

Comparing Symbols of Sardinian Carnivale & Bulgarian Kukeri Festivals of Old Europe Through Common Neolithic Rituals and Bronze Age Mythology



by Judith Mann

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Abstract

The intent of this research paper is to trace the antiquity and significance of the rudiments of traditional masquerades still practiced in Sardinia, Bulgaria and other Balkan or Alpine countries through matrilineal ritual symbols from Neolithic Old Europe interlaced with Dionysian Bronze Age rituals based upon Thracian myths.

Additionally, this research is to query accepted beliefs that Carnival origins only began with medieval Christmas, Lenten and Easter holidays, or are merely processions reflecting current popular culture.

In this paper, the symbols of suppressed spiritual consciousness embedded mnemonically in the masks and gear of all-male Bulgarian Kukeri Festivals and Sardinian Carnivales participants, are presented as evolving from Neolithic times in Old Europe, then extending to Sardinia with migrations, and later, through extensive obsidian trade routes, myths and rituals carried between Sardinia-Corsica, Old Europe and the Mediterranean-at-large.

The Ötzi DNA Connection of Old Europe to Sardinia



Fig. 1 Restoration of Otzi
Museo Arqueológico de Bolzano

In September 1991, a natural, well-preserved mummy of a 45-year-old hunter was discovered in the Ötztal Alps on the border between Austria and Italy. He had died between 3239-3107 BCE, a time period categorized as Late Neolithic, notable in Europe for Great Mother-goddess-oriented, hunter-gatherer cultures on the cusp of agriculture. Deemed 'Ötzi the Iceman', his is the oldest human sample to undergo high-throughput DNA sequencing of an entire genome ¹.

Austrian forensic scientist Walther Parson reported in 2013 that 19 men living not far from where Otzi was discovered, had the same Y chromosome mutation as the Iceman, based upon a study of almost 4,000 Austrian blood samples. ²

“His lineage is very rare in mainland Europe. Only 1% or less share the same sequence, but is rather frequent in northern Sardinia and southern Corsica. The Iceman’s ancestry most closely mirrors that of modern-day Sardinians”, said Stanford School of Medicine's Dr. Peter Underhill. He came to the conclusion assisting Dr. Carlos Bustamante in analyzing the mummy’s Y chromosome. ³ Just one small variation on the Y chromosome, a rare Y-chromosome mutation known as G-L91, pointed the researchers to Otzi’s Sardinia-Corsica connection. Sardinians and Corsicans have remained so moored to their genetic past, that a 5,300-year-old individual from Old Europe can clearly exhibit affinities with them. A reason might be the distinct isolation of central Sardinia mountain regions far removed from the often invaded coasts. ⁴

Extremely high frequency of I2-M26 Y chromosomes in the Sardinian population signal a major founder event, also adding to their outlier position. The detection of identical chromosomes in Volterra, Italy, suggests an ancient founder or trade connection between Tuscany and Sardinia⁵.

¹ *Genetic analysis of ancient 'Iceman' mummy traces ancestry from Alps to Mediterranean isle* Nature Communications
<https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2012/03/genetic-analysis-of-ancient-iceman-mummy-traces-ancestry-from-alps-to-mediterranean-isle.html>

² <https://www.mnn.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/blogs/11-things-you-dont-know-about-otzi>

³ *Genetic analysis of ancient 'Iceman' mummy traces ancestry from Alps to Mediterranean isle* Nature Communications

⁴ *The History and Geography of Human Genes* pg.95

⁵ *Reconstructing the genetic history of Italians* pgs 45-56

Paleolithic-Neolithic Migrations to Sardinia



Fig. 2 Pleistocene Sardinia-Corsica

First migrations from Paleolithic Europe to Sardinia-Corsica took place about 14,000-20,000 years ago, when sea levels were lower and access to the single Sardinia-Corsica island was close to the Tuscan coast, indicated by the submerged green land of Fig. 2. Early drifts brought matrilineal hunter-gatherer tribes. The oldest bones of *Homo sapiens* in Sardinia, dating back to the Upper Paleolithic period, have been found in the Corbeddu Cave of Oliena, central Sardinia.⁶ A significant portion of Sardinian-Corsican ancestry derives from these peoples, mixed with a subsequent wave of an undiluted Neolithic farmer strain.

A 14-inch bronze statue dating from the 9th century BCE, on display at the Museum of Cagliari, has been identified as an Early Neolithic farmer by independent researcher, Daniele Cocco,⁷ rather than a 'Craftsman', as labeled by the museum. Cocco bases his conclusion on what now seems obvious, that the figure is carrying, along with a hoe, a hand plow with a stone head, in use when a man, not an ox, was attached to the yoke.

So this statue precisely captures the 3-7,000 year-old memory of Neolithic origin, the giant leap into agriculture. It is an artistic communication tool inspired by oral history, and preserved intact through the ages. Masked dramas performed today at Sardinian and Bulgarian carnivals, echo the myth of man yoked to the plow.



Fig. 3 Bronze Farmer Statue

⁶ *Obsidian Studies in the Prehistoric Central Mediterranean* <https://doi.org/10.1515/opar-2017-0018> Open Archeology

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/antica.civilta.sarda/permalink/2048304225424117/>

Obsidian Trade Routes

With the transition into the Neolithic period, obsidian tools from Sardinia became the prototype of exchange. Because of obsidian, Sardinia became one of the most important trade nodes of the entire Mediterranean basin extending to what is now mapped as France, Italy, Crete , Austria, Croatia, and Bulgaria, thus spreading the y Sardo chromosome, 12a2-M26 link.⁸

From Monte Arci, a 3.5 million year-old volcano in western Sardinia, flowed the most ancient deposits of obsidian in the central Mediterranean.

Obsidian is a volcanic glass with a black-glossy appearance, formed when lava rich in silica quickly cools, generating a glassy mass. Because it can be reduced to very sharp shards, obsidian was fashioned into valuable cutting tools, hunting spears, scrapers and arrowheads.



Fig. 4 Neolithic Obsidian Trade Routes

Excavations carried out in 1968, by archaeologists Enrico Atzeni and Gérard Bailloud at a rock shelter called 'Su Carroppu' in the Sirri region, revealed obsidian tools from Monte Arci. The remains of ancient meals also found in the shelter, included bones of animals such as deer, wild boar and fish, confirm a 6,000 year-old Neolithic economy based on farming, hunting and fishing in Sardinia and Corsica.⁹

The obsidian trade brought the sea-faring Sardinians into direct contact with the syncretic worship of the high Minoan-Mycenean culture of Crete which reinforced and expanded their own Great Mother rituals, adding those of homage to *Dionysus*.

⁸ *American Journal of Human Genetics* 2009 pgs. 814-821 Google Scholar

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-Nuragic_Sardinia

The Great Mother

The Great Mother figured prominently in the cultures of Old Europe. Archeologist Marija Gimbutas characterized their unfortified settlements as peaceful, egalitarian, matrilineal. Their worship gave priority to cycles encompassing birth, nurturing, growth, death, and regeneration. Focus was on untamed natural forces as well as crop cultivation and animal rearing. As confirmation, extensive caches of goddess figurines have been unearthed in Neolithic settlements along the Danube and in the Balkans.¹⁰ Corresponding stone female figurines shown in Figs. 6 and 7 were discovered at Cuccuru S'Arrius and Senorbi in Sardinia.



Fig. 5 Willendorf, Austria 30,000 BCE

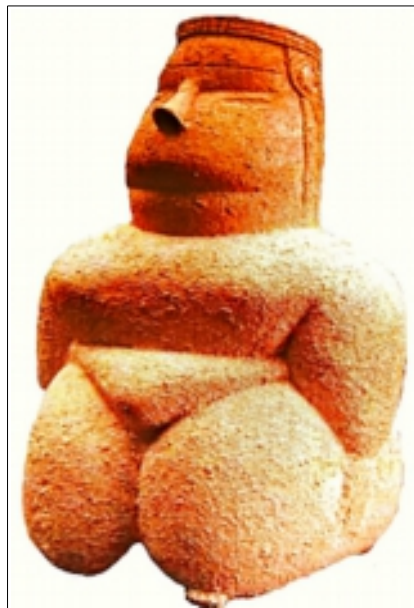


Fig. 6 Cabras, Sardinia 4,000-2800 BCE

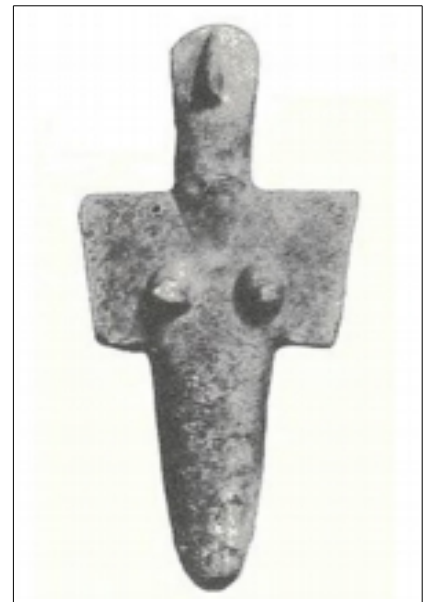


Fig. 7 Senorbi, Sardinia 3200-2700 BCE

Veneration of the Great Mother found its way from Old Europe to Sardinia during its Bonu Ighinu and Ozieri periods, from 4000-2800 BCE. Central to the pre-patriarchal worship of the goddess was the miracle of birth and the power to transform death into life through the mysterious cyclical regeneration of nature.¹¹ Her arcane initiation rituals were marked by masquerades representing cosmic powers, either benevolent or threatening and myths enacted with masks depicting birds, bulls, mountain goats and deer.¹² Astrologer, Barry Goddard views these initiations as “essentially inner experiences in which some new element of Spirit comes into consciousness.”¹³

¹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Europe_\(archaeology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Europe_(archaeology))

¹¹ *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* pg 91

¹² *The Chalice and the Blade* pg

¹³ <http://shamanicfreestate.blogspot.com/>

Deer Masquerades



Fig. 8 Star Carr 11,000-Year-Old Deer Mask Study Credit: University of Oxford

The oldest known deer rituals may date back 11,000 years, to a time when England was connected to mainland Europe. This premise is validated by a cache of twenty-seven deer masks probably worn by shamans, unearthed at Star Carr, UK in the 1940's and 2013.¹⁴

Shamans enter a trance state to communicate with animal spirits, often experienced as a physical transformation into the beast in question. This typically involves wearing a costume that integrates animal references and identifies the shaman with their animal spirit. Pre-agricultural hunting rituals tended towards such shamanic forms, with deer symbolism linked to cyclical regeneration and antler growth. Northern Europeans in the hunting stage carried an image of the Great Mother as an elk- or wild reindeer-doe, her udders depicted as the source of rain.¹⁵

Continuing the Mesolithic tradition, villagers in Sinnai, Sardinia, don horned deer masks to act as quarry in an ancient hunt ritual. As part of the rite, masked *Is Canaxus*, hunters, push *Is Cerbus*, deer-men, towards a stake-out for the kill. The goal is to renew divine consent, so as to continue to receive the Great Mother's gift of prey.



Fig. 9 *Is Cerbus*, Deer-Men Sinnai, Sardinia

¹⁴ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0152136>

¹⁵ *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* pg. 171

Indo-European Invasions



Fig. 10 Mycenaean Warriors 1500 BCE

The dispersion of Indo-Europeans into Old Europe, the Aegean and the rim of the Black Sea, overthrew these civilizations whose most important feature of life was worship of the Great Mother. Three great waves of proto-Indo-European pastoralists from eastern steppes mark the suppression of Great Mother worship by a dominant patrilineal culture. In Old Europe the physical and cultural disruption of the Neolithic societies that acknowledged the Great Cosmic Mother, seems to have started in the fifth millennium BCE, with what Marija Gimbutas termed 'Wave No. 1, 4300-4200 BCE', followed by 'Wave No. 2, 3400-3200 BCE' and 'Wave No. 3, 3000-2800 BCE'.¹⁶

At the core of the invaders' system was the high valuation on the power that takes, rather than on what gives life. The system was composed of patrilinear, socially stratified, herding units that lived in small villages or seasonal settlements while grazing their animals over vast areas. Its ideology, according to author Riane Eisler, exalted virile, heroic warrior gods of the shining and thunderous sky.¹⁷ The pastoral invaders increasingly obliterated Great Mother worship because it challenged their authority.

Findings indicate that in some invader camps, the majority of the female population was of Old European stock taken in slave raids.¹⁸ This may have contributed to the remarkable continuity of suppressed Great Mother symbolism appearing in the masked carnivals of historic times.

¹⁶ [*The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*](#) pg 17

¹⁷ [*The Chalice and the Blade*](#) pg 48

¹⁸ [*Ibid*](#) pg

The influence of Mycenaean Crete



Fig. 11 Silenus, Dionysus, and Maenad Procession 370 BCE

Early inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula were the Indo-European Thracians, who introduced the cult of Dionysus to the region including Mycenae, through their masked initiations and festivals. The Mycenaeans who went on to conquer Minoan Crete, superimposed the Dionysian rituals onto the existing Great Goddess worship of the Minoans, which appeared to be the most singular and important aspect of daily life.¹⁹

As mentioned, Late Bronze Age trade voyages to Crete also brought knowledge of Dionysian rituals on return trips, to be blended with the existing Great Mother worship of Sardinia. In his book, *The Golden Bough*, Sir James Frazer states, “The god, *Dionysus* is best known as a personification of the vine and as the exhilaration produced by the grape. His ecstatic worship is characterized by wild dances, thrilling music and tipsy excess.”²⁰ These attributes are still displayed in the carnivals of remote mountain villages in the Rhodope and Strandzha mountains of Bulgaria and the upland Nuoro Province of Sardinia.

The Thracian festivals that took place at the start of the ancient New Year in early spring, focused on the goddess and her son, *Dionysus*. Versions of his birth, sacrificial death and resurrection were performed in horn-masked rituals to ensure renewal of the cosmos and society.²¹

Though *Dionysus* was considered a deity of vegetation, he was often depicted as a bull or a goat, or wearing Taurine horns. Legend has it that he was in bull form when torn to pieces, reenacted in Crete by an actual bull being ritually torn apart and consumed raw. His worshippers may have believed they were eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a god. The killing of a bull or goat came to be regarded as no longer the direct slaying of a god, but as a sacrifice offered to him. Hence, *Dionysus* eating his own flesh and gaining resurrection²²

¹⁹ *The Chalice and the Blade* pg. 23

²⁰ *The Golden Bough* pg.386

²¹ *Carnaval* pg 48

²² *The Golden Bough* pg.392

Thread of Life



Fig. 11 The Three Moirai or Fates *Lachesis, Atropos, Clotho* Credit: John M. Strudwick

The *Moirai* were the three goddesses of Bronze Age mythology who personified the inescapable destiny of humans and gods. They assigned to every person his or her share of daily life. The sacred trinity was composed of *Clotho* who spun the thread of life from her distaff onto her spindle, *Lachesis* who measured the thread of life allotted to each person with her measuring rod, and *Atropos*, the cutter of the thread of life. She chose the manner of each person's death; and when their time came, she cut their life-thread with her loathed shears.²³ In Neolithic times, the three Fates were considered daughters of the primeval goddess to whom the gods themselves must bow and considered aspects of time: *Lachesis* represents the things that were, *Clotho* the things that are, and *Atropos* the things that are to be.

Common to the Sardinian *Carnavale* and the Bulgarian *Kekeri* Festival is the crone character, *Filonzana*, whose face is either painted with soot or wears a mask and dressed in black expressing deep mourning. The crone stays close to the 'victim' in the procession; the thread coiled on her spindle, the symbol of destiny. As birth naturally ordains death, the thread will soon be cut and the scapegoat cursed to prevent guilt from clinging to his killers as they spill his redeeming blood²⁴. *Moirai* or *Filonzana* embody a sentient power governing the limit of life.

Fig. 12 Spindle of Destiny, Sardinia



23 Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moirai>



Fig. 13 The Goddess Meskhenet

There appears to be an early dynastic Egyptian influence on the Sardinian crone, occurring through a Minoan Cretan connection with Egypt. The little-known ancient Egyptian goddess *Meskhenet* was defined by Sir Wallis Budge as 'the goddess of the birth chamber' and also as a presiding presence at the time of death²⁵, an antecedent to *Filonzana's* functions.

Laird Scranton observed in his book, *The Science of the Dogon*, "the passages that *Meskhenet* oversees relate to a gateway between the non-material and material, one that takes on different nuances of expression depending on whether we consider it in relation to the universe/macrocosm, the formation of matter/microcosm, or biological reproduction."²⁶

Scranton associates the name of the goddess which rests on the phonetic *Mes* with glyphs relating to a modern scientific perception of spindles and chromosomes in molecules through the concept of a dipole, a pair of separated electric charges of equal magnitude but of opposite sign or polarity. Certain hieroglyphs from the 30th Dynasty Metternich Stele can thus be interpreted.

Reading the hieroglyphs from left to right, a 'chromosome' glyph combined with a curved staff glyph conveys the idea of creative transition, the glyphs depicting the act of giving birth, the act of weaving, and the vision of energy shown as a snake undulating between nonmaterial and material domains. In that context, *Meskhenet* oversees not a static life-ending moment, but the energetic gateway of death.

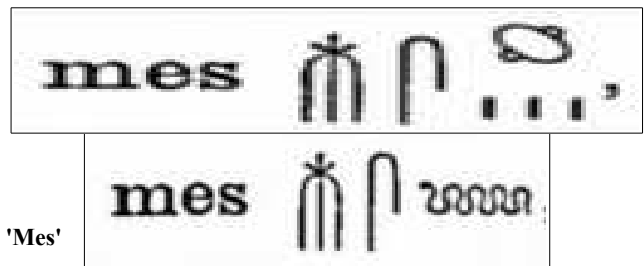


Fig. 14 Glyphic Definition of the Phonetic 'Mes'

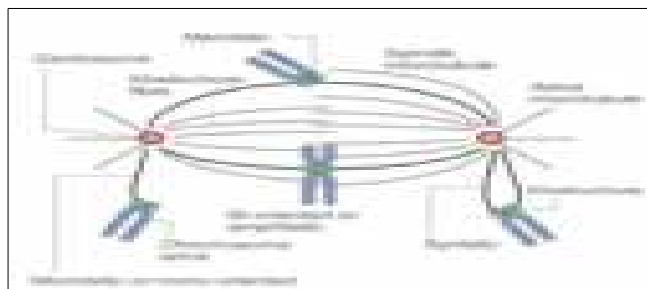


Fig. 15 Chromosomes and Spindles

24 *The Crone* pgs 26-27

25 *Egyptian Religion* pg 83

26 *The Science of the Dogon* pg 88

The Kouker



Fig. 16 Bulgarian Kouker Credit: V. Fol

The village of Indje Voivoda, Bulgaria, hosts an early spring festival revolving around a single *Kouker* who is sacrificed and born anew, akin to *Dionysus*. The role of *Kouker*, whose original Greek name has been defined as 'rod-carrier', serves the double function of chasing evil spirits and endowing fertility. This ritual has been performed continuously from ancient Thracian times to the present to restore order to an otherwise chaotic world.²⁷

The *Kouker's* face is blackened with rye straw soot mixed with oil as a sign of transitioning from one world into another, rather than wearing a formal mask. His costume, created from seven sheep or goat hides, is deconstructed at the end of the festival to be buried

in seven different parts of the farmland outside the village. Bells suspended from his waist and horns atop his hood refer to the sacrificial bulls of ancient cults.²⁸ He carries a phallic pole during three tours of the village, striking both ground and female spectators with the assumption they will conceive faster after being hit. Only the crone can resurrect him after his sudden death during a staged fight, reenacting the sacred mother-son mystery initiation. Everything in the ritual episodes speaks to the cyclical destruction and renewal of the universe.²⁹ Add the observation of author Riane Eisler, that the Paleolithic association of sex with communal sharing and benefiting from the bounty is made possible by the rebirth of nature each year in the spring,³⁰ In most other Bulgarian village celebrations, multiple *Koukers* evolved from the single *Kouker* character and appear as a group in ornate masks and garb.



Fig. 17 Masked Bulgarian Koukers

²⁷ *Carnaval* pg 57

²⁸ *Ibid* pg 53

²⁹ *Ibid* pg 60

³⁰ *Sacred Pleasure* pg. 60

Significance of Mamathune Masks & Costumes



Fig. 18 Kouker Back Bells Bulgaria

Masquerades focused on the characters of the *Kouker* in Bulgaria and the *Mamathunes* in Sardinia may be among the most ancient, arriving barely altered from the Paleolithic times of Great Mother worship. The name *Mamathune* translates as 'the men who call for rain'³¹, a shamanic under-taking for survival in a parched land. Their sheepskin costumes evoke a prehistoric man-animal connection.



Fig 19 Mamathune Procession, Sardinia Credit: Cristiano Cani

secured by tight leather straps. Smaller bells are secured on the front, purportedly to ward off evil spirits. Similarly, *Kukeri* wear both sets of bells, straps, skins and grotesque masks or blackened faces, though generally, not the kerchief. Other research ascribes a satanic origin to the black *Mamuthone* mask, and the entire procession is presumed to be a kind of ritualistic exorcism³².

³¹ *Mamuthones & Issohadores* www.mamolada.org

³² *Ibid*

Darkened Faces



**Fig. 20 Blackened Maimon Battileddu
Carnivale di Lula Sardinia**



**Fig. 21 Reconstruction of Kostenki Man
36,000 year-old Europeans Ancestor**



**Fig 22 Dark Carved Mask
Kukeri Festival. Pernik, Bulgaria**

Though the carnival custom of darkening the skin with soot or wearing dark carved wooden masks is attributed to the demonic or to animal nature and to be ritually exorcised, it actually might refer to a deep collective urge to display the genetic memory of chronologically distant European ancestors who were dark-skinned before the advent of the Ice Age.

According to evolutionary biologist Eske Willerslev of the Natural History Museum of Denmark, ancient DNA taken from the 36,000 year-old fossilized skeleton of a short, dark-skinned, dark-eyed young man, contains all the genetic components found in contemporary Europeans. He is known as the 'Kostenki Man' from the Don River, Russia.

The data, published online in the November 2014 issue of *Science Magazine*³³, suggests that today's Caucasian Europeans are descendants of an interconnected population of dark hunter gatherers that had spread throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East 36,000 years ago, long after leaving Africa.

A branch of this founder population called *basal Eurasians*, spread north and west into Europe and central Asia. These people interbred at the edges of their separate populations, keeping the entire complex network interconnected and so giving the ancient Kostenki man genes from three different groups, indigenous hunter-gatherers within Europe, people from the Middle East, and northwest Asians from the Great Steppe of eastern Europe and central Asia along the Middle Don River in Russia presents a different view: This dark-skinned young man with DNA from all three of those migratory groups was already 'pure European'.

³³ <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/11/european-genetic-identity-may-stretch-back-36000-years>

Procession Movements



Fig. 23 Jumping Mamathune, Sardinia

The first jump that a *Mamathune* or a *Kouker* takes is the most memorable, for it is the archetypal jump from the womb of the Great Mother, announced by the haunting sound of bronze cowbells.

The sound becomes even more impressive multiplied by twelve *Mamuthones* jumping simultaneously. On signal, they quickly jump three times in place, producing three sharp, powerful ringing sounds from their entire outfits. The claps reverberate through narrow cobble streets.

The group of twelve, who symbolize the number of months in a year, parade slowly in two parallel lines under the weight of the cowbells. Their every movement plays a significant part in the ritual.

As they press forward, the *Mamuthones* acting as one organism, swing their shoulders and twist their bodies, first to the right and then to the left. These gestures in two beats accompanied by deeply resounding bells, is executed in perfect synchrony despite the weight of their outfits, the mask's obstruction of vision and tight straps limiting their freedom of movement.³⁴



Fig. 24 Mamuthones Procession, Sardinia

The motions of this sacred procession suggest an ancestral memory of a miracle of twisting descent culminating in the birth of humankind. The profoundly dignified ceremony linked to the eternal cycle of birth and re-birth, honors the androgynous Great Mother.

34 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WipQXui6E18>

Return of Spring Sacrifice



Fig. 25 Sacrificed 'Tsar' or King of Kukerovden, Bulgaria

The ancient custom of sacrificing divine kings is played out in both Bulgarian and Sardinian festivals in the Dionysian mode by distributing virtual fragments of their mutilated bodies over village fields, thus ensuring the return of a fertile spring. The tradition, which associates the sacrifice of the king or his children with a great scarcity of crops, points to the belief that the king is responsible for the weather and harvests. The spilled blood evokes rainfall for the parched earth, essential for collective survival. According to Frazer, when gods are killed, they take on the role of scapegoat, sweeping away disease, death, and sin from the community, and are eaten symbolically in order to be assimilated.³⁵

In the carnival enacted in Samugheo, Sardinia, a related character called *S'urtzu-Dioniso*, symbolizes the god to be sacrificed. He appears as a goat, which according to legend, is how *Dionysus* often appeared. Under the goat skin is a bladder filled with blood and water. When he is hit and falls, the bladder breaks and red blood soaks the ground. After this sacrifice, new life emerges.³⁶



Fig. 26 Sacrifice of S'urtzu-Dioniso

Kukerovden, which translates as 'Day of the Kukers', is a Bulgarian mystery play within the festival, in which each player bears a strong symbolic connection to an archetypal aspect of nature. The Neolithic ritual is designed to bind heaven and earth together by telling a human story that echoes the greater, universal drama.

³⁵ *The Golden Bough* Chapter XXVI

³⁶ <http://www.sardiniapoint.it/7434.html>



Fig. 27 Kukerovden Plow with Male, Female and Tsar

The wine-fueled *Kukerovden* ritual includes a tsar or king and a human couple along with a team of attendant *kukeri*. In an act of bawdy pantomime, the groom impregnates his bride as the *kukeri* charge, dance and interact with the crowd, jabbing, thrusting, and chasing girls with their long, red poles. Two *kukeri* are then yoked to a wooden plow, goaded by the tsar as they ritually till three concentric rings. The tsar scatters grain seeds symbolizing the sowing of fields. The heated climax occurs when the tsar is struck down with the spindle of destiny. Raising his body announces the arrival of spring. By now the bride, a male disguised with kerchief and comically bulging dress is ready to give birth. When the child pops out, usually represented by an androgynous rag doll, the ceremony is complete.



Fig. 28 Maimone Dragging Plow, Orotelli, Sardinia



Fig. 29 Solo Maimon Dragging Plow, Orotelli

The ritual seems to have originated as an initiation for young *Kukeri*, historically, boys and young bachelors. Through phallic thrusting and sowing movements, older men would convey the ways of the world and their community. *Maimon* is the name by which *Dionysus* is invoked in Sardinia. In Orotelli, *Maimones* mime cultivation by dragging a plow behind them. The deep, indissoluble bond is indicated by ropes that bind the farmers to the yoke. It is no coincidence that *Dionysus* was especially adored by farmers who considered him the inventor of the plow and the one who had taught men how to lure oxen to ease their labour.³⁷

³⁷ *Ibid* Kindle location 181

The Sardinian version of carnival is called *Carrasecare*, 'meat carried in a cart to be dismembered'. But the term *care* does not mean meat for butchery, which is always called *petta* or *petza*. The term suggests human meat, revealing the arcane function of traditional Sardinia carnivals. Maskers continue to play out the roles, though with different intentions. They are sad events that require a victim or a stand-in effigy to be torn apart, incarnating the deity who had been eaten by Titans, then resurrected by his mother.³⁸



Fig. 30 Demeter and Dionysus in Kukeri Festival Cart, Bulgaria

The cart also serves as the platform for enacting the consummation of the divine union between the Neolithic Great Mother and her consort-son in Bulgaria. They reappear in Minoan myth as either *Demeter* or *Semele*, depending upon the version, as the stand-in for the Great Mother and her consort-son, *Dionysus* in bull form, representing male virility.

Ensured through these mini-dramas is the fertility of the fields, fruit trees and grape vines, the source of the wine that keeps the excitement of the festivals alive. The magic of these long-repeated rituals seem to be regarded as guarantee for a rich harvest, health and fertility for humans and their domesticated animals with chaos subdued and evil spirits chased away.



Fig.31 Sacred Marriage Enactment

³⁸ *The carnivals and the traditional masks of Sardinia* Kindle location 168

Conclusion



Fig. 32 Corriolo di Ristiano, Sardinia Credit: Cristiano Cani

Despite numerous invasions, suppression and co-opting of their cultures, the indigenous rural populations of Sardinia and Bulgaria manage to retain, almost intact, their root myths and rituals, legacies to guide future generations. How ancient symbols and legends are interpreted still underlies the shaping of both our present and our future.³⁹

This paper reflects author Octavio Paz's statement, "The essential attribute of Carnival is a time apart from ordinary life, a wild time of exuberant, uncontrolled, licentious behavior in which chaos reigns and order seems to disappear".⁴⁰ However, what must be taken into account is that these rituals establish their own order through collective participation, so that social relationships and values are reinforced during the remainder of the year. The reinforced values attuned to natural cycles, may prove to be invaluable in these uncertain times.

39 *The Chalice and the Blade* pg.188

40 *The Labyrinth of Solitude* pg. 7

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