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From the manuscript to YouTube
Liturgical and paraliturgical chants on the Web

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In questi ultimi anni, in Italia come altrove, la ricerca etnomusicologica è stata sempre più spesso oggetto di discussione e di riflessione comunitaria fra gli studiosi del settore in quanto è nettamente mutato l'approccio metodologico all'oggetto di studio, anche conseguenzialmente al cambiamento che ha riguardato il modo stesso di produrre e fruire la musica, compresa quella che convenzionalmente usiamo definire 'tradizionale'. Un effetto decisivo di questo cambiamento è avvenuto con l'avvento di Internet e in particolare di alcuni spazi virtuali dedicati alla musica. Questo contributo pone l'attenzione anzitutto sul fenomeno della documentazione e della fruizione on-line della musica di tradizione orale, in particolare quelle relative al canto liturgico e paraliturgico. A partire da alcuni esempi, offre anche spunti di riflessione sulla possibilità di considerare questi spazi virtuali come nuovi terreni di ricerca in cui avviare vere e proprie indagini etnomusicologiche.

Over the last few years, ethnomusicological research in Italy has, just like elsewhere, increasingly become the subject of collective discussion and reflection by scholars of the sector. This has resulted from a sharp change in methodological approach, which was also a consequence of the mutation that interested the very way in which music is written and the benefits deriving from this, including the one that – conventionally – we have always defined as 'traditional'. A crucial effect of this change came with the advent of the Internet and particularly of some virtual spaces dedicated to music.
The article first focuses on the phenomenon of the documentation and the on-line fruition of traditional music, especially liturgical and paraliturgical chants. Thanks to some examples, the paper also offers some reflections on the possibility of considering these virtual fieldworks as new areas of research in ethnomusicology.

New fields of research

FROM the end of the XIX century onwards, along with the invention of first, the phonograph, and then other devices for recording/reproduction, a radical change has come about in the concept of composing music (MOLINO 2001). Likewise, the arrival of the Internet and – particularly - some virtual spaces dedicated to music have given rise to an equally radical process and a series of decisive effects.

A certainly interesting fact of this variation also concerns the diffusion of new audiovisual systems of recording, which are always within everyone's reach (just think about smartphones whose applications include high-resolution cameras and digital audio-recorders, and then again, compact video-cameras, connected to the digital channels and able to upload contents directly to the Web) and, particularly, the advent of new virtual channels of communication, first of all Facebook and YouTube, which upset the concept of diffusion and the exchange of musical materials, including ethnomusicological ones, allowing free access to everyone. Furthermore, these channels also put an end to the physical and geographical limits which represented one of the most problematic aspects of searching for sources (if these materials can already be defined as sources). If, since the early years of its marketing, the phonograph played a decisive role in terms of preserving musical memory, a role which could be likened to that of a book (BATTIER 2001), these new means of recording and sharing sound materials also have a quite similar function. Just as Edison was certainly not aware of how his invention would have changed the destiny of popular music forever, even today we are perhaps not yet entirely convinced that the Web has upset the concept of tradition and orality related to music (SLOBIN 2011).

Furthermore, this new way of dealing with/analyzing traditional music has inevitably transformed the concept of community in the most intimate sense of the term. This concept certainly has to be reconsidered in the light of these new social phenomena which have led to a marked change, firstly in the way of approaching traditional music, and which have then upset the idea of its diffusion and transmission and, consequently, the methodological approach of research itself. The above-mentioned subject undoubtedly needs far more extensive and detailed treatment, on account of the importance that this kind of change has had in the field of ethnomusicological studies, both on the plane of research methodology and, perhaps, on the plane of the very ontology of the discipline. For a deeper investigation of this question I recommend the contributions which, over the last few years, have ever more frequently been dedicated to the phenomenon of 'virtual fieldwork'.[1]

In this essay, however, I intend to specifically focus on the paraliturgical and devotional repertoires that are nowadays so easily found on the Web, and

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[1] I recommend Barz - Cooley 2008, in which there is a chapter dedicated to 'virtual fieldwork'.

I shall propose a number of theoretical reflections, starting from some personal research experiences.

Devotional songs 'on the net'

In June 2013, I was in Colli a Volturno, a small urban centre near Isernia, to document the Feast of St Anthony and especially the traditional chants of the 13th Liturgical Celebrations, dedicated to the Saint of Lisbon.

Once the morning procession and the High Mass, celebrated in the small church dedicated to the Saint, had ended, I spent a little time before lunch talking with the parish priest of this small town, Don Paolo, whom I had met for the first time just a few hours before. We started to talk about the processional chants and about the ones sung by the choir during the Mass, and we were both in agreement about the beauty of the traditional songs, even in a purely liturgical context. Among the different questions I asked him as part of my search for materials for my research was whether there were other occasions in Colli a Volturno, in which musical traditional repertoires, linked with/connected to the local devotions, were performed. Don Paolo was delighted to be able to help me and his immediate response was: «Yes, of course; there are different kinds of devotional chants sung on the day of the Immaculate Conception, at Christmas or on St. Anthony the Abbot's Day; we also perform Vespers in Latin with traditional melodies on the Day of Mary's Assumption - and then he added almost as if it were a foregone conclusion - However, you can find whatever you need for your research on YouTube.»

The parish priest's forceful and determined reply was one of the most frequent answers I was given whenever I asked priests, first of all, but also managers of religious confraternities, presidents of associations, organists, and directors of parish choirs for information about musical devotional repertoires.

Until not so long ago, they would always suggest reading a number of books or theses written by local historians, or that I should examine cyclostyled sheets or photocopies containing the texts of the songs, whereas, nowadays, everyone's point of reference has become YouTube or the Facebook page of the parish, confraternity or choir. This is where you can find not only the religious programs of the celebrations and often very detailed descriptions of the events, but also some audiovisual recordings of the most important celebratory moments and some documentation of traditional chants, such as, for example, rosaries sung in dialect, or liturgical hymns played to local melodies, litanies, and chaplets.

Let us consider another example. A few days ago, one of my dearest friends, who is now the guide of an ancient Franciscan fraternity in Misilmeri (in the province of Palermo), asked me if I could document, with my semi-professional recording equipment, the ritual practice of the 'Seven Fridays of the Sorrowful Mother', which takes place every Friday in Lent before a 17th century papier-mâché simulacrum of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He wanted me

to make some videos that could be uploaded to YouTube and to the Facebook page dedicated to this event. Then he added: «We resumed this tradition last year after a thirty year break – the previous parish priest did not agree with this celebration- but thanks to the new priest, we have restarted celebrating this rite, and we want everyone to know about it through Facebook, so that everybody can see and listen to the traditional songs that we have recovered from the old folks' memory.» I told my friend that I was unable to document the event that Friday, because I had already agreed to carry out some other research with another group of cantors.

Despite my negative answer, the following day, the Facebook page of the event had photographs and a video, which – as my friend then told me – had been recorded the previous year by a nun with her smartphone: the registration contains fragments of the rosary, the litany, and of the *Stabat Mater*. The following description was inserted on the event's page

> This year too the people of Misilmeri, following a centuries-old tradition, get ready to honour the Virgin Sorrowful Mother with the traditional rite of the seven Fridays. On every Friday in Lent, the faithful meet at the foot of the venerated simulacrum for the chant of the ancient rosary performed in the Sicilian dialect, accompanied by the chant of the Latin litanies of Our Mother of Sorrows. The prayer ends with a singular version of the Stabat Mater, which has sung praise to the *Mater Dolorosa* for almost two centuries. On every Friday, in the Church of Saint Rosalia (known as the Church of St Paulinus), the chant of the rosary and the litany starts at 17:30; it is followed by the Eucharistic Celebration and by the Via Crucis. We have to cultivate and cherish the traditions that Our Fathers gave us to honour the Great Mother Of God.[2]

Beyond the value and the quality of this sonorous document published on the Web, there is an element that merits serious reflection: whereas, until a few years ago, it was only the parish communities, the cantor groups or the confraternities who were interested in devotional and paraliturgical repertoires, also frequently considered as something to be jealously guarded from the outside world, nowadays, they enjoy a large circulation and wider consideration.

Furthermore, such popularity is not just among scholars (who are always interested in these repertoires for certain aspects) but also amongst a vaster public of users, who are not specialists in this subject and who are sometimes defined, perhaps improperly, as being keen on these traditional repertoires. If you just type in 'popular rosary' or 'traditional litany' or something like this on YouTube, you will have access to a great number of audiovisual examples. These are usually accompanied by short descriptions, often followed by the users' comments, which, if they are read from a specific analytical perspective, testify to both the interest but also the curiosity of the person who listens to

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[2] The Facebook page dedicated to the 'Seven Fridays of the Sorrowful Mother' is available at the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1453296541569441>.

these melodies and feels the need to interact with the author of the recording or video to obtain information (this frequently also happens to the musicologist, who now prepares his research online, carrying out several virtual inspections before going to the real spaces).[3]

In this regard, I shall report some examples here of descriptions of videos uploaded to YouTube, in order to give a better idea of the new and widespread interest towards these musical traditions. You can read the following words in the description of a video containing the liturgical hymn *Ave Maris Stella* (Hail, Star of the Sea), sung in Ficarra (in the province of Messina) in a local melodic version:

> Chant of Ficarra's popular devotion to Our Lady of the Annunciation; according to tradition, this chant was performed in 1507, when the statue arrived at Brolo beach. The faithful still sing it during the solemn Vespers and at the beginning of the procession on the 25th of March and on the 3rd and 5th of August. After the chant, the bearers of the sacred effigy solemnly cheer: *Evviva, evviva a Gran Signura Maria* (Long live, long live the Great Lady Mary).[4]

Instead, the following description refers to the popular chant dedicated to Our Mother of Sorrows of Racale (in the province of Lecce), uploaded to the YouTube channel of the local confraternity of Our Sorrowful Mother:

> The Hymn to Our Virgin Mother of Sorrows of Racale, commissioned by the confraternity of Our Sorrowful Mother and composed by M° Luigi Letizia in 1885, represents one of the most beautiful pages in the long and glorious history of the pious cooperation, born in the first half of the nineteenth century and founded by the noble and affluent families of the small town. This hymn is still an inestimable heritage of the liturgical and musical history of this small town near Lecce and represents the backbone of the ceremonies of the septenary in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Sorrows, which precedes and officially opens the celebration of Holy Week in Racale.[5]

The description of a video entitled *Traditional Hymn to Our Lady of Canneto of Settefrati* is even more detailed and interesting; in this video, we find the comparison of two different amateur recordings of the same chant, both performed inside the church of Settefrati (a municipality of Lazio, in the province of Frosinone) with organ accompaniment:

> *Evviva Maria* (Long live Mary), Hymn to Our Lady of Canneto. This is not the one usually sung by the pilgrims, but a more ancient version which is in use in the parish of Settefrati. The sound is not of the best, because it comes from a rudimentary magnetic tape recording made quite a few years ago. The version of

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[3] As regards this, I recommend two texts that specifically address the concept of Netnography or ethnographic research carried out on the web: BOELLSTORFF - NARDI - PEARCE – TAYLOR 2012; KOZINETS 2010.

[4] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BypPDLB5I0A&hd=1> (Accessed on March 31, 2016).

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWX0kBTlIWs&hd=1> (Accessed on March 31, 2016).

the hymn, performed by all the orders of pilgrims at the same time, begins at half past eight.[6]

This other description also refers to an actual search for Holy Week chants from Ruvo del Monte (Puglia). In fact, the video, which lasts 25 minutes, contains both interviews filmed in several old women's houses and the chants documented in contextual situations inside the church. Moreover, the particularly romantic description that accompanies the video makes it easy to appreciate the precise intention to document these musical traditions via the local tourist board's virtual channel in order to not lose them forever:

> Time flies by and carries the last guardians of our town's ancient civil and religious traditions with it. The same happens to the traditional chants which were sung on the occasion of religious events occurring during the solar year. Fortunately, the meticulous work of Graziella Perrotta, helped by her husband Giovanni Minniti, gives us precious evidence of something that absolutely must be saved from oblivion, for it is an important part of Ruvo del Monte's historical, social and cultural heritage. This is the case of some of the Holy Week traditional chants shown in this video.[7]

The last short description I report is equally interesting, because - as I have observed on more than one occasion in other descriptions or comments found in the videos on the Web - it tells us something about the origin of the chant (in this case a local tone of the litanies), that is to say, it informs us - even if in a synthetic way - of the historical events related to its transmission:

> Litanies of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Amateur recording made inside the church. The faithful of Colli a Volturno (Isernia) sing it. These litanies were born in Brianza and were imported to Molise by the parish priest.[8]

Just these few examples allow us to understand that, beneath this ever more substantial phenomenon, there lies, first of all, the desire to make one's own liturgical and paraliturgical musical traditions known to everyone. In some cases and for certain aspects, this involves the use of criteria which are typical of scientific documentation (for example, reporting the name of the singers, the occasion on which the chant is traditionally sung, the place and date of the recording, and so on, with the information written in the description or superimposed on the images during the videoclip).

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[6] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT_8k6y1wbs&list=UUM7wkU_V5TWVlHBj3veJ7wA&hd=1> (Accessed on March 31, 2016).

[7] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Vm_28UNf6I&hd=1> (Accessed on March 31, 2016).

[8] Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXJvAok8a8E&list=UUM7wkU_V5TWVlHBj3veJ 7wA&feature=c4-overview&hd=1> (Accessed on March 31, 2016).

Between writing and new orality

An immediate reflection on this phenomenon brings into question whether the merits of this 'new' and ever widening interest towards these musical repertoires should be attributed to their diffusion on the Web or whether, vice versa, the plentiful online presence of traditional liturgical and paraliturgical chants should be considered the direct consequence of the spread (perhaps through the extensive work of both ethnomusicologists and historians of these traditions) of a new community consciousness of the importance of these musical practices, accompanied by the desire to diffuse their contents. This diffusion no longer comes about through notebooks or handwritten sheets, copied on several occasions (as was the practice for rosaries, prayers, and devotional chants until the recent past), but via social media, which are considered more direct and more complete, and, therefore, more effective for the conservation and protection of these repertoires.

To quote another personal experience, it is not by chance that about a year ago I found myself talking with a 22-year-old university student of Theology, whom I had met while doing some research on the devotional practices in Ciminna (a small town in the hinterland of Palermo). He informed me of his interest in the popular traditions and, particularly those related to the devotional sphere. He told me that he had already started to use his video camera to record the paraliturgical chants performed on the various festive occasions in his town, in order to 'document' them on his YouTube personal channel. In fact, a few weeks later, when I took a look at the website, I realized that he had already began to upload video clips, showing for example, votive Gregorian Masses, the singing of the popular rosary and the litanies of the novena to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, and sung chaplets.

Of course, the student from Ciminna is just one of those people (especially those of the younger generation) who, with an awareness and a precise perception of the ritual phenomenon, are ever more frequently taking an interest in the different forms of popular devotion in general and also, therefore, in the musical expressions that accompany their celebratory moments. They spend time documenting these occasions, finding the poetic text in the case of recited or sung repertoires, and collecting information from a historical viewpoint; then, all this information or a part of it is almost always merged into the videos that they upload to their channels or into the descriptions that accompany the videos themselves, especially when the video clips also become a subject for discussion on the social networks.

In fact, these young people, who are often regular members of parochial groups, confraternities, choral groups, religious associations and, more rarely, local tourist boards, not only upload the videos to the YouTube channels, but also create event pages or specific groups, especially on Facebook, where the videos, but also images or posts, become the subject of longer and sometimes very interesting discussions, in which the element of confrontation and, often, of competition emerges.

However, a permanent idea is common to all those who undertake to create and manage these virtual spaces dedicated to devotional music: these operations of 'uploading' audiovisual materials to the Web carry out - to all intents and purposes - the task of real documentation. Furthermore, this has better outcomes (in terms of their being available and hence, of their divulgation) than the outcomes of some forms I would dare to define as more traditional, such as the production of compact discs or the printing of volumes (proof of this can be found, for example, on the Web, where we can often find entire audio tracks extracted from recorded collections so that they can be available to everyone and not only to the owners of the recorded product). These data also lead us to reconsider the concept of storage and use of sonorous materials, which nowadays are published through a diffusion that is not coded by any restriction, nor managed by the traditional protocols that concern digital archives. In fact, today, a large number of the sound materials of ethnomusicological interest are ever more frequently shared on online platforms accessible to anyone, triggering an uncontrolled process of acquisition, which often turns into revival, transformation, and innovation. Even if these operations cause the decontextualization of repertoires, they are also the base for the conservation and revitalization of the selfsame music and of the selfsame chants. This is just what happened at the beginning of the XIX century when the birth and the spread of the radio deeply influenced the circulation of popular music in general, as a result of the power and the immediacy with which music directly reached homes and cultural salons, valuing its contents and enhancing its forms (SLOBIN 2011).

Let us return to our discussion about the topic of the online documentation of musical devotional repertoires. It is interesting to note the presence of a YouTube specific channel, called *Popular Religious Music*, which came into being about a year ago, with the aim of containing sonorous documents from the sphere of traditional liturgy or paraliturgy. The channel manager's description reads as follows: «Channel for the protection and diffusion of popular religious music».[9] The channel has received 42,000 visits and has a substantial number of members who interact with each other by making comments, exchanging materials and curious facts, or also holding discussions about different themes, including the recovery of liturgical-musical traditions, the use of some musical instruments during the liturgies or some Latin repertoires, and so on. You can find both amateur recordings, made by the channel manager himself, and recordings taken from cassettes, but also tracks contained on cassettes that until a few years ago the various places, especially the Italian sanctuaries, used to sell as souvenirs.

The theme of the protection and diffusion of these traditional repertoires by means of a process whose outcomes are entrusted to the potentialities of

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[9] <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCM7wkU_V5TWVlHBj3veJ7wA/about> (Accessed on March 31, 2016).

the Web and no longer just to oral and written transmission emerges yet again. It is clear therefore that that there is a kind of parallelism that arises from considering these virtual spaces as equal to the notebooks, in which the believers or the priest or even the local history enthusiast used to write down the texts of novenas, rosaries, and litanies, so that they would not be lost and could be jealously preserved.

Furthermore, one could also recall what happened to those stave sheets on which the organists, who played the organs in the churches (usually the sacristans or the priests themselves) noted down the melodies of the traditional chants, the tones of the Psalms, the hymns and the rosaries, often adding messy captions to the titles - for example, *A chant for the Immaculate Mary, sung in the church of St. Francis* or *Traditional chant performed by the men during the Good Friday procession*. Moreover, they also added notes that referred to the author or the way they should be sung, just as happens with the captions on the videos regarding paraliturgical traditions, uploaded to YouTube by enthusiasts or shared on Facebook, where expressions such as 'traditional chant' or 'ancient melody' are used with the aim of guaranteeing authenticity and giving value to the track, in exactly the same way as the transcriptions on sheets or in texts printed in devotional books.

It should be emphasized that today the almost rampant and uncontrolled disclosure of a chant or of a specific devotional repertoire, which are therefore - to all intents and purposes - sacred to a group or to an entire community, no longer worries the 'actors' of the ceremony (cantors, priests, friars). In the past, however, the notebooks with the texts, the manuscripts with the melodies or the possible audio-recordings were jealously conserved, because they were precious exemplary models, which for some aspects were considered unique and irreplaceable. On the contrary, nowadays, the cantors themselves expressly ask the researchers, who study their chants, to upload the documentation to the Web, in order to share it, but also with the aim of somehow attesting the paternity of the repertoire in question. *YouTube*, in fact, apart from being considered a means of material sharing by the confraternities, the cantors, and the parochial groups, is also considered an 'electronic register', in which they record their own chants to protect them from the risk of appropriation by other communities or, sometimes, by groups from the same community.

This fact is not of secondary importance, especially in the case of devotional repertoires, because the same protection that was once entrusted to being concealed by written sources (people boasted of possessing a notebook containing texts or of a stave sheet with the transcription) is today entrusted – almost paradoxically – to the extensive divulgation of the repertoires offered by the Web. In fact, nowadays, via the web, the groups of cantors belonging to the confraternities (but also to the *scholae cantorum*) represent themselves along with their own chants within a community context, whose space and time boundaries no longer coincide with the perimeter of churches and

oratories or with the processional routes, or even with the specific time of the ceremony or of the feast in general. Simon Frith (2001) suggests that the phenomenon of recording, and therefore the ability to listen to a piece of music at any time and in any place, has also resulted in a progressive confusion as to the boundaries between public and private, turning a collective musical experience into a moment of intimate listening (maybe within domestic and public spaces).

The possibility of knowing these events ahead of time in whatsoever moment permits a continuous confrontation between the cantors themselves or between the members of the community on questions such as: the success of the performance, the improvement of some parts, the collaboration of the cantors during the procession, the presence or the absence of some cantors, and so on. Therefore, this phenomenon has led to the extension, both in time and in space, of some behaviours (I would even go so far as to define them as rituals: criticism, competition, ostentation, and so on) which, until some years ago were instead -more or less- limited to particular periods of the year and - almost always - to specific spaces (churches, oratories, squares, the houses of cantors). Today, people talk to each other in front of these videos, even if they are thousands of miles apart; this is the case of emigrants, sometimes cantors themselves, who, once they have returned to their country of residence, keep on commenting on videos or images 'posted' to the Web, expressing their opinions, giving advice, deciding about the assignment of the soloist part to one cantor rather than another, and so on. The Web, in general, has somehow obscured and confused the boundary between real and simulated (or played) time, between physical and virtual spaces. Indeed, as regards this phenomenon, it is now clear that we are facing a new social and cultural landscape in which even traditional music has perhaps found a sense - although the consequences of such a change are still uncertain - which interests its diffusion, but, over and above all, research itself.

On the bases of the previous considerations we need to ask ourselves: is it permissible to consider these virtual spaces and these kinds of audio-visual documents as effective instruments which are useful for ethnomusicological research regarding musical devotional practices? The answer, or better, the answers to these questions come first of all from personal research experiences, but also, from confrontation with the other scholars of this sector. There is a habit that interests this kind of research nowadays: ever more frequently, research starts by referring to online contents, particularly to YouTube ones, especially in the preliminary phase of the investigation, which is then completed by real research conducted in the field. The video channels or the social network pages are the first instruments which the researcher refers to when he/she decides to start a new investigation, even before he/she approaches the specific literature, and before he/she spends time finding previously published recordings or bibliographic materials.

Today, researchers get close to the online audiovisual contents with scrupulous patience, trying to find useful details for their research within a container that is not always homogenous in form and content, in the same way as when, for example, they find themselves leafing through papers in the archives of the confraternities or the handwritten notebooks of organists and priests or books by local historians in order to find information of musical interest. However, there is one essential difference: in the case of an online investigation, it is almost never necessary in the first part of the research to physically go to the sacristy's or choir's archives, but researchers are able to carry out a careful virtual inspection, which turns out to be more immediate and more complete (one can even listen to and see the liturgies or the paraliturgical ceremonies themselves, a possibility that gives us an advantage over research which used to start off only with the help of written sources and archival information). There is a further element that must be taken into consideration: we frequently find interesting recordings both as regards quality and track content, such as, for example, in the case of historical recordings, which are merged into the Web for the reasons

I have already mentioned, especially with the aim of documenting a certain musical tradition, even from a diachronic perspective. Obviously, this observation can be extended to other kinds of online musical repertoires and not just to the sonorous documents regarding liturgical ones. And then, in my opinion, a second, even more interesting element emerges regarding the phenomenon under examination and, particularly, the architect of these operations of uploading materials onto the Web. In fact, the person who uploads these kinds of audiovisual recordings onto the Web is hardly ever a scholar or a professional researcher, but, in most cases, an individual who belongs to the social and cultural context (the cantors, the managers of confraternities or the priest himself). We are faced with a documentation carried out - one might say - thanks to an 'inside eye', that is, thanks to someone who knows the occasions, the places, and the modalities of every ritual moment, and, therefore, the documentation is more detailed than the one carried out by a researcher who is external to the context he/she studies.

Because of the reasons I have just discussed, these audio-visual documents are almost always exempt from any of the filtering operations which normally apply to the material published by the researcher or scholars of this sector. In other words, we are faced with materials that are more interesting because they can be considered 'first-half' materials. However, there is a problem in this kind of research, namely, the possibility of having to deal with two types of documentation: one of these has the expressed aim of emphasizing the musical devotional or paraliturgical repertoires of a particular town or of a precise ritual context (in this case the documents will have a specific title, for example *Holy Week Chant*, *Christmas Novenas* or *Sung Rosary to St. Joseph*, and so on), or we can come across documentation apparently aimed at describing traditional rites or ceremonies (processions, feasts, Liturgical

Celebrations) in which it is possible to find elements of ethnomusicological interest. In the latter case, the scholar needs to resort to his/her own experience in order to direct his/her research, as he/she would do in a festive context, taking account of the succession of ritual moments or possible clues that could suggest the presence of musical elements. Furthermore, another detail should not be underestimated: these sonorous documents, just like those notebooks or those stave sheets, are also used as didactic instruments for the transmission of musical knowledge; therefore, people no longer copy a rosary or a devotional chant onto a sheet by hand, nor do they even distribute photocopies, but they send a link, which makes it possible to listen to and learn chants, litanies or anthems, and which also allows one to download and print the text. This new habit is particularly noticeable especially among the youngest cantors.

It is interesting to observe that a lot of *scholae cantorum* use YouTube to study anthems, sequences, and Gregorian Hymns. In fact, you can find video clips on the Web which are explicitly destined for the didactics of liturgical chants, particularly, the Gregorian ones. In this regard I wish to cite the concrete example of the numerous didactic videos uploaded to YouTube by Giovanni Vianini, an expert and scholar of Gregorian chant, who is organist and director of the *Schola Cantorum Mediolonensin* at St Mark's Basilica in Milan. His channel offers access to several videos he has made, destined for the study of the Gregorian chant: there are specific comments regarding, for example, vocal training, the way it should be sung, and the liturgical period for which it is destined.[10]

The hitherto developed reflection, and in particular the parallelism on the functional level between the written text and the sound recording, must necessarily be the focus of a more specific consideration that concerns the actual type of documents themselves. In fact, it is not of secondary importance that, unlike the transcripts of the lyrics of the verbal songs written on staffs or in notebooks, the sources we can access on the Web, namely, the audio-visual documents do not require an interpretive reading that allows the sonic result to be reached. In fact, they are already 'sound', that is to say, they are already music and singing, which has been interpreted and secured by its recording. This new way of enjoying music, as pointed out by Frith (*ibidem*), has transformed the material experience of the music itself and has completely changed the dynamics of transmission and acquisition. In other words, not only the sound object itself but also the sound experience fixed by the recording is transmitted, and consequently acquired. Thus, we do not only have lyrics and music, but also the transmission of vocal styles, performance practices, ritual behavior, and perhaps even functions and values related to

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[10] See, for example, the Easter Hallelujah *O filii et filiae*, available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wXVpUgflJk> (Accessed on March 31,2016).

the music or to the singing, which are expressions that could hardly be included in a transcript on a staff.

From YouTube to field?

However, the online uncontrolled circulation of traditional chants usually causes the loss of some original information about the chant itself, for example, its origin, the name of the author of the text or the melody, or that of the person who made the recording. This also happened in the case of the texts of chants or popular rosaries, which circulated both in oral and written form, thanks to the continuous operations of copying them into notebooks or onto individual sheets. For example, it is interesting to hear what the parish priest from Colli a Volturno told me about the *Ave Maris Stella*, sung during Vespers every year on Assumption Day.

He had listened to it on YouTube and taught it to the choristers of his parish about seven years ago. Today, this chant is considered one of Colli a Volturno's traditional chants, even though its style seems to belong to the Brianza area; we could therefore say that it had been imported.

A similar example regards the Rosary of St. Francis sung in Palermo. During a conversation with the guide of Misilmeri's Franciscan Third Order, I was told that he had seen a video posted on YouTube containing the dialect rosary of St. Anthony, sung in the parish community of Fabrizia, a small town in the province of Vibo Valentia (in Calabria), which he had decided to adapt for the cult of St. Francis, substituting the name of the Saint to whom the rosary was dedicated with that of St. Francis.

He explained this operation using these words: «We did not have a Sicilian traditional rosary of St. Francis and it seemed right to us, first of all, because of the resemblance between the Sicilian and Calabrian dialects». Therefore, until 2013 a Sicilian rosary was being sung by the faithful, who were unaware of its origins or the historical events that had caused it to be adopted by the local community. Indeed, it was even considered as part of the place's traditional repertoire of chants and, in fact, has been inserted into the books containing the chants and prayers that are used by the local faithful.

These data suggest further reflection about the online circulation of these repertoires and especially about the role that the Web has had in the invention of a new oral way of circulation of the traditional chants. Such an analysis should start – once again - from an element, which is no longer fixed on the printed pages of graduals and antiphonaries, devotional books or handwritten personal notebooks, but which boasts a virtual support, whose pages – however many times they are leafed through- will probably never yellow!

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