THE ETHNIC MINORITIES OF SOUTHERN ITALY AND SICILY: RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SURNAMES

A. VIENNA*, J. A. PEÑA GARCIA†, C. G. N. MASCIE-TAYLOR‡ AND G. BIONDI¶

Dipartimento di Biologia animale e dell'uomo, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Rome, Italy, †Departamento de Biologia Animal y Genetica, Universidad del Pais Vasco, Bilbao, Spain, ‡Department of Biological Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK and ¶Dipartimento di Biologia animale e dell'uomo, Università di Torino, Torino, Italy

Summary. Surnames of grandparents were collected from children in the primary schools of the Albanian–Italian, Croat–Italian and Greek–Italian villages of southern Italy and Sicily. The coefficients of relationships by isonymy show almost no relationship with ethnicity. Ethnolinguistic minorities of southern Italy and Sicily are geographically subdivided into two main clusters: the first cluster comprises the Albanian, Croat and Greek communities of the Adriatic area; and the second cluster comprises the Albanian and Greek communities of the Ionian, Thirrenian and Sicilian areas.

Introduction

The construction of ethnic identity does not need any biological contribution. Ethnicity is part of the sociocultural context of a group of people that are biologically heterogeneous. A proper and recent definition of ethnicity states that ethnicity is a sociocultural construct whose discernible features involve language, religion, patterns of social interaction, etc. (Crews & Bindon, 1991). However, the sociocultural features of each ethnic group may influence its genetic structure through marriage and reproduction, and its biological and ecological structure through nutrition, transmission of diseases, pattern of mortality, etc. Despite the anthropological interest in the study of the genetic and biological variation within and between groups of people, ethnic groups are not static entities. Pure ethnic groups, in the sense of cultural and/or genetic homogeneous groups of people, do not exist in our species today, nor is there any evidence that they have ever existed in the past (Bogin, 1993).

The descendants of refugees from Albania, Croatia and Greece inhabit several villages in eleven provinces of southern Italy and Sicily. These peoples consider themselves to be ethnic minorities characterized by their own language, culture,

history and geographical location in respect to the surrounding Italian population. However, it is important to note that the spoken language today represents the most important, and in many cases the only element, that is culturally characteristic of the communities.

Albanians began to settle in Italy during the second half of the 14th century in the territory of the Republic of Venice and that of Apulia. Afterwards, in the course of the first half of the 15th century, contingencies of armies joined the territory of the Kingdom of Naples, following military accords between the Aragons and Albanian hero Skanderberg (George Castriota). These migrations were modest, but served as a reference to the exodus that brought numerous Albanian groups to southern Italy and Sicily following the Turkish occupation of the Balkan area (Tria, 1744; Salvi, 1975). The Albanian population that live in Italy have been subjected, since their arrival, to a strong pressure of integration that first imposed the abandoning of Greek religious ritual, and then of many other cultural manifestations. Today only the use of the language survives in forty-five villages of eight provinces (Cosenza and Catanzaro Provinces in Calabria Region; Campobasso Province in Molise Region; Foggia and Taranto Provinces in Apulia Region; Potenza Province in Basilicata Region; Catania and Palermo Provinces in Sicily Region) and represents the most important, and in many cases the only, element that is culturally characteristic to this community (Salvi, 1975).

The immigration of Croat groups to the Adriatic side of central–southern Italy began in the 15th century as a consequence of the Turkish invasion of the Balkan belt. This population founded many villages, but during the following centuries mixed with the Italians almost entirely. The memory of the Croat culture is only shown by a few words in the dialects of some villages of the central–southern Adriatic coast (Masciotta, 1914; Ucchino, 1957; Salvi, 1975). At the present time, only in three villages of Campobasso Province (Molise Region) have the population retained the use of the Croat language. This community is the smallest ethnolinguistic minority in Italy (Salvi, 1975). According to Rešetar (1908), the Croats came from the Balkanian region between the Velebit Mountains and the Narenta River. More recently Badurina (quoted in Ucchino, 1957) maintained, in accordance with linguistic and cultural data, that they came from Istria. Before the Second World War this minority was more numerous because it included the inhabitants of Istria first annexed by Italy in 1920, and subsequently annexed by Yugoslavia (Salvi, 1975).

Greek immigration to southern Italy and Sicily goes back to the beginning of the Greek expansion during the 5th century BC when great numbers of Greeks founded several towns and villages. The Italian area inhabited by this population was called *Magna Graecia*. During the Byzantine period (5th–8th centuries) a new migratory wave reached the Greek towns of Italy, and their descendants mixed almost completely with the surrounding autochthonous population. At present only thirteen villages in two provinces (Lecce Province in Apulia Region and Reggio Calabria Province in Calabria Region) preserve the use of the Greek language (Héraud, 1966; Salvi, 1975).

In this paper the results are presented of the study of relationships by isonymy among the three ethnolinguistic minorities of southern Italy and Sicily and the

Table 1. Matrix of values of R distance × 10^7 calculated for all pairs of provinces

n		ALCB	ALCS	ALCT	ALCZ	ALFG	ALPA	ALPZ	ALTA	CRCB	GRLE	GRRC	ITCB	ITCS	ITCT	ITCZ	ITFG	ITLE	ITPA	ITPZ	ITRC	ITTA
1515	ALCB	—																				
4167	ALCS	1353	—																			
446	ALCT	895	1829	—																		
1150	ALCZ	1464	2396	2671	—																	
690	ALFG	2856	1443	504	825	—																
1576	ALPA	928	1224	3237	905	676	—															
1408	ALPZ	1357	1837	613	933	1251	1066	—														
658	ALTA	1450	1390	3033	3033	584	371	1079	—													
603	CRCB	2512	569	1822	937	913	489	389	2268	—												
5540	GRLE	1495	1534	2807	1828	1898	561	898	3599	1268	—											
1318	GRRC	406	887	995	970	258	1023	439	271	679	407	—										
6961	ITCB	2317	1110	871	1084	1842	541	1201	1408	2727	1070	280	—									
5199	ITCS	1149	2730	811	3580	1459	337	1168	1866	376	1096	507	1467	—								
6233	ITCT	891	1355	3759	1421	648	2017	541	503	346	1571	1841	1082	878	—							
3512	ITCZ	621	1193	1286	2100	516	720	577	1380	609	845	1604	571	1752	1572	—						
4572	ITFG	1214	1570	1731	734	1003	736	1470	1034	974	1284	424	1089	693	1238	767	—					
3662	ITLE	901	2103	2351	1345	1636	560	1235	2722	555	4317	436	713	1023	954	749	1564	—				
6433	ITPA	574	1121	2414	2768	689	2241	766	760	281	1252	530	647	735	1883	885	666	1249	—			
3431	ITPZ	1536	1514	1983	1845	674	1413	10,175	2523	358	724	611	1580	710	440	627	1491	951	1016	—		
4281	ITRC	722	1165	1786	1366	591	800	680	1172	504	1125	3360	686	1154	2001	1759	963	1265	1141	1686	—	
3664	ITTA	902	1621	1352	1369	1327	724	777	2686	1025	2049	641	1135	1279	997	582	1188	2155	605	769	756	—

Albanian–Italian Provinces: ALCB=Campobasso, ALCS=Cosenza, ALCT=Catania, ALCZ=Catanzaro, ALFG=Foggia, ALPA=Palermo, ALPZ=Potenza, ALTA=Taranto; Croat–Italian Province: CRCB=Campobasso; Greek–Italian Provinces: GRLE=Lecce, GRRC=Reggio Calabria; autochthonous Italian Provinces: ITCB=Campobasso, ITCS=Cosenza, ITCT=Catania, ITCZ=Catanzaro, ITFG=Foggia, ITLE=Lecce, ITPA=Palermo, ITPZ=Potenza, ITRC=Reggio Calabria, ITTA=Taranto. n means the number of surnames.

surrounding autochthonous Italian population. In the analysis of relationships the villages of each province were treated as a single population.

Materials and methods

Data on ethnic minorities were obtained from schoolchildren aged from eleven to fifteen. The families of the pupils of the primary school of each village gave information on surnames of the children's grandparents. In the study only one child per family was considered, and the four grandparents' surnames were grouped (Biondi, 1994; Biondi *et al.*, 1990, 1993). The method based on grandparents' surnames, an extension by Lasker (1968), Pinto-Cisternas, Pineda & Barri (1985) and Biondi *et al.* (1993) of that of Crow & Mange (1965), addresses, in part, the bias that the male line is representative of all lines of descent, and increases the amount of information on each child. Also, data on the autochthonous Italian population of Campobasso, Reggio Calabria, Catania and Palermo Provinces were collected from schoolchildren. Data on the other Italian provinces were collected from the telephone directory.

The study of between-province relationships by isonymy (R_i) was carried out by analysing the combinations of surnames between two provinces (for each province, a list of the four surnames of schoolchildren's grandparents). The coefficient of relationship by isonymy was calculated following Lasker's extension of the R_i formula (1977, 1985, p. 23) as:

$$R_i = \frac{\Sigma S_{i1} S_{i2}}{2N_1 N_2}$$

in which S_{i1} is the number of individuals of the ith surname in the list of surnames of the first province, S_{i2} is the number of individuals of the same surname in the list of the second province, and N_1 and N_2 are ΣS_{i1} and ΣS_{i2} respectively (i.e. the total number of surnames in each list). The factor 2 makes the formula equivalent to a genetic relationship. To provide a graphic representation of the 21×21 R distance matrix obtained (Table 1), a non-metric multidimensional scaling technique was applied (Kruskal & Wish, 1978; Young, 1987). Genetic maps were constructed from the R matrix by plotting the first two eigenvectors. These eigenvectors were then translated, scaled and rotated to provide a least-squares fit to the actual geographic locations of populations (Lalouel, 1973).

Results

As Figs 1 and 2 show, geography and not ethnicity seems to be the main factor affecting the genetic structure of ethnic minorities living in southern Italy and Sicily. Albanian–Italians, Croat–Italians and Greek–Italians do not cluster together separately from the autochthonous Italian populations. In fact, each ethnic minority clusters at the provincial level together with the autochthonous Italian population of the same province. Two main clusters can be observed: the first groups the ethnic minorities and the autochthonous Italian populations of Sicily Region (Catania and Palermo Provinces) and the two southern provinces of Calabria Region, Catanzaro
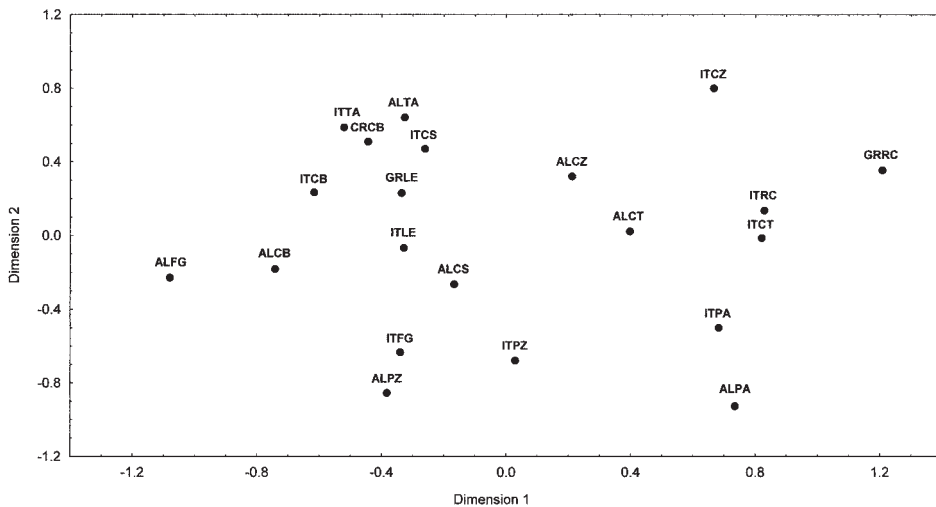
Fig. 1. Configuration of the first two dimensions (multidimensional scaling technique). First cluster: the Albanian–Italians of Catania (ALCT), Palermo (ALPA) and Catanzaro (ALCZ) Provinces; the Greek–Italians of Reggio Calabria (GRRC) Province; and the autochthonous Italian (Catania, ITCT; Palermo, ITPA; Catanzaro, ITCZ; and Reggio Calabria, ITRC) Provinces. Second cluster: all the other ethnic minorities and autochthonous Italian populations of southern Italy (Albanian–Italians: ALCB, ALCS, ALFG, ALPZ and ALTA; Croat–Italians: CRCB; Greek–Italians: GRLE; autochthonous Italians: ITCB, ITCS, ITFG, ITLE, ITPZ and ITTA).

and Reggio Calabria; the second groups all the other ethnic minorities and autochthonous Italian populations of southern Italy. The observed stress value of 0·12 (four dimensions) in Fig. 2 denotes sufficiently adequate configuration for data exploration (Kruskal, 1964).

Discussion

Studies of genetic structure by isonymy are subject to several problems (Lasker, 1985), but these are greatest when comparing coefficients based on surname analyses with those derived from other types of data. When the purpose is to compare the genetic structures of populations of the same or similar culture, such as those of the ethnic minorities of southern Italy and Sicily and other autochthonous Italian communities, the relative differences tend to be reliable, even if the absolute values may be inflated by polyphyletic names. In fact, the level of genetic isolation in these ethnic minorities, although high compared with Italian urban populations, is found to be very similar to that of other rural Italian villages.

The low degree of isolation found shows that the three ethnic minorities behave in the same way as the general population with respect to mate selection, that is regardless of ethnicity. They consider themselves ethnic minorities, but ethnic consciousness does not prevent mixed marriages. This behaviour supports the idea that ethnic boundaries seem to define only the sociocultural meaning that different
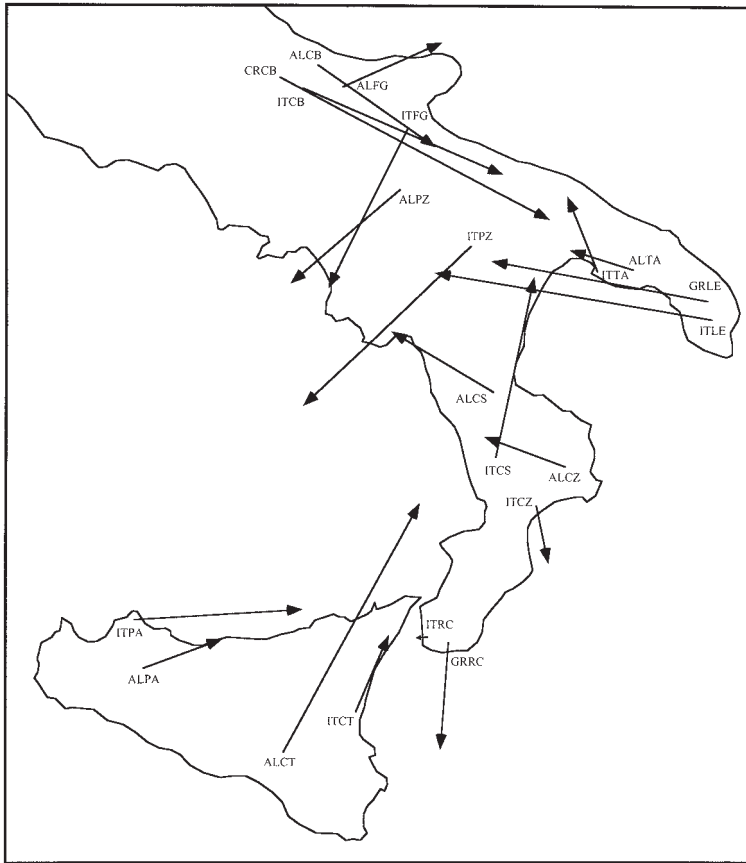
Fig. 2. Eigenvector representation of kinship of the ethnic minorities and autochthonous Italian populations of southern Italy.

sub-groups of people assign to a limited set of features. These features include historical events (their migration from the Balkan area), spoken language, religion and social interactions. Ethnic boundaries can be thought of as patterns of biosocial interactions among groups of different ethnicity rather than as tools to isolate people. These ethnic groups are not biologically distinct isolated entities.

Acknowledgments

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