Griko People

The Griko people (Greek: Ελληνοί), also known as Grecanici in Calabria, are an ethnic Greek community of Southern Italy. They are found principally in regions of Calabria (Province of Reggio Calabria) and Apulia (peninsula of Salento). The Griko are believed to be remnants of the once large Ancient and Medieval Greek communities of southern Italy (the old Magna Graecia region), although there is dispute among scholars as to whether the Griko community is directly descended from Ancient Greeks or from more recent medieval migrations during the Byzantine domination. Greek people have been living in Southern Italy for millennia, initially arriving in Southern Italy in numerous waves of migrations, from the ancient Greek colonisation of Southern Italy and Sicily in the 8th century BC through to the Byzantine Greek migrations of the 15th century caused by the Ottoman conquest. In the Middle Ages Greek, regional communities were reduced to isolated enclaves. Although most Greek inhabitants of Southern Italy have become entirely Italianised over the centuries, the Griko community has been able to preserve their original Greek identity, heritage, language and distinct culture, although exposure to mass media has progressively eroded their culture and language.

The Griko people traditionally spoke Italiot Greek (the Griko or Calabrian dialects), which is a form of the Greek language. In recent years, the number of Griko who speak the Griko language has been greatly reduced; the younger Griko have rapidly shifted to Italian. Today, the Griko are Catholic.

Name

The name Griko derives from the traditional name for Greeks on the Italian peninsula, it is believed to derive from the Graecian, an ancient Hellenic people which according to legend took their name from Graecus. They were one of the first Greek tribes to colonize Italy. The area that came to be known as Magna Graecia took its name after them. The Latins used this term in reference to all Hellenes because the first Hellenes they came into contact with were the Graecians. The name Greeks. Another opinion is that the ethnonym -κῶτον does not derive linguistically from either Latin Graecus or Greek Graikos; it may have been the term their ancient Italian neighbors used for local Greek speakers in pre-Roman times, although this is only one linguistic hypothesis among many.

Distribution

The Griko-speaking territory of Bovesia lies in very mountainous terrain and is not easily accessible. In recent times, many descendants of the early inhabitants of the area have left the mountains to set up home by the coast. The Griko-speakers of Calabria live in the villages of Bova Superiore, Bova Marina, Roccaforte del Greco, Condojanni, Palizzi, Gallipanico and Melito di Porto Salvo. In 1999 the Italian Parliament extended the historical Griko territories by Act 482 to include the towns of Palizzi, San Lorenzo, Staili, Samo, Montebello Jonico, Bagaladi, Moita San Giovanni, Brancalone and parts of Reggio. In the Grecia Salentina region of Apulia, the Griko-speakers are to be found in the villages of Calimeria, Martignano, Martano, Stegnata, Zollino, Corigliano d'Otranto, Solestello, Melippignano and Castrignano dei Greci, although Griko seems to be disappearing from Martignano, Solestello and Melippignano. Towns populated by the Griko people outside the Bovesia and Grecia Salentina regions have almost entirely lost the knowledge of their Griko language; this occurred largely in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Some towns that have lost the knowledge of the Griko tongue include the cities of Cardito, Montebello, San Pantaleone and Santa Caterina in Calabria. At the beginning of the nineteenth century today's nine Greek-speaking cities of the Grecia Salentina area along with Sogliano Cavour, Cutrofiano, Canoletto and Cutrofiano formed part of the Decatia Choria (the thirteen cities of Terra d'Otranto) who preserved the Greek language and traditions. At a more remote period Greek was also spoken by a prevalent Greek population in Galatina, Galatone, Gallipoli and many other localities of Apulia, and at Cutrofiano and Cutrofiano in Calabria.

Villages in Italy

The Griko villages usually have two names, an Italian one as well as a native Griko name by which villagers refer to the town. The Griko villages are typically divided into small “islands” in the areas of southern Italy:

- Apulia
  - Province of Salento (Grecia Salentina)
  - Calimera
  - Cannole: Càmna
  - Capracotta: Cripàraca
  - Corigliano d'Otranto: Corigliana
  - Martano: Martana
  - Martignano: Martignana
  - Melippignano: Lippignana
  - Solestello: Sulita
  - Stegnata: Sogliano Cavour
  - Zollino: Tsudhínu
  - Galatina: As Péترو
- Province of Salento (outside Grecia Salentina)

Griko people

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Groups by region

Northern Greeks:
- Thracians (Constantinopolitans)
- Macedonians
- Thessalians
- Epirotes
- Northern Epirotes

Southern Greeks:
- Peloponnesians (Maniots, Tsakonians)
- Roumeliotes

Eastern Greeks:
- Maceviates
- Greci (Aeolis, Ionia, Bosporus, Atlantis)
- Pontic (Caucasus, Crimea)
- Cappadocians
- Karamanlides

Islanders:
- Cretans
- Eptanesians
- Cyclades
- Cypriots

Other groups:
- Arvanites (Souliotes)
- Egyptiotes
- Grecanici
- Romaniotes
- Sarakatsani
- Slavophones
- Urums

Greek culture
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- Greek Roman Catholicism
- Greek Byzantine Catholicism
- Greek Evangelicalism
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- Islam
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Languages and dialects
- Greek
- Calabrian Greek
- Cappadocian Greek
- Cretan Greek
- Dodecanese Greek
- Epirot Greek
- Himaracian Greek
- Maniot Greek
- Pontic Greek
- Tsakonian

History of Greece

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Literature

Early migrations

The first Greek contacts with Italy are attested since prehistoric times, when Mycenaean Greeks established settlements in Central and Southern Italy and Sicily. In ancient times the Italian Peninsula south of Naples including the coasts of Calabria, Lecce, Apulia, Campania and Sicily were colonized by the Ancient Greeks, beginning in the 8th century BC. The Greek settlements were so densely collected that during the Classical period the region came to be called Magna Graecia (Greater Greece). Greeks continued to migrate to these regions in many waves from antiquity until as late as the Byzantine migrations of the 15th century.

Later migrations

During the Early Middle Ages, following the disastrous Gothic War, new waves of Greeks came to Magna Graecia from Greece and Asia Minor, as Southern Italy remained loosely governed by the Byzantine Empire. The iconoclast emperor Leo III appropriated lands in southern Italy that had been granted to the Papacy, and the Eastern Emperor loosely governed the area until the advent of the Lombards; then, in the form of the Capitaneate of Apulia, they were superseded by the Normans. Moreover, the Byzantines would have found in Southern Italy people of common cultural roots, the Greek-speaking ellenofoni of Magna Graecia. The Greek language never died out entirely in southern Italy, although the area in which it was spoken was significantly reduced by the progression of Latin. Records of Magna Graecia being predominantly Greek-speaking, date as late as the eleventh century (the end of Byzantine domination in Southern Italy).

Around the end of the Middle Ages, large parts of Calabria, Lucania, Apulia, and Sicily continued to speak Greek as their mother tongue. During the 13th century a French chronicler passing through the whole of Calabria stated that "the peasants of Calabria spoke nothing but Greek". In 1638 the Italian scholar Pietro Antono de Ferraris, recommended a stay in Calabria to a student who needed to improve his knowledge of Greek. The Griko people were the dominant population element of some regions of Calabria and the Salento until the 16th century.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a slow process of Catholicization and Latinization of the Greek populations of southern Italy and Sicily would reduce the Greek language and culture further. Antonio de Ferraris, a Greek born in Galatone in 1444, observed how the inhabitants of Kallipoli (Galatopoli in Apulia) as still conversing in their original Greek mother tongue, as did the Greek classical tradition that had remained alive in this region of Italy and that the population is probably Lacedaemonian (Spartin) stock. The Greek of Southern Italy, although greatly reduced, remains active in isolated enclaves in Calabria and Puglia. Even after the Middle Ages there were sporadic migrations from mainland Greece. Thus, considerable numbers of refugees entered the region in the 16th and 17th centuries. This happened in reaction to the Peloponnesian by the Ottomans.

During the 20th century the use of the Griko language was considered, even by many of the Griko themselves, as a symbol of backwardness and an obstacle to their progress, parents would discourage their children from speaking the dialect and students who were caught talking in Griko were classed as charisted. For many years the Griko of Calabria and Apulia have been forgotten. Even in Greece, Greeks were unaware of its existence.

Grik cultural group from Salento.

Griko national awakening

The Griko national awakening began in Grecia Salentina through the labors of Vito Domenico Palumbo, a Griko native of the town of Calimera, Palumbo embarked on to re-establishing cultural contacts with mainland Greece. The revival of attention is also due to the pioneering work of the German linguist and philologist Gerhard Rohlfis, who contributed much to the documentation and preservation of the Griko language. Professor Ernesto Aprilie of Calabria published his community interest for preservation and growth of Griko poetry, history, and performance as a civic responsibility until his death in 2008, and published multiple monographs on the subject for local and national distribution, acting as recognized—unofficial—ambassador to visitors and dignitaries to Calimera and the sea-side sections of Melendugno nearby.

Culture

Music

The Griko have a rich folklore and oral tradition. Griko songs, music and poetry are popular in Italy and Greece and famous music groups from Salento include Ghettonia and Asremlo. Also, influential Greek artists such as Georgia Dalamas, Dionyssos Savopoulos, Marinella, Hans Alexius and Maria Fanartouri have performed in the Griko language. Every summer in Meligiano, a small town of Salento, there is the famous Voti della Farante festival, it is attended by thousands of young people dancing all night to the tune of Pizzica and Griko Salentino dialect. An increased exposure to mass media has increasingly eroded the Griko culture and language.

Other music groups of Griko music include, from Salento: Agrıklı, Argallo, Arakne Mediterranean, Aristèa, Atanathan, Avledha, Briganti di Terra d'Otranto, Canzoniere Greco Canzoniere Greco, Officina Zoe. From Calabria: Astaki, Nistanimera, Stella del Sud, Ta scipòvlita; and from Greece: Encardia. Encardia was the subject of a documentary film called "Encardia, the Dancing Stone", inspired by and celebrating the music of the Griko people.

Language

The Griko's ancestral mother-tongue forms two distinctive Greek dialects, which are collectively known as Katoitaliotika (literally "Southern Italian"), Grecanika and/or Griko language, both mutually intelligible to some extent with Standard Modern Greek. The Griko people in Apulia speak the Griko dialect, as opposed to the Calabrian dialect, spoken in Calabria. These dialects, survived far into the Middle Ages and even into these days, preserve features, sounds, grammar and vocabulary of Ancient Greek, spoken in Magna Graecia by the ancient Greeks, colonists, Koine Greek, and medieval Byzantine Greek.

The Griko language is classified as severely endangered, as the number of speakers has diminished in recent decades due to language shift to Italian. Today it is roughly spoken by 20,000 predominantly elderly people, while the youngest speakers tend to be over thirty years old and only a few child speakers exist. The Griko language has been influenced more by the Italian than any other Greek dialects.

The Nfranghita which is the name of the Calabrian Mafia is a word of Calabrian Greek origin.

Religion

During the Middle Ages, the Griko people of southern Italy were adherents to the Eastern Orthodox Church, as were the majority of the Greek peoples who were part of the Byzantine Empire. Some Greeks of Southern Italy managed to rise to positions of power in the churches, several even managing to become Popes in Rome like Pope John VIII and Antipope John XVII. However following the religious East-West Schism this would soon change. In the 11th century the Normans overran southern Italy, and soon Bari, the last Byzantine outpost, fell to them. They began a process of Latinization, changing the Greek people's religious allegiances from Orthodox and the Church of Constantinople to Catholicism of the Church of Rome. This was a course of action which ultimately accelerated the assimilation process of countless Greek inhabitants. The Greek clergy eventually adopted Latin for the mass, although Greek resistance to the Latin rite was prolonged in Calabria. Latin prelates were not established at Consenza, Bistagno and Squillace until 1093-6. In 1093 the Norman King Roger attempted to install a Latin archbishop over the overwhelmingly Greek population of Rossano, however this was a complete failure, a revolt took place in favour of restoring the Byzantine rite. At Crotone, Rossa and Gerace the clergy continued to use the Greek liturgy even though they were under Latin bishops. In Apulia, where the Normans took a less intense attitude to the Latinization, the people, the Griko people continued to speak the Greek language and to celebrate the Orthodox rite. Some Griko in both Calabria and Apulia remained adherents to the Orthodox church until the early 17th century. Today, the Griko people are mostly Roman Catholic.

Literature

Early Griko literature

Contemporary literature

Cuisine

During many centuries of cohabitation there was an exchange of knowledge between Griko and Southern Italians in the art of cooking. The Griko are traditionally producers of cereals, vegetables, olives and legumes. Local Griko cuisine does not differ greatly from the local Italian population, however there local regional variations. Many typical Griko dishes are still in use among them. Some of them are mentioned below.
A book about the cuisine of the Griko of Salento has been published, entitled *Grecia Salentina la Cultura Gastronomica*. It features many traditional recipes distinctive to the Grecia Salentina region of southern Apulia.

**Notable people**

- Pope Anterus (died 236)
- Pope John VII (c. 650-707)
- Pope Zachary (679-752)
- Nilus the Younger (910-1005), a saint born to a Greek family in Rossano, Calabria.
- Antipope John XVI (c. 945-1001), of Greek origin from Rossano, Calabria.
- Barlaam of Seminara (c. 1290-1348), Aristotelian scholastic scholar and clergyman of the 14th century.
- Leonios Pilatus (died 1366), Greek cultural scholar, was one of the earliest promoters of Greek studies in Western Europe.
- Antonio de Ferranazia (c. 1444-1517), Greek scholar, academic, doctor and humanist from Palatine, Apulia.
- Sergio Stiso (c. 1458-1568), religious man of Greek-Orthodox Rite, humanist, philosopher and theologian from Zolino, Apulia.
- Vito Domenico Palumbo (c. 1854-1918), writer and poet.
- Domenico Tondi (1885-1965), writer and poet.
- Tony Bennett (New York, August 3, 1926), Italian-American singer of popular music, standards, show tunes, and jazz whose paternal ancestors were originally from the Griko town of Podarono in Calabria. His ancestors immigrated from Calabria to the United States where Tony was later born.
- Ernesto Aprile (2008), scientist.

**See also**

- Magna Graccia
- Griko language
- Greek diaspora
- Arbëreshë people

**References**

5. "F. Viti, Storia degli studi e della letteratura popolare greca in C.S.E. Bova (IL), 1992

**Sources**


**External links**

- Enosì Griko, Coordination of Grecia Salentina Associations
- Mi mi cuddise pedimmo ("Don't reproach me, my son"), a song in the Griko language performed by a local
- Franco st Angurina, Lo "Sciaccùddh". Two performances in the local Greek dialect of Choriana (Corigliano d'Otranto)
- Andra mou pas, a famous Griko song by Franco Corliano about immigration, with modern Greek translation, performed by Encarda. The full title of the song is "O Klama jineka u emigrantu" ("Lament of the emigrant's wife") but, commonly, the title is shortened to "Klama" and it's widely known as "Andramu pai" ("My husband goes away")
- Palearztia 2005 Bova Griko di Calabria

**Videos**

- Documentary on the Griko community of Salento (in Greek and Italian):
- Kalos Irata Sti Grecia Salentina - Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, Part 4
- Documentary on the Griko Community of Calabria (Subtitles in Greek and Italian. 60mins):
- Viaggio nella Calabria Greca - Part 1.
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Because Griko is a dialect, spoken by a minimal amount of (old) people in a couple of villages, less than 40,000 people. (Italy has 63 million inhabitants). I doubt they actually feel Greeks more than...