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## From the Other Side of the Ocean: Canada's Božidar Vidov and the Molise Croats of Italy

### SUMMARY

Following an overview of the history of the Molise Croats, their distinctive language, Italian laws protecting their linguistic rights, and recent publications dedicated to helping to preserve their endangered idiom, the author provides a brief biography of Božidar Vidov (1913–2000) before exploring Vidov's publication efforts related to this community. Vidov, who first visited the region in the 1940s and then later in the 1960s, joined members of the Molise Croatian community in 1967 to launch the periodical *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua*. He served on the editorial board of this periodical and from 1968 to 1981 he published eleven books and booklets specifically for, or about, the community. These publications included language manuals, poetry collections, almanacs, a brief history and music collections. Vidov drew material for his publications from the pages of *Naš jezik*, his own research findings while visiting the community, and from sources collected and documented by members of the Molise Croatian community and others. Through his self-financed publishing initiatives, Vidov sought to imbue members of the community with a sense of pride in their language and cultural heritage, and attempted to fill the void after *Naš jezik* ceased publication. These eleven publications foreshadowed later more substantial and successful efforts in the 1990s, and especially in the new millennium, to produce important linguistic manuals, various literary collections, and other publications dedicated to the Molise Croatian community and the preservation of their endangered language.

KEY WORDS: Božidar Vidov, Molise Croats, Molise Croatian, *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua* periodical, endangered language, language preservation

### INTRODUCTION

The Molise Croats (*moliški Hrvati* or *molizanski/molisanski Hrvati*) belong to the smallest ethnolinguistic minority in Italy and are the remnants of one of the oldest Croatian diaspora communities.\* The ancestors of this community emigrated from Croatia, or as the Molise locals like to say, “from the other side of the sea”

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(“z one bane mora”) during the time of the famed Split Renaissance writer Marko Marulić (Marcus Marulus, 1450–1524), at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. This turbulent period of history was characterized by upheaval and large-scale population transfers (Čoralić, 2003: 184–186; Jurković, 2003: 148–149, 157–158; Kadić, 1962: 67–68, 72–75).

Since the early 1990s, an intensified effort has been undertaken to draw more attention to this community and to assist it in its efforts to preserve its language, which UNESCO has identified as being “severely endangered” (Salminen, 1999, 2007: 258–259). One organization that has been at the forefront of efforts to assist and support the community is the Zagreb-based Croatian Heritage Foundation (Hrvatska matica iseljenika). Since the mid-1990s, this organization has co-hosted a number of roundtables and cultural manifestations focusing on the Molise Croatian speech community. It has organized annual forums dealing with the challenges facing Croatian minorities in neighbouring countries, including the Molise community; annual encounters of writers from Croatian minorities (including Molise writers) with writers in Croatia; book launches and cultural exhibits featuring the community; performances by choirs and theatre groups in Molise; and, Molise community participation in summer language programs, trade fairs and visits to local chambers of commerce in Croatia.

During the Foundation’s “Week of Molise Croats” cultural program that ran in Zagreb from 16 to 20 June 1996, the heritage of this unique ethnolinguistic community was presented during several thematic roundtable discussions focusing on its language, literature, and status within Italy. The discussion dedicated to the literature of this community was co-hosted by the Croatian Association of Writers. At that roundtable, Božidar Vidov’s modest 1981 publication in Toronto of a collection of poetry by Molise authors, entitled *Poezije na našu (Poetry in Our Language)*, was singled out (Piccoli, 1996: 33; Kukavica, 1996). However, this was only one of Vidov’s publications dedicated to this community. From 1968 to 1981, he published eleven books and booklets (see appendix) with the purpose of presenting the language, culture, and history of the Molise Croats, and with the goal of encouraging members of the community to preserve their language and heritage.

## THE MOLISE CROATS

The ancestors of the Molise Croats settled in several locations on the Italian, or western side of the Adriatic Sea. They were part of the wave of emigration from Croatia that surged during the Ottoman penetration into southeastern Europe (Čoralić, 2003: 184–186; Jurković, 2003: 148–149, 154–158; Holjevac, 1968:

9–16). These uprooted populations settled in several provinces including Marche, Abruzzo, Molise, Apulia, Campania, and Basilicata. At the time of their arrival to the Molise region, approximately 500 years ago, there were fifteen communities numbering some 7,000 to 8,000 inhabitants. Their population increased to an estimated 15,000 before gradually declining due to the forces of assimilation and emigration abroad. Today the community is located approximately 40–50 km west of the southern Italian port city of Termoli. According to the 2001 census, there were just over 2,000 individuals who still belonged to the Molise Croatian speech community (Babalini, 2005; Sammartino, 2002: 1–2; Sujoldžić, 1987: 118). In 2009, Antonio Sammartino placed the number of those who still spoke the language at 1,500 (Sammartino, 2009: 31).

Based on available historical records and linguistic analysis, it has been established that their ancestors fled the Croatian coast as refugees at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. Their ancestors were first uprooted from the regions roughly between the Cetina and Neretva rivers before reaching the Makarska region, the narrow strip of land between the Biokovo mountain and the Adriatic Sea. Due to the large numbers involved and the inability of this narrow strip of land to sustain the dramatic influx of refugees, they were forced to flee to more secure regions further west, on the islands, and even across the Adriatic to Italy (Scotti, 2006: 15–17; Čoralić, 2003; Sujoldžić, 1997). A Latin inscription that was found in the parish church of Santa Maria La Nova in Palata confirmed that these people were uprooted in the early 1500s. This inscription, which was destroyed in 1915, read that “the people of Dalmatia first settled in this town and built this church from its foundation in the year 1531” (“Hoc primum Dalmatiae gentes incoluere castrum ac a fundamentis templum erexere anno MDXXXI”) (Čoralić, 2003: 192; Sammartino, 2002: 2; Scotti, 2006: 36–8). The absence of Turkish loan words in their vocabulary also indicates that their ancestors had not lived under Ottoman rule (Sujoldžić, 1997: 296; 1987: 120).

Their distinctive idiom has only been preserved in three villages (separated approximately 5–10 km from each other) that until forty years ago were largely inaccessible: Acquaviva Collecroce (Živavoda Kruč), the largest; followed by Montemitro (Mundimitar); and, San Felice del Molise (Filič), the smallest (Cicanese, 1996: 43; Clauss and De Witte, 1982: 230–233; Spadanuda, 1980: 99). This idiom, which was strictly a spoken language, is referred to as *na-našo* (“to speak in our way”) by members of the speech community. It is an Ikavian-Štokavian dialect with elements of Čakavian that is closely related to Croatian dialects spoken in the Middle Dalmatian region (Sujoldžić, 1997). However, the language has evolved significantly due to influences of the dialects from the regions of Molise and Abruzzo, and standard

Italian (Breu, 2003). Although members of the speech community knew they were “from the other side of the sea,” due to their 500-year isolation from Croatia – they were “discovered” by South Slavic ethnographers, linguists, and researchers at the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century – their idiom was not influenced by the standardization process in Croatia, nor did it borrow from standard Croatian. Due to these factors, the locals, who self-identify as Italians, refer to their language as *Na-našo* and have regarded their unique idiom as a source of pride. The term Molise Croatian (*moliškohrvatski / Croato Molisano*) has recently been adopted in scholarly and popular literature as a designation for their language (Perinić, 2006: 95–98; Sujoldžić, 2004: 265–272; Sammartino, 2002: 3–4).

Since the eighteenth century there have been sporadic attempts by individual members of the community to create their own literature. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the community experienced a sort of renaissance resulting in the publication of their bilingual periodical *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua*, which included poems, prose, articles dealing with the local histories of the three towns, descriptions of local holidays and customs, and news articles (reportage) on local cultural and religious manifestations. Two issues of the periodical were published in 1985–86 and it was succeeded by *La nostra vita / Naš život*, whose four issues appeared from 1986 to 1988 (Sammartino, 2002: 5–6; Piccoli, 1997). A number of collections of literary creations also appeared in the early 1990s including: Angelo Genova's 1990 *Ko jesmo...bolje: ko bihmo?! Fiabe, fatti di cronaca, testimonianze, poesie, fonetica, parole*, which included poems, fairy tales, stories, and reminiscences; Sandro Galantini's 1991 collection of poems entitled *Il sentiero lungo dell'esistenza. Antologia di poesie in lingua Croato-Molisano*; and, Ivan Kačurov's 1995 collection of traditional songs with musical notes entitled *Baština moliških Hrvata: pjesme i zapisi / Il patrimonio culturale dei Croati molisani: cansone e scritti*.

Law no. 15 of 14 May 1997 of the Region of Molise provides for the: “Protection and development of the cultural heritage of the linguistic minorities of Molise” and for the “organisation of information and in-service courses for teachers, competitions for pupils and other extra-curricular activities aimed at improving knowledge of the history, culture, language and traditions of Croatia” (Council of Europe, 1999: 13, 14, 66). The Italian government's report of May 1999 to the Council of Europe also underscores that the “Croat language and culture” is being taught at the Institute of Monfalcone in the province of Campobasso and that a “Further course in Croat” was envisioned at the Institute of Palata (Council of Europe, 1999: 58).

On 23 April 1998 Treaty no. 129 dealing with the rights of minorities was signed by Italy and Croatia. Article 8 of this treaty spells out the “rules for the protection of the Croat-language minority which has long been established in the Region of

Molise.” This agreement also enshrines the commitment of Italy “to guaranteeing the Croat native minority the right to preserve and freely to express its own identity and cultural heritage, to use its mother tongue in its public and private relations and to establish and develop its own cultural institutions or associations” (Council of Europe, 1999: 75–76). The Italian parliament also enacted legislation (no. 482) to protect and promote linguistic and cultural minorities on 15 December 1999. Article 2 of this law states that the Italian Republic “shall protect the language and culture of ... the Croatian population” (Parlamento italiano, 1999). The above laws, bilateral agreements between Croatia and Italy, the efforts of Molise cultural leaders, and the engagement of Croatian and other scholars and institutions has resulted in a number of initiatives to assist in the preservation of the community’s language and culture (Sujoldžić, 2004: 271–272; Republika Hrvatska, 2008).

In recent years the Molise Croatian language has been codified through the publication of *Dizionario dell’idioma croato-molisano di Montemitro / Rječnik moliškohrvatskoga govora Mundimitra* (2000) by Agostina Piccoli and Antonio Sammartino (with the collaboration of Snježana Marčec and Mira Menac-Mihalić) and *Dizionario croato molisano di Acquaviva Collecroce* (2000) by Walter Breu and Giovanni Piccoli (with the collaboration of Snježana Marčec). These were followed by Antonio Sammartino’s *Grammatica della lingua croato-molisana / Gramatika moliškohrvatskoga jezika* (2004). Other important endeavours include the 2002 appearance of the high quality periodical *Riča živa / Parola viva* funded by the Agostina Piccoli Foundation (est. 1999) and now in its eighth year of publication; two collections of recent literary creations by various Molise authors (edited by Antonio Sammartino) entitled *S našimi riči: zbirka literarnih ostvarenja na Moliškohrvatskome* (2004 and 2007); and, Pasqualino Sabella’s 2005 trilingual (*na-našo-Italian-Croatian*) illustrated dictionary for children entitled *Vokabolarij ilustrani za dicov / Vocabolario ilustrato per bambini / Slikovni rječnik za djecu na našu-italiano-hrvatski*.

Several community and social organizations (choirs, folklore groups, sports teams, tourist associations) have also been established by members of the community in each of the three towns. These include the *Naš život* Cultural Association (Kruč), the Pro-loco *Naš-selo* Association (Mundimitar), the Association of Molise Croats (Filič), and the Cultural Association *Naš jezik* (Filič). The *Naš grad* Cultural Association was established in 1997 to link all three towns with the goal of rehabilitating the language. In 1999, the Agostina Piccoli Foundation in Montemitro, a non-governmental and non-profit organization, was established with the purpose of researching and preserving Molise Croatian culture and heritage. The Foundation supports cultural and artistic programs, and coordinates cultural exchanges with

Croatia. In 2000, Italy officially recognized the Foundation as an institution dedicated to preserving Molise Croatian culture and traditions. Today, Molise Croatian and standard Croatian are both being taught in the community's schools, and some of the street signs are bilingual Molise Croatian-Italian (Matejčić, 2005).

Members of the Molise Croatian diaspora have also undertaken significant efforts to raise awareness and preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage. An important work in this regard is John Felix Clissa's *The Fountain and the Squeezebox / Funda aš orginet* (2001). This book contains transcripts of the idiolects (individual speaking styles) in *Na-našo*, together with English translations, of ten individuals from Molise and seventeen first generation Australians who emigrated from Molise (Clissa, 2001: 30–225). One elderly male and twenty-six females (born between 1901 and 1934) were interviewed. This work provides a rich mine of material for linguists, ethnologists, and historians pursuing research on this community. Besides this work, the Molisan Croatian Cultural Association of Western Australia was also established in 1998 and published five issues of its newsletter *Dove bane svit* (1999–2001). It was established in an effort to connect the Molise Croatian diaspora community, and to encourage further study and research into the history and cultural heritage of the community in Molise and in Australia.

## **BOŽIDAR VIDOV**

Božidar (Teoktist) Vidov was born on 21 January 1913 in Novalja, island of Pag, to Mate and Benedeta (née Kaloćira), although his ancestors hailed from the island of Rab. He was employed as a postal clerk and like millions of other Europeans became uprooted by the ravages of World War II. In 1949, Vidov entered the Ukrainian religious Order of St. Theodore the Studite which focused on catechizing children and youth. Following the completion of his studies in theology, philosophy, Old Church Slavic, and southeastern European history at the Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Vidov was ordained in the Eastern Rite on 25 December 1954 by Ukrainian Bishop Ivan Buchko at the Pontifical Ukrainian College of St. Josephat (Rome). It was during this initial stay in Italy that Vidov became acquainted with the Molise Croats and established an interest in the community that he maintained for the rest of his life.

Vidov arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 5 March 1960 and initially resided at the Ukrainian Studite Holy Dormition Monastery in Woodstock, Ontario. He went on to assist at the Croatian parish in Toronto and a Slovak parish in Sudbury. He served as an assistant to Rev. Jure Vrdoljak, the first permanent pastor of Toronto's Our Lady Queen of Croatia Parish and later to Vrdoljak's successor, Rev. Dragutin

(Charles) Kamber, from 1962–65. He played a key role in the early institutional formation of Croatian language schools in Canada, helping to organize Toronto's Croatian Elementary School Abroad, in 1961–62. This school became the largest Croatian language school in Canada and Vidov served as its first religious instructor. From 1963 to 1967 he prepared and published the initial primers and readers used in the Toronto school and other nascent Croatian language schools that began to be established in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Ontario, Canada's largest and most populated province (Granic, 2007; Mikić, 1975; Vidov, 1965: 8–9). Between 1960 and 1990 Vidov published some fifty prayerbooks, booklets with devotional themes, popular histories, Croatian language text books, and other works, primarily in Toronto (Grubišić, 2000; Vrbanus, 1994; Tomas, 1964).

In 1981 Bishop Isidore Borecky appointed Vidov to serve the Ukrainian Catholic Holy Eucharist Church in Toronto, and he also assisted occasionally at the Slovak Greek-Catholic Parish of the Nativity of the Mother of God (Toronto) before finally retiring in 1996. Vidov actively participated in the cultural life of the Croatian community in Toronto, particularly in the life of the parish. He also served on the board and was a member for almost forty years of Lodge 650 (Toronto) of the Croatian Fraternal Union (est. 1894), the oldest and largest Croatian organization on the North American continent. He lived out his retirement at Sts. Peter and Paul Residence in Toronto, and passed away in Toronto on 28 June 2000. He was buried near his parents at the municipal cemetery on the island of Rab. This was made possible through donations from individuals of the Toronto Croatian community, and Our Lady Queen of Croatia Parish and its pastor at the time, Rev. Valent Bogadi (Granic, 2007; Banjavčić, 2000).

*Figure 1: Rev. Božidar Vidov (far right) with school children from Kruč (Acquaviva Collecroce) from his 1973 Calendario / Kalendar*



## THE PERIODICAL *NAŠ JEZIK* / *LA NOSTRA LINGUA*

Five years after coming to Canada, Vidov returned to Italy when Cardinal Josyf Slipyj reassigned him to the Studite Monastery in Castel Gandolfo, near Rome. In early 1967 Vidov visited Molise where he was warmly greeted by the local population (Varoš, 1967). During this same period, representatives of the three towns including local teachers G. B. Piccoli and Angelo Genova, Mario Spadanuda, Montemitro Mayor Domenico Giorgetta, the physician Dr. Cociolillo, and several other enthusiasts, together with Miroslav Varoš and Vidov, discussed the possibility of launching a periodical for the community provisionally entitled *Iskra* (Varoš, 1967). However, in 1967 the first issue of the community's periodical appeared under the title *Niša rič* (Rome). Only one issue appeared under this name and the periodical re-launched under the name *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua* in December 1967. Vidov not only helped to establish the periodical, he also promoted it to his many contacts in the broader Croatian diaspora, contributed pieces on the musical and religious heritage of the community, and also actively encouraged members of the community to contribute their own submissions. Vidov served on the editorial board of *Naš jezik* and explained in his brief piece in the inaugural issue of *Niša rič* that his motivation in becoming involved with the publication was to help the community to preserve its language and culture, just as the community had done up to that time (Vidov, 1968).

When the periodical *Naš jezik* appeared, it was described as a “very fine and technically polished” publication (Žic-Buj, 1968: 214). Broadly speaking, the pages of the periodical were open to an exploration of the Molise community's past, present, and future. The contributions were accompanied by many photographic reproductions of individuals (past and present), community events, and historical and cultural artifacts. In its message to its readership in the second issue of 1968, the editorial board underscored that while the periodical was primarily dedicated to representing the interests of the Molise community and its diaspora, it was also open to other Croatian minorities in Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, as well the broader Croatian diaspora, and to Croatia itself. Subscribers and donors to *Naš jezik* lived in Italy, Croatia, Austria, England, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Contributions by local authors covered a broad range of topics including: the histories of the three towns and the status of the Molise Croats; the unique customs and traditions of the community, particularly during religious holidays; explorations of other locations in Italy where Croatian colonies had once existed and disappeared (Palata, Tavenna); reflections on how their language was preserved in the past and encouragement of efforts to continue

preservation undertakings; and, especially creative submissions of poetry and prose (Scotti, 2006: 8–11).

Contributions from Croatia (Mate Šimundić, Karlo Jurišić, Ante Ujević, Jakša Ravlić) and the broader Croatian diaspora (Ernest Bauer, Vladimir Markotić, Miroslav Varoš) often dealt with the wider context of the community's history and origins, and were accompanied by Italian translations. Reportage of community events, important feast day celebrations, and visits by Croatian dignitaries like Cardinal Franjo Šeper and the Croatian Heritage Foundation's Vice-President Oleg Mandić, featured prominently in the periodical. Some of the first reports by early twentieth century Croatian scholars and ethnographers detailing their contacts with the community were also reprinted together with Italian translations. This included a reprint that ran in several issues of *Naš jezik* of Josip Smodlaka's report on his 1904 trip to the community that first appeared in the almanac *Kalendar Svačić* (Zadar, 1906), and which was translated into Italian for the periodical by Mario Spadanuda.

One of the successes of the publication of the periodical *Naš jezik* was the recognition by members of the community that more needed to be done to help preserve their language. The result was the establishment on 25 February 1968 of the *Kulturno društvo "Naš jezik" / L'Associazione Culturale "Naš jezik"* ("Our Language" Cultural Association) in San Felice del Molise. The aim of the association was to initiate and expand good relations between the Croatian ethnolinguistic community of the three towns by: 1) spreading the *Na-našo* language, culture, and arts in the three towns by means of conferences, publications, and public manifestations; 2) paying particular attention to the common linguistic treasure of San Felice del Molise, Acquaviva Collecroce, and Montemitro; and, 3) creating initiatives for cultural exchanges between the Croatian core of the three towns.

Due to a target audience that included the Molise Croat community, its specific diaspora community in Australia and the United States, other Croatian minorities in neighbouring countries, and the broader Croatian diaspora, the periodical experienced challenges to its purpose and mission. The wide-ranging focus, and the publication of articles in standard Croatian and Italian, resulted in criticism from some quarters within the community (Genova, 1996: 38). And yet, these same challenges also made it a unique publication in that its pages contained contributions from individuals from Croatia and the broader diaspora, which otherwise would not have occurred. The challenge of trying to be all things to everyone led to a conscious decision by the editorial board, during its meeting of 23 February 1969, to dedicate more space to, and encourage more contributions in, Molise Croatian (Piccoli, 1997: 54). When looking back on the periodical, Antonio Sammartino would

underscore that *Naš jezik* “is today a source of precious information, and a kind of anthology of poetry and prose creations in the Molise Croatian dialect” (Sammartino, 2002: 5), while Stjepan Krpan praised it as being a “strong instrument in preserving and fostering the Molise Croats’ language ... and in creating their written language” (Krpan, 1988: 307).

Vidov’s stay in Italy coincided with the cultural renaissance that took place within the Molise Croatian community. He visited the community, was actively involved in the launch of the periodical *Naš jezik*, served as a member of the editorial board, and was a contributor to several issues. This involvement with the Molise Croats led directly to his publishing of three booklets specifically for, and about, this community already during his second stay in Italy. On his returned to Canada in 1970, his publishing endeavours related to this ethnolinguistic community intensified, publishing another eight books and booklets, the last one being *Poezije na našu* in 1981. In some cases these publications incorporated contributions, or were direct reprints of material that appeared on the pages of *Naš jezik*.

## VIDOV’S PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE MOLISE CROATS

### 1 Language Manuals

During the period that Vidov studied in Rome, Rev. Teodor Badurina, then serving at the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jerome (Rome), had already visited the Molise community and begun collecting sources for a planned grammar of its idiom. Although this grammar was never completed, Badurina did author a book that dealt with the history of the Molise Croats entitled *Rotas opera tenet arepo sator* (Rome, 1950). When Vidov visited and participated in religious services in Kruč, in 1967, he too began collecting source material for his publications dealing with the Molise Croats. He was assisted in this activity by Professor Mauro Dell’Aversana, Mario Spadanuda, Milena Lalli (Rocchi), and other members of the Molise community who were studying at universities in Rome and Napoli (Varoš, 1967). The result of this was his first publication related to the community, a modest 47-page *Grammar of the Ikavian-Štokavian Dialect of the Molise Croats in Central Italy* which appeared the following year.

In the foreword to this 1968 grammar, Vidov explained his motivation: “When I first visited you and heard the beautiful Croatian that you spoke, the thought came to me that you urgently required, at the very least, a short grammar. And last year when I replaced your pastor in Kruč, I began gathering sources, and here now is printed this modest publication.” This bilingual grammar, which was prepared with students and the younger generation in mind, was written in standard Croatian and

Italian, with examples drawn from *Na-našo* speech. It focused on phonetics, morphology, and syntax. It also included a modest trilingual Molise Croatian-Italian-standard Croatian glossary of just over 400 words, and a reader portion that included five short prose passages and proverbs, four prayers, and seven poems by Molise authors.

Vidov's revised and expanded 60-page grammar appeared in 1974 under the title *Grammar of the Ikavo-Štokavian Dialect of the Croatian Linguistic Island of the Molise Region*. Like the 1968 grammar, it was bilingual Croatian-Italian with examples drawn from *Na-našo* speech. At the end is an 8-page standard Croatian-Italian glossary. Unlike the first edition, the lexical material at the end of the second edition did not contain an index of Molise Croatian equivalents. This second edition also left out the reading material found in the first edition.

In 1972, Vidov published a trilingual 96-page *Dictionary of the Croatian Linguistic Dialect of the Molise Settlements*. Vidov underscored in the introduction that the lexical material contained in the dictionary was based on Giovanni Piccoli's dissertation entitled *Lessico del dialetto delle località dell' isola linguistica del Molise*. The dissertation focused on *Na-našo* as spoken in Acquaviva Collecroce. The Vidov-published dictionary contained approximately 2,500 lexical units. The first part (pp. 5–44) is a list of Italian words, arranged alphabetically, with Molise Croatian and standard Croatian equivalents, while the second part (pp. 45–96) is a list of Molise Croatian words, arranged alphabetically, with Italian and standard Croatian equivalents. The publication of this dictionary, like Vidov's grammars, was undertaken for pedagogical purposes, to help preserve the language, and to encourage others to work towards the codification of the language of the Molise community.

## 2 Poetry Collections

As a co-founder and member of the editorial board of *Naš jezik*, Vidov was a participant in the cultural renaissance taking place within the Molise Croatian community in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This allowed him to draw upon the literary and other cultural material appearing on the pages of the community's newspaper. Already in his 1968 *Grammar*, Vidov included seven poems by the following five authors from the community: Milena Lalli, Pasqualino Piccoli, Franjo Rubina, E. A. Pakerno, and Giuseppe Cicanese. Vidov would continue to draw upon the material that appeared in *Naš jezik*, including many items in his annual almanacs from 1973 to 1975, and his two booklets of poetry.

His first booklet of Molise Croatian verse (*prvi librić do poeziji štampan na našu*) was a 1972 publication of a collection of fifteen poems by Milena Lalli (Roc-

chi). Although born in Rome, Lalli's family was from Mundimitar, where she often returned to visit and stay at her family home. She completed her Ph.D. in Slavic languages and literatures at the Oriental Institute of Naples before entering the civil service in Rome. A regular contributor to *Naš jezik*, her collection was entitled *Sfitle 'z naduga*. The themes of her poetry were heavily rooted in her Molise heritage and nostalgia for the hill on which Mundimitar sits, the town's narrow streets, its stone walls, oak trees, and surrounding forest. Through her poems Lalli expresses a profound love of, and attachment to, her ancestral home and its landscape, as well as its people and mother tongue (*hrvatska rič*). This attachment to her Molise roots is concisely expressed in her short poem "Moja zemlja" ("My Native Land"), which has even been included in text books for study in elementary schools in Croatia.

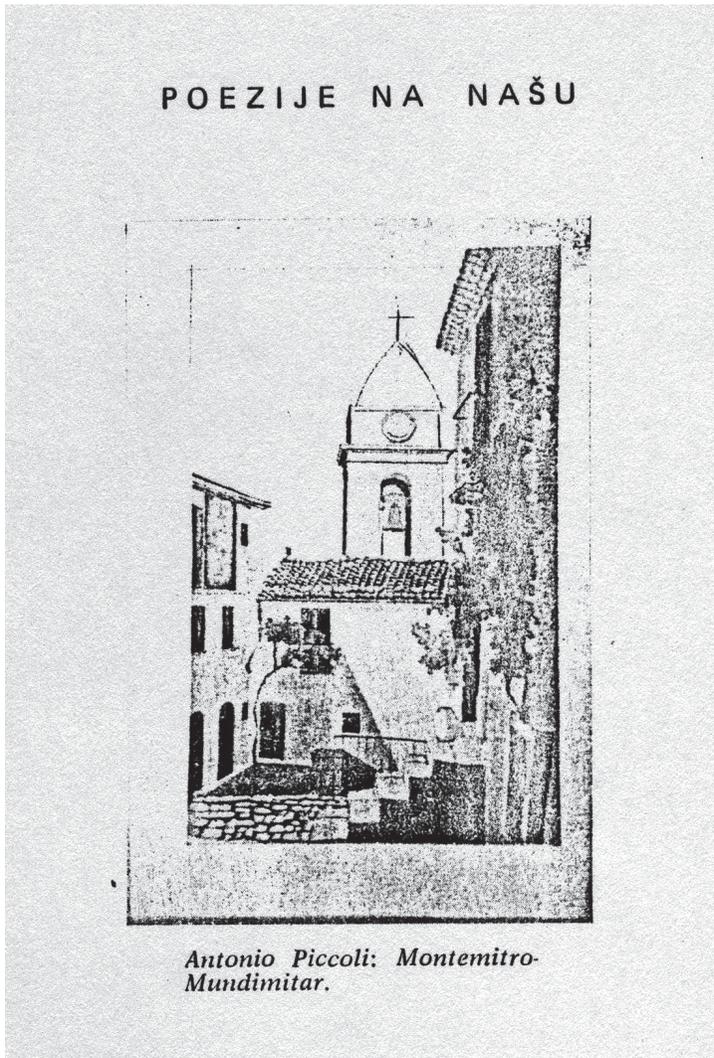
Vidov's second booklet of Molise Croatian verse, *Poezije na našu*, was a 1981 collection from previously published poems appearing in *Naš jezik* from 1967–70. In his brief introduction to the collection, Vidov lamented that *Naš jezik* had ceased publication and that the youth of the community no longer had a periodical in which they could express themselves in *Na-našo*. The booklet featured fifteen short poems in total. They were penned by the following authors: Professor De Rubertis, Giovanni B. Piccoli, A Genova, Milena Lalli, Giuseppe Cicanese, Matteo Ferrante, Rosetta Petrella, and Pasqualino Piccoli. In her brief article on the importance of this small collection, Agostina Piccoli underscored that it reflected the "themes present in the entire poetic output of the Molise Croats," and these were "images of the past, care-free days of childhood, youth, and especially the transient nature of things" (Piccoli, 1996: 33).

These two booklets of poetry published by Vidov confirm the observation that Molise Croatian poets are fundamentally inspired by their native land, and the unique characteristics and charming qualities of their three towns (Kukavica, 1996).

### 3 Annual Almanacs

As Vidov was an active participant in the cultural life of the Croatian diaspora of the second half of the twentieth century, he naturally turned to certain communication tools that he thought could aid the Molise Croatian linguistic community in expressing their cultural heritage. One of the tools he turned to was the annual almanac (calendar). Throughout the history of the Croatian diaspora, the almanac was not just a tool of communication, but also an agent playing an "active role in shaping and articulating culture in transition" (Dalbello-Lovrić, 1999: 160). For the Croatian diaspora, the almanac was often the first of the printed forms to appear. These miscellanies, which conveyed a broad range of cultural information, sought

Figure 2: Cover of Vidov's 1981 *Poezije na našu*, a collection of fifteen poems by eight Molise authors



to recreate in print a textual community or a social network (Dalbello-Lovrić, 1999: 160–238).

When the periodical *Naš jezik* ceased publication, Vidov attempted to fill the void by editing and publishing an annual almanac specifically for the community in 1973, 1974, and 1975. As Vidov indicated in his note to the first issue of *Calendario / Kalendar*, the almanac was started with the hope of encouraging members of the community to write and submit contributions in their Molise Croatian idiom. He

wanted to help reinforce the preservation of their language and culture, particularly among the younger members of the community. The almanacs, which averaged roughly fifty pages, followed the traditional format of Croatian diaspora almanacs, but on a much more modest scale.

Illustrated and containing photographic reproductions reflecting the community's history and institutions like churches, schools, cultural celebrations, and religious festivals, the almanacs also contained reportage of major community events. Special visits of dignitaries like that of Cardinal Franjo Šeper in 1967, and the tour of the Zagreb-based Branimir Choir, were also featured. Also included were new and previously published literary contributions from the community, including poems, local histories, and descriptions of festivals that were often reprinted from *Naš jezik*. There also appeared stories that were adapted (translated) into *Na-našo* for school children, as well as translations (adaptations) into *Na-našo* of short stories, parts of the New Testament, lives of the saints, and proverbs. The 1973 *Calendario / Kalendar* also included the lyrics and tamburitza arrangements for four Molise Croatian melodies.

#### 4 History

Among Vidov's publishing activities in the diaspora were his popular history books and booklets (Grubišić, 2000; Vrbanus, 1994). In 1969, he published his two-volume *A History of the Croats*, while a three-volume second edition appeared between 1975–1982. His smaller popular history booklets tended to focus on unique aspects of Croatian history. This was the case with his 1980 booklet on the essentially rural based commune of Poljica, which boasted a unique social organization that has fascinated many scholars to this day. His interest in the more unexpected aspects of Croatian history may explain in part his choice to republish the article by Ante Ujević on the origins of the ancestors of the Molise Croatian ethnolinguistic community. This article appeared in a 1968 issue of *Naš jezik*.

Written in standard Croatian, Ujević's article, "The Time and Place of Emigration of the Molise Croats", was republished by Vidov in small booklet format in 1969. It included an Italian translation by Milena Lalli (Rocchi), however, the booklet did not contain the many photographic reproductions found in the original piece appearing in the periodical. The work places the emigration of this community in the broader context of historical events at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. This period was characterized by major upheaval and large-scale population transfers from hinterland regions of Western Herzegovina, Sinj, Imotski, Makarska and the Neretva due to the Ottoman Turk onslaught. The author explains that the ancestors of the Molise Croats were part of those refugees

Figure 3: Cover of Vidov's 1975 Kalendar / Calendario



who escaped the Ottomans and found temporary shelter in Makarska, before departing to the other side of the sea.

“The Time and Place of Emigration of the Molise Croats” discusses the available historical sources, underscoring the importance of the 1531 Latin stone inscription on the parish church at Palata near the town of Termoli. This inscription, since destroyed and a new one erected in this place in 2004, read that “the people from Dalmatia first settled in this town and build this church from its foundation in

the year 1531.” Ujević also draws attention to the importance of the manuscripts housed in the Termoli diocese archives and provides an overview of the remaining evidence that helps to establish the time of departure from Croatia, and arrival to Italy, of the refugees from whom the Molise Croats draw their ancestry. Consideration is given to the source dialect (Ikavian-Štokavian dialect with elements of Čakavian), preservation of archaic words, and the lack of Turkish loan words in the community’s idiom, as well as name and surname analysis.

## 5 Musical Works

During a 1946 chance meeting while traveling from Genoa to Rome, via Grossetto, Slava Žic-Buj came across a group of men, fellow-travellers, who were singing songs in a language that immediately struck her ear. The group of men were Italian soldiers who were recently demobilized and returning to their family homes located north of Gargano Peninsula. As they were returning home, they were in particularly high spirits as revealed by their singing of songs which Žic-Buj described as containing: “sweet old Croatian words and sounds of some ancient melodies, which we only could have heard from our long deceased forefathers” (Žic-Buj, 1968: 211). Hearing similar melodies in *Na-našo* during his trips to the community, and recognizing their ethnomusicological value, Vidov began to collect and copy the songs.

His initial collection was a 13-page booklet entitled *Folk Songs of the Molise Croats of Central Italy* (1968). This collection, which brought together in one location twelve songs belonging to the Molise Croats’ musical heritage, was praised in a review in *Naš jezik* (Varoš, 1968). It included each town’s version of “Lipa Mara” (“Beautiful Mary”), called “Druga draga” (“Dear Sweetheart”) in the Kruč version. This melody is typically sung as part of wedding celebrations and invokes the name of the historic figure of Croatian Viceroy (*ban*) Ivan Karlović (1485–1531). While Karlović is represented as a heroic figure on the Croatian side of the Adriatic, in Molise Croatian songs his name invokes fear as many soldiers under his command fell during bloody battles with the Ottoman Turks at the stronghold of Klis. This led to an exodus of widows, mothers, children, and surviving soldiers, who fled across the Adriatic to Italy. These refugees to Italy, the original ancestors of the Molise community, incorporated the name of Karlović, which they associated with terror and death, in their popular tales and songs that have been handed down from generation to generation (Scotti, 2006: 63–65; Perinić, 2006: 99).

When Vidov’s second expanded and large format 30-page publication *Popular Songs in the Dialect of the Croatian Colonies in Central Italy* appeared in 1976, it was described as a work of “significant cultural and historical merit” (Ciprin, 1977:

414). The printing of this important booklet was made possible through the financial support of the Croatian Committee of Caracas (Venezuela), the Canadian-Croatian National Youth Charity (Toronto) and the Croatian Theatre Society (Toronto). Like the first edition, it included twelve popular melodies from all three towns which revealed a lyrical, patriotic, and spiritual character of those who face the daily challenges of cultivating and living off the soil. The melodies include love songs, songs reflecting special occasions, and those with religious themes. Taken together, they reflected all aspects of the daily life of the populace.

As Vidov underscored in the introduction to the second edition, had it appeared without a title, the first inclination of the reader would have been to conclude that the songs were “melodies from the Croatian Adriatic shore and moreover of the oldest type” (Vidov, 1976: 4). He describes the melodies as containing “the features of the older Croatian song: a litany-like aphoristic style, a modest melodic breadth belonging tonally to the old Phrygian mode” (Vidov, 1976: 3). In some cases the content of the songs like “Divojkica ke svitja si brala” (“Little Girl, You Who Gathered Flowers”) and “Oj divojka rodna” (“Hey, Lavishing Girl”) originated from Croatia and reveal “a surprising likeness” to some Croatian folk melodies that still exist (Vidov, 1976: 4). In other cases, features of the new environment are clearly reflected, as in the song “Kancuna do Maja” (“The Song of May”). The collection ends with a reprint of “Suita molisanskih Hrvata” (“Suite of the Molise Croats”) created in 1968 by the Zagreb-based composer Nikša Njirić, and based on three existing Molise songs (Scotti, 2006: 60).

The lyrics of the twelve songs collected in Vidov’s second edition were translated into English by Mauro Aversanović, while Lav Vrdoljak, who was a Croatian tamburitza instructor in Toronto, transcribed the musical notes for the twelve songs and also provided tamburitza arrangements for four of them (these four songs with tamburitza scores first appeared in Vidov’s 1973 almanac). A brief introduction describing the historical significance of the songs is provided in Croatian, English, Italian, French, Spanish, and German, thereby making the work accessible to a broader readership. The work also includes a 3-page Molise Croatian-English glossary to assist the reader.

## CONCLUSION

Like others before him, Božidar Vidov became interested in the Molise Croatian ethnolinguistic community during his initial stay in Italy in the late 1940s. This interest intensified following his return to Italy in 1965 and, particularly, in 1967, when he visited the community and also participated in some religious ceremo-

nies while in Acquaviva Collecroce (Kruč). It was during that year that he took part in the launch of the community's periodical *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua*. The establishment of this periodical ushered in a period of intensified activity among individual members of the community in preserving their cultural and linguistic identity. A year later Vidov was to publish his first of eleven separate books and booklets dedicated to the community; his final work being the 1981 poetry collection *Poezije na našu*.

Vidov's grammars and dictionary were practical works designed with the purpose of helping members of the community to preserve their language and to counteract the forces of linguistic assimilation and mirrored, on a smaller scale, his publishing and pedagogical efforts for the Croatian diaspora in Canada (Granic, 2007; Mikić, 1975). These were very much initial efforts targeting younger members of the community with the purpose of serving as handbooks for the study of *Na-našo*. The inclusion of reading passages, including proverbs and prayers, as well as a glossary of Molise Croatian words and their Italian and Croatian equivalents, in his first grammar of 1968 makes this goal clear. The 1974 grammar was certainly more substantial, but is surpassed by the 2004 Sammartino *Grammar of the Molise Croatian Language*. The dictionary, based on Giovanni Piccoli's lexical material, was a fairly substantial publishing endeavour at the time that would have been welcomed. Subsequent publications of the Piccoli-Sammartino *Dictionary of the Molise Croatian Speech of Mundimitar* (2000) and the Breu-Piccoli *Dictionary of Molise Croatian of Acquaviva Collecroce* (2000) represent major lexical achievements for the community rendering the Vidov-published dictionary outdated.

Despite any perceived deficiencies, the cessation of the publication of the periodical *Naš jezik* must have been a blow to those in the community who were apprehensive about the preservation of their language in the face of continued assimilation into the Italian-speaking majority and emigration to other parts of Italy and abroad. Vidov clearly attempted to fill this void with his publications that were of a popular nature, particularly his three almanacs and the two booklets of poetry. Through the miscellanies, he attempted to imbue individuals with a sense of pride in their heritage and community, especially among younger members. His goal was to encourage an interest in the whole range of traditions of the community and to convey its uniqueness back to the community through the print medium. While the two books of poetry managed to gather only thirty poems in total, they served to remind the community of the importance of its members having an opportunity to reflect, in an artistic manner, the depth of connection to their ancestors and life in their three towns.

Both Ujević's 1969 history of the origins of the ancestors of the Molise Croats and the second edition of the collection of popular melodies (1976) reflect works of a more scholarly ambition. The reprint of Ujević's history of the community from the pages of *Naš jezik* reflects the limited financial means Vidov had at his disposal for his publications. Most of his publishing endeavours were self-financed and the 1973 *Calendario / Kalendar* even contained an insert addressed to members of the Croatian diaspora in North America appealing for donations to help finance his publications related to the Molise community in Italy. The one exception appears to have been the 1976 collection of popular melodies which was supported by three Croatian diaspora organizations, one Venezuelan and two in Canada. This collection of popular songs reveals what could have been accomplished had Vidov's projects been better financed. The translation of the introduction to this work into five major European languages, the English translations of the lyrics, and the accompanying musical notes, make this work an important addition for ethnologists, musicologists and those with a general interest in the cultural heritage of the Molise Croats.

Giacomo Scotti described Vidov as being "a tireless worker" in his efforts as a "collector of the cultural heritage" of the Molise Croatian speech community (Scotti, 2006: 60). During a 1997 roundtable discussion, Vladimir Stanković emphasized that for years Vidov strove to ensure that the unique cultural and linguistic heritage of the Molise Croats became a source of pride for the community through his publications, which tried to reflect the positive achievements of its members via the print medium (Piccoli, 1997: 55). Writing in 1987, Petar Milanović, who served as the pastor in Kruč, noted that: "If Molise Croatian is still spoken today ... if efforts are made today to learn to write Molise Croatian, then we have to thank all those, who in different ways, worked to preserve this cultural and linguistic treasure. Up until now, all these efforts were primarily private initiatives" (Milanović, 1987–88: 349). This statement certainly applied to Vidov's efforts from the time he participated in the launch of *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua* in 1967 to his *Poezije na našu* published in 1981. All of Vidov's publications and activities related to Molise Croatian foreshadowed later more sustained and successful efforts to codify *Na-našo*, to provide an outlet for the creative works of Molise authors, and to make available educational resources for instructors to support language retention by younger members of the community.

In the end, however, it remains to be seen whether Vidov's activities and publications, and those activities and publications that followed, will prove enough to stem the tide of language loss among members of the Molise Croatian ethnolinguistic community and, ultimately, to save their endangered idiom.

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## APPENDIX: BOŽIDAR VIDOV'S PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE MOLISE CROATS (1968–1981)

VIDOV, Božidar (1968). *Gramatika ikavsko-štokavskoga govora molizanskih Hrvata u srednjoj Italiji / Grammatica del dialetto ikavo-štokavo dei Croati (Slavi) del Molise*. Grottaferrata: Božidar Vidov. 47 p. (Molise Croatian-Italian-standard Croatian glossary, pp. 39–45.)

VIDOV, Božidar (ed.) (1968). *Narodne pjesme molizanskih Hrvata u srednjoj Italiji / Canti popolari dei Croati (Slavi) Molisani dell'Italia Centrale*. Grottaferrata: Božidar Vidov. 13 p. (Contains twelve songs with musical notes.)

UJEVIĆ, Ante (1969). *Kada i odakle su odselili molizanski Hrvati / Quando e da dove emigravano i Croati del Molise* (translated into Italian by Milena Lalli). Rome: Božidar Vidov. 23 p. Reprinted from *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua*, no. 10-12.

LALLI, Milena (1972). *Sfite 'z naduga* (ed. Božidar Vidov). Toronto: [Božidar Vidov]. 15 p. (A collection of 15 poems by Milena Lalli.)

[PICCOLI, Giovanni] (1972). *Vocabolario del dialetto delle localita dell'isola linguistica croata nel Molise: Montemitro – San Felice – Acquaviva Collecroce / Rječnik ikavsko-štokavskog govora molisanskih Hrvata u srednjoj Italiji: Mundimitar – Sti Filić – Kruč* ([ed.] Božidar Vidov). Toronto: [Božidar Vidov]. 96 p.

VIDOV, Božidar (ed.) (1973). *Calendario in dialetto delle localita dell'isola linguistica croata nel Molise. Montemitro – San Felice – Acquaviva Collecroce: 1973 / Kalendar molisanskih Hrvata Mundimitra, Stifilića i Živevode-Kruča*. Toronto: [Božidar Vidov]. 64 p. (Reproductions and illustrations.)

VIDOV, Božidar (ed.) (1974). *Calendario in dialetto delle localita dell'isola linguistica croate nel Molise: Montemitro – San Felice – Acquaviva Collecroce: 1974 / Kalendar molisanskih Hrvata Mundimitra, Stifilića i Živevode-Kruča*. Toronto: [Božidar Vidov]. 52 p. (Reproductions and illustrations.)

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Stan GRANIC

## S druge strane oceana: Kanađanin Božidar Vidov i talijanski moliški Hrvati

### SAŽETAK

Dajući pregled povijesti moliških Hrvata, njihova osobitog jezika, talijanskih zakona koji štite njihova jezična prava i najnovijih publikacija posvećenih pomoći u očuvanju njihova ugroženoga govora, autor najprije iznosi kratku biografiju Božidara Vidova (1913.–2000.) i zatim propituje njegove izdavačke napore koji se odnose na tu zajednicu. Vidov, koji je prvi put posjetio taj kraj u četrdesetim godinama i ponovno u šezdesetima, pridružio se članovima zajednice moliških Hrvata 1967. kako bi pokrenuo časopis *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua*. Bio je član uređivačkog odbora tog časopisa, a od 1968. do 1981. objavio je jedanaest knjiga i knjižica, u prvom redu za zajednicu ili o njoj. Te su publikacije obuhvaćale jezične priručnike, zbirke poezije, almanaha, kratku povijest i glazbene zbirke. Građu za njih Vidov je crpio sa stranica *Našeg jezika*, iz svojih istraživačkih nalaza tijekom posjeta zajednici te materijala koji su prikupili i nabavili članovi zajednice moliških Hrvata i ostali. Samofinancirajući svoje izdavačke pothvate, Vidov je u članove zajednice nastojao usaditi osjećaj ponosa na vlastiti jezik i kulturno naslijeđe te pokušao ispuniti prazninu nakon prestanka izlaženja *Našeg jezika*. Tih jedanaest publikacija nagovijestilo je vrednije i uspješnije napore u devedesetim godinama, a posebice u novom tisućljeću, u izdavanju značajnih jezičnih priručnika, raznih literarnih zbirki i drugih publikacija posvećenih zajednici moliških Hrvata i očuvanju njihova ugroženog jezika.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Božidar Vidov, moliški Hrvati, moliški hrvatski, časopis *Naš jezik / La nostra vita*, ugroženi jezik, očuvanje jezika

Stan GRANIC

## **Dall' altro lato dell' Oceano: Božidar Vidov del Canada ed i croati del Molise d' Italia**

### RIASSUNTO

Seguendo una rassegna sulla storia dei croati del Molise, sulla loro lingua particolare, sulle leggi italiane che proteggono i loro diritti linguistici e recenti pubblicazioni dedicate ad aiutare a preservare il loro dialetto in pericolo di estinzione, l' autore fornisce una breve biografia di Božidar Vidov (1913–2000) prima di esplorare le sue pubblicazioni relative a questa comunità. Vidov, che visitò la regione per la prima volta nel 1940 e più tardi nel 1960, si unì nel 1967 ai membri della comunità croata del Molise per dare vita al periodico *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua*. Fece parte del comitato di redazione di questo periodico e dal 1968 al 1981 pubblicò undici libri ed opuscoli specifici per o sulla comunità. Queste pubblicazioni includevano manuali linguistici, raccolte di poesie, almanacchi, una breve storia e raccolte musicali. Vidov attinse il materiale per le sue pubblicazioni dalle pagine del *Naš jezik*, dai risultati delle sue stesse ricerche e dalle fonti raccolte e documentate dai membri della comunità croata del Molise e da altri. Attraverso le sue iniziative autofinanziate, Vidov cercò di dare ai membri della comunità un senso di orgoglio per la loro lingua e per il loro patrimonio culturale e tentò di riempire il vuoto dopo che *Naš jezik* smise di essere pubblicato. Queste undici pubblicazioni furono solo l'anticipazione di ciò che successivamente nel 1990 divennero sforzi molto più sostanziali e di successo e in particolar modo nel nuovo millennio, nella produzione di importanti manuali linguistici, varie raccolte letterarie e altre pubblicazioni dedicate alla comunità croata del Molise e alla conservazione del loro linguaggio in pericolo.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Božidar Vidov, croati molisani, croato molisano, periodico *Naš jezik / La nostra lingua*, lingua in pericolo di estinzione, conservazione della lingua