

Shanty Singing in the Mediterranean

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Preface

This article explores the under-examined tradition of shanty singing in the Mediterranean, situating the work within broader discussion of work song, cultural exchange, and maritime history. While much scholarly attention has been given to Anglo-American shantying, the role of the Mediterranean within complex musical maritime networks of the nineteenth century remains largely overlooked. By discussing cultural production and musical exchange through analysis of intercontinental maritime networks, changing shipboard technologies, and broader imperial and commercial activities in the Mediterranean, this paper argues that absence of documentation does not equate a lack of tradition, but rather reflects historical biases in maritime music collection and study. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of global maritime music traditions, while concurrently underscoring the need for further exploration into the Mediterranean's unique yet hitherto unexplored shantying heritage.

Introduction

The maritime world has long been a site of cultural exchange, with music playing a central role in the lives of seafarers. Amongst the various forms of maritime music, the shanty occupies a unique genre that is inherently bound in its work function aboard merchant sailing ships. In this sense shanties are often considered a tool for work and an intrinsic part of maritime labour, not simply a song sung as entertainment: 'The Sea Chanties are songs of labour; the crude symbols of much heavy toil; oft times terrible experience and physical suffering; of heroic battling with the wild, untamed forces of Nature – that we might have our daily bread'.¹ While most of the existing literature on shantying has explored the transatlantic tradition, with a heavy emphasis on shantying aboard Anglo-American ships, the Mediterranean remains a largely underexplored region in this discourse. In this paper, I attempt to highlight the presence, development and significance of shantying within the Mediterranean, challenging dominant narratives that not only prioritise but almost exclusively focus on the Atlantic world.

The following paper explores early examples of shanty-like practices found in literature from antiquity to the sixteenth century, demonstrating the deep-roots of the shanty tradition within the Mediterranean, as well as investigating the role of port cities in the wider nexus of cultural exchange, and the ways in which linguistic and musical traditions of the Mediterranean have shaped shanty repertoire. Additionally, this article interrogates geopolitical and economic factors that influenced Mediterranean shantying, including the British Empire's maritime dominance in the region, trade networks connecting Europe, North Africa and the Levant, and the role of Mediterranean sailortowns in fostering musical

¹ Bullen & Arnold, *Songs of Sea Labour*, p. xi.

exchange. The presence of British and other European merchant fleets in the Mediterranean raises important questions about the cross-pollination of shantying and the extent to which Mediterranean maritime music was influenced by – or, conversely, influenced – the more widely studied transatlantic repertoires. The final section of this study addresses the lack of evidence of shantying in the Mediterranean. While direct references to shanties in the region are sparse, other forms of maritime work song, such as fishermen’s songs, provide insights into how work songs functioned aboard Mediterranean vessels. This article challenges existing historiographies that have marginalised the Mediterranean in discussions of shantying and its repertoire. By examining the historical, cultural, and economic contexts of Mediterranean maritime music, it seeks to provide a fuller picture of how work songs functioned in one of the world’s most historically significant maritime regions. Through this exploration, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the sea as a space of musical exchange, where diverse traditions converged and evolved in response to the rhythms of labour and the demands of life at sea.

Early shantying in the Mediterranean

In its simplest form, a shanty can be referred to as a maritime work song, often – though not always – a call and response between a soloist, the shantyman, and the chorus of sailors. Broadly speaking, the shanty falls into two types according to the function of the work: heaving and hauling. While the height of the shanty is typically given as lasting from 1820 to 1880, or, more accurately, 1840 to 1880, the origin of the shanty has antecedents in various maritime cultures, including those of the Mediterranean.

Discussing the history of shanties in the 1960s, Stan Hugill gives the earliest example of maritime work song as the chants of Nile river-workers in Egypt, which predate Christianity.² One of the first references to a specifically shanty-like work song practice, however, can be found in the Ancient Greek novel, *Daphnis and Chloe*, written in the second century AD.³ In the story, Daphnis and Chloe are sat watching a ship get under way and observe the call and response between the boatswain and the sailors:

[...] they saw a fisherman’s boat come by... That therefore which other mariners use to elude the tediousness of labour, these began, and held on as they rowed along. There was one amongst them that was the boatswain, and he had certain sea-songs. The rest, like a chorus all together, strained their throats to a loud holla, and caught his voice at certain intervals.⁴

This passage refers to a sail-rigged fishing vessel, as opposed to the deep-water ships commonly associated with shantying. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement that ‘other mariners’ use this same call-and-response in song to alleviate boredom while at work could indicate that this was not solely a rowing practice, but was a feature of maritime labour more widely. Hugill highlights the description of the sailors’ voice being ‘caught ... at certain intervals’, later described as the ‘whooping’ of the sailors. A musical characteristic particular

² VWML, CD 89/*Fred Hamer, Stan Hugill*.

³ Broadwood, ‘Early Chanty-Singing and Ship-Music’, pp. 55–60.

⁴ Longus, *Daphnis & Chloe*, p. 159.

of shanties is the sailors' hitch – a notational ornament that Hugill elsewhere describes as 'a cockerel with a sore throat' or a deliberate break in the voice.⁵ The technique required to produce this sound is dependent on volume, hence the reference to the sailors '[straining] their throats to a loud holla'. The art of the hitch is intrinsically linked to the shantying tradition, which Hugill suggests provides a clear connection between the description of how rowing song is used in *Daphnis and Chloe*, and shantying practices.

Another Grecian reference to a form of work song that has similarities to shantying can be found in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, dating from the third century BC. Orpheus, the famous minstrel of Greek mythology, takes the role of *keleustes* aboard the *Argo*, using the power of song to spur on the maritime labour of the ship's crew.

[...] they to the sound of Orpheus' lyre smote with their oars the rushing sea-water... they set up the tall mast in the mast-box... and from it they let down the sail when they had hauled it to the top-mast... And for them the son of Oeagrus touched his lyre and sang in rhythmical song.⁶

In this passage, we see two examples of maritime labour set to music: the first a rowing song, the second a possible allusion to an embryonic form of halyard shanty, where the 'rhythmical song' that Orpheus sings orchestrates the raising of the sail by the sailors. Andromache Karanika suggests that 'Orpheus' role as a *keleustes* in this passage is the idealized form of a tradition that seeks to invigorate manual labor through musical performance'.⁷ What is interesting from a historical maritime perspective is that here we have an example of sailing song – not solely a rowing song – with musical characteristics typical of work song sung at the ropes aboard a ship. While we may not be able to label these songs 'shanties' in the sense of the nineteenth-century tradition, this nevertheless highlights the long-standing relationship between specialised maritime labour and song.

Though the latter two examples are relatively little-known, a commonly cited example of early shantying that has an undeniable connection to the Mediterranean is found in Brother Felix Fabri's account of his pilgrimage to Palestine aboard a Venetian galley via Greece, Croatia and Cyprus in 1484. Fabri provides detailed descriptions of sailor customs, discussing those 'who are called mariners, who sing when work is going on, because work at sea is very heavy, and is only carried on by a concert between one who sings out orders and the labourers who sing in response'.⁸ From a slightly later date, a comparatively obscure, though equally appropriate, example of early shantying with a connection to the Mediterranean is recorded by Samuel Morison:

For any operation like winding in the anchor cable or hoisting a yard, the seamen had an appropriate *saloma* or chantey... The chanteyman sung or shouted the first half of each line, the men hauled away on the 'o' and joined in on the second half, while they got a new hold on the halyard: —

⁵ Hugill, 'The Shantyman in Square-Rig'.

⁶ Apollonius Rhodius, *The Argonautica*, pp. 41–3.

⁷ Karanika, 'Inside Orpheus' Songs', p. 409.

⁸ Fabri, *The Book of the Wanderings of Brother Felix Fabri*, pp. 135–6.

*Bu izá
O dio – ayuta noy
O que somo – servi soy
O voleamo – ben servir
O la fede – mantener
O la fede – de cristiano
O malmeta – lo pagano [...]*⁹

In terms of the style and content of this ‘chantey’, which was recorded by a Spanish official in 1573, it is remarkably similar to the shanties that we find recorded in the *Complaynt of Scotland* (1549) (itself making use of the Spanish word, *vira*, meaning to heave or hoist). A common call-and-response is described in the practice surrounding the shipboard work song and a similar sentiment is expressed in the lyrics, the sailors availing themselves of the divine in ensuring a successful voyage. The style, practice and function of the songs point to a certain degree of universality that warrants discussion of a defined sixteenth-century shantying tradition.

While early references to shantying more closely resemble sing-outs, a precursor to the shanty where lines were chanted in a call-and-response when quick, choreographed effort was needed, the fact remains that the earliest forms of shantying are found equally amongst ships of Mediterranean origin and in Mediterranean waters, as they are aboard the more commonly associated British ships.

A veritable bell-curve of shantying: from the mid-sixteenth century to the rise of steam

Theories surrounding the lack of evidence of shantying in literature from the mid-sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century are manifold, and it is certainly true that references to shantying during this time are difficult to find. It is highly doubtful, however, that sailors were *not* shantying – early nineteenth-century references discuss shantying as a familiar practice – it is simply the case that if sailors were singing shanties, they were not being recorded and were not considered noteworthy enough to be remarked on. Nevertheless, it is prudent to discuss some of the more plausible theories that may have a bearing on our understanding of shantying practices in the Mediterranean.

Of particular relevance to the eighteenth century were the numerous military engagements across Europe, which had significant implications for the men of the merchant service. The need for experienced seamen in the Navy meant that merchantmen were often enticed to sign on in times of war – whether through the career prospects and promise of reward in the Navy, or by a sense of patriotism. Of course, merchant seamen was also pressed into the Navy, as men with sailing experience were highly sought after aboard Naval ships, which required large crews. As Dancy states in *The Myth of the Press Gang*, ‘the size and ability of Europe’s navies was determined as much by manpower as it was by the number of ships they had available, for without men to sail the great ships of war, they posed little threat to an enemy at sea’.¹⁰ The demand for sailors in the Navy and struggle to employ sufficient

⁹ Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, pp. 175–6.

¹⁰ Dancy, *The Myth of the Press Gang*, p. 10.

numbers of able seamen resulted in an imbalance of manpower between the Navy and the merchant service. In short, there were not enough sailors to man both the warships and the merchant ships of a country. It is worth noting, too, that merchant ships, alongside merchant seamen, were also pressed into service and used as military vessels.

Hugill writes that impressments of merchant seamen into the Navy, '[left] the merchant fleet to be manned by foreigners to whom shantying was, as far as we know, unknown'.¹¹ While I disagree with the notion that shantying was 'unknown' to men who came from similar seafaring cultures, crews in the eighteenth century were indeed comprised of men from a variety of nationalities. Eleanor Hubbard gives the example of merchant sailors working in the Mediterranean, stating, 'Englishmen worked alongside with Greeks, Dutchmen, Frenchmen, and North Africans'.¹² There are in existence shanty collections published in Swedish, Norwegian, German and French, as well as examples of, for instance, Hindustani, Dutch, Chinese, Javanese, and Samoan shanties. It is perfectly evident, therefore, that non-Anglophone countries did have shantying practices. We might therefore propose that rather than a lack of shantying aboard British ships manned by European sailors, these sailors instead practiced their own shantying traditions. As the earliest collectors of shanties were Anglo-American, there is a chance that these European shanties were lost when steam took over from sail, owing to the lack of European collectors preserving these songs. Additionally, Hugill posits that it is entirely possible that collectors during this time did not consider shanties to be worthy of preserving. As Hugill puts it, 'Who wants to sing those things? They're nasty old songs that the sailors sing...'¹³

Another reason Hugill gives for a lack of shantying is the influence of the Navy on merchant ships. The Navy was a silent service; that is, shantying was generally not permitted, save for a few exceptional circumstances. Orders were carried out to the sound of the bosun's whistle, different sounds conveying different commands, rather than the sound of song. Hugill writes,

[...] ships and men of the Merchant Marine were overshadowed by those of the 'King's Navee'. The merchantmen of the time were... perhaps more disciplined than in earlier and later years... they emulated Big Brother in no small degree.¹⁴

As a result, merchantmen were armed in case of attack and the larger East India Company ships were run with almost military discipline, which may also have extended to the practice of silent service. Hugill continues, 'even the smallest ship was over-manned compared to a sailing ship of a hundred years later'.¹⁵ Famously, the shanty's prevalence aboard merchant ships in the nineteenth century was instigated by a need for increased efficiency at work, motivated in no small part by desire for profit that saw large cargo ships manned by small crews. For ships with larger crews, the shanty was not as essential as a tool for work as they were in the merchant service of the nineteenth century. This goes some way

¹¹ Hugill, *Songs of the Sea*, pp. 10–11.

¹² Hubbard, 'Sailors and the Early Modern British Empire', p. 353.

¹³ Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, unknown.

¹⁴ Hugill, *Shanties and Sailors' Songs*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Hugill, *Shanties and Sailors' Songs*, p. 9.

to explaining the difficulty in recording shanties during this apparent fallow period in the shanty's history. If the shanty was not needed, it was not sung, and was therefore less likely to be passed down to new generations of seafarers.

It was not until the early nineteenth century that commentators began to recognise the shanty as a distinct form of music that was worthy of preservation and study, though this was often related to nationalistic documentation of maritime culture. The height of the shanty has been discussed in great detail by authorities such as captains Hayet (1934), Sternvall (1935) and Whall (1910), and by sailor-authors such as Hugill (1961) and Bullen (1914). As early as 1887, however, commentators lamented the decline of the tradition and the importance of preserving what was seen as a rapidly vanishing part of maritime culture.¹⁶ While sailing ship sailors of the old-guard inevitably turned to steam as work in sail became scarcer, a clear distinction was drawn between the steamship-man and the sailing ship-sailor. The lives of the steamship-men differed vastly from sailors aboard the old merchant sailing ships and there was no need for shanties in this world of mechanised labour.

British imperialism and international trade in the Mediterranean

This paper has demonstrated that at one time the Mediterranean was home to the embryonic forms of shantying that would later develop into the halyard and capstan shanties of the nineteenth-century merchantman, which begs the questions: did shantying actually take place in the Mediterranean during the nineteenth century, and, if so, why is shantying in the Mediterranean so infrequently referred to in documentation of the tradition from this time? The key to unlocking the answers to these questions lies in an awareness of imperial relations, international trade, and port cities during the nineteenth century.

When we look at the Mediterranean as a possible venue for shantying, it is apparent that we cannot hope to present a full picture of merchant trade without also fostering an understanding of imperialism in the Mediterranean. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, trade was frequently raised as a matter not only for merchantmen, but as a military consideration.¹⁷ Control and dominancy within the Mediterranean were seen to afford Britain a significant advantage over her enemies (and, to an equal extent, her allies), as well as command of key maritime trade routes that were instrumental to intercontinental trade. The peace settlements in 1815 following the Napoleonic Wars served to cement British power in the Mediterranean, allowing Britain to establish vital strongholds around Southern Europe, meanwhile allocating key regions to allies who would not pose a maritime threat should allegiances change (notably, the Habsburg Empire).¹⁸ In his chapter on 'The British Lake' that resulted from Britain's control over the pathways leading to the Mediterranean, historian Robert Holland writes, 'Britain had the unique advantage in 1815 of being a military and naval power, as well as being the paymaster of the winning coalition'.¹⁹

As the influence over military affairs within the Mediterranean shifted to British powers, so too did merchant interests and centres of commerce. Britain's imperial and

¹⁶ Manchester Literary Club, *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club*, p. 432.

¹⁷ Hardman, *A History of Malta*, p. 526.

¹⁸ Wirtschafter, 'Pacification and Peace (1815-17)', pp. 20–51.

¹⁹ Holland, *Blue-Water Empire*, pp. 28–9.

diplomatic ties to the Mediterranean, alongside political reform at home (notably, the repeal of the Corn Laws), increased the security of its trade connections and saw Britain establish itself as a significant commercial fixture. Mediterranean merchants were equally keen to capitalise on these trade connections with Britain. International traders from the Levant established successful merchant houses in England, opening up new markets in the Mediterranean for British consumers. These Mediterranean merchants operating in Britain, largely Greek, had the advantage over their British competitors and oversaw much of the British trade with port cities in the eastern Mediterranean. In the interests of shantying, the fact that Mediterranean merchants established merchant houses in Britain meant that crews from both Mediterranean and British ports manned their ships. Inevitably, there would have been a large percentage of British sailors aboard ships going to and from the Mediterranean. There is uncontested evidence that British sailors had a long-lasting tradition of shantying aboard merchant ships. It is no great stretch, therefore, to draw the logical conclusion that sailors recruited by merchant houses in Britain brought this tradition with them when manning brigs, barques and brigantines involved in the Mediterranean trade.

Other nations with similar perennial practices of shantying also gathered in the port cities and sailortowns of the Mediterranean. For Swedish and American ships, the Mediterranean salt trade was an important part of their industry; in Sweden in particular, salt was imported from the Mediterranean and used in the process of salting fish for their own commercial export.²⁰ Sweden also had the advantage of representing a neutral party at the time of the wars between the North African Barbary States, Britain and France, lending it a quiet status as a leading exporter of goods out of the Mediterranean in the years before British dominancy.²¹ Swedish ships travelled from Stockholm to London with their exports, then to the Mediterranean ports to pick up wine and salt.²² Exploiting a similar neutrality to the Swedish, the American merchants also began to take more of a serious interest in Mediterranean commercial affairs around this time, becoming a fixture of Mediterranean trade by the nineteenth century.²³ The Mediterranean was a major importer of American goods – including fish, grain and tobacco – as well as a prolific exporter of goods to the Americas.²⁴ Frangakis-Syrett adds that during the Napoleonic Wars, American ships brought Caribbean products to Izmir, stabilising a profitable trade with Ottoman-Mediterranean ports that continued well into the nineteenth century.²⁵

British, Swedish, French and American ships were conspicuous within Mediterranean trade structures from at least the eighteenth century, which has notable import on our understanding of the relationship between the Mediterranean and shantying traditions. We know that shantying was practiced aboard Scandinavian ships travelling from Sweden to British ports, as seen in Bosscher et al.'s discussion of the typical route of Swedish sailing ships travelling from Sweden to England to the Mediterranean, as well as references to this voyage in Sternvall's collection of shanties (1935). There is tangible evidence that shantying

²⁰ Amorim, 'Salt trade in Europe', pp. 244–53.

²¹ Müller, 'Swedish Trade and Shipping', p. 469.

²² Bosscher et al., *The Heyday of Sail*, p. 69.

²³ Marzagalli et al., 'An Introduction', p. 3.

²⁴ McCusker, 'Importance of the Trade between British America and the Mediterranean', pp. 8–9.

²⁵ Frangakis-Syrett, 'Concluding Remarks', p. 224.

took place on the first part of the route, so why would this not also be the case for outward-bound journeys from England to the Mediterranean? Likewise, in an analysis of the lyrical content of shanty collections, the Caribbean is frequently mentioned.²⁶ While there may be an argument to say that Swedish ships travelling to London on the Mediterranean route might not have been the same ships that travelled on transatlantic deep-water routes, there is no denying that shanties were definitely sung in the Caribbean trade. There is no convincing reason why sailors aboard the same ships that travelled to the Caribbean would then cease shantying as soon as they crossed the Atlantic into Mediterranean waters. To conclude, there must have been shantying aboard these ships.

Sailortowns and the port city diaspora: a melting-pot of cultures

A theme of this paper that we keep returning to is the idea of cosmopolitanism. By its very nature, the port city was a locus for people from all over the world. Both Hugill and Cicely Fox Smith, an authority on the sailing ship era, agree that the area around the docks, or the sailortown, was an amphibious space (a ‘collision of the maritime and the urban’) with distinctive, yet shared characteristics the whole world over.²⁷ The sailortown was ‘of no country – or rather it is of all countries’.²⁸ As a general rule of thumb, sailors did not stray far from the sailortown area of a port city, as ‘it was better to stay in the waterfront area where ‘English was spoken’ than to go ‘rovin’ up town where it weren’t’, English representing the *lingua franca* of seafarers during the nineteenth century.²⁹ Crucially, as Graeme Milne discusses, the development of the sailortown model is intrinsically connected to the age of sail and ‘especially with the expansion of the world’s trading systems to a global reach’.³⁰ This is of particular relevance when we come to consider the effect of steam on the merchant service from the mid-nineteenth century.

Henk Driessen writes, ‘Until recently, Mediterranean port cities shared a number of family resemblances... Among them a striking ethnic plurality stands out. This characteristic is an outcome of structural mobility in the Mediterranean and predicated on the intricate network of shipping lanes, cabotage and land routes’.³¹ Notable sailortowns in this vein that were familiar to merchants in the Mediterranean trades included Marseilles, Livorno (Leghorn), Genoa and Trieste. Marseilles, especially, is often identified as an important port city in discussion of networks of commerce, diplomacy and trade expansion during the nineteenth century. Referring to the French-Levant trade, David Celetti notes, ‘People met and interacted with each other: traders, diplomats, ship captains, sailors, men, and women crossed national, religious, and administrative barriers, forming a wide network of social, and economic interactions’.³² This, according to Celetti, secured the mercantile ties between France and the Levant during the nineteenth century. Perl-Rosenthal’s work into the ‘entanglements’ between French and American sailors also provides tangible evidence of the

²⁶ Appendix 1.

²⁷ Milne, *People, Place and Power*, p. 1.

²⁸ Smith, *Sailor Town Days*, p. 5.

²⁹ Hugill, *Sailortown*, pp. xx–xxi.

³⁰ Milne, *People, Place and Power*, pp. 1–2.

³¹ Driessen, ‘Mediterranean port cities’, p. 132.

³² Celetti, ‘France in the Levant’, p. 389.

complex socio-cultural exchange between seafarers in the Mediterranean from the perspective of those below deck.³³ Contrary to the view of the ‘insular’ shellback, Perl-Rosenthal instead suggests that Anglo-American and French seamen ‘had culturally substantive contacts in the Mediterranean... [that] went beyond simply serving on the same vessels or visiting the same ports’.³⁴ Perl-Rosenthal’s work demonstrates that sailors in port cities in the Mediterranean did not simply co-exist with one another in the transient space of the sailortown, but rather became familiar with each others’ languages, customs and traditions, fostering amity between disparate national groups. The result of this, Perl-Rosenthal concludes, was a ‘polyglot and transnational maritime world at odds with the single empire, monolingual approaches that still dominate studies of seamen’.³⁵ Here, we can supplement Perl-Rosenthal’s conclusions with a number of shanties that were shared between French and Anglo-American sailors, primarily ‘Boney’/‘Jean Francois de Nantes’, ‘Cheerily Man’/‘O Celimène’, and ‘Goodbye, Fare-yewell’/‘Hardi les gars vire au guindeau’.

Genoa and Livorno, or Leghorn as it was known by Anglo-American sailors, were other noteworthy ports of call in the nineteenth century. Although Anglo-Italian shanties cannot be found in any of the collections consulted for this paper, we can turn to another artistic medium for evidence of cultural exchange in the form of paintings dating from this time. Hugill writes, ‘One thing we do know for certain is that nearly every one of these ‘Med’ ports produced a ship-artist. Their work, some good, some bad, is to be found wherever any collection of sailing-ship paintings exists, in sailors’ homes, maritime museums, and the like throughout the world’.³⁶ In the first published collection of American shanties, *Roll and Go: Songs of American Sailormen* (1924), for example, Joanna Colcord refers to a watercolour of a ship by Peter Mazzinghi of Leghorn, bought by an American sailor in the Mediterranean trade and brought back to his home country.³⁷ The prevalence of these souvenirs in collections of maritime art demonstrates the influence of merchant trade with countries such as America on cultural production in Mediterranean port cities, as well as the importance of this trade to local economies. While I can provide no musical examples to draw on in the form of shanties, Livorno’s position as a leading centre of international commerce during the nineteenth century saw sailors from all over the world gather within its bounds. Naturally, this included sailors who came from countries with shantying traditions, principally the American merchant ships but also French, Swedish, Norwegian, German and British ships. In the Italian context, we also have a number of references to the mixed-nationality crews manning Mediterranean ships travelling on the Caribbean/American trade routes; for instance, a voyage from Pensacola, Florida, to Genoa on the Italian ship, the *Sant’ Antonio*, is recorded by an Italian sailor, Captain Pastore, who describes his shipmates as Germans, Norwegians, and West-Indians/African-Americans.³⁸ While there is a comparative lack of literature about the German and Norwegian commercial presence in the Mediterranean, it is worth pointing out that both of these nations had strong shantying traditions and produced their own collections

³³ Perl-Rosenthal, ‘Notes towards a Franco-American Mediterranean’, pp. 63–76.

³⁴ Perl-Rosenthal, ‘Notes towards a Franco-American Mediterranean’, p. 64.

³⁵ Perl-Rosenthal, ‘Notes towards a Franco-American Mediterranean’, p. 64.

³⁶ Hugill, *Sailortown*, p. 154.

³⁷ Colcord, *Roll and Go*, p. 16.

³⁸ Hugill, *Sailortown*, p. 183.

of shanties. Captain Pastore's description provides us with evidence that Mediterranean ships' crews were just as varied as British and American ships were known to be. It is likely, therefore, that these sailors brought their national traditions with them to the Mediterranean, including the practice of shantying. In other words, we can confidently suggest that not only were shanties sung in Mediterranean waters aboard ships coming from the shantying nations of America, Britain, Sweden, and so on, but that shanties were also sung aboard Mediterranean ships. This may not necessarily have been by Mediterranean sailors at first, however song spreads quickly in a confined setting and it is extremely likely that the Mediterranean sailors then became part of this song tradition.

The Mediterranean in shanties and shantying practices of the Mediterranean

One of the key ways in which trade routes and port cities instrumental to the development of shantying can be identified is by looking at the lyrics of the songs, and documenting both the frequency of references to a specific place and references to the general countries and regions that are most commonly sung about. Generally, if places in the Mediterranean are referred to in the context of a maritime voyage, these take the form of broad references to countries rather than specific port cities. For example, in the obscene version of the French song, 'Le Père Lancelot', the sailors bid *au revoir* to the English, the Portuguese, the Norwegians and the Italians.³⁹ Occasionally we find references to events that take place incontrovertibly in the Mediterranean, such as in the Swedish shanty, 'It Happened in Gothenburg', 'Det hände sig I Spanska sjön, vi skulle reva focken'/'It happened then in the Spanish Seas, that we should reef the fores'l'.⁴⁰ Another Swedish shanty, 'There was a ship in the city of Gibraltar' simultaneously tells the story of Swedish ships being attacked by privateers, and tells us the trade route that the ship was taking from Gibraltar to the East Indies.⁴¹ British encounters with enemy forces set in the Mediterranean are referred to in the lyrics of a handful of shanties, and the popular shanty 'Boney', which may well have its origin in the late-eighteenth century, refers to the Napoleonic Wars, with Elba and Corsica identified as two places of historic import in the lyrics of the song.⁴² The seafaring exploits of other nations are also captured in shanties, such as 'De Sülwern Flott'.⁴³

Discussing musical influences more generally, Terry suggests that a distinct Mediterranean influence can be heard through echoes of Venetian gondolier song in shanties, naming 'My Johnny' as a notable example of this.⁴⁴ Sailors could – and would – transform any song that passed their way into a shanty, so it is not such an illogical leap to suggest that they might have picked up the catchy songs of the Venetian gondolier on their travels. Of course, not knowing the meaning of the Italian, the sailors then set their own lyrics of a distinctly nautical flavour to the crowd-pleasing and familiar melodies. Tegtmeier records two further songs of Italian origin that made their way onto German ships: 'Santa Lucia', a Neapolitan folk song recorded with German lyrics, and the Venetian fishing song, 'O,

³⁹ Bihor, *Chansons de la Voile*, pp. 68–9.

⁴⁰ Sternvall, *Sång under Segel*, p. 174.

⁴¹ Sternvall, *Sång under Segel*, p. 201.

⁴² Terry, *The Shanty Book: Part One*, p. 54.

⁴³ Tegtmeier, *Alte Seemannslieder und Shanties*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Terry, *The Shanty Book: Part One*, p. viii.

Pescator Dell'onde'.⁴⁵ Another potential source of songs in the Mediterranean that is alluded to by Hugill is the Italian opera house. Hugill states, 'Sailors used to go ashore, they weren't exactly interested in opera, but a good shantyman would go along and say, 'Now, I wonder if I can find some new tunes''.⁴⁶ Given the documented mobility of operatic arias from the opera house to popular song in the form of street organs and broadsheets, I am not convinced by Hugill's claim that songs from operas that were used as shanties, such as 'The Anvil Chorus' from *Il Trovatore* and 'The Huntsman's Chorus' from *Der Freischütz*, came directly from the sailors attending performances of operas during their time ashore. Instead, it is more likely that the transition from operatic song to shanty came from it first having been popularised by street performers, which is where the sailors then encountered the song for the first time. Nevertheless, it is worth noting in print, as this is an aspect of the shanty's history that has not been dwelt on in recent scholarship.

Of course, it was not just merchant sailors who worked out of the docklands of the Mediterranean port cities. Merchant sailors would work alongside representatives of several other maritime occupations, all of whom had their own established musical traditions and repertoires. The songs of the Mediterranean fishermen, in particular, appear to have been attractive to the merchant seaman's ear, as they appear in song collections of nineteenth-century merchantmen. 'O, Pescator Dell'onde' we have already discussed as having been fancied by German sailors, however we can also attribute the popular Anglophone shanty, 'Reuben Ranzo', to a Mediterranean fishing song. Over the course of his career, Hugill asserted many times that 'Reuben Ranzo' was 'definitely the Sicilian fisherman's song *Sciacamunnista Lampa*' or 'Brindisi di Marinai'.⁴⁷ In its original form, Sicilian fishermen sang this song as they hauled in tuna nets; it was later used in a similar function as a hauling shanty aboard merchant ships. Hugill further asserts that Mediterranean sources could account for the origins of a number of shanties sung aboard merchant ships, suggesting that it is 'quite possible that research among the work-songs used by the fishermen of the Mediterranean may produce a few origins of 'no mammy, no daddy' shanties!'.⁴⁸ In other words, it would be no great surprise if we were to find other shanties, like 'Reuben Ranzo', that started life amongst the fishermen of Mediterranean ports.

Ordinarily one might not consider fishing songs to fall within the remit of shanty research. There is a key exception to this rule, however, when we consider a very particular Mediterranean fishing tradition that could be described as shantying. On *Music and Song of Italy* (1958), Carpitella and Lomax record 'two sea chanties from the Sicilian tuna fleet, recorded at sea as twenty half-naked fishermen walked around the capstan and raised a tremendous undersea net. The words of these songs are usually very bawdy and the pitch of the seamen, singing for their own amusement, is notably lower than that adopted by male singers when they sing serenades'.⁴⁹ This practice aligns with what we know of capstan shanties aboard merchant sailing ships in the nineteenth century. Capstan shanties are often

⁴⁵ Tegtmeier, *Alte Seemannslieder und Shanties*, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁶ Hugill, 'The Shantyman in Square-Rig'.

⁴⁷ Hugill, *The Bosun's Locker*, p. 48.

⁴⁸ Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, p. 247.

⁴⁹ Lomax, 'Sleeve Notes', [sleeve notes].

characterised by humour (often bawdy) and were stylistically different from a song performance in the traditional sense, owing to their being sung as part of work, rather than as a display of musical prowess. To this end, shanties tend to be easy to sing and limited in melodic range, which is part of the reason why they are still so accessible today. While the Sicilian tuna fishermen may not have strictly speaking *needed* to sing as a tool for work (Lomax emphasises entertainment value rather than labour), there are still substantial grounds for describing this as an example of shantying in the Mediterranean.

Explaining the lack of evidence of shantying in the Mediterranean

So far, this paper has laid out evidence of shantying in the Mediterranean by demonstrating the frequent interactions between sailors from shantying traditions in the sailortowns of the Mediterranean, as well as lyrical references to the Mediterranean, and an example of a uniquely Mediterranean shantying tradition. The reason for this paper, however, is the comparative lack of evidence of shantying in these waters when held up against other trades. Analysing ports and places listed in shanty lyrics, only ten out of 367 named places are attributed to the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean as a whole referenced a meagre 21 times compared to 130 references to Liverpool alone.⁵⁰ When we look at the number of ships travelling to the Mediterranean compared to those travelling in the transatlantic trade, we can see that there were roughly three times as many ships crossing the Atlantic from British ports as there were travelling to the Mediterranean in 1840, though this gap has narrowed considerably by 1870.⁵¹ A large difference in the number of ships going to the Mediterranean compared to crossing the Atlantic is not noteworthy, given the fact that the Atlantic and its possible destinations are considerably more plentiful than trade destinations with the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the fact that the number of ships travelling to the Mediterranean has almost doubled by 1870 is surprising when compared to the comparative lack of references to Mediterranean ports in the lyrics of shanties.⁵²

Central to this disparity is an understanding of the type of trade carried out between Britain and the Mediterranean in 1870. Comparing the type of ship travelling to and from the Mediterranean at this time, we can see that in 1840 only nine steamships were recorded. In 1870, on the other hand, screw and steam-driven vessels travelling to the Mediterranean, numbered 216. While there were still higher numbers of sailing ships travelling from British ports to the Mediterranean, these statistics are made all the more remarkable when we compare the number of screw/steam-driven vessels engaged in the larger and more expansive Atlantic trade. In 1840, steamers crossing the Atlantic numbered only nine – the same as in the Mediterranean trade. In 1870, by contrast, the total number of screw/steam-driven vessels had increased to 65. The Atlantic trade in 1870, therefore, represented a more stable and bountiful means of employment for the sailing ship man of shantying fame than the Mediterranean trade, where steamers were gradually replacing the old brigs as *dernier cri*. It certainly appears to have been the case that steam supplanted sail more rapidly in the

⁵⁰ Appendices 1 & 2.

⁵¹ Appendices 3 & 4.

⁵² Note that the Suez Canal had opened only a year before.

Mediterranean than it did in the Atlantic trade, which might explain the lack of references in the lyrics of shanties that were gathered in the following decades.

Both Hugill and Terry also note a difference in the musical cultures of the ‘small-ship trade’ compared to the deep-water sailing ships. For the sailors aboard Swedish, British and French ships, the routes that they were travelling in the Mediterranean trade were far shorter and quicker than those of, for example, the London to Callao nitrate trade, or Liverpool to Sydney passenger ships. The shorter route meant that trips to the Mediterranean could be completed more quickly and more frequently, the consequence of which was a prevalence of smaller ships, such as brigs, in Mediterranean ports, as opposed to the larger four/five-masted barques and schooners that needed a greater amount of manpower and efficiency, thus more regular shantying. Terry writes: ‘On the collier or short-voyage vessel the crew was necessarily a small one, and the shanty was more or less of a makeshift, adapted to the capacity of the limited numbers of the crew... Consequently, so far as the shanty was concerned, ‘any old thing would do’’.⁵³ The ships of the transatlantic trade were a breeding ground for shanties in the nineteenth century, the majority of the repertoire being traced back to this time and this trade, as a result of the greater importance placed on the role of shantyman and the longer voyages that required more frequent shantying. The shorter routes of the Mediterranean trade did not generate the same conditions for creativity as the long, arduous and tedious crossing of the Atlantic. New versions of shanties tended to come from the improvisation of the shantyman, which appears to have been a feature of transatlantic deep-water shantying, rather than Mediterranean shantying. Even without the considerations of steam versus sail, it could well have been the case that the shanties sung aboard Mediterranean ships were perfunctory tools that were only used from time to time, creating a repertoire of song that was neither of sufficient quality for collectors to record, unique to the Mediterranean trade, nor memorable enough for sailors to take with them on other voyages.

On a related note, of the twenty-two collections consulted for this paper, twelve of them were written from the memories and experiences of sailing-ship sailors, while the remaining collections were created from recordings of former sailing-ship sailors via a landsman mediator. For the most part, these collectors and contributors learnt their shanties on trade routes going to North America, South America, the Caribbean, Australia, Britain and Ireland, the West Coast and South Africa, India, and Asia.⁵⁴ While some may take this as evidence that shantying was not generally practiced in the Mediterranean, a comparative analysis of the seafaring careers of these sailors also shows that they uniformly went to sea in the latter part of the century. Indeed, none of the sailor contributors to these collections went to sea before 1853, with the majority representing seafaring culture from around 1870 onwards. By the time that the majority of these shanty collectors were sailing, the transition from sail to steam had already begun in earnest, and was almost complete when published collections started to emerge from the 1880s onwards. Although this article shows that both the Mediterranean and its ships were almost certainly venues for shantying at the height of the

⁵³ Terry, *The Shanty Book: Part One*, p. x.

⁵⁴ Though Hugill recalls his time spent in Port Saïd where he watched a mullah acting as a shantyman, standing alongside the ship and chanting lines from the Quran, which Egyptian sailors then imitated. This may also explain the lack of evidence of shantying (in the Western tradition) in the Arabic/Ottoman Mediterranean ports.

shanty in the nineteenth century, we might suggest that shantying in the Mediterranean halted earlier than, for example, transatlantic shantying, which is responsible for most of the shantying carried out aboard merchant vessels in the latter half of the century.

Conclusions

Exploring the complex and often overlooked tradition of shantying in the Mediterranean, this article has situated Mediterranean shantying within broader contexts of imperialism, maritime labour and historical developments in seafaring, highlighting gaps in scholarly attention and preservation efforts, as well as drawing attention to the historical, social and cultural conditions that demonstrate firm links between the Mediterranean and shantying in the nineteenth century.

The historical record of shanty singing in the Mediterranean, though relatively sparse compared to its Atlantic counterpart, reveals a complex tradition that has been underappreciated in maritime scholarship. As this study has demonstrated, the Mediterranean has long been a site of maritime musical expression, from the rhythmic chants and possible hauling songs of the Ancient Greeks to the Sicilian tuna fishermen with their own capstan shanty tradition. While Anglo-American and transatlantic shantying traditions have dominated prior scholarly discourse, this research has critically examined the Mediterranean's role as both a mediator of musical exchange and a melting pot of language and culture that influenced the cultural production of both its inhabitants and its visitors. The interaction of Mediterranean sailors with crews from Britain, Scandinavia and America facilitated a dynamic exchange of musical influences, which can subsequently be heard in the shanties carried across the Atlantic and beyond. The seafaring communities of the Mediterranean contributed to a vibrant and interconnected musical landscape, and the Mediterranean's vibrant trading networks and bustling port cities, such as Marseilles, Genoa, and Livorno, created fertile spaces for musical exchange. Given the region's significance as a centre for trade, migration, and musical production, as well as frequent and consistent interaction with sailors from documented shantying traditions, it is reasonable to conclude that shantying also played a role in the working lives of Mediterranean sailors.

The research presented in this paper has emphasised the need to reconsider Mediterranean maritime work song through a broader lens, recognising the cultural diversity of seafarers and the fluidity of musical exchange at sea. Future research should focus on uncovering oral traditions, examining regional folk music archives, and analysing historical maritime records to reconstruct the shantying heritage of the Mediterranean. Exploring connections between Mediterranean work songs and other global maritime traditions could provide a more nuanced understanding of the evolution and development of maritime work song genres. By acknowledging and studying Mediterranean shantying traditions, we contribute to a more holistic and representative history of maritime music. In doing so, we ensure that the voices and songs of Mediterranean sailors – often marginalised in historical narratives surrounding shanties – are recognised as an integral part of this global maritime heritage. This article, therefore, calls for continued exploration and reassessment of Mediterranean shantying practices, ensuring its rightful place in the broader discourse of maritime work song traditions.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Total number of ports and countries mentioned in the lyrics of shanties*

Region	Total number of references in shanty lyrics	Examples of ports mentioned in the lyrics of shanties
Africa	7	Congo River, Timbuctoo, Madagascar, Coast of Africa, Pretoria, Sierra Leone, Table Bay
Asia	12	Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Canton, Shanghai, Foochow, Yokohama, Chu-Kiang, Japan, Saigon, Yantze River, China Seas
Atlantic	6	St. Helena, Azores, Fayal, Gulf Stream, Tenerife
Australasia	16	South Australia, Sydney, Australia, Botany Bay, Auckland, Melbourne, Adelaide, Bight of Australia, Blue Mountains, Cape Leeuwin, Queenstown, Samoa, Sandridge Railroad Pier, Semaphore Roads, The Bight, Van Dieman's Land
North America (Canada/USA)	64	Newfoundland, Miramichi, Milford Bay, Bay of Fundy, Montreal, Virgin Rocks, New York, Mobile, San Francisco, Rio Grande, Baltimore, California, Sacramento, Boston, Missouri, Alabama, New Orleans, Tennessee, Mississippi, Nantucket, Rocky Mountains, Philadelphia, New Bedford, Bangor, Carolina, Cincinnati, Florida, Ohio, Pensacola, Texas, Virginia, Buffalo, Cape Cod, Chicago, Kentucky, Louisiana, Naragasket, Salem, Tarentum, Washington, etc.
West Indies/ Caribbean	11	Jamaica, Kingston, Bermuda, Western Islands, Antigua, Barbados, Colonies, Cuba, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Tropics
East Indies	10	Bombay, Malabar, Batavia, India, Java, Surabaya, Bengal, Colombo, Pasoeroean

Europe	184	Liverpool, London, Beachy Head, Amsterdam, France, Hamburg, Moscow, Dover, Mersey, Bristol, English Channel, Ireland, Plymouth, Waterloo, Dorset, Isle of Wight, Bordeaux, Calais, Dublin, Dundee, Cape Clear, Bay of Biscay, Holland, Holyhead, Nantes, Bergen, Cherbourg, Cork, Copenhagen, Crimea, Glasgow, Havre, Helgoland, Jutland, Portugal, Russia, Scilly, Aberdeen, Altona, Austria, Anglesey, Blyth, Broomielaw, Fife, Greenock, Gloucester, Iceland, Galway Bay, La Rochelle, Kristiansand, Kanakenland, Landevan, Leith, Limerick, Santander, Portsmouth, Stavanger, Sligo, Sunderland, Swansea, etc.
Mediterranean	10	Elba, High Barbary, Italy, Algiers, Corsica, Gibraltar, Jerusalem, Marengo, Spanish Sea, Lowland Sea
Polar Regions	6	Georgia, Arctic Seas, North Pole, Behring Straits, Bredefjord, Greenland
South America	29	Cape Horn, Callao, Mexico, Valparaiso, Columbia, Monteray, Pernambuco, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janiero, Santos, Brazils, Coquimbo, Essequibo River, Fallerones, Iquique Bay, Lima, River Plate, Tierra del Fuego

* Based on analysis of twenty-two shanty collections by the following collectors: Baltzer (1936), Bihor (1935), Bone (1931), Bullen (1914), Colcord (1924), Davis & Tozer (1887), Doerflinger (1951), Finger (1923), Fox Smith (1927), Harlow (1962), Hayet (1934), Hugill (1961), Masefield (1906), Pallman (1938), Saar & Forsyth (1927), Sharp (1914), Smith (1888), Sternvall (1935), Tegtmeier (1947), Terry (1921), Terry (1926), Whall (1910).

Appendix 2: Twenty most frequently referenced ports in the lyrics of shanties

Region	Place	References
Europe	Liverpool	130
USA	New York	78
South America	Cape Horn (Chile)	75
Europe	London	52
USA	Mobile (Alabama)	48
USA	San Francisco	32
USA	Rio Grande	24
USA	Baltimore	22
South America	Callao (Peru)	21
South America	Mexico	18
USA	California	18
Europe	Amsterdam	16
USA	Sacramento	16
Asia	Hong Kong	15
USA	Boston	15
Europe	Hamburg	14
USA	Missouri	13
Europe	Moscow and Saint Helena*	13 and 12
South America	Valparaiso (Chile)	12
Europe	Dover	11

* Both appear in the shanty ‘Boney’, which was an extremely common shanty and is recorded in almost every shanty collection listed above. These are not referred to as ports that the sailors frequented, but rather tell the historical story of the defeat of Napoleon and his exile to Saint Helena. As such, I have grouped them together.

Appendices 3 and 4: Comparative analysis of ships going to the Mediterranean and crossing the Atlantic in *Lloyd's Register*, 1840 and 1870 – Ship type and number

	1840 (M)	1840 (A)	1870 (M)	1870 (A)
No. of ships	787	2349	1238	1928

	Type	1840 (M)	1840 (A)	1870 (M)	1870 (A)
Sail-powered vessels	Barque	76	731	409	919
	Brig	234	747	194	235
	Brigantine	15	31	106	196
	Cutter	6	3		2
	Galliot	4	2		
	Ketch		2	1	
	Lugger	1			
	Polacre	18	1		
	Schooner	297	149	189	168
	Ship	18	362	22	295
	Sloop	1	3		
	Smack		4		
	Snow	100	296	100	40
	Unknown/unclear	7	4	7	1
Screw/ steam-driven vessels	Screw			118	32
	Screw-barque			8	1
	Screw-brig			3	2
	Screw-schooner			15	3
	Screw-ship			7	3
	Screw-steamer			32	20
	Screw-tug			1	
	Screw-yacht			2	
	Steam-tug			21	
	Steamer	9	9	6	4
	Tug			3	

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