

It is extremely tempting to see here evidence of at least one further distinct polyphonic version of the song. In any event, the case of *Une fois avant que morir* offers the necessary cautions about assuming that there was one definitive version of a song in these repertories—and simultaneously of course it presumably offers licence for a certain amount of embellishment in performance.

Other works do not, however. And it is difficult to find songs after about 1430 that show comparable source differences except in the German repertory. From the main body of the fifteenth century a very large number of songs offer evidence that there really was a ‘correct’ version.

Ben lo sa Dio

Six sacred lauda texts are based on the music of *Ben lo sa Dio*, thus more than for any other known polyphonic song of these years, with the exception of *Hora may che fora son* (discussed at Ex. 34.1). And the work’s popularity is attested by the survival of at least four versions of the music spread across more than a century. The earliest version is in a fragment at Atri. It is virtually illegible, but on the other side of the leaf is a more easily read version of Zacara’s Gloria *Micinella* in notation that suggests it was copied well before 1420.¹⁴ From what can be seen of the song, it is apparently in two voices and very much in the Italian style of the early fifteenth century. This version is almost identical with a copy just recoverable from the palimpsest FSL2211, with an ascription almost certainly to Zacara da Teramo, as revealed by Andreas Janke and John Nádas.¹⁵ Ex. 21.5 shows the version from the Atri fragment, as read by Janke and Francesco Zimei but with the missing notes filled in by Marc Lewon.¹⁶ They presented it with some variants from FSL2211, but for the present purposes it is enough to state that the two versions are close enough to count as a single song. What is important about the Atri version, though, is that it plainly had a full ballata text with two stanzas and that this text precisely matches the text presented fifty years later in **Cord**, albeit there lacking most of the second stanza. For the fullest version we must turn to the poetry manuscript, MS 1381 in the Biblioteca Oliveriana at Pesaro (*I-PESo*). As it is one of the most touching songs of the century, it is worth presenting the text in full here.

¹⁴ Description and facs. in A. Ziino, ‘Nuove fonti di polifonia italiana dell’ars nova’, *Studi musicali* 2 (1973), 235–45.

¹⁵ A. Janke and J. Nádas, ‘New Insights into the Florentine Transmission of the Songs of Antonio Zacara da Teramo’, *Studi musicali* NS 6 (2015), 197–214, at 209–11.

¹⁶ A. Janke and F. Zimei, ‘The Atri Fragment Revisited II: From the Manuscript’s Context to the Tradition of the Ballata *Be ’llo sa Dio*’, in *Liturgical Books and Music Manuscripts with Polyphonic Settings of the Mass in Medieval Europe*, ed. O. Huck and A. Janke (Musica Mensurabilis, 9; Hildesheim, 2020), 135–55, at 148–9. I am particularly grateful to Marc Lewon for allowing me to use his restoration, which has stood the test of concert performances.

Ex. 21.5. Antonio Zacara da Teramo, *Ben lo sa Dio*, from the **Atri fragment** with text from **Pesaro** (and notes in square brackets supplied by Marc Lewon)

1.5.9. Ben lo sa Dio se sum vergine e
4. Ben que'l pen sa re do lo re me

6
pu sy ra, Che en ben fa re spe ro
sy a, No pas sa de le ge ro

12
Che falsa in fa mi a non re move el ve ro.
A tol ler' gran sus pect del mal pen sa re.

17
2. Se ja lo si a pon' fal sa ca so ne Non
3. Al la vin dic ta non que ro ra so ne Che

24
pos so con tra la For tun na re
la ver tù se rà l'es chu na sa me

28
1. a. 2. a.

Ben lo sa Dio se sum vergine e pura
Che en ben fare spero
Che falsa infamia non remove el vero.

Se jalosia pon' falsa casone
Non posso contra la Fortuna rea.

Alla vindicta non quero rasone
Che la virtù serà l'eschusa mea.

Ben que'l pensare dolore me sya,
No passa de legero
A toller' gran suspect del mal pensare.

*Ben lo sa Dio se sum vergine e pura
Che en ben fare spero
Che falsa infamia non remove el vero.*

Manda chiarezza ho Dio di tanto herrore
A chi a torto mal di me favella.

Ma solo prego Dio justo seignore
Que abia pietà de me pura donzela.

Se la natura e Dio m'a fatto bella
Leva el sospetto fiero
Si ch'io non perda l'onor del mio impero.

*Ben lo sa Dio se sum vergine e pura
Che en ben fare spero
Che falsa infamia non remove el vero.*

The Lord knows well that I am a pure maid who hopes to do good since false slander does not change the truth. If jealousy bears false witness against me I am powerless against evil Fortune. For vengeance I seek no justification because virtue will be my defence. Although that thought brings me sadness, it will not go away lightly to take great suspicion from evil thought. *The Lord knows well...*

Give clarity, o God, at such error by which people wrongly imagine evil of me; but I only pray to God, the just lord, that he have pity on me, a pure girl. If nature and God have made me fair that raises the proud suspicion that I may have lost the honour of my inheritance. *The Lord knows well...*

The clearest version of the later form of the music is in **Cord**, copied in Savoy during the 1470s (the top two staves of Ex. 21.6), with an almost full ballata text.

Ex. 21.6. *Ben lo sa Dio* as found in **Cord**, **Cape/F27**, and the frottola of Nicolò Broch

Cord

D T
Ben lo sa Dio se sum vir-gine e pu - -

Ct

Cape/F27

D T
Con de - si - de - ri - o io vo, i' vo cer- chan - -

Ct

Broch

Ben lo sa Dio son ver-gine pu - ra Nel ben fa - re pe - ro la falsa in-

Ex. 21.6. Continued

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with three staves. The first system starts at measure 6, and the second system starts at measure 10. The third system continues the piece without a measure number. The parts are labeled on the left: Cord, Cape/F27, and Broch. The lyrics are written below the staves.

System 1 (Measures 6-9):

- Cord:** - ra Che en ben fa - re spe - ro Che
- Cape/F27:** -do De tro - va - re quel a - mo - ro - so Je -
- Broch:** fa - mia Ri - movera la

System 2 (Measures 10-13):

- Cord:** falsa in - fa - mia non re - mo - ve el ve - ro.
- Cape/F27:** sù Chri - sto de - lec - to - so,
- Broch:** ve - ri - ta - de, ri - mo - ve - ra la ve - ri - tade.

System 3 (Measures 14-17):

- Cord:** (Continuation of the previous system)
- Cape/F27:** (Continuation of the previous system)
- Broch:** (Continuation of the previous system)