

TULLIA MAGRINI

Department of Music and Performing Arts, University of Bologna,
Bologna

WHERE DOES MEDITERRANEAN MUSIC BEGIN?

The paper focuses on the work done within the ICTM Study Group on the Anthropology of Mediterranean Cultures with the aim of presenting and discussing some approaches to the study of "Mediterranean" music. In particular, it deals with the possible meanings of the term "Mediterranean" in musical studies.

Keywords: anthropology of music, Mediterranean music

Although the term "Mediterranean" was originally strictly a geographical one, towards the middle of this century it took on a more complex meaning, both from an historical and an anthropological point of view, thanks to the classic work of Braudel (1949) and of scholars such as Pitt-Rivers and Peristiany. A literature on the "Mediterranean" thus originated in a multinational perspective, as part of both the tendency toward "global history" championed by Braudel, and of the comparative approach adopted by the Oxford school of social anthropology (Peristiany 1966). In particular, the contributions by the Oxford school initiated a widespread tendency to consider the Mediterranean as a culture area, a tendency that, after gaining considerable authority, has lost some of its momentum in recent times. Even though Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers have claimed recently that they never meant "to establish the Mediterranean as a 'culture area'" (Peristiany & Pitt-Rivers 1992:6), several scholars have criticized the unified notion of the Mediterranean that has informed the contributions of the Oxford school, thus opening up a discussion (e.g. Gilmore 1987; Boissevain 1979; Piña Cabral 1989) which has not yet come to an end, although it has perhaps been somewhat overtaken thanks to the new orientations of anthropology in recent years.

In the field of music anthropology, a new study group on "The Anthropology of Music in Mediterranean Cultures" was created in 1992 within the International Council for Traditional Music (see Magrini 1993).

Some scholars have understood this initiative as an attempt to extend to musical studies the unifying hypothesis that had already been proposed for other social and cultural aspects of the countries bordering on the Mediterranean. This meeting is an excellent opportunity for me to clear up this misunderstanding and to show that the objectives which I, as the founder of the study group, personally set myself were completely different.

My first objective was to promote research on the human and social aspects of music in an area in which music had been studied primarily from historical and technical/theoretical perspectives, and according to the philological and documentaristic methods of musical folklore. With few exceptions (e.g. De Martino 1975; 1976), music had not been explored in Mediterranean countries as a means for understanding man and society. In my view, this state of affairs was not only a weakness in ethnomusicological literature, but also represented a great opportunity that had until then been missed.

Secondly, the choice of studying music as a human and social phenomenon in the Mediterranean was particularly challenging because of the cultural complexity of this area. For one thing, what do Mediterranean countries have in common? Basically, they have in common six thousand years of history during which they came into contact with one another (e.g. Davis 1993). As they fought against and dominated each other, they also traded goods, encountered the art of their neighbours, spread religions, and generated the most striking syncretisms. A feature which is particularly Mediterranean is the depth of information we have on its past. This gives our study a particular importance, since it allows us to deal with the issue of time, an issue which was often absent from anthropological and ethnomusicological studies. Furthermore, the history of the Mediterranean is extraordinarily rich: for example, if there is one geographical area in the world which prefigured the postmodern condition, this is certainly the Mediterranean area, in which Hellenism became the first historical experience of globalization — albeit on a relative scale. In this sense, studying Mediterranean cultures through music allows us to place the research into music as a human and social phenomenon in a unique historical perspective, and to acquire critical instruments for better understanding the present.

I do not, however, want to assert that their history renders these territories culturally homogeneous. On the contrary, the "Mediterranean" is fascinating because it represents better than others a place in which one encounters countless diversities, and because it enables us to observe the ways in which these diversities manage to coexist, ignore each other, know each other, come into conflict, or blend.

For example, if we observe Mediterranean territories from the perspective of art music since the end of the Middle Ages, we see a world split into two halves. One part, the north, is completely projected towards

continental Europe through the interaction between the music of Mediterranean Europe with Flanders, Germany, England and northern France. The other part, the south, is spread out horizontally from Maghreb to Turkey and bears a wealth of continuities with the musical world of Iran and India. From this point of view, the Mediterranean Sea constitutes more an element of division than of continuity. At the same time, it should be remembered that, despite being separated from each other, the countries bordering on the Mediterranean were able to export cultural products and to considerably influence even extremely distant countries. This fact presents itself on the musical level as another exemplification of Braudel's argument about the "widened Mediterranean".

On other musical levels, the Mediterranean presents itself rather as a mosaic of profoundly localized realities, where specific musical practices take root in particular social contexts and assume a profound meaning in terms of socio-cultural identity. I shall mention a few examples: for instance, the *rizitika* songs of the westernmost region of Crete, the Nomos Chanion (Magrini 1981 and forthcoming); the practices of improvised lyrical singing in southern Italy, which differ from each other from village to village (Magrini 1986; 1998a); the instrumental practice of the *kemence* of the Turks of the Black Sea, along with infinite other cultural realities of strictly local significance (Stokes 1993). In these contexts it is in fact the differentiation at the local or regional level that explains the proliferation of repertoires, of performance practices, and of instrumental practices.

But there also exist consistent phenomena of musical syncretism in the Mediterranean. These are the fruits of cultural encounters caused by unique historical events and by the ability of certain social groups to develop them in a particular way. Perhaps it would be worth using the term "Mediterranean music" in the strict sense only for those musical phenomena that have their roots in the contact and contamination between cultural realities which actually come from different parts of the geographical Mediterranean. In this sense, we would use the term for those musical phenomena which cross the sea, which have in their DNA a genetic patrimony that unites elements of different cultures, and which carry the historical memory of contacts within the Mediterranean.

This perspective, to which I will return later on, seems to me particularly interesting because it allows one both to point to the Mediterranean inasmuch as it is a place of interaction on the historical level, and at the same time to bear in mind what is going on in the Mediterranean today on the level of popular music, where there exists a consistent tendency toward contamination. Hybrid repertoires prevail in this field today, for example in *mizrakhit* music (e.g. Regev 1996), where the Hebrew language is mixed with Arab musical elements, bringing about a cultural fusion that unexpectedly triumphs over deeply-rooted ethnic and political hostilities.

If we exclude those kinds of music in which a fusion of different Mediterranean cultural realities is brought about, and which are generated either by complex historical events or, more recently, by the postmodern tendency to contamination, it is quite difficult to establish what Mediterranean music is, where it begins and ends, and, finally, what is meant by the term.

During our study group's work we deliberately avoided establishing precise boundaries for our area of study. For now the task of establishing the geographical extension of our arguments has been entrusted to the sensibility of the specialists in the individual areas and to the coordinators of the group. A definition of the boundaries might perhaps emerge as a final result of our work and might even bring about a reconsideration of the traditional classifications.

This problem can be illustrated by considering the particularly complex case of Italian folk music. Traditionally the music of the oral tradition in Italy was distinguished into two profoundly diversified realities, northern music and that of the south, linked by a musical area — — that of central Italy — that in certain respects has its own characteristics but in other aspects is also linked to the two neighbouring realities (e.g. Leydi 1973).

The music of northern Italy is considered profoundly "European", particularly because of the role that the ballad and polyphony in thirds has had in it and which connects it to other musical realities of the continent.

The music of southern Italy, on the other hand, is considered "Mediterranean", because of the prevalence of solistic singing, the widespread occurrence of a vocality pushed into the high register, the use of melismatic melodies that bring it closer to the music of the southern shores of the Mediterranean. This general division has its roots in Alan Lomax's historical research in Italy in 1954 and in his emphasis on vocal style and on the opposition between monody and choral music in his definition of musical areas (Lomax 1955-1956) — elements which Lomax later developed and perfected in his famous work, *Cantometrics*. The problematic aspect of this division is that, according to this classification, the music of the coastal regions of northern and central Italy appears to be connected more to Europe than to the Mediterranean.

Now, it is indeed true that, for example, the repertoires of ballads of the Veneto or Liguria are connected to the repertoires of the other northern Italian regions and of other European countries and in this sense confirm the "continental" nature of the music of northern Italy. At the same time, we must not forget the role that centres of political and cultural power such as Venice and Genoa have played in the heart of the Mediterranean or omit to look for the historical consequences on the level of music. For example, the spread of the violin in Crete, an island whose "Mediterranean-ness" cannot be doubted, is historically attributed to Venice's rule there from 1210 to 1669 and therefore represents a

documentation of the Italian city's Mediterranean role. At the same time, it must be observed that the music played on the violin in Crete was not the slightest bit Venetian or Italian (e.g. Magrini 1981; 1997). This is therefore one of the many examples where that which was transmitted is simply an object that was readapted to local musical reality.

Even if one cannot exclude the possibility that the violin was originally imported to Crete with a repertoire of its own of northern Italian origin, neither historical documentation nor any trace in the repertoires and musical practices of this century remain of it. With this example, I would like to point out to the difficulty of tidily winding up the skein of geographical, historical and strictly sonorous threads when trying to decide on the amount of "Mediterranean-ness" to assign to the phenomena we examine — in this case, the Mediterranean-ness of music in the area of Venice.¹

In my opinion another interesting case that is offered by Italian folk culture is the tradition of the *Maggio drammatico* (Magrini 1992), a form of musical theatre that is common in the Tuscan and Emilian Apennines. In this kind of theatre the clash between two groups in conflict is represented, with the two groups often historicized as Moslems and Christians in different historical or fantastic contexts. It seems that this form of theatre is typically "Mediterranean" in the sense that it concentrates on a central theme in the history of the Mediterranean.

But if we ask ourselves what the sources of the scripts of the *Maggi* are, it is easy to verify that these texts, in many cases, are based on a re-elaboration or imitation of Italian Medieval and Renaissance epic literature (which is a point of reference for many forms of popular Italian literature). We might therefore legitimately ask whether what interests the authors and audiences of the *Maggio* is the historical memory of distant political and religious conflicts between Islam and the Christian world recounted by this literature or rather the basically epic character of the narrative.

It is, in fact, the epic nature of the action that is essential to the *Maggio*, in that it allows for the kind of dramaturgical elaboration that characterizes it. In addition, it should be remembered that this same kind of dramaturgical elaboration can also be carried out with reference to other religious or political conflicts: one example of this is the *Maggio* "King David", which takes its material from the Bible.

The cases I have cited serve simply to demonstrate how difficult it is to go beyond purely geographical criteria and individuate in the musical repertoires of the Mediterranean countries traces of contacts or historical references that might expand the local importance of the repertoires to a properly Mediterranean dimension.

¹ In comparison, the musical praxis that characterizes certain Greek islands, like Kerkyra, which were also dominated by the Venetian, are much more "Italian".

Another, certainly less complex, way to study the musical cultures of the Mediterranean is to work on the comparative level. In this sense, the Mediterranean is again a particularly interesting territory, since it allows us to highlight, by way of contrast, the specificity of single places or areas and, at the same time, the often unexpected relations between some of them.

It is on this theme that the most work has been done within the ICTM study group, also during the recent meeting on "Music as Representation of Gender" held in Venice in June 1998. By examining the way of life and musical behaviour in certain Mediterranean countries, the meeting aimed to put into question the now obsolete image of a region unified by the syndrome of "honour and shame" (see Magrini 1998b) — an image that had stiffened the figures of the men and women of the Mediterranean into the well-known stereotypes of the male obsessively committed to the defence of his woman's honour, and of the woman obsessively committed to demonstrating her modesty, implying a total passivity on the social level.

A way to confront the stereotype of the uniformity of male and female behaviour in the Mediterranean was to take the religious variable into consideration. This allowed us to highlight how the three dominant religions in the Mediterranean (Islam, Judaism and Christianity), which share common traits such as monotheism and a masculinist and patriarchal conception of society, may be connected to different conceptions of femininity that are also represented at the level of musical events. To give an example, it is not by coincidence that in Islam where women are basically considered sexual beings, musical practices directed towards exalting this sexuality, like the belly dance, are extremely widespread (e.g. Nieuwkerk 1995; 1998), and that in the Catholic and Orthodox Christian world — which represses female sexuality and sees woman as essentially an instrument of reproduction — dances of open sexual seduction are normally absent from folk repertoires. In this sense, then, it is possible to work on the differentiation of the musical cultures of the Mediterranean by comparing them, as was done at the meeting on gender. But we must be sure to remember that it is always possible to find also examples of deep syncretism.

I would like to mention the case of a *panegyri* (a religious orthodox festival) which I attended in a village on Lesbos, a Greek island a few kilometres from the Turkish coast. As often happens in Greece, this religious festival also included evenings of dancing in which almost the entire community participated. The participants followed the common practice of the *paranghelia*: the person who wants to dance pays the musicians to play a dance which only he who pays and his guests perform, while the audience looks on. The dance thus becomes a moment of conscious public representation on the part of the performers. Groups of friends, groups of family members and even a single couple will dance. Both dance nights of the *panegyri* were totally dominated by one couple, a

husband and wife, who carried out a long series of dances, in particular *zeibekika* and *karsilamades*. These dances, compared to other widespread Greek dances such as the *syrtos* or the *ballos*, are characterized by a more relaxed and sometimes allusive use of the body. Through their dance, the couple seemed to want to represent an harmonious erotic relationship in front of the community, which responded in full syntony, expressing admiration, toasting the couple or offering them drinks and flowers.

The dances performed by that couple during a religious festival, would have probably been disapproved of in other contexts of Mediterranean Christianity, Catholic or Orthodox. But that did not happen at Lesbos, an island that for much of its history was under the rule of the Turks (from 1462 to 1912) and that assimilated from Ottoman culture the notion of accepting a public display of eroticism, syncretizing it with a religious Christian-Orthodox setting. Once again, we have before us a case of real "Mediterranean-ness", of a synthesis of cultural values belonging to traditions that are fundamentally different but that nevertheless encountered one another on this island, making room for a kind of musical performance that is perceived as completely coherent with the local culture. To a certain degree this phenomenon is not surprising if considered from the historical perspective. Until the early twentieth century, Lesbos belonged to the cultural area dominated by Smyrna, a city on the coast of Anatolia which, during the last 200 years of the Ottoman empire, was the most important economic and cultural centre of the Greeks under Turkish rule. Despite its multicultural character, the population of Smyrna was in fact largely made up of Greeks (up to 60%). It is not by chance that it was precisely at Smyrna and in the surrounding area that the Greek and Turkish musical cultures fused together. This fusion generated a rich repertoire that the people of Orthodox religion — — who were expelled from Turkey after the destruction of the city in 1922 following the unfortunate Greek invasion — brought to many Greek locations (including Lesbos) but above all to Piraeus and Athens, giving birth to the repertoire of the *café-chantant* and becoming one of the components of the *rebetiko* (e.g. Holst 1975).

What is particularly interesting about the case of the festival at Lesbos that we observed is that the syncretism in this case does not characterize a repertoire of commercial music — a genre that is traditionally more open to contamination — but even goes so far as to manifest itself in the ceremonial life of the villages, within the same religious festivals. The musical event that we observed then becomes even more complicated to analyse, since it unites multiple elements in a single phenomenon: a festive Christian-Orthodox religious context, the Greek praxis of public representation through dance by way of the practice of *paranghelia* (e.g. Cowan 1990), the allusive use of the female body which reminds us of the eroticism of the Turkish belly dance, the performance of a dance (the *zeibekiko*) that is originally proper to the Greco-Turkish culture of Anatolia (Holst 1975:64), a complex range of instruments

(bouzouki, trumpet, guitar, keyboard, drums) that uses a brass wind instrument, as is only found in Lesvos and in Western Macedonia (Dionysopoulos 1997:31). This is thus an emblematic case that gathers together different cultural values from the different landing places of *Mare Nostrum*.

Faced with phenomena like this, we can conclude that the term "Mediterranean" can actually have a much deeper meaning than its merely geographical one. When we study musical realities whose multiple facets demonstrate that this sea has been the instrument of an intense cultural interaction between countries of Europe, of Asia Minor and of Northern Africa, and that it has been the instrument for the circulation of ideas and values that cross the boundaries of nations and continents, then it can be agreed that, rather than to speak, for instance, of Italian, Tunisian or Turkish music, it is actually appropriate to use the term "Mediterranean". In this case we have the advantage of being able to allude with only one word to that collection of historical and cultural relations that has produced complex musical phenomena, phenomena that it would not be possible to analyse if not in the light of such relations.

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GDJE POČINJE MEDITERANSKA GLAZBA?

SAŽETAK

Iako je poimanje Mediterana u osnovi zemljopisno, sredinom ovoga stoljeća taj pojam preuzima složenije značenje u povijesnoj i antropološkoj perspektivi, a na takav je pristup utjecao rad Fernanda Braudela i skupine znanstvenika okupljenih u "Oxford School of Social Anthropology" (Pitt-Rivers, Peristiany). Takav se složeniji i slojevitiji pristup donedavno nije prepoznavao u studijama o glazbi Mediterana.

Autorica obrađuje rad studijske skupine "Antropologija glazbe u mediteranskim kulturama" osnovane 1992. godine pri ICTM-u. Ranija su istraživanja glazbenoga folkloru bila u skladu s filološkim i dokumentarističkim metodama i bila su usmjerena na istraživanje glazbe iz povijesne i tehničko/teorijske perspektive. Namjera je osnivača studijske skupine posebice potaknuti istraživanja ljudskih i društvenih aspekata glazbe u mediteranskom području.

Istraživanje mediteranskih kultura putem glazbe omogućava da se glazba, kao ljudski i društveni fenomen, smjesti u jedinstvenu povijesnu perspektivu, čime se otvaraju bitne postavke za razumijevanje sadašnjosti. Rad na istraživanju glazbe mediteranskoga prostora upućuje na poteškoće prevladavanja zemljopisnih kriterija određivanja, ali omogućava da se u glazbenoj tradiciji pojedinih mediteranskih zemalja iznađu tragovi dodira i povijesnih odnosa koji mogu proširiti lokalne okvire i vrednovanja glazbenog nasljeđa u odgovarajuće mediteranske dimenzije.

Ključne riječi: antropologija glazbe, mediteranska glazba