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KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF MEDICINAL AND ALIMURGICAL PLANTS



Interview with Francesco Veltri, a lover of nature. After graduating in natural sciences, he was a substitute teacher; in the Public Administration, trainer and employee at FORMEZ (Service, Assistance, Studies and Training Center); Officer at the Calabria Region with commands in ARSAC, mountain communities; finally, in charge of the FOREST DISTRICT, work carried out with great passion until retirement age.

- Dear Mr. Veltri, the treasure you propose is part of the knowledge and popular customs regarding practical medicine, i.e. the use of natural medicinal plants which, before the advent of chemistry and the pharmaceutical industry, were the basis of medical treatment. In this regard, could you explain what is meant by "medicinal" plants and "alimurgic" plants?

-The term "**officinale**" derives from an ancient cultural and historical tradition intended to remember the "workshops" of the apothecaries, also present in the ancient monasteries, today known as "pharmaceutical laboratories", where the plants were subjected to various processes (drying, trituration, maceration, distillation, extraction, etc.) in order to make them usable in their various purposes. Law No. 66 of 1931, however, further specified that "officinal" plants are all medicinal, aromatic and perfume plants whose derivatives can be used as supplements, cosmetics, drugs, veterinary products, etc. The term "**alimurgico**" (from "alimenta urgentia" "to seek nourishment in cases of food necessity") refers to edible plants that grow spontaneously in natural environments (countryside, hills, mountains, etc.). Alimurgic plants in the past, especially in times of famine and wars, ensured the food survival of the populations. Now they are harvested for pleasure, for taste and for health purposes, the most common are chicory, nettle, purslane, borage, mallow... etc.

-Was the discovery of the healing properties of plants, therefore, well known since ancient and remote times?

-The primitive man, from the very beginning, found in the plant the nourishing food, the garment, the shelter, the work tool, the source of heat, cosmetics, perfumes and also of course medicine. From a historical point of view it can be said that all medicine has its origins in the science of medicinal plants.

- Given that medicine has its origins in the science of medicinal plants, when did people begin to understand its health qualities?

-The first records on the use of plants for curative purposes are lost in the mists of time. The most ancient written documents belong to the Chinese civilization: famous is the herbarium of the father of Chinese medicine and inventor of acupuncture Shen-Nung, dating back to 2700 BC. which

contains the description of 2000 medicinal plants and 8000 herbal prescriptions. The foundations of our Western medical culture can be found in Egypt. In fact, the oldest manuscript on natural medicine is a papyrus (1550 BC) which contains about 876 herbal formulas based on more than 500 plants. Subsequently, herbal knowledge spread throughout the West, always deeply influenced by Egyptian and Mesopotamian knowledge. In Greece even the recipes of perfumes and medicines were engraved on marble slabs, near the temples, so that everyone could have access to them.

- In view of the evolution of pharmaceutical chemistry, which manages to synthesize and then build the molecules used later in the preparation of modern drugs in the laboratory, does it not seem out of the ordinary for you to continue talking about medicinal plants?

-Pharmaceutical chemistry has certainly made great strides in the mass production of the many molecules used in modern medicine, however, one important detail should not be overlooked, namely that the synthesis of these new molecules always starts from the active ingredients present in medicinal plants, therefore their importance remains unchanged.

-Your interest in the world of nature, more particularly in regard to medicinal plants, what does it derive from and what methods do you propose or adopt for the conservation of this treasure?

-I had the pleasure of graduating in Natural Sciences, for which the wonderful world of nature such as botany, zoology, geology and mineralogy was the subject of my study. The sector of medicinal plants, on the other hand, has always intrigued and passionate me, also thanks to the stories of my grandmother who was always ready with her herbs and natural medicines to solve any health problem such as cough, cold, stomach ache, back ache, etc., thanks to her strong knowledge of medicinal herbs and, mainly, to her precise familiarity with their use, preparation and storage. To safeguard this "treasure" we should make sure not to lose this wealth of knowledge, indeed we should enrich it through research in the memory of the elderly and compare ourselves with the other cultures of the Incult project, which certainly have similar knowledge.

-Mr. Veltri, how do you intend to conclude our chat?

-I have the honor to quote a phrase that I had the pleasure of finding in a book on medicinal plants dating back to 1922, the author of which was awarded a gold medal by the then Minister for Agriculture and Forests.

"Herbs not words all instill health"

THE LAUNEDDAS: A TYPICAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT-GAVINO MURGIA



Gavino Murgia, a multi-instrumentalist and composer from Nuoro, began studying music and alto saxophone at a very young age, playing with various musical groups and in theatrical performances. He has played with many of the the most important Italian and international ensembles. Currently he is interested in the sounds and sonorities of Sardinian music, and the typical instruments of his island, but in a modern musical context.

How do you describe launeddas to people who are unfamiliar with this musical instrument?

LAUNEDDAS are composed of three cylindrical rods obtained with river reeds tied with pitched string. The longest pipe, without holes, is called SU TUMBU, which acts as if it were a continuous bass.

The other two pipes, each equipped with four square holes with different positions and distances, depending on the instrument, are SA MANKOSA MANNA and SA MANKOSEDDA. The fifth hole, S'ARREFINU, emits a sort of other sound detached from the other holes and is free. Beeswax is spread on it in order to tune the instrument and perfect its intonation.

At the end of each of the three rods you can find SA CABITZINA, different in size and diameter, based on the type and tone.

How are sounds obtained?

SA MANKOSA MANNA is played with the left hand, and is linked to SU TUMBU. SA MANKOSEDDA is played with the right hand and is detached from the other two, but from the combination of the melodic pipes different CUNTZERTUS are obtained. Each Cuntzertus is distinguished from the other by the notes it can reach, thanks to the two reeds that create melody and harmony, SA MANKOSA and SA MANKOSEDDA (**examples of cuntzertus: SU PUNTU ORGANU, SU FIORASSIU, SA MEDIANA, SA MEDIANA A' PIPIA**), **notes that can be reached depending on the position of the hole and the distance from the next one.** Being built with natural elements, Launeddas are living objects: their intonation is affected by the temperature and is sensitive to the surrounding environment.

An indispensable condition for playing Launeddas is the use of the CIRCULAR BREATHING or CONTINUOUS BREATHING technique. The technique consists in the use, during the exhalation phase, of a reserve of air inside the cheeks, which is gradually expelled when the player inhales with his nose. In this way, an uninterrupted column of air is channeled into the instrument.

How old are the launeddas?

Launeddas are the oldest known polyphonic reed instruments. The existence of Launeddas has already been attested in the Nuragic times thanks to the discovery of the famous Italic bronze statuette dating back to the 6th / 7th century BC, found in Ittiri (SS) depicting a Launeddas player intent on playing his instrument. This instrument has always been linked to religious celebrations or to moments of secular feasts, that's why it carries out a strongly socializing function still nowadays.

What is certain is that there are strong affinities with tenor singing of which they use the same harmonic system; and since the voice was born before the instrument, it can be said that polyphony has existed in Sardinia for over 3000 years.

How important are launeddas today?

Today Launeddas remain vital in some parts of Campidano, Trexenta and Sarrabus, with schools and teachers who pass on their knowledge and oral skills to many young people.

The deepest study in the history of launeddas was carried out by the young Danish ethnomusicologist Andreas Bentzon, who toured Sardinia in the 1950s, systematically meeting and recording the most famous Launeddas players on the island.

How widespread are launeddas today?

Launeddas are still in constant evolution today, also thanks to the contamination and experimentation of young musicians.

The Carnival of Satriano di Lucania-Angiolina Palermo



Interview with Angiolina Palermo, a lady over eighty years old who, born in Satriano di Lucania, has lived this original Carnival intensely from her childhood to the present day, capturing the transformations that have taken place in this period of time.

-When did the origins of this Carnival date back to?

-The research and studies of several anthropologists suggest that this carnival originated in the period of the Norman domination of Satrianum and, perhaps, it was from the meeting of different cultures that the mythical figure of "**IL RUMITA**", the tree mask, was born.

-What are the typical masks of this Carnival still today?

"**IL RUMITA**" (the hermit) is a man totally covered with ivy, holding a stick, with a butcher's broom in his hand, used to knock on doors. The mask remains in absolute silence, standing on the doorstep that it never crossed, even if the mask is invited. This mask represents the nature knocking on the door and that must be respected in order to receive a reward in return. In fact, no one refuses to give the Hermit an offer, consisting in foodstuffs until a few years ago, and today in a few pennies, because his visit is considered a good omen.

"**L'URS**" (the bear) is a man entirely covered in goat or sheep skins, gathered at the waist by a chain from which a cowbell hangs, accompanied by a shepherd who, armed with a stick, leads him through the streets of the town. With noisy and funny skits, until a few years ago, these masks tried to sneak into houses to steal the sausages and pork salami hung from the ceiling to mature. When the robberies were not successful, they were offered, however, salami or cheeses which were divided among those who had taken part in the masquerade.

"**La QUARESMA**" (Lent) is an old woman dressed in long and wide skirts of black cloth, with overlapping aprons of different colours, with shawls with long earth-coloured fringes that cover her face on which a red, wide and crooked mouth is painted. She carries on her head the "naca" (the cradle), in which, symbolically, she carries away the now finished Carnival. She is accompanied during her outings by other Lents that mourn in chorus for the end of the Carnival.

-How was this typical Carnival celebrated when you were a child?

-When I was a child (in the 1950s) I remember that on the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday, children and adults wandered around the houses dressed as "**RUMITI, URS OR QUARESME**" in order to get some gifts, reciting nursery rhymes or telling legends that are part of the town's lived experience. Let's say that in my town the Carnival has always been a very popular festival!

-Have you ever participated in the Carnival celebrations?

-Sure, as a child I used to follow my brothers around the houses, maybe wearing their clothes to disguise me, hoping to receive some sweets. Really, **the "URS"** have always frightened me a little, because they are too noisy! Later in the years, already an adult, I happened to be part of the "Lenten" together with my friends of LUETEB, the university of the third age and we had a lot of fun. Too bad these last two years, due to the pandemic, the celebrations have been suspended!

-Can you tell us about "A ZITA" and the wedding and funeral procession?

- "**A ZITA**" is the staging of a peasant wedding with an exchange of roles: women representing men and vice versa. "**A ZITA**" (the bride) is accompanied by "**LU ZIT**" (the groom) followed by all the typical figures of a wedding ceremony: priest, altar boys and all the guests.

In the last century **the wedding procession** took place on Carnival Sunday and **the funeral procession** on Shrove Tuesday. At the end of the liturgical services on the last Sunday of Carnival, people stopped on the steps of the Mother Church to admire the masked procession which, after a collective representation in the square, walked the streets of the town, stopping in some houses where stories, tales, legends, typical of the country were represented. On the last evening of Carnival, on Shrove Tuesday, on the other hand, the streets of the town were crossed by the funeral procession, with male characters with carbon black faces and women characters of considerable size. Compared to the last century, the drama is now organized together with the walking forest.

-Have the meanings of the traditional masks of this Carnival changed over time?

-Yes, they have. The meaning of the mask of **the "URS"**, the bear, has changed. If it initially represented rich and noble people, after the war it was associated with emigrants who made their fortune and returned enriched. The **URS** are mute, they no longer speak the language of their town and are accompanied by a shepherd who keeps them at bay. On the other hand, after the great post-war emigration, **the "RUMITA"** was associated with the Satrianese who remained in town, poor but faithful to his land. Since 2014, a group of young people from Satriano has compared the figure of the "**RUMITA**" to that of the tree man and the walking forest made up of 131 tree men, symbolically one for each town in Basilicata, making the Carnival of Satriano a celebration of Nature. The desire to re-establish an ancient relationship with **Mother Earth** is the new message that we want to launch. This is now a green Carnival party with zero impact on the environment!

Interview with William Sersanti on the feast of “Our Lady of May”- (Madonna di Maggio) in S. Oreste (Rome) great lover of the history of his country.



Environmental Guide Hiker, Higher Technician for the Organization of Marketing and Integrated Tourism and with a curriculum studiorum linked to the Conservation of Forests and Nature, he loves ecotourism, walks in the woods, the familiar environment of small villages, customs typical, the aromas and flavors of genuine products. He also deals with ethno-folkloric research in the municipality of Sant’Oreste, his hometown, collaborating with exponents of the Interdisciplinary Group for the Study of Traditional Culture of Upper Lazio.

Could you make a brief presentation of S. Oreste, your village, and describe its relationship with the feast of “Our Lady of May”?

S. Oreste is located 40 km north of Rome on the ridge of Mount Soratte, known for its shape and its isolated position which rises in the middle of the plain of the Tiber river; therefore the town enjoys a unique position on the valley, characterized by a varied landscape with the background of the Sabine Mountains in the distance. I am William Sersanti, a great lover of the history of my village where I also work as an Environmental Hiking Guide. In 2020, the Municipal Administration and the Pro Loco gave me the symbolic title of "Ambassador of the Santorestese Culture" precisely because I have always wanted to make it known even outside the territory. Regarding my relationship with the feast of “Our Lady of May- Madonna di Maggio”, although I am not an active part of the committee (even though I participated in lighting the reeds just once), I live it intensely, with respect and admiration. And above all I try to talk about it on every useful occasion, in order to ensure that as many people as possible become aware of it.

Could you briefly say what the feast of Our Lady of May consists of?

Every year, on the last Sunday of May, since 1814, the feast of “Madonna di Maggio” has been celebrated as the most important and heartfelt anniversary in town. For the occasion, the historic centre is adorned with sumptuous flower decorations (the one on the main altar of the collegiate church of San Lorenzo Martire is not to be missed), triumphal arches and coloured balloons; in addition, there are many cultural initiatives that are a corollary to the event. The event ends in the evening with the transport of the historic "machine" by porters on their shoulders, with the unmissable votive torchlight procession on Mount Soratte and with a magnificent fireworks display. It is a unique ceremony of its kind, in which faith, folklore, a sense of belonging and tradition come together and coagulate indissolubly, creating an atmosphere of wonder.

Who is involved in the preparation and celebration of the feast?

A large part of the population is involved in the preparation of the feast and the various activities are coordinated by a committee of volunteers, made up of people of all ages.

How long does the preparation and celebration of this holiday take?

It begins in the winter months (January, February), when some men gather periodically to cut the reeds that in the spring months (March, April, May) will be left to dry, then gathered in special "bundles" and suitably positioned on the part of Mount Soratte facing Saint Oreste, in order to be set on fire on the evening of the celebration of the feast. Other men, over the last month, carry on what is locally called "a cerca da Madonna", a sort of itinerant begging, which goes around the districts of the historic centre, with the aim of raising funds. And speaking of fundraising, women are no less important: they cook sweets and various delicacies, which are sold on the Sundays preceding the important anniversary.

What does this participation and the feast itself leave you inside?

Participation and the feast itself leave a great sense of belonging, as well as pride and emotion. It is an occasion in which many people from Sant'Oreste who, for various reasons are forced to live elsewhere during the year, return to their town specifically to breathe the air of the celebration, that air that invigorates and tones the cultural roots of every citizen from Soratte. Without a shadow of a doubt, this anniversary represents the identity symbol par excellence of Sant'Oreste.

How do you keep this tradition alive?

The only way to keep this tradition alive is to let the youngest people live and get to know it (in the broadest sense of the term), so that they can appreciate its intrinsic values and understand its importance, its essence. And in this, I must say that the members of the committee are very good, as older people often try to involve their children and grandchildren, by passing the tradition down from generation to generation.

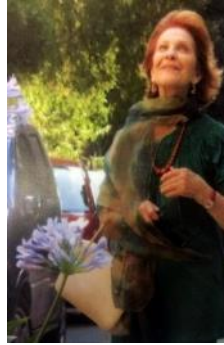
Could you suggest a way to make this feast better known?

With regard to giving greater visibility to the feast, nowadays it is certainly an achievable result: I would focus a lot on telematic promotion, which allows you to get anywhere.

The Fair of Oh Bej! Oh Bej! - An iconic Milanese festive event

Interview with Augusta Micheli of Cardinal Colombo University, Milan

By Farnaz T. shams



G. Augusta Marianecchi Micheli known as "La Grande Mamma", awarded the 'Ambrogino d'Oro Medal' for having contributed to spreading the commitment of volunteers at all levels, kindly shared with us the re-enactment of one of the oldest Milanese traditions the "Oh Bej! Oh Bej! "

-In your own words, could you tell us why the fair is called “Oh Bej! Oh Bej!”?

"Oh Bej! Oh Bej!" is a Lombard expression that translates into Italian "Oh belli!" (How beautiful things!) And derives from the joyful exclamations of the Milanese children who gladly accepted the gifts of the papal envoy.

-What are the specific characteristics of the fair that are passed down from generation to generation?

The fair opens on 7 December, the day of the feast of Sant'Ambrogio (patron saint of Milan), which is considered the most important religious festival in the city.

The fact that it is held in December makes you feel already the Christmas spirit and the magical atmosphere of giving gifts. Moreover, an active participation in charity programs, embodies a characteristic imprinted in the mind and heart of the Milanese (people from Milan), that is passed down from generation to generation.

Seeing the joy on the faces of children with their mouths coloured by cotton candy, wearing chestnut necklaces, firòn, smoked chestnuts in the oven, dipped in white wine and strung in long strings, an original way of preparing roasted chestnuts, are sweet memories that always make me smile.

-What is the relationship between the "OH BEJ!" and the pawnshop?

People in need borrow cash and exchange it for valuables. In most cases, if money is not returned within a certain period, these items are sold at the “Oh Bej! Oh Bej”, but, if someone recognizes the

object, he buys it and gives it to the owner as a Christmas present. Helping the needy has always been a peculiarity of this community.

-Do you think that the most significant historical events (the Second World War) have had some influence on a traditional festival such as that of "Oh Bej! Oh Bej! " ?

After the Second World War we have witnessed cultural colonialism, globalization!

I remember that the signs that said "COFFEE" were replaced with those that said "BAR"! People began to stop telling stories, tradition began to seem like something out of date!

And this sad story continues!

-How important is awareness of endangered cultural traditions?

Cultural traditions are essential to protect and maintain one's identity. Traditions offer an irrefutable link with the past and allow us to deepen our sense of unity, belonging and national pride. Tradition is important in any culture or civilization. Despite the attempts of Modern and Postmodern society to uproot it from its past, today more than ever, people show a strong desire to recover their traditional values. In an era of change, continuity is something that people feel the need and desire for. Preserving and passing on Italian traditions must be our ongoing commitment. I hope that we will be able to fulfill this mission by involving volunteers from different generations.

