Chants, Hypertexts, Prosulas is a companion website for my forthcoming book (by the same title) on prosulas in medieval southern Italy. This repertory is significant because it allows us to detect the many multicultural influences of a region in which Byzantines, Lombards, Normans, Franks, Jews, and Muslim were present at different times and with different political roles. Nuns, were active participants in this musical and liturgical production.

What are prosulas? Prosulas are short texts that were added to pre-existing melismas (long melodies) of chants for the liturgy of mass and office between, primarily, the tenth and the fourteenth centuries. These small texts added new content to the chant and changed its style. The example on the right shows how the melody on the word “alleluia” is reworked by adding a new text “Allevatus dominus.” Notice the textual assonance.

How can a website on medieval chant “Tear Down the Walls”?  

1. By bringing back to life the creativity of local cantors. Prosulas show the continuous balance between fidelity to a centralized repertory of chant and the will to preserve elements of the local musical and religious culture. In turn, prosulas show the fluidity of liturgical language that was morphing into a proto-Italian language. For this reason, my edition does not standardize the texts, so that historians of the language and literature can document linguistic fluctuations.

2. By providing details about the involvement of nuns in the creation and diffusion of this repertory. There are at least two manuscripts tied to the nunneries dedicated to St Peter in the city of Benevento, one inside, the other outside the Walls. Previous studies have tended to consider nuns as passive receivers of chant and book production. This study considers nuns as the creators of their own manuscripts and chants.

3. By highlighting the importance of African and Middle Eastern saints and cults in medieval southern Italy. In the region, early saints from Africa and the Middle East were deemed as more prestigious than local and contemporary ones because they were perceived as closer to the historical and geographical source of Christianity. While generally considered a sign of archaism, this emphasis on foreign and early saints is a striking contrast to white supremacists’ misappropriations of the Middle Ages.

4. By acknowledging all contributors with sigla and an “About the Team” page.

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Platforms used:
Google sites
Caspio
Digital Mappa

How hyperlinks and visual and textual annotations can enhance the understanding of medieval chant.

A comparable project on Digital Mappa