

**THE DANCE *TEŠKOTO* (THE HARD ONE) – A SYNONYMOUS OF  
A HARD DANCE FROM THE TYPE OF *LESNOTO*  
(THE EASY ONE)**

(an analytical review between the two dances)\*

Stojanče Kostov

“Marko Cepenkov” Institute of Folklore in Skopje

[stole\\_kostov88@yahoo.com](mailto:stole_kostov88@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** Why is *Teškoto* (“The Hard One”), considered a synonym for a dance of the type of *Lesnoto* (“The Easy One”)? Even though it may sound paradoxical, there are certain indicators that point to and can support this claim. In this text, we will focus on some of those indicators, such as the ethnochoreological characteristics of *Teškoto* and *Lesnoto*, the structure of the dance pattern, style, and manner of performance. We will also attempt to draw parallels between the two dances in an effort to clarify the mentioned phenomenon.

**Keywords:** hard dance, easy dance, structure of the dance pattern, style of performance

### **Introduction**

The phenomenon of the *Teškoto* dance of the type of *Lesnoto* is quite interesting for research and analysis, not only in the case of the *Teškoto* dance from the Mijak region but also for the remaining dances that carry this name. However, this text will mainly focus on *Teškoto*, a dance from the Mijak region, as well as *Lesnoto*, a dance from which, over time, *Teškoto* originated. The two extremes of hard and easy, which nevertheless merge into a single dance, are quite intriguing for study and deserve greater attention. Therefore, in this text, an attempt will be made to clarify some parameters that link these two extremes.

### ***Teškoto* (the hard one)**

In a narrower sense, *Teškoto* refers to one of the most striking dances preserved within the framework of Macedonian folkloric traditions. Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was primarily performed within the Mijak ethnographic group in Galičnik, Gari, and Lazaropole. The ethnochoreologist Dimoski, in his research, emphasizes that the Mijaks,

---

\* The paper is part of the project “Lexicon of the Macedonian Folklore”, funded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the RN Macedonia, in accordance with the Contract for the financing of a research project of the Public Scientific Institution “Marko Cepenkov” Institute of Folklore in Skopje for 2025/2026 (No. 15-6632/11 of 24.7.2025).

through their method of performing the dances, adhere to the patriarchal code, where women dance separately from men in a distinct semicircle. The elegant, slow and graceful dancing are the main characteristics of female performances, while the male dances are marked by firmness and complexity in the choreological elements (Димоски 1996: 281).

*Teškoto* is a male dance performed with the accompaniment of a *tapan* (drum) and *zurla* (pipe), in the period around holiday of St. Peter (Petrovden) and other similar celebrations. In the region previously mentioned, weddings were also held.

From the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, a process of organized preservation began, implemented through transmission, training, and performance in folklore ensembles. Thanks to this process, despite the loss of its authentic context, the essential features of *Teškoto* have been preserved.

According to some assumptions, the dance is believed to originate from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although these are only assumptions without any written documentation. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many researchers have written about it, but one of the earliest records of this dance can be found in the research of the Janković sisters in the 1930s. In their third book, part of it addresses events in 1938 at Belgrade folk festival and the successful tour across the former Yugoslavia by dancers from Lazaropole (Јанковић 1939: 301). They draw attention to the way the dancers from Lazaropole performed, describing it as follows:

The Lazaropole style of dancing shows that the dancers artistically experience every detail of the dance and for them, each movement has its own psychological justification. Their gradual transformation within the dance, the unusual energy in their expression, and the almost shocking depth in the interpretation of the dance had an irresistible effect on the audience

(Јанковић 1939: 302).

Undoubtedly, through this description, they provide a realistic picture of the performance of *Teškoto*, while also generally portraying the dance style of the Lazaropole dancers. Analyzing historical records, it can be said that *Teškoto* was in fact created by them. This can be confirmed by a note from Blaže Smilevski, who states that among all the Mijaks, the people of Lazaropole were the most talented dancers. This innate talent and mastery of the dance, as well as the psychological and character traits of the people of Lazaropole compared to other Mijaks, can most vividly be seen through the following statement:

When migrant workers pass by on the road, you should listen to what they're talking about. If they speak about household matters, how much they've earned, or how many sheep they intend to buy – those are people from Galičnik. If the conversation is intellectual, they are from Tresonče. If the topic is alcohol and women, they are from Gari. But if they speak about brides, beautiful girls, and at the same time plan how they will perform

Stojanče Kostov – *The dance Teškoto (The Hard one) – a synonymous...*

*Teškoto* on the upcoming holiday – they are from Lazaropole. The people of Galičnik are more attached to song. But the true masters of dance are the dancers from Lazaropole

(СМИЛЕВСКИ 2006: 22).

According to many authors, *Teškoto* is one of the most recognizable Macedonian dances. Over the years, it has become a kind of brand, a symbol through which Macedonian dance is identified. Authors Todevski and Palčevski emphasize that it is a dance that reflects the former way of life and the historical-social conditions – not only of the inhabitants of the migrant region of Mijak land, but also identifies with the centuries-old social injustices, the longing, and the struggle of the Macedonian people for freedom.

The very name of the dance, the steps, the movements, the visual expression of the performers, the shrill sound of the pipe (*zurla*), the rhythm of the drum (*tapan*) beats, and the gradually developing progression and the dynamics, from *rubato* to a fast-paced tempo, actually symbolize the difficulty of the dance. When we talk about difficulty, we refer to the method of performance and the style of *Teškoto*, which is considered to be a dance that not just anyone could perform. The choreographic content of the dance is quite complex and requires maximum concentration, endurance, exceptional skill, dance expertise, and a special emotional intensity from the dancers. *Teškoto* performed technically, without the emotional experience of the dancer and the other performers will not excite the audience, and this will be felt from the very beginning of the performance (Тодевски, Палчевски 2013: 27).

The choreographic elements of *Teškoto* merits closer attention and will therefore be examined in greater detail in the following section. Authors Palčevski and Todevski provide a detailed description of this dance, highlighting that *Teškoto* is exceptionally slow with carefully measured steps. The dance begins with preparatory steps and movements that seem to manifest the testing of the ground on which it is being performed. As the dancers move in a slow tempo at the start, their arms are held down until the moment they begin the stepping and balancing with the knees. At that point, the arms gradually rise into a position where the left arm is extended and the right arm is bent at the elbow. This manner of holding the arms is typical of the Mijaks who practiced it while performing other dances as well.

Furthermore, the extremely elastic step and soft knee balance, which extends even to the arms, are elements through which the extraordinarily complex and subtle choreography of the dance is expressed (Тодевски, Палчевски 2013: 29).

The dance develops as a process and gradually builds up until the final steps and movements are performed, with each step, each movement, and each body motion representing unity within the complexity of the

dance's content. Equally thrilling are the firm steps, balances, squats on one leg, bending the other leg at the knee, pirouettes, and the passing of the handkerchief and leadership from one dancer to another (Тодевски, Палчевски 2013: 30).

One of the most elevated moments of the entire dance, as Todevski and Palčevski explain, is considered to be when the lead dancer climbs onto the drum. The alternating stepping and balancing on the half-foot, or on the toes with one leg, then the other, the squats on one leg while crossing the other leg at the knee, in the shape of a semicircle over the head of the drummer, are choreographic elements of the dance that equally raise the adrenaline of the lead dancer, the accompanying dancers, the drummer, and, of course, the audience (Тодевски, Палчевски 2013: 30).

Many authors, including the authors mentioned before, consider the act of climbing onto the drum as the climax of all the difficulties that have weighed on the Macedonian people for centuries. The final part of the dance takes place with a gradual acceleration of the rhythm, with squats, spins, and the passing of the handkerchief from one dancer to another.

Among the Lazaropole dancers, there were certain rules regarding the performance of the dance, as emphasized by Smilevski. For example, only the lead dancer performed tricks, squats or spins, also accelerating or slowing down the tempo of the dance. This means that the lead dancer is the central figure in the dance (СМИЛЕВСКИ 2006: 23). The lead dancer holds a handkerchief in their right hand, using it to signal the other dancers for each change in the dance pattern, for each spin, for squatting on one leg, for free spins, for climbing onto the drum, and for the conclusion of the dance (Тодевски, Палчевски 2013: 28).

The lead dancer was often the one who created the movements, performed steps, and devised figures, and even at the end of the dance, they would step on the drummer. According to accounts by Dojčin Matevski, this practice occurred before the war, when only the lead dancer would spin at the final part of the dance. The lead dancer necessarily possessed great skill in improvising slow movements, which required great strength and coordination in their performance (Иванчиќ Дунин, Вишински 1995: 60).

Another rule was that women in Lazaropole could also perform this dance, meaning that it was not exclusively a male dance. However, the women's role was always secondary, meaning they would always take part in the second half of the semicircle or when the dance accelerated. Naturally, they didn't perform all the complex dance elements like the men, but instead performed a basic dance pattern. This reflects the patriarchal way of performing dances among all the Mijaks, not just the Lazaropole dancers.

One significant piece of information suggests that in this dance, no bride had a priority, as there was no rule about beauty, the wealth of the costume, social status, or dance skill. The only rule that was specific to the

women of Lazaropole was the order of engagement: the first to dance was the bride who had gotten engaged first that year, and so on. Bridesmaids, however, did not have access to the dance; they could only watch from afar – not from the dance itself, but from the windows of nearby houses. Older brides had the right to join the dance (through the mediation of their mother-in-law) at any place in the circle (Смилевски 2006: 24).

Next, in regard to the rules, there is one particular fact worth noting: a dancer from Lazaropole never climbed onto the drum. The act of climbing onto the drum was a personal creation by Spiro Žikoski-Jariče, the brother of the well-known Rafe Žikoski, and became part of the final formation of *Teškoto* (Смилевски 2006: 25). Researchers Dunin and Višinski also emphasize that the drums in Lazaropole were very large, and the lead dancer could only lean or climb onto the musicians while they were playing in a squatting position (Иванчик Дунин, Вишински 1995: 60). According to Čausidis' observations, climbing onto the drum was not an integral part of the dance, but rather a manifestation that occurred when the lead dancer found themselves in a special emotional and inspirational state (Чаусидис 2009: 69). He also adds that standing on one leg, as a pose, symbolizes the desire to separate from the earth – one foot is on the ground, while the other is raised. Standing on one leg, the dancer slowly rises and lowers, suggesting a yearning for a jump or gradual separation from the earth, that is, from the drum placed on it.

In relation to climbing onto the drum, Todevski and Palčevski highlight that this element was first introduced in the “Ensemble Tanec” for their performance at the World Folk Festival in Llangollen, Great Britain, in 1950. The authors consider this element as an enhancement of the dance, through which *Teškoto* began to incorporate theatrical elements (Тодевски, Палчевски 2013: 28).

Just as it is crucial for *Teškoto* to be led by an excellent dancer, it is equally important for the drummer to be at the same level. As Todevski and Palčevski point out, among the performers and experts in this field, it is said that not every dancer can be the lead dancer of *Teškoto*, nor can every drummer play for this dance. The most famous and authentic lead dancers of *Teškoto* are the Lazaropole residents Rafe and Spiro Žikoski, whom we mentioned earlier, and the longest-serving dancer was Dojčin Matevski (Тодевски, Палчевски 2013: 29).

According to Smilevski, another rule is that an indispensable part of the dance is the serious expression on the faces of all dancers, and no one smiles, emphasizing the solemnity of the dance and the events it represents (Смилевски 2006: 25).

Dunin and Višinski note that the perceptive image of *Teškoto* outside of Macedonia is represented by the performance of the Ensemble of folk dances and songs of Macedonia “Tanec”. The most common image associated with Macedonian dance is that of *Teškoto* – a dance in which

several dancers hold hands, wearing caps on their heads, with one foot raised in the air. The lead dancer is kneeling on the drum with one leg. This image of *Teškoto* is considered to be the traditional dance, which has changed little over time (Иванчиќ Дунин, Вишински 1995: 60).

### ***Lesnoto* (the easy one)**

*Lesnoto* is an example of the mentioned dance, which is in a 7/8 time signature.<sup>1</sup> It is a mixed dance performed by both men and women, holding each other under the armpits. The lead dancer occasionally releases themselves and performs a turn to the right side during the dance (Јанковиќ 1934: 9).

Further, we will use a quote from Blaže Smilevski who states: “*Teškoto* would not have been born, would not have matured, if before that, in the areas where the Mijaks live, in the villages of the Mala Reka (Small River) region, *Lesnoto*, *Čifte Čamče*, and especially *Manukot*, were not performed. The steps of these dances gave rise to *Teškoto*” (Смилевски 2006: 22). From this statement, it is clear that *Teškoto* was created from another dance, specifically *Lesnoto*, and evolved over time. Smilevski’s statement can be supported by the view of Elsie Ivancich Dunin, who also points out that *Teškoto* is essentially a slower version of *Lesnoto*, where the quick steps from *Lesnoto* are played slowly (Иванчиќ Дунин, Вишински 1995: 61).

According to research on the archetypes of dances in the Balkans, *Lesnoto*, with a dance pattern of two steps to the right and one to the left, represents one of the most archaic types of dance, which has survived over time and remains vital even today. The long-term research conducted by Janković in the territory of Macedonia, as well as more broadly across the Balkans, through which a large corpus of folk dances was collected and analyzed, contributed to the designation of the aforementioned type of light dances with a triple-meter dance pattern as *Balkanka*, due to their wide distribution throughout the entire Balkan Peninsula (Јанковиќ 1964: 57). Among Macedonian ethnochoreologists, special attention is given to Vladimir Janevski, who highlights the type of *lesni ora* (light dances) as one of the five most characteristic dance examples that interweave from one ethnic region to another, and at the same time as the most widespread type on the territory of Macedonia. Regarding the classification of *lesni ora*, they belong to the category of communal (assembly) dances; however, as a general dance model, they also appear in ritual dances and in dance-accompanied songs (*orovodni pesni*). The most frequent names encountered are: *Lesnoto*, *Pravoto*, *Ramnoto*, *Dus*, *Teškoto* and *Turskoto* (Јаневски 2013: 144).

---

<sup>1</sup> The Janković sisters (1934) recorded this dance in a 3/4 time signature.

The name of the dance *Lesnoto* (the easy one) itself suggests that it is danced easily, without much strain, virtuosity, or complex elements like balancing or jumps. The dance was widely accepted and could be performed by anyone, even those not particularly talented in dancing. This type of dance is widespread throughout Macedonia, appearing under various names, with the most popular being *Pravoto* in a 7/8 time signature (3+2+2). It is worth noting that in the past, this dance was known by many names and existed in nearly all dance areas in Macedonia, though with some differences in instrumental accompaniment and metrical structure. This dance is an integral part of today's weddings and celebrations, indicating that even in modern society, a traditional dance (in terms of its dance structure), finds application and continues to persist.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis performed so far, we can draw several conclusions. *Teškoto* dance, which represents a synonym for Macedonian dance, is considered difficult due to its complex ethnochoreological content, due to the slow movements, squats, turns, squatting on one leg, climbing onto the drum by the lead dancer, and the overall complexity of the dance steps. It is also considered difficult because many researchers associate it with the hard and strenuous life of the Mijaks, their difficult labor, and the challenging experiences they endured.

*Teškoto* is of the same type as *Lesnoto* in terms of the structure of the dance pattern, whose foundation is simple, but has been developed over time. It can be assumed that the evolution of *Lesnoto* into *Teškoto* was a long process, occurring over an extended period, although we were unable to find specific records to confirm this. We can also hypothesize that the development was gradual and that the dance leaders were the ones who enhanced the dance, shaping it into what we know today as *Teškoto*. The individual creativity and inventiveness of the dancers were crucial in the creation of *Teškoto*, but so was the collective consciousness in accepting specific innovations, learning, and transmitting all the innovations that were incorporated into the dance. Why was *Teškoto* untouched by foreign influences? It is assumed that its originality and authenticity are a result of being shielded from external influences, in the almost inaccessible mountain terrain of the Mijak region. Perhaps this is exactly why *Teškoto* is a unique blend of the physical and the spiritual, of the body and the spirit – an incredible expression of the spiritual creativity of a people, a manifestation of the artistic talent of the national genius.

## LITERATURE

### Cyrillic

Димоски, М. 1996. „Народните ора и орската традиција“. *Етнологија на Македонија*. Скопје: МАНУ, 281–286.

Иванчиќ Дунин, Е., С. Вишински. 1995. *Орања во Македонија – сценски дел Танец*. Скопје: АД Печатница „11 Октомври“.

Јаневски, В. 2013. *Етнокореолошки карактеристики на македонските народни ора (по избрани примери)*. Скопје: Институт за фолклор „Марко Цепенков“ – Скопје.

Јанковиќ, Љ., Д. Јанковиќ. 1934. *Народне игре I*. Београд: Просвета.

Јанковиќ, Љ., Д. Јанковиќ. 1939. *Народне игре III*. Београд: Просвета.

Јанковиќ, Љ., Д. Јанковиќ. 1948. *Народне игре IV*. Београд: Просвета.

Костов, С. 2018. „Типот на лесните ора во Србија и во Македонија“. Зборник на трудови *Врски меѓу Р. Македонија и Р. Србија низ векови и денес* од Меѓународна научна конференција за меѓународните и интеркултурните релации. Битола: Конзулат на Р. Србија во Р. Македонија, 637–641.

Смилевски, Б. 2006. *Тешкото од Лазарополе*. Скопје.

Тодевски, К., Б. Палчевски. 2013. *Танец – промотор на фолклорно-кореографска школа со национален предзнак*. Скопје: Дирекција за култура и уметност.

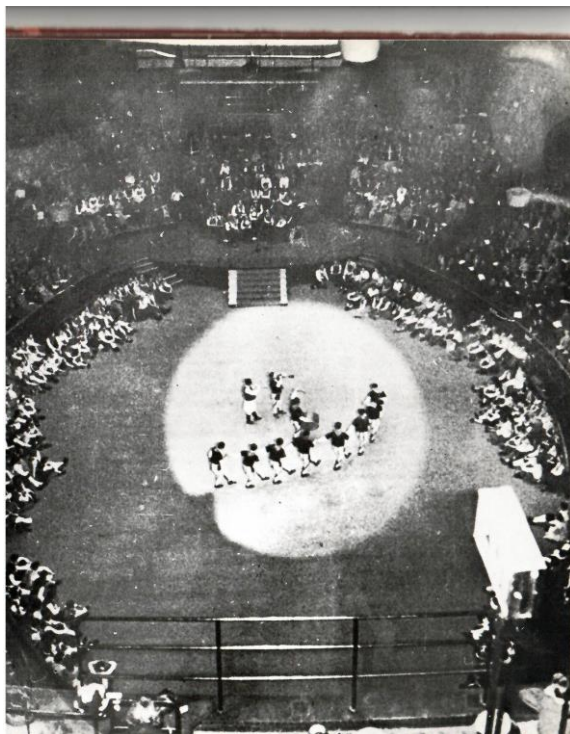
Чаусидис, Н. 2009. „Барабан и ‘тешко оро’ – анализ мифо-символичного и обрядового значення“. *Народна творчеств и етнологија: Македонски сѐцвијуск*. Київ, 68–79.

### Photographs



Ph. 1: “Teškoto” from Lazaropole (recorded in the 30’s of 20<sup>th</sup> century)  
Retrieved from the Archives of Ensemble “Tanec”

Stojanče Kostov – *The dance Teškoto (The Hard one) – a synonymous...*



Ph. 2: “Teškoto” performed by Ensemble “Tanec” in Llangollen, Great Britan, in 1950. Retrieved from the Archives of Ensemble “Tanec”



Ph. 3: “Teškoto” by Ensemble “Tanec”, dance leader is Dojčin Matevski (early 50’s of 20<sup>th</sup> century). Retrieved from the Archives of Ensemble “Tanec”

**ТЕШКОТО – СИНОНИМ ЗА ТЕШКО ОРО ОД ТИПОТ НА ЛЕСНОТО**  
(аналитички осврт меѓу двете ора)

Стојанче Костов  
Институт за фолклор „Марко Цепенков“ – Скопје  
[stole\\_kostov88@yahoo.com](mailto:stole_kostov88@yahoo.com)

Резиме

Зошто *Тешкојто* е како синоним за оро од типот на *Леснојто*? Колку и да звучи парадоксално, сепак, постојат одредени показатели, кои укажуваат и можат да го поткрепат ваквото тврдење. Во овој текст се осврнавме на некои од тие показатели, како што се: етнокоролошки карактеристики на *Тешкојто* и *Леснојто*, структурата на игроорниот образец, стилот и начинот на изведба на ората. Според досега извршената анализа, можеме да донесеме неколку заклучоци. *Тешкојто* оро, кое претставува синоним за македонско оро е, всушност, тешко поради неговата комплексна етнокоролошка содржина, поради бавните движења, клекнувањата, вртешките, клекнувањето на една нога, качувањето на ороводецот – на тапанот, односно според комплексноста на игроорните елементи. Исто така, за тешко се смета и поради тоа што многу автори го поврзуваат со тешкиот и со мачниот печалбарски живот на Мијациите, но и на Македонците воопшто – под турското ропство. Од друга страна, пак, *Тешкојто* е од типот на *Леснојто* според структурата на игроорниот образец, чија основа е едноставна, но со текот на времето се надградувала. Може да се претпостави дека еволуцијата на *Леснојто* во *Тешкојто* била долготрајна, односно се случувала во подолг временски период иако, за такво нешто, не успеавме да најдеме конкретни записи.

Исто така, можеме да дадеме една претпоставка дека надградбата се одвивала постапно и дека ороводците биле тие што го надградиле оротото, кое го знаеме денес како *Тешкојто*, за да дојде до ваков стадиум. Индивидуалната креација и инвентивноста на игроорецот се пресудни за создавањето на *Тешкојто*, но исто така и колективната свест – за прифаќање на одредена инвенција, како и учење и пренесување на сите иновациски појави, кои се вметнувале во оротото. Зошто *Тешкојто* било недопрено од туѓи влијанија? Се претпоставува дека неговата оригиналност и неговата автентичност се последица на заштитеноста од туѓи влијанија во, речиси, недостапниот планински терен на Мијачијата. Можеби токму поради тоа *Тешкојто* е неповторлив спој на физичкото и на духовното, на телото и на духот, односно тоа е неверојатен израз на духовната експресија на еден народ, израз на уметничката дарба на народниот гениј.