

OF BOVA
ENCHANTED HAMLET
LANGUAGE IN THE
CALABRIAN GREEK
MUSEUM OF THE
THE G. ROHLFS



MUSEO DELLA
LINGUA GRECO-CALABRA
GERHARD ROHLFS

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- Barrier-free building
- Tour route
- Museum sections in English and Italian (QR code)
- Captions in English, Italian, and Calabrian Greek
- Library services
- Photo archive and database
- Guided tours extend to the Giudecca and to the town of Bova
- Personalized tours available
- Multilingual audio guides
- Literary Park with relaxation area



Project: "DAL CONTENITORE MUSEALE AL MUSEO EN PLEIN AIR". Attività finanziata dalla Regione Calabria - Dip. Cultura - Azione 2 - Rafforzamento del sistema museale Annualità 2019 - Fondi PAC Calabria 2014/2020 Asse 6 Azione 6.7.1



THE "G. ROHLFS MUSEUM"

The museum was established in 2016, the museum is located at the entrance to the town of Bova, in the exact spot where in 1847 the English traveller Edward Lear sketched a beautiful view of Bova currently exhibited in the museum. The museum is dedicated to the German linguist Gerhard Rohlfs (Berlin, 14 July 1892 - Tübingen, 12 September 1986), due to his seminal work in the valorisation of the Greek language in the 1920s. Rohlfs was the first to systematically demonstrate the Magna Graecia origin of the Greco-Calabrian language, generating a burning academic *dispute* with several Italian scholars who, instead, considered this language the result of the Byzantine domination in Calabria. The museum collections document the vicissitudes of a language, once widespread throughout Calabria, which is the expression of a past that has never become archaeology. Behind the exhibitions there is the deep desire to make the museum a window through which to observe the Area Greco-Calabrian and in particular Bova, now also accessible through the museum's urban sections and the themed routes which are focused on salient moments in the history of Bova and of the Calabrian Greek cultural heritage. This ancient language, still spoken in a few municipalities of the southern Ionian coast, retains *dorisms* which date back to the eighth century BC., words that have been lost even in Standard Modern Greek. In the seven rooms of the museum, each dedicated to a great scholar interested in the complex heritage of the Greeks of Calabria, it is possible to deepen Rohlfs' linguistic hypothesis through photos, historical documents, audio-visual installations and reconstructions of historical settings which refer to defining moments of the Italo-Greek culture. The itinerary includes archaeological finds, historical-artistic objects and ethnographic artefacts of the Greek communities, some of which were collected by Rohlfs himself during his multiple study trips to Calabria. On the roof of the museum there is a contemporary art installation created by Roberto Lucifero and inspired by the wind rose. At the base of the exhibition there is the deep desire to make the museum a window through which to observe the Greek Calabria and in particular Bova, today also usable through the urban museum sections, such as the Giudecca, the literary park "O Cipo ton Logo - The Garden of Words" and the "Franco Mosino" Library.



HALFWAY BETWEEN SEA AND SKY

Bova is one of the Calabrian villages that most remains etched in one's memory. This ancient town, with a Greek soul clings to the sides of a rocky spur, raised up to touch the sky by the slow and inexorable clash between the African and European tectonic plates. From about a thousand meters high, Bova dominates a spectacular panorama: to the east the southernmost extremity of the Apennines stands out against the Ionian Sea, whose deep blue waters outline the horizon towards Africa; to the west, the imposing bulk of Etna, the largest volcano in Europe, captivates the eye with its living, pulsating presence. Behind the village there are the Campi di Bova, ancestral terraces of marine origin, now included in the Aspromonte National Park, one of the most pristine nature reserves in the Mediterranean. Everywhere steep slopes formed of stony and compact rock fall towards the sea, joining Calabria with Sicily in a myriad of ravines, ridges, narrow valleys, white river beds, the ephemeral streams of Calabria. In Bova you feel completely satisfied, far from the frenzy of the contemporary world. Immense spaces, contrasts of lights, intense fragrances, and deafening silences give a constant feeling of freedom. Its landscape is a combination of spectacularity, a mix of catastrophe and quiet, which captures the imagination and the spirit. Those who visit Bova are bewitched by its millenary history, of ancient Greek and Byzantine nobility, and by the genuine hospitality of its people. But it is above all the sacred solemnity of the places, its harsh and inviolable nature that make Bova an exclusive destination for lovers of trekking and travelers looking for authentic experiences.

CHÒRA TU VÙA

Everything in Bova seems to be shrouded in mystery, including the name of the village, which in Greek is called *Via*. According to some it could mean "granary storage pit", referring to the ancient practice of storing wheat in underground containers. Other scholars argue, instead, that the term derives from the name of a species of snake, particularly fond of the milk from cows, today recalled by the knockers that decorate the doors guarding the houses. Traditionally, the Greek-Calabrian word *Via* finds itself translated as ox, an animal that has become a symbol of the town, as confirmed by the ancient civic coat of arms, to which Christians later added the image of the Madonna and Child.



MITHS AND LEGENDS OF AN ENCHANTED HAMLET

An aura of mysticism pervades this picturesque village, suspended in time and space. In Bova you can feel the same energy felt by those who built and lived in these places. Walking through its alleys means retracing the steps of those who, over the centuries, travelled to the farthest extremities of the world in search of somewhere closer to heaven. Bova unites the sacred and the profane, prayer to meditation, of any religion, faith or belief. The origins of this ancestral ecumenical vocation can be traced in the myths of the site's foundation, myths in which the succession of different religious cultures are evident: pagan, Jewish and Christian. An ancient legend states that Bova was founded by a Greek queen, who came from the island of Delos. The trace of her foot remains imprinted on the top of the rocky ruins of the castle that overlooks the village. According to the legend, only the virgin whose foot perfectly fits the mysterious footprint will be able to discover a treasure among the ruins of the castle. The royal footprint recalls the mythological tales of lost sandals, such as the one worn by Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, kidnapped by the god of the dead. Testimonies of this cult still survive today in the Marian devotion and in the rites celebrated in Bova during Spring, along with the Easter celebrations. No less impressive is the story told by local historians about the arrival in Bova of Aramean populations, (Jews) descendants of Aschenez, Noah's great-grandson. A further legend, on the other hand, underlines the Christian origins of the village, attributing the establishment of the diocese of Bova to the deacon Suera, a follower of St. Paul, when the latter landed in Reggio in 61 AD. C., on his journey to Rome.



THE LITERARY PARK "O CIPO TON LOGO - THE GARDEN OF WORDS"

In the garden behind the "G. Rohlfs" Museum, is a literary park dedicated to the Greek language. This precious relic of the past was transformed by Roberto Lucifero into a contemporary art installation, created in 2020 together with Giuseppe Maesano, one of the last masters of dry stone walls in Bova, son of the well-known Greek-Calabrian poet *mastr'Angelo Maesano*. A symbolic semicircle facing Etna gives voice to the most significant literary testimonies written in Bova from a period between the twelfth and the twentieth century. Liturgical songs, poems and love songs mark the journey of the Greek language, focusing on salient moments in the history of Bova. These are six pages engraved in stone which recount the transformation of the language, first written in the Greek alphabet, then, following the abolition of the Byzantine liturgical rite, in 1572, in the Latin one. From then, the Greek spoken in Aspromonte remained an oral language, and returned to the centre of attention following the rediscovery of some local songs, published by Carl Witte in 1821 and thanks to the studies undertaken by the German glottologist Gerhard Rohlfs, over the course of the twentieth century. The Park is a corner dedicated to reflection and silence, a magical place where you can read, listen to the wind, and contemplate the sublime Graecanic panorama.

THE GIUDECCA

Documents dating between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries report the existence of a Jewish neighbourhood (Giudecca) in Bova. Today the ancient Giudecca is bordered by the old city walls of which remain only a tower of the Late Medieval Period, and a monumental eighteenth-century palace which incorporates the southern entrance to the Giudecca. Walking through the Giudecca, you can visit the beautiful installation of contemporary art made by Antonio Puija Veneziano which tells the vicissitudes of the Bovese Jewish community, within the centuries-old history of the Jews in Calabria. This community was well integrated among the Greek-speaking populations of the area. However, an edict issued in 1541 by Carlo V decreed their expulsion from the Kingdom of Naples.



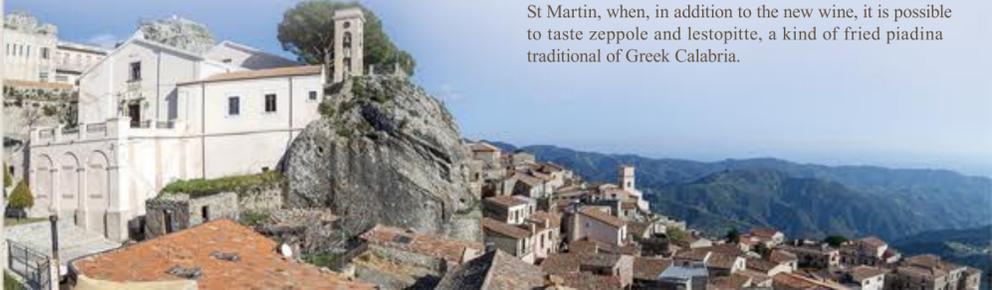
THE "FRANCO MOSINO" LIBRARY

On the ground floor of the G. Rohlfs Museum there is a library with about 4500 volumes, donated to the city of Bova by Franco Mosino, (1932-2015), a philosopher from Reggio Calabria and expert in Hellenistic studies who was nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature in 2013. The collection includes ancient books, rare editions, autographed texts by Rohlfs, the entire bibliography of Mosino, a profound connoisseur of the Calabrian Greek language, ancient Greek and the linguistic minorities of Southern Italy. The library also hosts the scholar's personal archive and a large number of volumes of Calabrian history, linguistics and philology, which can be consulted in an elegant reading room, embellished with the contemporary art installations "I Cantori di Urano" by Roberto Lucifero. The installation consists of a myriad of stylized faces, made with ethnographic artifacts, donated to the Rohlfs Museum by the local population.

BETWEEN RITUALITIES OF THE MAGNA-GRAECIA AND THE BYZANTINE SACRALITIES

In Bova the legacy of the Magna Graecia colonization and the long Byzantine domination lives on not only in the Greek language. An extraordinary wealth of traditions, handed down through rituals, foods, archaic gestures characterises the life of this village, especially during Spring, which has always been experienced as a moment of reflection on the change of the reality. In the village of Bova, this period acquires ritual tones, which have their roots in the eras in which the individual experienced the relationship with the sacred. Here, more than anywhere else, Spring is an excuse to perpetuate ancient traditions, in which the original pagan elements survive in the Christian rites of the Holy Week. In the days of Lent, people still prepare the *cuddhuraci*, from Greek bagel/round-shaped bread or biscuit, decorate sweets with egg, and practice propitiatory rites, scattering wheat seeds or marking crosses on agricultural lands. Most of the Easter rites also focus on the female sphere, also implied in food, which acquires a symbolic value alluding to fertility. Feminine forms characterise a particular type of cheese, called *musulupo*, and biscuits called *'ngute*, from the Greek word *egg*. Female images are also reproduced in the unique plant sculptures which are carried in procession on Palm Sunday. The rite is full of archetypal references, as visible, for instance by the practice at the end of the liturgy, during

which these ladies are dismembered by the faithful, who hoard up branches to keep for the blessing of the houses. Anyone who has had the opportunity to participate in the procession in Bova remains enchanted by the re-enactment of the myth of Persephone in renewing Spring on earth. The liturgical feasts in honor of Saint Leo are filled with Byzantine sacredness. St. Leo is patron saint of the village and co-patron of the Reggio-Bova archdiocese. On 4 and 5 May the relics of the Basilian monk, who probably lived in the 12th century, parade through the streets of the hamlet, in a solemn procession led by the Brotherhood of St. Leo and cadenced by the local band. A spontaneous religious devotion also affects the feast of the Corpus Domini, during the first Sunday of June, when the alleys of the village come alive with altars, the streets are colored with floral arrangements and the balconies of the houses are dressed in traditional blankets, woven with broom. Between the 15th and 17th August, Bova celebrates its co-patron, San Rocco, for having rid the village of the plague of 1577. A long procession, led by the Brotherhood named after the saint, carries the statue of the French pilgrim through the streets of the hamlet, followed by the monumental wooden vara of St Leo, inside which there is a silver reliquary depicting the bust of the hermit monk. The celebrations end with fireworks and traditional music shows in the main square of Bova, as part of the travelling ethnic music festival, *Paleariza*. It starts with the *Ballo dei Giganti*, and then continues with the *Ballu du camiddu*, a liberating rite where light, rhythm and fire come together in ancestral symbolism, repeating a magical dance that simulates the circular movement of the stars. Music, songs and dances of the Greek tradition also animate the *Wine Festival* which takes place in November dedicated to St Martin, when, in addition to the new wine, it is possible to taste *zeppole* and *lestopitte*, a kind of fried piadina traditional of Greek Calabria.



WALKING AROUND BOVA

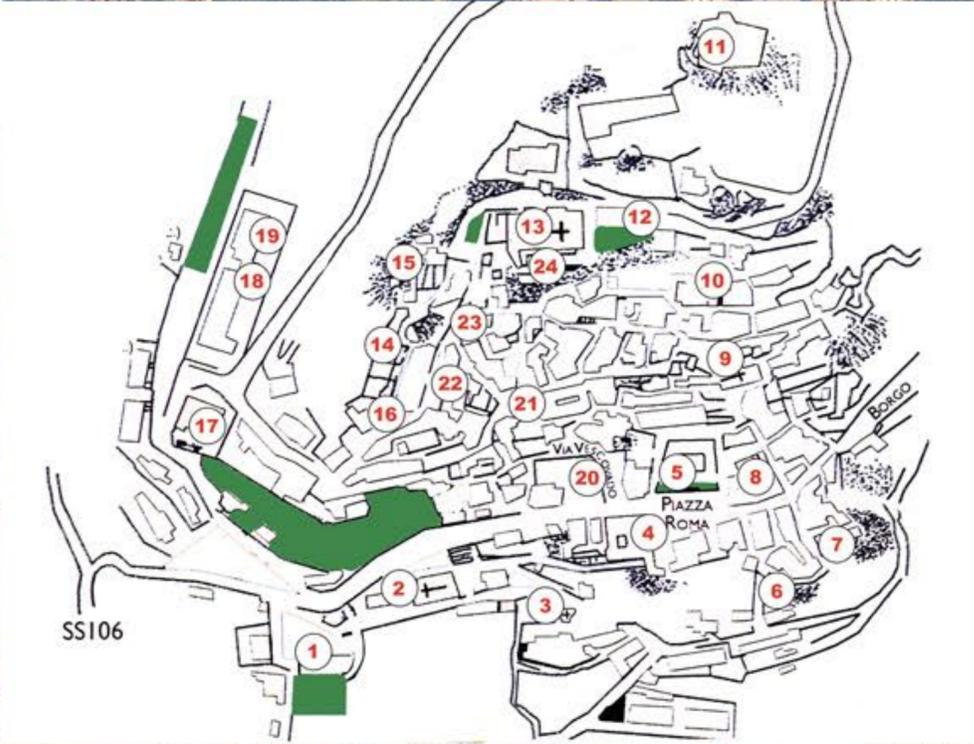
Leaving the **G. Rohlfs Museum 1** you will find on the right the **Church of St. Caterina, 2** which houses the marble statue of the Madonna delle Grazie which is from 1590, and is assigned to an artist from the workshop of Rinaldo Bonanno. Not far away, in the St. Antonio area, there is the **Church of St. Rocco, 3** built following the plague of 1577 and completed in 1633, as can be seen from the date engraved on the portal. The church is home to a wooden sculpture of the saint, attributed to a Neapolitan school teacher of the mid-nineteenth century, which bears a silver hat from the late eighteenth century, an ex voto by Bruno D'Andrea.



You can continue your tour through an ancient door of the village, incorporated in 1822 in the monumental arch of **Palazzo Nesci Sant'Agata 4**. It is said that when the local authorities denied the use of public water to build the arch, the barons Nesci Sant'Agata used their own wine to mix the mortar. On Piazza Roma, the heart of the village, stands the **Palazzo Comunale, 5** built in 1933 on the foundations of the residence of the Marzano family, a noble family from Bova who in 1848 gave hospitality to the English traveler Edward Lear.



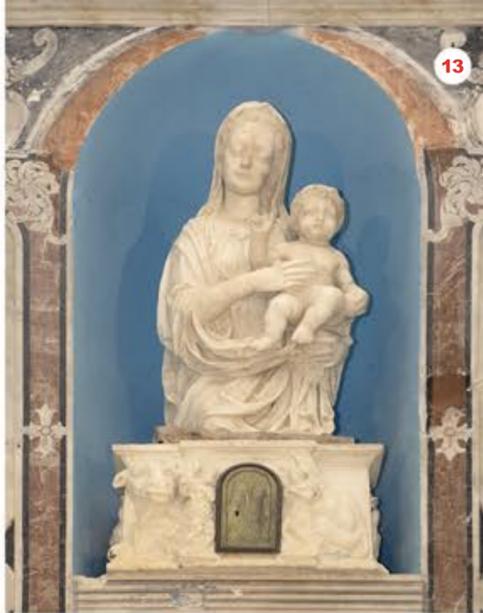
From here you can go to the Rao district to admire the exhibition of tools of the rural world that constitutes the **Path of Rural Life 6**. Along the way you will find the **Church of the Holy Spirit 7**, with its elegant stone portal of 1622. The church was of a Greek-Byzantine cult and is decorated inside with late Baroque stuccoes and a modern iconostasis, behind which there is a marble altar, commissioned in 1754 by the Traclo family. The nearby **Church of the Immaculate 8** is also from the 18th century, originally the funeral chapel of the Marzano family, today it is used as a **Tourist Office**.



Going up the steps you arrive at the **Sanctuary of S. Leo, 9** patron saint of the village. It is said that the building was built where the coffin of the saint, carried in procession, became so heavy that it could no longer be moved. A portal from 1606 introduces the single nave, at the bottom of which stands the high altar consecrated in 1755. In the central niche there is the marble statue of St. Leo, from 1582, attributed to Rinaldo Bonanno. The central chapel on the left, known as the Relics because it houses the sacred remains of St. Leo, houses an altar in marble inlays from 1732. Inside the niche, behind a wrought iron gate, you can see the silver bust of the patron saint, a work completed in 1635 by Santo Casella from Messina. The axe, held in the right hand, was instead made at the end of the seventeenth century by Antonio Pascalino, while the reliquary urn below was made in Naples in 1855 by Antonino Marzano. In the first chapel on the right there is a painting of the Immaculate Conception between saints and angels, from the second half of the eighteenth century, attributed to a local painter close to the manner of Antonino Cilea. Opposite is the wooden vara of S. Leo, commissioned by the bishop of Nusco, Giuseppe Autelitano (1849 -1854), a native of Bova.



From the sanctuary you can reach **Palazzo Toscano**, today the **Gate of the Aspromonte National Park, 10**. If you go up the steps on your left, you will arrive at a **castle 11**, which was built during the Norman age on the foundations of a Byzantine fortress. Most of the visible ruins date back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while the remains of the flight of stairs that led to a second floor can be traced back to the second half of the fifteenth century.



Heading back down to the village you will find the health clinic, set up where the **Hospital for the Poor 12** once stood, founded in 1632. Next to it stands the **Co-cathedral 13** dedicated to the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple, called Isodia in Greek. The current building was built between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the foundations of a Romanesque church (XII century), which was in turn raised over a Byzantine chapel. It is possible to see in the apse of the late seventeenth-century central altar the sculpture of the Madonna with Child, (1584) an autograph work by Rinaldo Bonanno, while in the chapel on the right stands a marble altar, built in 1714 by workers from Messina. In the latter chapel it is possible to admire the wooden busts of an Ecce Homo and of the Addolorata, commissioned by the bishop Vincenzo Rozzolino (1849-1855), to whom we also owe the statue of the Immaculate Conception to the left of the side entrance, sculpted in 1691. Dated to 1754 are the marble balustrades today in the chapel of the Rosary, to be assigned to the Messina marble-maker Gaetano Bara. The tombstones of the bishops who took care of the restoration of the church between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries are displayed in the main sacristy, decorated on the facade with a monumental portal from the early decades of the eighteenth century.



From the sacro of the co-cathedral, take the alley on the right leading to **Giudecca 14**, an urban section of the Rohlfs Museum. The Jewish quarter is still delimited by the medieval walls, from which a **tower 15** of the XIII-XIV century stands, and by the two wings of the eighteenth-century **Palazzo Mesiani Mazzacuva 16** seat of the Aspromonte Geopark (Unesco Global Geopark). Going down along Via St. Costantino you reach the **Museum of Paleontology and Natural sciences of the Aspromonte 17**, where about 15 000 fossil specimens of flora and fauna of Calabria are preserved.



Along the avenue that opens on the left you reach the **Spazio Cultura 18**, used for theatrical performances and cultural meetings. Inside, in addition to multimedia classrooms for teaching the Calabrian Greek language, there is also the **Museum of the Costume of Magna Graecia 19**.



Going back on Via IV Novembre which leads to Piazza Roma, the **740 Ansaldo Breda locomotive, 20** stands out as a symbol of emigration. From here it is possible to go up Via del Vescovato, along which you will find the **Artist's House 21**, an artist's residence, and right after the **Borgo dei Mestieri 22**, a set up of a peasant house with an adjoining communal oven. The **Church of Carmine 23** overlooks the same street, a title acquired in the nineteenth century after that the building passed to the Mesiani Mazzacuva family, whose coat of arms dominates the eighteenth-century facade. Sources mention the church as originally dedicated to St. Costantino, the first bishop of Bova who died in the 10th century. Flanking the nave of this church, it is possible to get lost in the alleys of the village, discovering breathtaking views like the one visible from the **viewpoint of the Co-cathedral bell tower 24**.



THE MILLENNARY HISTORY OF BOVA

Inhabited since the Neolithic era, and then again in the protohistoric period, the fortress of Bova was probably included among the great Greek fortresses, situated on the border between the poleis of Reggio and Locri Epizefiri. According to late sources Bova hosted refugees from the ancient coastal center of Delia, a site which had been abandoned at the end of the sixth century. A.D. The remains of the settlement, which also include a synagogue of the Late Antiquity, are now visible in the Archaeological Park of Bova Marina. However, archaeological data affirm that a first settlement, consisting of wooden huts, characterized the plateau below the fortress of Bova only from the ninth century. The remains of different types of pottery and of glass containers provide an image of a wealthy residential area, equipped with metalworking workshops. Bova had probably already been elevated to a Byzantine diocesan seat, by the end of the 10th century. With the arrival of the Normans, in 1059, the town was given as a fief to William, son of Framundo of the Hauteville house, who was probably the promoter of the fortification of the castle. At that time, the diocese of Bova was governed by the bishop Luca (XI-XII), who became a saint after having been the mediator between the Christians following the Greek rite and those following the Catholic one. In 1195 Henry VI of the Hohenstaufen dynasty elevated the diocese of Bova to a county, giving it as a fief to the archbishops of Reggio. Starting from the second half of the 13th century, the village assumed a strategic role in the clash that pitted first the Swabians against the Angevins, and then the latter against the Aragones. The enlargements of the castle and of the whole city walls date back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. An interesting storage room of Torinesi money, from Frankish Greece, which has been recently found belongs to the same period. Some pieces are at the G. Rohlfs Museum. In the Late Middle Ages the city was home to a Greek scriptorium, in which Filippo di Bova was also probably involved, the same person who was involved in the transcription of liturgical codes in Sicily in 1280. At that time the city was an enclave of Italo-Greek orthodoxy, as confirmed by the refusal of Bishop Basilio di Bova to accept the Latinization of the diocese, imposed in 1334 by Pope John XXII. With the advent of the Aragones, the church of Bova was ruled by Catholic bishops, who nevertheless tolerated the traditional liturgy and the transcription of Greek codes until the mid-sixteenth century. Tolerance was also demonstrated towards a small Jewish community, documented for the first time in 1497, and subsequently between 1506 and 1508.

In 1572 the Greek rite was abolished. The transition to the Catholic liturgy was made official by the apostolic administrator Giulio Stavriano, a Dominican of Armenian origin who died in Bova during the plague of 1577. The Latinization of the Greeks of Calabria spread also thanks to a huge investment in the artistic field, during a period when Calabria was under constant threats from the Turks. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the village was often threatened by the Turks, and three different late Mannerist sculptures together with refined silverware were commissioned in Messina, so as to replace the ancient Byzantine icons. This propaganda was not sufficient to erase the traditional language, if still at the end of the seventeenth century, the mayor of Bova Francesco Antonio de Marco was writing love poems in Graecanic using Latin characters. In the eighteenth century, new cultural ferment led to the artistic redevelopment of palaces and churches. The earthquake of 1783 marked the beginning of a crisis that lasted throughout the nineteenth century. It was in this period that the Greek language became the object of attention, especially by foreign scholars, first of all Carl Witte, who in 1821 published a number of songs in Calabrian Greek spreading the knowledge of the Greek-speaking area of Calabria. In 1848 the English landscape architect Edward Lear also stayed in the village. In his writings, Lear highlighted the customs of the Bovesi to reaffirm their Magna Graecia origins. However, it will be necessary to wait for Rohlfs' studies (from 1920s onwards) to have a systematic study of the Greek language of Calabria.

At that time Bova was an isolated village, difficult to reach even from nearby Reggio. Subsequently the Anglo-American bombings of 1943 and the floods of 1953 and 1972 gradually depopulated the area. In order to remember the many emigrants that had left Bova, in 1987 a steam locomotive from 1911, was placed at the entrance to the town. Since then, constant enhancement work has contributed to making Bova an exclusive destination. This is recognised by the awards that the hamlet has received in recent years. Bova has been included in the circuit of the "Most Beautiful Villages in Italy" and the "Organic Cities", and was awarded both the title "Jewel of Italy" and the "Orange Flag" environmental tourism quality mark. Google Street View recently included Bova in the list of six Italian villages to visit at least once in a lifetime.