
Book presentation

Future in Arberia: visions of women

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February 2023





Summary

The **Arbëreshë** are a people originally from areas between present-day Albania and Greece. Arriving in Italy in the 15th century, their history has been linked to the rural civilization of southern Italy. Already Pasolini called them an "anthropological miracle." From October 2017 to August 2021, I met and interviewed them at the Arbëreshë villages of Cosenza (a small addition was made in March 2022).

At the heart of the work are 17 **microbiographies** of Italian-Albanian women, and particularly fine photographic portraits of them. The micro-stories contain examples of tenacity and passion directed toward the regeneration of Arbëreshe cultural identity.

On the journey I also addressed questions about **universal** issues that affect us all. In particular, I wondered if and how the activities of these women can inspire us to expand the possibilities of our future.

The work has three main **functions**: one aesthetic (photos and portraits linked to microbiographies), the second of socio-anthropological reportage, and a final one of identity and gender empowerment.

The book was **printed** in February 2023; the first official announcement by ICPI was on March 8, 2023. [Click here to read it.](#)

Short-term plans: a campaign to present the work, including videos, events and exhibitions, also with the collaboration of the Embassies of Albania and Kosovo; a multilingual digital version (in the works).

Further initiatives will be announced.

Tab

Publication	2nd issue in the "Research" series of the Central Institute for Intangible Heritage (ICPI), Ministry of Culture (Rome, Italy); co-edited by Effigi Edizioni.
Print date	February 2023
Format and pages	A4 vertical, 150-gram paper; 208 pages.
Microbiographies and interviews	17 micro-stories of women. Other talks by old and new Italo-Albanians: Carmine Stamile, Antonio Bellusci, Arbër Agalliu, Geri Ballo, Angelo Conte (Peppa Marriti), Lucia Martino.
Foreword	Michelangelo La Luna , MLI Professor, University of Rhode Island
Sponsorships	Embassy of Albania in Rome, Embassy of the Republic of Kosovo in Rome. Arbëreshë municipalities in the province of Cosenza: Acquafamosa (Firmoza), Cerzeto (Qana), Civita (Çifti), Frascineto (Frasnita), Lungro (Ungra), S. Benedetto Ullano (Shën Benedhiti), S. Demetrio Corone (Shën Mitri), S. Martino di Finita (Shën Mërtiri), S. Sofia d'Epiro (Shën Sofia), Vaccarizzo (Vakarici); Ethnic Arbëresh Museum in Civita (CS)
Sponsors	Generously contributing to printing costs were COOP Biosybaris (Corigliano-Rossano) and BCC Mediocrati (Rende, CS).
Technical sponsors	Mashfrog creative solutions, Engineering spa

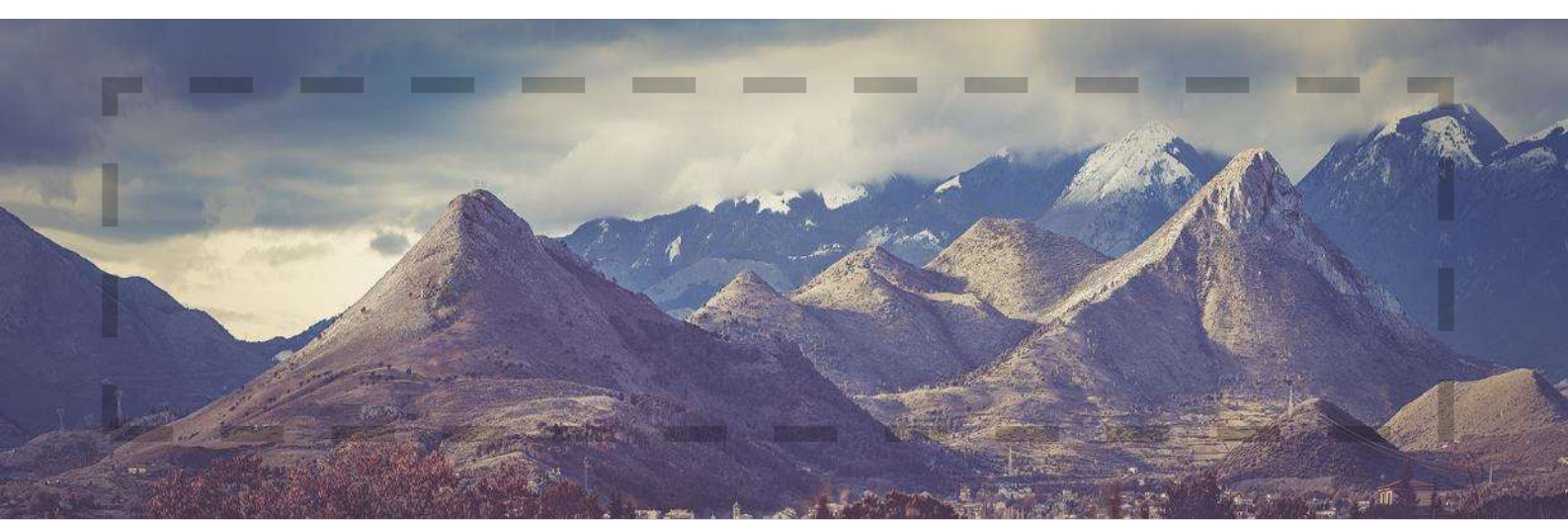


Future in Arberia: visions of women

Why a women's book

- Among these Arbëreshe women I found a less rigidly conservative approach than their male counterparts, and a greater ability to relate positively to the present and to nonlocal dimensions. One might speculate that they are more interested in preserving the salt of their community values than in drawing up family trees and tracing micro-boundaries.
- I believe they are the best candidates to **actualize** the meaning of the Arbëreshë characters, and make them interesting to younger people; a necessary work, because these are rapidly becoming disconnected from their cultural origin.
- Many of the interviewees are "restanti" (a Vito Teti's word meaning "intentionally and stubbornly remaining people"), sometimes former emigrants who have returned to the original land; not common people but immersed in their communities. Through their efforts they contribute to the emergence of a new meaning for their towns, in continuity with symbols, rituals and customs of the past; they testify with their lives that the cultural heritage of their ancestors is not destined to become a faded dream; the very activity of **rethinking and recovering** that heritage in today's world can be an opportunity to problematize it, curb the onset of certain pathologies characteristic of the "first world," and even create forms of **social innovation**.





Content overview

The **foreword** is by Prof. Michelangelo La Luna, a well-known Arbëresh intellectual and Professor in the Department of Languages at the University of Rhode Island ([website](#)).

The **introduction** briefly presents the story of the Arbëreshë and the peculiar way in which their culture has processed external contaminations and influences, in Italy. It explains the motivations that prompted me to undertake a journey that becomes a path of personal growth. It also clarifies the reason why the work is about women.

The **first chapter** introduces Carmine Stamile, a former school teacher, author of publications and curator of an Arbëresh museum, who accompanies me on the journey as a sort of field guide. In this chapter I tell Carmine about the 17 interviews of the Arbëreshë women I met and portrayed. They spend themselves daily to give Arbëria a chance, each in her own way and in different fields. While all of them operate mostly locally, many have

contacts abroad, particularly in Albania and beyond: in some cases their work has been known even in the Americas (this is the case of Anna Stratigò).

Each microbiography is associated with the photographs I have taken (usually portraits, plus a few landscapes) in a glamorous style, quite unusual in reportage books.

Carmine Stamile in turn answers my follow-up questions and after each micro-biography tells interesting anecdotes, drawn from his own research and personal memoirs, adding more depth and context.

This first, long chapter ends with pictures of some of the arbëreshë folkloric groups from the same area.

In **Chapter 2** I inquire about some attempts at cultural reactualization through hypotheses of possible "renewal" of women's traditional dress. Here I engage with another historical memory, that of 90-year-old Antonio Bellusci (a former Byzantine priest, here as a scholar of traditional folk culture). The Chapter involves the very few local artists who

have grappled with possible re-actualizations of the traditional gala dress, and contains particularly original subjects.

In **Chapter 3** I engage with two Italo-Albanian journalists and public figures, Arbër Agalliu and Geri Ballo, on the contacts between the Albanian, Italo-Albanian and Arbëresh worlds. The reflections start from the personal stories of the two interviewees, both of whom came to Italy from Albania with their migrant parents when they were still at an early age.

Chapter 4 contains my concise reflections on why I believe that reflecting on Arbëria can become an opportunity for all of us to grow. In addition, the chapter touches on the topic of the possible role that an appropriate use of AI and a possible inclusive declination of the metaverse could play in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Notes:

- these are topics that I am developing in parallel in another project, which may involve institutions and large companies;
- Chapter 4 was written in 2021, when GPT had not yet entered the daily news, yet the writing remains valid and current.

Multimedia inserts. Scattered among the pages of the work are a number of multimedia inserts using QR codes, which link back to external links. These link to short original video interviews, and numerous recordings of traditional songs and tunes. Some of these were already published on the web, while others had not been disseminated on the before, and have been specially published.

Future projects

A mini-videodoc from the book; contributions to a possible Festival for Innovation in Arbereshe Culture; an inclusive Metaverse; NFT; eLearning courses; and a second volume (but with a different artistic slant) to be implemented in southern areas not covered in this book.



With the use of multiple flashes and spotlights, I intended to give the images a stark presence, in contrast to the evanescent image often conveyed by the photography of endangered cultures. Thus I communicated the intention of these women to be there. The somewhat glamorous style also counters the grotesqueness of many popular culture photos, which try to astonish the viewer to the detriment of the subject. Finally because these are real people and real stories, I avoided overbearingly imposing my artistic vision over their reality.



Photos

The book contains 120 original photos of different types:

- some of them are artistic portraits, designed and executed with some preparation, in a style that combines glamorous and ethnic;
- secondly there are more journalistic/reporting photos, of people and environments. Thirdly, there is no shortage of photos sitting in between.

Visually, this aesthetic quest eschews the pathetic and worn-out clichés with which many reportages from rural areas are made. Beauty is enhanced by combining framing, focal lengths, body position, movement and the use of multiple points of light, but strictly without resorting to invasive post-processing that deforms the bodies of the people portrayed. The result is the fruit of planning and photo sessions, with unobtrusive editing and no graphic reworking such as replacing skies or bodies, which I would have found out of place in this book.



The Author

Born in 1980, he holds a bachelor's degree and doctorate in education. Since 2005 he has been working at the intersection of education, multimedia communication and network technologies (eLearning); first as a trainer, then as a designer, researcher, methodologist and innovator. Art has always played a role in his life, although he has never made it a full-fledged professional activity; in music he started at a very young age, but stopped after starting his doctorate in 2007. His last work was the original score for the film "The Light Side," by F. Orsomando (2006, Italy). A life without art, however, is intolerable for him, so he resumed in 2017, this time with photography and visual storytelling. His subjects are the sea and maritime culture, as well as classic cars. He collaborates pro bono with local associations or supporting children's health services. His images have often been published in magazines, but it is not the interest in photography per se that moves him: it is rather the emancipatory function of art, and in this he is inspired by the teaching of master Giulio Sforza. His encounter with the Arbëresh people motivated the Author to start a project that resulted in this book. In his artistic activity today, Lorenzo Fortunati brings together the multiple skills developed over the years at work (visual storytelling, digital culture) and in art.



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A group of women in traditional Arbëresh costumes are dancing in a field. The costumes are colorful and feature intricate patterns and textures. The women are captured in various poses, some with arms raised, suggesting a lively dance. The background shows a dry, open landscape under a clear sky. The text "FUTURO IN ARBERIA: VISIONI DI DONNE" is overlaid on the image in a light, sans-serif font.

FUTURO IN ARBERIA: VISIONI DI DONNE

From the back cover

This is the first memory I have of an Arbëresh village: walking unknowingly through the streets of one of their towns, I found myself unexpectedly immersed in the colors of their costumes, enveloped by the sound of their language and their poignant songs; and so all of a sudden I no longer understood where I was, or in what time. That was 20 years ago and I knew nothing about them. Even today it seems to me very few know them: they are ancient Italo-Albanians, scattered blood of the Diaspora, settled in Italy for almost six hundred years. In 1975 the famous poet and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini called them an "anthropological miracle" due to the amazing preservation of rituals, customs and language.

In the pages of the book, I have collected microbiographies and sculpted photographic portraits of Arbëreshe women, dedicated to keeping their culture, now markedly feminine, alive. With the power of small, noiseless daily actions, these women contribute to the emergence of new reasons to exist for their depopulation-stricken villages, and although they are often not fully aware of it, they could generate forms of social innovation.

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