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“Bella festa si fa ncelu”: Jesuits and Musical Traditions in the Heart of the Mediterranean

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Abstract

Still today, in Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, the three main islands of the western Mediterranean, there is a great flourishing of orally transmitted devotional songs which can be traced back to the acculturation processes brought about by Jesuit missionaries in the early modern era. Adopting an ethno-musicological approach, our essay focuses on some significant case studies, aiming to contribute to the discussion about Jesuits and music both in a contemporary and in an historical perspective. On the one hand, we observe the special consideration given today to some widespread popular religious songs that are commonly regarded as “historical Jesuit heritage.” On the other hand, we investigate historical sources, looking for traces of past music practices and hints about the relationships between Jesuit missionaries and traditional musicians. Rather than provide definitive answers, our purpose is to raise questions about the inherent complexity of the interpretation of past musical practices, and about the thought-provoking interconnections between these practices and the variegated music scenarios of the present day.

1 Ignazio Macchiarella wrote the section titled “The *Santuzza*, the *orbi*, and the Jesuits”; Roberto Milleddu wrote the sections “*Deus ti salvet* and other songs,” “The Jesuits and the people,” and “A Jesuit for every season.” The two authors jointly wrote the introductory paragraphs and the conclusions.

Keywords

Orally transmitted religious songs – devotional singing – secular confraternities – Jesuit missionary songs – historical ethnomusicology – popular religious singing – Sicilian religious story-singing – Sardinian anthem – Corsican anthem – *Salve Regina*

In present-day Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, the three main islands of the western Mediterranean, there is still a great variety of orally transmitted musical expressions connected to different paraliturgical rituals. Some of them have an exclusive character—*i.e.*, they are performed by professional singers/musicians, others an inclusive one—*i.e.*, common people can participate in them. In their formal diversities, these expressions are strictly related to ritual events. They are not mere background music for the devotional event: rather, they punctuate the time, and mark and qualify the spaces where the paraliturgy takes place. Some expressions seem to be peculiar to a geocultural area, or to a community or a group within it, while others, especially the exclusive ones, have important elements in common which are present in all the three islands (and beyond, in southern Italy or in the Iberian peninsula): therefore, it is reasonable to think that they derive from and went through similar historical processes.

In this paper, we will explore the relationships between some of these orally transmitted musical practices and the apostolic activity the Jesuits conducted in the three islands during the early modern era. We will do this by presenting a series of case studies. In each case, we have started from fieldwork and then moved on to archival research: as we will see, this combination of tools and perspectives, typical of historical ethnomusicology, proves to be especially fruitful for areas such as those considered, which were the target of extensive missionary activity and have maintained robust musical traditions until today.

The *Santuzza*, the *orbi*, and the Jesuits

The worship of St. Rosalia is still very common in Sicily, especially in its capital Palermo, where the human remains of the *Santuzza* (*i.e.* “little saint,” as believers lovingly call her) are kept in an always crowded sanctuary on a hill that overlooks the town. This worship is mainly based on a hagiographical story narrated by the Jesuits of Palermo in the first half of the seventeenth century.²

² See Valerio Petrarca, *Genesi di una tradizione urbana: Il culto di Santa Rosalia a Palermo in età spagnola* (Palermo: Fondazione Ignazio Buttitta, 2008).

Today this worship is realized through spectacular events, but also with different forms of pilgrimage as well as family or individual devotional acts. The most important of these events is the so-called *u.fistinu*, one of the largest and most complex Italian patron festivals, with a wide range of events organized over several days, the main of which is the great procession on July 15th. Among the many musical and poetical compositions linked to this worship, the so-called *Triunfu a Santa Rosalia* is particularly relevant. It is a text written in hendecasyllables about the legend of the virgin Rosalia Sinibaldi, the supposed direct descendant of Charlemagne *imperaturi* (Emperor), and the daughter of Sinibaldo, the vassal of King Roger II of Sicily (r.1130–54). The king himself chose her as the bride-to-be to knight Baldwin, but she renounced to the court life to live in a cave instead, dedicating her life to prayer and contemplation, after she saw Jesus in a mirror while she was getting ready for her marriage.³ Nowadays this sung story is performed in a large variety of vocal-instrumental combinations by revival folk groups in theaters and other venues. But it derives from the performance practice of the *orbi* or *orvi*,⁴ the so-called blind story-tellers, a congregation of traditional musicians who performed all around Sicily. The congregation surely had extensive contacts with the Jesuits, but the exact working and chronology of this relationship is difficult to establish, as we will see in due course.

The figure of the *orbu* has an emblematic value in Sicilian culture, far beyond the realm of musical practice. Actually not all the *orbi* were completely blind: they were, however, professionals with sophisticated skills as musicians and performers, thanks to which they had an important role in the social life of the urban centers. Their task was basically to perform religious-devotional acts "by request." The last surviving expressions of this particular musical practice have been tracked by ethnomusicologists in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, in the old city center of Palermo, a small group of elderly musicians and poets which were somehow related to the *orbi* congregation were still active in performance.⁵ They mainly performed *i triunfi* in private houses, by request and according to the tradition. The term *triunfu* was used to refer to a genre of songs as well as to a kind of devotional-religious celebrations organized by a family or a group of families, or by a neighborhood to celebrate a particular event, for instance as an *ex-voto* for a favor received. Each celebration was dedicated to a saint and the *orbi* sang their praises in a musical performance which varied in length and character. The organizers prepared a sort of altar (in their

3 For the development of the worship of St. Rosalia, see Petrarca, *Genesi di una tradizione urbana*.

4 Singular *orbu* (*orbo*), *orvu* (*orvo*).

5 Similar traditions were present in other main cities of Sicily up to the 1830s.

house or in the street) richly decorated, with the image of the celebrated saint in the middle. The *orbi* were hired and paid for the occasion and participated in the complete ritual, singing and playing the guitar and the violin (sometimes accompanied by the mandolin, the cello, the accordion, or other instruments as well).

According to the research carried out by the present writer under the direction of Elsa Guggino between 1980–81, the *trionfu* started with an *allegro* instrumental piece, whose aim was to draw the listeners' attention. Immediately following, the song about the story of the saint in Sicilian dialect began, always a long tale, full of anecdotes about miracles and digressions. The performance was interrupted from time to time, to respite both the musicians and the audience. At the end of the story, they sang some songs with a sustained rhythm, among which the *abballu di li virgini* (the dance of the virgins): the lyrics are about a "bella festa ncelu, nnanzi a Diu Patri e Signuri" (a great celebration in Heaven before God, our Lord and Father), to which all the virgin saints participate (a list of the virgins is poured out quickly at the end). An instrumental *a complimentu* song ended the performance. However, this pattern could present different variations, as documented by the material collected by Guggino.⁶ Local performers and listeners of the time thought that the *trionfi* of the late twentieth century represented the last remains of a much richer and more complex performative practice, which constituted a real devotional event for the organizers, the audience, and the entire neighborhood.

The core of the devotional event was the narration of the glories of the saint: a text in Sicilian dialect, divided into several sections. It included long series of emblematic episodes (healings, miracles, and other supernatural events), as well as digressions and narrative stratagems, whose performance was embellished with interludes and instrumental pieces. Its length became proverbial: the idiom "a storia i l'orbu" in Sicilian dialect is used to describe a never ending story. The narration followed the structure and logic of a tale sung in a storyteller style.⁷ It was usually entrusted to oral memory and transmission—which is obvious for actually blind performers—, but there probably existed written transcriptions (descriptive ones, that is, subsequent to the performing act), such as those included in the handwritten notebooks of one of the last *orbi*

6 See Elsa Guggino, *I canti degli orbi. 1: I cantastorie ciechi a Palermo* (Palermo: Folkstudio-Archivio per le Tradizioni Popolari, 1980), 28–40. The work of the *orbi* actually took place all year long, as each religious festival included specific events. Particularly important were the main feasts of the liturgical year, such as the Holy Week, which had specific repertoires.

7 For the art of Sicilian and southern Italian storytellers, see Mauro Geraci, *Le ragioni dei cantastorie* (Rome: Il Trovatore, 1996).

from Palermo, Rosario Salerno (1915–75).⁸ The stories were not fixed: rather they were sketches, shared memories used each time as a basis for a new and different performance.

There is no sure information about the origin of the congregation of the *orbi* and its history. What is certain is that there was in Palermo a congregation of blind people named after the Immaculate Conception in the early seventeenth century; whether they performed music, though, is not clear. In 1644, this congregation is said to have been accepted by the Jesuit fathers in the hall of the Chiesa del Gesù (Casa Professa), “therefore starting a relationship that would last for more than two centuries.”⁹ According to the nineteenth-century Jesuit Gaetano Filiti, however, the congregation was established at the Jesuit house from its start, and was directed by the Jesuit Francesco Drago, who died in 1656.¹⁰ The scholar Antonio Mongitore (1663–1743), in an undated manuscript titled “About the history of all the Churches, Convents, Monasteries, Hospitals and other religious places of the City of Palermo. Churches of Associations, Brotherhoods and Congregations of Palermo” and kept at the Municipal library of Palermo (shelf-mark QqE1–9), states that the association was founded in 1690 by Father Tirso González de Santalla (1624–1705). Starting from this manuscript—possibly integrated with orally transmitted historical memories—nineteenth-century folklorist Lionardo Vigo (1799–1879) sets the establishment in 1661 within the regulation of the trades which concerned different occupational categories (merchants, masters, workers, etc.), which were hosted by the Jesuits in the same premises. That year probably marked a turning point in the activity of the congregation, confirmed by other indirect evidence.¹¹

The earliest pieces of evidence do not provide direct information about the musical practice, even if it is reasonable to believe that it was already present. In the mid-eighteenth century, the marquis of Villabianca (Francesco Maria Emanuele e Gaetani, 1720–1802) wrote:

8 See Elsa Guggino, *I canti degli orbi. 2: I quaderni di Zu Rusulinu* (Palermo: Archivio per le Tradizioni Popolari, 1981) and Guggino, *I canti degli orbi. 3: I quaderni di Zu Rusulinu* (Palermo: Archivio per le Tradizioni Popolari, 1988).

9 Sergio Bonanzinga, “Tradizioni musicali per l’Immacolata in Sicilia,” in *La Sicilia e l’Immacolata: Non solo 150 anni*, ed. Diego Ciccarelli and Marisa Dora Valenza (Palermo: Biblioteca Franceseana-Officina di Studi Medievali, 2006), 69–154, here 73.

10 See Gaetano Filiti, *La chiesa della casa professa della Compagnia di Gesù in Palermo* (Palermo: Bondi, 1906), cited in Guggino, *I canti degli orbi. 1*, 11.

11 Bonanzinga, “Tradizioni musicali,” 73.

The poor *orbi* and people blind in both eyes, [...] as it is well known, make a living by singing and performing sacred and secular songs in the streets, and in particular by improvising poems in the popular festivals dedicated to the Saints which take place outside the churches, in the squares and neighborhoods of the city [...] A good selection of the poems produced by these lower poets of popular extraction can be found in volume 82 of my erudite collections. These songs of the *orbi* and these recitative songs are mostly ridiculous and made in Sicilian bernesque style; and among those which have been published the following are particularly noteworthy: *Lu calaciuni a tri cordi* (also known as *Lu curnutu cuntenti*), *La storia del Meschino*, *Il mercadante fallito*, *Il demonio tentatore*, *La storia di Orlando*, *Aromatario e taverniere* and others.¹²

The most ancient charter of the congregation known up to now dates back to August 14, 1775,¹³ and it contains specific prohibitions for musical activities as well as explicit rules about musical performances required by the Jesuit fathers. For instance, chapter XI establishes “the absolute prohibition to sing mock-heroic or profane songs in the streets and squares of this City and to stay near or inside the houses of public prostitutes under the following punishment”, while in chapter IX it is “prohibited for every congregated brother to sing new spiritual songs if not previously heard and approved by the Superiors and Councilors of our Congregation.” Moreover, the charter guaranteed to the *orbi* members a sort of monopoly on the itinerant musical practice in the city, imposing to possible “foreign blinds” the payment of a fee to the benefit of the members of the congregations.

12 “Li poveri orbi e ciechi di tutti due occhi, [...] come è notissimo, soglion vivere col mestiere di cantare e recitare per le strade orazioni sacre e profane e sopra tutto improvisar poesie nelle feste plebee in onore de’ Santi che fuori de’ tempj nelle piazze e contrade espongonsi delle città [...] De’ parti e composizioni di tai bassi poeti di volgo, per me, Villabianca, al volume piccolo di n. 82 di mie erudizioni se ne tiene una buona raccolta. Per lo più sono, queste canzoni di orbi e recite di canzoni, ridicolose e prodotte in poesia sicola bernesca, e fra esse che son date alla luce delle pubbliche stampe riescon pregevoli *Lu calaciuni a tri cordi*, ch’è lo stesso di *Lu curnutu cuntenti*, *La storia del Meschino*, *Il mercadante fallito*, *Il demonio tentatore*, *La storia di Orlando*, *Aromatario e taverniere* ed altri.” Francesco Maria Emanuele e Gaetani, Marchese di Villabianca, *Descrizione della Sicilia e storie siciliane*, ed. Salvo Di Matteo (Palermo: Giada, 1991), 113.

13 “Chapters of the Venerable Congregation of the Blind under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, present in the cloisters of the Professed House of the Reverend Fathers of the Society of Jesus of this town, renewed in the year 1755,” fully transcribed in Bonanzinga, “Tradizioni musicali,” 142–54.

According to Vigo, the *orbi* continued to meet in the premises of the Professed House even after the Suppression of the Society in 1767, led by their own chaplain, a Father director and various ecclesiastical authorities, including also an admonisher who acted as Censor. It is believed that in the almost four decades of the Suppression, the *orbi* had acquired their own independence and that this led to the contrasts in the early eighteenth century. In 1806, after the restoration of the Society of Jesus, "the king granted the Jesuits the third part of the income of the congregations linked to the Professed House." The *orbi* protested "that the fathers took it all" and repeatedly complained with the local authorities: a stiff conflict ensued.¹⁴

In 1820, the Fathers imposed new charters to the congregations that met in their premises. The conflict worsened, as the *orbi* refused to become one of the "spiritual congregations", which would serve only the "improvement of souls," and to renounce the privileges granted by the previous charter. Only in 1829 they issued a new charter including some sections that somehow limited the interference of the Jesuits in the actual musical performance.¹⁵ The censorship and the preliminary approval of the songs continued to exist, but the *orbi* obtained the right to manage directly "All the money received and that they would have received [...] regardless of its origin" (chapter VII), without the intrusion "of the Reverend Father" set in the 1775 charter.

The "independence" of the congregation was relative, and in any case it did not last long: with the Expedition of the Thousand (1860), after which Sicily was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy, and the consequent acquisition of the properties of the Church by the new State, the history of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blind came to an end.¹⁶ In 1871, however, priest Giovanni Carollo (1829–1917) organized a new form of association for the blind, establishing a school that anticipated the institute for blind people set up by the municipality, in the premises of the former Professed House. Carollo, inspired by the Jesuit model, was himself the author of religious stories in Sicilian dialect to be performed by the *orbi*.¹⁷

The literature of the folklorists of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century is rich in testimonies regarding the activity of the *orbi*, including after the dissolution of the congregation. A wider picture emerges: apart from religious tales and stories (probably submitted for approval to the

14 See Lionardo Vigo, *Raccolta amplissima di canti popolari siciliani* (Catania: Tip. Galatola, 1870–74), 59–60.

15 This charter is fully reported in Guggino, *I canti degli orbi. I: I cantastorie*, 61–66.

16 Bonanzinga, "Tradizioni musicali," 77.

17 Guggino, *I canti degli orbi. I: I cantastorie*, 28.

ecclesiastical censors) for the *triumfi* and other devotional celebrations, the *orbi* performed music for dancing, for weddings, baptisms, local celebrations, and private parties, as well as to accompany the shows of the *opera di pupi* (opera of the Sicilian puppets) and open air entertainments. This variety of uses, and the symbolic link with the Jesuit heritage, were also confirmed by the oral memories of the last *orbi* from Palermo.¹⁸

The case of the blind storytellers of Palermo briefly discussed here is emblematic as to the problem of the relationship between orally transmitted musical practices and the apostolic activity of early modern Jesuits. By controlling the activity of the *orbi*, the Jesuits were better able to spread their message to the people. It is likely, moreover, that the Jesuits might have become directly involved, as authors of the lyrics or even contributing to the music.¹⁹ Music was considered a means for the apostolic activity, and the music of the *orbi* must have had a peculiar relevance. In fact, it was a professional expression, characterized by the presence of instruments, such as the violin, which underscored its difference from the “ordinary” music (religious and secular) of the common people. Moreover, the figure of the blind musician, with its special combination of disability and skill, probably contributed to give a memorable and impressive character to the performance—and this is probably why the *orbi* are mentioned at all in early modern written sources which provide us information about popular devotional practices such as the *triumfi*. On the other hand, the contested relationship between the *orbi* and the Jesuits seem to suggest some form of popular “resistance” to the Fathers’ apostolic work: an issue which will need to be studied with specific research based on a critical reading of the documents and publications of the Society.

***Deus ti salvet* and Other Songs: From Popular Missions to Popular Music**

A paradigmatic case of how some cultural works with a clear origin within the context of early modern Jesuit spirituality have entered the popular culture of Sardinia and Corsica is that of the songs whose incipit is *Deus ti salvet Maria* and *Dio vi salvi Regina*. In fact, they were used as tools for the missionary

¹⁸ Ibid., 34–42.

¹⁹ As for the lyrics sang by the *orbi*, only a few names of possible authors belonging to the clergy are currently known, but they were not Jesuits. Among them, the most famous is canon Antonio Diliberto, who lived in the eighteenth century and was known under the pseudonym of Binidittu Annuleru; see Bonanzinga, “Tradizioni musicali,” 78.

activity of the Society in those lands, but in the twentieth century they assumed new meanings within those identity construction processes which developed in both Sardinia and Corsica, and which reworked and re-functionalized a large variety of practices, ranging from traditional music, properly speaking, to church music and popular music.

Although the results are different from the original purposes for which these compositions were conceived and spread by the Jesuits since at least the early eighteenth century, it is important to highlight that their "rootedness" is due to the apostolic activity carried out by the Fathers both in towns and in the countryside. In fact, since the second half of the sixteenth century, the Society of Jesus had played a central role in the two islands, in terms of culture and education, with activities ranging from the training of clergymen and ruling classes (the Jesuits were in charge of the University of Sassari) to the missions on the territory for urban and rural low classes; in the seventeenth century they were able to bring "an organized and reliable teaching even in the most marginal parish churches."²⁰

In the missionary activity, singing was used as an efficient and useful educational instrument to teach the doctrine to the illiterate: the catechisms were written in verses, making it easier, especially for children, to learn religious truths and the precepts that a good Christian must obey.²¹ Moreover, in the rich bibliography produced by the Jesuits on this topic, there are some *laude*, sometimes provided with music notation, which were meant to replace secular and dissolute popular songs. It is precisely in one of these missionary tools that we come across the two devotional Marian songs that interest us. In the preface of the *Istruzioni in forma di Catechismo per la pratica della Dottrina Cristiana* (Instructions in the form of Catechism for the practice of the

20 Raimondo Turtas, *Storia della Chiesa in Sardegna: Dalle origini al duemila* (Rome: Città nuova, 1999), 425. On Jesuit popular missions, see Armando Guidetti, *Le missioni popolari: I grandi gesuiti italiani; Disegno storico-biografico delle missioni popolari dei gesuiti d'Italia dalle origini al Concilio Vaticano II* (Milan: Rusconi, 1988). Raimondo Turtas, S.J. published a detailed bibliography on the Jesuits' activity in Sardinia; see in particular Raimondo Turtas, "Missioni popolari in Sardegna tra '500 e '600," *Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia* 44 (1990): 369–412; Turtas, *I gesuiti in Sardegna: 450 anni di storia* (Cagliari: Cuec, 2010); and Turtas, *Storia della chiesa in Sardegna*. For Corsica, see François J. Casta, *Christianisme et société en Corse: Études d'histoire et d'anthropologie religieuses (1969–1996)* (Ajaccio: Albiana éditeur, 2013).

21 For instance, in the appendix of the *Catecismo y breve esposición de la doctrina* printed in Cagliari in 1743 there are "coplillas espirituales para cantar los niños en la procession de la doctrina" [short verses to be sung by children during the procession of the doctrine].

Christian doctrine) published by Pietro Maria Ferreri (1677–1737), a Jesuit from Palermo, in 1737²² we read:²³

A Christian doctrine written in rhymes in Italian in a simple and popular style so that it could be sung during the Catechism and it was easier for the students to learn by heart. It was composed and published by father Innocenzo Innocenzi, a famous Italian missionary, for the benefit of many people, who, learning these little songs by heart, not only were better able to learn and remember the teachings of our Faith, but they sung [the Doctrine] everywhere instead of the profane songs, when they were resting from their hard work. It was used also by the renowned Father Paolo Segneri in his Missions, with excellent results everywhere, and was sung by every kind of people in their houses, in the streets and in the country; a young layman affirmed that he sold fifteen thousand copies of it, and it is still used in Italy nowadays.²⁴

The quotation refers to the Christian doctrine written in verse by father Innocenzo Innocenzi, S.J. from Todi (1624–97), which included Italian paraphrases of the *Ave Maria* (“Dio ti salvi Maria, / che sei di grazia piena”) and of the *Salve Regina* (“Dio vi salvi Regina / e Madre universale”).²⁵ Repeatedly reprinted,

²² Other editions currently held in Sardinia include one dated 1759 (Sassari: Biblioteca Universitaria) and another one dated 1827 (Isili: Biblioteca Comunale), which testifies that the missionary activity was carried out for a long time.

²³ Cited in Roberto Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], *Enciclopedia della musica sarda*, vol. 7, ed. Francesco Casu and Marco Lutz (Cagliari: Unione Sarda, 2012), 28.

²⁴ “Una Dottrina Cristiana composta in rime italiane con stile facile, e popolare per potersi cantare in tempo del Catechismo, e con più facilità e diletto impararsi a mente dagli scolari. Essa fu composta e pubblicata dal P. Innocenzo Innocenzi celebre missionario in Italia con non poco profitto di tanti popoli, che mandandosi a mente queste canzonette, non solo s'imprimevan meglio le cose della nostra santa Fede nella memoria, ma di più lasciate le canzoni profane, si sentivan dappertutto cantar questa, per aver qualche respiro in tutti i loro più faticosi lavori. Di questa medesima servissi pure il famoso Padre Paolo Segneri nelle sue Missioni, con profitto sì universale, che la cantava ogni genere di persone nelle case, per le strade nella campagna di modo che attestò un giovane secolare di averne venduto egli sol di sua parte infine a quindicimila, ed anche a diè d'oggi è ella tanto in uso in Italia.” Cited in Roberto Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], *Enciclopedia della Musica Sarda*, vol. 7, ed. Francesco Casu and Marco Lutz (Cagliari: Unione Sarda, 2012), 28.

²⁵ For a recent discussion of Innocenzi and his sung catechism, including a list of extant editions, see Daniele V. Filippi, “A Sound Doctrine: Early Modern Jesuits and the Singing of the Catechism,” *Early Music History* 34 (2015): 1–43, here 29–40.

Innocenzi's catechism was so successful and efficient that it was re-used by other missionaries, including Paolo Segneri (1624–94), whose works were also present in Sardinia and Corsica. As appropriately highlighted by Salvatorangelo Pisanu,²⁶ the paraphrase of the *Ave Maria* was introduced in Sardinia through translations in Castilian and in Sardinian (both Logudorese and Campidanese). It is included in the *Rosarium Beatae Mariae Virginis* of the confraternity of San Vero Milis, a village near Oristano, of 1731 and in the *Reglas de sa Congregazioni de sa natividad de Maria Virgini* (Rules of the Congregation of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary), which were translated in *sardu calaritanu* in 1797 when the previous edition of 1724 was republished²⁷ and which contained both the paraphrase of the *Ave Maria* and that of the *Salve Regina*. Here are their first two stanzas:

S'Ave Maria

*Deus ti salvit Maria
Chi ses de grazia plena
De grazia ses sa vena
E sa currenti.*

*Su Deus onnipotenti
Cun tegus est'istadu
Poita t'hat preservadu
Immaculada.*

Sa Salve Regina

*Deus ti salvit Reina
e mama piadosa
pura e fragranti rosa
de Paradisu.*

*Ses allirghia, e arrisu
De dogna isconsoladu,
de dogna tribuladu
Ses su respiru.*

²⁶ In his doctoral thesis, Pisanu carried out a scrupulous analysis of the two songs, finding similarities with *laude* and spiritual contrafacta of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, especially with the popular form of poetry called *zingaresca* (gipsy song), which shares the same metrical pattern. Pisanu also found melodic similarities with some *laude*. In his work he also investigates how these songs were appropriated in Sardinia and Corsica. See Salvatorangelo Pisanu, "Confluenze e parallelismi nel canto popolare. Corsica e Sardegna" (PhD diss., Université de Corse, 2004).

²⁷ According to the title page, the rules, which contain the prayers recited by the congregates in their meetings together with the respective indulgences, were translated from a Castilian edition of 1724 (there are no extant copies of this first version). The Sardinian translation was probably prepared when the seat of the Congregation was moved from the Jesuit college in Cagliari to the novitiate of the society in the complex of San Michele. See Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], 33).

The Hail Mary

God save you, Mary,
Who are full of grace:
You are the source
Of the grace's stream.

God Almighty
Has been with you
Since he has preserved you
Immaculate.

The Hail Holy Queen

God save you, Queen,
And merciful mom,
Pure and fragrant rose
Of Heaven.

You are the joy and smile
Of every disconsolate man,
You are the respite
Of every tormented man.

Even if the first stanza of the *Salve Regina* has some discrepancies, in the second one we can see precise matches with the text attributed to Innocenzi. What is particularly noteworthy here is that the Sardinian versions of these Marian songs are included (without musical notation) in books for the devotional practices of secular confraternities: which further confirms that the confraternity medium was the “membrane” through which elements of the culture of the official Church reached “the people.”²⁸ In the case of San Vero, a rural village near Oristano, it is likely that the song arrived through the mediation of the secular clergy or other religious orders,²⁹ even if we cannot exclude a direct intervention of Jesuit missionaries; while as for the Congregation of the Nativity (an urban congregation of craftsmen), the direct link with the Jesuits is clear: the Society hosted the congregates in its premises and provided them a spiritual guide.

The two Marian songs were part of a wider repertoire of texts to be sung during the spiritual exercises, both by the members of congregations and by the people, notably the children. In the twentieth century, however, *Deus ti salvet Maria* (also known as *Ave Maria sarda*), underwent a transformation: from a devotional song sang in different ways in various locations of the Island, as part of the sung rosaries and different forms of *pregadoria*,³⁰ it became a self-standing piece, and a vehicle for new cultural meanings, especially thanks to

28 See Ignazio Macchiarella, “Le manifestazioni musicali della devozione cristiana in Italia,” in *Enciclopedia della musica*, vol. 3, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), 340–71.

29 The devotional text is included in the books for the missions of other religious orders (notably the Franciscans, both Minor and Capuchins: see for instance Friederich Münter, *Sendschreiben an Herrn Geheimen Hofrath und Professor D. Friedrich Creuzer über einige Sardische Idole* [Kopenhagen: Scubotho-Popp, 1822], 7).

30 One of the first versions (monodic) was recorded by G. Nataletti during one of the expeditions made on behalf of the Centro Nazionale di Studi di Musica Popolare (CNMSP—

the reworking and subsequent dissemination done by the choirs of the "school of Nuoro" in the early 1960s.³¹

The dissemination and success of the song had already begun in the first half of the twentieth century, when it was inserted in collections of religious songs, from *Pregate così* (1936) edited by the bishop of Nuoro Salvatore Cogoni (1885–1947), to the fundamental *Sacri Conventus*, cyclostyled for the seminarians of the Regional Seminary of Cuglieri. Thus the song started to circulate in a "pan-Sardinian" version in the parish churches and Catholic groups and ended up to be sung by organized choirs, with different versions for folk and classical choirs. There followed a progressive revival by groups that performed oral multi-part singing. A well documented example of this is that of Bosa, a village in northern-central Sardinia, where around the late 1960s, by request of the local clergy, the song was reworked according to the rules of the *cantu a tràgiu* (the local name for the particular polyphonic singing method which includes only chest voices). Today the song is also performed by the groups which practice the so-called *canto a tenore* (with its characteristically guttural low voices). The popularity of the song was sanctioned also thanks to its presence in folk revival contexts in the early 1970s:³² crucial was the version by singer Maria Carta (1934–94), who recorded the song in 1974 and performed it in popular shows broadcasted by the national Italian television.³³ From then on, *Deus ti salvet Maria* started to become a real "sound icon" of the soul and of the spirituality of the Sardinian people. Nowadays, it is sung during liturgical celebrations, in prayer meetings, and on any occasion in which it is necessary to show off Sardinian identity, even outside the Island. However, it is not unusual to hear it, sung in many different manners, on informal occasions such as dinners or parties.³⁴ The versions are countless: from the reworkings by

National centre for the study of popular music), in Olzai (Nuoro) in 1959 (see Pisanu, "Confluenze e parallelismi nel canto popolare," 221).

31 As for the sung rosary, see Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], 68–75. On the phenomenon of the organized choirs, see Ignazio Macchiarella, Roberto Milleddu, and Luigi Oliva, *Cori polifonici, Enciclopedia della musica sarda*, voll. 15 and 16, ed. Francesco Casu and Marco Lutz (Cagliari: Unione Sarda, 2012).

32 See Roberto Milleddu and Diego Pani, "Folk music revival: La Sardegna," *Studi e ricerche* 6 (2013): 221–35.

33 The *Ave Maria sarda* became Maria Carta's speciality act. She performed it in two versions, one accompanied by the organ, clearly influenced by religious music, and the other accompanied by two guitars, providing therefore two distinct "sound" models. The song was also recorded by singer Maria Teresa Cau (1944–77), probably in 1962, accompanied by the guitar for the record company Vis Radio (Naples).

34 Even informal performances without specialised singer-poets demonstrate a strong association between the song and the choral medium: often on these occasions there is a sort

academic composers to those of folk choirs, to those of popular music artists (regional or not).³⁵

Expanding about *Deus ti salvet*, we have momentarily neglected the other Marian song. In fact, *Dio vi salvi Regina* is less popular in Sardinia than in Corsica. The dissemination of the song must have been similar to that described so far, in a progressive transition from a purely devotional-religious character to a broader palette of identity and political meanings. Remarkably, there is an almost perfect correspondence between the melody printed in Ferreri's work (ed. 1759) and the one currently sung in Corsica.³⁶

Although the question is still debated among historians, Corsican leaders reportedly chose the song as their "national anthem" in 1735. As Pisanu has pointed out,³⁷ the exact date and mechanism of this adoption is ultimately irrelevant: what is important is that *Dio vi salvi* was already a "traditional anthem", rooted in popular practice, before being an "official" one. This is a clear example of how music, as a symbolic system, becomes a fundamental element in identity creation processes. In this case it is the so-called *u riacquistu* movement which used it as a "flag song" in a process focused on the re-appropriation of the Corsican language and of multipart singing (*paghjella*). Ignazio Macchiarella wrote:³⁸

of intuitive polyphony or, better, of plurilinearity, according to Simha Arom's taxonomy; see Maurizio Agamennone, ed., *Polifonie, procedimenti, tassonomie e forme: una riflessione a più voci* (Venice: Il Cardo, 1996), in which the melodic line, known to everybody, is overlapped by other parts at the octave and especially in parallel thirds. This is properly illustrated in a Youtube video [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzwLNBNxfNM>, accessed in December 2015] in which Sardinian soldiers of the Italian army on a mission in Herat (Afghanistan) sing *Deus ti salvet* in a "syncretic" version (mixing traditional multi-part singing, Nuorese vocal style, etc.) clearly meant to express identity and religious values.

35 As for popular music, singer Andrea Parodi (1955–2006) associated his name in a very special way to *Deus ti salvet Maria*, which he recorded for the first time in 1986 (*Misterios*) and included in several records and live performances. Particularly important, for the interest and success obtained in Sardinia, is the version that pianist and arranger Mark Harris made for a record of singer-songwriter Fabrizio De André (1940–99) (LP *Fabrizio De André*, also known as "L'indiano," 1982), based on the version made by Albino Puddu (b.1942) for the record *La mia città* of the Cagliari band Is Cantores (1976). I should mention also Ennio Morriconi's (b.1928) arrangement for Sardinian singer Clara Murtas (b.1950) (contained in *De sa terra a su Xelu*, 2002), and, as for contemporary art music, Fabrizio Marchionni's (b.1976) reworkings for organ and piano.

36 See Pisanu, "Confluenze e parallelismi nel canto popolare," 341–43.

37 Pisanu, "Confluenze e parallelismi nel canto popolare," 213.

38 Ignazio Macchiarella, "Harmonizing in the Islands: Overview of the Multipart Singing by Chording in Sardinia, Corsica, and Sicily," in *European Voices I: Multipart Singing in*

The complex socio-political and cultural movement of the 1970s–1980s created a renaissance of the language and the culture of the island. Originally identified with the activities of the historical group "Canta u populu corsu", "u riacquistu" focused attention on the "rediscovery" and practice of the *paghjella*, the main genre of multipart singing.

The link between *Dio vi salvi* and multipart singing is particularly tight, as testified by the many versions of the song which can be found on YouTube: the historical versions by the ensemble *Canta u populu corsu*; the many improvised performances; those of such bands as *A Filetta* or *I Muvrini*, which put it in a world-music context; the cross-over versions of ensembles *Barbara Furtuna* and *Costantinople*, which mix an early music approach and sounds of the Near East; and the versions sung at soccer stadiums before matches.³⁹

The large number of results obtained with a search on the popular video-sharing website about 6000 for *Dio vi salvi* and 8000 (duplicates excluded) for *Deus ti salvet* – shows us how these pieces, originally a product of Jesuit spirituality in the Counter-Reformation era, have reconfigured themselves in the second half of the twentieth century, embodying new meanings and occupying different cultural spaces on the contemporary scene.

The Jesuits and the People: Other Devotional Songs in Sardinia

The two above mentioned cases of the *Rosarium* of San Vero Milis and the *Reglas* of Cagliari of the late eighteenth century can provide us with other useful information to understand how the activity of the Jesuit missionaries influenced, directly or indirectly, traditional Sardinian singing practices. On the on

the Balkans and in the Mediterranean, ed. Ardian Ahmedaja and Gerlinde Haid (Vienna: Böhlau, 2008), 103–58, here 129. About this topic, see also Dominique Salini, "Musiques traditionnelles de demain," *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie* 22 (2009): 49–61, here 54 [<http://ethnomusicologie.revues.org/912>].

39 I Muvrini: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ot6ov96UAZs>; Barbara Furtuna and Costantinople: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Loy721NTfBg>. Match of SC Bastia at the Stade de France, Paris (April 2015): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrAKBWve_S8. Among the many versions (only a few of which are non-polyphonic), I would like to mention the one by famous chansonnier Tino Rossi (1907–83), which contains a classicizing arrangement with a choir and an orchestra based on the Marsillaise model: http://www.wat.tv/audio/tino-rossi-dio-vi-salvi-regina-605sx_2gp9b_.html (all URLs accessed in December 2015).

hand, the 1731 *Rosarium* contains mainly compositions related to the *gosos*,⁴⁰ the main, “pan-Sardinian” genre of devotional songs, a fact which seems to suggest that the collection was conceived essentially by locals. In the *Reglas* of Cagliari, on the other hand, this genre is very rare, while all the other compositions refer to Latin texts of liturgical origin (antiphons, psalms, hymns, and litanies) or to translations from Italian, as in the case of some well-known *canzoncine spirituali* by Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori (1696–1787) (repeatedly published from 1732 on): an adaptation of materials, metric patterns and probably musical forms which seems foreign to the culture of the island and, so to speak, imposed from the outside.

The Jesuits continued to adapt different materials in this way still in the nineteenth century: for instance, the *Canzoneddas e sentimentus spiritualis a usu de is Missionis de sa Cumpangia de Gesus in Sardigna*, published in Cagliari in 1844, still include some texts derived by Liguori, such as a curious translation into Campidanese dialect of the famous Christmas carol *Tu scendi dalle stelle (From starry skies thou comest)*.⁴¹ In many cases these translations are stiff and pompous, far from the local language, but in others the lyrics are appropriated and adapted to the local singing style, with the inevitable changes due to the oral practice. Interestingly, in the study published by Dom Clemente Caria about the diocese of Oristano, some of the texts included in the mentioned *Canzoneddas* are referred to as “traditional” of Santu Lussurgiu and Ardauli (*O fillus cantai / cun coru innocenti*) or of Seneghe and other villages of the province of Oristano (*Alabit Maria / Chini senza velu*).⁴² Therefore, the questions regarding the ways of dissemination for these materials and even more the ways of performance are extremely complex, since, in particular, the orally transmitted devotional repertoire has gone through a deep deconstruction during the twentieth century.

A document of 1814 shows us how songs were used in the context of a Jesuit mission: it is a set of instructions given to the Fathers in charge of a popular

40 The *gosos/gocius* are one of the main forms of sung religious poetry in Sardinia. The literature about this topic is extensive: for the historical, formal and structural aspects, see the synthesis I edited together with Marco Lutz in Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], 50–67. The study by Giovanni Serreli and Maurizio Viridis of an eighteenth-century manuscript kept at the municipal library in Sinnai (near Cagliari) offers a multidisciplinary perspective: see *Gozos: Componimenti religiosi raccolti nel XVIII secolo da Francesco Maria Marras*, ed. Giovanni Serreli and Maurizio Viridis (Dolianova: Grafiche del Parteolla, 2011).

41 “Tui abbasias de is istellas / Rei de su Celu / e ind’una grutta benis / A friu e gelu.”

42 Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], 30.

mission in the village of Benetutti in the “royal district of the Goceano”⁴³ (and who by the way could speak and understand the “vernacular language”, *i.e.* the Logudorese variety of Sardinian). According to the instructions, they should lead the people in a procession “along the streets singing the rosary or the litanies.” After the mass, they should sing “the litanies and *Salve Regina* with two choirs” and each and every day of the celebrations the participants should devoutly sing all the songs the “Father director” would have taught them. Another testimony of how these repertoires were used is given in the autobiography of canonic Giovanni Spano, one of the main Sardinian intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Recalling an event that occurred in Sassari in 1826, he writes:

It was the year of the jubilee for Sardinia. From the first of January they started to make altars in the streets and daily processions attended by countless men, women, students, friars, priests [...] guilds, confraternities and associations, seminarians, people of any class, even hoers and porters, as they were Christian too. It was a continuous movement, a commotion; at night in the streets they sang *Stabat Mater* and *Miserere* and spiritual popular songs written and taught by the Jesuits (especially by that cunning missionary father Sebastiano Rosselli, the dean of the church of Gesummaria) to lower classes, who sang them so full of mistakes that they made people laugh and lose the fruit of devotion.⁴⁴

In their missionary activity in Sardinia, thus, the Jesuits preferred simple melodic and metric forms, using miscellaneous materials derived from the Italian *laude* of the Counter-Reformation and texts adapted from the Redemptorist

43 Archivio di Stato di Cagliari, Segreteria Stato e di Guerra, II, vol. 554, loose sheets. See Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], 30.

44 “Era a proposito l'anno di giubileo per la Sardegna. Dal primo gennaio principiarono a formar altari per le strade, indi le processioni quotidiane a bizzateffe di uomini donne, di studenti, frati, di preti [...] di gremi, di confraternite e sodalizi, di seminaristi e di ogni ceto di persone, anche di zappatori e facchini perché anch'essi erano cristiani. Era un continuo movimento, un'agitazione; cantavano di notte per le strade *Stabat Mater* e *Miserere* e canzonette spirituali composte ed insegnate dai Gesuiti (specialmente da quello scaltro missionario padre Sebastiano Rosselli rettore della chiesa di Gesummaria) al basso popolo, che cantavano con mille spropositi da far ridere e perder il frutto della divozione.” Giovanni Spano, *Iniziazione ai miei studi*, ed. Salvatore Tola (Cagliari: AM&D, 1997), 72.

repertoire, reworked in a way similar to the traditional Sardinian *gosos*, but performed within inclusive contexts.⁴⁵

A Jesuit for Every Season: Bonaventura Licheri

The story of *Deus ti salvet Maria* discussed before contains at least another element which is worth mentioning, and which tells us something about the local reception of early modern Jesuit missionaries. One of the most prominent Jesuits active in Sardinia was father Giovanni Battista Vassallo, a Piedmontese of noble origins who about 1726 started an extensive missionary activity in the inland of the island (he died in Cagliari in 1774). Vassallo, called “the Apostle of Sardinia”,⁴⁶ was extremely popular and revered, still in the nineteenth century: so much so that he was officially appointed as the author of *Deus ti salvet*. Sebastiano Patta (1842–1913), in his collection of religious poems in Sardinian language published in 1888, wrote: “Custu componimentu no est de su poeta Madeddu, ma voltada in sardu dae s’*Ave Maria* de padre Vassallo” (this poem is not by the poet Madeddu, but a Sardinian translation of father Vassallo’s *Ave Maria*).⁴⁷ Interestingly, this authorship is contended by another “Jesuit”: Bonaventura Licheri (1668–1733), an enigmatic figure that only recently has been more closely studied, thanks to the researches carried out by Mario Cubeddu. In fact, a chain of misunderstandings and ambiguous data gave birth to the myth of the “Jesuit” Licheri, purported friend of father Vassallo and author (or translator in Logudorese) of the famous Marian song, as well as of the vast majority of the religious songs in Sardinian language.⁴⁸ But a Jesuit of this name never existed: according to the documents studied by Cubeddu, Licheri, a native of Neoneli, indeed received a Jesuit education but soon left the college, remained a layman, and even married.⁴⁹

45 That is, as remarked at the very beginning of the article, with the participation of non-specialized performers.

46 Joseph Fuos, *Notizie dalla Sardegna: 1773–1776*, ed. Giulio Angioni (Nuoro: Ilisso, 2000).

47 Quote from Pisanu, “Confluenze e parallelismi nel canto popolare,” 224.

48 A die-hard legend, to judge from Wikipedia entries and recent newspaper articles, where he is sometimes called “Jesuit musician.”

49 As Cubeddu wrote, Sebàstian Buenaventura Liquerì was born in Neoneli on January 19, 1668, and entered the Jesuit college of Cagliari in January 1692. He then moved to Sassari and in September 1692 he left the college, maybe for health problems. He returned to his village and in 1694 he married Cipriana Polla. He died, childless, in May 1733. The study by Cubeddu can be found at <http://www.fondazioneSardinia.eu/ita/?p=1837> (accessed in December 2015).

As it often happens, however, mythopoeic constructions contain some elements of truth. Licheri apparently wrote religious poems, and we cannot exclude that he might have authored, mediating between Jesuit spirituality and popular religious feeling, such texts as those of the *Settenario della Beata Vergine Addolorata* (the Septenary of Our Lady of Sorrows), which are still present today in many devotional practices linked to the rituals of the Holy Week in northern-central Sardinia. These texts, which close each of the seven days of the Septenary, rather than referring to the usual seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary, are based on the dramaturgy of the Passion that, as is well known, inspires a complex rituality made of songs, gestures, and paraliturgical actions such as the dramatized Deposition (*s'iscravamentu*).⁵⁰ Here are the texts of the Septenary, as synthesized in a late eighteenth-century manuscript from Oristano:⁵¹

1st day: *Reyna prite amantades / sa cara bianca que nie...* (Queen, since You cover / Your face as white as snow...)

2nd day: *Iscurta populu amadu / ca seo posta in corrutu...* (Oh listen, beloved people, / Because I am in mourning...)

3rd day: *Sende Mortu cun rigores / Figiu de s'anima mia / No mi llamedes Maria...* (Having died under torture, / Son of my soul, / do not call me Mary...)

4th day: *Pro figiu meu spiradu / a manos de su rigore / Sette spada (sic) de dolore...* (For my Son who passed away / After being tortured / Seven swords of pain...)

5th day: *Cun su tristu mantu abassadu / preguntat Maria arreu...* (With the sad mantle lowered / Mary inquires continuously...)

6th day: *Po qui non li queren dare / sepoltura a figiu meu...* (To those who do not want to give / Burial to my Son...)

7th day: *O tristu e fatale die, / o horas penosas duras! / Callade bos creaturas...* (Oh sad and fatal day, / O painful and hard hours! / Be silent, you creatures...)

50 See Bernard Lortat-Jacob and Ignazio Macchiarella, *Musica e religione* [1], in *Enciclopedia della musica sarda*, vol. 6, ed. Francesco Casu and Marco Lutzu (Cagliari: Unione Sarda, 2012).

51 The lyrics of the Septenary were already known among confraternities in the 1780s and 1790s: for instance, they appear in a manuscript of the Confraternity of the Rosary of Cabras of 1787 and in the one I am quoting from, which is kept at the Biblioteca Regionale of Cagliari: dated 28 December 1796, it is written in Logudorese dialect, with introductory rubrics to the songs in Campidanese dialect with Castilian influences (Milleddu, *Musica e religione* [2], 58–59).

Still today they are at the basis of orally transmitted multipart singing and of choral reworkings in the “school of Nuoro” style, which attest to their vitality and expressive power, regardless of whom actually composed them.⁵²

Irrespective of their actual role in the making and diffusion of these works, it is remarkable how popular mentality has wrapped Vassallo and Licheri in a mythical aura, and how the same mentality constantly associates missionary identity and production of religious songs. Being regarded as the epitome of the rigorous, ascetic, and learned Jesuit, Vassallo and Licheri must of necessity, in this perspective, be also creators of songs.

Conclusion

Musical expressions such as those discussed so far present features that distinguish them from other orally transmitted practices, not related to the religious sphere, of their respective areas. One example of this is the use of Latin or of standard Italian, instead of the usual dialect, for certain of the sung texts. Other elements concern the musical form, the preference for regular metric and rhythmic patterns, the presence of polyphonic textures, and the choice of non-characterized vocal timbres based on an ordinary vocal color. While certain scholars have spoken of a “devotional pathetic mannerism” whose influence unifies cultural expressions which are otherwise profoundly different,⁵³ recent studies have highlighted, instead, the role of local peculiarities, above all regarding the modalities of vocal emission and other subtle performative differences,⁵⁴ within a broader reflection on the impossibility to identify a sharp difference between the religious and the non-religious sphere in traditional musical practices.⁵⁵ There is no doubt, however, that recurrent elements in a cross-regional perspective are apparent and that they can be immediately related to the presence and the work “on the field” of Roman Catholic missionaries since the early modern era.

52 As for multipart singing in the rituals of the Holy Week, *i.e.* the text of the Septenarium, it is performed in Orosei, Nughedu S. Nicolò, Seneghe, Ghilarza (see Lortat-Jacob and Macchiarella, *Musica e religione* [7]).

53 “Manierismo patetico devozionale [costituito da] tratti formali che ravvicinano realtà culturali per altri aspetti profondamente diverse”: Piero Arcangeli and Pietro Sassu, “Canti liturgici di tradizione orale,” in *Guida alla musica popolare in Italia*, ed. Roberto Leydi (Lucca: LIM, 2001), 2:79–94, here 80.

54 See Bernard Lortat-Jacob, *Canti di passione* (Lucca: LIM, 1998); Ignazio Macchiarella, *Cantare a cuncordu: Uno studio a più voci* (Udine: Nota, 2009).

55 See Macchiarella, “Le manifestazioni musicali della devozione cristiana in Italia.”

Until recently, this fact, instead of stimulating research, has, paradoxically, held it back. On the one hand, for a long time secular scholars have considered paraliturgical musical practices as cheap products of Catholic missionary work, therefore unworthy of attention: based also on the linguistic justification that "the people" sang its own songs only in dialect, this mixed repertoire was considered *a priori* as "non-authentic." Catholic scholars, on the other hand, were not interested in what they considered as corrupted versions of the musical models proposed by the Church in the past. This kind of *impasse* was overcome only in the 1980s thanks to the cooperation among scholars from different backgrounds.⁵⁶ Since the beginning, research in this field has highlighted a series of theoretical issues, which are worth to briefly mention.

Considering the ephemeral character of musical facts – and of the respective performance scenarios –, we always have to exclude that what we listen to and observe today corresponds to or re-proposes sounds and gestures from the past. This is true even when we observe clear similarities between modern ritual elements and written descriptions from the past, as we have seen above. Unfortunately, this kind of misinterpretation is quite common, especially among performers of early music, who sometimes tend to consider the present of oral tradition as an unaltered persistence of the past: clearly, a simplistic understanding of the issues at stake. On the contrary, it is always necessary to be cautious in defining lines of continuity in terms both of contents and of performance behaviors. In particular, even when it is possible to establish a connection between a modern ritual scenario and one from the past, the data obtained about music are to be regarded only as suggestions and hints for interpretation, not as immediate correspondences.

On the other hand, we need to take into account that the historical instructions on music making are always limited and generic. Even the most accurate written reports cannot reproduce the details and nuances of the performance, of the gestures of the protagonists, of the non-verbal features of speech, or of the interaction dynamics. Musical writing, in particular, can only reproduce the quantitative aspects of music (pitches and rhythms), but it cannot represent the timbre nor the color of sounds, nor many other elements which are crucial for local performers and listeners. Moreover, writing (and the writing of music) has been until recently an almost exclusive prerogative of Western élites, primarily interested in describing and passing on the musical expressions of their own cultural milieu: the music making of the "others", in their own society or elsewhere, was often addressed in writing with defamatory,

⁵⁶ See Roberto Leydi, *L'altra musica* (Milano: Giunti-Ricordi, 1992).

paternalistic aims, implicitly conditioned by the will to reaffirm the predominance of “high” Western culture. Therefore, we should be aware that the available sources which describe ritual events offer a perspective which is not the one of the performers.

With these inevitable limits, talking about music making in the past in traditional contexts means to make educated guesses. This is what we have tried to do by presenting our case studies, which are proposed here as specimens, in order to show the complexity and extension of the problem. Our aim was not to provide answers (not even partial ones), but rather to raise questions about the specific scenarios of the three islands as well as broader theoretical and methodological questions. It is not possible to fully know the reality of past sound events, and the result of similar researches can only be partial and indicative. Further investigations in historical ethnomusicology, however, combining fieldwork and archival research, will certainly contribute to improve our “paradoxical knowledge”, *à la* Zumthor,⁵⁷ of past musical practices transmitted by oral tradition and of their interconnections with early modern missionary activities.

57 See Paul Zumthor, *La lettera e la voce: Sulla letteratura medievale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 29.