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I.S.S.N.: (en trámite)

Reaping and Threshing Rhythms in Calamònaci (Agrigento – Sicily)*

Sergio Bonanzinga

Por medio de un vídeo desarrollado cerca de Calamònaci, provincia de Agrigento, se presentan las características primordiales de una jornada de siega del grano y la trilla del mismo y las diferentes formas musicales (religiosas, satíricas, amorosas y sociales) presentes durante el periodo que abarca el desarrollo de dichas tareas del campo, además del estilo y el valor de dichos ritmos de trabajo y la dimensión místico-ritual de los mismos.

0. The traditional way of reaping has gone out of use in Sicily since the beginning of the Sixties¹. The field-research here reported has been recently carried out near Calamònaci, a small rural village in the southern part of Sicily (province of Agrigento), during a reaping organized for our video-recording². All the informants are old countrymen that have been practising traditional work for a long time³. Our contribution is intended to consider the sounding landscape of the reaping day: the prayers at the beginning; the songs during work; the ending-cry.

The second part of the paper regards threshing. In Sicily, as in other Mediterranean regions, animals (oxen, donkeys, horses or mules) tread out the wheat on a threshing-floor. Differently from reaping, the threshing with animals (mainly mules) even if rather seldom performed is still practised in Sicily⁴. The field-research – always carried out in Calamònaci⁵ – relates to the setting out of the threshing-floor and to the cries during the work as an incitation for the mules⁶. After the threshing we got the chance of filming a gleaner, an old

(*) The reading of this paper was correlated with the projection of a video-tape. The musical examples have been transcribed by Santina Tomasello with our collaboration; the verbal texts have been transcribed together with Giovanni Moroni. We wish to thank both of them for the qualified assistance.

1. Some recent studies concerning traditional reaping in Sicily are the following: Uccello 1964; Nicosia 1980 (pp. 231-238); Buttitta–Cusumano 1991 (pp. 52-54). For a catalog of field-recordings see: Documentazioni e studi Rai 1977; Finocchiaro 1991, 1993. For examples published on record see: Guggino *d.*1974 (A/2); Nicosia *d.*1980 (A/5); Moroni–Vacante *d.*1991 (B/4a-b-c-d-e).
2. Research (June, 21st, 1992): S. Bonanzinga and G. Moroni – Folkstudio of Palermo (tape-recording: S. Bonanzinga; video-recording 3/4 U-MATIC: F. La Bruna; photos: G. Moroni).
3. Informants: Diego Borsellino (b. 1926), Vincenzo Campo (b. 1931), Calogero Caruana (b. 1923), Gaetano Gallo (b. 1923, *ligaturi*), Francesco Lino (b. 1945), Giosafat Palminteri (b. 1931), Vincenzo Scorsone (b. 1936), Francesco Zicari (b. 1929), Giuseppe Tudisco (b. 1927).
4. Some recent studies concerning traditional threshing in Sicily are the following: Guggino 1974 (pp. 318-324); Nicosia 1980 (pp. 239-253); Buttitta–Cusumano 1991 (pp. 54-58). For a catalog of field-recordings see: Documentazioni e studi Rai 1977; Finocchiaro 1991, 1993. For examples published on record see: Carpitella–Lomax *d.*1957 (B/2, 27); Guggino *d.*1974 (A/1); Uccello *d.*1974 (A/9); Nicosia *d.*1980 (B/3); Garofalo *cd.*1992 (21-22).
5. Research (June, 22nd, 1992): S. Bonanzinga and G. Moroni – Folkstudio of Palermo (tape-recording: S. Bonanzinga; video-recording 3/4 U-MATIC: F. La Bruna; photos: G. Moroni).
6. Informants: Calogero Caruana (b. 1923), Gaetano Gallo (b. 1923), Giovanni Silvio (b. 1928).

woman, who sings while she threshes the ears of wheat using a wooden stick⁷. This work, nowadays completely avoided, was traditionally done by women beside the house-door.

1. A traditional team-work (*opra d'ommini*) was composed of eight reapers plus one who fastens the sheaves (*ligaturi*). The *ligaturi* was the group leader and he used an uncinat stick (*ancinu*) and a bifurcate stick (*ancinedda*) for his work. The *ligaturi* had an assistant, usually a boy called *sburraturaru*, who provided the traditional asphodel ropes (*liami*) used for fastening the sheaves (*gregni*). The reapers' implements were a little scythe (*faci*) and two reed thimbles (*cannedda*) to protect the middle finger and the little finger. Both the *ligaturi* and the reapers wore aprons (*fasdali*) and sleeves (*manicuni*) made of heavy material to shield their chests and arms. The reaping started at dawn and lasted until sunset. The reapers started working in silence till the *ligaturi* had tied the first sheaf (*gregna*). At that moment the *ligaturi* began to declaim the *litania* (litany) or *rusariu* (rosary) with the choral participation of reapers while continuing to work. The text is a prayer dedicated to the Holy Sacrament (*lu Sacramentu*), with invocations to the saints and the Virgin Mary (see Ex. 1):

<i>E ogn'ura e ogni mumentu</i>	[solo]
<i>sia lodatu e ringraziatu</i>	
<i>lu santissimu e divinissimu Sacramentu!</i>	
<i>Sempri sia! [var.: Sempri sia lodatu!]</i>	[choir]
<i>Un'Avimmaria e un Patrinnostu</i>	[solo]
<i>a san Gisippuzzu</i>	
<i>ch'è lu patruni di tuttu lu munnu!</i>	
<i>Viva san Gisippuzzu!</i>	[choir]
<i>Un'Avimmaria e un Patrinnostu</i>	
<i>a Maria santissima</i>	
<i>ca dà la grazia al suo caro figliu!</i>	
<i>Viva Maria!</i>	
<i>Un'Avimmaria e un Patrinnostu</i>	
<i>a san Caloiru</i>	
<i>ca è prutitturi di tuttu Sciacca!</i>	
<i>Viva san Caloriu!</i>	
<i>Un'Avimmaria</i>	
<i>a san Micenzu Firreri</i>	
<i>ca è lu prutitturi di lu nostru paisi!</i>	
<i>Viva san Micenzu Firreri!</i>	
<i>Un'Avimmaria e un Patrinnostu</i>	

7. Informant: Antonia Spataro (b. 1910).

a sant'Antuninu
ca è lu prutitturi di li picciotti schietti!
Viva sant'Antuninu!
E ogn'ura e ogni mumentu
sia lodatu e ringraziatu
lu santissimu e divinissimu Sacramentu!
Sempri sia!

The solo part was then performed by reapers who one after the other repeated the acclamation to the Holy Sacrament three times:

E ogn'ura e ogni mumentu [solo]
sia lodatu e ringraziatu
lu santissimu e divinissimu Sacramentu!
Sempri sia! [choir]

One of the two following formulas pointed out the changing to the next reaper:

[A] *E cu tri boti sia* [solo]
scatta lu mpernu e triunfa Maria
la virginedda e Santa Rusulia!
Viva Maria! [var.: Viva santa Rusulia!] [choir]
 [B] *E cu tri boti chi l'hau datu* [solo]
cu lu cori e cu lu ciatu
viva Gesù sacramentatu!
Viva Gesù sacramentatu! [choir]

The acclamation to the Holy Sacrament was still repeated by the *ligaturi* who ended with a final appeal to acclaim Saint Calogero: *E tutti gridamu! [ligaturi] – Evviva san Calò!* [*ligaturi* and reapers raising the scythes above their heads] (see Ex. 2).

The above described ritual action was called *dari lu Sacramentu* (give the Sacrament) or, more simply, *lu Sacramentu* (the Sacrament). The whole action had to be repeated at the onset of work after the two main meals of the day (8:30 and 12:30). It is important to point out how the responsorial rhythmic iteration of these devotional formulas provides both the magic-religious protection of men and harvest⁸ and the right cadence in carrying on their work.

As soon as the Sacrament terminated, the reapers could freely perform the traditional songs. In Calamònaci these songs are called *canti di paglia* (straw songs). The musical form

8. For a symbolic interpretation of reaping, with a specific attention to the life-death relation connected to the agrarian cycle (even in a historical-comparative perspective), see in particular De Martino 1975² (chap. 6, "La messe del dolore").

is the distich and the verbal form is the hendecasyllable combined in couplets, quatrains or sestinas (rarely octaves). The performance is characterized by monodic lines sung by the soloist with simple choral intervention in correspondence with the main cadences. The content is prevalently that of a love-song, but there are even satirical [E] and social [A] texts. Here are some examples, where the reapers' alternation denotes even some improvising forms, such as the substituting of one voice for another to carry on the verses of the same song [B, G] or singing in contrast challenging each other [E]:

- [A] *Faci ca t'accattavu mezza lira* [D. Borsellino]
 (a) *Fallu pi carità rumpiti ora.*
- [B] (a) *Sabatu di sira allegracori* [G. Palminteri]
 (a) *Miatu cu havi beddi (o) li muglieri*
Cu l'havi lasdi cci scura lu cori [D. Borsellino]
Cu l'havi beddi cci scura a basari.
- [C] (a) *Com'a ffari ca la notti un dormu* [G. Palminteri]
 (a) *Pinsannu a ttia sempri corpu di sangu*
 (a) *Sempri pinsannu a ttia corpu di sangu*
 (a) *Notti pi notti cu lu malabbentu.*
- [D] (e) *Garofaru chi ha ca va chiancennu* [G. Gallo]
 (e) *Persi la rosa e la vaiu circannu.*
- [E] *Haiu lu cumpagnu meni ch'è malateddu* [D. Borsellino]
 (a) *Iù mi sentu cchiù malatu d'iddu*
 (a) *Pi iddu cci voli un ciaraveddu*
E pi ttia cci voli un crastu com'a ttia. [G. Gallo]
- [F] *Lu sulì si nni va e dumani veni* [D. Borsellino]
 (e) *Si mmi nni vaiu iù nun vegnu cchiuni.*
- [G] (e) *Garofaru di Roma si bbinutu* [G. Gallo] (see Ex. 3)
 (e) *Nti la grastuzza me fusti chiantatu*
Sira e matina t'haiu abbiviratu [G. Palminteri]
 (a) *La cura un ti l'haiu maiu pirdutu*
Ora ca lu garofar' è sbucciato
 (a) *Tu si la bedda e iù lu nnamuratu*
 (o) *Tu si la bedda e iù lu nnamuratu.*

It is difficult to determine a definite functional priority with regard to these songs. The reapers' formation had to move forward evenly following the orientation of the ears of wheat and, as in every collective work, the song provides a rhythmical pattern for the productive action. During the endless working-day each reaper nevertheless operated individually, and for this reason a great expressive freedom was possible in comparison with other ergological contexts. The melismatic contour of melodic lines, the variety of poetic texts and the singing compound among reapers show the need of mixing the practical

efficacy of the rhythmical synchrony with the psychological emotion of the expressive form.

The end of the working-day and any other reaping interruptions were always ordered by the *ligaturi* through the cry *Oravà, picciò, fora ferru!* (Come on boys, the iron away!), and the reapers in chorus soon replied aloud: *Fora ferru!* (see Ex. 4).

2. The sheaves left on the reaped field were carried on mules to the edge of the threshing-floor. The earthen floor were made compact using straw and water and by trampling it with the feet (this action could be considered an archetype for a dance movement). The sheaves were then untied and spread on the threshing-floor. Each mule trots round and round through the wheat, while his master (*pisaturi* or *cacciaturi*) pivots at the centre. During the work the *pisaturi* never stops encouraging the mules and invoking the saints with formulas exclaimed in a peculiar style. Here is a typical beginning (see Ex. 5a):

*E trasi cu l'ancilu
e nesci cu Maria, Baiu!
E nchiana e batti
c'âm'a tagliari, mulu!
E duna sti canti canti
ca c'è l'ancilu santu
c'aiuta a ttia e a mmia, baiu!
Allegra e cuntenta â stari, gran mula!
Nchiana e batti,
sciarda e mancia, mulu massaru!
Forza mulu, damuci lu tempu a lu cumpagnu!
E ffacciati davanti, baggianu!
Taglia e ritaglia
c'âm'a ffari paglia,
po veni lu ventu e si la piglia!
A Baiu!
E rii la testa ca vintia!
E l'occhiu vivu
e lu cori chi dormi, baggianu!*

[G. Silvio]

Some time later the wheat had to be turned upside-down, so that the threshing could be carried on uniformly. Soon after the mule-round and the cries of another *pisaturi* begin; here we have some onomatopoeic expressions and poetic lines (see Ex. 5b):

*E gira lu ferru gran mula!
Ieeeh! Bedda dea!
Ieeoh! ooh ooh ooh ooh!
Talè comu volanu
l'acidduzzi di lu mari!*

[G. Gallo]

Carrica e scarrica gran mula!
Vota e rivota
e rassenati lu cori e la menti
bedd'armalu ca un c'è nenti!
Veni ccà!!
E casdìa stu ferru
ca lu ferru stira mentri è casdu!
Amuninni!
leeeh! Bedda dea!
Oooh! Ooh ooh ooh ooh!
A muredda, amuninni!
E rii la testa ca ti vintà, mula!
Batti e ribatti
comu batti l'acqua di lu mari!
leaah!
E veni ccà ca t'haiu chiamatu
cu l'accitedda e lu pipi salatu!
A l'acchianata ti guardi la vita
c'à ghiri a lu ventu, gran mula!

When the straw is ready on the floor it is time to drive away the mules and start working by hand with the help of the wind. Here is the formula traditionally used for this purpose, which ends with the expression *A lu ventu!* (To the wind!) to indicate that is time to start the *spagliata* (i. e., the separation of the wheat from the straw, carried out by throwing the produce ahigh with tridents so as to exploit the effect of the wind) (see *Ex. 5c*):

Acchiana e scinni [C. Caruana]
ca a lu ventu à ghiri, baggianu!
E tornaci arrè
che non è parola di re, a Baiu!
A l'acchianari a lu ventu à ghiri, baggianu!
Ooh! Ora ora, oi e dumani nn'avemu, Baiu!
A lu ventu! Oh!

The measuring of the wheat while stuffing it into the sacks is the final operation⁹.

3. The gleaners (customary women) used to thresh the wheat in a domestic dimension, beside the house-door or in court-yards, with sticks shaped on purpose (*mazze*). In

9. Even this operation, traditionally called *misuratina di lu frumentu*, was once marked by a sounding performance consisting in a peculiar intonation of the numeric progression (for some examples see Favara 1957, vol. II, pp. 371-372).

Calamònci this action was called *mazziata* and it offers a valuable interest with reference to the singing repertory practised as rhythmical support of the gesture. Differently from the other examined working situations, a particular "voice" or "song" did not exist in effect for the *mazziata*. The individual nature of this action implied a considerable expressive freedom. For this reason it is always the single gleaner who establishes with which song he likes to mark the rhythm of his work. During our observation the gleaner (*viscugliatrici*) performed the *mazziata* while singing a Sicilian *canzonetta*, an opera air (the *Siciliana* from *Cavalleria rusticana*) and a *romanza*¹⁰. For exemplification here is the *romanza* (the text is part in Sicilian and part in Italian), pointing out how the beating iteration of the *mazza* provides an almost perfect metronome marking (see Ex. 6):

*Sta notti mi sognavo dormire in canto
Mi vado per svegliare in faccia al vento
Dove l'amanti mia che amava tantu
Come che m'ha sferito (ma) come il vento.*

*Iettu la paglia a mari e mi va nfunnu
Ca gatu viu lu chiummu natari
Che l'omu sventoratu nun c'è chi ffari
Che na donna sincera nun poi trovarì.*

*Apriti sti finestri (o) ca su cchiusi
Quando sento l'adoro di li rosi
Idda la mariola chi me risposi
L'adoro lo fazz'io non so' li rosi.*

*Ora ca semu iunti en alto mari
Ve la lasciamo un poco arripisari.*

10. About the circulation of *airs* and *romanzas* of art and semi-art productions among Sicilian peasants see: Carapezza 1977; Pennino 1985; Bonanzinga 1993 (pp. 23-26); for examples published on record see: Guggino-Pennino d.1987. About the traditional performances of the *Siciliana* that opens *Cavalleria rusticana*, see in particular Plastino 1993 (pp. 100-103).

EX. 1 $\text{♩} \approx 96$
(5,7")

solo (4,6")

E o- gn'u- r'o- gni mu- men- tu
sia 'da- tu e rin- gra- zia- tu u
San- tis- si- m'e di- vi- nis- si- mu Sa- cra- men- tu!

choir (1,6")

Sem- pri sia!

EX. 2 $\text{♩} \approx 88$
(9")

solo (1,7")

E tut- ti gri- da- mu!

choir (7,3")

Ev- vi- va san Ca- lò!

EX. 3 $\text{♩} = 100$
(26, 2")

solo

(e) Ge-ro-fa-ru di Ro-ma si bbi-nu-tu

choir
a-ah

(e) Nū la gra-stuz-za me fu-sti chian-ta-tu

choir
a-ah

EX. 4 $\text{♩} = 120$
(2, 7")

Fo-ra fer-rui

EX. 5a $\text{♩} \approx 100$
(3,8")

$\frac{2}{4}$ (2,3")

E tra- si cu l'an- ci- lu

(1,5")

e ne- sci cu Ma- ria, Ba- tu!

EX. 5b $\text{♩} \approx 92$
(5,8")

(2,9")

E gi- ra lu fer- ru gran mu- la!

(2,9")

Ie- e- eh! Bed- da de- a!

EX. 5c $\text{♩} \approx 69$
(6,8")

$\frac{2}{4}$ (5")

Ooh! O- ra o- ra oi e du- ma- ni nn'a- ve- mu, Ba- tu!

(1,8")

A lu ven- tul Oh!

EX. 6

♩ = 84

(42,3")

* = off beat equivalent to half value of the previous note on the voice line

stick

Sta not-ti mi so-gna-vo dor-me- ra in can-to (10,4")

Mi va-do per sve-glia-re in fac-cia al ven-to (9,6")

Do-ve l'a-man-ti mi-a chia-ma-va tan-tu (10,5")

Co-me che m'ha sfe-ri to (ma) co-me il ven-to. (11,8")

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d. = rec. ed.; cd. = compact disc ed.

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