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Life cycle of Greko. *In memoriam* of Domenico Nucera – Mimmo Nucera “Milinari”

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Introductory remarks

Domenico – Mimmo Nucera passed away on May 17th, 2022, mourned by the entire Grecanic Calabria. His work and engagement were invaluable in preserving the Greko language and culture. He was a treasure trove of knowledge about the Greko community that he enthusiastically shared with everyone, especially with young people. Milinari was involved in many activities promoting the Greko language and culture, including actively teaching at the summer schools *To ddomadi greko – La settimana greka* (EN: The Greko Week). His death is an irreparable loss to the community.

Mimmo Nucera was born in Condofuri on 12th of April 1947 and lived in Gallicianò. He owed his nickname (“Milinari”)², to the part of a miller in a theater performance which he had played as a child (Καραναστάσης 1988). Since his early years, Mimmo had been involved in activities fostering the protection, sustenance, and transmission of the Greko-Calabrian language, culture, and musical tradition. He danced and played the

¹ ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8149-779X>.

² *Ο μιλινάρη* [o milinári] – means ‘miller’ in Greko, especially in Galliciano, Condofuri, and Bova.

tambourine, accompanying the accordion and zampogna (an instrument similar to a bagpipe) players, himself an excellent zampogna player as well.

For the Greko community in Calabria, Mimmo was a point of reference not only in matters of language, but also in the organization of cultural events. The members of *Jalò tu Vua* refer to him as their rolemodel, dearest friend, a force of energy and perseverance inexhaustibly striving to pass the Greko values onto new generations. The community at large has expressed immense gratitude for his input in the Greko community, and for the great friendship.

This brief memorial note aims to honor not only the memory of Mimmo, but also that of the last generations of the Greko people who were native speakers of the language. Thanks to these individuals, the Greko language and culture have had a chance to undergo a revival, hence their key role in language and culture transmission should be both emphasized and appreciated.

The Greko People

The inhabitants of Gallicianò, similarly to other Greko villages, were exposed to nearly all factors typically associated with language extinction (Bromham, Dinnage, Skirgård et al. 2022). In the 16th century, the cultural connection with the Byzantine Empire was interrupted, which caused an ever strengthening process of Calabria's latinization. Byzantine culture and religion directly associated with the Greek language and heritage, were superseded by their Catholic and Latin counterparts in an attempt oriented towards cultural homogenization in this area (Violi 2005). Cultural centers which could contribute to the systematic continuation of the Greko language and culture remained absent in Bovesia until the 1960s-70s (Πετροπούλου 2023). Paralelly, Calabria shared the fate of Southern Italy losing its importance along with the development of civilization and industry, especially in Northern Italy. This situation caused many Calabrian people to emigrate to more economically developed regions, especially considering that the predominantly agricultural character of Bovesia was dependent on natural dynamics, cyclically exposing its inhabitants to bouts of hunger and cold (Crupi 1979). The strongest decline of the Greko language began in the early 20th century (Squillaci 2017); by 1975, the International Association for the Defence of Threatened Languages and Culture

noted that Greko language and culture to be nearly extinct (AIDCLCM 1975). Some researches have even evoked the notion of language death (Stamuli 2007).

Domenico Nucera

Mimmo's domicile, sometimes referred to as the "Acropolis of Magna Graecia", is recognized not only as the place where the Greko language has survived (Condemi 1995), but also a cradle for the revitalization and rebirth of Greek culture and Orthodox religion (Schwaderer 2018). Until 1968, when the first Greek speaking cultural association "La Ionica dei Greci di Calabria" was established, Gallicianò had been one of the many villages where the Greko language was spoken (Πετροπούλου 1994).³ The Ionica association tried to act against the sentiment of shame and social inferiority. Moreover, the establishing of the association was an incentive for further activities aimed at preserving the Greko linguistic heritage via teaching, among others (Πετροπούλου 2007).

The movement in its entirety led to an awakening and re-discovery of the Greko identity (Πετροπούλου 2023), as the revival took place not only in villages like Gallicianò, but also in Reggio di Calabria, where Greko people partially moved from their villages. Domenico Nucera thus witnessed a range of activities performed by the members of "La Ionica dei Greci di Calabria", and inevitably realized the fact that he and his generation were the main living "transmitters" of a unique culture and language.

Nonwithstanding, the living conditions were still difficult in the Greko rural areas. Consequently, due to socioeconomic and political circumstances, the speakers were forced to disperse throughout Calabria, the rest of Italy, and abroad. For example, many inhabitants of Gallicianò emigrated, permanently or temporarily, to Switzerland or to Northern Italy. Mimmo did not leave his homeland and continued to live in the Reggio di Calabria district where he worked in the forest industry, eventually settling down in Condofuri where he was buried on May 19th, 2022.

³ Other such villages include: Αμυγδαλέα (Amendolea), Βούα (Bova), Γιαλό του Βούα (Bova Marina), Βουνί (Roccaforte), Χωρίο του Βουνίου (Chorio di Roccaforte), Κοντοφούρι (Condofuri), Ρηγούδι/Ρογούδι (Roghudi), Χωρίο του Ρηγουδίου (Chorio di Roghudi).

Having gathered the experiences of Ionica and CUMELCA⁴, i.e., the older associations uniting the Greko people, Milinari became an energetic leader who shared his knowledge, language, and music-making skills with all of the Greko generations he met in his lifetime. Though not a teacher of language and music, he was a guardian spirit for the youngest generation of Greko activists.

Milinari did not officially participate as a member of the Jalò tu Vua association⁵, he was nevertheless invariably involved in the numerous activities of this association. Among these was the Summer School of the Greko Language and Culture *To ddomadi greko – La settimana greka* where he met students of different age groups and taught them to speak and sing in Greko.

Mimmo's funeral was attended by numerous members of the Greko community and by those whom Milinari encouraged to explore and sustain the Greko language and culture.

Pame ambrò!⁶

The Greko language and culture have been actively struggling for survival in the changing circumstances, for many decades. Domenico Nucera was affected by these processes. Although his generation, i.e., the generation whose first language was Greko, disappeared, their valuable input in preserving the Greko language and culture has remained. Milinari was aware that it is the young people, especially local activists and Greko language and culture practitioners, who offer a new hope. His faith that the vitality of Calabrian Greek heritage can be passed onto the next generations fueled his efforts to preserve the tradition in a difficult time when many resigned from transmitting the Greko language to their descendants. In this perspective, the life of Mimmo Nucera mirrors the fate of the Greko language and culture. Even without his physical presence, his words and teachings remain with the Greko people and activists whom he endowed with hope, vision, and inspiration to undertake more systematic activities which became possible in 1999 when the Law 482 on linguistic minorities in Italy was passed (Pietropaolo 2016).

⁴ Cumunia tos Ellenofono tis Calavria.

⁵ <https://www.jalotuvua.com/>

⁶ 'Let's go forward!' in Greko language.

As an active keeper of Greko language and culture, Mimmo always engaged in the activities of the summer school *To ddomadi greko*. The 8th edition of the school, organized in Bova Marina on 1–7 August 2022, was dedicated to his memory. Since the very beginnings, Domenico Nucera's voice and music were warmly received; in 2022, the coordinators of the school decided not to organize loud events. Even though the school fell silent without Milinari, his message resounded as clear as ever. He gave the floor to younger generations and allowed them to share the unique Greko heritage. At this point, a new stage in the life of the Greko language and culture has begun.

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Abstract

The text was written in honor of the memory of Domenico Nucera of Gallicianò, known as Milinari ('the Miller'); its aim is to emphasize the key role of his generation for the Greko language and culture revitalization movement. Milinari was both an outstanding figure and a crucial agent in the preservation and

revitalization of Greko language and culture. His life reflects the plight of many members in the Greko community in Greko-speaking Calabria, Italy. Though not officially considered an activist, he collaborated with nearly all organizations and groups whose goal was to preserve and revitalize the Greko heritage in South Calabria. His most recent activities centered around the summer school of Greko language and culture; its 8th edition which took place in Bova Marina on August 1–7, 2022, was dedicated to his memory.

Karolina Gortych-Michalak, Modern Greek researcher. Her PhD Thesis was devoted to the political rhetoric of 20th-century Greece and her Post-Doc Thesis to Greek-Polish legal translation. In the last decade, she was a participant of a number of research projects concerning the parameterization of legilinguistic translology (Polish National Science Center) and minorized languages, especially the Greco language in Calabria (MSCA). She independently managed a project in which she examined the distance between Modern Greek and the Greko and Griko languages (Polish National Science Center). Her current work focuses on sociolinguistic research and research within the frames of anthropological and cultural linguistics; in her current research, she makes frequent use of linguistic landscape as a tool. She works at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, where she leads the Department of Unique Languages and Literatures.

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