be seen in Tryphiodorus 352-357, where the Trojans, dragging the wooden horse to their citadel, are likened to migrating cranes in their "wandering dance."

⁴⁰ Professors E. H. Sturtevant and J. L. Heller have both suggested to me that the dance may have been associated with the crane because of the resemblance of the crane's long neck to a serpent. The referee to whom this paper was submitted suggests that the dance may have portrayed a conflict of cranes and serpents, and that there might possibly have been some connection with the *Geranomachia* attributed to Homer in the *Vita* of Suidas.

⁴¹ Weege, *op. cit.* (see note 14) Fig. 73.

groups would merely join hands. As time went on, the snake replica would naturally become more and more schematic, until it resembled a thick rope. In this form it could easily be associated with Ariadne's clue — and indeed some scholars think that the clue was a later interpolation into the myth, and that it was inspired by the rope-like objects carried by dancers in art representations of the *geranos*. A final development would be the substitution of enmeshed arms, or simply clasped hands, for a replica of the snake.

This interpretation, I believe, clarifies also the problem of the "leaders" and the *γερανούλκοι* — who are, in my opinion, one and the same thing. The word *γερανούλκος* contains an element of the word *έλκύω*, "drag, draw," a synonym of *έρύω*. Further, *ὄλκος* is a term used of the path made by a crawling snake (Nicander, *Theriaca* 162). The two *γερανούλκοι* are, in all probability, the two persons who bear the major responsibility in the carrying of the snake replica and in the "drawing" of the path of the snake-line, one at each end. If the line sometimes reversed its direction, now one *γερανούλκος*, now the other, would be the leader of the line. If, as some scholars think,⁴² the line divided at times into two files, one *γερανούλκος* would naturally lead each file. It is interesting that modern dances in Italy and Greece which use a choreography generally similar to that of the ancient *geranos* are called by the name *tratta*, from *traho*, "drag, draw."

In several of the inventories of the Artemisium on Delos, most of them of the third century B.C., there is mentioned *ἡ καλουμένη γέρανος*.⁴³ Also, there is a record of "things from the *geranos*," or "things that have fallen off the *geranos*," along with broken pieces and handles from dedicated vessels, most of them of precious metal⁴⁴ — apparently all old and fragmentary, but sacred. With these objects there is mentioned a *ὄρμος ὁ ὑποτείνων ὑπὸ τὴν γέρανον* or *ὄρμος ὁ περὶ τῇ γεράνω*.⁴⁵ Latte (71) summarizes well the discussion that these inscriptions have aroused, and is himself inclined to the theory that *ἡ καλουμένη γέρανος* may have been a statue of a dancing maiden, typifying all the *geranos* dancers. He believes that the *ὄρμος* in this connection may have been a wreath around the base of the statue. He notes that after 250 B.C. there is no mention of *ἡ καλουμένη γέρανος* in the inscriptions.

⁴² Heller, *op. cit.* (see note 19) 131–132.

⁴³ *IG* 11.2.161B.7–8 and 61–62; 162B.51, etc.

⁴⁴ *IG* 11.2.161B.61–62; 162B.5; 164A.51; 199B.35–36.

⁴⁵ *IG* 11.2.161B.61–62 and elsewhere.

I believe that this object was nothing more nor less than a very old representation of a snake, perhaps in a thick, cable-like form, which in early times was carried in the dance, and which was superseded by the more conventionalized *ρῦμοί*. The fact that it was placed in the Artemisium implies that it was held in considerable reverence. I believe that it was decorated with gold or silver ornaments, perhaps suggesting spots on a snake; and I believe that these dropped off as the replica fell to pieces with age. The *ὄρμος* could have been a supplement to it, as it were — a long garland made up in part of gold or silver ornaments, and fastened to the *geranos* or twisted about it, perhaps to protect the *geranos* and prolong its life. We know that in later times lesser garlands were sometimes twined around larger ones (Athenaeus 15.679F). The transformation of the object carried from a snake to a garland may have been facilitated by persistent references to "Ariadne's garland."⁴⁶ The basic meaning of the word *ὄρμος* is, of course, "cord, rope." The *geranos* could have been carried in the dances for many years, then have been placed in the Artemisium when it could no longer be handled. The fact that it ceases to be mentioned in the inventories would indicate that it finally crumbled to pieces.

The *ὄρμος* of the inscriptions is very interesting in view of Lucian's account (12) of the dance of that name. To be sure Lucian's term may be largely metaphorical, as applied to a dance. However, a snake-carrying dance can easily be softened into a garland-carrying dance,⁴⁷ and, still later, can become a dance with hands enmeshed, to represent the object formerly carried.⁴⁸

The ritual of the Hellotia furnishes an interesting parallel. We are told⁴⁹ that at Corinth there was celebrated a festival originally Cretan, in which a great garland was carried in procession; and that inside the garland were "the bones of Europa." I expect to discuss this ritual at greater length in a later study; but it may serve at this point to illuminate the function of ἡ καλουμένη γέρανος.

There are several representations in ancient art which have been associated with the Delian dance. The most famous of these, the

⁴⁶ Professor Heller suggests to me that there may be some significance in Ovid's statement (*Met.* 8.182) that the constellation Corona is placed in the sky next to Ophiuchus.

⁴⁷ For garland-carrying rituals see Athenaeus 5.202D-E.

⁴⁸ Cf. Donatus on Terence, *Adelph.* 752-753.

⁴⁹ Athenaeus 15.678A-B; cf. *Et. Mag.* s. v. Ἑλλωρία; Schol. Pind. *Ol.* 13.40; Hesychius, s. vv. Ἑλλωρία, ἐλλωρίς.

François vase,⁵⁰ shows Theseus playing a lyre, and seven youths and seven maidens, richly dressed, dancing with clasped hands before Ariadne and her nurse, while a ship awaits them offshore. Johansen⁵¹ has recently published a new study of this vase and of other sources for the dance; it is his belief that the victory dance there portrayed takes place not on Delos, but on Crete; and that the Delian *geranos*, performed to Apollo from the beginning, and representing the wanderings of Leto, had no connection with Theseus and the Labyrinth. Others have likewise denied that the François vase shows the *geranos*. On the vase, there is no representation of any object in the hands of the dancers; Ariadne, however, holds her clue of thread.

On the Polledrara hydria⁵² the dancers are joined with a mesh-like arrangement of the arms, the first holding the hand of the third, the second the hand of the fourth, etc. The first dancer carries an object which looks like a long, thick cord. In the upper frieze of the same vase Ariadne, as she watches Theseus slay the Minotaur, holds an identical cord, which rises in a coiling spiral between the legs of the Minotaur. A similar portrayal of Ariadne's "clue" is seen in other representations.

It is significant in this connection that among many peoples a snake is called a "rope." Sometimes this is deliberate — as in India, where we are told that "a snake should be addressed euphemistically as a rope," and where such names as "the toothed rope," "the putrid rope," "the biting rope" are used in speaking of snakes.⁵³ Sometimes the usage is figurative. Sometimes it is believed that a rope turns into a snake, or vice versa.⁵⁴ We may recall that in our own southwestern states there is a belief that a rope placed on the ground around a person sleeping outdoors will keep snakes away from him. On the other hand, in the Old Testament, Hebrew words for "cord," "rope" are used for a line of ritual dancers, sometimes in connection with palms and a horned altar.⁵⁵ In Greek, the root *καλ-, perhaps of pre-Greek origin, seems to denote now a snake, now a rope.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Furtwängler-Reichhold, *Gr. Vasenmalerei* 1.60, and Pl. 13.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.* (see note 15) 3–60.

⁵² Cecil Smith, "Polledrara Ware," *JHS* 14 (1894) 206–233, and Pl. vii.

⁵³ Vogel, *op. cit.* (see note 32) 12; cf. Frazer, *op. cit.* (see note 16) 3.399–404.

⁵⁴ Hastings, *op. cit.* (see note 22) s. v. "Egyptian Religion" (W. M. Flinders Petrie), 5.242.

⁵⁵ *Psalms* 118.27; *Hosea* 11.4; Oesterley, *op. cit.* (see note 17) 92–93, 108–110.

⁵⁶ I expect to treat this matter in more detail in a subsequent study of ancient snake and lizard dances.

It is possible that in Terence, *Adelphoi* 752–753, there is a joking reference to the *geranos* — transmitted to Terence by his Greek source, evidently. “Tu inter eas restim ductans saltabis,” is the remark made to a man who is proposing to install in the same house both his son’s wife and a *meretrix*; and he replies, “Et tu nobiscum una, si opus est.” The point of the joke seems to be that the dancers must go wherever the *γερανοῦλκοί* “drag” them, no matter how devious or difficult the course. There is also, in all probability, a covert reference to the fact that the dance was performed ἀναμίξι!⁵⁷

Livy’s account (27.37.14) of a Roman expiation ritual during the Second Punic War, in which “thrice nine maidens” “per manus recte data . . . sonum vocis pulsu pedum modulantes incesse- runt,” and then moved in procession to the temple of Juno Regina, may indicate a reversion to the primitive serpentine dance of apotropaic type, dedicated to a mother goddess. The rope in this case may have been introduced in direct imitation of the Delian dance.

The Pythian oracle given to the Spartans before the war with Tegea (Herodotus 1.66; *Anth. Pal.* 14.76), ambiguous as usual, may yet contain a play on words referring to a rope-carrying dance: “I will give you foot-beaten Tegea to dance in, and a beautiful plain to measure with a rope.” As it turned out, the Spartans were beaten, and they “measured the plain” in a quite different way — as bound captives.

The form of the *geranos* seems to have had a tremendous influence on later Greek dances, in many cults. Some scholars think that a dance like it was part of the Eleusinian and other mysteries in Greece.⁵⁸ Pindar may possibly have had the *geranos* in mind when he says⁵⁹ that in olden days the dithyramb “crawled, drawing a rope” — εἶρπε σχοινοτένεια — but that in his day newer, freer dance forms were coming into the rituals. Hermogenes and others thought that Pindar was referring metaphorically to a long-drawn-out meter. However, there may be here a hint that the *geranos* form had influenced even the dithyramb.

The *geranos* form continued. As time went on, there may have been some conscious adaptation to the Labyrinth pattern. The enmeshing of arms which we have already noted as a substitute for

⁵⁷ Cf. Donatus, *ad loc.* Farnabius’ identification of the dance with the *kordax*, in which several other writers concur, seems to me untenable. I expect to discuss the nature of the *kordax* in a later paper.

⁵⁸ W. F. J. Knight, “Maze Symbolism and the Trojan Game,” *Antiquity* 6 (1932) 448.

⁵⁹ Sir John Sandys, *The Odes of Pindar* (London and New York, 1930) 558–560.

something carried is seen not only in ancient art,⁶⁰ but in the *tratta* and other dances of modern Greece and Italy. In ancient, mediaeval, and modern times there has been a dance in Greece called the *syrtos*, from *σῦρω*, "drag, draw." In antiquity this name may have implied the dragging of long Ionic chitons; today it certainly denotes a "trailing" line of dancers.⁶¹ Indeed, there is a dance called the *geranos* in Greece today; but it differs little from other Greek folk dances, and the name may be conscious archaizing. As a matter of fact, the *geranos* type — the maze dance of men and women in a line, with enmeshed or joined hands — is actually the basis of most modern Greek folk dances. It seems also to have influenced Spanish dancing; and in Mexico today there is a dance that looks very much like it.⁶²

Even in our own modern American cities we can see survivals of primitive serpentine dances. Whether they are aware of it or not, children playing hop-scotch on the sidewalk are perpetuating an old maze and snake dance. Boys and girls playing "crack the whip" on the street or in a skating rink are engaged in ancient serpent ritual. Their elders, in a rumba line, are pantomiming the writhing and twisting of a great snake. And the noisy, shouting college students who do a snake dance through the streets on the night after a football victory, and who end up with a great bonfire into which they throw everything upon which they can lay their hands, are, in spirit at least, at one with the youths and maidens who inaugurated the *geranos* on Delos, some thirty-four hundred years ago.

Addendum: Professor Helen Pope, of Brooklyn College, has sent me some interesting published material on the "Furry Dance," which is performed annually, on May 8, in the town of Helston, in Cornwall. In it, men and women alternate in a long dance line, which winds in and out, through the streets and houses of the town. According to legend, the dance originated as a joyous celebration after St. Michael slew a local dragon.

⁶⁰ E.g., on a tomb painting from Ruvo — see Séchan, *op. cit.* (see note 11) Fig. 4, p. 58; cf. Propertius 3.5.19–20.

⁶¹ Lillian B. Lawler, "'Ορχήσις 'Ιωνική,'" *TAPhA* 74 (1943) 66.

⁶² Juan Jose Tablada, "The Dance in Mexico," *Theater Arts Monthly* 11 (1927) 637–644.