

# The Italoalbanian Kalimera of the Parco Pollino in Calabria

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**Abstract**—In several regions of Southern Italy there is still a rural tradition to recite the Passion in the local dialects. They are Balkan dialects which are mixed with the local Italian dialect, but its ritual recitation is usually called kalimera («Good morning» in Greek). The present study compares five communities which perform the kalimera in a more or less liturgical context of the Holy Week: Spezzano albanese (Spixana), Acquaformosa (Firmoza), Lungro (Ungra), Firmo (Ferma), San Basile (Shën Vasili), Frascineto (Frasnita), and Civita (Çifti). The five communities use a corpus of texts which often follow a literary prototype created by Jul Variboba during the 17th century. Each village uses different melodies or strophic models usually a monophonic recitation by female singers, San Basile's recitation is even performed as a multipart song alternating between male and female singers, while the female multipart recitation of Spezzano must be regarded as a lost tradition.

## 1. Introduction

The kalimera is a paraliturgical genre, a narration made in the local dialects which are sung before Christmas and Easter. It is known in many villages of Southern Italy, and it proves that the national jargon which defines «ethnic and linguistic minorities» in Southern regions, is wrong, because Balcan languages might have only survived in small «linguistic islands»... Nevertheless, from a traditional point of view it must be understood beyond the question of linguistic competences as a mainstream culture, which has also survived, where this genre is sung in Italian dialects. This situation made the common distinction between so-called minorities and majorities obsolete, especially since the status is no longer used to protect minorities, but abused instead to abandon them, at least within the subjects to be taught in elementary schools. As consequence, this dialect, although it still has a very large number of speakers in comparison with Occitan and Greek «minorities», is now as well on the red list of seriously endangered languages, because a definite

decline of this dialect is expected for the next years.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this problematic, we will focus here on Italoalbanian communities within a very small territory of Northern Calabria, geographically located between Spezzano Albanese and San Basile on the North South axis, and between Acquaformosa and Civita on the West East axis. The villages whose kalimeret in their Italoalbanian dialects are compared here, are Spezzano Albanese (Spixana), Acquaformosa (Firmoza), Lungro (Ungra), Firmo (Ferma), San Basile (Shën Vasili), Frascineto (Frasnita), and Civita (Çifti).<sup>2</sup>

The local kalimeret have in common that most of the texts, although they existed within an oral tradition over nearly three centuries, can be traced back to a literary prototype, which was created and published by the papas Jul Variboba in 1762.

### ***1.1. The author of the oldest kalimeret***

His biography is very tragic. He was one of the first seminarists educated exclusively for the Arbëresh communities, since a new law was established at the Vatican, that these communities were allowed to celebrate again the Greek rite.<sup>3</sup> In order to introduce them well for this purpose, a Collegio was established in the village of San Benedetto Ullano (not far from the provincial capital Cosenza). Jul Variboba who intended to replace his father at San Giorgio Albanese (Mbuzat), was one of its most gifted students among the first generation, that its director nominated him as his successor. Meanwhile Variboba had to leave San Benedetto Ullano, because the over-aged father needed his support at San Giorgio. Finally, he could not follow his father, because the local maire denounced him before the church administration, the so-called «Propaganda fide», that Jul Variboba intended to convert the Greek rite of his village into the Latin rite.<sup>4</sup> Jul Variboba was forced to leave his village and the following trial at Naples provoked scandal, where Variboba stayed for several years. After this period he went to Rome, and he stayed at the Vatican until his death, separated from the communities for those he was once educated.

Despite he had failed so much in his own career, his importance for the Arbëresh communities at

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1 Two reports about Arbëresh teaching in different forms of education were published by Gianni Belluscio (1995;2010).

2 Some recordings of the local kalimeret have already been done by Diego Carpitella and were finally transcribed and translated by Gianni Belluscio (Ricci & Tucci 2006).

3 The relevant papal bulls and the new charges of the Collegio Corsini were quoted by Italo Elmo (2011, 2:1013-1052).

4 Very useful material around Variboba was published by Italo Elmo (2011, 2:1068-1071). It might be interpreted that Jul Variboba acted in a subversive way against the newly established Greek rite. The few things we know, is that he collaborated with the archdiocese of Rossano, the former residence of the local Archimandrite, a Byzantine institution which was once established under the Normans. If Mbuzat had come under administration of Rossano, it would have caused such a conversion, since the diocese did not belong to the «Byzantine rite» according to the new law.

the Calabrian border towards Basilicata which can be regarded as one of the most creative centres among the living Italoalbanian traditions today, is out of question.

### ***1.2. The current kalimeret of Italy***

Like the kalimera texts, we know from Grecia salentina (a linguistic island between Sternatia in the West and Martano in the East which is about 50 km at the South of the provincial capital Lecce), that the kalimera has even survived in villages, where the Apulian dialect is no longer mixed with a local Greek dialect called «Griko». Interesting enough this tradition has survived as para-liturgy, since it could not be touched by church reforms. It survived as well in communities of the Greek as well as those of the Latin rite, it even survived in those villages, where linguistic competences to speak the Balkan dialects have disappeared. Oliver Gerlach proposed another view as the one which marginalises these traditions as those belonging to certain minorities and their particular concept of national identity. Instead they could be regarded a particular «Southern» culture, which once belonged to the majority of its population until it had become excluded as part of Italy for ideological reasons.<sup>5</sup> At least this might explain, why paraliturgical dance forms known as tarantella and the kalimera as an epic recitation of important church feasts in dialect language are much more wide-spread than the competences to speak these dialects. Both forms have many parallels with rural traditions of Balkan countries (the integration of nomadic tribes and gipsies, a lot of customs which are regarded sometimes with suspicions by church authorities).

Despite its official minority status as a linguistic community, we can say that its culture does less belong to a «minority», rather to a former «majority» of Southern Italy. Nevertheless, the kalimeret cannot be regarded as «mainstream», because they show a great diversity, since every village uses different melodies, although they are used to recite similar texts. With focus on the Easter kalimeret we found, that the kalimeret as a para-liturgical genre had become almost liturgical in this area. Often they are no longer performed during the processions like in Frascineto, they became a ceremony of its own which is performed on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday in the church. The old custom that the kalimera is performed during the night between Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday (its name *καλημέρα* derived from the greeting which opens such a performance) does no longer exist in this area.

## **2. Localisation of kalimera texts**

The fact that kalimeret are related to Variboba's earliest efforts to transcribe an oral language like Arbëresh into Latin letters had also a strong impact on Librandi's concept to teach the grammar of

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<sup>5</sup> Gerlach (2015;2016).

this dialect with poetic texts taken from his book by the end of the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> Jul Variboba himself was not convinced that his first experiment to transcribe and create poetry within the oral language will find an enthusiastic reception in his village and within the other communities nearby. His book was published 1762 in Rome, but sold at a bookshop of his home village San Giorgio Albanese. In its preface he addressed his readers with following words.<sup>7</sup>

If you do not like it [the book], make a pretty fire and burn it. At least you can warm your hands.

Ndë mos të pariirtit, e ti ben gne të miir frunguleer, e digghie, se astù alminu ngroghen duar.

The social situation at San Giorgio Albanese (Mbuzat) during the 18th century shows that a very few people could write and read Italian except of a few priests, monks, and teachers. We do not know, how many could read the idiolectal Albanian written by Variboba. Nevertheless, the traditions of kalimeret prove that Jul Variboba's contribution can hardly be underestimated.

Today the living traditions offer an opportunity to make recordings of the kalimeret in all these different villages and to describe the local differences according to linguistic terms and according to the different arrangements and melodies based on Variboba's contribution.

Our documentation during the last years proved that the more or less oral tradition of the villages in question have a limited repertoire of texts. Most of them are arrangements which are either directly based on Jul Variboba's poems or simply own local creations inspired by them. The main problem is that not all the materials that are part of the tradition come directly from Variboba's text, so the aim of our research is (a) to monitor and to describe the real situation in every village, (b) to collect and to overview all the material we can get, (c) to reconstruct the oral tradition as far as possible, (d) to draw parallels between the current tradition and older layers as far as they can be reconstructed (Variboba, unknown authors, other known poets or editors of printed text books in use etc.).

### Maundy Thursday

- «E graxje patsha Zonjza Najtesh» (Firmoza, Ferma, Çifti, Spixana).
- «Pasjuna Ti zot ki paçenx», «Një t'ënjtazin mbrëma» (not Frasnita).
- «Nutixja» (Spixana, Firmoza, Ferma, Çifti).

6 It should be noted that Vincenzo Librandi (1897) had great difficulties to find one of those books published by the author himself. He looked for it in public libraries, but he finally found one in Vaccarizo Albanese. Today not even one of Variboba's original books printed in 1762 has survived. We have only two reproductions on microfilm in Tirana and at the university library of Rende.

7 Variboba (1762: 6): *Oi ti Cie diavasën* («To you who is reading [this book]»). Modern transcription according Vincenzo Belmonte (2005: 44): *Ndë mos të parirtit e ti bën një të mīr frungullēr e digje, se ashtu allminu nrgroghën duar[t]*.

## Good Friday

- Patirterni («Sot që jan dhulluret», «Oj bir»°, «Kujtomi sa për ne»\*) in Çifti, Firmoza, Spixana°, Frasnita\* (kalimera with vajtim).
- Kapuçini whose text is not based at all on Variboba's poem, but an Arbëresh version of the Calabrian song «Lu vënniri santu».<sup>8</sup>
- Vajtim «E keqe penë» (Ferma).
- Vajtim «Popo, Bir, hjemath si diell» (Frasnita).

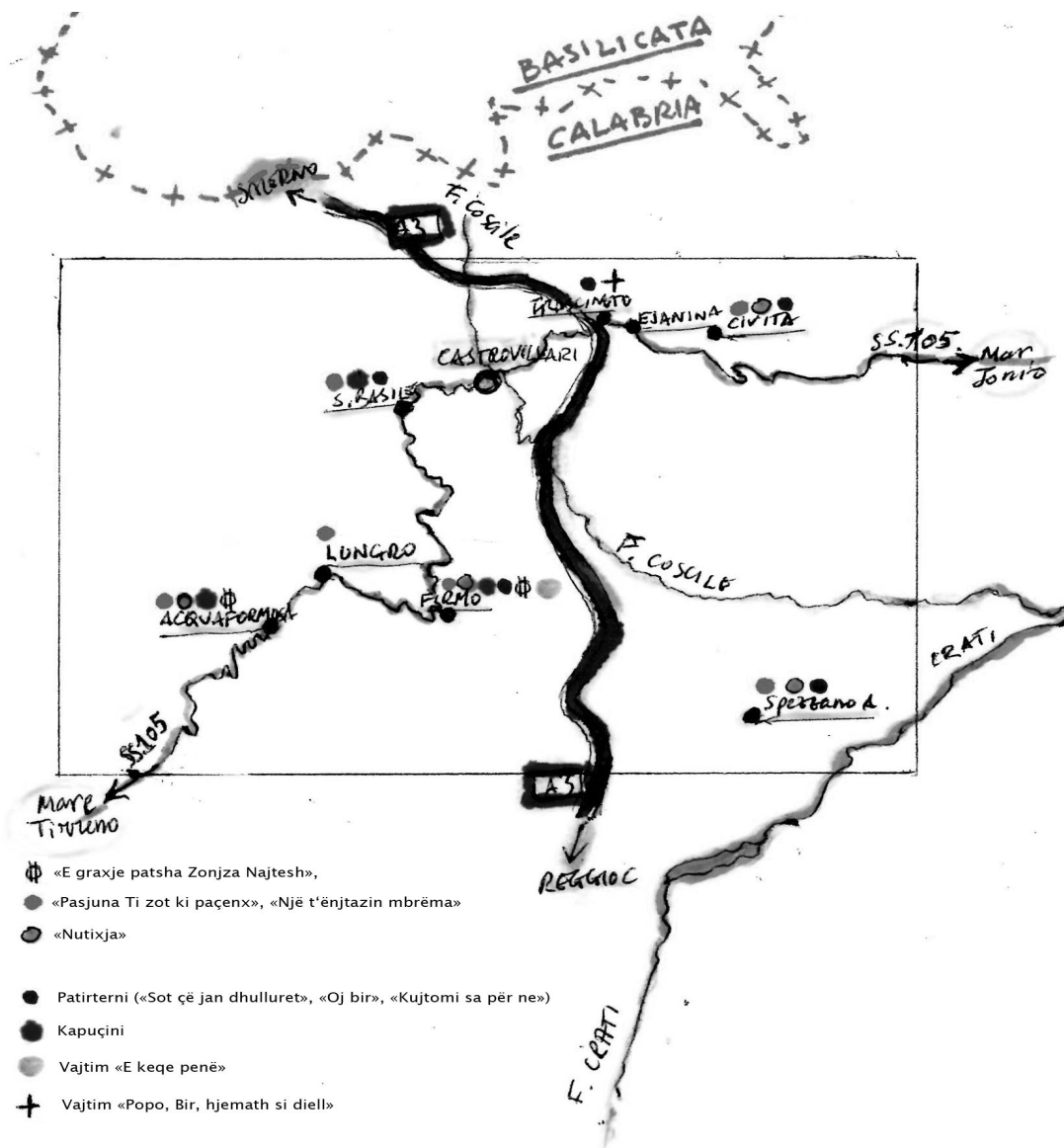


Fig. 1: Map for the location of the kalimeret

The map (fig. 1) shows how the villages of this repertoire are located geographically.

<sup>8</sup> According to Leonardo Alario (1998) from Alto Ionio.

## ***2.1. Linguistic variety of a rural area***

The Italo-Albanian linguistic area which spreads from the Province of Pescara (Abruzzo) to that of Palermo (Sicily) presents a fuzzy situation which is the result of their different (geographic and chronological) origins and of about six centuries of isolation. The result of such a situation is the consequent production of different phonetic and morphological variations, but also a deep distance both among their lexemes and their semantics.

From a social point of view it seems necessary to remind that structural changes are also due to acculturation and to the linguistic pressure of Italian language and to the transformation of the traditional way of life, which in the past was above all based on agriculture and farming.

Then there are also generational linguistic transformations, which produce the loss of large pieces of vocabulary and both semantic transformations, as well as morphological and phonetic simplifications, such aspects have had an important influence especially during the oral transmission of texts. Today, thanks to the written transmission the corruption of texts is more controlled and limited.

The first example «E graxje patsha Zonjza Najtesh» might illustrate the whole spectrum between an oral tradition of the village Firmo which has modified Variboba's text, and another version in a village not far called Acquaformosa whose first line is obviously inspired by the same poem «Ti graxje pafshe Zonjza Shën Miri», although its text follows an own composition of verses which can hardly be regarded as a variant of Variboba's poem.

A first comparison with the text sung in Firmo might illustrate, how an oral tradition has modified its literary prototype.<sup>9</sup> The kalimera itself was called «Calimera e Pashqëvet» in Variboba's first edition. The comparison in the table (fig. 2) shows, how certain words had been substituted.

In verse 3775 of the first edition opening with «I gheghe» we find the local expression «kambanët» of the area around San Giorgio. As an Italian loan word for «campanella» the verse «Did you hear today the bells?» used this word to talk about the church bell «kambanë», while «këmborë» meant the bell hanging around the neck animals like cows or goats. In any case «kambanë» was not used in the area around Firmo, where the Tosk expression was meant all kinds of bells. The verse «E sot» interpretes «And today the bells rang» without addressing the audience.

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9 The village is particular interesting, because two students of Gianni Belluscio, Anna Gaudio and Caterina Maleno who are from Firmo already transcribed the kalimeret in 2005. Their transcription probably provoked a certain resistance among the traditional singers of the community. When Oliver Gerlach did his field recording during Holy Saturday (19 April 2014), he had to arrange a private meeting in the house of one of the singers. The entire group singers he met did not use any written texts during their performance. We could transcribe four kalimeret (two for Good Friday and two for Maundy Thursday), but they were not identical with the transcribed repertoire and text published 25 March 2005: [http://ensembleison.de/calabria/kalimera\\_ferma.mp3](http://ensembleison.de/calabria/kalimera_ferma.mp3).

In this case the expression was simply adapted to the local dialect.

Vers	Local transmission [Variboba's transcription of Arbëresh]
3773	E graxje patsha Zonjza Najtesh [Grazie paciv oi Zogna Noitefs]
3774	t' e solla një notë të mir', po mirre vesh. [Tu sualm gnu novv tu miir por mirre vefs']
3775	E sot më ran këmborë, këmborët mbi hare [I gheghie fot cambanet mbe garee]
3776	u ngjaall Zoti Krisht e erdh me ne. [Zoti Crift u nghiaal e erf ndur nee.]
3777	E mortja vdiq e çifari u pjas [Mortia Vdichiv ede Cifari piassi] (errore di stampa: th per f)
3778	gjakut e Zotit Krisht shkoi ndë Parrajsit. [Giacu i Zotit Crift e caparriasi.]
3779	U hap Parrajsi e nëng jan më mbëkat, [Parraisi u gap fu jann' mu mucat]
3780	e penët t'Inzoti, Krisht i pat. [Pennut tona Zoti Crift i pat.]
3781	E pat pen' e mortja me hjidhi [Scoi penn' e mort, e me ghidii]
3782	ndë varrit u vu Zonjëza e Shin Mëri. Ndu vart, e Vuu Zogna e S. Murii.

Fig. 2: Table with the original transcription by Jul Variboba and the transcription of the sung kalimera (Firmo)

There are other examples like «caparriasi» in verse 3778 which was not so easily understood. In Variboba's dialect it meant «defeated». In Firmo it was just interpreted as a variant of the word «Parrajsit» in the following verse which sounded similar, but had nothing to do with it. Speakers who did no longer understand «caparriasi» changed it into «Parrajsit».

The following quotation just compares the first four verses of Variboba's poem with the local versions as we could transcribe them according to our field recordings, the version of Firmo was set in italics, the one of Acquaformosa in bold.

Grazie paciv oi Zogna Noitefs  
*E graxje patsha Zonjza Najtesh*  
**Ti graxje pafshe Zonjza Shën Miri**

Të sualm gne novv të miir por mirre vefs'  
*t'e solla një notë të mir', po mirre vesh.*  
**se gjith bilt e saj oj i ka asaj ndi gji**

I gheghie fot cambanet mbe garee  
*E sot më ran këmborë, këmborët mbi hare*  
**e si duris ajo oj me thik e shpat**

Zoti Crijt u nghiaal e erj nder nee.  
u ngjaall Zoti Krisht e erdh me ne.  
**se kurmiin e saj oj ja vun ndi kriq**

We can see that the poet who created the kalimera of Acquaformosa did already choose another rhyme without caring too much about the prototype which was rather used like subject.

### 3. Monophonic and multipart recitation of the kalimeret

Although we find closer versions of the same prototype, the different communities usually do not use the same melodic models to recite a similar text. What they all have in common, including the Greek kalimere in Salento and Aspromonte which are usually accompanied by an accordion or an organetto, is a falling melos which starts on a higher pitch or reach it right at the beginning. Within traditions of Orthodox chant this melody type is called «katavasia». We can distinct melodies which are monophonic or two part compositions which are used to recite the kalimeret.

#### 3.1. Monodic recitation

Not all of the melodies, even if they are monodic or performed monophonically, are composed according to the usual melos types of the Orthodox oktoechos. Many of them are manifold in rhythm and meter, but clearly composed according to modern tonality.

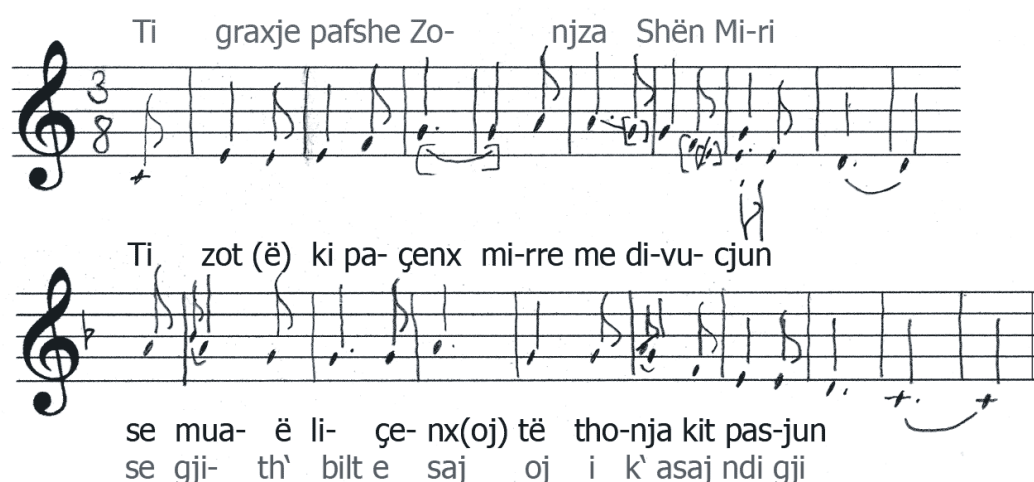


Fig. 3: Transcription «Ti graxje pafshe Zonjza Shën Miri» and Pasjuna of Acquaformosa (recording 18 April 2014)

If we look at the melodies which are sung unisono with the analysed text taken from Variboba's poem or inspired by it, we discover that the singers of Acquaformosa have a rather cheerful melody in Waltz rhythm which they do not only use for the recitation of «Ti graxje pafshe Zonjza Shën Miri», but also for the principal text of the Pasjuna «Ti zot(ë) ki paçenx». <sup>10</sup> It is obviously tonal and

<sup>10</sup> Please note that the Pasjuna texts, despite the similar beginning it shares with Civita, differ considerably from Variboba's book. It is quite a challenge to explain the exact relation to the literary prototype. We recorded both recitations in the main church of the village during an informal meeting in the church before the official evening



less modal.

The same can be said about the melody in four-four time for the recitation of «E graxje patsha Zonja Najtesh», which is sung at Firmo during the Maundy Thursday procession.



Fig. 4: Transcription «E graxje patsha Zonja Najtesh» of Firmo (recording 19 April 2014)

Verse	Variboba's version	Transcription (Firmo)
3779	Parrajsi u ghap, së jan' mëkat,	u hap parrajsi nëng janë mbëkat,
3780	penët tona Zoti Krisht i pat.	e pent e t'In ë Zoti Krisht i pat.
3781	Shkoi pen e mort, e mi hjidhī	e patë pen e mor tje me hjidhi
3782	ndë varrt e vū Zonja e Shën Mëri.	nedë varrit m'u vu Zonja Shi'Mëri.

#### Translation

While paradise is open for us,  
he paid for it through his remorse.  
He suffered pain and death in his tomb  
Saint Mary took him down.

There are monodic melodies composed according the Orthodox oktoechos which are better transcribed with Chrysanthine neumes, since the characteristic ornaments are used. One example might be the kalimera about the text of the Kapuçin, which has a very odd melody in the community of Firmo (fig. 5).

The open cadence of the first part is very odd. The melos is characteristic for the echos plagios protos, even the melodic drive (*élxē*) on E which is attracted by the basis D, but such an attraction would always result an immediate resolution. Here it does not come before the very end of the model. Hence, such an open cadence has to be transcribed as a temporary transposition which turns b flat and E flat into a tritos pentachord ( $\gamma'$ — $\nu\alpha\rho$ ). The result is an unexpected and open tritos cadence on the phthongos of the expected plagios devteros  $\pi\lambda\beta'$  (E).

service which was the Lamentation of the tomb (*epitáphios thrēnos* or *akolouthía tōn thrēnōn*). Recording dating 18 April 2014: [http://ensembleison.de/calabria/kalimera\\_firmoza.mp3](http://ensembleison.de/calabria/kalimera_firmoza.mp3).

Handwritten musical notations and symbols above the staves include various rhythmic markings, accidentals, and melisma lines.

nd'a jo ki- shja ar-dhurai te- ek u  
mos o një qind i ndë rrj ti ku- tjend

ja kish-ja ja dhën oj më se një qind  
ja kish-ja ja dhën oj një ve- sti- mend

Fig. 5: Transcription Kapuçini of Firmo (recording 19 April 2014)

### 3.2. Multipart recitation

Multipart forms do also appear during the recitation of kalimeret, it is even known from Italogreek communities, but unfortunately there are few documentations of these traditions which are lost today.

Some of those multipart recitation are spontaneous, as we know from a field recording of the first kalimera (Pasjuna) sung in Lungro after the hesperinos (evening service) of Maundy Thursday.<sup>11</sup> The melos begins and ends in plagios tetartos (C), but the cadence of the first section and most parts of the strophe have a basis tone of the protos (D). While Anna recorded the kalimera, she was also actively participating with the singers and improvised a second voice which follows the melody in parallel thirds and meets it during the protos cadence in unisono, the second part she does not continue with the ghymel, instead she lies on the basis tone of protos concluding on a rather dissonant third with the final cadence on plagios tetartos (C—E).<sup>12</sup> Thus, she emphasised the protos cadences against the main tonality.

A more authorised multipart structure, but based on very similar principles could be documented for Gianni Belluscio's community San Basile. Also here the Pasjuna is sung with a katavasia melos of plagios tetartos beginning on the fifth degree or the pentachord (G) and falling down to a final

<sup>11</sup> The recording was made by Anna Stratigò the 2 April 2015. It will be presented in the online publication.

<sup>12</sup> The dissonant third obviously results in a rather pythagorean sonority which can be found frequently in multipart forms which are regarded as «specific Arbëresh».

cadence on the basis tone (C). Although the final cadence usually concludes with on a unisono on base degree of the mode, the very first strophe during the celebration, when the singers still find together, we documented a similar dissonant cadence erroneously intoned by one singer who did not conclude the melody one step down (D—C), but one step up. Thus, the paenultima interval fifth (Γ—D) does not end with a unisono conclusion.

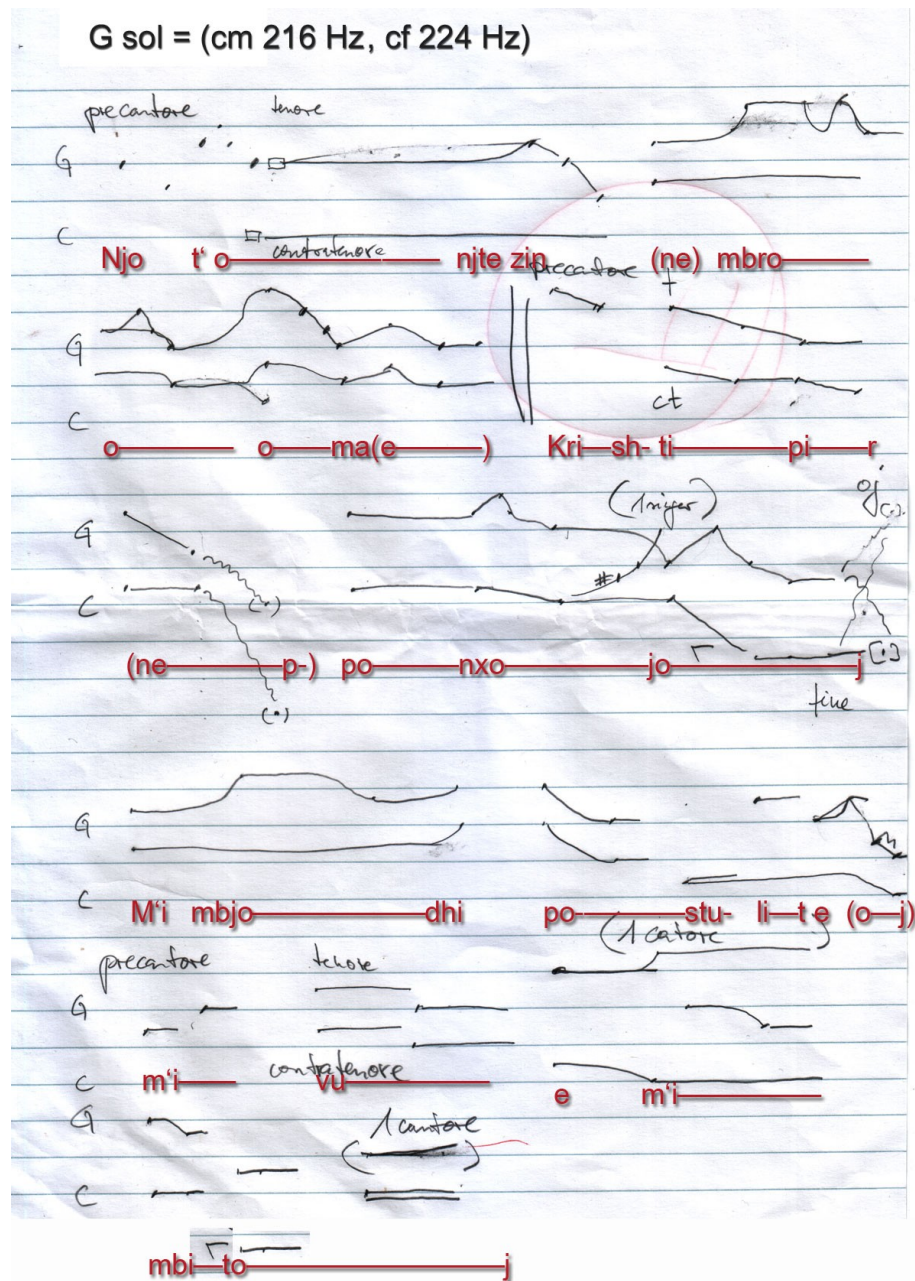


Fig. 6: Transcription of the Pasjuna sung in San Basile (recording 28 March 2013)

Very particular for San Basile is a rather liturgical celebration, during which the male choir sings behind the ikonostasis and in multipart. The kalimeret are not only sung by female singers like in most of the communities of this area, but in alternation with a female group which sing in the same

register, so that it is not possible for them to sing a second voice which descend to fourth under the basis degree of the mode.

The phonetic transcription shows, how the standard orthography is really pronounced at San Basile,<sup>13</sup> and how the first strophe of the Pasjuna is related to Maundy Thursday, when it is performed in Lungro, Firmo, San Basile and Civita.<sup>14</sup>

IPA	standard	translation
nɔ t'ɔŋ tæzi:n (ɛ) mbrɔma (ɛ)	Një t' ënjtëzën mbrëma	On a Thursday evening
'kri:fti pɪr nɛ pɔn'dzɔj	Krishti për ne pënxi	Christ thought of us,
mi: 'mbjɔði: 'pɔstɔlit (ɛ'ɔj)	m'i mbjodhi Postulit	he gathered the Apostles together
m'i: 'vu: ɛ mi: mbi'tɔj	m'i vu e m'i mbitoi.	and invited them (for supper).

The two part structure which Oliver Gerlach transcribed here, shows that parallel thirds occur frequently, but they are often stabilised by transitional big seconds with the more stable proportion 9:8. Concordant consonances are unisono, octaves and fifths at the cadence which concludes the first part.<sup>15</sup>

The last example is a kalimera «Oj bir» of Spezzano Albanese about another lament (vajtim) of Variboba.<sup>16</sup> The beginning was simply used for a multipart version which rather brings out the phonetic side of the vajtim. This tradition was documented in 1992 by a field recording of Vincenzo La Vena.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately it was not possible to document this tradition of Spixana during the last years. In 2002 Maria Laurito tried to revive it.<sup>18</sup> In 2008 another CD was published by Daniela Bosco.<sup>19</sup> Although the community of Spixana still seems to be proud of this tradition, it seems that this kalimera is no longer part of the living tradition today.<sup>20</sup>

13 A history of its local dialect since the last 200 years will be published in Munich (Belluscio 2015).

14 Recording dating 28 March 2013: [http://ensembleison.de/calabria/kalimera\\_shenvasili.mp3](http://ensembleison.de/calabria/kalimera_shenvasili.mp3).

15 For a more detailed analysis of this field recording and the poetic use adding syllables in Arbëresh, see our contribution in the forthcoming proceedings of the conference, organised by the ICTM Study Group Multipart Music in Budapest 2014.

16 Belmonte (2005: vv.3675-3680), it really begins already in verse 3657. We called all kalimeret which include this vajtim, «Patirterni».

17 La Vena & Borsetta (2001: CD track 10). Vincenzo La Vena recorded Cosmina & Adelina Spingola the 18 March 1992 and the following transcription is dedicated to him who made so important contributions about the Italoalbanian tradition.

18 Laurito (2003). A concert of 2003 was recorded by Gianni Belluscio.

19 Bosco (2008). The vajtim was sung with four strophes by two singers of the same family which was already documented 16 years ago: Rosa Galizia, Gilda and Rosina Spingola.

20 See the page of the local Sportello linguistico which transcribes the text and translates to Italian and English: [http://www.comune.spezzano-albanese.cs.it/sportello\\_linguistico/SITO%20SPORTELLLO\\_file/Page4042.htm](http://www.comune.spezzano-albanese.cs.it/sportello_linguistico/SITO%20SPORTELLLO_file/Page4042.htm). Also: [http://www.comune.spezzano-albanese.cs.it/sportello\\_linguistico/SITO%20SPORTELLLO\\_file/sound4042.wav](http://www.comune.spezzano-albanese.cs.it/sportello_linguistico/SITO%20SPORTELLLO_file/sound4042.wav).

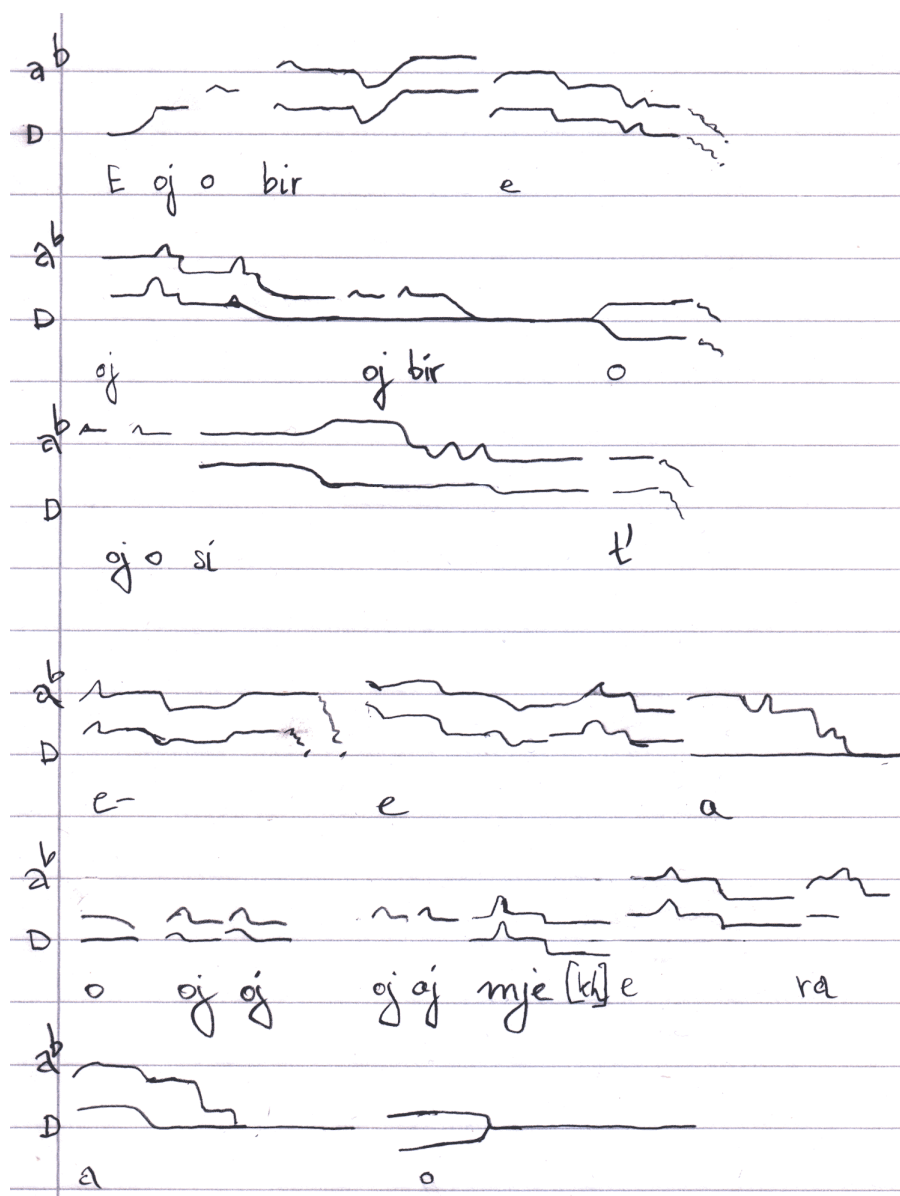


Fig. 7: Transcription kalimera «Oj bir» of Spezzano Albanese (recording 18 March 1992)



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