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**Naples, an Important Center
of the Arbëresh-Albanian Renaissance
in 18th and 19th Centuries**

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NAPLES, AN IMPORTANT CENTER OF THE ARBËRESH-ALBANIAN RENAISSANCE IN 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

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“in Napoli ove potente beltà a sé levommi del basso mondo” (in Naples where a fierce beauty raised me up from the gloomy world) [Poesie Albanesi di Girolamo De Rada, II. Scanderbeccu i pafaan. Storie del secolo XV, Corigliano Calabro, Tipografia Albanese, 1872, 5]

Introduction

The Italian city-states of Venice and Naples, thanks to their intense economic and military activity exercised in the Mediterranean area before and during the Ottoman rule, were the main “doors” of the historical relations between the Italian peninsula and the Balkan peninsula, as well as between the Italian and the Albanian territories.

In this paper we will focus particularly on the cultural role the city of Naples played in regards to the Italian-Albanian relations, supported directly or indirectly by the activities conducted in southern Italy by the educational and ecclesiastical institutions within the Arbëresh Catholic Church of the Byzantine rite, which took place in the 18th and 19th centuries between South Italy and South Albania¹.

¹ This paper is closely related to the paper that I presented in Tirana, at the international conference organized by the Academy of Sciences of Albania (November 2012) and dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Independence of Albania, entitled: “Arbëreshët e Italisë për Rilindjen e Shqipërisë mes shekujve XVIII-XIX: paralelizma me diasporat e tjera të hapësirës italo-balkanike”.

This activity, supported by the Roman Catholic Church through its Congregation “*De Propaganda Fide*”, was justified by the common Byzantine heritage, which was an integral part of Eastern Christian Orthodoxy and/or Western Catholicism. Ties and contacts were favored among the ‘Greeks’ of the Ottoman Empire (and the Republic of Venice) in the Balkans and the ‘Greeks’ of the Kingdom of Naples, who were mainly Arbëresh migrated to Italy since the 15th century.

We should keep in mind that these peoples, before being “imagined”² as political communities, “special cultural creatures”, and nations (Latin *Nationes*), up to the end of the 18th century, they were mainly considered as religious communities, belonging to various nations of different ethnicities but of the same ritual tradition or liturgical language, whether Catholic or Orthodox.

This concept can be explained more accurately by the way various nations of the Christian faith within the Byzantine Empire were identified; which, based on the language of the liturgy they used, could have been *Ρωμαίοι*³ – the term used for the Orthodox Christians of the Greek⁴ world, or *Greeks* of the “Latin” world, if they followed the Eastern Orthodox Church (with Greek liturgical language) – and *Latinoi* – in the Arbëresh language, *Lëtinj* – if they followed the Roman Catholic Church, regardless their ethnic or «national» origin.

It dealt with the role that the Greek and the Albanian diaspora had in Italy between the 18th and 19th centuries for the national renaissance of the respective ancient homelands in the Balkans.

² The use of the word ‘imagined’ follows here the ideo-philosophic vision that the American philosopher, Benedict Anderson, attributes to this word in his famous book, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins of Nationalism* (London 1983).

³ From *Νέα Πόλις*, which was the new name given to the ancient city of Byzantium, by the Emperor Constantine the Great, the city which in his memory was later called *Kostantinopoli* up to the year 1923 and later *Istanbul*, by adjusting in the Turkish language the Greek “στην Πόλι” (“The City”). From *Νέα Πόλις* originated *Ρωμαίοι* with which the citizens of the Byzantine Empire were defined and, later, after the Ottoman rule, all Eastern Christians under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Read: Roderick Beaton, «Antique nation? ‘Hellenes’ on the eve of Greek independence and in twelfth-century Byzantium», *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 31, 1 (2007), 76-95.

⁴ It does not seem excessive to persist here in the accurate and the authentic interpretation that we must give to the term “Greek” according to the original religious meaning of the word at that time and not by decoding it, in an anachronistic manner based on the meaning of “nationality” it has today: its semantic spectrum did not cover that which we today identify as members of one nation; it covered the nations of the East, which from the “Western” perspective, regardless of the ethnicity, were identified with the Eastern churches. Therefore, the terms like the “Greek Diaspora” and the “Greek Church” in the terminology used at the time did not have the same “national” meaning at all, which they have taken today in the Balkans. The same thing happens with the term “Turk” with which diachronically all Muslims were identified, but with which today synchronically only members of the Turkish nation are identified. Unless we are careful and unless we respect the history of the words, we risk of mix paradoxically not only the words but also the nations, as it happens with some politicians...who ignore the history stating even today that the Muslim Albanians are Turks and that Orthodox Albanians are Greeks!

As a result of this early religious distinction and this ancient labeling common in the Byzantine world that reflects the vision of medieval Christianity, we can find some significant linguistic traces among the Arbëresh language in Italy, where the term “Leti” (plural: “Lëtinj”) identified “Italians”, namely “other ethnicity”. This terminology tells us that the Arbëresh, before their exile in the Apennine Peninsula, were identified – primarily based on the church and not religion as “*Romei*”, “Greek”, “Orthodox” within the one Church that was characterized by the language of New Rome, that is, by Byzantine Greek. In the Byzantine world, Christians sharing the Catholic faith were identified by the language of ancient Rome, which was Latin, as “*Latinoi*”. The Arbëresh, due to the fact that they were not Catholics, used and still use these ancient religious ethnonyms and non-ethnonyms to identify the Italians⁵.



Map of the Balkan Arbër world in a book (1614) of the Old Fund of the Library of the former Basilian Monastery of Saint Adrian, which is preserved today in the Arbëresh College Library in San Demetrio Corone.

⁵ Read FR. ALTIMARI, “Alcuni etnici di origine albanese nei dialetti della Calabria”, in *Beiträge zur sprachlichen, literarischen und kulturellen Vielfalt in den Philologien*. Festschrift für Rupprecht Rohr zum 70. Geburtstag, mit einem Vorwort herausgegeben von G. Birken-Silverman – G. Rössler, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1992, 173-178 s. 176.

After their migration to Italy, the preservation of the Christian religion in the Eastern tradition was the only political-ecclesiastical “shield” of the Arbëresh against the assimilating policy of local Italian bishops. In this venture, the Arbëresh were able to secure the strong support of the Vatican, which aimed to present the Arbëresh as positive examples of a united universal Catholic Church, in terms of hierarchical structure, while preserving the character of their ancient Orthodox rites.

The Greek-Byzantine rite, for centuries, represented for the Arbëresh an overarching external identifying element that explains why some of their “hora” or “villages/katunde” have preserved (and they partially use it today) the determinant ‘Greek’ in the official Italian designation: e.g., Greci, Rota Greca, Piana dei Greci, which until 1941 was the official name of the town that today is called Piana degli Albanesi⁶. This label, external but not internal, served to protect their identity, which was related to the origin of their religious affiliation within Orthodox Christianity (according to the “unitary” ways of the Councils of Florence and Ferrara, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453). But, unlike some other Eastern churches that broke away from the Patriarch of the Phanar and joined the Pope of Rome and therefore were called “uniate”, the Arbëresh never broke away from the Orthodox Church⁷ with an official act.

There were two key players that kept alive the Italian-Albanian and Albanian – Arbëresh relations during the first centuries (18th & 19th) of the Arbëresh presence in Italy⁸:

⁶ Here I will mention the fact that in some villages of the Province of Catanzaro, those few residents who could still speak the Arbëresh language during the 80s of the twentieth century, when I conducted my interview, used the phrase “parlare greco”, to say “parlare albanese”: for eg in the community of Xingarona /Italian Zangarona, neighborhood of the todays Municipality of Lamezia Terme), my interviewee, Francesco Sciallis, 70 years old, used the phrase “*holënjë / hlazënja ngriku*” (an adaptation in the phonetically conditioned Arbërisht language from the local Calabrian dialect “*folënj / flasënj ngriku*”) for “*parlare albanese*”. I got the same response in the community of Dandall (Italian Andali), where Giovanni Strazzi, the interviewee, during the interview I conducted, used the phrase “*fjasnjëmë ngreku*” to say “*parliamo albanese*”. This is how the interviewees, the last witnesses of the Arbëresh speakers in these “villages”, where the Arbëresh language is not used any longer, embraced only the language part but not the identity part of their external identification by Calabrians during the interviews, they clearly stated that they were not at all and they never felt like “Greeks”, reiterating their identity perception as ‘Arbëresh’ (Italian albanesi).

⁷ These particular churches, namely the Arbëresh eparchies of the Southern Italy, which even today preserve the ancient Eastern rite, are not considered ‘uniate’ but ‘sui iuris’ churches, that is, autonomous in preserving the Eastern liturgical, canonical, spiritual and theological tradition within the Catholic Church.

⁸ My colleague and friend, the antropologist Mario Giacomarra, at the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, taking in consideration the small number of published Arbëresh works, referred to this period as the “century of silence”.

a) Educational institutions of the Arbëresh Eastern Church - especially the centers for the formation of priests from the Arbëresh communities of Southern Italy, as the Basilian Monastery of Mezzojuso (Munxifs), founded in 1609 in Sicily; then from the eighteenth century the Arbëresh Seminary of Palermo (1734), also in Sicily; the Corsini College in San Benedetto Ullano (Shën Benedhit) in Calabria, founded in 1732, which was later on transferred to San Demetrio Corone (1794) [Shën Mitër] also in Calabria;

b) The “Greek” parish of Naples, which has been an important religious, social and economic center of the Eastern Orthodox diaspora in the West, as well as an important connecting bridge for the growth of ecclesiastical and intellectual connections between the Arbëresh of Southern Italy, especially those of Calabria and Sicily, but also between the Arbëresh and the people of Himara during the second part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th.

1. The First Arbëresh Contacts with Himara in 18th-19th centuries: the Role of the Monastery of Mezzojuso in Sicily

Extremely important for the Albanian-Arbëresh relations was the role of the Monastery of the Basilian Fathers of Mezzojuso in Sicily, a city established by the Arabs who named it *Manzil Yūsuf*, later abandoned and re-established in early 16th century by the Arbëresh.

⁹ For the history of the ‘Greek’ community and this church, see: V. GIURA, “La Comunità Greca di Napoli (1534-1861), in *Storie di Minoranze: Ebrei, Greci, Albanesi nel Regno di Napoli*, Napoli 1982, 119-156. Recently there was published a monography prepared by J. KORINTHIOS, *I Greci di Napoli e del Meridione d’Italia dal XV al XX secolo*, Editrice AM & D, Cagliari 2012, where the history of this community is treated in a cultural perspective, that is, mononational Greek. In a broader perspective, we can say Balkanic, and with a more transnational and transbalkan approach, emphasizing the transnational character that the Orthodox diaspora historically had in the Mediterranean and in the West - that was ‘Greek’ religiously and not nationally. It also appeared the new contribution of Angela Falchetta, in the form of a summary of her doctoral thesis, entitled: “Li Greci fugiaschi delli luoghi d’Italia”: uomini, reti e comunità attraverso i confini politici e confessionali” (pp. 1-13). This young Italian scientist, with a very correct methodological approach, includes not always linear and many times intertwined and problematic relations that exists between cultural Hellenism - and later ‘national’, on one side - and religious orthodoxy, on the other side, in the “Greek” diaspora of southern Italy which consisted of heterogeneous communities by linguistic and ethno-culture, such were the Greek Catholics under the Venetian rule, Orthodox Greeks under the Ottoman rule, non-Greek eastern Orthodox, Arbëresh Catholics of the Eastern rite in the Kingdom of Naples.



Iconostasis of the Monastery of St. Mary in Mezzojuso.

The Basilian Monastery, founded by Andrea Reres in 1609, was the first clerical educational center of Sicilian Arbëria and the most important center up to the first half of the eighteenth century. Various “Greeks” studied and worked there: mostly local Arbëresh, “Venetian” Greeks from the Morean Peninsula (today’s Peloponnese) and the island of Candia (today’s Crete), as well as occasional Italians of the “Italo-Greek” Church, who still survived in Southern Italy as a result of the long Byzantine rule in the area. This monastery cultivated liturgical Greek as well as the Arbëresh language, which helped the monks in their religious missions in southern Albania, especially in Himara, where the Albanian and Greek languages were used. These missions were encouraged and promoted by the Vatican to protect the Catholic faithful of the Byzantine rite, jeopardized by the Islamic Ottoman invaders¹⁰.

This monastery played an important role in the relations with Himara and southern Albania starting from the 17th century. Among the Basilian Arbëresh monks and the Byzantine Italian Catholics who participated in these

¹⁰ For the role of the Basilian Monastery of Mezzojuso in relation to Himara and the Balkans in general, read PIETRO DI MARCO, *Il Monastero di Mezzojuso nella storia culturale arbëreshe*, in *Mediaeval Sophia, Studi e ricerche sui saperi medievali*. E-Review semestrale dell’*Officina di Studi Medievali* 2 (luglio-dicembre 2007), 5-23 in the website www.mediaevalsophia.it.

missions during the 17th and 18th centuries, helped by the Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*¹¹, we may mention the following missionaries: Nilo Catalano, Italian with origin from Messina, who later embraced the Arbëresh culture and language, Filoteo Zassi and Callinico Granà from Mezzojuso, Basilio Matranga and Giuseppe Schirò, both from Piana dei Greci, later re-named Piana degli Albanesi (Hora e Arbëreshëvet)¹².

There were the Arbëresh missionaries from the Basilian Monastery of Mezzojuso who opened the first Albanian schools in Southern Albania. The purpose of these schools in Himara was primarily religious – to preserve the Catholic faith according to the Byzantine tradition which was threatened by the Ottoman rulers and the Greek Orthodox. The Albanian language - according to the published texts and manuscripts of these missionaries, as Archbishop Giuseppe Schirò - was known and used by said missionaries from Mezzojuso as a facilitating means to evangelize these Albanian regions, closely related with the Kingdom of Naples and the Republic of Venice.

2. *The First Arbëresh Renaissance: the Role of the Arbëresh Seminaries*

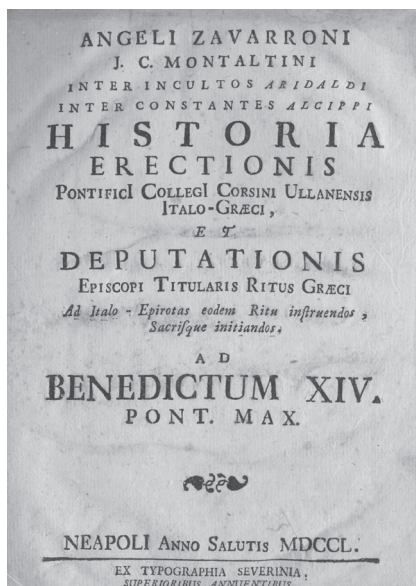
A great interest in the Albanian community in the Balkans and in the Arbëresh of Italy began with the activities of Pope Clement XI (Giovanni Francesco Albani), of Albanian origin (1700-1721)¹³; but, the real change in

¹¹ Cyril Korolevsky dealt first with the history of these missions, “La missione greco-cattolica della Cimarra nell’Epiro nei secoli XVI-XVIII” in *Bessarione* s. III, 8 (1910-1911), 440-483; 9 (1912), 181-199; also, in the same period, the well-known Arbëresh scholar, Father Nilo Borgia got interested in Himara and he wrote a series of studies for the missions of the Basilian Arbëresh monks in Himara: *La missione dei monaci basiliani d’Italia in Albania*, in *Roma e l’Oriente* 3 [1913] (5), 97-117, 159-166; *La missione dei monaci basiliani d’Italia in Albania*, in *Roma e l’Oriente* 3 [1913] (6), 209-231; *Contributo alla storia del rito greco in Italia*, in *Roma e l’Oriente* 4 [1914] (7), 272-285; 340-352; *I monaci basiliani d’Italia in Albania. Appunti di storia missionaria (Secoli XVI-XVIII). Periodo secondo*, Roma 1942. With the initiative of the publishing house Naimi, these contributions of Father Nilo Borgia are summarized in a book entitled: *Murgjit bazilianë të Italisë në Shqipëri. Shënime mbi misionet në Himarë: shek. XVI-XVIII*, with an introduction by Matteo Mandalà, Naimi, Tirana 2014.

¹² For the contribution of Arbëreshë Basilians, Mons. Filoteo Zassi and Giuseppe Schirò, and the apostle of Arbëresh Sicily, Father Giorgio Guzzetta, in the appraisal of the Arbëresh culture and use of the Albanian language in church official texts of the time, read the recently published papers of BARDHYL DEMIRAJ, “Zef Skiroi në kulturën e shkrimit shqip të shek. XVIII”, in *Studime* 12 [2005], 67- 97, Prishtina 2006; “Aspekte të mendimit intelektual shqiptar në shek. e 18-të. Atë Gjergj Guxeta dhe vendi i tij në historinë e albanologjisë”, in *Hylli i Dritës* 3 [2007] Shkodra, 9-37; “Një dorëshkrim ritual në gjuhën tonë që duhet kërkuar”, in *Hylli i Dritës* 1 [2007], Shkodra 30-37.

¹³ A series of acts, some published and other in manuscripts, are pertinent to this period. They show an increased and special attention to the Albanian religion, language and culture

the religious, political, cultural and civic history of the Arbëresh community in Italy started with the establishment of the two Arbëresh Colleges in Calabria and Sicily with the help of Pope Clement XII (1730-1740). These important educational centers were the Corsini College (1732) in San Benedetto Ullano in Calabria, strongly sustained by the brothers Stefano and Felice-Samuële Rodotà, and the Arbëresh Seminary of Palermo in Sicily, founded in 1734 on the initiative of Father Giorgio Guzzetta¹⁴.



Frontispiece of Angelo Zavarroni's history of the establishment of the College of San Benedetto Ullano (1750)



Frontispiece of the regulations of the Arbëresh Seminary in Palermo (1757)

It is very important to note the activity undertaken by the Holy See, more sensitive and tolerant than the local Latin rite clergy and hierarchy, in preserving the Byzantine tradition and the original religious identity of the Arbëresh

strongly supported by the Catholic Church under the papacy of Clement XI. Read: *Kuwendi i Arbërit* (1706), the first grammar of the Albanian language, *Osservazioni grammaticali nella lingua albanese* (1716) and *Dittionario Italiano-Albanese* (1702) of Father Francesco Maria da Lecce, re-published in 2009 with a philologically perfect edition by Gëzim Gurga.

¹⁴ About this, read F. ALTIMARI, "Gli Arbëreshë d'Italia per la rinascita dell'Albania tra XVIII e XIX secolo: parallelismi con altre diaspore di area italo-balcanica", in *Studia Albanica*, Tirana 2012, 129-143.

colonies in Southern Italy. These two seminaries, in addition to their crucial contribution in perserving the Byzantine liturgical rite on Italian territory, represented the main centers for the theological and cultural preparation of a handful of Arbëresh clergymen and lay-people by the end of 19th century.

The presence of these two cultural centers gave the Arbëresh community of the provinces of Cosenza and Palermo an important historical and cultural heritage/legacy, wherein a new trend was formed by a series of civic and intellectual obligations under the care of the liberal-democratic influence of the Italian society. Besides the training of progressive intellectual lay people and clerics - who later held a role in the Italian Risorgimento - these two institutions favored the development of a broad national awareness among the Arbëresh intellectuals. They pursued their search of the ancient roots of their national identity and the essential features that served to distinguish them before the public opinion from the Greeks, with whom they only shared the Byzantine ritual tradition.

The need to free themselves, once and for all, from identifying the Arbëresh of the Byzantine rite with the Greeks, urged the strong interest of the Arbëresh intellectuals, originally in Sicily and later in Calabria, to present the cultural and linguistic characteristics of their ethnicity, referring to themselves as “Italo-Albanesi”, whereas the Greeks of Italy began to be called by the Church of Rome as “Italo-Greci”.

The necessity of overcoming this false mixture of ethno-religious identity, as well as the need of separation from this external identification that openly contradicted their internal identity and ethnicity, urged the Arbëresh intellectual circles to foresee, since the first half of the 18th century, several issues such as the rediscovering of their ethnic origin, a subject that will be discussed in the European cultural debate decades later, especially with the affirmation of new directions of the ideas expressed in the literature of Romanticism, in the idealistic philosophy of the German school and in politics, due to 19th century nationalism.

This movement originated in the Arbëresh Seminary of Palermo, where thanks to the broad cultural vision of its founder, Giorgio Guzzetta, the first ideological laboratory for exploring the Albanian national roots in the Arbëresh context was set up. This activity was further elaborated by his successors, Paolo Parrino and Nicolò Chetta¹⁵.

¹⁵ See M. MANDALÀ, “Paolo Maria Parrino e le origini dell’ideologia albanista”, in P. DI MARCO – A. MUSCO (a cura di), *Aspetti della cultura bizantina ed albanese in Sicilia*, in *Officina di Studi Medievali*, Palermo 2005, 1-60.

The first to use the ethnonyms “Italo-Albanese” (Arbëresh of Italy) in an official act was Bishop Giuseppe Schirò¹⁶, a former student of Father Giorgio Guzzetta, in a 1742 document addressed to Pope Benedict XIV, who issued the constitution *Etsi pastoralis*, wherein the Latin rite was given a prominence against the role of the Arbëresh Church.

As Matteo Mandalà notes,¹⁷ this difference was known even before Schirò, by Father Giorgio Guzzetta, who wrote about it in his study, “*De Albanensium Italiae ritibus excolendis ut sibi totique Sanctae Ecclesiae prosint*”. On Guzzetta’s plan, the student, and later his seminary follower, Paolo Maria Parrino, elaborated this distinction in some of his works, first in 1740, and then more fully during the years 1745-1764, when he began to elaborate his two major works (still unpublished): *In septem perpetuae consensionis libros Albanensis Ecclesiae cum Romana omnium Mater et Magistra* and the *Perpetuae Albanensis Ecclesiae consensionis cum Romana omnium Mater et Magistra libri VII*. In the 1749 correspondence that Parrino exchanged with a senior representative of the Sicilian Church, he states the following about the Arbëresh identity: “*Albanesi tutto che volgarmente si chiamano Greci, nulladimeno di Greci non ànno che solo i riti, essendo del resto d’una nazione totalmente diversa dalla Greca, perché oriundi d’Albania, che nulla avendo di greco nella lingua e nei costumi*”¹⁸.

In Calabria too, this interest for the ancestral origin urged the Arbëresh clergy to deal with various works - historical, folkloric, theological - to emphasize its ancient identity and to ‘disassociate’ themselves from the Greeks, although they were linked by the same religious rite. Authors such as Pietro Pompilio Rodotà, Michele Bellusci and Francesco Avati, belong to this group of intellectuals who, as had reference and some training at the Corsini College of San Benedetto Ullano, later (1794) transferred to the Monastero Sant’Adriano in San Demetrio Corone¹⁹.

The debate regarding the Arbëresh ethnic affiliation, which needed to be distinguished from the religious affiliation, moved from the Sicilian medium

¹⁶ Look up his paper “*Notizia distinta degl’Italo-greci e degl’Italo-albanesi esposta da mons. Giuseppe Schirò, Arcivescovo di Durazzo, già Vicario Apostolico di Cimarra nell’Epiro, in occasione di dover rispondere ad alcuni quesiti proposti da un personaggio*, published first in the newspaper *Roma e l’Oriente. Rivista criptoferratense per l’unione delle Chiese* IV, vol. VII, 1914, 282-285 and 341-352.

¹⁷ We refer to his paper, “*Vepra e pabotuar e atë Gjergj Guxetës dhe fillimet e albanologjisë në shek. XVIII*”, in *Studime Filologjike* 1-2 (2006), 11-41.

¹⁸ M. MANDALÀ, *Mundus vult decipi. I miti della storiografia arbëreshe*, Mirror Editore, Palermo 2007, 199.

¹⁹ For the history of the Monastery of St. Adrian (955-1794) and the Arbëresh College (1794-1923), see D. CASSIANO, *Sant’Adriano. La Badia e il Collegio Italo-albanese*, volume I, Marco Editore, Lungro 1997; Id., *Sant’Adriano, Educazione e politica*, volume II, Marco Editore, Lungro 1999.

to Calabria. In the 1750 Latin work of Angelo Zavarroni, published in Naples, on the history of the Corsini College, the term “Greek” or “Italo-Greek” is used in regard to the rite, while on identifying the Arbëresh faithful a set of synonyms is used, such as: *Epirotae*, *Gens Epirotica*, *Epirotica Natio*, *Italo-Albani*, *Albanenses*, and *Italo-Epirotae*²⁰.

We believe that, in his famous work about the Greek and Arbëresh rite, Pietro Pompilio Rodotà (1763), also due to the previous debate that this researcher had with Paolo Maria Parrino, for the Arbëresh used the terms *Albanesi*, *Nazione albanese*, and *Albanesi di rito greco*, and from then we do not encounter any more the historical mix up with the Greeks from the ethnic point of view as it was implied by the old traditional word *Greco*²¹.

Finally, in 1771, in the frontispiece of a book with a religious character, published in Naples by an Arbëresh priest, Alessandro Marini, we find the first evidence of the ethnonym: “Italian-Arbëresh” as the author refers to himself as “Italo-albanese”²².

The expansion and the maturation of this process of awareness among Arbëresh intellectual circles in Calabria can be traced in a special edition published in Naples in 1796, entitled *Risposta di Filarete*, prepared by Michele Belusci but inspired by Monsignor Francesco Bugliari. There, the Arbëresh right to keep the “Greek” religious rite in their churches is protected, even though they are not ‘Greek’; and the authentic identity of the Eastern rite of the Arbëresh is clearly explained, without being mixed with the Greeks, since they belonged to the community that the author refers to as “nazione albanese”²³.

From these relations, established among the intellectuals educated in both Arbëresh cultural centers of Calabria and Sicily, and other representatives of the Albanian diaspora, a broad cultural movement was launched, which resulted in an increased interest in the Albanian identity. Although some authors failed to publish their works due to economic difficulties, these ideas circulated within Arbëresh circles as manuscripts from generation to generation and

²⁰ See Angeli Zavarroni J. C. Montaltini inter Incultos Aridaldi inter Constantes Alcippi, *Historia erectionis Pontifici Collegi Corsini Ullanensis Italo-Graeci, et Deputationis Episcopi titularis Ritus Graeci ad Italo-Epirotas eodem Ritu instruendos, Sacrisque initiandos*, ad Benedictum XIV, Pont. Max., Neapoli Anno Salutis MDCCL, Ex Typographia Severina, Superioribus Annuentibus, 103.

²¹ P. P. RODOTÀ, *Dell'origine, progresso e stato presente del rito greco in Italia*, III: *Degli Albanesi, Chiese greche moderne, e Collegio greco in Roma*, Giovanni Generoso Salomoni, Roma 1758 (Ristampa Cosenza 1986).

²² *Sistema teopolitico sopra la economia della grazia col libero arbitrio nella permissione de' mali morali del dottor Alessandro Marini italo-albanese*, Stamperia Avelliniana, Napoli 1771.

²³ See D. CASSIANO, “Passione e morte di Monsignor Francesco Bugliari”, in *S. Adriano. La Badia e il Collegio italo-albanese, volume I (955-1806)*, Marco Editore, Lungro 1997, 193-229.

echoed through a series of articles with religious themes. We know these works today and surprisingly find in them those “national” motives, which a century later, during the Romantic period, became the subject of discussion among the Albanian circles of the Balkans.

Such topics as the discovery of the ancient national roots of the Albanians through the language, history and ethnography of Arbër began to be debated and addressed in these two cultural centers since the 18th century, especially in the Sicilian center, creating a strong cultural tradition towards the strengthening of the respective ethnic identity, a tradition that can be defined as the first Arbëresh “Renaissance”. Its results among the Arbëresh elite of the other Southern-Italian areas began to be felt by the end of the 18th century and the first decade of the 19th, mainly in Naples and Calabria. Thanks to this, today we understand better the emancipation role the Arbëresh Church of southern Italy had for the Albanian intellectual elites.

3. Naples and the Second Arbëresh Renaissance: the Role of the Arbëresh Intellectuals

By the term *sofjot schools*, borrowed from the prominent Arbëresh researcher, Domenico Cassiano, we refer to the group of intellectuals with an illuminist intellectual formation and a liberal political background, originally from *Shën Sofia* (Santa Sofia d’Epiro) in Calabria. They operated mostly in Naples, but also in Arbëresh Calabria during the second half of the 18th century. We are talking about Pasquale Baffi (1749-1799), who after being a minister of culture in Naples, was sentenced to death by the Bourbons in 1799; Francesco Bugliari (1742-1806), the so-called “red bishop”, who fell victim of the creationists in 1806; and Angelo Masci (1758-1821). These eminent figures of the Arbëresh intelligentsia, with their multi-faceted activities that took place during the last decade of the 18th century (in the case of Masci also during the first decades of the 19th century) paved the way to a more conscious Renaissance with illuminist basis and thus constituting the preliminary stage of the romantic Renaissance.

Strong links, be it family or culture, joined these intellectual figures from Santa Sofia d’Epiro who had their professional center in Naples. Besides the prominent figure of Pasquale Baffini, who was known as one of the most famous Hellenists of that time and as one of the Neapolitan elite intelligentsia; not accidentally, we find other figures in the second half of the 18th century in the capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Naples), such as Angelo Masci, Father Giuseppe Bugliari, who as a vicar of the “Greek” Church contributed to

the strengthening of these ties of the “colony” from Santa Sofia d’Epiro with the Neapolitan environment, especially since the 70s of that century²⁴.

A decisive role in this process belongs to the cultural ties the Neapolitan circles had with the Arbëresh College Corsini-Sant’Adriano at the time headed by Bishop Francesco Bugliari. Thanks to this remarkable intellectual, the College was opened to illuminist ideas, a process that was interrupted by his cruel murder by reactionaries in 1806, but recovered later by his successor, Bishop Domenico Bellusci from Frascineto (Frasnita). These two remarkable individuals provided the Arbëresh College with the foundation of a process of pedagogical modernization and a progressive cultural role in the Calabrian context where they operated.

A further impetus to the Arbëresh cultural movement was provided by the other relations that the group of intellectuals from Santa Sofia d’Epiro in Naples had with compatriots who came from other Arbëresh colonies of the Kingdom and the Balkans. We should mention here a number of personalities who had managerial positions and high ranks in the military and administrative hierarchy of the state, especially the Albanian officers of the Macedonian Royal Regiment, the major contingent of the regiment’s troop, from Himara and other parts of Epirus, then under the Ottoman rule. Although it is still early to talk about a genuine Albanian-Arbëresh lobby, we cannot deny the presence of an intellectual circle of Albanian and Arbëresh origin that gathered and met in the ‘Greek’ church of Sts Peter and Paul in Naples. These intellectuals and senior officers exercised a cultural and political weight of indisputable value within Neapolitan society.

The most important contribution given to the Albanologic debate and the Arbëresh cultural issues from this “school” was the handbook of Angelo Masci, *Discorso sull’origine, costumi, e stato attuale della nazione Albanese* (Napoli 1807), which had a great impact in European circles thanks to its publication in French by the Danish scholar Malte-Brun²⁵: *Essai sur l’origine, les Meures et l’Etat actuel de la Nation Albanaise par M. Ange Masci. Traduit de l’Italien, communiqué par M. Sonnini*, in the series: *Annales des Voyages de la géographie et de l’histoire ou Collection des voyages nouveaux les plus estimes*,

²⁴ See A. CATALANO, “Angelo Masci: la sua opera e i suoi tempi”, in *Risveglio Zgjjimi*, VI, n.2, Cosenza 1968, 17-29.

²⁵ Conrad Malte-Brun was the pseudonym of the Danish geographer, *Conrad Bruun* (Thisted, Jütland, 1775 - Paris 1826) who was banished from Denmark by king Frederick VI, due to some books criticizing the government and who found a shelter in Paris, in post-revolutionary France (1799) and embraced French citizenship. In 1807 he established there the periodical *Annales des voyages* where he published the translation of Masci’s study about the Albanians.

traduites de toutes les langues européennes publiées par M. Malte-Brun, Tome troisieme, Comprenant les cahiers VII a IX , Paris 1808.

By means of this pamphlet on the origin of the Albanians, Masci gave a great impulse and publicity to the debate about the origins of this nation. He rejected, among Leibniz's ideas, the popular hypothesis of the time of the origin of 'Albania' in the Balkans from the 'Albania' of Caucasus²⁶, affirming that the Albanians were indigenous people of the Balkans and the direct successors of the ancient Illyrians.

In other words, the intellectual group from Shën Sofia represented the main core of a cultural and political movement. Thanks to its influence the Arbëresh College of San Demetrio Corone gained a more liberal (even radical) pedagogical character which made the Arbëresh community of Calabria one of the protagonists of the Risorgimento movement in Italy in the 19th century.

The importance that the Arbëresh intellectuals gained in Naples and Southern area circles by the end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century is associated with the organic relationship they established with the most prominent Neapolitan intellectuals of the time, some of whom had Arbëresh origin. To mention some, one recalls Vincenzo Torelli, Emanuele Bidera, Girolamo De Rada, Angelo Basile, Domenico Mauro, Demetrio Strigari, Pasquale Scura, Cesare Marini, Tommaso Pace. They conducted an intense cultural activity there until the establishment of the new Italian State (1861). Even after that time, the role of Naples as cultural center of the whole South of Italy and the Arbëresh continued until the early twentieth century.

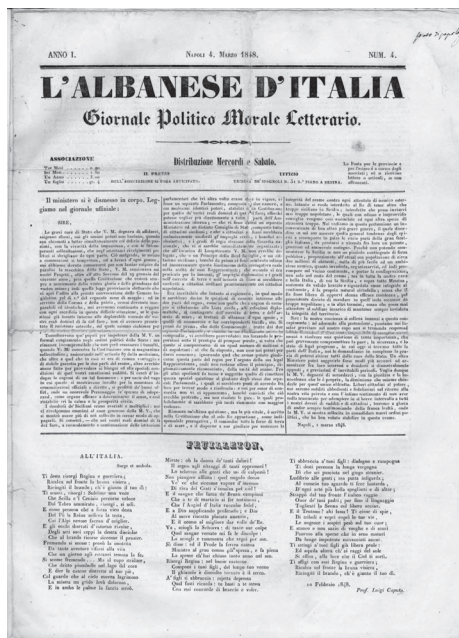
Some Arbëresh intellectuals actively participated in political developments and became protagonists of a liberal-Risorgimento. As its result, the temporary Garibaldi Government, before joining the newly unified Italy, had several ministers chosen from the Arbëresh community, Francesco Crispi, Luigi Giura and Pasquale Scura, just to mention a few. The latter as the Minister of Justice officially decreed the annexation of the southern provinces to the new Italian Kingdom²⁷.

²⁶ Rodotà was the first who mentioned the theory of the Caucasian origin of the Albanians: *"Fu opinione d'alcuni Scrittori, che gli Albanesi traggano l'origine dall'Albania antica, provincia dell'Albania antica, provincia dell'Asia sul mare Caspio nella parte orientale della Georgia. Narrano che aspramente travagliati dalle scorrerie e guerre lungo tempo sostenute contro a' Tartari vicini, indi si allontanarono; e venuti all'Europa per cercare più sicuro e tranquillo riposo, occuparono la parte più nobile della Macedonia, cui diedero ancor d'Albania il nome. Aggiungono che vaghi di nuove fedi, col favore delle armi dilatarono il dominio in tutta la Macedonia e l'Epiro"*, in RODOTÀ, *Dell'origine, progresso e stato presente*, III, 2.

²⁷ See FR. PERRI, *Pasquale Scura, L'Italia una e indivisibile, la sua vita attraverso i documenti*, Lepisma, Roma 2011.

The emergence of a literary phenomenon, such as De Rada, should be considered an expression of the unique climate that existed in this cosmopolitan city of Naples, which was not only one of the most important European cultural centers, but also the crossroad of the Mediterranean nations. Naples became a meeting point for Albanians, Arbëresh and Greeks who, despite all their ethnic differences, were recognized as members of the same religious community. Its underestimated cultural role to date deserves to be valued not only as a cradle of Hellenism but also of Albanian studies.

It is no accident that some of the most important works of the Arbëresh literature were published in this city. Girolamo De Rada published here all his works of the first phase of his literary creativity – *Songs of Milosao* (1836, 1847), *Songs of Serafina Thopia* (1839, 1843), *I Numidi* (1846), *L'Albania dal 1460 al 1485* (1847), *Storie d'Albania dopo il 1460 storie [Stories of Arbër]* (1848). Other important literary works, like the tragedy *Ines de Castro* of Angelo Basile (1847) or cultural works like *Su gli Albanesi, ricerche e pensieri* of Vincenzo Dorsa (1848), titled meaningfully “*Alla mia Nazione, divisa e dispersa, ma una*” were published in this city. It should not be forgotten that, on the initiative of De Rada, the first Albanian newspaper in the world, *L'Albanese d'Italia* (*The Arbëresh of Italy*) was published here in 1848.



An issue of the newspaper *L'ALBANESE D'ITALIA* (Year I, no. 4, March 4, 1848)

4. Naples for the Second Arbëresh Renaissance: the Role of the “Greek” Church



The entrance of the “Greek” church in Naples (photo by Atanasio Pizzi)

The “Greek” church of Naples had the important role of a catalyst, as we shall see below, despite its numerous difficulties and vicissitudes, becoming a significant reference point for the ‘Greeks’ of the Balkans and the ‘Greeks’ of Italy.

This role increased with the establishment of the Royal Regiment of Macedonia (1735), whose officers were also members of the religious fraternity, and as a rule its commander was the president of the fraternity. Within the Albanian-Arbëresh circles of the ‘Greek’ church, various ideas and ideals were given and interspersed, siding with the ancient Greek-Pelasgian myths. There were also ideas and ideals of the philo-Hellenist movement, fusing into a unitary Greek-Albanian identity we might call “transnational”, typical of the Mediterranean diasporas²⁸. We have here two main ideological components:

a) the Hellenistic ideology, which had its roots in the philo-Hellenist trend favored by an early Byzantine religious tradition, where the frontiers of Catholicism and Orthodoxy were not very clear;

²⁸ See A. FALCETTA, *Diaspora ortodossa e rinnovamento culturale: il caso dell'abate greco-veneto Antonio Catiforo (1685-1763)*, Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, Torino Cromohs, 15 (2010), 1-24, <http://cromohs.unifi.it/15_2010/falcetta_catiforo.html >

b) the Albanist ideology, born around the 18th century and rightly considered the genuine incubator of the philosophical and cultural thought that inspired the first Arbëresh renaissance [we refer here to the ecclesiastical centers of higher education established by the Pope of Rome in San Benedetto Ullano (1732) and in Palermo (1734). During this time, in comparison with the Corsini College of Calabria²⁹ the leadership of the Arbëresh Seminary of Palermo was within the development of the Albansit ideology]

We have reasons to consider the so-called “Greeks” fraternity as a new hearth where members of the Arbër or Orthodoxy started to meet and discuss issues like origin, religious and cultural heritage, ethnicity and language (we include here the Arbëresh of Italy and the Balkan Albanians with a Greco-Byzantine religious tradition).

Within this new Albanist ideology, the Arbëresh intellectuals tried to find their ancient roots and use them as an argument to seek and support the right of the Albanian nation to be liberated from the Ottomans, as did all other nations of Eastern Europe. To serve this purpose, they found their roots among the ancient non-Greeks nations of the Balkans, among Pelazgs and Illyrians.

Highlighting the two main elements of identity - language and culture - the Arbëresh embraced the Romantic movement. Politically, they were the first to raise the “Albanian issue” in Europe, and thus they became the founders of the Albanian modern literature. Finally, the old “Greek” dream of the Arbëresh Renaissance, headed by Girolamo De Rada, was realized. As in ancient Greece the salvation of the motherland came from the colonies, so the salvation of the ancient Arbër will come from its Italian colonies. The precious heritage that was taken away from them when forced to abandon it in the Middle Ages now returns. Only an extraordinary visionary poet as De Rada was able to fulfill this dream, this miracle, which is unique in the history of literature and culture of the European nations.

²⁹ For a detailed role of the Italo-Greek-Arbëresh Seminary of Palermo as the main cradle of the Albanologic ideology, read the chapters dedicated to G. Guzzetta, P. M. Parrino and N. Chetta in the study of Matteo MANDALÀ, *Gjurmime filologjike për letërsinë e vjetër arbëreshe*, Çabej, Tirana 2006.



The church yard of Saints Peter and Paul in Naples (photo by Atanasio Pizzi)

The “Greek” church was founded in the city of Naples in 1518, when Thomas Asan Paleologus, nephew of Demetrius, built the Chapel of the Apostles, later on dedicated to the Saints Peter and Paul. This church, destined for the “Greeks” that had economic and military ties with this city, in time became a referral point of very heterogeneous peoples, whose only common element was the Orthodox religious identity³⁰.

However, there are scholars who try to present the identity of this Neapolitan ecclesiastical institution in a more simplified and flattened manner than it was in reality, by removing the word “Greek” - the Western version of the word *Ρωμαίοι* [the semantic dilemma deriving from its multi-meaning in reference to the centuries of the Ottoman rule³¹]. We especially consider here

³⁰ The ethnic heterogeneity of the community is clearly reflected in the various monuments and sights that are preserved in the church yard, but we should note that in the Ancient Monuments, the ‘Arbëresh’ origin of some of the most prominent figures of the members of this parish is clear: for example: the one of the Stradiot captains, brother Nicolò dhe Angelo Maipesi (Italian) “*nobili capitani albanesi*” (without a date), the one of ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ ΜΟΥΖΑΚΗΣ (Greek) and maybe the one of Nikollë Drakoleo from Corone, dated 1604. This documentation, with photographs of the original inscriptions in marble, is added at the end of this study, before the bibliography.

³¹ The British researcher, Mackridge, rightly notes that the semantic dilemma of the word Romaios / Romiós (“Greek” in the Western usage) results from the fact that it also serves to designate a nation of a Romaic language, as was called the language of Byzantium in the areas

the period that stretches from the 70s of the 18th century, when the so-called Greek enlightenment emerged, until the declaration of the independence of Greece (1830) - to give a patriotic but anachronistic value of today's ethnonyms of 'national'.

In the Statutes of the Fraternity (1764)³², the term 'la Greca Nazione' was used to refer to the members of the Greek church of Naples and of the Orthodox nations from the Eastern Balkans that were represented there, as an attempt to unify a 'community' where the coexistence was in fact often problematic and put in risk due to internal conflicts. And this happened not only because of the internal conflicts between believers seeking leadership positions with great political and economic importance within the Fraternity, but also because of the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Within the pseudo-unitarian concept of '*nazione greca*', we find people who were connected with each other by a strong identity factor such is the religious factor, but did not have any homogenous ethnic identity³³.

The word 'Greek' during the centuries of the Ottoman rule indicated either the ancestry from '*Oikumene Byzantium*' - the word that Obolensky termed *Byzantine Commonwealth*³⁴ including ethnically different nations connected by politics, administration and economics - or the Balkan Orthodox Christians regardless of their ethno-national origin.

Starting from an un-identifying perspective rather than a self-identifying, we can better understand how others perceived the 'Greeks' of the Neapolitan Fraternity. Under this word we find here: Ottoman 'Greeks', Venetian 'Greeks', Coronean 'Greeks', Greek-Albanians of the Royal Macedonian Regi-

of Rumelia, which included Greece and the nearby lands with Christian populations under the Turkish empire, the Ottoman Orthodox Christians in general (read P. MACKRIDGE, *Language and national identity in Greece, 1766-1976*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, 51).

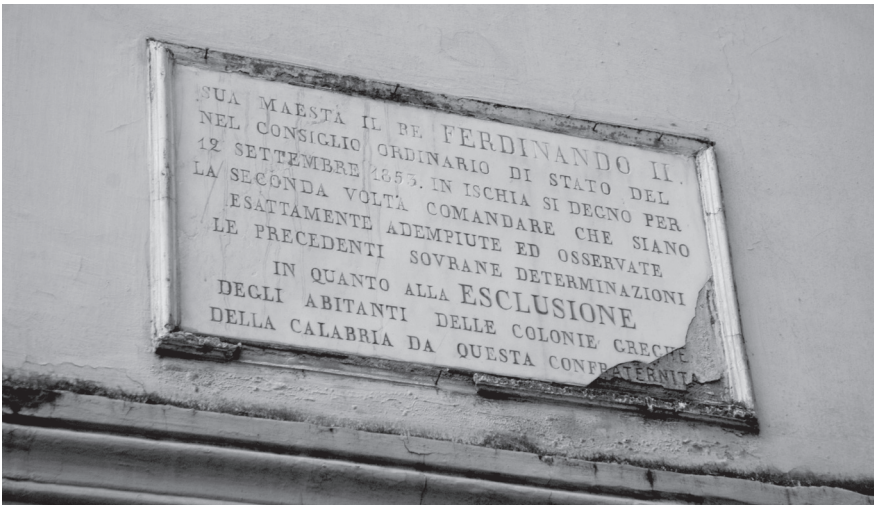
³² *Statuto con cui deve regolarsi la Chiesa e Confraternita de' Santi Pietro e Paolo de' Nazionali Greci in Napoli, munito di Regio exequatur del 20 Febbraio 1764*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Napoli 1861.

³³ Apparently the same situation, complex and heterogeneous from an ethnic point of view, also occurred in other 'Greek' religious institutions in the Mediterranean cities of the time, where under the roof of the same church and of the same religious tradition, often included the identity of the community members: read about this in the dissertation theses of Mathieu Grenet, *La fabrique communautaire: les Grecs à Venise, Livourne et Marseille, v. 1770-v. 1830*, European University Institute, Florence 2010. Also of great interest and from the same perspective in treating the diaspora communities with a transnational approach, is the PhD thesis of the Italian researcher, Angela Falcetta, hitherto unpublished, entitled: «*Li Greci fugiaschi delli luoghi d'Italia*» *uomini, reti e comunità attraverso i confini politici e confessionali*.

³⁴ The idea of Byzantium as a cultural and religious community, united by a common Byzantine tradition, is treated for the first time by the scholar Dimitri Obolensky, in his book *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1971.

ment, and ‘Greeks’ of the Kingdom of Naples (Arbëresh of Calabria, Sicily, Basilicata, and Abruzzi).

The official inscription in a church yard, still well preserved, explains without a shadow of doubt what was understood back then by ‘Greeks of the Kingdom of Naples’, wherein with words carved in stone, the King of Naples, Ferdinand II Bourbon, decreed for the second time the *exclusion* of the Arbëresh of Calabria from the Fraternity. The decree, dated September 12, 1853, may be a form of political punishment for the mass participation of the Arbëresh in the anti-Bourbon uprisings of those years, or even incited by the numerous disputes that characterized the inner life of the Greek church of Naples.



The Decree of King Ferdinand II Excluding the Arbëresh of Calabria from the Greek Church of Naples (photo by Atanasio Pizzi)

5. Philo-Hellenic and Philo-Albanian in the Albano-Arbëresh Environment of Naples

Let us examine now the meaning of these phases in light of the cultural 70s of the 18th century, known as the Greek Enlightenment. Here the adjective *Greek* has the meaning of Greek *ethnos* within the Ottoman Empire and does not necessarily imply the Greek *nation*, since it did not exist at that time. This movement appeared especially in Constantinople, still the “moral” capital of Hellenism, and also in the so-called Danube Principalities, governed by Greek nobles, who had important positions within the Turkish imperial administration, and were more sensitive to the external influences of Western culture.

This phase coincides with the emergence, immediately after the Russian-Turkish War (1770), of a movement called in Europe *Philo-Hellenism*³⁵. It was a cultural trend backed by the Christian Orthodox circles of the Phanar³⁶ and some European nations, especially Russia, which was at war with the Ottoman Empire and aspiring to become the guarantor of Orthodoxy and the 'Greek' nations of the East³⁷.

Antonio Gicca (Anton Gjika) from Himara can be considered the pioneer of the philo-hellenic cultural movement in Italy and in Europe. In 1771 Florentine newspaper *Notizie del mondo*³⁸ Gicca published a fervent appeal for the freedom of Greece under the title of *Voti dei Greci all'Europa Cristiana*, wherein he demanded the forming up of the Christian European forces and the Russian to support the Greek cause of the Russian-Turkish war³⁹. But he also sought the support of the Russian Czarina Catherine to liberate the 'New Rome' or 'Second Rome,' as it was called by the Orthodox in Istanbul. According to this philo-hellenic movement, Russian military pressure would liberate Greece from the Ottoman occupation and also rejuvenate the culture and the arts in Greece and throughout Europe⁴⁰.

³⁵ See A. DI BENEDETTO, "Le rovine d'Atene: Letteratura filellenica in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento", in *Italica* 76, 3 (1999), 335-354.

³⁶ Phanar (Turk Fener), a historical neighborhood in Istanbul, where the See of the Greco-Orthodox Patriarchate is located.

³⁷ Since the early decades of the 18th century, while Russia was building its political and cultural identity in Europe, some Balkan intellectuals thought that the tsar Peter the Great could help their countries by renewing the Orthodox world. The biography, *La Vita di Pietro il Grande (The Life of Peter the Great)* by the Greco-Venetian Abbot, Antonio Catiforo (1739), best reflects the confidence that some intellectuals of Orthodoxy had in Russian czars: "*i Popoli del rito Greco, che gemono sotto il giogo dell'Ottomano, cominciato avevano a riguardare Czar Pietro come l'Angelo mandato dal cielo per metter fine alla tirannia dei Turchi. Anzi l'istesso Czar [...] avea concepito speranze, che il Cielo l'avesse destinato, per rovesciare la tirannia de' barbari Maomettani, e rimetter la gloria del Greco Imperio [...] onde lusingavasi che tutti i Greci sudditi del Turco alla prima occasione si solleverebbero in suo favore*", cited by A. FALSETTA, *Diaspora ortodossa e rinnovamento culturale: il caso dell'abate greco-veneto Antonio Catiforo (1685-1763)*, Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, Torino: Cromohs 15 (2010), 1-24.

³⁸ According to Italian scholar, Franco Venturi (1914-1994), this fervent call of Gicca should be valued as "*il più importante appello filellenico apparso allora non solo in Italia, ma nella intera Europa, destinato a risuonare anche ben lontano dalle terre toscane*" (FR. VENTURI, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. 3, Einaudi, Torino 1979, 83).

³⁹ Gicca's call was addressed not only to the European countries but also to the Russian Czarina Catherine to proceed against the Turks in favour of Greece. This appeal was published in the Russian language on August 8, 1771 in No. 656 of the newspaper "Sanktpeterburgskie Vedomosti" (See VENTURI, *Settecento riformatore*, 103).

⁴⁰ These ideas inspired Czarina Catherine in drafting the so-called "Byzantium or Greek Project", which she shared with Austrian Emperor Joseph on September 21, 1782. Catherine's goal

A native of Himara, Antonio Gicca was the son of the Count Strati-Gicca, who in 1735, by the order of the King of Naples, organized the Macedonian Royal Regiment (Reggimento Real- Macedone), formed by Albanians and Greeks who lived under the Turkish and Venetian rule. Antonio, who was among the most active proponents of the Russian policy towards Albania and Greece, served from 1777 to 1783 on the Russian Legation in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies as an adviser to the Russian Ambassador.

In light of this philo-hellenic movement inaugurated by Gicca, we encounter some other renowned Arbëresh personalities from the community of Naples, like the priests Giuseppe Bugliari⁴¹ and Pasquale Baffi⁴². Also, Nicolò Chetta with his literary, cultural and lexicographic⁴³ works should be considered a true predecessor of the Albanian Renaissance, as he devoted a special attention to the policy of Czarina Catherine II in Eastern Europe.

From Chetta's correspondence⁴⁴ with the Russian royal court (1789-1797) and the Russian diplomats in Naples, emerged the hopes some Arbëresh intellectuals within the philo-hellenic movement had for Czarina Catherine's

was to attract the sympathy of all Christian nations of Europe, sensitive to the ancient Greece and its culture, and thus liberate that part of Europe from the Ottoman dominion. With the Ottoman Empire in crisis, this strategy undoubtedly served to increase her influence among the intellectuals of the Balkan regions.

⁴¹ *"Don Giuseppe Bugliari, cappellano del Reggimento Real Macedone, costituito in massima parte da soldati ed ufficiali di origine albanese ... era anche un intellettuale conosciuto nell'ambiente dei letterati napoletani come cultore della lingua greca in cui la sua bravura si evidenziava per la composizione di poesie. Egli fu, infatti, autore di una poesia, dedicata alla zarina Caterina II, sottoscritta col nome di Josif Bouliarios. Si deve, pertanto, ritenere che appartenesse a quel discreto gruppo di intellettuali filo-ellenici che speravano nella rinascita della Grecia e ne vedevano uno strumento nella politica estera della zarina, ma che contestualmente costituivano anche quella intelligenza napoletana e meridionale, attestata su posizioni progressiste, anticipatrici del Risorgimento nazionale"*, D. CASSIANO, "Angelo Masci (1758-1821) ed il principio di uguglianza al tramonto del feudalesimo", (pp. 1-20), in www.arbitalia.it/cultura/interventi/2010cassiano_angelo_masci.pdf.

⁴² It's known that Baffi devised a Greek ode, inspired by the Greek poetry of Pindar, and dedicated it to the Russian Czarina Catherine II. In 1781 its author presented the manuscript to the erudite Angelo Maria Bandini (1726-1803). Today, this manuscript is kept in Firenze, Biblioteca Marcelliana, B. I. 18, cc. 285r-287r: See 'Pasquale Baffi' in A. PETRUCCI - C. FRANCOVICH, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, volume 5 (1963), [www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pasquale-baffi_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pasquale-baffi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

⁴³ See M. MANDALÀ, "Për botimin kritik të veprave të Nikollë Ketës", in M. MANDALÀ, *Gjurmime filologjike për letërsinë e vjetër arbëreshe*, Botime Çabej, Tirana 2006, 171-272.

⁴⁴ See M. MANDALÀ, "Per un profilo bio-bibliografico di Nicolò Chetta", in *Nicolò Chetta nel bicentenario (1803-2003)*, a cura di Matteo Mandalà, A. C. Mirror, Palermo 2003, 43-54 s. 50-52. Thanks to Mandalà's research through the archives of Sicily and the manuscripts of Gangales at the Royal Library in Copenhagen, today we have an important source of documents that enlighten this prominent figure of the Arbëresh culture as well as the era he lived in.

policies to liberate the Albanian, Greek and 'Rumelia' lands from Turkish rule, along with Constantinople. One should note how Nicolò Chetta in one of his letters presented to the Czarina's son, Prince Constantine, wrote: "io che di Macedonia oriundo, sono prete greco-albanese, rettore di questo connazionale seminario" ("I, a descendent from Macedonia, am a Greek-Arbëresh priest, the Rector of this same national seminary")⁴⁵.

From this correspondence with Catherine and her son Constantine, Nicolò Chetta used the diplomatic channels to keep contacts with the Russian imperial court, mainly the Russian embassies in Italy [in Naples during 1783-1785, when Antonio Gicca himself was his close associate, and in Venice in 1790] Through these channels, Chetta sent the Russian imperial court copies of some of his works, hoping that they might raise interest in St. Petersburg and could be published there, since they prophesied the imminent liberation of "Second Rome" by "the Third Rome".

He calls these works '*i miei Ellenici lavori*' (my Greek works) explaining that there were '*tre intieri miei scritti accademici*' (three complete academic writings) and hoping to publish them '*in Italiano o Russiano torchio*' (in the Italian or Russian press). In an undated letter he wrote from Naples, -which Matteo Mandalà assigns to the years 1791-1792- Chetta claims to have given these three manuscripts, together with a letter to the Czarina, to an Albanian who had just arrived in Naples, Don Giovanni Gicca, a cousin of Antonio Gicca already mentioned.

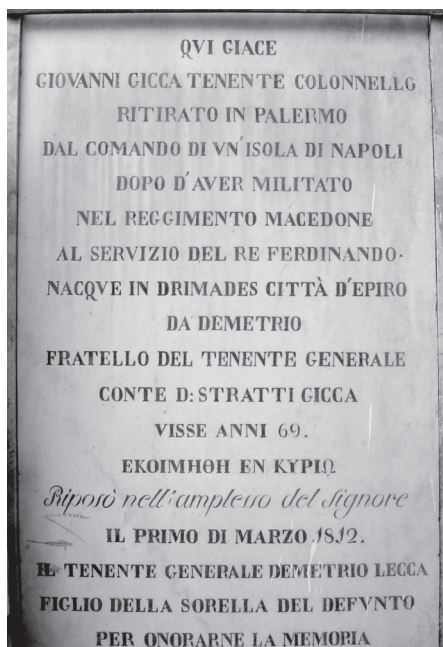
6. *The Macedonian Royal Regiment and the Arbëresh Renaissance*

Through a commemorative plaque, preserved in the church yard of Martorana in Palermo (and previously in the church of Saint Nicolò of the Arbëresh Seminary of Palermo), we learn that Giovanni Gicca was from Himara – he was born in 1743 in Dhërmi and died in Palermo in 1812. The year of Giovanni Gicca's death (1812) coincides with the allocation - due to financial difficulties of the court – of this military unit, whose members returned to Epirus the following year. But King Ferdinand immediately decided to reconstitute it by engaging the

⁴⁵ From this self- declaration of Chetta - which is also the title of his work *Tesoro di notizie su de' Macedoni* (1777) - the notion Arbër also included that of Macedonia. Pjetër Bogdani in his famous work *Cuneus Prophetarum* (1685) calls himself a 'Macedonian' (Latin: macedonis) and he his homeland "Arbën" (in Latin: Epirus). Also, a Balkan map of 1689, dedicated to Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Albani, the future Pope Clement XI, refers to Albania, '*Albania propriamente detta o superiore o Macedonia occidentale*'; whereas, the present Macedonia is identified as '*parte di Macedonia*' whereas the lower part as '*Epiro o Bassa Albania*'.

British general Richard Church, who had served in the Heptanese islands with a similar army against the French. This re-formed 'Macedonian' battalion, formed mostly of Epirotic Albanians, operated until 1820 in the Kingdom of Naples⁴⁶.

Giovanni Gicca, a *Tenente colonello* (lieutenant colonel) of the Macedonian Royal Regiment, was the son of Demetrius, brother of Count Gicca-Strati. This plaque was dedicated by his nephew - the sister's son - to Dhimitër Leka⁴⁷ (1779-1862). Gicca was the last commander of the regiment, to which Girolamo De Rada devoted his first song of the *Canti di Milosao* (Këngët e Millosaut): "*A S.E. il General Brigadiere Commendatore Signor Demetrio Lecca, questi canti che sien testimonianza dell'attaccamento agli antichi costumi della dispersa gente d'Epiro, Girolamo De Rada*"⁴⁸. Since modern Albanian literature origi-



⁴⁶ But the efforts of the soldiers from Himara to recreate such an army in Naples continued, by sending a special request to the king, on August 2, 1821: "*La nazione albanese ha sempre serbato l'attaccamento al Real Trono di Vostra Maestà.. Or che si vede alquanto libera brama ognuno di servire il vostro Real Trono con quella solita fedeltà che gli Albanesi per lo corso di ottanta anni hanno prestato i loro servizi in tutte le campagne*" (This document is kept at the Archives of Naples, under the file Albanesi, no. 4341, cited by S. PANAREA, "Albanesi nel Salento e Albanesi al servizio del Regno di Napoli", in *Rinascenza Salentina*, Anno VII, XXVI-XXVII, Lecce 1939, 329-343 s. 341).

⁴⁷ The personality of Demetrio Lecca (Dhimitër Leka) was very well-known among the Arbëresh of Italy. Prior to Girolamo de Rada, Cesare Marini too had dedicated to Leka one of his works, titled: *Memoria su' riti delle nozze presso gli albanesi dedicata al sig. brigadiere D. Demetrio Lecca, commendatore del Real Ordine di S. Ferdinando, cav. dell'ordine di San Giorgio, ispettore della gendarmeria reale, dall'avvocato Cesare Marini*, Dai Torchi di Settembre, Napoli 1831. The Arbëresh scholar, Vincenzo Dorsa, also writes about him: "*Demetrio Lecca attuale Maresciallo di Campo tuttavia in servizio del nostro governo, uomo cui la Nazione albanese è per mille titoli riconoscente, di nobile famiglia della Chimera stretta in parentela col principe de' Mirditi, e nel cui petto ferve potentemente l'amore nazionale*", *Su gli Albanesi, ricerche e pensieri*, Napoli, Dalla Tipografia Tirana, 1847, 113.

⁴⁸ See *Poesie Albanesi del secolo XV. Canti di Milosao, figlio del Despota di Scutari*, Napoli, Da' Tipi di Guttemberg, 1836. But the real mentor of the poet from Macchia Albanese was, an

nates from this work, said ties serve us to better understand its specific cultural environment and explain the new stage of the Arbëresh and Albanian culture in the diaspora.

As for the role of the Macedonian Royal Regiment⁴⁹ in the historical Albanian-Arbëresh relations, we shall mention some general remarks about its particular formation in the Kingdom of Naples. The regiment was established in 1734 by King Charles Bourbon, afterwards called Charles III, King of the Two Sicilies. Its referendaries were the Count Giorgio Korafa, from the island of Kefalonia, an officer with the rank of colonel, and Count Strati-Gicca, from Himara⁵⁰.

Shortly after the agreement with the king of Naples, Strati-Gicca went to Albania to recruit officers and soldiers for the newly formed unit. They had to be ‘*nazionali Greci*’, and citizens under Ottoman rule and not under the Republic of Venice, Catholics, as it appears from a document of the Greeks “fraternity” of Naples⁵¹:

Arbëresh from Palazzo Adriano, Emanuele Bidera (1784-1858), at that time one of the eminent intellectuals of Napoli. He urged De Rada to publish his first poetic works, which the Poet had spouted at his school: “*E come gli dissi de’ miei esercizi in nostra lingua ed udì qualche ode del Milosao, non lasciò ragionamento che non usasse per indurmi a metterle in luce. E mi trovò ei stesso il tipografo, intanto ch’io facevami venire da casa i danari per la stampa. Si pubblicò nell’agosto del 1836 quella cantica dedicata al Maresciallo di Campo del re, Demetrio Lecca, albanese esso pure ma della Madrepatria e rimasto nel regno dopo sciolto il Reggimento Real Macedone, in cui avea militato unitamente a Marco Bòtzari*”, in GIROLAMO DE RADA, *Autobiologia*, Cosenza, Tipografia Municipale di F.Principe, 1898, 21.

⁴⁹ For the history of this regiment, see R. MANSELLI, “Il Reggimento albanese Real Macedonia durante il regno di Carlo di Borbone”, in *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 71 (1950-1951), 142-167; P. PETTA, *Stradioti. Soldati albanesi in Italia (sec. XV-XIX)*, Argo, Lecce 1996; G. PASSARELLI, *Le icone e le radici. Le icone di Villa Badessa*, Rosciano 2006, 9-13 and *passim* with bibliography; *Dissertazione storico – cronologica del Reggimento Real Macedone, nella quale si tratta della sua origine, formazione e progressi, e delle vicissitudini, che gli sono accadute fino all’anno 1767*, in Bologna, Presso il Volpe, 1767.

⁵⁰ “Il Conte Stratti Ghica era un potente signore e ricco abitante dello Epiro (Albania Meridionale). Egli fu Tenente Colonnello prima e poi Tenente Generale del Real Reggimento Macedone, che nel 1734 venne ideato da Carlo di Borbone di Napoli, poi Carlo III Re delle due Sicilie, e nel 1735 venne effettuato il Reclutamento, a mezzo del Conte Stratti con elementi presi dalla bassa Albania. Allo stesso Stratti successe il Sig. Giorgio Corafa, greco dell’isola di Cefalonia, educato e domiciliato in Venezia ed impiegato al servizio militare di quella Repubblica. Fu questi Colonnello e poi nel 1775 Tenente Generale del medesimo Reggimento Macedone (A. LEK, “Cenno storico dei servizi militari prestati nel Regno delle due Sicilie dai greci, epiroti, albanesi e macedoni in epoche diverse”, Corfù 1843, 17). Based on the paper: *Manoscritto inedito di papas Andrea Figlia (1764)*, with later notes written by Papàs Lorenzo Pernicario, edizione on line con trascrizione a cura di Giuseppina e Pietro Di Marco, Mezzojuso 2008, 11.

⁵¹ *Statuto con cui deve regularsi la Chiesa e Confraternita de’ Santi Pietro e Paolo de’ Nazionali Greci in Napoli, munito di Regio exequatur del 20 Febbraio 1764*, Stamperia del Fibreno, Napoli 1861.

“Intorno poi al sistema vien chiarito da’ fatti divisati, che in detta Chiesa siavi stata una confraternita dei Greci non da molto tempo dismessa, da’ quali si presceglievano li governatori, e detti Greci doveano essere tutti cattolici Romani, che aveano fatto la professione di fede nella corte Arcivescovile di questa Città, dalla quale confraternita si eliggevano quei governatori, che doveano amministrare, e governare la Chiesa, onde l’espedito più proprio, che sembra alla Camera regale sarebbe di rimettersi nuovamente in piedi detta Congregazione di Greci Cattolici Romani nella maniera che fu eretta, ed indi governata”.

From this document, the position of Count Strati Gicca is clear; he is required to take part in the governance of the confraternity:

“Compare in questa Curia il brigadiere Conte (omissis) Tenente Colonnello del reggimento regal Macedone, affin di essere inteso per la ragione, e diritto, che circa il governo di detta Chiesa spetta ad esso Conte, ed agli altri ufficiali Nazionali Greci”.

The connections between the Greek Church and the ‘Macedonian’ Regiment - consisting mainly of inhabitants of Himara, but also of Epirus and the inhabitants of the islands of Heptanese - were very close and this unit was *de facto* part of the institution of the Neapolitan church. These special ties can be clearly seen if we analyze the close relationships that residents of Villa Badessa (Badhesa), a new Albanian community established in 1743⁵², had with the church of the Saints Peter and Paul in Naples. The numerous advantages that these residents benefited from the King of Naples to settle in Villa Badessa, are related to the interventions to the royal court exercised by those officers who came and settled there, along with the soldiers who were recruited by the Korafa himself during his first expedition to the East.

The officers from Himara who had already settled in Badhesa with the military garrison of the regiment, asked the king to get their families⁵³ there simply because they wanted to have them close by, and not because they were persecuted for religious reasons by the Muslim Turks, as Pietro Pompilio Rodotà⁵⁴ writes.

⁵² Up to-date information on the history of this village of Albanian origin and not Arbëresh in Italy, see PASSARELLI, *Le icone e le radici*, 9-20.

⁵³ This explanation about the real reasons and circumstances of the establishment of the community of Badhesa are given by Passarelli (read cit. work., p. 11), who reminds us that also Lino Bellizzi in his book *Villa Badessa oasi orientale in Abruzzo*, Pescara, Tracce, 1994, 86-91, had had rejected the “most dramatic and heroic” reasons for the establishment of this village.

⁵⁴ See *Dell'origine e progresso*, 62-63: “Essendo fieramente attaccati, e aspramente soverchiati dai confinanti Maomettani, si salvarono nei contigui cantoni [...] Vennero nel regno di Napoli con

7. *The Closing of the Arbëresh Presence in the "Greek" Church of Naples*

As Gaetano Passarelli notes:

"In Naples, as in Barletta, Ancona, Lecce, Livorno, Trieste etc., immigrants – who felt like members of one ethnos not because they were associated based on ethnicity in the modern sense of the word, but because of Orthodoxy – represented a kind of an anti-Turkish and anti-Latin ethno-religious cultural gestation, that were united in a fraternity taking care of religious aspects, be it for trading or for the careers of its members [...] The Neapolitan fraternity, formed by people from Epirus (Greek, Albanian, Macedonian) and from the Ionian islands, unlike the others, had a more bureaucratic-military than commercial character [...] The Graecorum fraternity had regular relations with the countries of the origin of its members, either through correspondence, through the trips they made, or through the works (artistic) that they ordered from the homeland. The Neapolitan fraternity, like its counterparts in Italy, suffered deep inner disunity due to the different backgrounds of its members, but the more frequent collisions were related to different positions – philo-Latin or anti-Latin – that they sided with"⁵⁵.

These historical strifes characterized the relationships between Greco-Venetians, who were residents of the Venetian possessions in Heptanese islands, and Greco-Ottomans, who were the Epirus under the Turkish rule, with the Arbëresh who remained the third party. The latter as Catholics, naturally sided with the 'Venetians' political positions, but sometimes, due to ethnic grounds and as followers of the Byzantine rite, they lined up with the other side, especially in cases of international crises (eg. when the Russian-Turkish war broke out they sided with the Epirus Orthodox).

These shifting positions characterized the relations between the fraternity members during the eighteenth century, although the statute adopted in 1764 sanctioned the seniority of the Greek-Venetian part⁵⁶ over the Greek-Ottoman part, being recognized as Arbëresh, who were Catholics with full Eastern rite membership in the parish of Saints Peter and Paul, at least until 1877 when for political reasons it was decided that the fraternity should

tre Sacerdoti. Umanamente trattate dalla Maestà sua, furono spedite a popolare il feudo rustico della Badessa, membro della terra di Pianella [...]. Eresse ancora il Re e dotò la chiesa, in cui dovessero professare il rito greco che sotto la direzione di due Sacerdoti esattamente osservano".

⁵⁵ PASSARELLI, *Le icone e le radici*, 12.

⁵⁶ The Greco-Venetian component of the Greek parish fraternity of Naples stemmed mainly from the islands of the Ionian Sea, where the border between the Catholic and the Orthodox Church was always a problem, and this often created a tense situation in the political and social sphere.



A monument dedicated to Demetrio Lecca at the Greek church yard in Naples (photo by Atanasio Pizzi)

Greek-Catholics of the Eastern rite of Arbëresh ethnicity on one side, and the Greek-Orthodox, of Greek ethnicity on the other.

In brief, we have a realignment of ethnic ‘ingredient’ which represented the traditional poles of the Neapolitan fraternity and a radicalization of the conflict which was not limited to the reports of internal forces between currents, as it used to be the case; on the contrary, the foreign countries that interfered in the internal relations, increasingly gained a greater political weight and foreign countries interfering in internal reports.

pass under the leadership of the Greek Orthodox.

Among the Arbëresh priests who worked in this church during this period, were: Papàs Giuseppe Bugliari from Santa Sofia d’Epiro, Papàs Andrea Filja⁵⁷ from Mezzojuso, Papàs Antonio Pace from San Costantino Albanese, Papàs Nicolò Chetta from Contessa Entellina, Papàs Francesco Antonio Tamburi from San Basile, Papàs Demetrio Camarda from Piana degli Albanesi, Papàs Costantino Tamburi from San Basile, Papàs Giuseppe Martino from Lungro.

With the changes in geo-political scene of the Mediterranean and Europe during the nineteenth century and the formation of some national states, as the Greek State in 1830, together with the continued shrinkage of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe, tensions increased among the fraternities of

⁵⁷ See *Manoscritto inedito di papas Andrea Figlia (1764)*, with later notes added by Papàs Lorenzo Perniciaro, where it was written for: “Fu Parroco della Chiesa Parrocchiale Greca SS. Pietro e Paolo di Napoli (*ku edhe qe varrosur on 22.8.1781*). Fu ancora Cappellano, per lo spazio di molti anni, del Real Reggimento Macedone a Napoli” (p. 10), edizione on line con trascrizione a cura di Giuseppina e Pietro Di Marco, Mezzojuso 2008.

In 1870, with a court decision⁵⁸ that praised the rights of the Arbëresh Catholic community of the Greek rite, represented by Papàs Costantino Tamburi and Giuseppe Martino, the activity of the powerful local Orthodox lobby and its efforts to control the ‘Greek’ Naples parish was temporarily blocked. But, immediately after this decision, the Greek government intervened again (the first time had been 1860 requesting from the government of the time to submit the church to the Greek Orthodox believers) by pressuring the Italian government until an agreement was achieved with the announcement of a law in 1877, which annulled the previous statutory obligation and so excluding the Catholic believers of the Byzantine rite. Through this seemingly liberal law, the old goal of the “pure” Greek Orthodox representatives to exclude from the community the ‘diversamente Greci’ (different Greeks) who were merely Venetian Greeks and Italian Arbëresh. The Greek nationalism managed to secure the hegemony of the “pure” Greeks and the strict tradition of the Orthodox Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Naples, unfortunately with the support Italian politics and of an Arbëresh opportunist, Francesco Crispi⁵⁹.

With this nationalist ‘twist’ ends the presence of the Arbëresh church in Naples⁶⁰; and, unfortunately, also ends the immense transcultural and transnational witness, the one thing that historically characterized the ‘Greek’ Neapolitan, which was the subject of this study. But within the historic diaspora of

⁵⁸ See M. BELLIZZI, *La chiesa dei profughi. Microstorie della Calabria Citra (secc. XVII-XX). Dalla confraternita La Venerabile Cappella del Purgatorio all'utopia del Monte Frumentario di San Basilio*, Librarium Haemus, Bucarest 2014, 61-65.

⁵⁹ Crispi, at that time the president of the Parliament, pressured the Italian prime minister, Depretis, and the Minister of Justice, Mancini, to support the interests of the Greek nationalist circles and as a “reward” for his political interventions in favor of the Greeks of Naples, from the Greece King, Giorgios I, he received the grand cross of the Royal Order of the Savior, one of the titles that was given to Greeks and foreigners who were distinguished in the support of the Greek cause (see F. GUIDA, “Correnti e iniziative filelleniche in Italia dopo il Congresso di Berlino (1878-1886)”, in *Garibaldi e il filellenismo italiano nel XIX secolo*, Istituto italiano di cultura, Atene 1985, 87-117 s. 114).

⁶⁰ The last attempt to return the Greek church of Naples to the Arbëresh of the Eastern rite, was undertaken by Guglielmo Tocci, the uncle of Terenzio Tocci, who in a letter published in the “Giornale di Calabria” on April 22, 1904, urged Ricciotti, the son of Garibaldi, to deal with this issue: “Questi aveva sollecitato sul “Giornale di Calabria” del 22 aprile 1904 da Ricciotti un impegno per la restituzione alle colonie albanesi del collegio italo-greco di San Basilio in Roma e della Chiesa Greca dei SS. Pietro e Paolo in Napoli, con annesso Patrimonio della Confraternita, beni confiscati dopo l’Unità dello Stato italiano (in the footnote we read: *la chiesa dei SS. Pietro e Paolo, insieme con la rendita di 40.000 lire era stata ceduta agli ortodossi per ‘giacobinismo’*”, in Fondo Ricciotti, *Albania*, 274,35 in Central Museum of Risorgimentos in Rome), ricevendo una risposta pubblica ricca di speranze più che di certezze”. Cited from Fr. GUIDA, “Ricciotti Garibaldi e il movimento nazionale albanese”, in *Archivio Storico Italiano* CXXXIX, I (1981), 97-138 s. 111.

the Mediterranean – here we do not mean only the Greek communities, but also Jewish, Arbëresh communities, etc. - this heritage has always been present, a quality that distinguishes these communities from the mono-nationalist and non-diaspora cultures. Thanks to the ‘cultural mediation’ they managed to hybridize and to interplay with other cultures that were added to the original one, so naturally, without limitations and nationalistic exceptions, becoming more prosperous.

These diaspora cultures by surpassing the obstacles that nationalism produces - whether geographical, political, ethnic or religious - have found deeper reasons of their identity, historically and naturally hybrid. As James Clifford wisely reminds us, ‘clean fruits derange’⁶¹: the delayed nationalism of all parties and the backward nationalists of all flags that always follow the “foolish ideology of purity”, even today, fail to grasp this important lesson⁶².

⁶¹ The original title in the English version: J. CLIFFORD, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Harvard University Press, Boston 1988. The Italian translation by Mario Marchetti of James Clifford’s work, was published as *I frutti puri impazziscono*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1993.

⁶² I sincerely thank Diana Rexha Ibrahim who helped me translating this work from Albanian into English and also Mons. George Dmitry Gallaro for editing the final text.