



(LYRCD 7333)

FOLK MUSIC AND SONGS OF SICILY VOLUME I - WORK SONGS

This recording serves as testimony of an existing cultural reality within a marginal world upon which socio-economic and cultural oppression has been and continues to be exerted and which has often been and remains the object of unscrupulous exploitation: the non-industrial world, in fact, according to various political interpretations, has often been looked upon as mythical Eden that conjures up archaic and colorful images (as in the folk songs of Sicilian-Arabic tradition, or those of the 15th and 16th centuries, without considering oral traditions and the thematic or musical transformation which the songs have undergone throughout the ages), or as a conscious attitude of protest that aim at creating an alternative culture. Actually there are not many beautiful images (according to current standards) to be found in Sicilian folk songs, and the people themselves did, in fact, not create the few that do exist. Utterance against the misery of everyday life conditions is seldom a prominent theme, and often lies within the context of a culture, which in most respects is fundamentally conservative (note, for instance, the religious outlook and the obsequious attitude towards the employer). This, then, is the traditional culture which is disappearing together with its load of misery, with the ideological obstacles, but also, unfortunately, along with all those values which, though not explicitly sought after as an alternative to the predominant culture, are offered, and can be accepted as such. Actually, while folk songs usually stress utility, sociality, and technique, they also solicit the discussion of those romantic aesthetics that are so relevant to the mystification of the non-industrial world.

Under the heading of “work songs” there have been included the following: a) actual work songs whose purpose is to cadence the rhythm of work (threshing songs, songs of the salt workers, songs of the tuna fishers; and b) songs that accompany certain work situations but are not specifically connected to the work at hand (some peasant songs, cart-driver songs). All these songs are a part of the traditional oral culture, a culture which today is undergoing a process of rapid but incoherent transformation, a circumstance which accounts for the remarkable decline

which can be determined if a numerical comparison is made with even the recent past. An even more rapid process of disintegration looms over the “work songs”, for many of the old trades for which these songs were used have now disappeared. This is the case, to a considerable extent, of the salt worker songs of Trapani, since the old salt mounds are now a barren expanse of land and in substitution of which are new salt production techniques have been adopted even in the few that are still in operation. The songs we have recorded are fragments of the memory of an old salt worker and will vanish with him. The same fate is reserved for the threshing songs, since the traditional Sicilian method of threshing wheat by means of mules has all but disappeared. The ever declining number of tuna-fishing rings in Sicily underscores the fact that the songs we have recently recorded during the mattanza (tuna-killing round) at Favignana is one of the last testimonies of a time-span which is very important in the context of Sicilian culture. More conspicuous, however, is the survival of other songs, which are not specifically related to work and can therefore be transmitted and revived, albeit with changes from one milieu to another. This is the case of some of the peasant songs, which are still popular in various versions among cart-drivers and housewives.

In the explanatory notes an attempt has been made to illustrate the relation between the song and the context in which it lives, as well as the reasons for its survival or its rapid decline.

The songs collected in this recording were recorded from 1969 through 1974, during a research program sponsored by the Institute of Folk Traditions of the University of Palermo (Sicily) and by the Folk studio, Palermo.

Written by Elsa Guggino

PEASANT SONGS

1. THRESHING SONG

This song in cadenced rhythm is sung during the pisatura, which is the traditional method of threshing wheat on the threshing floor. Sheaves of wheat are strewn across a specially prepared area from the center of which a peasant guides one or more mules on the end of a cable as they circle around the floor, treading the scattered wheat. The songs serve to incite the animals, to break the tedious monotony of the movements, and to establish a work-rhythm. In both expression and content these songs possess a formal, unitary structure, but they do not have terminal consistency insofar as their rhythms, scansion, schema and dissertative content and duration are connected with the work at hand, which varies according to the time required for it. Nor could it be otherwise, since these songs derive their meaning and in a more immediate manner than in any other cultural form – from their function, i.e., from an extra-textual stimulus.

Let us praise and give thanks/to the most holy and divine sacrament/and you beautiful horse wake up/can't you see it's not time for sleeping/it's time to work, horse/grind, grind/contented heart/the heart is content/the mind is content/with you.

Recorded at Corleone (Palermo) on July 26, 1971, by Elsa Guggino and Gaetano Pagano, during actual threshing work.

2. REAPING SONG (Fragment)

Among the various songs performed during reaping, we have selected this unique text because of the interest as a document of a method of transmission and the elaboration of a song for its use in another context. This simple, example, in fact is referred to as di la issara (issare = to hoist), and appears to have originally accompanied work relative to the extraction of chalk; from this use it seems to have been transmitted to groups of farm laborers (who in some cases were also chalk-workers) who attended to the threshing of wheat. The more remote origins of the song however, are not to be attributed to the regions of southern Italy; the melody and rhythm, even though slightly readapted, are, in fact, those of an Alpine choral song.

.../in Naples they make spinning tops/and go to Palermo to sell them/O poor women/they don't know to wait for/...

Recorded at Resuttano (Caltanissetta), on March 24, 1972, by Gaetano Pagano and Susi Siino.

3. VARIOUS SONGS a-b-c-d-e-f

Certain songs, depending upon the circumstances, are performed interchangeably during farm work or rest periods, without serving any specific function. While their melodic line and style of performance varies from region to region and in part from one village to another, the thematic variations, on the other hand, are less marked.

a. This is a two-part song accompanied by the marranzanu (jew's harp). It consists of two separate octaves of handcaeyzzables that cross each other. Each couplet is called sirbia. One peasant performs the first sirbia of his song (indicated as A) while the other responds with the first of another son (B)). Consequently these proceed alternatively: A1 and B1 and A2 and B2, etc.

- A. I have come from afar/and I'm tired of walking/I've come to sing in this beautiful meadow/that you might appear O beautiful coral/don't consider me an outsider/I'm your lover, the first one/throw down your tresses that I may climb up/so that I may kiss your delicate lips.
- B. In the middle of two mountains, a bow and a mountain/I saw Rosina washing at the fountain/she gave me to drink from the palms of her hands/a little that was plenty/and if the little one doesn't please me/in paradise the Saints are complaining.

This song was recorded at Resuttano (Caltanissetta), on January 5, 1974, by Elsa Guggino and Gaetano Pagano.

b-c. The first is a song with alternating voices and a polyvocal refrain. The second is a four-part polyvocal song performed by one male and three female voices. Polyvocal work songs are found only in several areas of Sicily; they are frequent in those zones where lamentanza (lamentations) and ladate (laudatory or religious songs of Good Friday) are still sung or were sung until the recent past. Polyvocal songs, regardless of the various musical traditions, can still be found in those areas where farm work requires group participation. The transcription of the text (3) refer to the first of the two voices which alternatively repeat the same couplet:

b. Beautiful is your name Nina/always Nina I want to call you/the water you wash yourself with each morning/by beauty I pray you not to throw it away/for a thorn will grow where you throw it/this is a perfumed rose/I still have the rose you gave me/I love it more than myself/and carry it with me wherever I go/I smell the rose and think of you.

c. I've come to the part of Messina/and saw my love who.../she was dressed like a queen/she will be the daughter of a king with her crown/but she doesn't want a crown/she wants the lover she loved so much.

Recorded: 3b. at Bivona (Argentento) on February 2, 1969, by Elsa Guggino.

3c. at Bafia (Messina) on December 8, 1972, by Elsa Guggino, Gaetano Pagano and Susi Siino.

d. Among the various subjects found in the songs of the peasants there often emerge protests against the employer. Many songs also denounce, albeit indirectly, the peasants' miserable life conditions.

How will we make ends meet this year/the creditors come and go/if I work I can pay you back/and little by little I'll give it back to them/I hope what happened last year doesn't happen again/when you didn't pay me in summer or in winter/but this year I've promised myself/that I'll take my money to hell with me.

Recorded at Bivona (Agrigento) on February 12, 1969, by Elsa Guggino.

e. The charcoal-worker who performs this song (of which we have included a fragment that is an organic entity) put a great deal of effort into recalling the following verse. The various couplets, with slight variations, also exist autonomously as motifs that also recur in other peasant songs.

On this street there is a girl/and in the neighborhood nobody is better than she/(twice)/it's she I want, she I must marry/she is inscribed in my heart/along this street I pass and pass again/in the neighborhood nobody is better than she/(twice)/it's she I want, she I must marry/she is inscribed in my heart/my beauty you're not even twenty years old/time passes and I'm dying for you.

Recorded at Bivona (Agrigento), on February 12, 1969, by Elsa Guggino.

f. This is one of those songs which are performed by groups during the certain tasks (i.e. olive gathering) and which are also frequently repeated during non-working situations, when their function is then purely a social one.

The sun rises and melts the frost/I melt for a lovely girl/who is lovely/who is lovely, who is lovely/who has a breast like a shelf/and eyes like a magnet/I'd like to close her in my hands/I'll tell you what/give me a kiss/(repeated)/I'm a dead man and you give me life/(repeated)/my beauty, I'll tell you what/let's run away/and we'll take what God gives us/with you /with four good friends we've nothing to lose/we'll calm both mother and father.

Recorded at S. Lucia del Mela (Messina) , on December 8, 1972, by Elsa Guggino, Gaetano Pagano and Susi Siino.

4. STREET CALLS a-b

Merchandise was and is still proclaimed loudly by itinerant peddlers along the streets and in the market places, with shouts that in some cases actually assume the characteristics of a proper song.

This is the case of the *abbanniati* or the street calls of the cart-drivers of Bagheria, Villabate and Misilmori (document 2a.) and of Giuseppe Celano of Palermos (document 2b.), more famous as a *cantastorie*, but who can culturally be placed among the cart-drivers of Palermo. Among other things, he has also been an itinerant peddler.

It is impossible to translate the text of the *abbanniati* in full; however, the essence of each of the cries is the advertising of the good quality of the merchandise, and its low cost – both being invitations to its purchase. Quite often these also contain allusive phrases or playful provocations. Recorded: 4a. at Bagheria (Palermo), on November 8, 1970, by Elsa Guggino and Gaetano Pagano; 4b. at Palermo, on November 22, 1970 by Elsa Guggino.

5. SONGS OF THE SALT WORKERS a-b-c

The songs of the salt workers accompanied and cadenced the work of salt gathering and transport, which, until fifteen or twenty years ago, was performed in the traditional manner of gathering salt from the sea. The final stage of the work in the holes was done by the *spalatura* and the *cartriddara*; the *spalatura* used wooden shovels to transfer the salt previously gathered in mounds, into baskets. The baskets were carried on the shoulders of another group of men, the *cartriddara*, who, as quickly as they could, passed along each group of *spalatura*, to leave an empty basket and gather up a filled one. These baskets were then placed on rudimental cushions that covered both shoulders and were fastened with a strip of cloth that wrapped the head of the salt worker from the back of the neck to the forehead. The team of salt workers was called *avena*. From the middle of June until the first rains the *avena* worked at gathering and transporting salt, starting their work at 2:00 A.M. and finishing at 4:00 P.M.

The songs of the salt workers are for the most part a computation of the baskets of salt. At times groups of verses on various other subjects are introduced between one count and the other. Many terms are incomprehensible and several phrases lack any meaning at all. The reason for this is explained by the importance given to the expression rather than to the content; as is typical of most work songs. It is the counting while singing that is necessary, therefore requiring that the phrases or the single words serve, above all, as rhythmic elements, and only in second place to project a particular concept.

Of the three songs presented here, the third has a different, more hurried rhythm, since its purpose was to accelerate the work.

- a. Somebody has a *salaletti*/we go up and we go down seventeen/the ferryboat arrives at eighteen/I touch it and it doesn't move nineteen/how beautiful is my *avena* and I had twenty of them.
- b. Some have a *salaotto*/we go up and down and count to four/one day I took a job with *Campanella*/who gave me bread in slices/and with the bread a piece of hazelnut/to wrinkle my stomach/with mine I had thirteen.
- c. Some come and some go and some have two/and I have three and I have four/and five behind me/some come and some go and I have six/*salaletti* and I have seven/I have eight young men/*salamore* and I have nine/O how beautiful these salt workers/that makes ten and I have eleven/I have eleven here and more to come/from the other side thirteen/you some have salad/we have fourteen and I have fifteen; I have sixteen *salaletti*/on this side seventeen/young men eighteen/*salamore* nineteen/*salasulu* and twenty-one/I danced with you and twenty-two/*salalini* and twenty-three/I danced with you and twenty-two/*salalini* and twenty-three/the first to come gives a signal/if only I had this ship half-filled.

Recorded at Trapani, on May 17, 1970, by Elsa Guggino and Gaetano Pagano.

6. CART-DRIVER SONGS a-b-c

Up until twenty or so years ago, the songs of the cart-drivers were sung while driving the cart and in the funnachi, a sort of combination inn-stable where both drivers and animals would spend several hours or the entire night. Here the drivers would improvise lengthy Contests, usually by challenging each other with a friendly invitation, and often following provocation from the closing words of each song, i.e., “...And now that the song (either good or bad) is almost finished, Mr. I must give me an answer...” Today, this ancient profession is completely extinct and the ex-cart-drivers have become truck drivers or small eating-hours (trattorie) owners, but their songs still live and are performed in contests held in the various trattorie or in the house of common friends, where the men often spend the night singing.

The reason for the lively survival of these cart-driver songs can be found in part in the fact that these new professions have not caused the dissolution of the “group” not have they substantially modified the rhythm of life and culture of which they are a part; another reason can be attributed to the double function for which songs were utilized, and if on the one hand, they were connected with certain jobs, on the other they constituted a social manifestation. Also to be taken into account is the fact that the cart-drivers had, and still retain, a high opinion of their songs; to sing in the style of the cart-drivers is considered an art – art being, in this case and always within the sphere of the non-industrial ambient, a matter of technique. The cart-driver, in fact, does not place importance on the quality of the voice, but rather, on the substance of his performance, the correctness of style, and the character of the images he projects. As a result, the decisive ability manifested in the performances of the cart-drivers is never intended in the sense of free expression, but is rigidly controlled within a definite system of rules.

The three songs presented here were performed respectively by cart-drivers from Monreale, Misilmeri and Villabate. The initial words of the first are missing, with words in brackets serving to complete the text. Despite the fact that the technical quality of the recording may be somewhat imperfect, we have included this document because the cart-driver who performs this song, a certain Nicola Badagliaccio of Monreale (Palermo), possesses a technique and performing style, which is almost incomparable. The document was recorded during an intimate gathering among cart-drivers and is therefore representative of a custom, which is still present today.

A. Beyond my window there is a garden/there’s an orange tree with golden branches/the bird goes there to make his nest/to make little birds in their first flight/Rosetta goes there and takes one/and puts it in a golden cage/you are the cage, woman of love/and I am the bird that sings and flies /and now that the song is almost finished/zzu Ancilu will sing and his friend will reply.

B. On Mount Pelegrino there is a rose/in the care of a Palermitano/it is celebrated with jubilation and festivity/it is the glory of every man/in Palermo there are continuous celebrations/in Palermo one goes to melt find gold/for the good water of the River Jordan/for the good wine of Castelvetro/and he who wants pardon goes to Mount Pellegrino/where there is Saint Rosalia with Christ in her hands/and now that the song is almost finished/Gnazziddu gives me your answer/what pleasure I feel in my heart/to hear you sing tonight.

C. Have a heart the size of a hazelnut/I go searching for a beautiful girl/it doesn't matter if she's very young/I will make her a mantle and a skirt/stockings as she wishes them/and shoes with bells/I've been walking for three days /three days that I haven't seen my betrothed/my betrothed is angry with me/because she wants a dress of silk/and now that I've finished my singing/it's Nino Baggianu who'll give me an answer/

Recorded:

1. A at Monroi, near Altavilla Milicia (Palermo), on December 2, 1972, by Maria Grazia Torrisi.

1.B and 1.c at Bagheria (Palermo), on November 8 1970, by Elsa Guggino and Gaetano Pagano.

7. SONGS OF THE TUNA FISHERS a - h

These accompany the fishing of tuna and are sung when the tuna are killed and hoisted into the waiting boats.

These songs have been recorded partly during the actual fishing and partly during the course of special recording sessions; in the first case precedence is given to the scientific exactness of the document, and in the second, to better comprehend of the text. The documents recorded during the actual fishing are marked with an asterisk (*). These are in the following order: a prayer on board the *muciara raisi* (*) (the boat of the rais, which is recited in the moment in which the boat leaves the port and heads towards the *tonnara*; *cialoma* and *ignanzo* (*); *zza monac*; *cialoma* (*); *gnanzo*; *mpugna ca zampugna*; *era affacciatea a lu barcuni* (she was leaning over the balcony). A transcription has been made of the first and last songs.

The subject matter of the *cialoma* usually consists of invocations to God and to the Saints, recollections of dangerous encounters with pirates, and reference to various episodes regarding fishing. The *gnazo*, with different rhythmic patterns, take up the same subject matter. *Za monaca* and *mpugna ca sampugna* are clearly ambiguous in meaning. The final song is interesting because of its reversal of the actual rapport between employer and worker. The fishermen, in fact, exchange one for the other, describing various physical attributes and the "daughter of the boss," whom they finally reject.

Among the songs recorded during the fishing one can hear, in the midst of the shouts of the fisherman, the orders given by the rais: the *aisa* (hoisting of the nets); the *trasi* (return to work); the *anguanta* (to grab or stop); and the *assumma* (lowering of the nets).

a. A Salvo Regina to the Madonna of Trapani/...of the Rosary;...of Calvary;...to Saint Teresa;...to the Madonna of Fatima; a pater noster to the Patriarch San Giuseppe;...to San Francesco of Paola;...to the Sacred Heart of Jesus;...to Saint Anthony;...to Saint Peter that he pray for an abundant haul, (everybody) so be the will of God; *requiem eternam*, Holy Creator, for our dead.

b.-c.-d. *Cialoma*, *gnanzo*, *zza monaca* (recorded during the fishing).

e. *Aiamola* and go ahead/*aiamola aiamola* (thrice) Jesus Christ and the Saints/*aiamola aiamola* (thrice)/who created the moon and the sun/*aiamola* (thrice)/*aiamola* (thrice)/who created all the people/*aiamola* (thrice)/Holy Birth giving Virgin/*aiamola aiamola*...

f. Nzou zza/gnanzo/nzou strength/gnanzo/nzou pull the anchor/...God save us/...from the pirates/nzou and from those/...Turkish dogs/nzou the infidels/...who don't believe/nzou the boss/...a true gentleman/...and the rais/...who gives orders/...head watchmen/..."shouters"...guards/...villans/...muciara del rais.

g. Take up the bagpipe (four times)/Let's give it to Pierino/this great bagpipe/and take up the bagpipe (four times)/let's give it to Pierino/let's see who'll play it/etc...

h. She was leaning over the balcony (four times)/what a beautiful head she has/she boss's daughter/was leaning over the balcony (four times)/we must betroth her with someone/the boss's daughter/was leaning over the balcony (four times)/let's give her to Ciareddru/the boss's daughter/was leaning over the balcony (four times)/Ciareddru doesn't want her/.../what a beautiful breast she has/the boss's daughter/...we must betroth her to someone/the boss's daughter.

Recorded: 7a -f. at Favignana (Trapani, on June 13-15, 1974 by Elsa Guggino and Gaetano Pagano; 7 g-h at Castellammare (Trapani), on October 19, 1969, by Elsa Guggino and Gaetano Pagano.

English Translation: ALIKI ANDRIS-MICHALAROS

TRACKS:

CANTI DI CONTADINI/PEASANT SONGS

1. Canto Della Battitura Dell'aia/Threshing Song
(eseguito da/informant: Francesco Vella)

2. CANTO DELLA MIETITURA/REAPING SONG
(eseguito da/informants: Ignazio Selvaggio & coro/chorus)

3. CANTI VARI/VARIOUS SONGS

a) Tanot a due voci con marranzanu/two-part song with jew's harp
(eseguito da/informants: Epifanio Gallina & Gaetano Tombello: Antonio Manfre, Marranzanu)

b) Canto a voci alternate/Song with alternating voices
(eseguito da/informants: Antonio e Piertro Pecoraro & Coro/chorus)

c) Cnato polivocale a guattro voci/four-part polivocal song
(eseguito da/informants" Santa Cuzzola, Maria e Venera Mirabile & Boce Maschile/male voice)

d) Canto di protesta/ protest song
(eseguito da/informant: Antonio Lazzara)

e) Canto di carbonaio/charcoal-worker's song
(eseguito da/informant: Antonio Lo Cicero)

f) Canto di lavoro di gruppo/colletive work-song
(eseguito da/informants: Gaetano e Tindara Amalfa)

4. ABBANNIATI/STREET CALLS

a) Bagheria, Cillabate, Misilmeri
(eseguito da/informants: Nino Geraci & Altri/others)

b) Palermo
(eseguito da/informant: Giuseppe Celano)

5. CANTI DEI SALINARI/SONGS OF THE SALT WORKERS

a) A cu l'ai salaletti/A chi l'ha salaletti/Sp,ebpd has a salaotto
(eseguito da/informant: Salvatore Gabriele)

b) A cu l'ai salaotto/A chi l'ha salaotto/Some have a salaotto
(eseguito da/informant: Salvatore Gabriele)

c) Cu va e vvi brmr zvjo bs r vjo bormrSome come and some go
(eseguito da/informant: Filippo Palumbo)

6. CANTI DI CARRENTTIERI/CART-DRIVER SONGS

a) Rarrerri a me finestra cc'e un gghiardino/Dietro la mia ginestra c'e un giardino/Beyond my window there's a garden
(eseguito da/informant: Nicola Badagliacco)

b) A munti Piddirinu cc'e na rrosa/A monte Peliegrino c'e una rosa/On Mount Pellegrino there's a rose

c) E tengu lu cori quanto na nuciddra/Ho il cuore quanto una nocciolina/I have a heart the size of a hazelnut
(eseguito da/informant: Ignazio Fominici)

7. CANTI DELLA TONNARA/SONGS OF THE TUNA FISHERS

a) Preghiera sulla muciarra raisi: Salve Regina (prayer)
(eseguito da/informant: Capobarca della muciarra raisi "barca del rais"/Boatmaster)

b) Cialoma
(eseguito da/informants: "Ciuma" della tonnara di Favignana/Crew of the Favignana "tonnara")

d) Zza monaca
(eseguito da/informants: "Ciuma" della tonnara di Favignana/same as above)

e) Dialoma (Aiamola e vvai avanti)
(eseguito da/informants: Vincenzo Sercia & coro/chorus "Cincenzo Bellotti, Matteo Campo, Pietro Costanza, Giuseppe d'Angelo, Giacomo e Giuseppe Ernandes, Michele Macchi, Pasquale Mercurio, Filippo Messina, Giuseppe Miceli, Giuseppe e Salvatore Spataro, Giovanni Zabbarino")

f) Gnanzu (Nzou zza)
(eseguito da/informants: Cincenzo Sercia & coro/chorus "come sopra/same as above")

g) E mpugna ca sampugna/E impugna la zampogn/Take up the bagpipe
(eseguito da/informants: "Ciuma" della tonnara di Castellammare del Golfo/Crew of the Castellammare del Golfo "tonnara")

h) Era affacciata ru barcuni/Era affacciata al balcone/She was leaning over the balcony

(eseguito da/informants: “Ciurna: della tonnara di Castellammare del Golfo
Crew of the Castellammare del Golfo “tonnara”)

c) Gnanzu

(eseguito da/informants: “Ciurma” della “Ciurma” della tonnara di Favignana/same as above)

THE ANTHOLOGY

This anthology of Sicilian folk music and songs includes a series of original documents that consist of work songs, serenades, dances, stories of the orbi, cantastorie, religious songs and others. The criteria with which they have been selected and documented are based upon the same theoretical premises and methodology as that used for in-the-field research. The songs were recorded, whenever possible, within the work or recreative situation in which they are actually performed; therefore, several of the documents are, or will soon be, a final testimony of certain moments in life in which the expression of song emerges from necessity of circumstances.

Cover design: Domizia Gandolfi



THE LYRICHORD ARCHIVE SERIES

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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