

Abstract

This research project aims to recover, analyze, and enhance the musical, sonic, and choreutic elements documented in travelogues. The study is situated within the field of musicological and ethnomusicological research that considers travel literature as a valuable source for reconstructing sonic cultures belonging to historical and geographical contexts in which endogenous documentation – such as musical scores, theoretical treatises, or sound recordings – is scarce or entirely absent. In this respect, travel diaries represent documents of exceptional value for reconstructing historical soundscapes, providing access to descriptions of musical and performative practices of the past.

The project examines a selected corpus of travel diaries and memoirs produced by explorers of Venetian origin who journeyed along the Nile and its surrounding territories between 1492 and 1860. Particular attention is devoted to the testimonies concerning sonic phenomena described in these narratives, including sounds of the natural environment, vocal expressions, musical practices, musical instruments, dances, and festive rituals observed within the societies of Egypt and Sudan during the Early Modern period. Through the analysis of these testimonies, the research seeks to reconstruct a complex and nuanced picture of the musical and sonic heritage of these regions, highlighting the plurality of cultural traditions characterizing the Nile Valley and emphasizing the multicultural nature of the performative practices.

One of the main aspects to be considered in this study concerns the ways in which the sources are read and interpreted. Travel narratives cannot be considered neutral representations of the realities they describe, as they inevitably reflect the cultural background and subjective perspectives of their authors. The descriptions of sonic phenomena are therefore mediated by travelers' experiences and interpretative frameworks. Through the contextualization of sources and the critical examination of their Eurocentric narratives, the research seeks to identify and analyze the sonic data contained in these accounts, interpreting them not as faithful reproductions of original sounds but as “echoes” of the observed soundscape filtered through the travelers' perceptions.

From a methodological standpoint, the study combines analytical tools and theoretical perspectives derived from historical musicology, ethnomusicology, and soundscape studies. In particular, the concept of the “sound event,” first introduced by Raymond Murray Schafer and later reinterpreted in musicological studies by Franco Alberto Gallo, represents a key theoretical reference for the analysis of the phenomena described in the sources. The methodological framework adopted in this research integrates Schafer's environmental perspective on sound with Gallo's anthropological approach, which suggests identifying as sound events only those sonic phenomena that held cultural significance for the communities that produced them. This combined perspective allows the

testimonies to be interpreted not merely as descriptions of sounds but as cultural manifestations carrying social and symbolic meanings.

The investigation focuses on a selected group of travelers, including Domenico Trevisan, Filippo Pigafetta, Giovanni Antonio Soderini, Vitaliano Donati, Giovanni Battista Belzoni, Girolamo Segato, and Giovanni Giacomo Miani. These figures are complemented by two women travelers, Sarah Parker-Brown and Amalia Sola Nizzoli, whose accounts offer additional perspectives and allow for comparative observations, including from a gender perspective. Limiting the corpus primarily to Venetian travelers enables the analysis of testimonies produced by authors sharing a relatively similar cultural background, thereby facilitating the comparison of sources and highlighting continuities and differences in the ways sonic phenomena were observed and described.

Particular attention is devoted to the explorer Giovanni Giacomo Miani, whose expedition toward the sources of the Nile in the mid-nineteenth century represents an exceptional case study. In addition to his travel diaries, Miani collected a significant number of ethnographic objects, including musical instruments and artifacts related to local performative practices, which are currently preserved in several European museums. The analysis of these materials, combined with the written testimonies, allows the research to establish a dialogue between travel literature and museum material culture, offering a more comprehensive perspective on the musical and choreutic traditions encountered during the expeditions.

From a thematic perspective, the research reconstructs a broad range of sonic phenomena documented in the travel accounts. These include the sounds of the natural environment – such as the noise of water, wind, and animals – human voices, religious and secular singing practices, choreutic performances, and musical performances associated with rituals, festivities, and public ceremonies. The travel narratives describe, for instance, chants related to Islamic religious ceremonies, ritual vocal expressions used during weddings and funerals, dances performed in both sacred and secular contexts, as well as the use of various musical instruments such as drums, flutes, lyres, and traditional wind instruments. The comparative analysis of these testimonies makes it possible to identify recurring patterns as well as variations in the sonic and musical practices observed across different locations along the Nile.

An innovative contribution of this research project is the development of the web application *Echos. Sound Ecosystems in Travelogues*, designed for the preservation, organization, and dissemination of the data collected during the study. The platform allows the archival and geolocation of sonic testimonies extracted from travel narratives, creating an interactive historical sound map of the phenomena described in the sources. Through the structure of a relational database and the integration of multimedia materials, the web application enables comparative analyses across

different geographical and chronological contexts, while simultaneously providing a digital tool accessible to both scholars and the broader public. The platform is designed according to the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable), ensuring the accessibility, interoperability, and long-term usability of the data.

Overall, the project contributes to expanding the methodological and epistemological perspectives of musicological research by proposing an approach that integrates historical sources, interdisciplinary methodologies, and digital humanities tools. By analyzing travel narratives and highlighting the sonic testimonies contained within them, the study demonstrates how travel literature can serve as a valuable source for reconstructing historical soundscapes and for understanding intercultural interactions between Europe and Africa during the Early Modern period. The methodological model developed in this study may be applied to other geographical and cultural contexts, encouraging further investigations into the sonic, musical, and choreutic heritage of different traditions and promoting the appreciation and preservation of intangible cultural heritage on a global scale.