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# LIGHT AND SHADOW

Isolation and Interaction in the Shala Valley of Northern Albania



MICHAEL L. GALATY   OLS LAFE   WAYNE E. LEE   ZAMIR TAFILICA  
EDITORS

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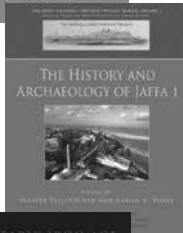
## LIGHT AND SHADOW

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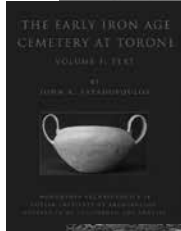
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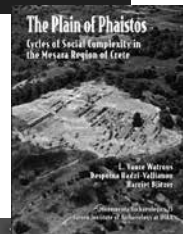
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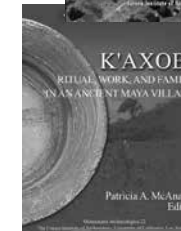
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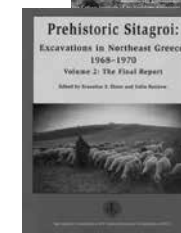
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On the Cover: Foreground, the last *bajnaktar* of the Shala tribe surrenders his gun to representatives of the Albanian federal government, 1922. Pjetër Marubi, used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania. Background, the peaks of Shala. Ann Christine Eek.

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**“A Chief of Thethi,” 1921, from the archives of the American Red Cross, Library of Congress**

*Happiness comes from the skies. It comes from sunshine, and from light and shadow on the mountains, and from green things in the spring. It comes also from rest when one is tired, and from food when one is hungry, and from fire when one is cold. It comes from singing together, and from walking on hard trails and being harder than the rocks; and there is a kind of happiness that comes to a man in battle, but that is a different kind.*

*Lulash, a chief of Theth in Shala, to Rose Wilder Lane in 1921 [1923:142]*

*Dedication*



**“School Children at Thethi,” 1921, from the archives of the American Red Cross, Library of Congress**

*To the people of Theth, past, present, and future.*

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# FOREWORD

Jack L. Davis

The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology embraced intensive, diachronic surface survey in the Mediterranean long before these techniques had become acceptable to the majority of archaeologists who worked in Greek and Roman lands. One afternoon, in the 1980s, on a pier in the harbor of Laurion, Greece, Lloyd Cotsen and I were waiting for a ferry to cross to the island of Kea. In the course of conversation, Lloyd asked me if John Cherry, Eleni Mantzourani, and I had found a publisher for the results of our regional study of the northwest part of that island. I answered “not yet,” casually, and he immediately replied, “Why not talk to Ernestine Elster [director of publications at UCLA] about it?” The rest is history. We were honored to be chosen as the very first Joanne Stolaroff Cotsen Prize imprint.

In choosing to publish what many then viewed as controversial research, the Institute of Archaeology at UCLA made a statement about the importance of regional studies for the Mediterranean. Publishing our results in an attractive volume also emphasized the significance of what we had learned.

The book at hand follows in the footsteps of our own, and has a like goal—to compose a long-term history. The editors and authors have drawn on archaeological, historical, and archival sources, as we did, and there are also similarities between our study areas. Shala is today off the beaten track, as was Kea when we worked there in the early 1980s—isolated by high mountains, rather than the sea. But, just as we concluded for Kea, present conditions may be a poor indicator of those in times past. Galaty, Lee, Lafe, and Tafilica write,

*Our results point to a complex, diachronic interplay of isolation and interaction. In some periods the valley was closed*

*and in others, it was open, but never were the people of Shala locked into a process of culture change that they did not, at least partially, control. Rather, they chose their own destiny.*

If the Shala Valley Project is methodologically a stepchild to the Kea survey, this is no accident, since a direct succession of research projects links the SVP to it through common personnel. For me, the story began in graduate school in 1974, when I was assigned to report to members of a seminar about the phenomenon of tumulus burial in Albania. Then, prior to 1991, Albania still could be nothing but a romantic dream, a place that I never imagined I would have the opportunity to visit. My fieldwork was confined to regional studies in Greece, first Kea (1983–1984), then Nemea (1983–1989), and finally Pylos (1991–1995).

Everything changed in 1991. Suddenly our television news was filled with images of Albanians struggling to reach Italy on crowded boats of every sort, and dream became reality. The government of Europe’s most isolated Communist state had collapsed. Karl Petruso fired off an unsolicited letter to the Albanian Academy of Sciences, and, lucky for us all, Muzafer Korkuti, Director of the Institute of Archaeology, replied. Thus began a joint Albanian-American project at Konispol Cave. In 1994, I traveled to Albania with Shari Stocker, Charles Watkinson, John Cherry, and Bill Alexander, all members of the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project. On that occasion, we visited the ruins of the ancient Greek city of Apollonia and were enthralled by the natural beauty of its surroundings. The following year we returned, and, then, fueled by Petruso’s tales of his fruitful collaboration, we began to think about organizing an intensive surface survey in its territory.

After a planning season of two weeks in 1996, we were determined to begin fieldwork in 1997 but were hampered by the collapse of pyramid banking schemes that threw the country into turmoil and led to widespread outbreaks of violence. 1998 brought with it more settled conditions and heralded the true beginning of the Malakstra Regional Archaeological Project, which embraced both intensive survey and test excavations. It was the first such project to be launched in Albania.

Many contributors to the Shala Valley Project were with us at Apollonia. Michael Galaty was field director, and Charles Watkinson and Wayne Lee were survey team leaders. It was Ols Lefe's first experience with Americans and one that encouraged him to attend graduate school

in the United States. Mentor Mustafa was also there, as were Joanita Vroom and Susan Allen. Galaty, Lee, and Watkinson had been at Pylos, as had William Parkinson and Robert Schon. It is thus a special honor for me to congratulate my friends and all of their own colleagues on a job well done. A plethora of regional studies projects has now been completed in Albania, but the Shala Valley Project takes pride of place for its record of publication and offers a shining example for others. The vision that we had for Albania is well on its way to being realized, as more and more archaeologists fall in love with this magnificent country, and one project spawns another, as in 1996 we hoped would be the case.

## PREFACE

In writing a book like this, we run the risk of effacing the present by romanticizing the past. That is the last thing we want to do.

People live in Shala today. They are our friends and collaborators. Their parents and grandparents occupied the ethnographic present we describe in these pages. They dropped the pottery we picked up, built the houses we studied, made the history we have recorded. They remembered and, in remembering, kept the *fs* alive. They fought for the life of the tribe, and many of them died in the process. Telling their stories is a sacred trust, one we do not take lightly.

Even today, the outside world impinges on Shala. Cell phones are ubiquitous, having arrived in the valley only a few short years ago. Climate and rainfall grow increasingly unpredictable, making farming difficult, the unfortunate result of global warming. Tourism might help save the unique culture of Shala, or doom it. And for the first time in a decade, young people are returning to the valley, from Tirana and Athens, Italy and the Bronx, to live and raise their families. They do not stay the winter, but at least they have returned. What gets saved and what gets left behind is up to them.

Yet, even in the face of change, honor is still valued. Hospitality rules are observed. Labor is shared between families. Snow falls. Water flows. Maize grows. Sheep are driven to pasture. Wolves and bears still leave their marks on village trails. The stars shine like they must have done when Grunas was first built, 3,000 years ago. And if one listens very carefully, the *ora* still calls in the night. Shala is easy to romanticize because it is a romantic place.

That said, it is also a hard, unforgiving place. Only a handful of families live in Shala year-round. Winters there are cold, snow piled on top of snow, until the passes close and the valley is cut off. Even the cell towers can freeze and cease functioning. Those who live in Shala through the year carry the cultural-historical torch passed to them by their forebears. If in the future lineages are counted and the *Kanun* observed, it will be because they choose to preserve these things. It cannot be otherwise. If they choose not to preserve them, the world will be diminished for their loss, but of course life will go on.

Bread. Salt. Heart.

*Bukë. Kripë. Zemër.*

These will remain. And there is a certain kind of happiness in them, too.

The Editors



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## Chapter One

# INTRODUCTION

Michael L. Galaty, Ols Lafe, Wayne E. Lee, and Zamir Taflica



*Great things are done when Men and Mountains meet.*  
William Blake, *The Notebook*, late eighteenth century

Some peoples endure. They survive against all odds. Their cultures are resilient and sustainable. Such is the case with the tribes of northern Albania. Pinned between predatory, expansionist states, in a frontier zone, high in the Bjeshkët e Namuna, the “Accursed Mountains” (Figures 1.1 and 1.2), for 500 years they persevered. This book tells their story.

This book also addresses one of the most vexing of anthropological theoretical problems: where do cultures come from, and under what conditions do they change

(Moone 1981; Spicer 1971)? Generally speaking, there are two possible answers to this question, and neither is entirely satisfying. Cultures may form in isolation, as closed, stable systems with unique localized histories. Or they may form and evolve through contact with other cultures, producing systems that are open and dynamic, with regional histories that are entwined and symbiotic. Which strategy is the more adaptively successful over the long term? Which of the two leads to the kinds of resilience and sustainability displayed by the peoples of northern Albania?

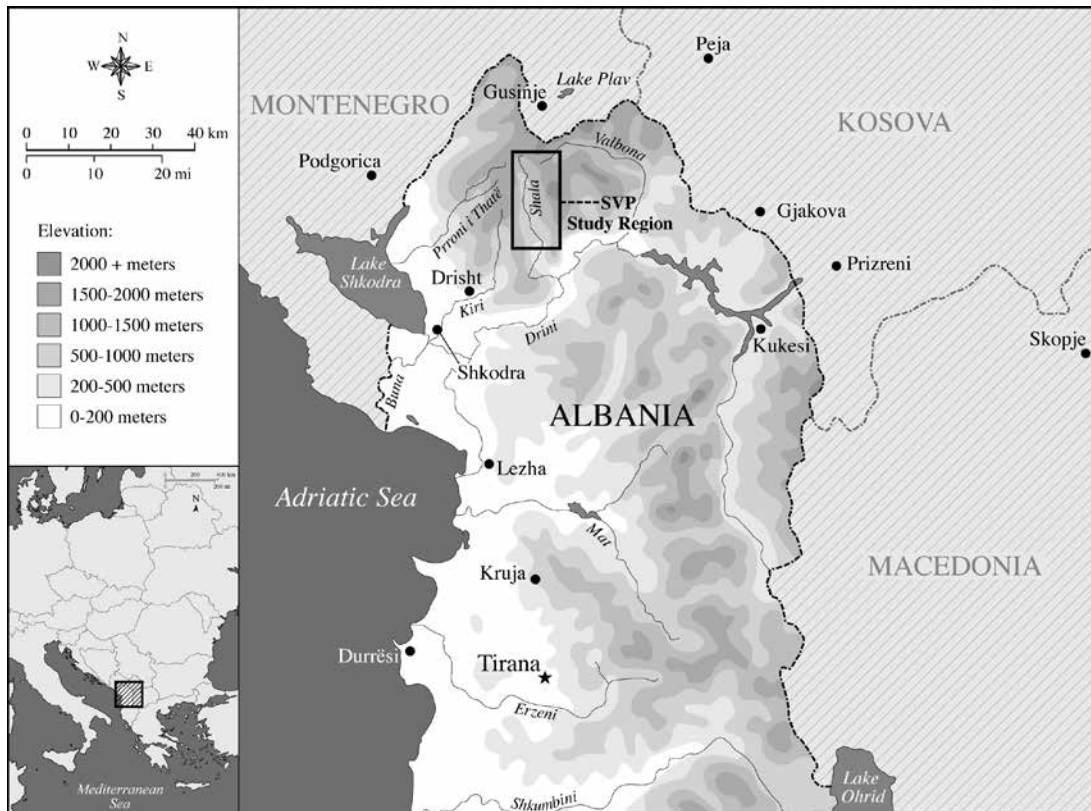


Figure 1.1. Modern northern Albania and surrounding countries showing major cities, rivers, lakes, and the Shala Valley Project's study region.  
*Jill Seagard*



Mountain environments are good places to study sociocultural dynamics (e.g., Barker 1995; Cole and Wolf 1999 [1974]; McNeill 1992; Netting 1981; Viazzi 1989). They challenge people. They inspire, but are often harsh and unforgiving. Indeed, mountains do not give up their resources easily, so they test the limits of hospitality and ingenuity. They are also good places to hide, and consequently, despite the difficulties, they attract settlement: “For the mountains are a refuge from soldiers and pirates, as all the documents bear witness, as far back as the Bible” (Braudel 1972:31). Mountain social systems, like mountains themselves, are often characterized as isolated and unchanging. The people of the Shala Valley, members of the Shala “tribe” (Albanian *fis*), are typically described as such (Figure 1.3).

*If you don't see Albania, you're wasting the chance of a lifetime. Up in those mountains—right up there in those mountains, a day's journey from here—the people are living as they lived twenty centuries ago, before the Greek or the Roman or the Slav was ever known. There are prehistoric cities up there, old legends, songs, customs that no one knows anything about. No stranger's ever even seen them [Red Cross teacher Frances Hardy to Rose Wilder Lane, with reference to Shala, in Lane 1923:2].*

Our research tells a different tale, though. Archaeological, historical, and ethnographic data all point in the same direction: Shala is remote, but it was not necessarily isolated. Rather, the Shala tribe deployed a strategy of isolationism (Galaty 2008; Schon and Galaty 2006), opening and closing the valley as the need arose. Isolationism allowed the northern Albanian tribes to fend off conquest and incorporation by external powers and preserve a degree of autonomy. In this way, they created “regions of refuge” (Aguirre Beltran 1979; Scott 2009), pockets of resistance in a hostile world.

Northern Albanians did not simply react to the world around them, however. They were intelligent, frequently proactive, agents. They balanced isolation against interaction depending on the situation, often to their own profit. They “negotiated” their “peripherality” (Kardulias 2007), as it were, and in so doing they created a distinctive, adaptive cultural system. This book analyzes that system, addresses its origins, and tracks its development through time. We demonstrate thereby that anthropological theoretical frameworks that emphasize isolation to the exclusion of interaction, and vice versa, create a false dichotomy. Isolation and interaction are countervailing yet complementary forces, two sides of the same coin. There is continuity in change.



Figure 1.2. The Bjeshkët e Namuna (the Accursed Mountains). Ann Christine Eek

An equally vexing question for anthropologists is what factors render one culture resilient in the face of change, whether world- or eco-systemic, and others unable to cope (McAnany and Yoffee 2009). What makes one system sustainable through time, while another is not? Answering this question demands particular theoretical and methodological approaches. The former are discussed in detail here and comprise the framework into which all other chapters fit. The latter are described in Chapter Two.



Figure 1.3. A family of Shala. Ann Christine Eek

## Why Northern Albania?

Anthropologists have long acknowledged the impact of various forms of contact, such as trade, on trajectories of culture change. Lewis Henry Morgan (1877) argued that cultures evolved via interaction with other, typically more “advanced,” cultures. Diffusion of culture traits was used by V. Gordon Childe (1925) to explain the development of European civilization

beginning in the Neolithic. In this traditional, “evolutionary” view, periods of cultural isolation were punctuated by periods of interaction leading to change. Eventually, though, this cultural-evolutionary model was called into question. Following the lead of Franz Boas (1920), many (primarily American) anthropologists, including archaeologists, argued that interaction, including trade and diffusion, played a limited role in culture change. In this “particularist” view, most cultures were thought to exist in isolation, possessed of their own, distinct histories, and change, when it happened, was internally motivated and innovative. When cultures did interact, disruption and disequilibrium often followed (cf. the “Law of Cultural Dominance,” Sahlins and Service 1960:Chapter 4). Modern anthropologists, archaeologists included, have yet to decide which of these two seemingly contradictory views of culture—evolutionary or particularist—is correct. Most emphasize the theoretical gray areas.

Northern Albania presented the rather unique opportunity to test the hypothetical implications of both views along a sliding scale running from isolation to interaction, wherein a cultural system might be fully closed or wide open. In the case of Shala, neither view of culture change, both of which are equally extreme, held. On the contrary, our results point to a complex, diachronic interplay of isolation *and* interaction, that is, the gray areas. The valley was closed in some periods and open in others, but never were the people of Shala locked into a process of culture change that they did not, at least partially, control. Rather, they chose their own destiny. Sometimes they chose poorly, sometimes the range of choices was limited (e.g., during Communism), but they always made a choice.

As described in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, northern Albania’s environment and history are exceptional. Although Albania borders the Mediterranean, the climate and environment of the north are Continental/“Montane Mediterranean” to Sub-Alpine/“Alti-Mediterranean” (Allen 2009) and the winters are long and hard, with much snow. Most of Shala’s houses are found near the valley floor, between 800 and 1,000 m above sea level (masl), and the surrounding mountain peaks approach 3,000 masl (Figure 1.4). Unlike all other parts of southern Europe (e.g., Bosnia and Montenegro), northern Albanian tribal systems survived intact through World War II, were partially suppressed by the Communist regime,

but reemerged in the 1990s and continue to function, in many respects, in the present day (Figure 1.5). The economy of Shala is built around sedentary agro-pastoralism (i.e., “mixed” village farming), although that too has changed over time, from more pastoral to less so now. Tribal sociopolitical organization (see Chapter Five) and settled agro-pastoralism (Chapter Six) are particular answers to the general challenges of mountain life, and together they have had a profound effect on Shala’s landscapes, built environment, settlement

patterns, and demography (Chapter Seven). Large, stone houses, some of them fortified towers (*kulla*), dot elaborately terraced foothills (Figure 1.6). Fields are irrigated and runoff is controlled by a complex system of small dams and canals. Property boundaries are marked by stone walls and fences, and deeply entrenched, very old paths link fields and homes. As such, the landscapes and built environment of Shala preserve a diachronic record of tribal political and economic decision making.

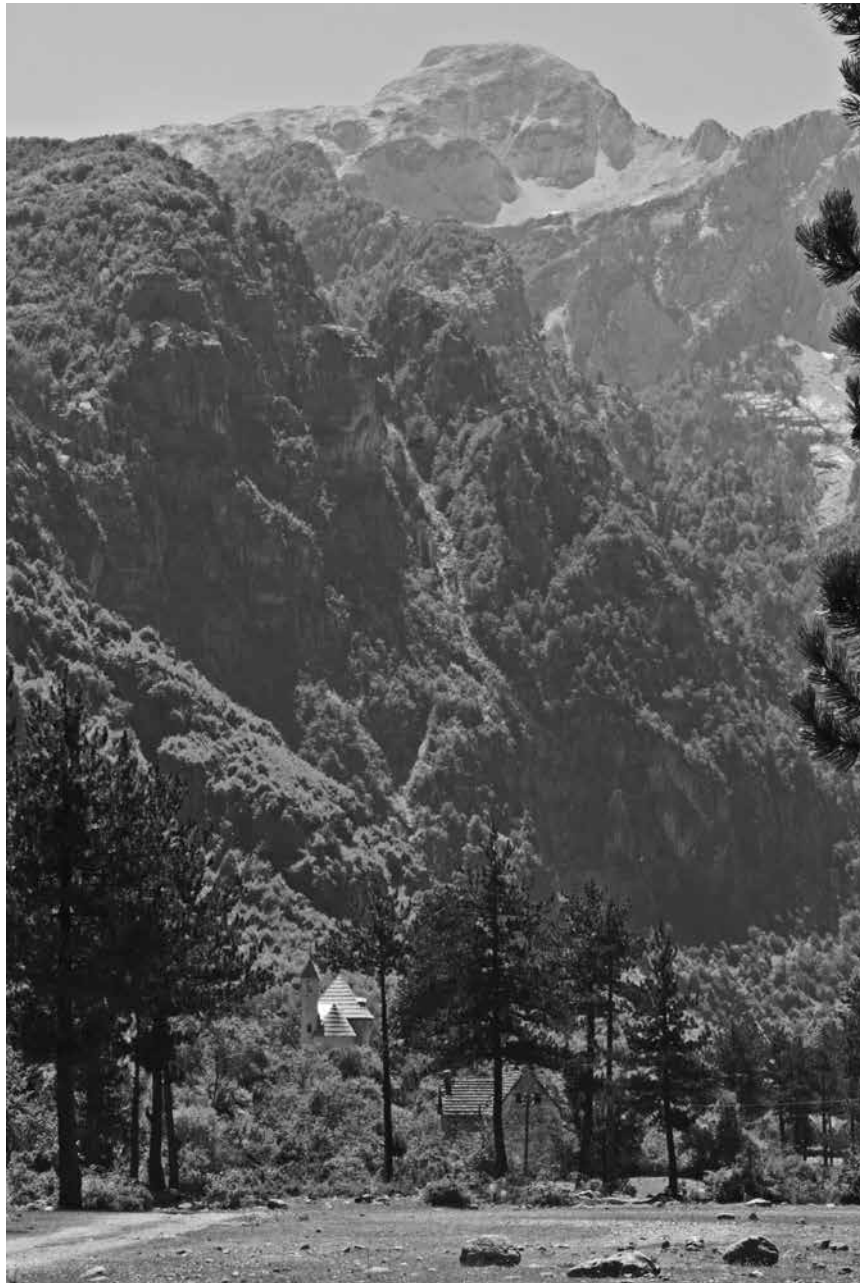


Figure 1.4. Buildings and mountains together, that is, the built environment. *Ann Christine Eek*

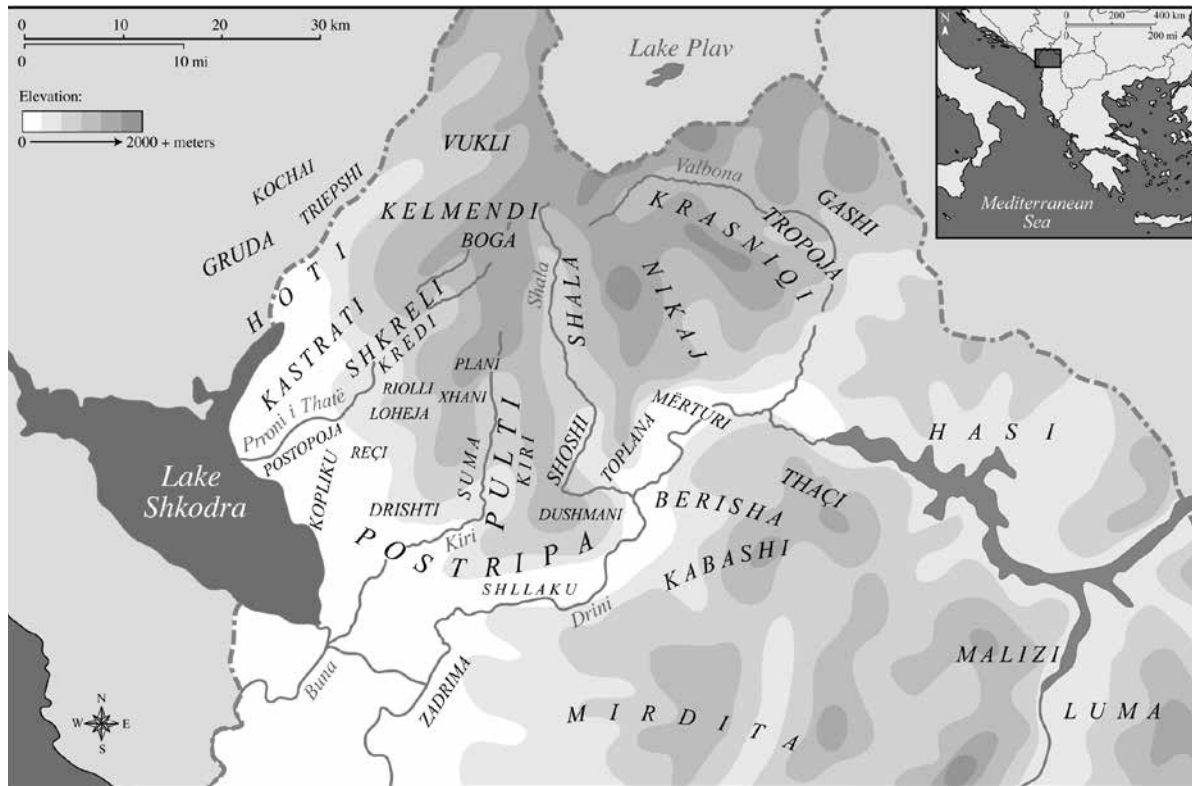


Figure 1.5. Map of northern Albanian tribal territories (derived in large part from the Admiralty War Staff Map of Northern Albania showing Distribution of Tribes, 1916 and Durham 1985 [1909]). *Jill Seagard*



Figure 1.6. Houses (*kulla*) and terraces, looking south, down the valley of the Shala River. The Ulaj and Kolaj neighborhoods of Theth are in the foreground, Grunas neighborhood in background. *Ann Christine Eek*

<i>Strength of Incorporation</i>	<div> <div>None</div> <div>Weak</div> <div>Moderate</div> <div>Strong</div> <div>Formal</div> </div>			
	<div> <div>←</div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div>→</div> </div>			
<i>Impact of Core on Periphery</i>	None	Strong	Stronger	Strongest
<i>Impact of Periphery on Core</i>	None	Low	Moderate	Significant
<i>Type of Periphery</i>	External Arena	Contact Periphery	Marginal Periphery or Region of Refuge	Full-Blown Periphery or Dependent Periphery
<i>World-System Terminology</i>		External Arena	Incorporation	Peripheralization

Figure 1.7. The continuum of incorporation. After Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997. Redrawn by Jill Seagard

Shala served, therefore, as an ideal venue for testing general, historical, and archaeological models of cultural interaction, such as world-systems theory (WST), that are often engaged in scholarly research on the Mediterranean but are only rarely applied systematically and evaluated. Our project was designed to explore one

particularly problematic aspect of intercultural interaction, that of the incorporation of peripheral regions by expanding states, as well as the effects of incorporation, or attempted incorporation, on a particular cultural system's resilience and sustainability in the face of transformative change.

Processes of incorporation appear to have operated along a line that runs from the complete economic domination of peripheral communities by core states (so-called effective or formal incorporation) to very casual interactions between core states and seemingly isolated, independent regions (so-called contact peripheries) (see Hall 1986:391–392, 1998:12, 2001:257) (Figure 1.7). Most episodes of incorporation appear to fall somewhere in between these two idealized extremes, and in reality, expanding states used a variety of tactics for incorporation depending on the situation. There are many good archaeological examples of the more formal mode of incorporation, but there have been very few studies of incorporation along contact peripheries, such as existed in northern Albania.

## Literature Review: Shala

Very little systematic research had taken place in Shala prior to our arrival in 2005, and of that, none was archaeological. Literature produced with regard to Shala can be divided into three categories: travelers' accounts, priests' reports, and the work of Communist and immediately post-Communist (pre-1997<sup>1</sup>) scholars, who focused primarily on folklore.

Some visitors to northern Albania, like Sir Arthur Evans, characterized northern Albania and Albanians as completely cut off from the outside world, a place and people stranded in time (Figure 1.8).



Figure 1.8. Northern Albanian men in traditional dress, 1900–1915. *Kel Marubi*, used by permission of the *Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi*, Shkodra, Albania

*The regions of [northern Albania] are amongst the wildest and most inaccessible of the Balkan Peninsula, and are peopled for the most part by savage and fanatical Albanian mountaineers [Evans 2006:168, who traveled to northern Albania in the 1880s].*

For Evans and those like him, the Albanian tribes formed and survived as a result of isolation.

Other visitors, such as Carleton Coon, who were in the minority, stressed connections between tribes and the outside world; they admitted that northern Albania is remote and argued that valleys like Shala could be culturally (and perhaps genetically) isolated, but emphasized lines of communication over barriers.

*At Kukës [a market town in northeast Albania] we saw zebra hides on display outside several shops. These had been sent all the way from South Africa for the manufacture of opingas [traditional footwear] [Coon 1950:16, who traveled to northern Albania in 1929].*

For Coon and those like him, the Albanian tribes formed and survived in the face of (often violent) interaction with the outside world.

Travelers to northern Albania first arrived in large numbers in the early nineteenth century (Figure 1.9). Their accounts are analyzed in Chapter Four, which places northern Albania into a larger historical context. As described by Jezernik (2004), most Victorian visitors to the Balkans, including Albania, had overly romantic views of the “Oriental” cultures they found there, and so their descriptions must be treated with care. Many travelers believed that the northern Albanian tribes were prehistoric in origin, direct descendants of the Illyrians (e.g., Coon 1950). Durham (1979 [1928]), for example, analyzed everything from wood carvings to tattoos in attempts to connect modern, northern Albanian tribal practices to those of prehistoric Balkan cultures. Despite the lack of good evidence for continuity, however, she and others—almost all travelers, of all nationalities, argued for some form of historical continuity—thought that an ancient tribal culture had managed somehow to survive, hidden away in the high mountains, insulated from the outside world. Even those travelers who were trained scholars emphasized the isolation of the northern tribes, including Shala, to the neglect of obvious external interactions, such as exogamous marriage patterns (cf. Hasluck 1954:31). Isolation thereby became the main rhetorical and explanatory device employed by those travel writers and

scholars who sought to understand the apparently autochthonous nature of the northern tribes. The irony is that many of these accounts, written by individuals who made very short trips to Shala, have been translated into Albanian (e.g., Ippen [2002], an Albanian reprint of four early twentieth-century monographs) and are now read by the valley’s living inhabitants, who quote these accounts in lieu of their own oral histories, which all point to a more recent arrival (see Sorge [2009] for a similar process in highland Sardinia).



**Figure 1.9. Jan and Cora Josephine Gordon in the home of Sadri Luka (IAS Site 009, ST159), Okol neighborhood, Theth, Shala in 1925. Original drawing by Cora Josephine Gordon (Gordon and Gordon 1927:251)**

The concepts of autochthony and isolation were of particular importance to Catholic priests who served mountain churches, such as those in Shala (Figure 1.10). Their reports, which are discussed in detail in Chapter Four, often describe social conditions in tribal regions where priests were stationed. These are useful, although they, too, like the accounts of travelers, must be treated with caution. Priests typically reported social behaviors they sought to abolish, such as folk magic and superstitions, which they described as anachronistic and non-Christian. As was true of travelers to northern Albania, priests tended to emphasize the prehistoric, or at least pre-Modern, roots of most northern Albanian traditions. There was a particular effort made to connect tribal practices, such as customary law codes, to Roman practices, thereby emphasizing the original Latin (i.e., Catholic) links to Albania. It was thought that the Illyrians had adopted Catholicism early but later,





Figure 1.10. Priests at the church of Shën Gjini, Theth, Shala, in 1942. From Luckwald 1942:87

under the Orthodox Byzantines and Slavs, had lapsed into paganism and heresy, such as Bogomilism. Modern priests believed, therefore, that they were reclaiming lost Catholic territory, an effort made more important by the Ottoman conquest and the real possibility of mass tribal conversion to Islam.

The most famous of the Catholic albanologists was Father Shtjefën Gjeçov, who in 1913 first recorded the most widespread of the Albanian law codes (*kanun*), that of Lekë Dukagjini (introduced in more detail in Chapter Five). Throughout his transcription of the

*Kanun*, he made frequent expository references to Roman law, and the Church played a prominent role in tribal politics, making “smoke in the parish” like any other house (Book 1, Chapter 1, Article 2; see Gjeçov 1989:2). Gjeçov’s implication, of course, was that priests have, and always have had, a place in the tribal system, often one of authority. Whereas mountain people were thought to be “isolated,” and thus primitive, prone to sin, and in need of guidance, priests themselves served as bridges to the outside world; typically, they were the only individuals in a village who could read and write,

for instance. And because Western travelers often stayed with priests while visiting mountain villages, priests' opinions heavily influenced published accounts of tribal origins and history.

Modern Albanian scholars also perceived direct, historical connections between northern Albanian tribes and the Illyrians. Studying these connections became particularly important in the early twentieth century, during which time Albania sought to protect itself from surrounding, expansionist nations, such as Greece, Italy, and Yugoslavia, that made repeated ethnic claims on Albanian territory. Greeks, for instance, claimed southern Albania, which they continue to call "Northern Epirus," based on the presence there of an ethnic Greek minority. The Montenegrins claimed Shkodra, which they had occupied during the Balkan Wars. Conversely, Albanians claimed descent from the ancient Illyrians, so that all lands where Illyrians had once lived—that is, most of the western Balkans—should belong to "Greater Albania." Albanian-Illyrian continuity was, therefore, not simply an academic issue—it was a political issue, and it assumed added importance under Communism (Galaty and Watkinson 2004). The Hoxha government strongly supported linguists, philologists, ethnographers, and archaeologists, who joined forces under the auspices of the Albanian Academy of Science (Akademisë së Shken-

cave të RPS të Shqipërisë) to prove the prehistoric Illyrian origins of the modern Albanians (see, e.g., Korkuti 1986; Korkuti et al. 1971). What better place to search for evidence of cultural continuity than the northern high mountains, where isolated tribal Albanians had preserved, in heroic fashion, authentic Albanian culture? The northern mountains were thereby unlike the rest of Albania, which had been conquered and more fully assimilated by the Ottomans (a process described in Chapter Four). Following in the footsteps of Gjeçov, Durham, and others, Albanian scholars went to the tribal regions of the north, including Shala, where they documented traditional culture, such as styles of dress and architecture, as reported in the annals of various journals, such as *Etnografia Shqiptare* and *Monumentet*. Archaeologists used these data to link prehistoric Illyrians to living Albanians, by collecting evidence from archaeological sites for shared artifact styles and decorative motifs. For example, jewelry and clothing worn by women in Shala (Figure 1.11) were thought to reflect Illyrian styles that had been retained through the Dark Ages at isolated mountain sites like Koman (see again Chapter Four).

During Communism, very few Western scholars were allowed into Albania. Those who wrote about the northern tribes did so from a distance, usually based on



Figure 1.11. Shala women in traditional dress, 1938. *Shan Pici*, used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania



pre-Communist sources (e.g., Blanc 1960; Odile 1989; Shyrock 1988; Stahl 1986; Whitaker 1968, 1976, 1981). As a result, they tended to reaffirm the importance of isolation to the formation and preservation of the tribal system. Other scholars worked across the border in Montenegro (Boehm 1983, 1984a, 1984b) or in Kosova (Backer 2003), and they tended to emphasize isolation less or not at all. But their results were only rarely applied to northern Albania.

With the end of Communism in 1991, several foreign scholars undertook new research projects in northern Albania. Berit Backer, who had worked in Kosova, made the documentary film *The Albanians of Rrogam* (released in 1991 in the UK's Disappearing World series), which depicts the redistribution of communal land in the village of Rrogam near Theth. Backer was murdered in Oslo in 1993, a tragic end to a promising career. In the early 1990s, Antonia Young (2001) conducted research in northern Albania on so-called sworn virgins, working very closely with Pashke, a sworn virgin and resident of the Okol neighborhood in Theth, Shala. Young (2001:55–56, 126–127) has implied that the tradition of sworn virgins persisted in northern Albania due at least in part to cultural isolation. Finally, an Austrian team from the University of Graz, led by Helmut Eberhart and Karl Kaser, spent several months living and working in Theth in 1992, culminating in an edited book (Eberhart and Kaser 1995). They sought to determine the degree to which traditional culture, based on the *Kanun*, had survived the Communist period. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (1998, 2001, 2003, 2004), an original member of the Graz team, has continued to conduct ethnological research in Albania, though without a specific focus on Shala. In recent years, Kaser and colleagues at the University of Graz have focused on Albanian family structures and historical demography (e.g., Gruber 2006; Gruber and Pichler 2002; Kaser 2002), based in large part on analysis of the Austrian census of Albania conducted in 1916–1918 (Seiner 1922). The Austrians in general have avoided the issue of isolation, or questioned it (see Brunnbauer 2004 in particular). At the same time, they also have argued that very little of traditional tribal culture survived Communism. Foreign research in the northern mountains was curtailed by the near-civil war that engulfed Albania in 1997, followed by the war in Kosova in 1999.

Several Albanian scholars, many of them trained in Western Europe and the United States, have published

on northern Albania during the post-Communist period, as well, but usually without conducting fieldwork. Their work has been informed directly by recent social theory, postcolonial theory in particular, which tends to de-emphasize further the study of tribalism, focusing instead on the individual agency of northern Albanians themselves (e.g., Blumi 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2007; Doja 1998a, 1998b, 2000). Kahreman Ulqini (1991, 2003), for example, has conducted excellent historical research on northern Albania, including Shala, emphasizing migration and competition as key factors in the formation and further development of the main *bajraks* (tribal military districts established by Ottoman authorities).

Ultimately, the tension between cultural isolation and interaction has shaped and continues to shape all explanations of tribal origins, evolution, survival, and, according to some, demise, in northern Albania. Yet the various types of data collected over the centuries by visitors to and scholars of northern Albania, as summarized in this section, have never been systematically collated, compared, and used to test the significance of isolation and interaction as meaningful causal factors, inhibiting and/or driving cultural change and persistence. The interdisciplinary methodology of the Shala Valley Project (SVP), as described in Chapter Two, was designed to collect the data necessary to test general theoretical models of culture change and isolationism, as framed by previous research. Isolationism is the primary strategy whereby Shala resisted formal incorporation into the expanding Ottoman Empire. We contend that similar strategies have helped “persistent” peoples the world over, through time, maintain independence, often in “regions of refuge” (Aguirre Beltran 1979; Castille and Kushner 1981; Scott 2009). Our conclusions possess, therefore, general, cross-cultural explanatory power, as described in the concluding chapter.

## Factors Affecting Incorporation and Persistence in Shala

In the course of our fieldwork, we identified several key factors, or “effects,” that appear to have inhibited processes of incorporation in Shala and encouraged persistence: a frontier location; integrated, dynamic landscapes; localized (i.e., micro-regionalized) decision-making processes; and a resilient, sustainable, coupled human-natural eco-

system. Each of these factors affected the formation and survival of the tribal system differently, and no single factor fully determined the course of events in Shala; rather, different factors were at work in different periods, and in some periods, all of them operated simultaneously.

## World-Systems/Frontier Effects

Taking a world-systems approach (Wallerstein 1974), we might define northern Albania, Shala in particular, as “marginal,” located along the poorly integrated edge of a wide peripheral contact zone (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; see Sherratt [1994] for the “nuclear-margin” concept specifically). Various imperial cores lightly touched northern Albania—Rome, Byzantium, Istanbul—but none managed to fully conquer and/or incorporate the region. In some periods, northern Albania fits well the definition of a “contested” periphery, a frontier zone where two or more expanding states collide and compete for dominance (Allen 1997; Cline 2000). In some cases, contested regions may be devastated and depopulated, while in others, inhabitants manage to exploit their territorial, strategic importance. This was certainly true of northern Albania, Shala included, as described in Chapter Four. Caught variously between Catholic Venice, an independent Montenegrin state, which was Slavic and Orthodox, and the Muslim Ottoman Empire, in some periods the tribes flourished, while in others they suffered. Never was the process of incorporation fully effected, though, and tribes always found room to negotiate. Tribal organization and membership were themselves fluid concepts, always open to interpretation:

*As the outside world became more and more rigid in how it understood the world during the course of the nineteenth century (and tried to impose these understandings on the region), the Malësorë's [Mountaineer's] social “hybridity” and cultural “ambiguity” empowered its inhabitants to negotiate on a number of fronts for their continued autonomy. Over the course of more than thirty years, individuals and groups alike demonstrated a capacity to adjust their formal membership claims to one group or another when and if external conditions dictated [Blumi 2003a:238].*

It may be, in fact, that a—or perhaps *the*—key factor affecting cultural persistence is the ability of a people, or tribe, to create a shared history, a malleable

symbolic system that supports and encourages adaptive, resilient responses to world- and eco-systemic pressure (Castille 1981:xviii; following Spicer 1971). This is discussed for Shala throughout the volume, but particularly in Chapter Eight, in which we demonstrate how tribal history and beliefs have been encoded symbolically in a sacred landscape.

Hall (1986, 1998, 2000, 2001; see Dunaway [1996] for incorporation of mountain regions specifically) has strongly criticized Wallerstein's concept of “incorporation” for being too narrowly defined and focused on the results of the process (the “development of under-development”), rather than the process itself. Furthermore, he considers incorporation to be a much more diverse and complex undertaking than Wallerstein imagined. Recently, several archaeologists have investigated incorporation and largely have affirmed Hall's position. Kardulias (1999, 2007), for example, has introduced the useful concept of “negotiated peripherality,” the idea that peoples living in marginal zones may have in some cases set the terms of their own incorporation (see also Morris 1999). In northern Albania, tribal leaders may have turned contested peripherality to their own profit, using distance from regional cores and the freedom this brought to create political and economic advantage.

The concept of the “frontier” itself has undergone recent reevaluation (see discussion in Schon and Galaty 2006). Frontiers à la Frederick Jackson Turner were once thought to be regions at the edges of state or imperial expansion, where wilderness cultures were engulfed and people subjugated. Today, they are more often viewed as zones of cultural contact and production (Gardner 2007; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Parker 2006; Parker and Rodseth 2005), places where worlds collide and ideas and individuals move from core to periphery, and vice versa (see again, Figure 1.7). This view of the frontier now holds for many historians, as well, including those who study Medieval and later Balkan history (Bartlett and MacKay 1989; Peacock 2009a; Pohl et al. 2000; Power and Standen 1999; Staecker 2004). Following the model of Parker (2006), we argue that prior to the late nineteenth century, northern Albania was a “borderland” zone, marked by a “fluid” frontier, through which different peoples and products freely passed. By the early twentieth century, however, the frontier had closed and become, in Parker's (2006:81) terms, a “static” border, a line of demarcation separating new nation-states. The closing of the frontier had

disastrous effects on the northern Albanian tribes, and yet somehow, certain individuals learned to exploit the new situation, often through smuggling and black-market dealing (Blumi 2003a, 2003b, 2007).

Ferguson and Whitehead (1992) have argued that tribal systems evolved in regions, such as frontiers, disrupted by the ripple effects of contact with expanding predatory states and empires. These so-called tribal zones typically are characterized by endemic warfare. The formation and evolution of the northern Albanian tribal system may fit the “tribal zone” model. Boehm (1983, 1984a, 1984b) has described nineteenth-century tribal Montenegro as a so-called “region of refuge” (see Hall 2000:241) characterized by a “warrior” ethos. In Boehm’s model, Montenegrin tribes maintained their independence through a symbiotic relationship with the Montenegrin and Ottoman states, which depended on Montenegrin mercenaries. The same may hold for Venetian and Ottoman northern Albania. Historical documents record the exploits of the *stradiots*, Albanian mercenaries who served throughout Western Europe (Millar 1976). We contend that the northern Albanian tribal system of feud and consequent emigration produced a ready pool of such mercenaries and was a flexible, adaptive strategy that encouraged resilience and long-term stability.

There is also good evidence that the Ottomans deliberately tried to destabilize northern Albania by encouraging tribal rivalries, leading to a net loss in resilience. Economic and political competition between chiefs reduced the possibility of tribal confederation and coordinated, mass uprisings (as had happened under Skanderbeg, the leader of the fifteenth-century Albanian resistance movement; see Chapter Four). Ottoman officials created a parallel system of tribal military leadership, the *bajrak* system (in the late eighteenth century; the first written reference to a *bajrak* is from 1783), so that *bajraktars* might be played one against the other (Coon 1950; Ulqini 1991:167; additional examples of Ottoman political interference in Schwandner-Sievers 1998:146–147). In return for political and economic favors, *bajraktars* were expected to recruit and lead young men in Ottoman military campaigns. In this unsettled atmosphere, a body of customary law emerged. Codified in the *Kanun* and strictly enforced by a council of elders, it defined social, political, and economic relationships between tribal members and families. It is these relationships, as they developed through time, that

are reflected in the landscape and built environment of Shala. According to the *Kanun*, “work moves the path” (Book 5, Article 289; Gjeçov 1989:86). Every house constructed or destroyed, each decision made regarding grazing or water rights, where to build a terrace, whom to kill in a feud—these acts reflect relationships dictated by oral customary law, which formed in a frontier “tribal zone,” mediated by concerns about the outside, ever-encroaching world.

Our work in Shala demonstrates the tight links that exist between human sociopolitical systems and ecosystems in frontier zones (Galaty et al. 2009). The northern Albanian tribes maintained a functional autonomy from the Ottoman Empire for 500 years, in part by exploiting their location along a contested periphery, but also by selling themselves as mercenaries, resorting to banditry if needs be, and “negotiating” their “peripherality” in numerous, creative ways. The actions of individual chiefs were, however, tuned to eco-systemic shifts, such as changes in snow pack and the water to be had for irrigation, which determined food availability, family size, and, thus, local power dynamics (as discussed in Chapter Three). Central to the northern Albanian system of political ecology was the ability to deploy violence (and form alliances) (Galaty 2013). What is only now becoming apparent generally is that world- and eco-system frontiers often coincide (Hornborg and Crumley 2006). Human and environmental systems relate to one another synergistically—change in one system precipitates change in the other—and these changes often begin locally, at small scales and in frontier zones, and spiral outwards, leading to variable effects as cultural and ecological boundaries, such as those demarcated by mountains, are crossed. Such processes of change must be explained over time, across landscapes, and from the ground up.

## Dynamic Landscapes

The landscape approach to regional analysis in archaeology has been reviewed recently in multiple venues (e.g., Anschuetz et al. 2001; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Fisher and Thurston 1999; Ucko and Layton 1999). Most archaeologists now agree on several key characteristics of landscapes. They are layered, mutable, and symbolically charged (Galaty et al. 1999). There is no such thing as *a*, or *the*, landscape. Any landscape is

composed of various intersecting physical and social “fields” (Appadurai 1996). We have defined for Shala, with the input of ethnographic informants, various –scapes, mapped them, and sought to demonstrate how they were integrated, or not, through time, forming a systemic, resilient whole. The first of these is the *landscape* that defines the natural space(s) into which all other –scapes fit (see again, Figure 1.2). Landscapes are often depicted as imperturbable, but this is not of course the case, and Shala’s environment did evolve through time depending on various external inputs, such as those derived from shifting weather patterns. Shala’s landscape and environment, including climate, are described in Chapter Three. A second –scape defined by the SVP is the settled, or built, environment, which in Shala is composed of houses, barns, terraces, roads, paths, walls, canals, churches, cemeteries, mills, neighborhoods, villages, and so on, as described in Chapters Six and Seven (see again Figure 1.4). The built environment, including settlement pattern, of Shala encodes and displays changes through time to the region’s social, political, and economic fields, each of which is cognized and interpreted via individual and collective memories and shared histories, discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Five. For the people of Shala, the natural and built environments support “mental maps,” inscribed as toponyms onto the valley’s landscape (cf. Basso 1996). The valley’s social and political –scapes, or “fields,” are further connected to the natural landscape and built environment through the imprint of boundaries and borders that define family and tribal systems of resource owner- and stewardship, lending structure to the economic field of pastures and farm plots. These boundaries shifted over time and were marked in a variety of ways, including the erection of standing stones, *guri i kufinit*, as described in the *Kanun* (Book 4, Chapter 13, Articles 238–240; see Gječov 1989:74):

238. The boundary is constructed with large, towering rocks thrust into the earth and exposed above it. An aged tree may also serve as a boundary. “The boundary stone has witnesses behind it.”
239. The boundary stone has witnesses around it. These are six or twelve small rocks which are buried in the earth around the boundary stone.

240. When boundaries are fixed, aside from the households concerned, there must also be present Elders of the village, Elders of the Banner [*bajrak*], and as many young people and children as possible from the villages of the district, so that the boundary will be retained in memory.

The people of Shala also produced a sacred landscape—an “ideoscape”—one that is home to spirits, such as the *ora*, and mythical beasts, such as the *kulshedra*, a 12-headed serpent that can steal the sun and moon (Elsie 2001; an old song about a *kulshedra* in Shala is recorded in its entirety in Cukeli 2007:69–87, while excerpts appear in many travelers’ accounts, e.g., Lane 1923:221–223). In northern Albania, aspects of the natural landscape—mountains, springs, rivers, trees—were imbued with sacred meaning and powers, this despite the Catholic faith of the inhabitants (see above). Many of these natural features are represented symbolically in Shala’s material culture, in the form of carvings on stone houses, for example (discussed in detail in Chapter Eight). Cemeteries were of particular importance, since they bridged the sacred and social worlds (Figure 1.12).

These various –scapes were interlocking and integrated, literally and in the minds of the people of Shala, forming a “charged,” dynamic network, linked eco-systemically. It was these eco-systemic connections that tribal elders monitored and mediated in order to sustain resilient cultural systems. Mapping the various –scapes of Shala required application of a variety of



Figure 1.12. Monumental, carved wooden crosses at the site of the old cemetery in Theth, at the church of Shën Gjini, taken by Edith Durham in 1908. Used by permission of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London

specific methods, including various forms of survey (as described in Chapter Two). Moreover, understanding the human responses to change in Shala, such as threats of frontier incorporation, necessitated a micro-regional, micro-historical approach to the valley's past.

### Micro-regionalism and Micro-history

It is our belief that general models of human behavior, such as those proposed in this chapter, must be tested at local scales. Recently, some archaeologists have adopted the “small worlds” approach to regional analysis, with good success (see Brooks et al. [2008] on “micro-history” generally). Broodbank (2000), for example, has analyzed the “small world” of the Bronze Age Cyclades, and Pullen and Tartaron (2007) the “small world” of the Greek Saronic Gulf. In this way, it is perhaps useful to think of the Bjeshkët e Namuna range as a “small world,” an upland island surrounded by, but connected to, settled plains and plateaus, such as the Albanian coastal plain, the Montenegrin plain, and the interior plain of Kosova (see Figure 1.1). The geography of this region is discussed in much more detail in Chapter Three. Suffice it to say here that the upland regions of northern Albania functioned as an independent cultural and linguistic unit at least as early as the Middle Ages (Martin 1992; Winnifrith 1992). Northern Albania, north of the Shkumbin River, is home to speakers of the Gheg dialect of Albanian, which is quite different from the southern dialect, called Tosk. Moreover, southern Albania was subject to much more intense interactions with, and outright colonization by, the Greeks and, later, the Romans. Northern Albania, with the exception of the coast, was largely spared these episodes of conquest. Likewise, later invasions, by Bulgarians, Serbs, Byzantines, Venetians, and the Ottomans, lightly touched northern Albania, the Albanian Alps north of the Drin River in particular (the exception to this rule may be the sixth- to seventh-century Slavic invasion, as discussed in subsequent chapters). Whereas far southern Albania and Slavic regions to the north were influenced by the Orthodox Church, and much of central Albania converted to Islam under the Ottomans, northern Albania, the Dukagjin region specifically, remained firmly Catholic. These historical forces—imperial, linguistic, and religious—intersected with one another in ways that have set the Bjeshkët e Namuna apart, as a “small world,” subject to micro-historical study.

It is also the case that the tribal system was most developed and persistent in the Albanian Alps. There are indications that tribal entities once existed throughout the Dinaric mountain chain, extending from Bosnia and Montenegro south to Epirus, but that they were disrupted first and most fully in south and central Albania, in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest, and later in the north, in Montenegro in particular. In Montenegro, mountain tribes, both “Slavic” and “Albanian,” were absorbed into the new state's socio-political system in the early to mid-nineteenth century (Boehm 1983, 1984a). Those in Bosnia may have migrated south into northern Albania, merging with existing tribes (Coon 1950; Durham 1979 [1928]). As tribal territories shrunk or were swept away, individuals and groups, Catholics especially, appear to have fled, some to Italy and Greece, others into the Bjeshkët e Namuna, which became a “region of refuge,” as defined above.

Far northern Albania thereby followed its own historical and cultural trajectories, which require local study and regional contextualization. Heads of households in Shala were motivated, first, to balance their own political needs and wants against the eco-systemic challenges of year-round settlement in a mountain zone and, second, to situate their decisions within the “small world” of the Bjeshkët e Namuna and the larger world-system that surrounded and threatened to engulf it. Our micro-historical, micro-regional approach, described in more detail in Chapter Two, allowed us to gather data pertaining to strategic decision making by individuals and groups in Shala through time. Archival historical research produced data necessary to situate these decisions within a wider geopolitical context. These data, taken together, demonstrate just how the people of Shala built and maintained a resilient, sustainable cultural system, as reflected in the valley's landscapes through time.

### Resilience

Resilience theory, along with sustainability science and political ecology, has garnered much recent attention in anthropological, particularly archaeological, circles (Redman 2005). Here we define resilience as “the ability of a system to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic form” (McAnany and Yoffee 2009:10). As argued above, as a “small world,” the Bjeshkët e Namuna range,

with Shala as our case study, presents an ideal setting for the recovery and analysis of factors that contributed through time to the resilience of the northern Albanian tribes. Because Shala could be opened and closed by its inhabitants, depending on the nature and intensity of external disturbances, it served as a near-perfect laboratory for testing theories about resilience in human societies. In this sense, the valleys of the Bjeshkët e Namuna really are like islands, another setting in which resilience and sustainability are typically studied (e.g., Easter Island; Hunt and Lipo 2010 *contra* Diamond 2005). Our research indicates that the inhabitants of Shala re-

sponded to external pressures, including but not limited to incorporative pressures, in any number of creative, sustainable ways (Figure 1.13). They possessed various means to regulate the valley's population (as discussed in Chapter Four). Settlement patterns shifted through time (Chapter Seven). The subsistence system changed (Chapter Six), as did the intensity of investment in the built environment (Chapters Six and Seven). Patterns of feud and exogamy evolved (Chapter Five). These and other responses to change in Shala are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two (with reference to Figure 1.13), as are the indicators used to measure them and the

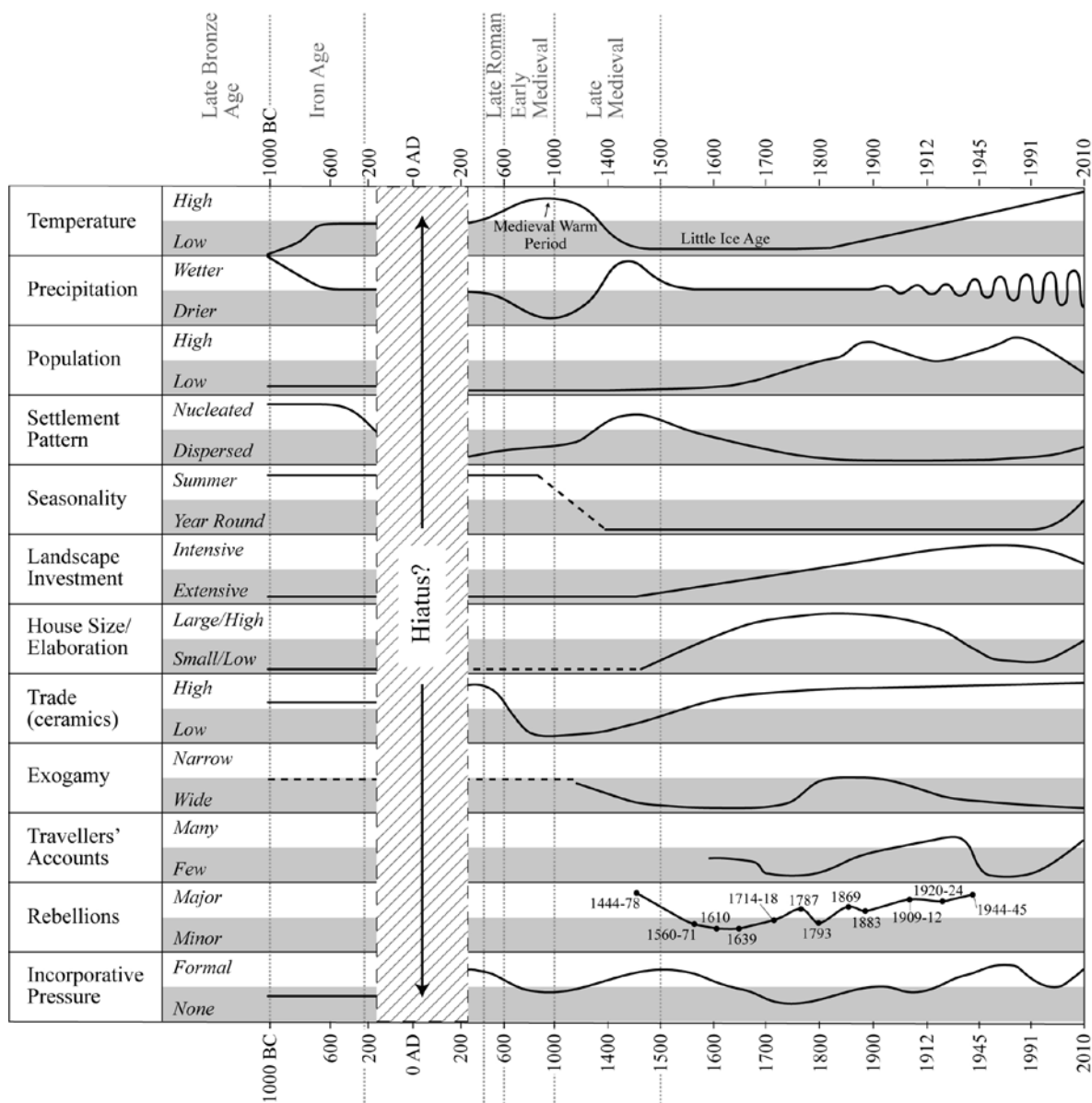


Figure 1.13. Factors that affected Shala through time and responses to those factors. *Jill Seagard*

methods whereby pertinent data were collected. One long-term trend is clear: climate, including temperature and precipitation, had an enormous effect on the valley's settlement and economy, as discussed in Chapter Three.

## Conclusion

The Shala Valley Project was designed to contribute to ongoing debates about the nature and causes of culture change. Our results indicate that Shala was never completely isolated. Nor was it ever fully integrated into external social, political, and economic systems, even under Communism. Rather, the residents of Shala carefully managed their interactions with outsiders, cultivating strategies of isolationism. This approach produced a resilient, sustainable cultural system, reflected in the valley's landscapes.

Our results also serve as a lasting tribute to the ingenuity of the people of Shala and their ancestors. Often the odds were against them. Yet the door was always open to a guest. A fire always burned in the hearth. And always, there are the mountains.

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*Mountains! Wherever you look you see mountains.  
Albanian poet, Stavre Frasheri, on his first ever trip to the  
Albanian Alps, in 1929 [2002:33]*

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> In 1997, a large financial pyramid scheme collapsed in Albania, and most people lost their life savings. This precipitated a near civil war, which was avoided through Italian intervention. Many Albanian and foreign scholars who had initiated fieldwork in northern Albania, including Shala, left in 1997, never to return. The events of 1997–1998 were followed by the war in Kosova in 1999, which caused additional chaos in northern Albania, in part due to rampant smuggling (of guns and petrol) across the international border. The lawlessness of 1999 mirrored earlier, similar periods of black marketeering and violence in northern Albania (see, e.g., Blumi 2003a). Albania, including northern Albania, largely has recovered from the negative effects of the late 1990s. It has forged strong ties with the European Union and the United States, became a NATO member in 2008, has negotiated visa liberalization with the “Schengen Area” countries of Europe, and is working hard to obtain candidate status for eventual European Union membership.

## Chapter Two

# PROJECT HISTORY AND METHODOLOGY

Michael L. Galaty, Ols Lafe, Wayne E. Lee, and Zamir Taflica



*As a synthetic conjunctive approach that is both flexible and selective in the choice of methodologies and data sets, ethnohistoric archaeology is a powerful tool with which to explore the past [Brain 1988:11].*

*If the operation of a system is predicated on linked dynamics across scales—particularly the interaction of “fast” and “slow” variables or the “mismatch” of scales at which social and ecological variables interact—then examination of these linkages from both social and ecological perspectives will be crucial [Redman 2005:70].*

The project design developed and implemented by the Shala Valley Project was intended to collect the kinds of information needed to test the models described in Chapter One, depicted in

Figure 1.13, and discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. Our methods were meant to return data that spanned all periods of Shala’s past, from deepest prehistory through the present day. The project therefore integrated interdisciplinary programs of intensive and extensive archaeological survey and excavation with geo-scientific, ethnographic, and (ethno)historical surveys, including archival historical research. Our approach might be described as “ethnohistoric archaeology,” similar to the methodology designed by Brain for his study of the Tunica (1988; cf. Cherry et al. [1991] for an analogous approach focused on a Mediterranean landscape) (Figure 2.1). Ethnohistoric archaeology allows living cultures to be analyzed and situated within a deeper temporal framework, across multiple spatial scales, and so met well our methodological needs. And as noted by Redman (2005:70), interdisciplinary, diachronic, landscape-focused studies of resilience are rare and much needed, so the SVP can serve as a model in this regard.

## Project History

The Shala Valley Project was launched in 2004 and conducted fieldwork during the summers of 2005–2008, over the course of four, one-month field seasons.

In 2005, we surveyed the village of Theth in upper (northern) Shala (Figure 2.2). Three hundred thirty-eight fields and 460 structures were mapped and fully documented, and 26 heads of household participated in detailed interviews. In 2006 and 2007, we surveyed lower (southern) Shala. Six hundred sixty-two fields and 120 houses were mapped and fully documented, and 10 heads of household participated in detailed interviews. Ten archaeological sites were identified in Shala and further investigated, including one that is Middle

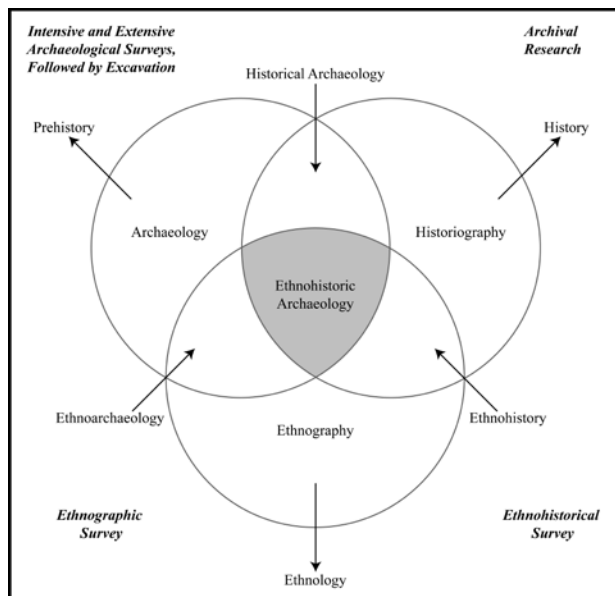


Figure 2.1. Schematic representation of the “ethnohistoric archaeological” methodological framework as applied by the Shala Valley Project, after Brain 1988:11. *Jill Seagard*



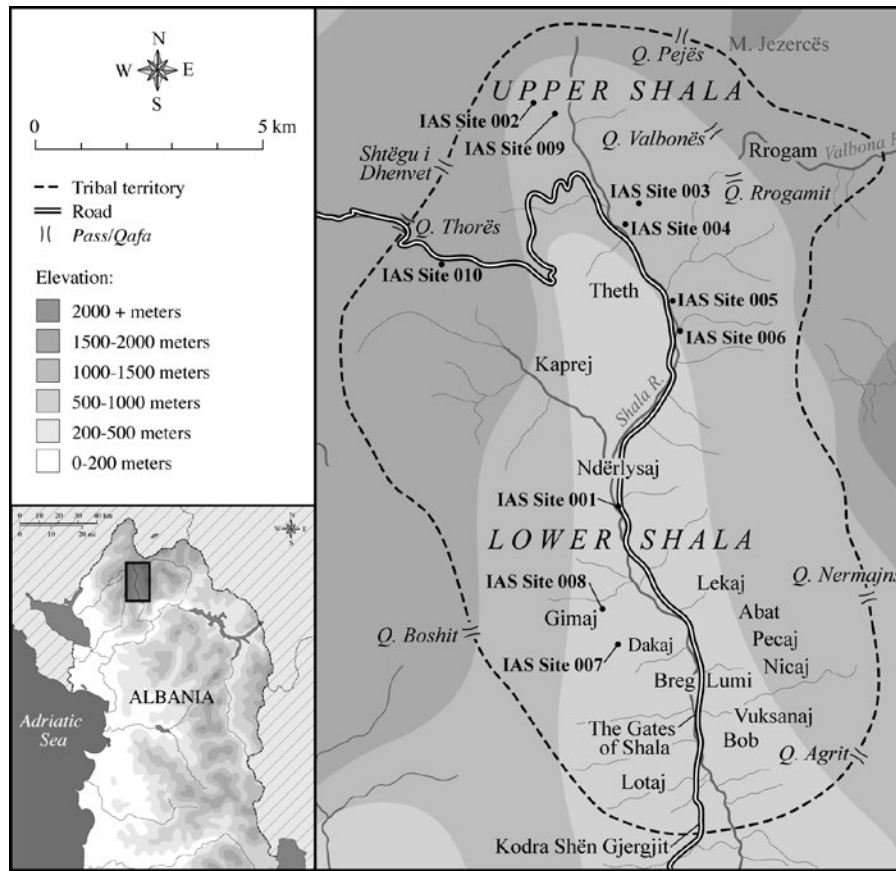


Figure 2.2. Map of Shala showing villages, roads, rivers, and sites identified by the Shala Valley Project. *Jill Seagard*

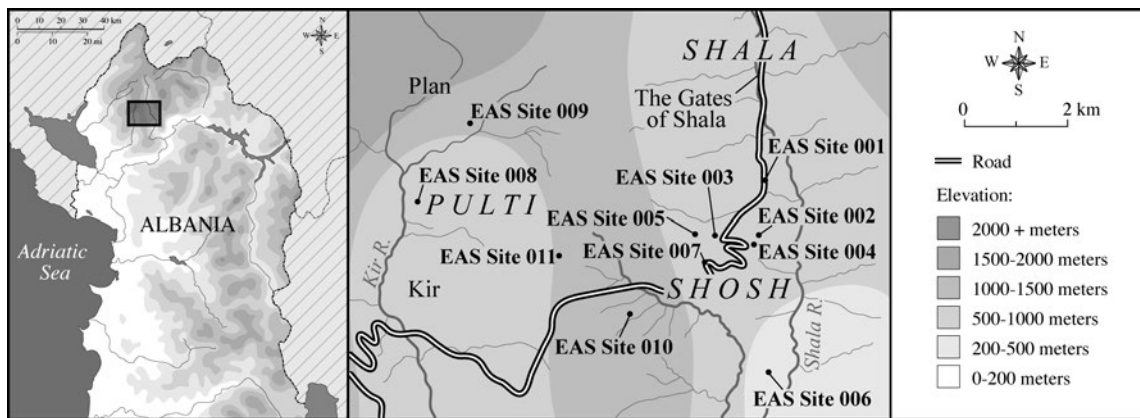


Figure 2.3. Map of Shosh and Pulti showing villages, roads, rivers, and sites identified by the Shala Valley Project, in relation to Shala and the wider region. *Jill Seagard*

Paleolithic (IAS Site 001). Also in 2007, an extensive archaeological survey team worked south of Shala in the regions of Shosh and Kir, identifying and documenting 11 new archaeological sites (Figure 2.3). These results are discussed in Chapters Five through Nine.<sup>1</sup>

One result of intensive field survey was our discovery in 2005 of a terraced, fortified Iron Age site (IAS Site

006) in the modern neighborhood of Grunas, located at the far southern tip of Theth (Figure 2.2). In 2006, 2007, and 2008, we conducted excavations there (and at four additional sites: IAS Sites 005 and 008, which we thought might also be prehistoric; IAS Site 009, a historic house; and IAS Site 010, a high-altitude *stan*, i.e., shepherd's camp). Excavation results are presented

and discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten. Survey and excavation results further hint at a Late Roman (ca. fourth-sixth centuries A.D.) occupation of Shala. Whereas the evidence for Late Roman, though tantalizing, is limited, there is substantial evidence for occupation during the Late Medieval period (thirteenth-fifteenth centuries A.D.). Late Medieval pottery collected in the course of the survey was scattered in fields surrounding Shala's Catholic churches and at the site of Dakaj (IAS Site 007), a Venetian-Ottoman era fort strategically located at the center of the lower valley (Figure 2.2). Oral histories and family genealogies collected by SVP ethnographers, discussed in Chapter Four and Five, suggest that the ancestors of the valley's modern inhabitants arrived in the late 1400s, having fled the Ottoman conquest. They probably infiltrated a sparsely settled landscape, quickly spreading north toward Theth, sometimes occupying residential terraces vacated in the Iron Age, such as at Grunas. It was during the following centuries that Shala's "tribal" sociopolitical system developed.

Unlike the Modern residents of Shala, who live in extensive villages, the Iron Age residents had an intensive, highly focused impact on the landscape and produced an impressive nucleated, but ultimately limited, built environment. We found Iron Age artifacts at two sites only: Grunas and Dakaj. We believe that the radical differences in landscape, settlement, and the built environment between Iron Age and Modern Shala are the result of two very different types of engagement with the outside world, as described in Chapter Eleven.

## Project Goals and Methods

The SVP had two primary goals in conducting intensive, diachronic research in Shala. First, we sought to produce a record of the valley's cultural resources that might help local administrators create a viable heritage resources management plan, important given that more and more tourists arrive in Shala each summer.<sup>2</sup> Second, as described in Chapter One, we sought to study the effects of "isolation" on people who have always lived in a frontier zone at the edges of larger polities. The former goal is, of course, practical, whereas the latter is theoretical, and meeting each required somewhat different methods.

To meet the first of our two goals, we focused our attention on the village of Theth, located at the north end of the valley. Theth is increasingly the destination

of choice in the northern Albanian Alps for so-called eco-tourists. The influx of tourists has been spurred by inclusion of the region in a proposed transnational park, which spans the whole Bjeshkët e Namuna-Prokletija range, linking three nations: Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo.<sup>3</sup> To capitalize on the tourist industry, local Albanians are converting their historic stone homes into small guest houses, adding bathrooms and subdividing floors into private bedrooms. These renovations rarely preserve the historical character of houses. Some families are building tourist quarters, such as bunk houses and small hotels, from scratch. Others are tearing down barns and out-buildings that are no longer necessary given the new tourist economy. These changes to the built environment are altering rapidly the appearance of the landscape and constitute a direct threat to the heritage record of Theth. Consequently, in 2005, we undertook full-coverage archaeological and architectural surveys. Furthermore, we sought to interview as many elders in Theth as possible.

Complete coverage surveys in Theth allowed us to construct architectural typologies that could be applied readily throughout Shala and were chronologically meaningful (see Chapter Seven). This further allowed us to conduct a stratified sample survey in southern Shala in 2007 focused on several key villages and neighborhoods. Sampling in southern Shala was desirable because the villages there are together approximately five times as large as Theth, and yet they have not been nearly as affected by tourists, with attendant changes to the built environment. Archaeological surveys also sampled southern Shala, in 2006 and 2007, focusing on certain key landmarks, such as the church at Abat and the site of Dakaj. Several elders from southern Shala were interviewed in 2007, with a focus on the valley's history and political and kinship systems. The data thereby collected, 2005–2007, will permit us to advise local, provincial, and federal officials regarding how best to preserve Shala's unique landscape, built environment, and human resources. Furthermore, these data have allowed us to address our second, theoretical goal relating to isolation versus interaction, as well as the nature of culture change and resilience.

One attractive feature of working in a single, known tribal territory in a single valley system is that we were able to draw clear boundaries around our study region. The geography, geology, and natural environment of Shala are described in Chapter Three. Suffice it to say



Figure 2.4. Intensive archaeological survey team members conducting a field survey. *Ann Christine Eek*

here that the study area as defined encompasses in full the whole of Shala's social, political, and local economic systems. Because we know with certainty the spatial extent of these systems and the resources at their disposal, we could track with similar certainty the movement of people and things in and out of these systems. Never-

theless, in 2007, we also sponsored extensive archaeological surveys, conducted by Robert Schon and Zamir Taflica, in regions to the south of Shala, in Shosh and Kir, in the vicinity of the cathedral church at Pulti (Figure 2.3). We wondered whether these regions, which are at lower elevation and are closer to the major coastal city



Figure 2.5. Ethnohistoric survey team members conducting an architectural survey. *Ann Christine Eek*

of Shkodra, might have experienced different degrees of isolation and interaction with the external world as compared to Shala. The results of the extensive survey are discussed in Chapter Nine.

SVP fieldwork also was designed to integrate archaeological, historical (i.e., architectural), and ethnographic field surveys. Each day, the intensive archaeological survey (IAS) team, led by Charles Watkinson, targeted a neighborhood, or portion thereof, for a systematic pedestrian survey (Figure 2.4). Fields and terraces were walked at 15-m intervals, and all artifacts, except those that were clearly very recent, were collected and returned to base for cataloging and analysis. Each survey tract was photographed, sketched, and mapped using a handheld GPS. The IAS team leader, usually Watkinson, took detailed notes in a logbook, noting tract characteristics such as visibility (measured as a percentage, with 100 percent indicating full visibility), vegetation (e.g., associated tree species and ground cover), cultivation (e.g., maize, beans, etc.), landscape features (e.g., terraced or not?), soil and geological characteristics, and so forth. All data thus collected were entered into an

IAS database and mapped in the project Geographic Information System (GIS). All IAS photos, logbooks, databases, and GIS products are archived and available at the Archaeology Data Service (ADS; as described in endnote 1). IAS results are presented and discussed in Chapter Nine. While conducting field surveys, the IAS also recorded standing and ruined structures that were then targeted for study by the ethnohistoric survey (EHS) team, led by Wayne Lee (Figure 2.5). Each structure studied was photographed, drawn, and mapped using a handheld GPS. These data are likewise archived and available at the ADS. EHS results are presented and discussed in Chapter Seven. Whenever the EHS team studied an occupied house, they conducted preliminary interviews with the owner focused on architecture and the built environment. Some of these individuals were then targeted by the ethnographic survey (EGS) team for longer, more detailed interviews (Figure 2.6), covering family composition, marriage and kinship patterns, traditional culture, economy and subsistence, travel and trade, and the valley's history. The EGS team consisted of Antonia Young and Mentor Mustafa. Their



Figure 2.6. Ethnographic survey team member conducting an interview. *Ann Christine Eek*

interviews were often recorded, and the audio files and English transcriptions are archived and available at the ADS, along with an EGS database. The results of EGS interviews are described primarily in Chapter Five but also inform other chapters, Chapter Six on economy in particular.

Archaeological sites identified by the intensive and extensive archaeological survey teams were mapped and described in two sites' databases. These sites were targeted for additional investigation, including surface collection and test excavation. We used a variety of surface collection techniques, including micro-tracting, gridding, and vacuuming (cf. Cherry et al. 1991:28–31). Site surface collection and excavation methods and results are described in Chapters Nine and Ten.

Several sites were test excavated. In 2007, we excavated 1 × 1-m test pits at two sites that we thought might be prehistoric, sites 005 and 008. Also in 2007, 1 × 1-m test pits were excavated at a historic house (IAS Site 009) and a mountain *stan* (shepherd's camp;

IAS Site 010). These excavations accompanied soil chemistry surveys at both sites, conducted by Heather Rypkema. The results of excavation and soil chemistry from sites 009 and 010 provided comparative interpretive data with which we sought to contextualize results from Grunas (IAS Site 006)—that is, was the prehistoric settlement more like a modern permanent house or a seasonal camp? Grunas was excavated in 2006, 2007, and 2008 (Figure 2.7). Soil chemistry surveys were conducted there in 2007. Research at Grunas is described in detail in Chapter Ten.

In all excavation units, we followed natural stratigraphy. When natural stratigraphy could not be followed, we dug in 10-cm arbitrary levels. All dirt was screened through a ¼-inch mesh. In 2008, during excavation in units 001 and 003, an approximately 1-gallon soil sample was taken from each level using the so-called pinch method. These soil samples were later bucket floated and water screened through fine mesh. Botanical remains from excavation were studied by Susan





Figure 2.7. Excavations at Grunas, 2008. *Michael L. Galaty*

Allen and Michelle Elliott. Bone, though rare and very fragmentary, was studied by Richard Yerkes. Results of paleobotanical and paleofaunal analyses are reported in Chapter Ten. Artifacts found in situ were mapped using a Total Station. Large charcoal samples found in situ were likewise mapped and collected for radiocarbon testing. The Total Station was also used to produce a

detailed topographical map of the whole site, including the remains of fortification walls.

All data collected in the field were entered each night into a relational database. Likewise, all survey tracts and structures were mapped in the project GIS. Thus, tracts and structures were associated spatially in the GIS and then linked in the database via shared structure (ST###)

and tract (YEAR-###) numbers. Likewise, EGS interviews were connected to survey tracts and structures via a household number (HH###). This procedure allowed us to check and adjust fieldwork strategies in real time. Artifacts collected in the field were processed in a field laboratory. These fell into three general categories: pottery, lithics (i.e., chipped stone tools), and small finds. Each artifact was assigned a unique identification number (P###, L###, and SF###). Data about artifacts were entered into three separate databases, linked to other databases and the GIS via the related tract or structure numbers. This allowed us to produce artifact distribution maps. Artifacts were photographed by Ann Christine Eek and drawn by Adnan Bushati.

SVP artifacts have been studied by various specialists, as reported in Chapters Nine and Ten. Galaty and Tafilica studied the prehistoric pottery in consultation with Albanian specialists such as Lorenc Bejko. A subset of the prehistoric pottery, from Grunas and from other Iron Age sites in the region, such as Zagorë in Shkrel (Andrea 1996) and Rosujë in Tropoja (Jubani and Ceka 1971), was taken to the Keck Laboratory at Millsaps College for chemical compositional analysis. Some of these also were subjected to residue analysis by Hannahkeh Hoekman-Sites, looking for fatty acids that might indicate they were used for dairying. Later pottery was studied by Tafilica and Joanita Vroom. Tafilica focused on possible Late Roman materials, whereas Vroom analyzed the Medieval to Modern pottery. William Parkinson analyzed all the chipped stone, and a sample of cherts was subjected to chemical compositional analysis in the Keck Laboratory. Finally, Tafilica and Galaty studied the small finds.

Another key source of information regarding Shala and the northern tribes were archival historical data stored in Albania, Austria, Italy, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. By accessing these data, we hoped to add detail to the broad picture of Late Medieval to Modern Shala that had emerged from our fieldwork. The Albanian archives were searched by Eduard Ndreca, who worked primarily in the Central Archive of the Albanian State, located in the capital, Tirana. He also used the library of the Shkodra Historical Museum. Wayne Lee worked in the Kriegsarchiv in Vienna, Austria. He accessed military surveys of the northern mountains from the late nineteenth century as well as military maps produced during the Austrian occupation of Albania, 1916–1918. Lee also spent two

days in the Royal Anthropological Institute's archives in London studying the papers and photographs of Mary Edith Durham, who had traveled extensively in Albania in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The primary archives consulted in Italy by Matthew Lubin were the Vatican Secret Archive, the Venice State Archive, and the Biblioteca San Marco, better known as the Marciana. Lubin also worked in the Prime Minister's Ottoman Archive in Istanbul, Turkey, with a particular focus on the Registers of the Secretary to the Janissaries. Lee and Michael Galaty visited the Anthropological Archive of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and consulted the papers and photographs of Carleton Coon of Harvard University's Peabody Museum, who traveled to northern Albania in 1929–1930. Galaty also consulted the files of the American Red Cross Mission to Albania, which began in 1919 and lasted several years, housed in the National Archive and Records Administration complex at College Park, Maryland. The photographs of the Red Cross mission, which are kept in the Library of Congress, were also searched. Finally, the songs transcribed and notes taken by Albert Lord in Shala in 1937, housed in The Milman Parry Collection at Harvard University, were searched for pertinent social and historical information. Archival historical data inform the whole of this book but are analyzed primarily in Chapter Four.

## Indicators

To measure the effects of the factors that conditioned levels of incorporation and strategies of resilience through time (Chapter One), which are linked to changes in isolation and interaction, we developed methods necessary to document the movement of people, animals, ideas, and things in and out of Shala. The ease with which these crossed the tribe's borders at any given time was determined, in part, by internal and/or external events (e.g., feuds, wars, and rebellions) and decisions (e.g., whether to work with the Ottomans or against them), or a combination of the two. Likewise, natural events, such as climate change, may have strongly affected the degree to which Shala cultivated isolation or sought integration. As argued in Chapter One, processes of decision making in Shala are reflected dynamically in its landscapes, in the form of changing settlement patterns, demographics, architecture, subsistence, and forms and intensity of landscape investment.

We collected and analyzed several types of pertinent archaeological data, as described in Chapters Nine and Ten. Archaeological evidence and interpretations were supplemented by various forms of available environmental, historical, and ethnographic data, as described in Chapters Three to Eight. These data together allowed us to produce Figure 1.13, which was introduced in the preceding chapter. The following section, in which we discuss in more detail the factors that affected strategies of resilience in Shala and the diachronic archaeological data that indicate those factors and strategies, should be read with reference to Figure 1.13.

## Environmental Inputs

Mountain environments serve as sensitive barometers of climate change, and mountain ecosystems tend to be more dramatically affected by even small changes in average temperature and precipitation than most other physiographic units. As discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Shala was subject to at least two pertinent episodes of climate fluctuation that shaped coupled human–natural systems interaction in the valley: the “Medieval Warm Period” (A.D. 900–1400) and the “Little Ice Age” (A.D. 1400–1850) (Roberts et al. 2004:347). During these phases, Shala likely experienced somewhat warmer and colder temperatures, respectively, but the greater, more pertinent change was to precipitation levels and snow pack. In warmer periods, like today, snow, if it fell, tended to melt quickly by the start of the summer, rendering unsustainable Shala’s system of irrigation agriculture. It may be therefore that year-round occupation of northern Albania, with large populations, was only possible during cold periods and required certain kinds of investment in the landscape and built environment to remain viable.

The environmental data we collected in Shala are from the site of Grunas, as described in Chapter Ten, and are focused on the Iron Age. There also are environmental data from the region of Plav in Montenegro and from Lake Shkodra, described in Chapter Three, that serve as proxy measures of climate change in the Albanian Alps, including but not limited to the past 500 years.

## Population and House Size/Elaboration

Changing sizes of houses and settlements in Shala signal levels of population through time (see Chapter

Seven). Larger, more substantial houses and settlements indicate larger populations. Population growth may be due to immigration, or a change in birth/death rates, or both. Architectural evidence indicates that house and settlement size, and therefore population size, in the village of Theth, for example, increased during periods when emigration slowed but also varied in response to political decisions made in and imposed from the outside, as, for instance, when land was collectivized under Communism. Population in Shala appears to have varied through time as a function of isolation, but the diachronic trend was upwards through the mid-nineteenth century, followed by a crash at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Chapters Four and Seven). Explaining these variations in the valley’s demography was an important, though difficult, task since population crashes may indicate a failure of what were usually resilient, sustainable systems.

House size and elaboration were measured by the EHS team, with general settlement data provided by the IAS. A complete survey of all buildings was conducted in Theth and a partial survey in lower Shala, with a focus on the village of Gimaj. Houses were dated based on changing styles of architecture, informed by ethnographic interviews with home owners. Population data for Shala were gathered from several sources—travelers’ reports, parish records, and various censuses—and pertain to the past 500 years.

## Settlement Pattern and Seasonality

Shifts in settlement size may reflect changes in population size, but settlement may also change in terms of organization. Settlement in Shala appears to have shifted through time from nucleated to dispersed, perhaps in response to climate change, but also as a function of need, such as the need during some periods for defense. Likewise, the valley appears to have been settled permanently in some periods and not in others. Several factors may have contributed to decisions about season of occupation, such as changing weather patterns, availability of New World crops, forms and levels of transhumance, and so forth, but permanent, year-round occupation of Shala seems to have begun during the Late Medieval period and only ceased with the end of Communism in 1991 (as discussed in Chapter Six). The dispersed settlement pattern visible today likewise formed during the Late Medieval to Early Modern period. This means



that population size actually grew *during* the Little Ice Age and was accompanied by year-round occupation in dispersed settlements, a rather counterintuitive result that is explained in Chapter Eleven, the conclusion to this book.

Settlement size and organization were reconstructed through time by the IAS, working in tandem with the EHS. In the absence of early architecture, artifacts collected in survey, diagnostic pottery in particular, were used to identify areas of early settlement and to track settlement expansion (see Chapter Nine). These data indicate a clear trend toward year-round occupation and expansive settlement organization through time.

## Landscape Investment

Periods of intensified land use, such as the building of terrace and irrigation systems, co-occur with periods of permanent settlement and population expansion. Our data indicate that in the village of Theth, for example, large-scale investments in the landscape were made *as* population grew and settlement expanded; one did not lead to the other. This would seem to indicate that landscape intensification occurred despite, and may have even been stimulated by, ongoing processes of (attempted) incorporation. Furthermore, landscape investments, such as irrigation systems, were necessitated by the shift in climate associated with the Little Ice Age.

Landscape features, such as paths, terraces, and irrigation canals, were mapped by the IAS and EHS and dated with help from land owners. Many of these are also visible in early aerial and later satellite photos, helping us to determine which are old and which were constructed following collectivization.

## Trade

Changing numbers of artifacts imported into Shala (discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten), such as exotic pottery, reflect levels of isolation through time. Large numbers of imported pottery indicate interaction. Small numbers of imported pottery indicate isolation. Absolute numbers of imported artifacts vary in response to the strategies of incorporation employed by encroaching states, as recorded in available historical documents. Archaeological survey data indicate that the numbers of imported pottery in Shala increased through time, beginning in the Late Medieval period, at the same

time the Ottoman Turks sought to incorporate, or at least control, the mountain tribes, through the *bajrak* system, for example. This implies that isolation in fact *decreased* at the same time the pressures, and possibilities, of incorporation *increased*.

Diagnostic artifacts, such as foreign pottery, were collected during survey and excavation. Additional, extra-valley economic links can be inferred (see Chapter Six). For example, various exotic species of plant, such as sumac and mulberry, appear to have been introduced to Shala and harvested for an export market. Other products, such as salt for curing, must have been imported into Shala.

## Exogamy

Shala's system of marriage was (and still is) exogamous (see again, Figure 1.11). Women married into the tribe from elsewhere, as described in Chapter Five. Reconstructing marriage exchanges between families allowed us to map social relationships between tribes through time. Tribes that intermarried presumably maintained healthy economic and political relationships, as well. The data we have pertain primarily to the twentieth century and indicate a widening of exogamous marriage patterns through time. According to Coon (1950:28), in 1929, Shala married preferentially with Shosh, the next tribe to the south. Our more recent demographic data indicate that men of Theth now regularly take wives from south Shala (e.g., from the village of Gimaj), as well as from Shkodra. A wider system of exogamy may be correlated with a decline in feuding and the integration of Shala into wider economic and political networks, as facilitated by the new Albanian state.

Extra-valley social and political contacts, such as those facilitated by exogamy, were mapped for the ethnographic present through interviews with male tribal members, who have memorized family genealogies (see Chapter Five). We also have some limited data regarding historic tribal networks, mostly from travelers' accounts and from reports written by Catholic priests.

## Travelers

As described briefly in Chapter One, numerous Western (and some Ottoman) travelers visited northern Albania, including Shala, beginning in the seventeenth century. Their accounts are discussed in more detail in Chapter

Four. The numbers of travelers' accounts do wax and wane through time, though, such that no travelers at all visited Shala throughout the whole course of the eighteenth century. This may be because visitors were not welcome but might also reflect ongoing attempts on the part of Ottoman officials to control access to the northern tribes on the part of outsiders, priests and ambassadors in particular. It may be that when the tribes were at the height of their power, the Ottomans did their best to isolate them. It was in periods of tribal decline, such as the mid to late nineteenth century (ironically the very time when the population in the mountains was growing rapidly, likely putting pressure on local subsistence systems), that the Ottoman state attempted forcible incorporation, causing rebellions, which drew curious outsiders as well as foreign spies.

Published travelers' accounts, mostly French, German, Italian, Ottoman, and English, were collected and searched for references to Shala. Primary data were gleaned from various archives, as described above. Another excellent source of information regarding settlement in Shala were historic maps. These are described in some detail in Chapter Four.

## Rebellions

Throughout the course of the Ottoman occupation, northern Albania was a hotbed for wars of rebellion (see Chapter Four). These were sometimes fought in response to changes in official Ottoman policies, such as were initiated under the Young Turk administration, but were occasionally framed as "wars of independence" (cf. the rebellion of Kara Mahmoud in 1787, which was joined by all of the Catholic tribes, including Shala; Naçi 1964). Shala participated in at least 12 minor and major rebellions over the course of the past 500 years. Importantly, waves of turmoil engulfed northern Albania on average every 75 years, with four spikes: in the late fifteenth century, late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, the early eighteenth century, and the late nineteenth to early/mid-twentieth centuries.

Explaining the cyclic regularity of Shala's entry into regional wars of rebellion is one key task addressed below, in Chapter Four in particular. Most of our information about these wars comes from historical sources, although recent rebellions, such as those that occurred in the twentieth century, live on in the oral historical record. Earlier rebellions are sometimes

recorded in traditional songs, though without specific dates associated (see examples in Cukeli 2007).

## Incorporative Pressure

The above factors indicate and may be causally related to changing patterns of incorporation and resistance. To some degree, the agentive act of creating and maintaining resilient cultural systems coupled to dynamic landscapes was itself a form of resistance, a means to survive in the mountains and avoid conquest by external powers. We should expect, therefore, that many of our indicators changed through time—oscillated—together with or in opposition to incorporative pressures applied to Shala from the outside. These pressures were, we think, strongest in the immediate aftermath of the final Ottoman conquest, in 1478, as the Porte sought to exert control over Albania and extend the *timar* system into the mountains (see discussion in Chapter Four). When these efforts failed, Ottoman officials deployed various, flexible strategies meant to appease the mountain tribes and harness their energies, as mercenaries, for example. It was in this context that the *bajrak* system formed (see Chapter One). By the late nineteenth century, the Ottomans once again actively sought to conquer and incorporate the northern tribes, including Shala, a process continued by the fledgling Albanian government, under King Zog, and completed by the Communists. Attempts to incorporate Shala must be inferred from historical documents, in particular those written by Ottoman officials, such as tax records (*defters*). Accounts written by foreign consuls, stationed in Shkodra, are very useful as regards Ottoman attempts at pacification and incorporation of the northern tribes. Finally, various lines of archaeological and material-cultural evidence may signal incorporation, or not, particularly when conceived as a frontier process. These include evidence for hybrid behaviors, common in frontier zones, such as the adoption of Ottoman and/or Muslim traditions, such as coffee drinking and tobacco smoking, by Catholic northern Albanians, marked by the appearance of artifacts related to such behaviors (Jezernik 2004:Chapter 8).

## Conclusion

The methodology employed by the SVP, ethnohistoric archaeology, is interdisciplinary, diachronic, (micro-) regional in scope, and designed to study the multiple,

intersecting, dynamic landscapes of Shala. It worked well to capture various types of data indicating the appearance and growth of a sustainable, resilient cultural system coupled to a particular mountain environment. The environmental setting of Shala is discussed and illustrated in the next chapter, Chapter Three, with a focus on the limits set by geography and climate, and the creative ways in which people overcame those limits, year after year, generation after generation.

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*Up to the high pastures the ocean sent a sirocco,  
Covering everything in somber rain clouds,  
Snowslides did plummet down into the chasms,  
And once more, as always the mountains resounded. . . .*

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[from the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Albanian epic,  
*Songs of the Frontier Warriors*; translated by Elsie 2004:63]

## Notes

1 In 2009, we received a grant from the journal *Internet Archaeology*, funded by the Mellon Foundation, that allowed us to archive all of our data, including photos, drawings, logbook scans, audio files and transcriptions, field reports, and GIS and database files, with the Archaeology Data Service, based at York University. Throughout this book, we direct the reader to sources of data that are not reproduced here but are available online through the archive.

The SVP archive can be accessed at [http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/archive/svp\\_mellon\\_2009/](http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/archive/svp_mellon_2009/). Additional resources are available at the SVP website: [www.millsaps.edu/svp](http://www.millsaps.edu/svp).

2 Grunas was declared a protected monument of culture by the Albanian government on May 19, 2009.

3 See <http://www.balkanspeacepark.org/>.

## Chapter Three

# THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Michael L. Galaty



*The truth is that the mountains are a place where you can find whatever you want just by looking, as long as you remember that they do not suffer fools gladly and particularly dislike those with pre-conceived ideas [de Bernières 1990:296].*

*Gjovalin had business in Tirana so he decided to hike out with us. We shouldered our heavy packs. He slipped cigarettes and a bottle of raki into his coat pockets. Off we went into the cold, dark morning [Galaty field notes, Theth, Shala, January 2008].*

The northern Albanian landscape is one of harsh contrasts: soaring mountains and deep gorges, thick forests and denuded hills, rushing rivers and dry canyons (Figure 3.1). It is a region “easy” to cross if one knows the way, and potentially deadly if one becomes lost or is caught unprepared. Albanian people who know their way through the mountains travel light: tobacco, a knife, a gun. They do not carry water; rather, they drink from springs. They do not bring food, since the primary law of the Dukagjin is that hospitality (*mikpritja*) must be given to a guest (*mik*), even if that guest is a sworn enemy. “If your hospitality is violated, the Kanun gives a choice of two paths: ruin or dishonor” (Book 8, Chapter 18, Article 644; Gjeçov 1989:136).<sup>1</sup>

Survival in and passage through the Bjeshkët e Namuna is determined by its geography, which is tied to the bedrock geology of the region. The geology of the mountains has been shaped by tectonic and fluvial forces, creating an angular, vertical topography, a world of cliffs, one in which flat land for farming must often be engineered (Figure 3.2). The complex physical landscape of Shala reflects in microcosm the geography and geology of the wider region of northern Albania. Its boundaries, the routes in and out of the valley, systems of settlement and subsistence, are set and limited, to

some degree, by geography and geology, with the Shala River itself playing a central, vital role (Figure 3.3). Water from the river and its tributaries, which are fed by melting snow, is essential to the system of agro-pastoral, mixed village farming that forms the basis for the northern Albanian subsistence economy. Climate, therefore,



Figure 3.1. The mountains of Shala above the neighborhood of Okol in Theth highlighting vertical topography. Ann Christine Eek



Figure 3.2. Terraces in the neighborhood of Gjelaj in Theth, looking south. *Ann Christine Eek*



Figure 3.3. Shala River looking south over Breg Lumi toward the Gates of Shala. *Ann Christine Eek*

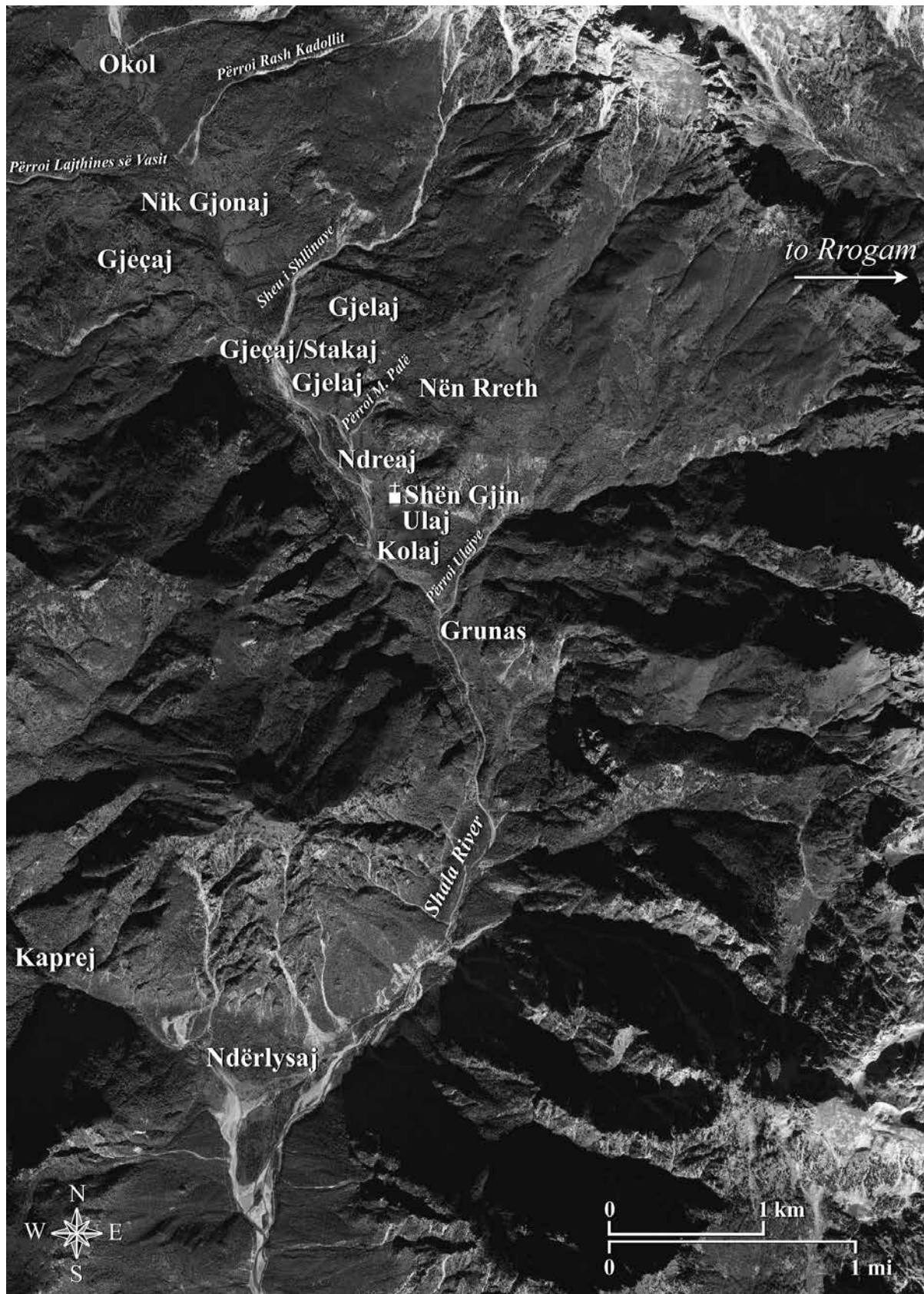


Figure 3.4. IKONOS satellite image of Upper Shala with streams, neighborhoods, and churches marked. *Jill Seagard*



temperature and precipitation in particular, has had a direct and profound impact on the formation in Shala of stable, resilient cultural systems.

## Geography

As is true of the Mediterranean generally (Braudel 1972:25), the geography of northern Albania (see Hasluck 1954:Chapter One), and of Shala, is defined by mountains. As described by Coon (1950:8), who visited the area in 1929,

*A concentrated jumble of snow-covered peaks, rising to 7000- and 8000-foot heights, the mountains of Gheg-nia [northern Albania] follow no simple system of parallel ranges and valleys, but instead form a knot through which the Drin [River] has cut a passage in its tumultuous journey from the plain of Kosovo to the Adriatic Sea.*

It is the region north of the Drin that is of most concern to us. As discussed in Chapter One, the Bjeshkët e Namuna range is like a large island, surrounded on three sides by (comparably) flat lands: the plains of Shkodra and Kosova to the west and east, and the Montenegrin plateau to the north (see Figure 1.1).<sup>2</sup> Valleys and rivers cut and cross cut the range, in no particular pattern. Some valleys dead end, or merge with other valleys. Some, like that of the Shala River, open to the Drin, which is passable north to south, by ford and bridge, at only a relatively few points and serves as a southern boundary for many tribes (Coon 1950:9) (see Figure 1.5). As is true of other mountain ranges, in other parts of the world (e.g., the Andes; cf. Wernke 2007), valleys (and tribes) that are adjacent, but separated by a river or massif, might be cut off. However, for the most part, valley systems are not isolated from one another; rather, they are connected by an intricate system of trails and passes (*qafa*). This network was first mapped for northern Albania, including Shala, in detail by the intrepid geologist-explorer, Franz Baron Nopsca, who was the Austrian consul in Shkodra in the early twentieth century. Nopsca (1910, 1929) recorded all of the passes that connected Shala to various other valleys and micro-regions, several of which—the Qafë Peja, Qafë Valbonës, and Qafë Boshit—were hiked by Shala Valley Project staff (see Figure 2.2). Routes of travel and trade through northern Albania are described in Chapter Four, but here a discussion of Shala's geography can be organized around Figures 3.4 and 3.5, with reference to

rivers, streams, churches, villages, and neighborhoods (villages and neighborhoods are discussed in more detail in Chapters Four through Seven).

Shala can be divided into two sectors, north and south, with a boundary at the neighborhood of Ndërly-saj (Figure 3.4). Upper (i.e., north) Shala is occupied by the village (*katund*) of Theth, which was, during Ottoman times, its own military-administrative unit (*bajrak*). Theth is composed of 10 neighborhoods, or quarters (Alb. *lagja*, sometimes called *mëhallë*, after the Arabic for “military camp”; Coon 1950:22), all of which correspond to different *fisi* (i.e., patrilineages or “clans”; see detailed discussion in Chapter Five), including two relatively recent extensions: Okol, Nik Gjonaj, Gjellaj, Gjeçaj, Ndrea, Ulaj, Kolaj, and Grunasi are major *lagja*; Stakaj and Nën Rreth are minor; Ndërly-saj in south Shala and Rrogam on the other side of the Qafë Valbonës are extensions.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, the latter two were neighborhoods and *fisi* of Theth but are now administered with Lower Shala (Breg Lumi) and Valbona (in Tropoja), respectively. Many of Theth's toponyms, such as Ndrea, where the church of St. John (Shën Gjini) is located, appear on early maps (see Chapter Four re. maps). Clearly, several *lagja* are older than others, and the village grew as households divided and new *lagja* were established. Patterns of neighborhood growth and expansion in Theth are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. Here it is sufficient to note that the founders of the first neighborhoods (e.g., Okol, Ulaj, and Kolaj) exploited the best arable land. Many younger *lagja* occupy steeper slopes and are divided from one another by prominent geographic features, such as tributary streams (*përroi*) that run downslope through gorges and into the Shala River (see again, Figure 3.4). The Shala River itself separates eastern and western portions of several neighborhoods, including Okol, Nik Gjonaj, and Gjeçaj, the latter of which is situated mostly on the valley's steep, west-central slope and therefore receives far less sun during winter months compared to other neighborhoods. The upper course of the Shala River (Alb. Lumi Shalës) is sometimes called the Lumi i Thethit. Its lower course, south of Shala, is sometimes referred to in early historical sources by a Slavic name, Lesniqu, meaning “hazel,” *Corylus avellana* (Elsie 1994:19). Shala, Theth in particular, is home to some of the highest peaks in Albania, including Mali Jezercë, at 2693 m the tallest mountain wholly within the country's borders. These peaks loom over the village, a

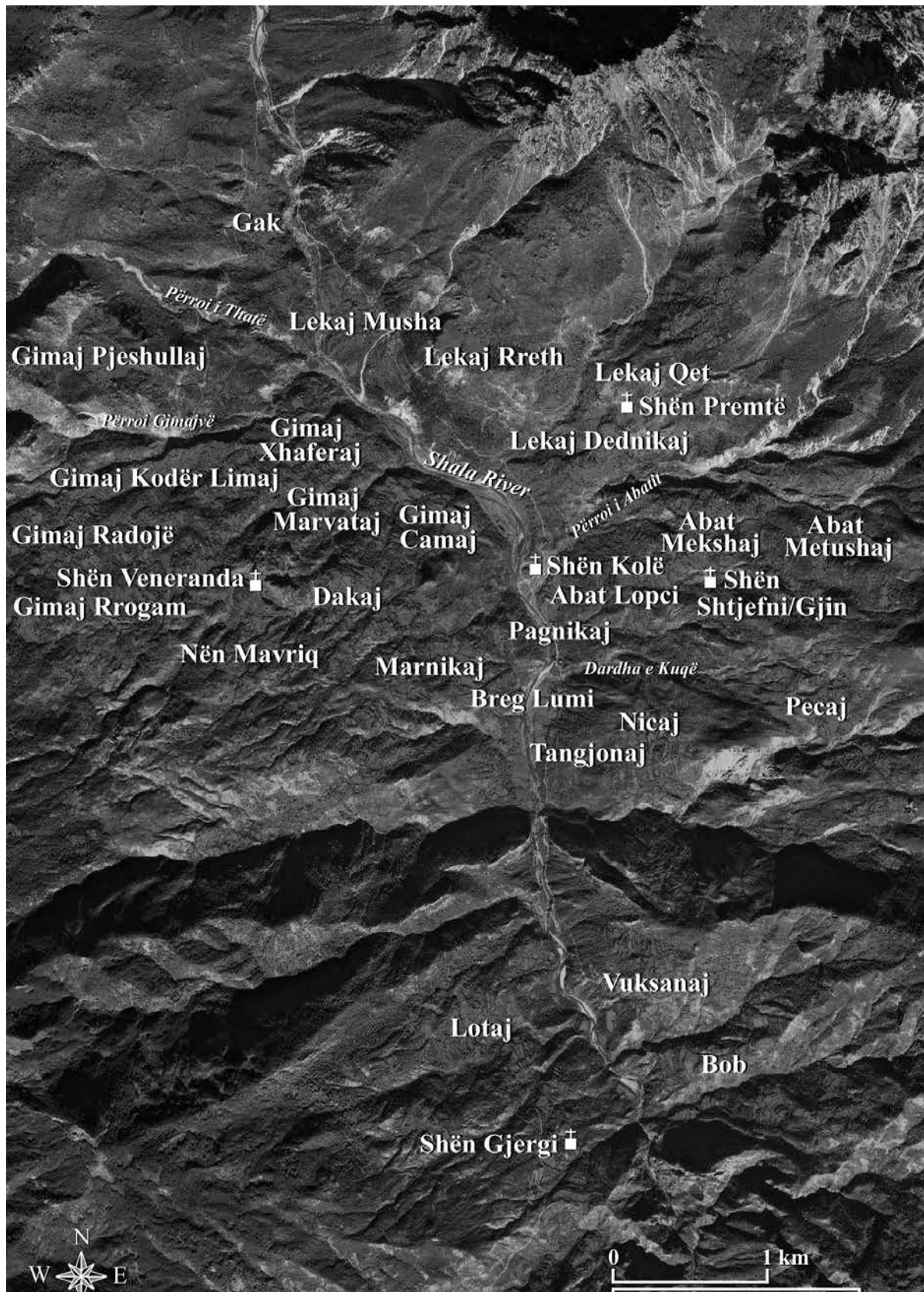


Figure 3.5. IKONOS satellite image of Lower Shala with streams, neighborhoods, and churches marked. Only those neighborhoods where the Shala Valley Project operated are labeled. *Jill Seagard*



constant, encircling presence, adding to the (incorrect) impression that Theth sits in an isolated cul-de-sac.

The pattern of settlement in Lower (i.e., south) Shala—Shala proper—is broadly similar to that in Upper Shala, although the topography is somewhat different (Figure 3.5). Lower Shala is wider and possesses gentler slopes. These support several villages, most composed of multiple neighborhoods: Gimaj, Nën Mavriq/Dakaj, Lekaj, Abat, Nicaj, Pecaj, Breg Lumi, Lotaj, and Vuksanaj, which includes Bop (Bob). During Ottoman times, Lower Shala supported at least three *bajraks*—Pecaj, Lotaj (see below), and Lekaj (according to Durham 1979 [1928]:26)—and Gimaj, which traditionally is described as a “non-Shala” *fis* (which may be why Durham missed it, as discussed in some detail in Chapter Four). As described in Chapter Two, we surveyed a subset of villages in Lower Shala—as opposed to Theth, which we surveyed completely—so neighborhoods in Lower Shala are introduced and described only as necessary in subsequent chapters. As is the case in Upper Shala, villages and neighborhoods in Lower Shala also are separated by prominent geographic features, *përroi* in particular (see again, Figure 3.5). Several of the presumably older villages are associated with churches: at Abat (either Shën Shtjefni or Shën Gjini; the dedication is unclear and may have changed through time) and Dakaj/Nën Mavriq (Shën Veneranda? [Elsie 2001:258]<sup>4</sup>) (the age of the church of Shën Koll [St. Nicholas] at Breg Lumi is unclear). Churches, and their place in the scared landscape of Shala, are discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight. South of the village of Breg Lumi, the seat of government for the modern administrative commune of Shala, the Shala River cuts through towering cliffs. This dramatic landscape feature is referred to as the Gates of Shala (Figure 3.6). Several Shala villages are located beyond the Gates of Shala; these include Bob, Lotaj, and Vuksanaj. The southern edge of Shala territory was marked by a church, now destroyed, that of Shën Gjergj (St. George).

Villages and neighborhoods control various lands and resources (discussed below). Each neighborhood is associated with a particular pasture (*kullotë*, often referred to as a *fushë*, i.e., “field”), typically located at higher elevation above the highest houses (several of these are visible in Figures 3.4 and 3.5). These are areas of grass, surrounded by forest, that have been cleared of trees. Neighborhoods and houses are linked by paths, called *shtegu*, and privately owned fields are divided

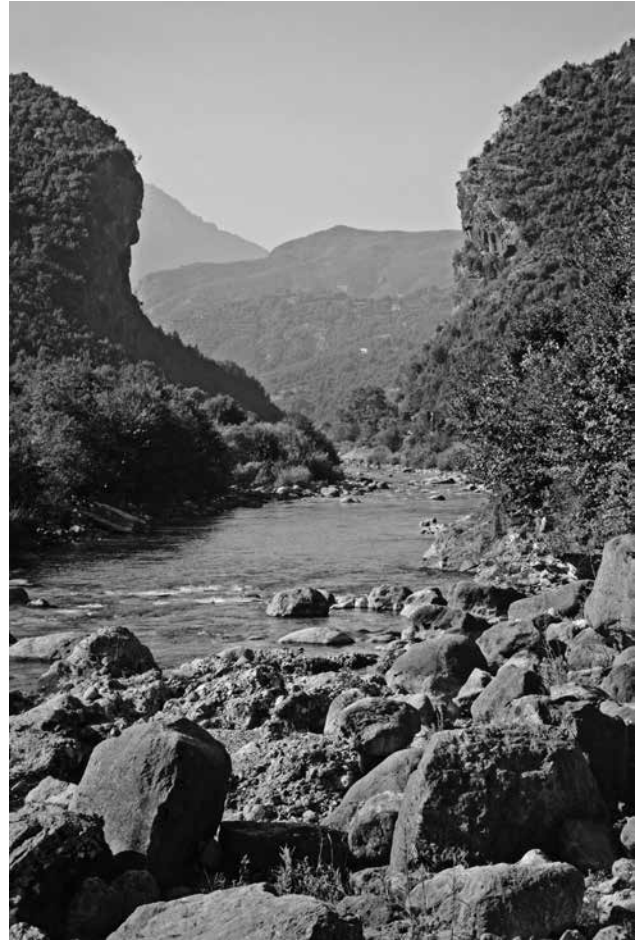


Figure 3.6. The Gates of Shala. Ann Christine Eek

one from the other by fences and stone walls. Before the modern road from Shkodra into Theth was cut in 1934 at the Qafa Thorës (see description in Chapter Four), which is clearly visible in Figures 3.4 and 3.5, there was only a single, precipitous path that connected Lower to Upper Shala, via a narrow, defensible gorge. It was at this choke-point that the prehistoric site of Grunas was constructed (Chapter Ten). Other trails allow entry to and exit from the valley (see Figure 2.2). Before the road was built, the primary means to reach Theth from Shkodra was through Boga in Kelmend territory via the Shtegu i Dhenve (the “Sheep’s Path”), an exceedingly steep trail over the mountains above the Gjeçaj neighborhood. Another trail runs via the Qafë Peja to Vuthaj and Gusinje, now in Montenegro, and ultimately to the city of Peja in Kosova (Figure 3.7). Given the difficulty of getting to Shkodra, the people of Theth traditionally went to market in Gusinje, or Peja. Another means of reaching Kosova was over the Qafë Valbonës or the Qafë Rrogamit, thence via Rrogam,



Figure 3.7. View over Theth from the Qafë Peja. Wayne E. Lee

Valbona, and Bajram Curri to Gjakova. Finally, several other passes, as mapped by Nopcsa (1910), lead to various, other contiguous valleys and population centers, such as Vukli to the west and Curraj to the east.

The primary route into and out of Lower Shala was via the Gates. From there, trails run south into Shoshi and a road runs east into Kir, thence to Shkodra (see Figure 2.3). This road, which also provided access to the cathedral church of Pulti (the Latin derivative is *Pulati*) at Xhani (“Ghoanni” in the historical sources), is, even today, difficult, particularly in winter (as described by Ippen 2002:41, who visited Shala in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century). Other trails might in the past have been more important, depending in part on the season, such as that via the Qafë Boshit (or Bashit), which begins in Gimaj and crosses the mountains to Plan. Another important trail, via the Qafa Nërmaajns, ran from Abat to the territory of Nikaj (Figure 2.2). The road that climbs from the bridge across the Shala River to Lotaj passes through Pjolla and Vuksanaj before arriving at Bob

after a walk of about one hour. This road was used during the Communist period to service a fluoride mine near the Qafa e Agrit. It probably also links to a higher mule track between Abat and Salcë connecting the upper villages across the boundary ridge that eventually forms the Gates of Shala.

As described in Chapter Two, one benefit of working in Shala is that the boundaries of our study region are fixed by geography and tribal convention (Figures 2.2–2.3 and 3.4–3.5). The borders of Shala run along the line of the mountain peaks, ringing Theth, with an extension into modern Tropoja that encompasses Rrogam. Interestingly, the very high pastures to the north of Theth, accessed by the Qafë Peja, are Kelmend territory; the people of Shala must pay rent to use them. The boundaries that encompass Lower Shala similarly ring the mountain tops. The far southern boundary, though, past the Gates of Shala, is not delineated by mountains but is no less definitive; it is marked by a church, that of Shën Gjergj, on a prominent ridgetop and another line of cliffs (Figure 3.8).



Figure 3.8. Kodra Shën Gjergj, 1930s (church in foreground, Gates of Shala in center background; looking north). *Shan Pici*, used by permission of the *Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania*

## Geology

The geology of northern Albania was described first by Nowack (1929) and Nopsca (1929), as summarized by Almagià (1932). Based on their field surveys and mapping, Albania was divided into nine tectonic zones. These zones still form the basis today for modern discussions of Albania's geology (Meço and Aliaj 2000). Several tectonic zones converge along a line north of the Shkodra-Peja transversal, a fault that marks the southern termination of the Albanian Alps, the so-called "High Karst" (Meço and Aliaj 2000:10–11): the Cukali, Gashi, Vermoshi, and Albanian Alps zones (Figure 3.9). Due to Shala's position close the Shkodra-Peja fault, the region is prone to earthquakes in the 5.5 to 6.0 range on the Richter scale (Meço and Aliaj 2000:176–178), which we experienced on July 10, 2005, when a magnitude 6.0 tremor, centered on Bajram Curri, hit northern Albania. The Shala Valley is located entirely within the Albanian Alps geological zone, which is characterized by Permian to Triassic terrigenes and carbonites, including Anisian conglomerates, Ladinian dolomites, and the black "Thethi" limestones (Meço and Aliaj 2000:73).

Just south of the Gates of Shala, near the village of Lotaj, the Albanian Alps zone over-thrusts the Cukali zone (Harta Gjeologjike 1984).

Theth in Upper Shala is dominated by black dolimitic limestone (as depicted in the 1:200,000 scale National Geological Map of Albania; see Xhomo et al. 2002) (Figure 3.10). Most settlements and cultivated fields, however, are associated with alluvial deposits that date to the Quaternary (Xhomo et al. 2002), although the neighborhood of Gjeçaj is situated largely on steep limestone slopes. Lower Shala is dominated by carbonites and terrigenes (Xhomo et al. 2002), including various argillaceous stones, such as shale, which is used to roof houses. Again, as with Theth, most settlements and cultivated fields in Lower Shala are associated with Quaternary alluvial deposits, which are particularly extensive in the east, but there is also settlement, such as the village of Gimaj, on terrigenes (Xhomo et al. 2002). Thus, in both Upper and Lower Shala, the best alluvial soils are always associated with houses and cultivated fields. Poorer soils, those associated with terrigenes in Lower Shala, for example, were also settled and cultivated, although it is interesting to note that Gimaj, a

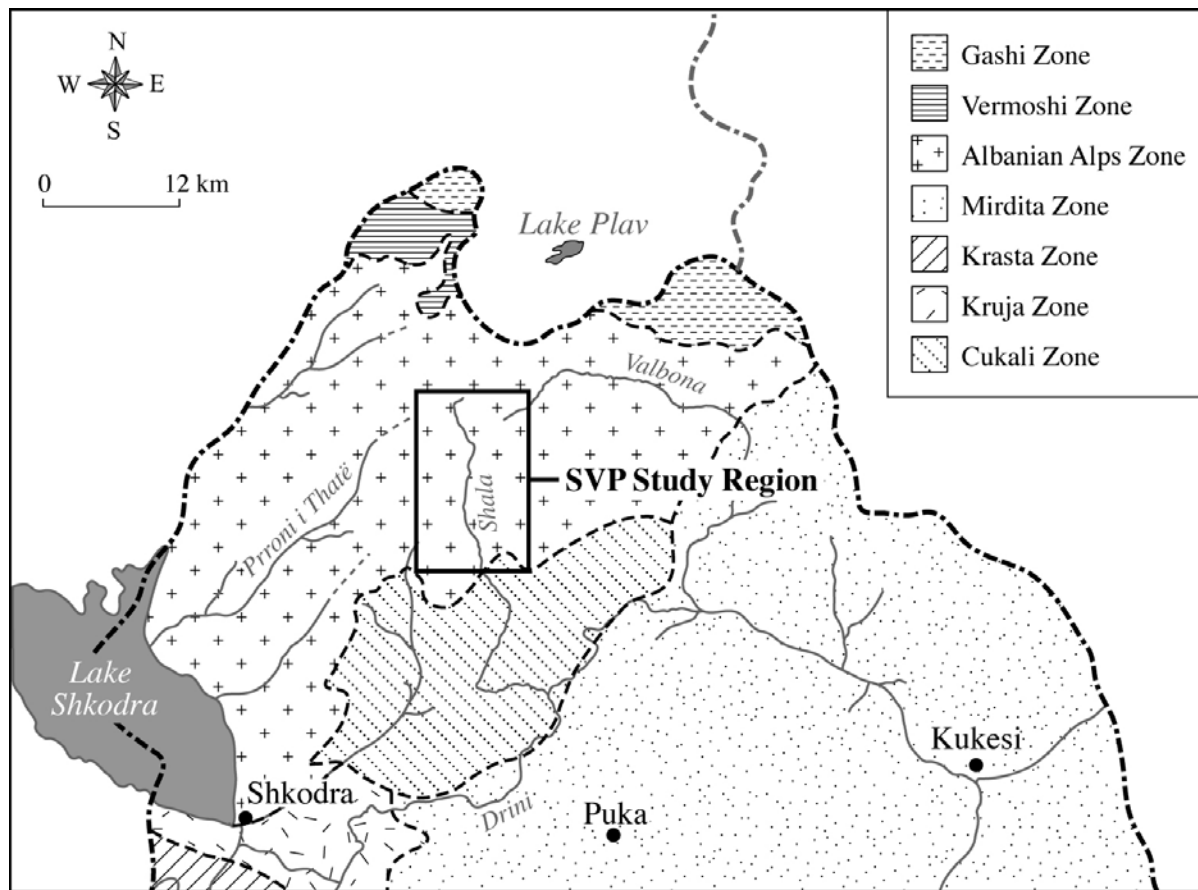


Figure 3.9. Map of the northern Albanian geological zones, after Meço and Aliaj 2000: Figure 35. Jill Seagard

separate, “different” *bajrak* and *fis*, is the only village in Lower Shala located on poor, terrigenous soils. Throughout Shala, limestone slopes are forested, and rarely settled and cultivated, except in circumstances of relatively recent terracing and soil creation, as at Gjeçaj. In Theth, it may be that population growth and village expansion lead eventually to settlement on and intensification of otherwise marginal, unattractive lands.

## Climate

Climate and climate change have played central roles in long-term processes of human adaptation to life in the high mountains of northern Albania, Shala included. The first occupants of the valley appear to have been Neanderthals, based on the recovery of Mousterian stone tools from IAS Site 001. They lived and hunted in the high mountains during the last interglacial, circa 115,000 years ago, when the Dinaric Alps were snow and ice free in the summer season. Snow and ice continued to affect settlement and subsistence in Shala into

modern times. Unlike other parts of the Mediterranean, agriculture in Shala depends on runoff from the snow pack, which is carried to fields by simple irrigation systems (Figure 3.11). As noted by Almagià (1932:465), northern Albania receives moderate amounts of rain during the summer months, whereas southern Albania, south of the Shkumbin River, does not. (Not incidentally, the Shkumbin River also marks the frontier between speakers of Gheg and Tosk Albanian.) Nevertheless, farmers in Shala depend on the steady input of irrigation water to their fields, in particular during dry summers. This means that a cold winter with much snow, followed by a mild summer, with some rain and the slow melting of the snow pack, provides optimal conditions for successful planting, growing, and harvesting of crops. A winter with very little snow, followed by a hot, dry spring and summer, causes the snow pack to melt quickly, leaving very little water in rivers, streams, and canals by mid-summer, at which point crops wither. We witnessed just such a poor growing season in the summer of 2008, during which time river levels were

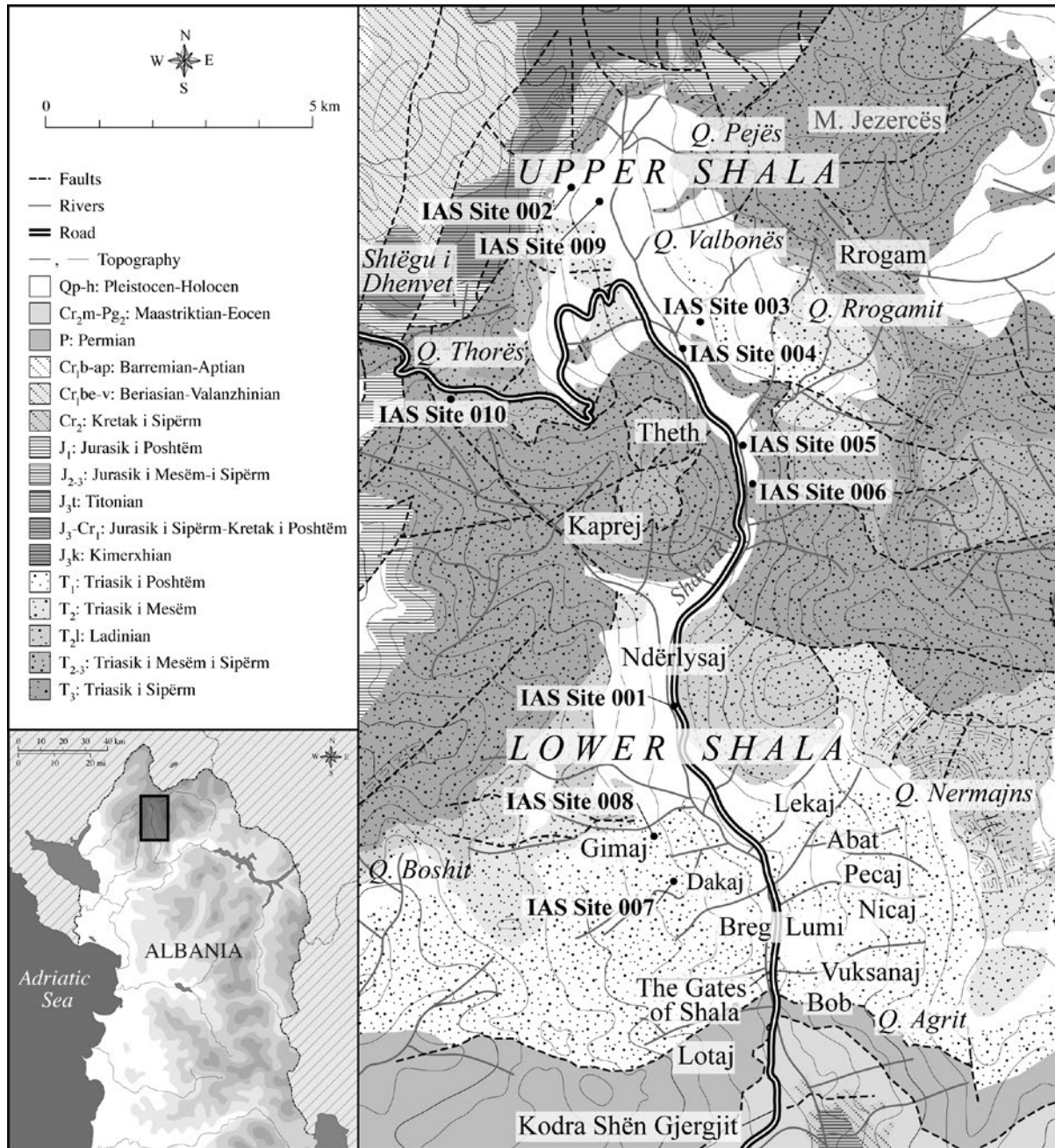


Figure 3.10. Detailed map of Shala's geology, after the National Geological Map of Albania, 2002. *Jill Seagard*

extremely low, springs dried up, and village men quarreled about access to irrigation water. In fact, one of the most important functions of the village council (*kuvend*), in Shala and elsewhere throughout northern Albania, is to set the irrigation schedule for its constituent households. According to the *Kanun* (Book 5, Chapter 13, Articles 351–352; Gjeçov 1989:92):

351. The channels of the fields are not diverted or blocked.

352. The channel must be open for a length of time agreed to in a kind of contract made among the members of the society. No one may alter this contract.

The importance of predictably cold, snowy winters and mild summers to agriculture in modern Shala means that during the period A.D. 1400–1850, the so-called Little Ice Age (LIA), conditions would have been perfect for the kind of irrigation-based, mixed





Figure 3.11. Irrigation canal above Ulaj neighborhood of Thethi.  
*Michael L. Galaty*

village farming practiced today in northern Albania. In the Mediterranean region, the LIA began with increased humidity and precipitation, followed by cooler, drier conditions A.D. 1700–1850 (Verschuren et al. 2004:575). The preceding period, A.D. 900–1400, the so-called Medieval Warm Period (MWP), would have made Shala's system of irrigation agriculture difficult. Interestingly, it was precisely during the LIA that Shala experienced the most prosperity, including expanding populations (see Figure 1.13). Conversely, there appears to have been a settlement hiatus leading up to the MWP, with a very small founding population present in Shala sometime after 1300. It was after 1850, when the LIA ended, and particularly in the early twentieth century, that northern Albania, Shala included, experienced population pressure and historically attested famines, followed by increases in feud, raiding, and warfare. In addition, and not coincidentally, it was early in the sixteenth century that maize arrived in the Balkans, perhaps as early as 1520 (Andrews 1993:201; although A. Pieroni [personal communication, March 2010] thinks it may have arrived in northern Albania somewhat later,

perhaps during the seventeenth century). According to villagers, wheat does not grow well, or at all, in Shala, so it may be that maize enabled successful, year-round settlement in large numbers in the valley. For maximum production, a medium maturity maize crop requires between 500 and 800 mm of water, depending on climate (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2010). Since Shala receives up to 2291 mm per year (UNEP 2006:5), the amount of water necessary for maize cultivation could be delivered easily by irrigation in Shala, provided water to the irrigation system did not run short due to an overly rapid spring and early summer snow melt followed by a lack of rain.

While we were not able to generate diachronic temperature and rainfall statistics for Shala,<sup>5</sup> there are some data for past climate and vegetation cover for nearby regions from lakes Shkodra, in Albania, and Plav, in Montenegro. Palynological data from the Plav cores indicate several periods of possible deforestation, and an Albanian Little Ice Age that was cooler and wetter than the Medieval Warm Period (Wilkinson 2011). Isotopic data from the Shkodra cores indicate several phases of warm, wet weather, one of which may correspond to the early portions of the Medieval Warm Period and another to the end of the Little Ice Age (A. Van Welden, personal communication, May 2010). Palynological data from the Shkodra cores indicate anthropogenic impacts on tree species beginning circa A.D. 1100 (A. Van Welden, personal communication, May 2010). Environmental data were also gathered from the Grunas prehistoric site and are discussed in more detail in Chapter Ten. An analysis of wood macro-samples provides some evidence for resource stress in later periods (i.e., following abandonment of the site, when there was a shift away from beech and pine). It is possible that this shift corresponds to similar anthropogenic processes under way at the same time in Shkodra, and perhaps Plav, associated with Medieval and Modern population growth.

## Resources

There was a wide variety of valuable, natural resources available to the people of Shala. Some of these were also of value outside the valley, in the markets of Shkodra and Gusinje and in the wider Mediterranean region.

Wood was an extremely important resource, particularly hardwoods for building and pine for roofing of houses. It is unlikely that timber was exported from



Figure 3.12. Drying furs. Ann Christine Eek

Shala in quantity prior to the twentieth century, but even so, forests may have shrunk as climate changed and population pressures grew (Allen 2009). Larger numbers of people meant more sheep and goats, which cut back forest by eating saplings. Historical photographs of Shala appear to show a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century landscape that was much more denuded than the present landscape (see, for example, images in Chapter Seven). Coon, who visited Shala in 1929, describes the peaks of Shala as being “forever white” in contrast to the peaks of Montenegro, which were black with “coniferous cover” (1950:10). Such being the case, the forests of Theth may have recovered during Communism due to policies that prohibited logging, as well as in the past 20 years due to depopulation of the region. As described in more detail in Chapter Six, other plants besides trees were of economic importance to the people of Shala and occasionally were gathered for export, including medicinal herbs (Pieroni 2008; see also Durham 2000 [1909]:15, 1979 [1928]:sections 6 and 7). Mulberry trees were introduced to the Mediterranean from the Near East in the fifteenth century

(A. Pieroni, personal communication, March 2010) and may have been brought to Shala for silkworm production. Durham (1979 [1928]:17) notes that in the mid-fourteenth century, when Albania was under the control of Serbia, Lower Pulati was ordered to pay a tribute of 100,000 silk cocoons to a local Orthodox monastery. Likewise, sumac (*Rhus coriaria*), which is native to the Mediterranean (A. Pieroni, personal communication, March 2010) and grows in large stands in Shala, is used to tan hides and may have been harvested for export to industrial markets in Shkodra and Kosova (as described by Luka 1981:222–223).

A wide variety of wild animals that are native to Shala were of economic importance (Imeraj N.D.; see also Radović and Marić 2002). These include wild goat (i.e., chamois; *Rupicapra rupicapra*) and the brown hare (*Lepus capensis*), both of which are still hunted and consumed today. Wild boar, roe deer, and brown bear are likewise native to the region and may have been hunted in the past. Various animals are trapped for their fur, including wolf, red fox, weasel, pine marten, badger, otter, polecats, and European lynx (Figure 3.12). Furs may well have

been an extremely lucrative trade item, since they were unobtainable in the lowlands around Shkodra and other market towns. The Shala River is also home to a variety of trout (*Salmo trutta*) that is caught and eaten today and may have been in the past as well.

Northern Albania is rich in minerals and ores that are of economic value, such as copper, iron, nickel, chrome, and, in the Albanian Alps tectonic zone, fluorite and bauxite. There are, however, no mineral or ore deposits in Shala. The people of northern Albania do not appear to have worked iron; rather, they traveled to towns like Shkodra where blacksmiths were to be found (Coon 1950:13). Salt was a key import, used to cure meats, and one of the key trade goods packed into and through the mountains by mule train (see discussion in Chapter Four).

## Cultural Responses to Northern Albania's Environment

The geography, geology, climate, and resource base of the Bjeshkët e Namuna set certain limits on human behavior. That is not to say, though, that the life of the Albanian *malësorë* was fixed and unchanging; rather, they learned to balance their needs and wants against the environmental restrictions imposed by life in the high mountains. Decisions—about what to eat, whom to marry, when to fight—were also circumscribed by the outside, surrounding world. In the following sections, we outline generally some of the effects the mountain environment had on Shala's inhabitants, describe their range of responses, and investigate the roles played by external forces, to which isolationism was a primary response. This chapter, along with Chapter Four, which describes the historical context of northern Albania, thereby sets the stage for more detailed discussions of Shala's socioeconomic system, which take place in Chapters Five and Six.

## Subsistence and Economy

Given northern Albania's geography, climate, and environment, we might predict some form of long-distance, seasonal transhumance of the type that exists in the high Pindos range of Greek Grevena (Chang 1992; Chang and Tourtellotte 1993; for the history and archaeology of transhumance in Grevena, see Efstratiou et al. 2006). Koutsovlach pastoralists winter their herds on the plains

of Thessaly and travel to high pastures in the Pindos each summer, where they live in several substantial villages. The topography of northern Albania is similar to Grevena, but the people of Shala have traditionally stayed in their villages year-round, over-wintering relatively small numbers of animals in barns, a costly, labor- and resource-intensive undertaking (Halstead 1990, 1998; Halstead and Tierney 1998). The question, then, is why fully sedentary, year-round village agro-pastoralism developed in Shala (cf. Halstead 1990, 1996 re. high-altitude Greek villages), as described in detail in Chapter Six, when seasonal transhumance might have been more efficient and profitable.

Barker (2005) has argued that prehistoric and modern pastoral systems in the high mountains of Italy were strongly affected by changes in population and settlement that occurred in lowland valleys. When population size or settlement systems changed in the valleys, winter pastures might expand or contract. When winter pastures grew, specialized nomadic or diversified transhumant pastoralism (Halstead 1990:62–63), which encouraged large flocks and movement in and out of the mountains (with a corresponding reduction in isolation), became possible for larger numbers of people. When winter pastures shrank, pastoralists might shift routes of migration, reduce flock size, or take up settled life (cf. Chang 1992:83 re. post-World War II Vlachs).

In Albania and surrounding regions, it may be that disruptions to Medieval and Early Modern lowland systems of land distribution caused subsequent changes in landscape and settlement in the highlands, which are reflected in Shala's archaeological and historical (both oral and written) records. In Medieval times, prime agricultural lands were consolidated into large estates (*latifundia*) controlled by so-called noble families, thereby creating large tracts of winter pasture, but disenfranchising and displacing landed peasants (Martin 1992). During this period, people may have begun to trickle into the mountains, seeking to avoid feudal servitude. In fact, the earliest Medieval pottery found in Shala dates to this period (see Chapter Nine). Later, after the conquest, these estates were divided by the Ottomans and land was parceled out to Turkish soldiers in the *timar* system (Pollo and Puto 1981:64, 66, 88–89; Winniffrith 1992), cutting off traditional winter grazing lands. Those already living in the mountains first gained and then lost access to pastures, and the result was a move away from specialized forms of transhumant-pastoralism, which



encouraged regional interaction, to year-round village farming, combining diversified, mixed agriculture and small-scale stock-raising, which encouraged (or allowed) isolation. (About 40 sheep per family seems to be the upper limit in Shala, which matches Halstead's [1998] data from the high-altitude Greek village of Plikáti [also Halstead and Tierney 1998].) With increased sedentism and immigration, population centers in the mountains may have become larger and access to resources, such as good land, circumscribed. In Shala, as in northern Albania generally, the response was agricultural intensification, perhaps through terracing and irrigation (Figure 1.13). Investments in the built environment created the landscape visible today. As the landscape became more structured, so too did the sociopolitical system. It was at this time that the tribal system as recorded in the *Kanun* evolved, a dynamic, social response to the pressures and possibilities of demographic growth coupled with isolation in a frontier zone. Subsistence systems and their effect on the sociopolitical landscapes of Shala are taken up in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

### Demography, Marriage, and Feud

One variable that strongly affected the evolving situation in Shala, and was linked tightly to environment and subsistence, was population size. Our field and historical data indicate that population in Shala grew steadily beginning in the fifteenth through the early twentieth centuries (Figure 1.13; see discussion in Chapter Four) and that population pressure was the result. Beginning with Malthus (1803), most scholars who study mountain ecosystems have asserted that their carrying capacity is rather low and that mountain economies are particularly prone to collapse (e.g., McNeill 1992:2–7). Consequently, many mountain societies carefully regulate marriage, birth, and immigration rates. Emigration from mountain to plain may also serve to relieve population pressure. Whereas these strategies have been well documented for the Medieval to Modern period in the European Alps (e.g., Viazzo 1989), Mediterranean mountain regions have received far less attention.

Most scholars working in the Alps argue that mountain societies depended on isolation as a means of buffering and limiting population growth (e.g., Netting 1981). Alpine anthropologists applied the concept of the “closed corporate community” (Wolf 1957; see also Sorge 2009): small, endogamous villages, composed of

small, economically and politically independent nuclear families, that closely regulated rules regarding marriage, land tenure, and inheritance. Immigration and emigration were limited. This view of Alpine communities was challenged by Cole and Wolf (1999 [1974]), who argued that historically most Alpine villages have been “open” communities, the frontier reserve from which low-altitude urban imperial cores drew surplus people and products. Thus, the real key to understanding mountain demography was not to track the degree to which mountain communities were isolated and isolationist but rather to understand how the shifting frontier situation affected the movements of individuals in and out of the mountains. Cole and Wolf (1999 [1974]) therefore view migration as a primary release valve limiting overpopulation in mountain valleys. Recent scholarship shows that migration was one possible strategy for limiting population in the Alps but that the migration rate varied through time from village to village (Viazzo 1989).

Mediterranean mountain societies, northern Albania included, differ from the Alps in several important ways. Northern Albanian family structure is dominated by the so-called “root” or “complex, joint” family (as opposed to the “stem” family common in the Alps) (see Gruber and Pichler 2002), in which several generations live together in one large house and share all proceeds of their work (the so-called *zadruga*; Burns 1976). The land is owned by the patriarch (*zoti i shpis*) and is divided between sons on his death or “retirement” (Kaser 2002). There are no restrictions on marriage and birth, and all men are allowed and encouraged to marry and have as many children as possible. Women of the family marry out (exogamy), and wives are brought in from other, nonrelated tribes. Several of the main population checks employed in the Alps do not exist therefore in northern Albania, and there are three possible means whereby population in Shala was controlled: blood feud, female infanticide, and emigration.

Blood feud must have had a tremendous effect on northern Albanian populations during some periods. Catholic Church documents indicate that in the period 1901–1905, the male death rate from feud in Shala stood at 26 percent (from Nopsca 1925, cited in Coon 1950:27; additional statistics in Whitaker 1968:272–274). At the same time, however, male births outpaced female births by a rate of 128 to 100. Our historical data, discussed in Chapter Four, indicate that

this skewed sex ratio must have been caused by selective, probably passive, female infanticide. Feud was also the primary cause for emigration (Schwandner-Sievers 2004:117). Men would have fled the mountains not to marry, as was the case in the Alps, but to escape feuds. Thus, demographic change, feuding, and emigration are key factors in explaining the development of Shala's tribal system through time but also serve as indicators of isolation and interaction. These topics are taken up in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

## Conclusion

The geography, geology, climate, and ecosystem of Shala set the stage for centuries of coupled human-natural interactions. These interactions and their products are reflected in the multiple, dynamic landscapes of the valley. The stable, resilient cultural systems of Shala, whether Prehistoric, Medieval, or Modern, were not determined by the environment; rather, people and the environment interacted recursively through time (Fisher and Feinman 2005:64). The people of Shala banked their capital through long-term investments in the built environment, such as the construction of irrigation systems, terraces, and fields. This allowed them to react creatively and efficiently when their system was perturbed, as when climate changed. They also banked capital "on the hoof," in the form of domestic animals, which could be moved throughout the valley, from low to high altitude, to and from good pasture, depending on weather and the seasons. Banked landscape and animal capital allowed families to pursue various social, economic, and political goals, linked directly to household size and composition, and their ability to undertake a feud or go to war, either with or against the Ottomans. Shala had hardly any natural resources to offer the outside world: no precious metals, a few furs, some plants. Their main asset was human: a seemingly inexhaustible supply of men at arms. Various outside powers sought through time to tap this source, and control it. For the most part, they failed. Little did they know that in engaging the mountain tribes, in pitting them against rivals and, sometimes, against each other, they generated a flexible frontier zone, cut and cross-cut by various, migrating tribal entities. The next chapter, Chapter Four, describes the origins of the Shala *fis* and fits that story into a wider regional, historical narrative.

*In the service of Venice, the Albanian horsemen became known as 'stradiots', a strange term in military language of the sixteenth century. Their name, in fact, comes from the Italian strada, meaning road or way, signifying 'wanderers', persons of no fixed abode. Displaced persons, men without a home, at least in the romantic sense, they found war a profession that made them famous and feared from the Mediterranean to the Solway Firth [Millar 1976:469–470].*

## Notes

1 Interestingly, the opposite is true of hospitality laws in highland Sardinia, where villages have been characterized by Sorge (2009) as "closed corporate communities," as opposed to the more "open" communities of highland Albania.

2 See Braudel (1972:33, note 41, following Cvijic 1918:29) on the concept of Balkan "mountain islands."

3 Neighborhood (and *fis*) names and boundaries shifted through time, partly in response to changing relationships between families in the village, and depending on to whom one talks, different names and boundary locations than those reproduced here might be given. We are thus aware that reifying any particular village map is dangerous and potentially misleading. See further discussion in Chapters Four through Seven.

4 In 2007, villagers in Lekaj took the IAS survey team to the ruins of a church dedicated to Shën Premte (i.e., Veneranda) in the Qet neighborhood. Little remains of the church today except some dry-stone foundation walls. However, the route is still well marked by wooden crosses and the saint's feast day is celebrated on July 25. The ruined church may be that referred to in the commentary to Padre Gaspari's 1671 map: "between Nicaj and Pecaj, where the *bajraktar* lives, are still visible the ruins of a church given the name San Prende by the locals" (Gaspari 1930 [1671]). A church of Shën Veneranda is marked on the 1689 Cantelli map on the left bank of the Shala River, along with an unnamed church at "Murichi" (i.e., Mavriq) on the right bank. It may be therefore that Elsie (2001:258) is incorrect in his identification.

5 Recently, a team of European scientists took dendroclimatological samples from *Pinus heldreichii* CHRIST, a long-lived tree species, throughout Albania, including in Theth, covering the period A.D. 1417 to 2007 (Seim et al. 2010, 2012). Samples have been used to explore climate sensitivity and signal strength through time of *P. heldreichii*, and early analysis of the data indicates that they may be suitable for producing long-term climate reconstructions in Albania and throughout the Balkans. As it is now, the Albanian master chronology (A.D. 617–2008) indicates generally dry conditions during the MWP and stability in precipitation, at moderate levels, during the LIA (Seim et al. 2010:78), but these results require additional testing.



*Chapter Four*

## ARCHIVAL HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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with contributions by Michael L. Galaty, Mentor Mustafa, and Robert Schon

**Introduction and Historical Overview<sup>1</sup>**

The highland tribes of Shala and Shoshi have no archives and little written history. Indeed, part of the motivation for this project has been to seek alternate ways to recover their past. Secure in their mountain fastnesses for centuries, they have alternately threatened and been threatened by the regimes around them—by some more than others. For the most part, it has been only those contentious relationships that have appeared in the histories of the cosmopolitan zones around them. The tribesmen limned the margins of Ottoman administrators' correspondence; bedeviled Catholic priests and missionaries with their idiosyncratic understanding of Catholicism; and occasionally became the sole focus of a few literate travelers with ethnographic or romantic interests in the *malësorë* (Albanian for “mountaineers”). Theirs is a history written by outsiders and contested only by oral traditions passed from father to son.

This section therefore cannot hope to present any sort of comprehensive history of the Shala Valley and its inhabitants. Instead, it will do two things. First, it presents a rough sketch of the history of the broader region—essentially what is now northern Albania stretching into Montenegro, on either side of the Drin River as it runs east-west, and roughly between Shkodra and Peja (Figure 1.1). This brief history provides the terminological and chronological framework for the rest of this volume's analysis (aside from the prehistoric archaeological evidence). Even those readers interested only in the archaeological analysis should read at least this opening historical overview. Second, this chapter summarizes our archival and historical investigations, generally focused on specific periods as illuminated

through specific types of records. To be clear, the archival material that directly refers to Shala and Shoshi is thin indeed (although further work in the Ottoman archives is warranted). Nevertheless, many oft-repeated assumptions about the *malësorë* and their relationships with the rest of the world fail to stand up to careful examination of the historic record.

**Ancient and Medieval History**

Northern Albania has always been strategically important. Its Adriatic shore sheltered pirates, while key routes of travel and trade spanned its mountainous interior and provided access to metal-rich Kosova. During the Bronze Age (beginning ca. 3000 B.C.), northern Albania had cultural connections up the coast to Dalmatia and down to Epirus (Galaty and Lafe 2008:267; Lafe and Galaty 2009). Early (ca. 1000 B.C.) “urban” features are found at Late Bronze Age fortified sites in northern Albania such as Gajtan and Shkodra (Ceka 1998; Korkuti 1972). According to ancient writers, such as Appian, Arrian, and Polybius, the region was home to a diverse array of late-prehistoric (i.e., Iron Age) “tribal” peoples collectively called “Illyrians.” In the *Periplus of Scylax* and the *Periegesis of Scymnus* (written in the fourth and second centuries B.C., respectively), Illyrian territory stretched from Split in the north to Byllis in the south (Wilkes 1992:94–97).

Illyrian territory was colonized during the Archaic Age by Greeks, at Apollonia and Epidamnus/Dyrrachium in central Albania. Much archaeological work has been done recently on colonial contact in Albania, with a special focus on the colony at Apollonia. Data collected by the Mallakstra Regional Archaeological Project (MRAP) indicate that colonizing Greeks,

based at Apollonia, and indigenous Illyrians, based at hill forts like that of Margëlliç, maintained a degree of separation, punctuated by trade, for hundreds of years (Davis et al. 2005). During this time, there was “acculturation” on both sides (Galaty 2002), symbolized most dramatically by syncretism in burial practices (Amore 2010; Papadopoulos et al. 2007). Things had changed by the end of the Classical Age, however, when central and southern Albania were pulled more firmly into the ambit of Greece (Galaty et al. 2004) and *poleis*-style centers developed throughout the region.

Whereas central and southern Albania were integrated into the wider Mediterranean world, primarily through processes of colonization, northern Albania was not. Consequently, the Illyrians of northern Albania posed a serious threat to the rising power of Macedonia, so much so that Alexander the Great saw fit to conquer them before heading to Asia in 334 B.C. Northern Albania first drew Roman attention in 229 B.C., when naval forces crossed the Adriatic to end Illyrian piracy. Their chief target was Teuta, an Ardiaean “queen,” based in Rhizon on the Bay of Kotor in present-day Montenegro. Over the course of the next 50 years, the Romans defeated the Illyrians and then occupied the region. Shkodra, capital of the Labeates, became a Roman colony (Hoxha 2003:159–160) and northern Albania a beachhead for the conquest of the Balkan interior.

When the Roman Empire split in A.D. 395, northern Albania was assigned to the west, under the authority of the western emperor and therefore the Latin pope (Hill 1992:48). The north remains Latin in outlook and heavily Catholic in religion to this day. Northern Albania fell largely into the province of Praevalis (Hoxha 2003), which suffered heavily during the Avar and Slavic invasions of the sixth century A.D. Albania, the north in particular, was plunged into a “dark” age, during which the syncretic “Koman Culture” formed, providing evidence for Illyrian to Albanian continuity (Hill 1992:51). Albania was later conquered by the Bulgars (beginning in the late eighth century) and the Normans (in 1081). It is during this unsettled period that the first written references to Albanoi/Arbanitai appear (Hill 1992:53–54). Over the next 200 years, Albania, including the mountainous north, was incorporated into a series of small states, including Arbanon, the Despotate of Epirus, and the Latin Kingdom of Albania, under the Angevins. This dynamic period of rapid change

produced the great Albanian feudal families of the late Middle Ages, set the stage for the Venetian and later Ottoman conquests, and thrust Albania and Albanians onto the world stage.

In the early fourteenth century, Byzantine control of the western Balkans slipped, and Venice was only just beginning to exert its influence on the Adriatic coastline. Into this gap stepped the Serbian King Stefan Dushan, who conquered much of modern Albania and Kosova in the 1340s, but in the north of Albania, his rule remained nominal. Power there had fragmented, primarily into the hands of local Albanian lords, leaders of the Dukagjin, Balsha, Thopia (Topia), and Kastrati families (Hill 1992; Hodgkinson 1999; Vickers 1999; Winniffrith 1992). It was these mini-principalities that faced the new emergent threat in the Balkans—the Ottomans.

In 1354, the Ottomans bypassed the Byzantine capital at Constantinople and swept into Europe. They famously destroyed the Serbian-led coalition of Serbs, Hungarians, Bosnians, Bulgarians, and Albanians in Kosova in 1389 (Malcolm 1999), and over the next two decades, they secured their control over most of what is now southern Albania, as far north as Kruja. It was supposedly during this very era that Lek Dukagjin (1410–1481), chief of the Dukagjin family, laid down the northern tribal laws and customs known as the *Kanun*, although it was no doubt heavily based on much older, less homogeneous traditions, and other versions continued in use among various groups. Schmitt (2001) argues that some of the *Kanun*’s principles (especially the feud and the *besa*, the “truce,” discussed in Chapter Five) were elaborated and deepened, gaining a greater hold among the tribes during this long period of chronic warfare in the face of two competing empires. The other empire was of course Venice, deeply committed to preserving waystations for its fleet along the Adriatic coast and fearful of the growing Ottoman control of that coast. Venice sought Albanian allies, control of Albanian ports, and access to Albanian grain and salt (Schmitt 2001:222, 242, 640; Schmitt 2009). The Venetians had taken Durrës in 1392 and accepted control of Shkodra from the Balsha family in 1396.

Meanwhile, the Ottomans secured the south, established their administration over the region, and began progressively to move into the north and challenge Venetian interests. At this point (in 1443), Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (Skanderbeg, 1405–1468), scion of the Kastriot family, raised as a hostage at the sultan’s

court and eventually a general or “bey” in the sultan’s army, began his famous revolt against the Ottomans. His revolt continued even as the Ottomans captured Constantinople in 1453. Improbably successful for over 20 years, he cultivated diplomatic ties in Italy, especially with the Kingdom of Naples, and rallied the Albanians to his cause. The war continued after Skanderbeg’s death in 1468, becoming part of the Venetian-Ottoman “Long War” of 1463–1479, which finally ended in the Ottoman capture of Shkodra and the imposition of Ottoman control over all of modern Albania—at least in name (Ducellier 1981; Hodgkinson 1999; Schmitt 2001; Vickers 1999). One tradition says that after the death of Skanderbeg, Lek Dukagjin and his brother established a base in the Shala Valley at Mauricum/Mavriq (referred to today as Dakaj), a fortified site in Lower Shala (discussed in Chapter Nine), and at another site further south in Shoshi known as the “Guri i Leks” (the Rock of Lek) (Nopsca 1910:31–32).

## The Ottoman Regime

The Ottomans controlled Albania for over four centuries. The nature of their regime was hardly a constant, and it will not do to reinforce older and persistent stereotypes of continuous Ottoman oppression, devastation, and corruption. Their rule was flexible, often accommodationist, and at times the most bureaucratically “modern” in the Western world. Generalizing over 400 years is difficult, but several critical aspects of their administration can be summarized here.

The Ottomans were a dynastic flowering of one Turkish clan (Osman) that ruled a frontier principality in Anatolia in the fourteenth century. They had fled Mongol rule and had successfully carved out an autonomous territory from the Byzantine Empire. Their expansion seems to have been energized by being squeezed between Mongol administration to the east and Byzantine Christians to the west, and they legitimated their successful expansion on the basis of a *ghazâ* ideology of holy war dedicated to expanding the *DârüIslâm*, the “house of Islam” (for more on *ghazâ* ideology and its limits, see Darling 2000; Peacock 2009b). *Ghazâ* ideology served as a potent unifier of disparate peoples and gained expansive power when combined with the Ottomans’ cultural origins as steppe nomads. The Turks were a nomadic, horse-based culture that grew to wield

enormous power, but they also successfully adopted the bureaucratic capacities of the more settled peoples they conquered. In one sense, the Ottomans were merely the most recent incarnation of steppe peoples moving westward, and their path to power was eased by the Turkish dynasties, such as the Seljuks, who had preceded them and provided the model for the hybrid of steppe culture and imperial administration. The Ottomans were uniquely successful, however, both in penetrating Christian Europe and in sustaining themselves there for over five centuries.

As Halil Inalcık (2000) has pointed out, the initial Ottoman presence in Europe was less an outright conquest than the establishment of vassalage relationships over various minor principalities who were then busily freeing themselves from Byzantine control. Only when a vassal rebelled, or when a particular sultan adopted a more aggressive policy, did a full Ottoman campaign of conquest ensue. Although greatly aided by having a standing force of infantry called the “new troops” or *janissaries*, during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, much of Ottoman success depended on the strength and loyalty of their traditional ethnic Turkish cavalry, or *sipahis*. Those cavalrymen were rewarded for their service by the grant of conquered land in a *timar*, a kind of feudal fief, over which they would rule subject to the will of the sultan. The janissaries, on the other hand, were technically slaves of the sultan, loyal to him, and housed primarily in Istanbul without a claim on provincial land. The regime divided conquered territory into administrative divisions called *sancaks*, ruled by *sancakbeys*, usually closely following the boundaries of the former kingdoms. The Ottomans also quickly imposed a bureaucratic system of census and taxation (about which more below), dividing the population into either “peasant” or “official of the sultan” classes (*reayah* and *askeri*), with the former divided further into Muslim and non-Muslim, a status that affected the level of taxation and susceptibility to military service. Muslims were taxed less but were expected to do military service. Non-Muslims faced additional taxes for their religious status and could be required to surrender sons under the *devshirme* “tax” who were then raised as Muslims in Istanbul to serve the sultan, primarily as members of the Janissary corps (Inalcık 1954a, 2000; also Imber 2003).

This is the relatively standard understanding of Ottoman conquest and its subsequent black-and-white divisions of the population. In fact, there were many

more shades of gray, especially in the first centuries of the empire, but many endured well into the nineteenth century (Peacock 2009b). In essence, the problems of projecting power in the Early Modern era demanded those shades of gray, and they were particularly important in the mountains and borderlands of northern Albania. Landers (2003) argues that imperial control in the preindustrial world depended on expanding coercive authority over the productive (and taxable) zones that exist in an “organic” economy. Wealth fundamentally derived from areally expansive vegetative growth, either as crops or as fodder for animals. Normal patterns of human habitation exploit that landscape, generate wealth, and build mostly local communications networks to move products around. The denser the habitation, the denser the concentration of wealth and the thicker the capillary-like network of roads and nodes connecting the fields, villages, and local markets. With the exception of some few intensively exploited zones (e.g., Roman Egypt), only a relatively small percentage of goods left the local region. In these circumstances, establishing centralized (or imperial) dominion was a matter of establishing hierarchically responsive systems of linked coercive authorities, tied to the center, but capable of exploiting (i.e., taxing/coercing) out to the ends of those field-village-market nodes, and ultimately dependent on the communications nets built by the farmers and villagers.

In circumstances where the area claimed was huge, as it quickly became for the Ottoman Empire, several key ingredients were required to sustain control. Local authorities had to be tied to the center in some way, preferably through some low-cost binding ideology of legitimacy but also through fear of the imperial center’s power (cf. Barkey 2008: esp. 13). The center also needed some mechanism to extract wealth without destroying those who produced it—in short, a census of wealth and a measured and restrained system for tapping it. Furthermore, the imperial center had to be able to move extracted wealth over long distances, on networks not normally built by villagers in the course of their own work. Finally, the imperial center had to have some form of coercive power that it could project to keep its subordinates in line. The Ottomans, leaning on the Near East’s millennia-old traditions of bureaucratic state building, proved greater masters of these problems than any of their initial European foes. The *timar* system distributed Ottoman agents (often co-opted locals,

even Christians; see below) broadly across the landscape, invested them in the success of their subordinate peasants, but held ultimate ownership of the land in the hands of the sultan. The Ottomans rapidly established a census system covering the whole of the empire. They also encouraged or directly ordered the construction of a long-distance road network, much of it built on the old Roman network, serviced by periodic caravanserais or *hans*. Finally, the sultan established a network of fortresses in conquered territories that he manned with Janissary troops responsible directly to him (Lowry 2008). The janissaries later also became the mainstay of a standing army (until 1826) under the sultan’s immediate control (in addition to the cavalry of those retainers in the immediate proximity of Istanbul). The Romans had done all of these things as well, but their imprint had been fading or was absent from Christian Europe.

Despite the relative Ottoman success in mastering the problems inherent to the areal expansion of coercive authority, not all “areas” were equal. Contested frontiers and difficult terrain (especially mountains) added new challenges. Imperial competitors on the other side of a frontier could subsidize resistance, while mountains were neither as productive nor as valuable as the plains, nor were they as laced with local communications routes useable by imperial agents and armies. Even if the resistance of mountaineers could be overcome by a brief campaign, establishing permanent control was more difficult and not clearly worth the cost. An alternate strategy was to establish some other less definite status for the people in those zones difficult to control. Modern diplomats might call it using “soft power”—using the attractions of the empire combined with the *threat* of its power, rather than actually using it. In essence, the idea was to create economic and political relationships that the frontier residents or mountaineers would see as to their advantage—relationships that would connect them to the center but could not bind them to it. Naturally, those relationships shifted and adjusted as imperial authorities and local peoples repeatedly evaluated the relative costs and the benefits of maintaining them (cf. Aksan 2011; Özoğlu 2004).

Ottoman Albania, and especially the mountains of the north, provides several examples of this process as the Ottomans sought creative and flexible solutions to the problem of imperial control and the use of “soft power.” In the early stages of the Balkan conquest, the Ottomans reached out to local indigenous lords and

folded them into their system, sometimes even granting *timars* to Christians to continue to rule over their home territory (Inalcık 1954a; Khoury 2006; Lowry 2008). This kind of co-option could prove remarkably effective in creating a smooth transition of power. Then, as succeeding generations faced the punitive taxation structure for Christians or simply desired a more intimate relationship with the center, those landholders converted to Islam. In northern Albania (and other like places difficult to access), the Ottomans “declared” a zone conquered and designated the inhabitants as *derbendçis*, or “guardians of the passes,” a kind of gray status between peasant and official that demanded only nominal submission to the imperial center, and in return they were not required to pay certain taxes (cf. Kasaba 2009:27–28). The tribes of Shala, Shosh, Hot, Pult, Nikaj-Mërtur, and Kelmend, although at least partly registered in the cadaster (i.e., tax register) of the *sancak* of Shkodra in 1485 as part of a *timar* (and again in 1536), appear to have thrown out their Ottoman landlords by the end of the sixteenth century and to have acquired the more independent status of *derbendçi* by 1582—although there was no Ottoman acknowledgment of full independence (Luka 1981; Pulaha 1973, 1976). The tribes were ordered to “guard” the main routes linking the coast to the eastern part of the *sancak*: the Kelmend guarded the two arteries linking Shkodra to “Altun-ili”; the Hoti people guarded the route from Shkodra to the fortresses of “Depeduken” and Medun (in present-day Montenegro); and the men of what are now Pult, Shala, and Shosh served as *derbendçis* on the route linking Shkodra to Peja in Kosova, Novipazar, and Podgorica (Pulaha 1974a:4, 32). In this status, they fell outside of the full weight of the Ottoman bureaucracy, but they also had less reason to attack it.

In all probability, the rewards for a massive Ottoman military effort to subjugate the mountains were simply too small. Nevertheless, preexisting and necessary economic connections with the outside world forced the highland tribes to accept this kind of compromise. Eventually, perhaps as late as the eighteenth century, the Ottomans instituted a formal system designed to co-opt or divide the tribes’ leadership structure by designating a prominent individual (usually not the same person as the tribal chief) as a *bajraktar* or “banner bearer,” who had the responsibility of providing a certain number of men for Ottoman military service (Hasluck 1954:115–119, 128; Ulqini 1991, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Such a designation no doubt

carried material rewards and certainly became a mark of prestige, especially since Ottoman administrators were careful to award the title only to those men who had committed some act of unusual bravery or distinction that would carry weight within the masculine, honor-driven culture of the tribesmen. Hasluck (1954:116) recorded the then six-generation-old (~1750) story of how Kolë Voci became the first *bajraktar* of Shala-Gimaj when he killed a Serbian *bajraktar* and carried his head and standard to the officer commanding the Turkish forces. Nevertheless, the position likely was designed by the Ottomans to discourage integration by exploiting tribal rivalries. The *bajraktars* could be played one against the other and also be pitted against the more traditional authority of the tribal chiefs and elders. Economic and political competition between tribes and tribal leaders reduced the possibility of tribal confederation and the kind of coordinated, mass uprisings that Skanderbeg had led in the fifteenth century (Pollo and Puto 1981; Winnifrieth 1992). Furthermore, fostering this kind of semi-autonomous martial culture on the frontier also served to make it a zone that potential enemies would be reluctant to enter. In essence, the militarized tribes, simply by defending their own territory, became a kind of buffer zone for the Ottomans, a role that the Ottomans clearly imagined them filling right down to the nineteenth century, initially against the Venetians, and later against the independent Montenegrins (Boehm 1987; Kasaba 2009; Reinkowski 2003). Of course, it is only fair to point out that such a buffer could be unreliable, turbulent, and disruptive. The mountains were a perennial source of rebellion and brigandage and could be especially troublesome in combination with self-aggrandizing regional Ottoman governors bent on becoming autonomous powers. These two problems eventually led to a concerted nineteenth-century effort by the sultan to truly centralize control, to abandon co-option and substitute coercion, and to otherwise reform the administration of the empire: a program of reform known as the *tanzimat*.

Before turning to the *tanzimat* of the nineteenth century, it will pay to dwell a bit more on these two problems, the first of which was the longstanding autonomy of the mountaineers and their tendency to use that autonomy not only to resist taxation but also to plunder their plains-dwelling neighbors and nominal fellow subjects. There are many accounts or mentions of mountain rebellions, but equally clearly, such rebellion



was not continuous (see Figure 1.13). There existed a fractious relationship between the tribes and the imperial administration, one punctuated by more intense episodes of violence, but the daily contours of which were probably the result of a deliberate process of each pretending that the other did not exist, or at least that the other's existence did not change one's way of life. The mountaineers for much of the sixteenth and into the nineteenth century simply had enough power to prevent the penetration of Ottoman taxation and administration—as a marker of their success, many of the mountaineers (including those of Shala and Shoshi) maintained their Catholicism (Catholics were still a majority in the *sancak* of Shkodra in the 1880s [Gawrych 2006:29]). Marino Bizzi, Archbishop of Bar (Antivari), reported in 1610 that the mountaineers regularly opposed Turkish expeditions into their country and equally regularly raided the peoples around them (Bizzi 2003 [1610]:97, 117; Bolizza 2003 [1614]:152, 157–159). A local account from 1639 recorded the arrival of a *sancakbey* in Shala itself (attesting to ongoing relationships), but when he wanted to impose new rules, beyond what the residents were accustomed to following (again attesting to some previous level of cooperation), the locals revolted, allied themselves with the surrounding tribes, and “managed not only to expel, but also killed the sancakbey and many of his soldiers, and thus managed to save themselves” (Naçi 1964:26). It was this kind of history that led Father Stefano Gaspari in 1671 to conclude that the men of Shala were “well armed and vigorous, both from their physical disposition and their location, they continually repel the bordering Turk and emerge almost always victorious” (Gaspari 1930 [1671]:495). Perhaps most famously, the Kelmendi tribe supported the Venetians in the 1684–1699 Ottoman-Venetian War. As a result, after the treaty ending the war, the Turks resettled the Kelmendi in Serbia. In 1707, however, they began to return by force and successfully reinserted themselves into their homeland (Bartl 1975:14). In addition to the examples cited here, there are other early reports of the mountain people lashing out from their mountain fastnesses in 1560 to 1571, 1638, 1680, and 1714 to 1718 (Pulaha 1978, docs #23–#52, #91, #126, #275). Interestingly, this comprehensive collection of Ottoman documents mentions Shala and its surrounding villages only once in the whole period from 1560 to 1715, suggesting not so much continuous rebellion but rather

substantial autonomy, punctuated by bouts of violence. This tradition of the mountain tribes' autonomy and willingness to revolt when traditional relationships were threatened continued right up into the twentieth-century reign of King Zog, including in 1836, 1869, 1883, and 1910 to 1912 (some discussed below; see, for example, Destani 1999:289).

The other persistent problem faced by the Porte (a term for the Ottoman central administration in Istanbul) was the increasingly independent governors—especially from the late eighteenth century (Adanir 2006; Anscombe 2009; Khoury 2006). In northern Albania, Mehmet Bey Bushati declared himself the lord of Shkodra in 1757. His son, Kara Mahmoud, continued and expanded on his father's example, extending his personal control deeper into Kosova and further south in Albania. Ironically, critical to his success were the Catholic tribes, including the men of Shala and Shoshi, who banded together with this Ottoman bey, descended from former Albanian feudal lords, to declare independence from the imperial center. Kara Mahmoud attacked Montenegro and even opened negotiations with the Habsburgs as an independent prince. Istanbul sent several armies to force him back into the fold, each of which failed. Fearing Habsburg interference, the sultan offered Mahmoud a pardon, and he, fearing the success of yet another Ottoman expedition against him, briefly returned his allegiance to the sultan in 1788. When he rebelled and attacked Montenegro again, he was defeated and killed. His younger brother nevertheless became governor of Shkodra and ruled until 1810 (Anscombe 2006; Hecquard 1858:145; Naçi 1964; Vickers 1999).

In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire struggled against peripheral rebellions, independent-minded governors, and repeated military defeats at the hands of the industrializing European powers. One result was the *tanzimat* reforms, which sought to modernize the imperial administration. In the north, the first obstacle was continued Bushati rule in Shkodra, which Sultan Mahmoud II ordered crushed in 1831 (despite its recent history of loyalty) (Anscombe 2010). In 1832, the Ottomans followed up by destroying a host of other semi-independent beys in Albania. Then, in 1839, the regime formally began the *tanzimat*—a central component of which was to erase distinctions in law between Muslims and non-Muslims. All inhabitants in the empire were to be simply “Ottomans” (Gawrych 2006:16–18; Kasaba 2009:99–122). The reform effort had many aspects,

but for the Albanian mountains, it meant a concerted effort to end the old “gray” status of semi-autonomous tribesmen. In theory, they were to become full, and fully taxed, members of the empire. Outside the high mountains, there were revolts in Uskub (Skopje), Tetova, and Prishtina in 1844; another in Gjakova in 1845; and another regional rebellion in 1847. The rebellions were generally crushed, but as will be seen below in the discussion of the travelers’ accounts, there remained a remarkable level of independence in the high mountains (also Gawrych 2006:30). They retained their right to be armed, and faced with the rising threat of Montenegro (a de facto independent state by the late eighteenth century, internationally recognized in 1878), the Ottomans felt they had no choice but to maintain a militarized border, manned primarily by the semi-autonomous tribes (Aksan 2007; Reinkowski 2003; Vickers 1999). As Reinkowski argues (2003:253), in essence the “traditional policy of bargaining, cooptation, limited military pressure and of playing the various tribes off each other” continued in operation. In 1862, local administrators in Shkodra suggested to the sultan that the long history of tax exemptions for the region should be continued given the military service of both Muslims and Christians in the more or less continuous struggle with Montenegro. Further south, in Mirdita, and further from the border zone, the *tanzimat* took a more thorough cast. “In the 1840s and 1850s, the Ottoman authorities had still judged the whole of the Catholic population in the province of Shkodra (representing still the majority) as loyal toward the empire. But with the 1860s the picture changed radically, these tribes were seen as unruly people deserving to be punished, disciplined, and civilized” (Reinkowski 2003:252; see also Clayer 1997). In part, this derived from the increasing Ottoman frustration with the mountaineers placing tribal loyalties before all others, including even religion (Blumi 2003a:241–247; Gawrych 2006:32–36; cf. Rogan 1996).

The ramping up of oppressive practices in Albania merged with the growing nationalist sentiments in the Balkans to feed an Albanian nationalist movement. Much of this movement occurred outside the bounds of the high northern mountains, and need not concern us here, except insofar as it helped lead to an independent Albania, and one defined by its current boundaries (Blumi 2003b:19). The Russian defeat of the Ottomans in 1878 allowed them to impose the pro-Slavic Treaty of San Stefano, which sliced away

territory populated by Albanians and awarded it to the emergent Slavic states of Serbia and Montenegro. The specifics were determined through great power mediation in Berlin: in the Shkodra region, Montenegro received Pec, Ulqin, Hot, Plava, Gusinje (Gucia), and Podgorica—all territories with long and abiding connections to Albanian-speaking regions. This tendency to ignore mountain people’s kin and trade linkages in favor of separating them based on language and religion was aggravated by nineteenth-century “ethnographies” that served Great Power interests (Blumi 2007:3). The mountaineers, possibly in collusion with Ottoman officials, successfully resisted the establishment of the new border, long delaying its implementation and eventually even forcing a partial redrawing of the line. Shala, for example, maintained access to its traditional market at Gusinje for a bit longer (see below). Nevertheless, this process of negotiating and resisting division further stirred an Albanian nationalism opposed to the loss of territory and increasingly opposed to remaining within the empire (Blumi 2003a; Gawrych 2006:44–71).

French and British hopes to prevent either Austria-Hungary or Russia from taking territorial advantage of the shrinking power of the Ottomans complicated the question of Albanian independence. They repeatedly propped up Ottoman control in the Balkans. In the end, the process was hijacked by the Young Turk movement, which overthrew the sultan in 1908 and sought to create a new, more secular, modern, and constitutional state structure. Initial Albanian support for the movement gave way to disgust with the new state’s efforts to “enforce a uniform Turkification” and deny or ignore the emergent Albanian nationalist movement (Vickers 1999:59). Actual and incipient Albanian revolutions against the Ottoman government took hold throughout the region. The Catholic tribes joined in March 1911, with the overt support of Montenegro. Austria-Hungary threatened to intervene on behalf of the Catholics under Ottoman attack, and Italy declared war on the empire in September, hoping to take Libya. Under this kind of pressure, the Ottomans had to make some accommodation with the Albanians—and the *malësorë* received a variety of promises that preserved much of their old autonomy (Gawrych 2006:186–187). The international perception of Ottoman weakness, however, soon led to the outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912 as Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and

Greece sought to carve up the remaining Ottoman territories there—including Albania. Montenegro attacked first in Albania but was soon joined by Serbia, whose army marched across Albania to take Durrës and then turned north (Greece also attacked in the south). The Serb campaign became notorious for atrocities, and the villagers of Gimaj in the Shala Valley preserve a story that all homes in the village were burned by the Serbs at that time. Austria finally decided that an independent Albania served its interests better than an expanded Kingdom of Serbia and intervened to support an Albanian state. Meanwhile, Montenegro laid siege to Shkodra (with the diplomatic support of Russia). A European conference eventually agreed on a fundamentally independent Albania, and laid down its basic boundaries, but had to threaten force to get the Serbs and Montenegrins to bring their armies home.

### An Independent Albania

At this point, the details of the future borders of the new state again became a problem. The tribesmen of Hoti, Gruda, Kelmendi, Shkreli, and Kastrati appealed to the British naval commander at Shkodra to be left in Albania and not divided into Montenegro. The Balkan powers, meanwhile, began to turn on each other in hopes of further carving up Albania and Macedonia. In June 1913, the Second Balkan War broke out, with the result that the Porte in May 1913 finally and fully relinquished rights to Albania. The settlement conference created a commission to determine the boundaries of the newly independent Albania and to create the basic structures of an independent government. The northern boundary proved highly contentious and its ultimate settlement extraordinarily complex—not least because of the continued activity of Serb troops inside Albania. Getting those troops to return home eventually required allocating Peja, Prizren, Gjakova, and Dibër to Serbia (Destani 1999: map 3). This represented a major break in the ancient trade routes from Shkodra to Peja, Gjakova, and Prizren (see Figure 1.1). Locally, the town of Gusinje was consigned to Montenegro, cutting off the Shala folk from their normal market where they sold their flocks and purchased wheat (Durham 1985 [1909]; Galaty et al. 2009 contains an ethnographic audio excerpt on just this issue).

Uncertainty and instability were the rule in 1913 and 1914, and then the outbreak of World War I swallowed

up the issue. There was no real functioning national government in Albania, and the tribes ruled themselves as best they could. The Balkan powers again sought to carve up the country and competed with each other and against the tribesmen inside its now seemingly irrelevant new borders. Finally, the Austrian army, in pursuit of a defeated Serbian army, effectively occupied most of northern and central Albania (the southern portions were under French and Italian control). It took several conferences from 1918 to 1921 to redefine Albania's borders roughly back to their 1913 shape, and Italy was given a special role in helping the country establish a government. From a complex series of political struggles, Ahmed Zogu, a Muslim northern tribesman from Mat, emerged to dominate first a republican government and then made himself king in 1928, taking the title King Zog.

Zog's rule had profound consequences for the northern tribes. Not unreasonably, some of his primary goals were to reestablish order, expand government authority into the mountains, and assert the ability to tap the *malësorë* for both taxes and soldiers. He embarked on programs to build roads, ban personal firearms, and abolish the blood feud. All of these programs constituted a major attack on the traditional lifeway of the mountains, and in 1926 to 1927, Shala, Shosh, and other parts of Dukagjin revolted—possibly with material support from Serbia. Their revolt was quickly put down, and Zog appears to have had a surprising amount of success in suppressing feuds, at least temporarily (Fischer 1984; Hadwen 1931; Tomes 2003).

Zog's successes ran headlong into Mussolini's expansionism. Italian influence in Albania was already extensive, and it soon morphed into outright occupation. Partisan resistance to the Italians and the Germans during World War II received extensive British aid (Bailey 2008), but in the end it was the Communist resistance fighters led by Enver Hoxha who dominated the scene and assumed power when German troops retreated (no allied troops moved into Albania). The partisan movement only arrived in Shala in late 1945. Then, and in the immediate postwar years, they sought to disarm the tribes. At one point, the partisans called an assembly of the heads of household, who were then ordered to send relatives to fetch their guns. If they did not, the head of household was executed (Z. Tafilica, personal communication, June 2007).

Hoxha's wartime success aided his move to dominate the political scene in the postwar years, and he imposed a progressively more restrictive, authoritarian, and paranoid regime on the country. He progressively broke ties with other Communist allies, Stalin, Tito, and finally even Mao. One of the major programs of the regime was to restrict movement of the rural population into the cities and to encourage agriculture with the goal of eventual autarky. As part of that program, agricultural land and flocks were collectivized—a program that came relatively late to the mountains but was in full swing even there by the late 1960s. As we will discuss in Chapter Seven, these changes forced significant social adaptations on the inhabitants of the Shala Valley. Upper Shala even became a kind of workers' resort area for the regime, with tourist camp/hotel facilities built in the upper reaches of Theth where busloads of "workers" could go for retreats.

Enver Hoxha died in 1985, and his successor, Ramiz Alia, proved incapable of holding together the authoritarian regime, especially under the pressures of the post-1989 opening up of the Eastern Bloc. Unfortunately, the regime collapsed in a chaotic fashion, and pent-up resentment at the state led to widespread rioting and destruction of state-owned properties, including factories, offices, and cooperative buildings (de Waal 1996). In Shala, most of these facilities survived the 1991 violence, but then in 1996–1997, the collapse of a deeply rooted pyramid scheme wiped out many Albanians' personal savings and led to another round of rioting and destruction. It was at this time that many of the state stores, hotels, cooperative barns, and other buildings in the Shala Valley were destroyed, mostly robbed for their materials (their ruins still litter the landscape). Of even greater importance, the collapse of the regime's practice of transporting food into the mountains during the winter combined with the collapse of controls on emigration to generate a massive movement out of the mountains—initially to Shkodra but also overseas to Italy, the United States, and elsewhere in Europe. The scale of depopulation was immediate and dramatic (more below), especially during the winter. There has been some increase in the returning summer population in recent years, but its continuance will depend on the maintenance and improvement of the roads.

It is hoped that this rough sketch of events in and around the Shala Valley over 2,000 years has already suggested the role of interaction as much as isolation

in shaping the lives of the Albanian *malësorë*. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, however, the direct documentary evidence from within the valley is limited indeed, and this rough history can only get us so far. Instead, we now turn to the categories of historical data that are available, considering each in turn, beginning with the oral traditions of the founding of the Shala Valley communities, a discussion that also provides significant insight into the nature of the mountaineers' social organization.

### Founding Legends of Shala<sup>3</sup>

As discussed in the introduction, at present the word *Shala* designates a river, a valley, and the name of the *fis* or tribe that brought their name to that valley. Studied in combination, old maps, Ottoman records, and the folklore of the region tell a story of the arrival of the current inhabitants of the Shala valley sometime in the fifteenth century. The Shala *fis* arrived as part of a wider movement and redistribution of peoples under pressure from Ottoman conquests, and therefore it will be helpful to consider first the regional toponym of Dukagjin, of which Shala is a part.

Like Shala, Dukagjin is a name the meaning of which has shifted over time. In the thirteenth century, one Gjin Tanushi led a powerful noble family in northern Albania and may have served as an officer in the Byzantine or Serbian armies, earning the title "Dukë" (*Ducam Gjinium Tanuschum Albanesem*), and thus, in Albanian, Dukë + Gjin = Dukagjin, which came to designate the land owned by Gjin Tanushi and his descendants. At that time, it referred to a wholly different region from its present meaning (Albanian Academy of Sciences 2002; Gelasius 1941:37; Shufaj 2002:232). In the earliest records, Dukagjin was a part of the wider region called "Pulti," which encompassed the whole area from Lake Shkodra all the way to Drini i Bardhë (the White Drin River) and at this time was divided into Pulti i Epërm (Upper Pulti) and Pulti i Poshtëm (Lower Pulti). Over time, regional toponyms clarified as families fought each other for control, and by 1454, Pulti included only Postriba, Shala, Shoshi, Plani, Gjani, and Kiri (Sirdani 1934:186–189) (see Figure 1.5). This may be the first appearance of the word *Shala* and seems clearly to refer to the current location.

Under Ottoman administration, the toponym Pulti faded and in general was replaced with Dukagjin,

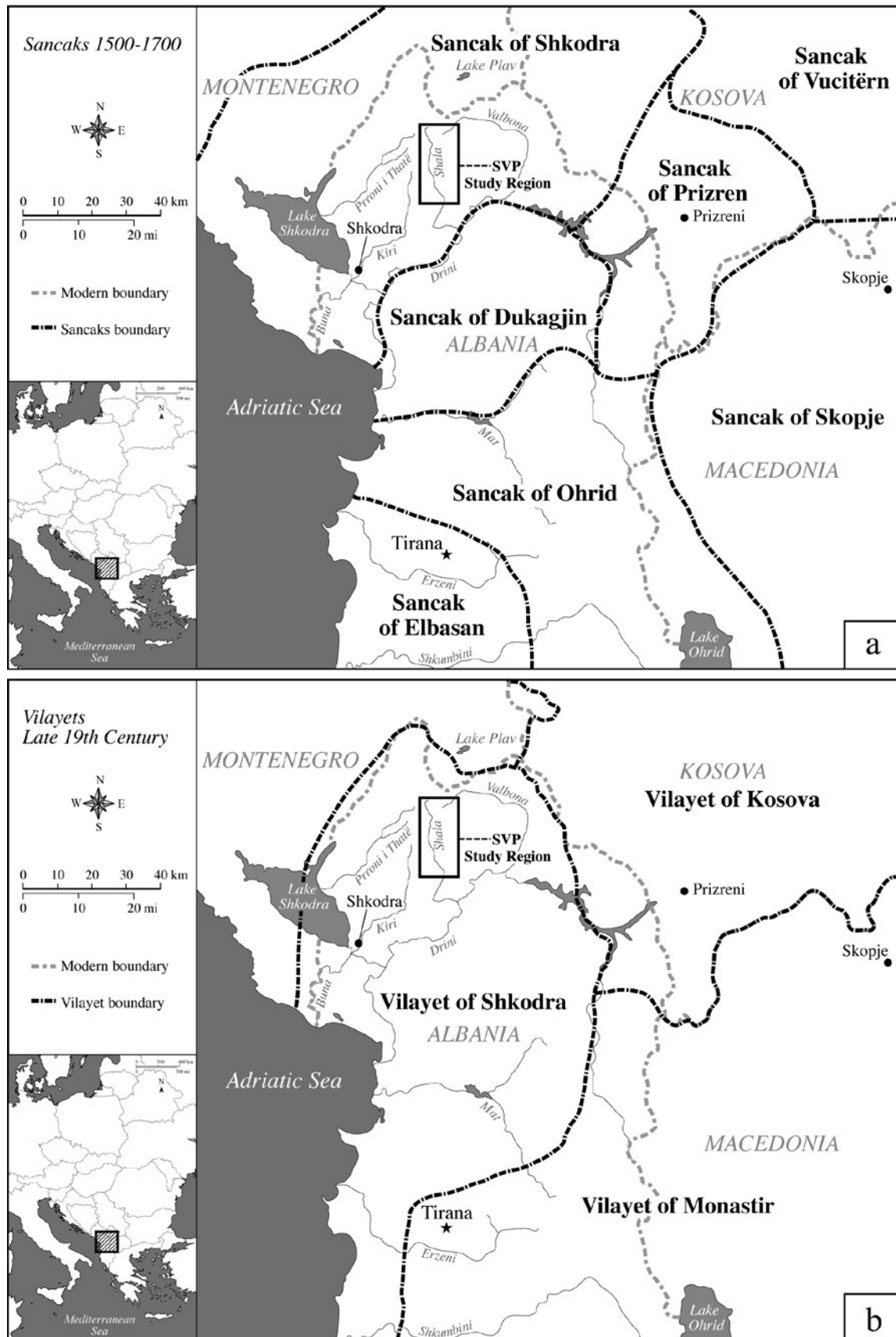


Figure 4.1. Map of Ottoman provincial boundaries: (a) *sancaks*, ca. 1500–1700, and (b) late nineteenth-century *vilayets* (based on Pitcher 1972 and Malcolm 1999). *Jill Seagard*

**Table 4.1** Comparison of Shala *Fis* Origin Stories

Founding Legend: Shiroka			
(undated)	<b>Intrusive Fis Name</b>	<b>Placename</b>	
	Sons of Pep Vladi	Kodër e Thanës (Dogwood Hill) below the church of Shën Prenda in Dednikaj	
	Pecnikaj	“Gurra e Abatit” (Abati Stream)	
	Nicaj?	“Gurra e Nicajve” (Nicaj Stream)	
	Pecaj?	Pecaj	
	<b>Indigenous Fis Name</b>	<b>Placename</b>	<b>Notes</b>
	Koprat	Lekajsh (=Lekaj?)	Driven away by Pecnikaj
	Koxhobot	Abat	Driven away by Pecnikaj
	Bob	“Gurra e Nicajve” (Nicaj Stream)?	Pushed south by “Nicaj”
	Gzhoba	“Gurra e Nicajve” (Nicaj Stream)?	Expelled by “Nicaj”
	Agrin	Pecaj	Expelled by “Pecaj”
	Mavriq	Western side of Lower Shala	Expelled over time
	Shdërvella	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Gapzhella	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Shushella	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Murdat	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Deshk	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Maçk	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Gjakajush	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Dekajush	Unknown	Expelled over time
	Bob and Lopç	Below Abat	NOT expelled or moved
Founding Legend: Sons of Nika			
(as recorded early twentieth century)	<b>Intrusive Fis Name</b>	<b>Placename</b>	<b>Neighborhoods</b>
	Pec Nika	Pecaj and Nicaj	Doçaj, Pjoll, Vuksanaj, Bicaj, Hasanaj, Pap-Nikaj, Mar-Nikaj, Mekshaj, Qukë, Dakaj (part of which is also Nën-mavriqi), Abati (composed of Metushaj, Lotaj)
	Ded Nika	Theth	Okol, Gjellaj, Gjeçaj, Nik Gjonaj, Ndrejaj, Kolaj, Nderly-saj, Ulaj/Camaj, and Grunasi
	Lot Nika	Lotaj	Kolë-Markaj, Vat-Gjeçaj, Gjeçaj, Binoshi, and Troja
	Lekë Nika	Lekaj	Mushi, Rrethi, Pacaj, Gurra, and Qeta
	<b>Indigenous Fis Name</b>		
	Lopçi	Below Abat	
	Bob	South of Vuksanaj	
	Gimaj	Western side of Lower Shala	1931: Dostanicaj, Kapreja, Gagu, Xhaferaj, Buq-Vataj, Gjell-Vataj Present: Camaj, Xhaferaj, Marvataj, Kodër Limaj, Rrog-am, Radojë, and Pjeshullaj, with more distant related neighborhoods in Kaprej and Gak
Cadasters			
<b>Cadasters</b>	<b>Village Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of Households</b>
1485 Cadaster	Shala	Eastern Lower Shala	11
	Mavriq	Western Lower Shala	20
	Bob	Beyond Gates	5
1529–1536 Cadaster	Shala	Eastern Lower Shala	15
	Mavriq?	Western Lower Shala	20?
	Bop	Beyond Gates	8
1671 Gaspari	Shala	Eastern Lower Shala	32
	Bop	Beyond Gates	13
1918 Census			
	<b>Village Name</b>	<b>Neighborhoods</b>	
	Abata		
	Gimaj	Buçvataj, Dostanishaj, Gagu, Gjellvataj, Kapreja, Marvataj, Niklekaj, Nikushaj, Prëklekaj, Xhaferaj	
	Lekaj	Canaj, Dednikaj, Musha, Pacaj, Qeta, Rrethi	
	Lotaj		
	Nenmavriqi	Dakaj, Mëkshaj, Qukja	
	Nicaj	Babi, Marnikaj, Nicaj, Papnikaj, Pjolla, Vuksanaj	
	Pecaj		
	Thethi	Gjeçaj, Gjellaj, Nderlysa, Ndrejaj, Nikgjonaj, Okoli	

although the area encompassed by that particular term has continued to change. In the first Ottoman land registration in 1485, the Ottomans encompassed all of what is now northern Albania, Kosova, and southern Montenegro into the *sancak* of Shkodra, divided into four *kazas*, which further subdivided into *nahiyas*. Shala was in the *kaza* of Podgorica (Pulaha 1974a:4). As administration matured in the 1500s, the region divided into the *sancaks* of Shkodra, Vuçitern, and Prizren and the *vilayet* of Dukagjin. Normally a *vilayet* contained several *sancaks*, but in this case, the “*vilayet* of Dukagjin” was essentially the equivalent of a *sancak*. It lay south of the Drin, encompassing roughly the modern districts of Puka, Mirdita, and Lezhë (Pulaha 1973). As late as the mid-seventeenth century, the boundaries of those four *sancaks* remained roughly the same, but in the nineteenth century, the *vilayets* and the *sancaks* within them were reorganized. Shala now fell within the *sancak* of Shkodra, part of the larger *vilayet* of Shkodra (see Figure 4.1; Gawrych 2006:x–xi; Luka 1981; Malcolm 1999:xxi–xxii; Pitcher 1972: map 26; Pulaha 1973; Sirdani 1934:190).<sup>4</sup> Dukagjin ceased to exist as an Ottoman administrative unit but continued in use as a marker of identity, claimed primarily by the tribes of Shala, Shoshi, and Mirdita—very likely because of their common adherence to the oral legal code handed down as the Kanun of Lek Dukagjini (as discussed in Chapter Five). With the beginning of an independent Albanian administration, Dukagjin reemerged as an official toponym, now as a subprefecture with its headquarters on the hill of Shën Gjergji and including Shala, Shoshi, Toplana, Plan, Gjaj, Kir, Dushman, Shllak, and Mazrrek (Sirdani 1934:191).<sup>5</sup> In short, although Shala has always been associated with Dukagjin as an identity marker, it has not always been administratively within it.

As for “Shala” the *fis*, there are competing traditional accounts of how the *fis* got their name, where they came from, and how they arrived in the valley. It is now impossible to verify any of them, but the different versions suggest some truths about the probable origins of their permanent settlement in the Shala Valley (see Table 4.1). In the most often told version, three brothers from Pashtriku i Gjakovës (Gjakova, in what is now western Kosova) had nothing else to divide among themselves but a *Shalë* (saddle) and a *Shoshë* (sieve or strainer). The first brother got the saddle, the other the sieve, and the last one nothing. The one that got the saddle took the name *Shalë*, the one that got the sieve took the name

*Shoshë*, and the third one who got nothing left saying “*të mirë ditë*” (“a good day”) to his brothers and, for that reason, took the name *Mirditë* (a good day) (Gurakuqi 1931:57). The legend accords neatly, perhaps too neatly, with the process of household division and movement discussed in Chapter Seven.

According to another legend, the Shala tribe came from Shiroka, a region near Shkodër. In this version, the sons of one Pep Vladi fell out with their father for his taking a mistress in his old age and then having a child out of wedlock. Again, in a way much like that described in Chapter Seven, the household split, and the sons left their father in Shiroka along with the bastard child and went to Shala (Palaj 1937:70). The first place they settled was Kodër e Thanës (Dogwood Hill), below the church of Shën Prenda in Dednikaj. Then, in a continuing process of fission and expansion, groups broke off and established new neighborhoods and villages, and in this version of the legend, they had to drive off previous inhabitants. The first to split off was Pecnikaj, who settled in “Gurra e Abatit” (Abati Stream), driving away the Koprati *fis* from Lekajsh and the Koxhobati from Abat. A branch from Pecnikaj then settled in Gurra e Nicaeve (Nica Stream), pushing away the Bob and expelling the Gzhoba. Then the tribe expanded into Pecaj, expelling the Agrin, which had included 70 households and two churches. Then the tribe expanded into the whole territory where it is today, pushing and driving away all the earlier tribes: Mavriq, Shdërvella, Gapzhella, Shushella, Murdat, Deshk, Maçk, Gjokajush, and Dekajush, with the exception of Bob and Lopç (Palaj 1937:70; Palaj and Gurashi 1941:375). This version of Shala’s origin story appears to explain the initial settlement of Lower Shala only, on the eastern side of the river in particular, founded by Pec Nika (see below).

Yet another origin story, based more on records than on folklore, argues that the Shala tribe, together with the Gimajs (more below) and many other tribes, left Kosova in the seventeenth century and settled where they are today (Ulqini 1996:42). However, the fact that Shala was first mentioned in the Turkish registers in 1485 (discussed below) suggests otherwise. Furthermore, an eighteenth-century source claims Shala was mentioned for the first time in 1454, when Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (Skanderbeg) went to Shala to make peace after the death of Pjetër Shpani (Shyti 2008:4; Ulqini 1996:52). Finally, evidence suggests that the Shën Shtjefni Abbey existed already on the banks of the

Shala River, from 1335 until 1405, and was then part of Lower Pulti (see below). The abbey and the tradition of the Shala *fis* driving out other tribes suggests at least some continuity of habitation in the valley, although the archaeological evidence is less clear (see Chapter Nine). It does seem that the majority of the inhabitants came to the Shala Valley after the Ottoman invasion, and there is certainly an unbroken tradition of their continued presence there since then.

Another local tradition, recorded early in the twentieth century, somewhat contradictorily, identifies the Shala *fis* as founded by four brothers, sons of Nika, listed in order of their age: Pec Nika, Ded Nika, Lot Nika, and Lekë Nika (see again Table 4.1). The villages of the Shala *fis* were formed by these four brothers (Figures 3.4 and 3.5). Pec-Nikaj was first, and most senior, and eventually it divided into Pecaj and Nica, which in turn is composed of Doçaj, Pjoll, Vuksanaj i Sipërm (Upper Vuksanaj), Vuksanaj i Poshtëm (Lower Vuksanaj) (and it is divided into Vuksanaj and Bicaj), Hasanaj i Sipërm (Upper Hasanaj), Hasanaj i Poshtëm (Lower Hasanaj), Pap-Nikaj, Mar-Nikaj, Mekshaj, Qukë, Dakaj (part of which is also Nënnavriqi), Abati (composed of Metushaj, Lotaj), and at the bottom of Abat is Lopçi, which Shala found there. The second main village was Dedë-Nikaj (now Thethi), which has divided into Okol, Gjellaj, Gjeçaj, Nik Gjollaj, Ndrejaj, Kolaj, Ndërlisaj, Ulaj/Camaj, and Grunasi. The third was Lotaj, divided into Kolë-Markaj, Vat-Gjeçaj, Gjeçaj, Binoshi, and Troja. Finally, Lekaj, which is divided into Mush, Rrethi, Pacaj, Gurra, and Qeta (Gurakuqi 1931:58).<sup>6</sup> Edith Durham, traveling in 1908, recorded a similar oral tradition, adding the chronological detail that the three main families (Petsaj, Lothaj, and Lekaj) had diverged by 1532 (Durham 1985 [1909]:123). Gimaj and Bob are also inside Shala territory, but their separate origins are discussed below.

Our own ethnographic interviews support some or all of these founding legends, seemingly with an admixture from modern Albanian scholarship filtered through schools. Our first interviews in Theth in 2005 reaffirmed the tradition of common descent from Ded Nika (the second brother), but only a few families could recite a single patriline to Ded Nika, listing 9 to 12 generations of male ancestors. Thethi's residents claim that they arrived there (generations ago) from southern Shala, although some also claim to have come from regions near Shkodër and Rrafshi i Dukagjinit (western Kosova). Those who

offered an explanation always attributed their settlement in Thethi some 300 to 350 years ago to a need to retreat to the mountains in order to avoid conversion to Islam. One source indicated that the settlement of Thethi followed the death of Skanderbeg and the eventual subjugation of Albanian lands by the Ottomans in the late fifteenth century.

In contrast to the interview data collected in Theth in 2005, the respondents from Ndërlisaj and Gimaj in 2007 were able to offer extended genealogical information and lengthier patriline. We collected two patriline that go six generations beyond the founder Shalë Bengu (Shalë-Bengu-Zogu-Shiroka-Gjini-Murrani-Deti). These patriline place the founder of the extended Shala *fis* on the fifteenth generation. This evidence is relevant because it speaks not only to the issue of the original settlement of the valley but also to the origins of the Shala settlers. Given that each generation generally covers a temporal bracket of about 33 years, the collected patriline place the foundation of the Shala *fis* in the valley in the early 1400s. In addition, it seems that the trajectory of settlement may have run from lower to upper Shala with a gradual settlement of the higher reaches of the valley—that is, the villages of Gimaj, Lekaj, and Theth (although see below for an alternate history of Gimaj). There is strong evidence, however, that while the original settlement proceeded from the lower to upper valley, there was also some movement of population in the opposite direction—from north to south—and within the valley. Such is the case of Ndërlisaj, which is a neighborhood of Theth, and perhaps Rrogam (located over the mountain in a subsidiary valley to the east of Shala, midway between Theth and Valbona), both of which were settled as satellite neighborhoods. These satellites may have relieved population growth and accommodated families who had experienced economic and social hardships in their original neighborhoods.

The two extended patriline collected in 2007 also offer new insights into the question of the place of origin of Shala's current inhabitants. The testimony on this issue is rather diverse and sometimes confusing, with some claiming origins in Kosova and others claiming Shiroka of the Shkodra district. There is in fact an extended patrilineage with the name of Shalë in Kosova (located to the northeast of Mitrovica and composed of some 40 villages with a population of 20,000 people) from which some informants claim descent. The issue of *fis* affiliations and shared *fis* names has been treated



by various scholars, and Ulqini (1996:34–57) offers sound analysis in this regard that is strengthened by the data presented here. Because similar toponyms are found throughout Albanian populated lands, Ulqini argues that many *fis* have adopted similar names even though they may not share common ancestry with one another. For instance, we recorded a family name that was adopted from the name of a pasture that they owned. This toponym might then be appropriated by the whole kin-group despite disparate origins. In our case, the genealogical information from our surveys better supports the origins of the tribe in Shiroka.

### Other Tribes in Shala

As the Shiroka founding legend suggests, there is evidence for the presence of other tribes or groups within the valley who were not part of the Shala *fis*. The villagers of Gimaj are now a Shala brotherhood (*vllazni*), “but the Shaljans do not consider them a real part of the tribe,” since the Shala Gimajs are believed to have been, at some time, inhabitants of Curraj i Epërm (Upper Curraj) (Anonymous 2 1932:96; Naval Intelligence Division 1945:171–172). Some Gimajs claim a longer residence (800 years) in the valley than the Shala *fis* and even call themselves natives compared to the others who came later than they did, although the Shiroka-Shala founding legend does not mention Gimaj among the groups expelled or pressured by the newcomers (the list includes Lopç, Bob, Agri, Koprati, Gzhoba, Goxhobati, Mavriq, Marin, Shdërvella, Gapzhella, and Shushella) (Anonymous 2 1932:96). Although in modern times, the Gimajs used the *shalë* (saddle) as their standard, and some Gimajs claim the same origin as the rest of the Shala *fis*, it remains uncertain what kind of tribe it is (Milani 2008:8). Apparently, as late as the 1950s, elderly Shala men, when asked, would state that the Gimajs were not of the same tribe as Shala and say, “We live and work together with the Gimajs but we are not brothers” (Milani 2008:8).<sup>7</sup> Other sources have suggested that the Gimaj family originated in the Kelmend tribe, and yet another definitively claims that “Shala has two flags, the Shala flag and the Gimaj flag” (Milani 2008:8).<sup>8</sup> Its most likely origin seems to have been as an expansion into the Shala Valley from Plan (to the west), and as a separate tribe, it had its own *bajraktar* (flag bearer). In 1931, Gimaj was divided into the neighborhoods of Dostanicaj, Kapreja, Gagu, Xhaferaj, Buq-Vataj, and

Gjel-Vataj (Gurakuqi 1931:59).<sup>9</sup> At present, attesting to the mutability of local toponyms based on family dynamics, the villagers recognize Camaj, Xhaferaj, Marvataj, Kodër Limaj, Rrogam, Radojë, and Pjeshullaj, with more distant related neighborhoods in Kaprej and Gak (Figure 3.5).

The Bob (or Bop) tribe is more clearly distinct. Originally and still in the Nicaj neighborhood of Shala, it has only a few households. When the Shala *fis* moved into the valley, they found Bob there, in addition to a number of other tribes (listed above) whom the Shala tribesmen expelled (Gurakuqi 1933:96). According to local tradition, as reported by an 83-year-old resident, Bob (along with Nën Mavriq) is the oldest settlement in the valley and was occupied before most of the inhabitants of the valley arrived. The priest Pjetro Stefano Gaspari, who wrote an extensive account of different areas of Albania in 1671, noted that the Bob village in Shala “included 13 households with 58 people” (Gaspari 1930 [1671]:495). Most of the Bob *fis* moved, under pressure from Shala, to the Puka region, in the Firë and Kokë-Dodë villages, with perhaps yet further extensions to Kaçanik in Kosova (Gurakuqi 1933:96). Ernesto Armao’s 1933 commentary on Gaspari noted that the village still had only 13 houses as of 1905, and the Austrian census of 1918 also found only 12 houses and 73 persons (Austria 1918). Armao reported that they were considered part of the Shala tribe, although he also notes the tradition that the inhabitants of Bob were descended from a people predating the Shala *fis* (Armao 1933:41). This legend has yet another twist, in which the northern mountains were inhabited by an “indigenous” smaller and darker people, referred to as *anas*, who were mostly driven out, but in Shala, eight families remained, presumably at either Bob or Lopç (Durham 1985 [1909]:70, 123). Interestingly, the word *anas* means the people on the edge, that is, a people peripheral to the larger tribe, who thus could be “older, indigenous” or simply be considered marginal to the larger tribe. At a council of the tribe, for example, their representatives would occupy the margins of the gathering.

The toponym Mavriq presents another interesting case. There is some suggestion that the Mavriq people were originally non-Albanian speakers, and their descendants have been attested in Shala, Theth, and Curraj i Epërm (Upper Curraj). They were believed to be warriors based at Dakaj (discussed in Chapter

Nine), which later led to a neighborhood down the slope from the fortress there being called Nën Mavriq (“below Mavriq”). One argument is that these people were under the command or rule of a Roman leader named Mauritius, later changed to Mauric and then later into Mavriq. When the Shala tribe moved in, they expelled the Mavriq people, who then moved to Maja e Zezë (Black Top), settling in Curraj i Epërm (Upper Curraj), from which they were expelled as foreigners with Ottoman assistance in the late seventeenth century (Anonymous 2 1932:96–99). Pulaha’s work on the Ottoman 1485 cadaster shows a village called Mavriq adjacent to “Shala,” and some of the inhabitants’ names are clearly Slavic, and one hints at a tie to the “Koman” culture, which had formed in the larger region in the early Middle Ages (see the first section of this chapter) (Pulaha 1974a:149). All of these hints suggest at least a limited occupation in the lower Shala Valley in the Medieval period, which would appear to fit the archaeological data reported in Chapter Nine.

Our own ethnographic interviews support the tradition of Mavriq and Bob having been inhabited prior to the coming of Shala’s current inhabitants. The Mavriq were eventually outnumbered by the growing Shala population and may have been pushed to the brink of extinction, while Bob befriended the new inhabitants and adopted their *fis* identity, thus becoming *fise të shoqñue* or a “befriended” *fis*.

## The Church Administration in Shala

Of particular interest in this early history is the toponym of Abat, where the Shala church is today (it is in fact called the “church of Shala”). *Abat* is Albanian for “abbot,” and there are clearly ruins of a large housing complex associated with the modern reconstructed church. Medieval records place the Shën Shtjefni Abbey (*S. Stefanus Major de Ypolatum*) on the bank of the Shala River from 1335 until 1405. It is at least probable that this is a reference to the church in Abat, since it has also recently been referred to as the church of Shën Shtjefni (Palaj and Gurashi 1941:370).

It took some time for Catholic administration to catch up with the movements of the Catholic tribes. The first recorded mass was held in Mavriq by the Franciscans at Easter in 1636 by Father Benedict (Benedetto da Soligo) (Palaj and Gurashi 1942:263). He and Gregoria da Novara were the first Franciscan missionaries

who lived in Shala. They came from Mirdita, together with priest D. Gjon Gallata as an interpreter, around the end of January 1636. Prior to that time, Shala had neither a priest nor a parish but was instead a “villa” under the administration of the priest in Plan. Even after 1636, Shala rarely had a continuous or consistent number of priests. After Soligo and Novara, a father Antonio da Sara is recorded having served in Shala but is said to have been killed by the Turks in 1648 or 1649, and after that, Shala remained without its own parish priest for some time. Even the date of the formation of the Shala parish is not clear. The Apostolic Prefecture of Pulti in Shosh, which had Shala under its jurisdiction, was formed in 1747. One Franciscan document suggests that Shala had its own parish by 1754, but the Shala parish registers only date back to 1763. There is other contradictory evidence. In 1721, Cardinal Giuseppe Sacripanti wrote to the prefect of Kastrat that he needed to send the missionaries of that place to Shosh because Shosh was then being served by the Shala missionary. This might suggest that Shala had its own parish before 1747, even before 1721. It is clear, however, that prior to 1700, Shala was not mentioned at all as its own parish but as a “villa” managed by missionaries in transit or by some priest of the diocese (Palaj and Gurashi 1942). Gradually, Shala would become the center of Catholicism in the mountains of Dukagjin.

## Conclusion

All these legends, collected by individual interrogators at different times, with different motives, produced a bewildering array of possibilities, and it is unlikely that they can ever be adequately disentangled. Studying them, however, brings out certain key characteristics, which in turn have found support in our archaeological investigations (see Chapter Nine, in particular). The very multiplicity of the legends suggests that the idea of a single tribal lineage, descended from a particular apical-ancestor, generating all the current inhabitants of Shala is unlikely (even setting aside the issue of marriage being exogamous). There were most likely multiple, or even semi-continuous, streams of movement into Shala, perhaps a group from Shiroka at one point, another from Kosova later, and individuals or single families throughout. Furthermore, the scattered archaeological evidence for Medieval habitation, as well as the repeated

if obscure references to pre-1400, pre-Shala *fis* inhabitants, suggests at least some continuity of habitation, if on a smaller scale. Dakaj was clearly a place of some strategic importance that had long attracted settlement. The Shala “tribe,” like other tribal peoples under pressure from surrounding states, drove out some existing inhabitants, incorporated or confederated with others, and then over time absorbed newcomers.<sup>10</sup> Such new arrivals, faced with a locally dominant group of patriarchs, would progressively have come to identify themselves as a part of the Shala *fis*. Some did retain a separate identity longer (as Bob, or Bop, seems to continue to do, and Gimaj, although less so), especially when they continue to live in a coherent separate community. But individual families who arrived and took up residence within existing villages would likely have come to adopt the Shala *fis* identity within a generation or two. In some ways, this process is reflected in the Kanun, which includes a process for incorporating a brotherhood from outside the tribe into a village (Gječov 1989:72). Local tradition relates the process by which residents evaluated the suitability of newcomers for acceptance into the group. They invited the newcomers to a feast but deliberately placed the food on the *sofra* (a low communal table) a bit out of their reach, on the far side of the table from them. If the newcomers reached out and pulled the table and the food on it towards them, this was taken as a sign that they were suitably strong-willed and apt for inclusion. Merely the existence of such a practice, and the memory of its use in the present, suggests a more or less constant ongoing process of incorporating new arrivals, probably most often as single families, into the valley community and eventually into the *fis*. In this way too, in addition to armed resistance, the *malësorë* negotiated their relationship with the outside world and successfully adjusted their social structure in response to eco-systemic needs and outside pressures.

### Venetian and Ottoman Sources on the Northern Albanian Frontier, 1400–1750<sup>11</sup>

As the founding legends suggest, the Ottoman Empire has played a crucial role in the social formation of the Albanian mountaineers in modern times. No doubt there was great continuity in tribal structure from the pre-Ottoman era, but very little direct historical evidence for that period can be recovered (despite frequently repeated claims of the “timelessness” of the tribal system [e.g.,

Fischer 1999]). Most of the historical records for the region were generated by the imperial ambitions of the Venetians and the Ottomans, and those records reflect primarily imperial administrations and competitions in the coastal regions, revealing only dimly the processes of life in the higher mountains. Nevertheless, since our project was meant to address the nature of the mountaineers’ “isolation,” examining Venetian and Ottoman records for what they tell us of their interactions with the mountain tribes is helpful. This section, therefore, deals with the Venetian, Papal, and Ottoman records of the northern Albanian frontier roughly from the time of the Ottoman ouster of the Venetians from Shkodra in 1479 (with some prefatory material) through the middle of the eighteenth century, when Venice had virtually disappeared as a regional power, and when for the Ottomans more historical literature and a wider array of sources begin to become available.

### Skanderbeg

The early era of Venetian activity in Albania has been studied exhaustively by Schmitt (2001) and does not need repetition here. The era of Skanderbeg’s resistance (or rebellion) against the Ottoman Empire has also generated a mountain of historical scholarship, most of which falls outside our concern with the Shala Valley. As our aim is to convey what Venetian and Ottoman sources exist for the history of northern Albania in this period, however, we would be remiss to omit any mention of Marino Barlezio’s works. Barlezio, or Barletius (ca. 1450–1512), who is known as Marin Barleti in Albanian, was born in Shkodra and was present at the Ottoman siege of the town in 1478. His narrative *De Obsidione Scodrensi* (*On the Siege of Scutari*) was published in 1504. His other major work relevant to northern Albania is his study of George Scanderbeg’s life and works, *Historia de vita et gestis Scanderbegi, Epirotarum principis*, of 1510. For Skanderbeg’s swings between Ottoman and Christian loyalties, in particular, we have the chronicle of Kritovoulos, a Greek who stayed in Constantinople after the Ottoman conquest, as well as works by Ottoman historians such as Neşri, Tursun Bey, and Aşıkpaşazade. Among Ottoman sources, the chronicle of Aşıkpaşazade is also helpful for Murad II’s advances in northern Albania. Finally, Inalcık has listed property deeds in the Topkapı Palace Archive referring to Scanderbeg’s father and the prince himself, indicating

that they were *fief* (*timar*) holders in Mus and Yuvan-eli, respectively, in northern Albania (Encyclopedia of Islam 1954–2009 s.v. “Iskender Beg”).

## The Attractions of the Region: Soldiers and Minerals

One of the prime attractions of northern Albania for any would-be hegemonic power was manpower. The inhabitants’ ferocious reputation as soldiers ensured their military employment. Although religious ideology might lead men to take up arms in the service either of Venice or the Ottomans, the career of Skanderbeg himself, the Albanian national hero, is evidence for the flexibility of loyalties. The so-called *Chronicle of John Musachi*, a family history written by a scion of one of the leading north Albanian clans in 1515, describes how Skanderbeg (raised as a hostage at the court of Murad II to ensure the good behavior of his father in Albania) fled after the Turks were routed by the Hungarians; became lord of the fortress of Kruja, or Croia, through a ruse; and promptly reconverted to Christianity (Musachi 2003 [1515]; the story of his being raised as a hostage comes from Barletius 1504). The career of the Albanian-born poet Yahya Beg Dukagjini (ca. 1498–1582) offers another example of the tendency of empires to mine northern Albania for soldiers. He was levied into the Janissary corps, as a member of which he took part in the Battle of Çaldıran against the Safavids in 1514 and the campaign into Egypt in 1516–1517, as well as other campaigns down to the last of Süleyman the Magnificent, the siege of Szigetvar in 1566 (Elsie ca. 2005).

In addition to becoming a mainstay of Ottoman armies, Albanians became famous in western European service as mercenary *stradioti*, a kind of irregular light cavalry widely used in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Admittedly, there is some question about the extent of out-migration for this purpose. Millar (1976) suggested that the *stradioti* of sixteenth-century Europe, who served mostly in the Italian wars but also as far away as England, were expatriate refugees from Skanderbeg’s failed war at the end of the fifteenth century, and as the first and perhaps the second generations of those men died, they were not replaced by native Albanians. As a result, it is likely that the term *stradioti* quickly lost any precise ethnic or national connotation. The Venetian humanist Coriolano Cippico,

for example, who wrote about the *stradioti* in Venetian service in the late fifteenth century, made it clear that some were Greek, some Albanian (Sathas 1888:liv). The Shkodra region, however, continued to be known for irregular light cavalry in Ottoman service and in European service (Anonymous 1 2003 [1570]:64), and the Venetian statesman Paolo Paruta’s posthumously published (1605) history of Venice and its expansion specifically mentions *stradioti* from the *sancak* of Dukagjin (Paruta 1605:104).

Occasionally, we can document the presence of Albanian *stradioti* in the same theater fighting on both sides at once, although northern Albanians were more likely to fight on the Venetian side and southern Albanians on the Ottoman side. For example, the anonymous Venetian chronicle on the situation of Antivari (Bar) and Dulcigno (Ulcinj), probably dating to 1570, describes the southern *sancaks* as having furnished soldiers to the Ottoman war effort on Cyprus:

*The sancakbeys of Vlora, of Elbasan and of Ohrid set off with all of their cavalry, summoned by the Grand Turk, to go, as they said, to Caramania for the war in Cyprus, whereas the sancakbeys of Shkodra and Dukagjin [more northerly sancaks] remained at home [Anonymous 1 2003 [1570]:64].*

It is not implausible to imagine that the continuous cold war along the Ottoman-Venetian frontier, and the occasional lapses into outright war between the two states, led to situations where families were divided and where brother was pitted against brother, father against son.

In many respects, this kind of mercenary activity may have remained a relative constant since the days of Philip II and Alexander the Great of Macedon. In the Greek historians’ accounts, the mountain tribes of Illyria, when threatened, were able to melt away into the mountains but for the right price could send out bands to serve larger, better organized states to the south (Hammond 1989; Wilkes 1992). Only weapons and tactics had changed: firearms were increasingly in evidence in the fifteenth century, and well-armed tribes were celebrated for their proficiency with the weapon until about the time of independence, when King Zog attempted to enforce a disarming of the mountain tribes (see the first section, above).

Soldiers were not the only natural resource that northern Albania could supply—of particular note were copper and silver mines (Inalcık and Quataert 1997; see

also Chapter Three, this volume). We should specify that the silver mines of Kratova, the richest in the area, were not in modern-day Albania, but not far to the east, in the Republic of Macedonia. Novo Brdo and Srebrenica, also prosperous Ottoman mining areas, lie in what is now independent Kosova and Bosnia-Herzegovina, respectively. But, like the Spanish following rumors in their search for El Dorado, the Ottomans may have pushed into the Shala area spurred by the discovery of mines further east. In fact, it appears that the Ottomans recognized the need to act carefully to retain the favor of the Mirditë tribes, south of the Shala Valley, because they controlled the route between Prizren and Shkodra and later Tirana (Bartl 1978:28). It was therefore perhaps not mines themselves but the routes to those mines that mattered to the Ottomans in northern Albania.

As early as the first Ottoman forays into the Balkans, the value of the silver mines was recognized, and the late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century historian Hadidi wrote the following lines on the subject:

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*Enthroned was Bayezid Han.  
Replaced his father, became Sultan.<sup>12</sup>  
The Karatova silver mines.  
Chambers full of treasures.  
To Skopje was sent Pasha Yiğit Bey.  
Vidin was conquered [Inbaşı 2002:94].*

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The rights over Kratova's mines, however, were ceded back from the Ottomans to Venice in 1526, a sign of how both empires valued them (Beldiceanu 1964; Refik 1931). Perhaps because scholars seem to have paid more attention to the Serbian and Bosnian mines than Albanian ones (Inalcık and Quataert 1997; Jireček 1879), Albanian mineral resources have been comparatively neglected; yet the copper mines of Prishtina, in the Kosova region, had considerable value for the Ottomans, and their importance should not be underestimated as a stimulus for Ottoman expansion into the region.

In times of war, religious ideals may have shone forth clear and unambiguous, but in the long intervening periods, commercial interests generally drove Venetian and Ottoman policy in Albanian lands. Venetian ambassadorial correspondence attests to the many ups and downs in the Venetian-Ottoman relationship, such that Venice was at times the determined enemy of the Turk and at times his "courtesan," as Philip II of Spain once remarked (Braudel 1974). If economic interests seemed to drive

the Ottoman-Venetian rivalry, the rivalry was not always violent: at the height of Süleyman the Magnificent's fame in 1546, six years after the conclusion of another bitter Ottoman-Venetian war, the Ottomans accepted 25,000 Venetian ducats and conceded a monopoly on alum mining within the empire to Venice (Inalcık 1977).

## The Beginnings: From 1385 to 1463

With these attractions of the region in mind, one can turn to the first arrival of the Ottomans in Albania in the fourteenth century. They were at first content to raid into the hills of Albania, without any definite intention to create permanent settlements. The situation there was disordered and marked by rivalries among various lords. Later accounts written by Christian Albanians in the sixteenth century stress that even within families, there were instances, as with the Dukagjin clan, where brothers split along the Christian-Ottoman divide (Musachi 2003 [1515]). During this period, the Ottomans were often at first content to establish a vassalage relationship over local lords and only later, for various reasons, would they feel compelled to send in a full army of conquest and establish territorial and bureaucratic control (Inalcık 1954a). A guiding principle for the advancing Ottomans made much of by Ottomanists for this early period was *istimalet*, a term found in the fifteenth-century chronicles and often rendered in English as "accommodation" (Inalcık 1991; Lowry 2003, 2008). Conversion to Islam was rarely coercive, and local laws and customs were generally incorporated into the Ottoman *kanunnames*, or law codes, to the extent that Ottoman officials were willing to put in the effort to investigate what laws had prevailed at the time of the conquest or *fetih* (literally, "opening") of a given area. This was true for Hungary, Bulgaria, and many other Christian-majority areas beyond Albania. Skanderbeg's rejection of vassalage in many ways can be held responsible for the full Ottoman conquest, and that war also led to the direct Ottoman-Venetian confrontation in northern Albania. As that competition ebbed and flowed over the next three centuries, so too did the nature of the frontier between them.

## The Ottoman-Venetian Frontier

At many points in Venetian history, commissions were appointed to settle the Venetian-Ottoman boundary,

especially after each of the Venetian-Ottoman wars. The office was formalized in Venice in 1537 as the *Provveditori sopra i Confini*. It would be altogether too easy to assume that the Venetians and Ottomans envisioned the process of “frontier adjustment” in the same conceptual terms. The most plausible interpretations of Ottoman frontiers in Europe follow Rifa’at Ali Abou-el-Haj (1969) in pushing back the Ottoman acceptance of a demarcated frontier in Europe all the way to the peace of Karlowitz in 1699. Superficially, to be sure, Ottoman maps such as the *Mappamondo* by Ali as-Sharafi of Sfax dating to 1551, as well as Katip Çelebi’s *Planisphere* of the early seventeenth century, look like those available to Venetians in the same period (Pinna 1996). This does not mean that both sides really thought of frontiers in the same way. In fact, given the widely divergent legal traditions on each side regarding borders, territory, and war, it should not surprise if there were in fact great differences in conceptualization (Brauer 1995; Brummett 2007; Encyclopedia of Islam 1954–2009, s.v. Harb: Ottoman Empire; Kasaba 2009). The Ottomans of the sixteenth century, following the medieval Islamic conception of the world, interpreted their western confines largely in terms of the distinction between the *dar al-Islam* and the *dar al-Harb* (the House of Islam and the House of War). A third area, the abode of peace, or *dar al-Sulh*, was also discussed in juristic circles, coming down from such texts as the early jurist al-Shaybani’s Arabic text *al-Siyar*, and influenced how the Ottomans dealt with the Albanian, Ragusan, and Hungarian fronts. They appear also sometimes to have taken seriously the idea of an *uc*, a frontier or buffer zone (Heywood 1999:239, 244). Nonetheless, no party in the Albanian lands in the Early Modern period very often observed legal niceties, and by the time of the peace of Karlowitz in 1699, the Ottomans agreed that there was a need to appoint commissioners to sit alongside those of the Hapsburgs and of the Venetian Republic, and the *Mühimme Defterleri* in Istanbul would preserve their boundary demarcations (Abou-el-Haj 1969:469–470).

The question of border adjustments in the entire littoral contested between the Venetian and Ottoman empires enjoyed, however, at least one rock of relative stability: the Republic of Ragusa, which, as Anselmi and others have noted, did not change boundaries from the fifteenth century to the end of the Venetian Republic in 1808 (Anselmi 1974:34n2; Carter 1971;

Harris 2003; Krekič 1997). It will be helpful in this context to briefly review the major Ottoman-Venetian conflicts and how they affected the northern Albanian frontier.

### The War of 1463–1479

The War of 1463–1479 began as part of the ongoing Ottoman effort to defeat Skanderbeg, but, after his death from malaria in 1468, native Albanian resistance began to collapse, and the Ottomans carried on against Venice and its possessions and allies in the region. Through the treaty that ended the war, the Venetians lost the fortress of Kroia/Kruja, as well as the city of Shkodra and its hinterland (in Ottoman sources, the town would be called Iskenderiyye thenceforth). At the end of this long and debilitating war, the Venetian ambassador, Benedetto Trevisan, went to Constantinople to define the borders and was followed in 1481 by another Venetian representative, Niccolò Cocco, who visited Mehmed II and faced the sultan’s demands for the return both of Police/Bolizza in Albania and of Vatika in Greece (Theunissen 1998:134). These precedents would lead to a whole series of similar efforts after each Venetian-Ottoman war. At the conclusion of this war, the two *sancaks* that included the Shala and Shoshi homelands were established: it is not always clear which of the two *sancaks* could claim these areas. The *sancak* of Shkodra was administered from Shkodra, while the *sancakbey* or governor of Dukagjin had his headquarters in Kruja.

### The War of 1499–1503

During the war, in 1501, the Ottomans conquered Durrazzo/Durrës. The treaty of 1503 that marked the end of this war left certain territorial questions unresolved, and so it was only later, in 1506, that the Venetians formally ceded Alessio/Lezhë to the Ottomans (Fisher 1948; Theunissen 1998).

### The War of 1537–1540

During this war, the Venetians lost Coron and Modon in the Peloponnese, the so-called two eyes of the Republic, as well as Napoli di Romania. In Dalmatia and Albania, the borders remained more or less unchanged.

## The War of 1570–1573

By the time of the outbreak of the War of 1570–1573, only Zara, Sebenico, Traù, Spalato, and Cattaro, as well as a few Aegean islands, Crete, and Cyprus remained in Venetian hands (Anselmi 1974:34n2). After the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, the Christian-Ottoman conflict generally moved from the sea to the land, and the Ottomans pressed their advantage along the land front (Tamborra 1974). The war was fought on fronts all around the Mediterranean and eastern Europe, including northern Albania, and it may have played a role in spurring an increase in the number of Albanian rebellions in the next century. It certainly seems to coincide chronologically with the mountainous center of the *sancak* of Shkodra ejecting the *timariots* and the *timar* system (see the first section, above). In addition to the broad trend toward an increase in land warfare between the Ottomans and both the Venetians and the Hapsburgs, the seventeenth century also saw the creation (in 1631) of the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, a missionary organization based in Rome that sent missionaries out to the Balkans. Their correspondence is preserved in the Vatican Secret Archives and suggests that their personal geographic origins were from all over the Italian peninsula.

## The Seventeenth Century

Such priests were far from politically neutral. Mariano Bolizza, for example, Archbishop of Antivari and author of a long relation dating to 1614 on the people and politics of northern Albania, in 1598 called on the Albanian people to launch an outright rebellion against Ottoman rule (Bolizza 2003 [1614]). In his 1614 relation, Bolizza discussed the ensuing revolt of the Clementi/Kelmendi tribe (their homeland was modern-day Kelmendi, just west of the Shala region).<sup>13</sup> During this revolt, it is not clear what side the Shala and Shoshi tribes were on; Bolizza gives the impression that the region was in fact deeply divided and that the Ottomans were able to win some tribes to their side with bribes of money, with offers of offices, and through simple intimidation. Further evidence of their political role can be seen in an episode during the Venetian-Ottoman war for Crete (Candia) of 1644–1669.

## The War of Candia, 1644–1669

Venice and the papacy both conceived of the missionary effort in Albania as part of a general understanding in

Catholic Europe that civilization went hand-in-hand with Catholic preaching in the benighted parts of the world, rather than cynically exploiting missionary fervor to further commercial and other material interests. Furthermore, the contents of the *Fondo Missioni Francescani* in the Vatican do not suggest that Venice took an active hand in guiding or directing these missionary activities. Venice's role was limited to offering places of refuge for Catholic missionaries in those lands that remained in Venice's hands, notably around the Gulf or so-called *Bocche* (literally mouths) of Cattaro. Nevertheless, it is difficult in the Early Modern era to disassociate religion and politics.

Marko Jačov has discussed the 1648 rebellion in northern Albania within this missionary context. He has published a letter suggesting that the execution of two Franciscan friars, Giacomo da Sarnano (or Sarnani) and Ferdinando da Genova, amply documented in the Vatican Secret Archives, was related to the Venetian-Ottoman war for Crete (1644–1669) then raging, a war that boasted a front in Dalmatia and Albania as well (Jačov 1992:170, Document no. 95). There exists in the Vatican Secret Archives a lengthy *busta* crowded with reports on this martyrdom, as it is generally described. The main *relazione* of the death of the two friars stresses that they were given the option to convert or die; there follows a description, in excruciating detail, of the deaths of the two, stressing that although one died instantly, the other was forced to endure seven hours on a pole, while Turks pelted him with mud and poured out insults upon him. As his goal is to establish that these two men were martyrs, the author of the *relazione* spares no effort to tell his story in a way that recalls Christ's crucifixion (ASV, *Fondo Missioni, Francescani* 10, *Fascicolo* 2, 2 verso).

This *busta* is typical of the early modern Italian ecclesiastical reports on Albania in one respect: little to no attention was paid to the everyday workings of the society in which the missionaries found themselves. The relations generally concern themselves with the general ecclesiastical situation in Albania (of which the most prominent example is the *Concilium Albanum* of 1703) and/or the niggling details of gossip about the strengths and weaknesses of various priests and the material needs of various parishes in terms of ecclesiastical objects (one *relazione* dating to about 1756, for example, requests a certain sum of money to pay for a dispenser of holy water in the diocese of Scutari) (ASV, *Fondo Missioni*, 105, *busta* labeled “Ristretto,” 3 verso).

Almost nothing appears in these documents on Albanian tribal divisions and customs. Folkloric beliefs come up only negatively, insofar as they posed difficulties to legitimate Catholic practice. The bishop of Scutari, for example, in about 1788, disapproved of the northern Albanian practice of pronouncing formulae of exorcism over fields to protect them from swarms of locusts:

*It has always been done in these parts, and is still so today, that when sown fields become infested with vermin, locusts, or other damaging insects, they call the priests, and that they recite prayers, in the course of which the same use a certain book, entitled Collection of Blessings of the Priest Sannus [?], in which one does nothing but repeat "I exorcize you, you pestilent worms, and I abjure, and I hold you as anathema"—I cannot excuse from superstition this means of exorcizing irrational creatures: it is to be determined if we ought to allow still this way of behaving in such emergencies, or to forbid it, and one has to ask what rule might be invoked to do so [ASV, Fondo Missioni, 105, f. 5 verso].*

Furthermore, the correspondence of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith repeatedly references the Council of Trent and the regulations laid down at that time. There would seem to have been churchly blinders on, in short, and their overriding goal of normalization of religious practices in a Tridentine mold may have impaired their ability to recognize cultural features that might have worked to their advantage. Despite these disadvantages, the Catholic position reasserted itself triumphantly in the nineteenth century in northern Albania, after a low ebb during the eighteenth century, when a great many local notables converted to Islam, during what is often called the Age of the Ayans (McGowan 1994).

Even by the seventeenth century, however, conversion to Islam could be an attractive option, so that the very priest, Stefano Gaspari, who wrote a long account of northern Albanian political and ecclesiastical organization from 1671, was described in a letter of some years later as having converted to Islam (Tacchella 1984).

That northern Albanian society was convulsed by the land fighting during the War for Candia in 1644 and 1669 is difficult to deny, on the basis of the many Venetian reports indicating the devastation of areas formerly under Venetian control. Marko Jačov (1998:386), in his recent studies on Catholic missions to the Balkans

during the seventeenth century, cites a letter from one Fra Donato Jelich da Spizza, dated April 17, 1652, which mentions the sorry state of Catholic sees in the region: "The vacant sees are those of Dulcigno, Sfacia, Shkodra, Drivasto, Pulati, and Diocleia." The picture is, however, quite mixed, and certain accounts, even when written about the same geographic areas, are difficult to reconcile with each other. For instance, a letter of 1674 from Nicolò de Nigris, Apostolic Vicar and missionary in northern Albania, to his superiors, notes that the Bishopric of Pulati/Pult, where he worked, was large and flourishing:

*The diocese of the Pullatensian see in Albania extends four days' journey in length, and three days' journey in width. Eight thousand Christian souls make it up, approximately, without any mixture of Turks, divided into many lands and villages. Altogether a mountainous and bitter land [Jačov 1998:307].*

By contrast, a letter sent just eight years later in 1682, by one Giorgio Stampaneo, who gives his title as Abbot of the Mirditi, laments a frightful situation:

*He holds forth his most humble sentiments of Truth, moved by nothing but pure zeal, and Christian charity, and to expose to his Beatitude the deplorable state of Christians, who find themselves in the afflicted land of Albania, deprived of Catholic ministers, while in two hundred Christian communities and more, no priest is to be found who can administer the most holy sacrament [Jačov 1998:531].*

## Sancaks, Cadasters, and Dioceses

Over the course of this long confrontation with Venice, the Ottomans progressively refined their administrative and territorial control over Albania. In the wake of the initial conquest, they followed their traditional practice and introduced several leading officials into each of the Albanian cities they conquered: *kadis*, or Islamic judges; *naibs*, or deputy *kadis*, from whose title the term frequently read in Ottoman cadasters, *nahiye*, derives; and in the administrative centers, *sancakbeys*, each of whom ultimately answered to the Beylerbey of Rumelia, who for this entire period was based in Sofia.

The first Ottoman *sancak* in Albania was that of Arnavut, sometimes transcribed *Arvanid*, including the following principal places: Argyrocastro/Ergiri, Kanina, Belgrade/Berat, Iskarapar, Bratushesh, and



Akçahisar (Inalcık 1954b). A critical component of Ottoman administration was to prepare a cadaster, or census, which determined the taxes due from peasants but also indicated who had legal claims to land (although technically all land was owned by the sultan, and titles were withdrawn upon his death). The second Albanian *sancak* was Ohrid, founded about the second decade of the fifteenth century and based in what is now southwestern Macedonia. The date is approximate, for the Ottoman chronicles of Uruc and Aşıkpaşazade are confused on this point. This was followed by the third, the *sancak* of Berat, founded about the same date (Patsch 1904). The *sancaks* of Dukagjin and Shkodra were founded around the same time shortly after the Ottoman conquest of the city of Shkodra in 1479. To judge from the Ottoman cadasters studied by Pulaha, the borders of the *sancak* of Dukagjin stayed relatively stable throughout the sixteenth century, although the extent of real control within those boundaries ebbed and flowed.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, northern Albania was also divided into Catholic dioceses. Two of the major dioceses, which the documents call to our attention as the site of active missionary activity and political agitation among the tribes, were that of Sapa and Sarda, on one hand, and of Pulati, on the other. The Concilium Albanum of 1703, a document that consists of Italian churchmen's assessments of the state of the Church in Albania and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the Balkans, offers important testimony to the mobility of the Albanian population (although whether this was due to transhumance, or simply a frequent displacement in search of other sorts of gainful employment, is not specified):

*At the root of all dissension, there is just the bringing-up of axes. This action sows every evil, confusion in the diocese, and violation of jurisdiction [ASV, Concilium Albanum (1703), Fondo Missioni, busta (folder) no. 88, Chap VII, p. 66].*

This intriguing phrase seems to suggest that, among the northern Albanian tribes, there was something like the (perhaps imaginary) Native American custom of unburying the hatchet as a start to fighting. Another complaint of the anonymous ecclesiastical observer was the following (and the language might here, too, be compared with that of American military officials vis-à-vis the Native Americans):

*Often, there obtains the abuse that families, which are going forth from one diocese on a brief journey, settle down within the borders of another see [ASV, Concilium Albanum (1703), Fondo Missioni, busta (folder) Chap. VII, p. 66].*

These migrants apparently presented a bureaucratic nightmare for the Catholic hierarchy, since when family members died in neighboring sees, they were said to bury their relatives in neighboring sees, rather than their own, and then felt obliged to frequently visit the graves of their loved ones, confusing the count of Christian souls in various parishes.

Here a brief consideration of the Catholic organization of northern Albania is in order. The dioceses are described with admirable clarity in a document dating to about 1755, the very end of our chosen period, from the *Fondo Missioni*, of the Vatican Secret Archives. The anonymous author was concerned with one of the major functions of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Eastern Europe, opening schools:

*There are six bishops of Albania. First, that of Antivari, where there can be no schools because of the Turks. Second, that of Pulati, where there are no priests, but Friars alone. Of these two, it is useless to write. Third, Sappa, where there is the school, which is paid each year 50 scudi, where there remains nothing to do, save to take to the bishop a copy of the new Decree, so that in the future he will regulate himself according to the same. Fourth, Scuttari, where the school has not been built because that bishop supposed it to be impossible, and because of the difficulties which are met with from the Turks. However, Zogorezzi, the Vicar, supposes that for the young people of Scuttari, one could open the school in Pulati, which is not far away, entrusting it to someone in the church; wherefore it is necessary to communicate this project to the bishop of Scuttari. Fifth, Alessio: to this bishop, one must ask whether there are two, or but one school under his supervision, that is one built on the order of the Holy Congregation after the year 1748, or the other founded by the money left by Master George Vladagni, bishop of Alessio. It is not possible that they both exist, and perhaps neither does, not the first, because the Holy Congregation has not paid for it since the year 1754, and the second, because with twelve scudi it is not possible to maintain a school. Sixth, Durazzo. To this bishop, one must write that it matters little whether the school opens at Corbino or Ressella [ASV, Fondo Missioni, 105].<sup>15</sup>*

The depressing ecclesiastical situation painted here suggests that Islamization had taken off, a conclusion that many Ottomanist historians have drawn as well.

## Propaganda on the Frontier

One of the themes that the Ottomanist historian Inalcık (1977:84) has forcefully propounded has been that of conscious Ottoman efforts to undermine Venetian authority among the Christian masses through a policy known as *istimalet*—winning hearts and minds, in modern phrasing. The term has been taken up by other Ottoman historians such as Murphey (1993) and Lowry (2003, 2008). Whether this term was used by contemporaries or accurately describes the Ottoman policy while expanding to the west in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is not clear. It is generally agreed, however, that the Ottomans deliberately revoked feudal dues in many Orthodox areas of the Balkans. Equally common is the view that Venice never learned alternatives to the blundering heavy-handedness in its dealings with eastern Europe, as evident in the Fourth Crusade of 1204. It pays to recall, however, that between 1390 and 1450, Venice accepted rule over many Orthodox areas (for example, Antivari/Bar in 1390 and Thessaloniki in 1423) at the invitation of the local inhabitants, rather than against their wishes (Schmitt 2001). Admittedly, the political winds changed direction after the Council of Trent and the Catholic Reformation, when (in the late 1570s) Pope Pius V established a Congregation for the Reform of the Greeks, which in practice tried to prevent the Greek rite from being recognized as equal to the Latin anywhere in Italy. But debates within the Roman Church as to the status of the Greek rite had little effect in northern Albania, where the Orthodox were a tiny minority and Catholicism predominated. In these regions, at least from 1390 to 1479, as Schmitt (2001:572–578) has argued, Catholic bonds to the locals had strengthened the Venetian position. Furthermore, the Ottoman attacks on Zara, Spalato, and Shkodra in the 1470s left devastation in their wake and no doubt helped to demonstrate to the Albanians the need for the aid of a stronger outside power.

## Conclusion

Early modern Venetians and Ottomans, competing for control of northern Albania as a part of their long, larger struggle for control of the Mediterranean, agreed on the ferocity and potential utility of the *malësorë* (Armao 1933:101; Atsız 1978). Crucially, however, neither side ever gained full control over the high mountains during

this period. The Ottomans may have briefly claimed it but quickly reverted to the soft power methods discussed in the first section of this chapter. The Venetians were interested in the *malësorë* more indirectly, as irritants to the Ottomans, who could be stirred up from a distance, and they were able to do so at least partly through the separate mechanism of the Catholic Church's interest in maintaining the region as part of a unified Catholic world. Very little emerges from these sources from the point of view of the mountaineers themselves, except for their persistent ability to negotiate their peripherality, deploy isolationism, and maintain their autonomy; their equally persistent engagement with the outside world, as a source of resources; and as agents to be resisted and dealt with.

## Travelers, Routes, and Trade<sup>16</sup>

Accounts of the movement of people and goods, surviving as maps or in travelers' reports, constitute another major source for reconstructing the local and regional history of Shala. The evidence of routes carries us back into the Greek and Roman era, but the most revealing travelers' accounts are concentrated in the seventeenth century and then again in the mid- to late nineteenth century through the early twentieth. This section reviews that evidence with an emphasis on how it speaks to the economic and political connections of even the most isolated *malësorë* with the rest of the region, and often with the Mediterranean as a whole.

Numerous routes of trade and travel span northern Albania, connecting Adriatic ports to the Balkan interior. The main artery was the "Lissus-Naissus Road" (hereafter LNR), which ran from coastal Lissus (modern Lezhë) to Naissus (modern Niš) (Adami 1983:37–40, 49–51; Brahaj 1994; Hoxha 2003:19–20; Përzhita and Hoxha 2003:13–20; Wilkes 2006). Niš is located in southern Serbia near the Morava River, which provides access north to the Danube, south to Greece via the Vardar, and east to Constantinople via the Maritsa—thus its strategic and economic importance. The road followed portions of the Drin River (the ancient Drinos or Drilon), most of which were submerged when the river valley was dammed in the 1980s (Figure 4.2).

The LNR features prominently in the earliest maps of the region, such as the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (hereafter TP), a thirteenth-century copy of a fourth-century

original that depicts the Roman road system (Miller 1916). According to the TP, the first leg of the LNR ran from Lissus to Ad Picaria (modern Puka, although Vig is suggested as an alternative by Hoxha 2003:20, following Baçe 1977:94), a distance of 30 Roman miles (about 44 km). Between Lissus and Ad Picaria, near Vau i Dejës (Dagno; see Saraçi 2001–2002), the LNR met the Dalmatian coastal road, which connected Adriatic ports, such as Rhizon (on the Bay of Kotor), Antibaris (modern Bar), and Olsinium (modern Ulcinj), to Shkodra (Adami 1983:36–37; Hoxha 2003:16, Figure 6). From Ad Picaria, the road went east to Theranda (modern Prizren in Kosova) by way of Creveni and Gabuleo (modern Va Spas and Kukës), covering an additional 130 kilometers (Përzhita and Hoxha 2003:14–16 *contra* Nopsca 1929:651–652 and Evans 2006:174, who suggest a more northerly route via Valbona and Gjakova, the so-called *Rruga e Gjauri*

[cf. Perzhita and Peja 2005–2006:256]). It is at Kukës that the White and Black Drin converge.

That the LNR existed already during Roman times is indisputable; the southern boundary of the Roman protectorate of Illyricum, which was established in 167 B.C., followed the Drin River. That it was also important in earlier periods is indicated by the attention paid to northern Albania by Alexander the Great, during the so-called Illyrian campaign of 335 B.C. (see, e.g., Arrian 1971, Book One). Among the “Illyrian” peoples who occupied northern Albania were the Labeates, with their capital city at Shkodra; the Grabaei; the Dassareti; the Chelidonians (the “snail-eaters”); the Pirustae, including the Scirtari—famed miners who were moved by the Romans from Montenegro to Dacia—and, in what is today Kosova, the Dardanians, the main thorn in Alexander’s side. These assorted “tribal” groups appear to have had Iron Age, if not earlier, roots, as attested

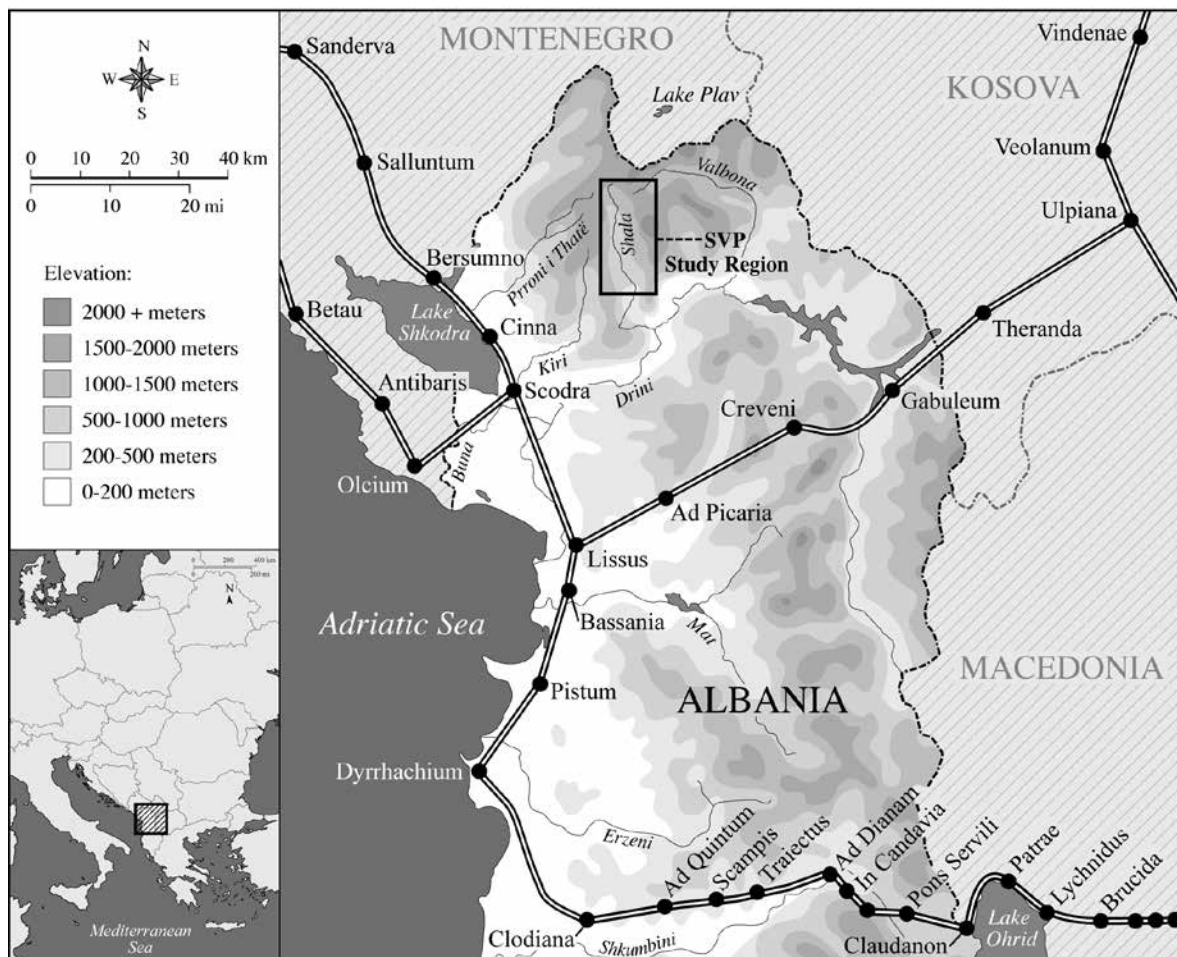


Figure 4.2. Map of the Roman road network in northern Albania, including the Lissus-Naissus Road and Roman waystations (adapted from Hoxha 2003:Figure 6, p. 16). Routes continued in use into the modern era. *Jill Seagard*

by the numerous prehistoric cemeteries found scattered throughout the north of Albania, along the Drin and in clusters at strategically important places. Prehistoric *tumuli* (burial mounds) and open cemeteries are found on the Shkodra plain (i.e., “Mbishkodra”), at places like Shtoj (Koka 1985) and Shkrel (Jubani 1995), near Kukës (Jubani 1974b), up the valley of the Valbona River (e.g., at Bujan [Andrea 1995]), and in Rugova (Shukriu 2004), just over the Qafë Peja from Shala. Cemeteries typically accompany fortified settlements, such as Rosujë near Bujan (Ceka and Jubani 1971), built on high ground along routes of transportation. These may be described accurately as “waystations” and “relay”-stations (Roman *mutationes* and *mansiones*, respectively) (Wilkes 2006). Many of these fortified settlements (*castella*) had pre-Roman origins (Përzhita and Peja 2005–2006), and some were expanded and embellished in later periods, in particular under Justinian I (A.D. 483–565), who rebuilt castles throughout Byzantine territory, 69 of which, according to Procopius, were in Dardania alone (Përzhita and Hoxha 2003:126). *Castella* and cemeteries thereby mark key roadways throughout northern Albania, from prehistoric through Byzantine times.

Justinian’s strengthening of the Byzantine northern frontier did not prevent, however, the Slavic invasion, which began in earnest in the sixth century A.D., plunging the region into a so-called dark age. Northern Albania experienced a cultural florescence in early Medieval times, associated with the Koman Culture, which appears to connect “Illyrian” material culture and practices to those of the high Middle Ages. The epicenter of the Koman Culture was the site of Koman, located on a mountaintop midway along the Drin River (Nallbani 1999–2000). In later Medieval times, northern Albania came under the influence and control of various external powers, including the Bulgarians, Normans, Serbians, and Venetians. It was during this period that regional ethnic and linguistic frontiers hardened, dividing Orthodox Slavs from Catholic Albanians. Different portions of northern Albania were controlled by great, feudal families, such as the Zaharia, Dukagjini, and Kastrioti (Winniffrith 1992), all of whom fought for control of the LNR, with a focus on the fortress at Dagno (Hodgkinson 1999:84–91).

Most authors emphasize the LNR’s economic importance, in contrast to the more overtly military Via Egnatia, which connected central Albania to Thessaloniki via Elbasan (e.g., Adami 1983; Brahaj 1994). After their

conquest of northern Albania in the fifteenth century, the Ottomans exercised only a nominal sovereignty over the high mountains. They, however, were greatly interested in securing cultivable land and lucrative trade routes, including the LNR. In Ottoman times, caravans—some with hundreds of horses, hauling, among other goods, loads of salt (see Hodgkinson 1999:47–48, who cites documents in Thalloczy et al. 2002 regarding the importance to Ragusa of the Drin River salt trade)—plied the LNR, going back and forth from the Adriatic to bazaar towns in metal-rich Kosova and beyond. Some Western travelers joined such caravans, which were led by professional traders, called *kirijeas*, and traveled from *han* to *han* (a *han* was an Ottoman inn) (e.g., MacKenzie and Irby [1971 (1877)] in 1861, Graves [1933] in 1912, Glück [1892] in 1891, Hassert [1898] in 1898, Tozer [1869] in 1865, and Brown [1888] in 1888, who hiked in a blizzard through “20-foot drifts”).

*Notwithstanding the poor condition of the only connecting road between Prizren and the Adriatic coast, there exists here a lively movement of goods. I was met on my way through the mountains by 300 laden horses, carrying the wares of greater western Europe from Scutari to Prizren and Rumeli [Grisebach 1841, 2:324–325, visited in 1839].*

As Grisebach approached the coast, traveling from *han* to *han*, he was able to buy more southern fruits (probably figs, lemons, and oranges—as identified by von Hahn [1854, 1:109]) and was surrounded by people who could speak Italian. He even found it necessary to remind himself that he was in the Albanian mountains (Grisebach 1841, 2:355).

The safety of these caravans was of paramount concern to Ottoman officials. In theory, they enlisted the *malësorë* as *derbendçis* (see the first section, above), who would participate in securing the road. In actuality, the *malësorë* were as likely to plunder the caravans as guard them. The LNR passed through the middle of *malësorë* territory, and they also inhabited the main road’s subsidiary routes, such as those that ran through Pulti, Toplana, and Tropoja via the Valbona River and, of course, Shala. In fact, a road encircled the whole of the Prokletija mountain range, splitting from the LNR at Prizren and running north to Peja, west through Rugova to Montenegro via Gusinje, Plav, Podgoritza, and Dolea, a capital, along with Shkodra, of the Roman province of Praevalis (established in A.D. 297), and south via

ancient Cinna (possibly located near modern Kopliku; Hoxha 2003:19) back to Lissus. Many modern, Western travelers took this northerly route, too, but their passage was often blocked by conflicts between Montenegrins, Turks, and Albanians, in Plav and Gusinje, for example (e.g., Cozens-Hardy 1894; Tozer 1869; see Spencer 1851:11–12 for a description of this route).

Several key themes regarding routes of trade and travel in northern Albania can be extracted from the cartographic record and from travelers' accounts (Table 4.2). Mžik and Nopsca provide detailed descriptions of all maps that include northern Albania, both "Islamic" and Western (in Nopsca 1929). The earliest of these is the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, described above. Several other examples of early maps of the Balkans exist, such as the "world" maps by Ptolemy (ca. A.D. 150, extant copies date to the fifteenth century) and Fra Mauro (ca. 1450) (Nopsca 1929:652–653), but these present few details. The "Islamic" maps, such as those by Idrisi and Halifa, produced in the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, respectively, are for the most part equally lacking in detail (Nopsca 1929:640–649). The exception is the map, drawn by Pulaha (1974b), that shows the locations of

places listed in the 1485 Ottoman cadaster (tax record) for the *sancak* of Shkodra. Shala is represented by villages at Mavriq, Nicaj, and Bop but, curiously, not Theth (see discussion, above). Detailed Western maps of northern Albania first appeared in the seventeenth century. The first of these to depict Shala ("Sciala") is that by Coronelli, which dates to 1688 (Figure 4.3). Coronelli identifies four villages in the valley of the "Lestinichie" (Shala) River: Theth gia' ville, Sciala V<sup>a</sup>, S. Veneranda, and Robbi, all of which are in the district of Pulati Superiore. Each of these toponyms is attested historically (Armao 1933). Cantelli produced a similarly detailed map of Albania in 1689, partly copied from Coronelli (Theth is labeled "Thethigia"), but adds the village of Murichi, which must be Mavriq, associated with the fort and church at Dakaj. Many of the eighteenth-century maps appear to have been copied from Coronelli and Cantelli (Nopsca 1929:677–690) and add little detail, although scale and perspective were corrected.

It is perhaps no accident that the first detailed maps of northern Albania appeared in the seventeenth century since it was then that the first travelers visited the region (Table 4.2): for example, Marino Bizzi (2003 [1610]),



Figure 4.3. Detail of the map by Coronelli (1688) showing the region of Shala. Adapted from a copy of the original by Jill Seagard

**Table 4.2** List of Travelers' Accounts Related to Shala through Time, with Place of Origin and Date

Traveler	Nationality	Year	Route
Bizzi, Marino	Italian	1610	Dukagjin to Prizren via Kolsh and Kukës
Çelebi, Evliya	Turkish	1660	Shkodra to Gjakova via Spas
Gaspari, Pjetto Stefano	Italian	1671	Pulati including Shala
Boué, Ami	French	1836–1839	Prizren to Shkodra
Grisebach, A.	German	1839	Prizren to Shkodra
Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich	Montenegrin?	1830–1841	Northern Albania
Spencer, Edmund	British	1850	Plav, Gusinje, Peja, Gjakova, Berisha
Mackenzie, Muir and A. P. Irby	British	1861	Lissus-Naissus Road, Prizren to Shkodra
Tozer, Henry	British	1865	Shkodra, Mirdita, Prizren
Knight, Edward	British	1878	Kelmend
Evans, Arthur J.	British	1880	North Albania, including Valbona (Shala-Shkrel in feud)
Brown, H. A.	British	1887	Shkodra to Prizren, Lissus-Naissus Road
Glück, Leopold von	German	1891	Shkodra to Prizren, Lissus-Naissus Road
Baldacci, Antonio	Italian	1897	Shkodra to Shala (Abat) via Q. Boshit, Shosh, Q. Peja, Toplana
Hassert, K.	Austrian	1897	Shkodra, Mirdita, Prizren, back to Shkodra; Shala via Q. Boshit, Shosh, Kir
Ippen, T.	Austrian	1897–1902	Throughout northern Albania, including Shala
Nopsca, Franz Baron	Austrian (Hungarian)	1900–1910	All over northern Albania, including Shala
Steinmetz, Karl	Austrian	1903	Mati, along Drin
Le Quex, William	British	1906	Shkrel, notes Shkrel-Shala feud
Durham, M. Edith	British	1908	Through north, including Shala
Louis-Jaray, Gabriel	French	1908–1909	Drin Road to Kukës from Prizren, south to Mirdita
Graves, Robert	British	1912	Peja to Shkodra via Prizren, Lissus-Naissus Road
Warfield, William	American	1919	Northern mountains, including Shala
Lane, Rose Wilder	American	1921	Shkodra to Shala
Gordon, Jan and Cora Jospheine	American	1925	Shkodra to Shala via Bog, south to Shosh, Gjoani
Coon, Carleton	American	1929	Through north, including Shala
Fraseri, Stavre	Albanian	1929	Through north, including Shala (with Coon)
Chater, Melville	American	1930	Shkodra to Shala via Bog
Hadwen, E. H. L.	British	1931	Mirdita, Kosova, Shala, Shkrel, Shkodra
Newman, Bernard	British	1935	Shkodra to Theth return via Kir
Mathews, R.	British	1934	Shala via Bog
Lord, Albert B.	American	1937	Shala
Kolleger, Willibald	Austrian	1942	Shkodra and Theth
Amery, Julian	British	1944	Kukës, Lissus-Naissus Road

who went from “Dukagjin” to Prizren via Kukës in 1610; Evliya Çelebi (1999), the Turkish geographer, who traveled from Shkodra to Gjakova via Mati and Va Spas in 1660; and Father Pjetto Stefano Gaspari (1930 [1671]), who was sent to the region of Pulati (Pulti), including Shala, by the Vatican on a fact-finding mission in 1671. Fifteenth-, sixteenth- and eighteenth-century travelers, such as Cyriacus of Ancona (1747)—who visited Shkodra in 1436 and saw nothing “worthy of recollection” (p. XXII)—generally stuck to the coast or were warned away from the interior by Ottoman officials, as was the case with Lorenzo Bernardo (1591), a Venetian ambassador en route to Constantinople in 1591. The 1400s, 1500s, and 1700s stand in stark contrast, therefore, to the 1600s and 1800s. During the latter centuries, travelers penetrated the northern Albanian interior, whereas in the former, they did not (Figure 1.13).

As alluded to above, the northern Albanian caravan routes were secured by Albanian chieftains but were also attacked by them. Such individuals often appear in the historical records and travelers' accounts as “bandits,” Turkish *haydud*, but this term was applied very loosely by the Ottomans (Anscombe 2006:88). Some bandits were indeed brigands who had taken to a life of thievery, some were cattle rustlers or in feud, but many were mercenaries in the employ of Turkish and Albanian “notables” (*ayan*) who had other, economic and political objectives (Anscombe 2006:89). For example, Robert Graves, who traveled from Peja to Shkodra via Prizren in 1912 in the company of the Turkish Interior Minister, Hadji Abdil Bey, noted that their caravan was attacked twice, once near Gjakova and once near Kukës (Graves 1933:262–263). The latter ambush was organized by Ram Razkok, a chief of the Ljuma

tribe (Figure 1.5). Razkok had participated in a recent rebellion—the 1911–1912 uprising caused by northern tribal dissatisfaction with reforms in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution—and had been offered amnesty, which he rejected because it did not come with guarantees of personal safety and further promotion in the local gendarmerie (Graves 1933:263). This is only one example of many such acts of “banditry” that appear in the travelers’ accounts. Clearly, such attacks were not motivated by greed or desperation only; rather, they were linked to deeper economic and political factors. Furthermore, according to Turkish sources, banditry in the Balkans, much of which was instigated by Albanians, reached epidemic proportions in the late seventeenth century in the aftermath of the wars between Russia and Austria, in which many Albanians served (Anscombe 2006:88–89). In 1802, Ali Pasha of Tepelena was put in charge of controlling mountain banditry (Anscombe 2006:104–105). Ali Pasha was named *derbendler başbuğu*, supervisor of the guardians of the gorges, but he ended banditry not by closing the passes—cross-mountain trade was too lucrative; rather, he forced “bandits” to settle down or migrate (Anscombe 2006:105). As a consequence, Albanian trade along caravan routes boomed in the nineteenth century (Anscombe 2006:105), which is precisely the period during which Shala was first visited by Western travelers in great numbers (beginning in the 1830s, which is, not coincidentally, the point at which the Tanzimat reformation of the Ottoman Empire began). It seems likely, therefore, that trade routes through Albania, including the LNR, were disrupted on a cyclical basis and that disruptions can be linked to international, as opposed to purely local, forces.

Generally speaking, periods of rebellion, banditry, and disruption of trade and travel occurred during the late 1500s and early 1600s, and in the mid- to late 1700s and late 1800s. By contrast, the later 1600s and early 1800s were periods of relative calm, although they, too, were punctuated by occasional tribal revolts (see above and Figure 1.13).<sup>17</sup> By the early twentieth century, Albania had become unstable again, primarily as a result of the Balkan Wars, the declaration of Albanian independence in 1912, World War I, and resistance to the rise of King Zog (see above). Unlike earlier periods, however, Western interest in and travel to Albania continued apace through the late Victorian era and in the aftermath of World War I, especially

during the Zog administration (Table 4.2). Shala was a particularly popular destination, in part because the new government had completed a road over the Qafa Thorës in 1934 (described in detail by Ronald de Coves Matthews [1937:110–111], who traveled the road as it was being built), but also because, as Jezernik (2004) asserts, Western travelers had discovered and popularized the Balkans, including Albania, as an exotic, “Oriental” culture, worth visiting, and within easy striking distance of Italy. Shala itself became the exotic, Albanian destination of choice. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travelers’ reports regarding northern Albania, including Shala, are, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Nopsca), certainly overly romantic, emphasizing the isolated and autochthonous, even primeval, nature and history of the Ghegs. With regard to Theth, Durham (1985 [1909]:119) wrote,

*I think no place where human beings live has given me such an impression of majestic isolation from all the world. It is a spot where the centuries shrivel; the river might well be the world's well-spring, its banks the fit home of elemental instincts—passions that are red and rapid.*

Despite their hyperbole, these reports, if read with care, are useful.

What individual travelers wrote about northern Albania, including Shala, and how they perceived the culture and condition of the mountaineers, was dictated by their personal interests and background but also by national origin and religious affiliation. In many accounts, travelers recorded and reinforced tribal oral histories that emphasized flight from the Ottomans, isolation, resistance, and continuity. In others, they described abject poverty, endemic violence, and a general lack of stability. The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between.

Italian priests who visited northern Albania were concerned with the work of the Church in remote valleys and the general ignorance there of Catholic dogma, but they were also quite aware that social conditions often mediated against adherence to Catholic beliefs and values. Gaspari (1930 [1671]), who visited Shala in 1671, described men who were “well armed, vigorous, and free” (p. 495) but the land as “rocky and barren” and unable to produce wheat, which he proposed to import from Gjakova and Prisren (p. 497). Without food support, he feared poverty would cause the people of Pulati to “abandon their faith” (i.e., convert to Islam). Other,



later travelers further emphasized that the mountaineers were a proud, but poor, people and that their poverty was heightened whenever trade and travel through the mountains was hampered (e.g., Chater 1931:182 who described the scarcity of food in Shala). The American Red Cross mission to Albania, which began in 1919 in the aftermath of World War I, sought to alleviate the perceived suffering of mountaineers by providing factory-made woolen clothing, undergarments in particular.

*The need for food, while great, was second in importance to that of clothing. Whole droves of sheep had been commandeered by Austrians during their occupation of the country, since wool was a necessary factor in the manufacture of high explosives. . . . [We evolved] a plan whereby the needy could receive a supply of warm clothing. [We gathered at] Hadji Achmed's mill on the Mezi River on the outlying plains of Scutari on Sunday afternoon, Sept. 14. The Shala Tribe had been selected as the beneficiaries for the day. . . . many had come a two-day's journey. Their way lay through the country of a hostile tribe, but for the day the vendetta was suspended, and the tribesmen were allowed to come and go in peace. Great mounds of clothing were piled in an improvised tent by the side of which proudly floated the Stars and Stripes. Around the flag staff were stacked dozens of rifles, a telling proof of the confidence in which the Americans are held by the natives.<sup>18</sup>*

The point that northern Albania's poverty in 1919 was not a result of World War I, but was rather caused by the closing of the border between Montenegro and Albania in 1913, thereby blocking access to traditional market towns, such as Gusinje, which was of particular importance to Shala, was made forcefully by Red Cross Captain William Warfield, Director of the Red Cross Unit in Albania, in separate letters to Captain R. S. Doman and Lt. Col. Henry W. Anderson, both of whom were stationed at the Red Cross Balkan headquarters in Bucharest, Romania. Warfield made a one-week trip through northern Albania in May of 1919. He observed that

*at present, the serious problem in the mountains is the inaccessibility of the market towns. . . . All the valleys leading away from Lake Scutari have been cut off by the frontier troubles from the natural markets. Notably the people of Klementi, Nikai, Shala, Grashi and Grasnichi are likely to be in serious difficulty not later than the month of May on account of the closing of the Montenegrin frontier, the destruction of the important market of Gusinje and the isolation of Djakova.<sup>19</sup>*

He went on to note that families throughout northern Albania (at least 350 in Shala alone) would need food relief and that if such relief was not forthcoming, then "there will be an increase in the unrest on the frontier and probably bands will be formed to engage in armed attempts to secure food." Warfield's letters also addressed the claim, made at the time by Edith Durham (first presented in great detail in her book *The Struggle for Scutari* [1914]), that the Montenegrins were persecuting Albanians who lived in their territory and driving them out of their villages. He reported that 2,000 Albanians had come over the mountains from Gusinje and Plav and were refugees in Shkodra. Ultimately, though, Durham blamed frontier problems on the Great Powers: "I repeat emphatically that I find it hard to believe that the frontier drawers of Berlin can have been so badly informed as to have done these things in crass ignorance. Why shove the Austrian down on the Slav and the Slav down on the Albanian unless bloodshed and race hatred were desired?" (2001 [1909]:19).

The frontier border between Montenegro and Albania appears again and again in travelers' accounts, reinforcing Reinkowski's (2003) thesis (see the first section, above) that the relationship between the free Montenegrin state and the Ottoman Empire and, later, an independent Albanian nation based in Tirana, conditioned the relationship of the northern Albanian tribes to the outside world (also Blumi 2003a:239). Many Western travelers tried to reach the frontier, Gusinje in particular, although few were successful. Those who approached the frontier from the Montenegrin side had the most luck. One of the first to describe this region was Edmund Spencer (1851), who went via Plav and Gusinje to Peja in 1850. Roy Trevor (1911) and his companions went from Podgorica to Kolashin in Kosova by automobile in 1909. Along the way, at places like Gusinje, they saw many Albanians who had checked their guns at the border and come into Montenegro to trade. Edith Durham (1985 [1909]:134–147), on the other hand, was frustrated in her initial attempts in 1908 to cross the Qafë Peja from Shala to Gusinje, which had been closed to foreigners; she described the village as the "Lhassa of Europe" (1985 [1909]:131). Cozens-Hardy (1894) likewise failed to reach Gusinje but provided a colorful description of the "bandit" Mula Zeka, who had stirred things up in Gusinje and then fled to Rugova to hide from the Turkish governors in Peja. Edward Knight (1880) and his companions, who were



British students, were turned back from the border in 1878 by active fighting; they had wanted desperately to see tribal warfare and head hunting (pp. 204, 213–214, 219). Finally, Sir Arthur Evans (1880) went to visit the famous monastery at Dechani in Kosova via Valbona and Gjakova; he had wanted to approach via Peja but could not reach Theth and the Qafë Peja because Shala and Shkrel were in feud. These reports of fighting along the border were not, it seems, exaggerated. Agnes Conway (1917), who visited Shkodra in 1914, provided a detailed description of its English governor, Colonel (later General) G. F. Phillips. According to Conway (1917:188–189), “all” the northern tribes came down from the mountains to pledge their support and ask for help against the Montenegrins, who were “perpetually raiding Albanian cattle across the frontier.”

Several travelers who went to Shala, such as Edith Durham (2000 [1909]), Margaret Hasluck (1954), Rose Wilder Lane (1923), William Kollegger (1942), Bernard Newman (who traveled all of Albania, with the exception of Shala, on a bicycle named “George” [1936, 1938]), and Jan and Cora Gordon (1927), who visited Shala in 1925 and paint a positively idyllic picture (see Figure 1.9), were keenly aware of such processes but nevertheless chose to emphasize isolation from, versus interaction with, the outside world (see Chapter One).

In contrast, the European and American scientists, who traveled all over northern Albania, were generally more objective, emphasizing the climatic and environmental difficulties of living in the mountains year-round and the resulting need for contact and trade with the outside world. A good example is Antonio Baldacci, an Italian botanist who visited Shala in 1890. Baldacci (1917) described in great detail his itinerary, including travel times and the weather on particular days (e.g., it was too cloudy for him to see Shkodra from the Qafa Nermajns between Shala and Nikaj; p. 313), and of course the vegetation (e.g., lots of hawthorne growing at the Qafë Boshit between Plan and Gimaj Shala, which he thought might be cultivated as a medicine, p. 313). J. G. von Hahn (1854), an Austrian, and Gabriel Louis-Jaray (1913), from France, both described regional geography and then argued for a railway across northern Albania to Thessaloniki. A large number of scientific travelers in northern Albania were geologists or had an interest in the region’s geology, often with mining in mind (e.g., Ami Boué 1854). The northern Albanian traveler *par excellence* was, however, Franz Baron Nopsca (see, in particular, 1910,

1912, 1925, 1929). Nopsca was an Austrian (ethnically Hungarian) paleontologist who lived in Shkodra for many years in the early twentieth century, during which time he made numerous lengthy trips into the mountains. From 1907 to 1932, he published 54 works devoted to Albanian studies, providing a wealth of information on the history of northern Albania. Other travelers to Shala were archaeologists, such as Sir Arthur Evans, mentioned above, and Teodor Ippen (e.g., 1902, 1906, 1907), who was the Austrian consul to Shkodra from 1897 to 1903. The famous musicologist, Albert Lord (1948:43), a student of Milman Parry, collected over 100 recordings of epic verse in Shala in 1937. Finally, the Harvard anthropologist, Carleton Coon (1950), toured all of northern Albania, including Shala, in the winter of 1929–1930 (see also Frashëri 2002), measuring heads in an attempt to support his views on racial origins. Such morphological studies were all the rage in early twentieth-century anthropology. In fact, Nopsca (1912:242–244) described no fewer than 18 such studies in Albania alone prior to 1912. Coon (1950) was, like many of the other physical and social scientists who traveled to northern Albania, open to the idea that the northern Albanian tribes were in fairly continuous contact with each other and the outside world. Contact was indicated in his morphological data—or so he thought—but also in the accompanying social data he collected for each subject, which indicated that highlanders had to visit the plains, if anything, to meet their need for certain products, such as metal goods, tailored clothing, and ammunition, that they could not get in the mountains (see below). The world of the Albanian mountaineer was not so small as it was sometimes made out to be.

Finally, the many reports produced by British and American operatives, who parachuted into Albania during World War II, provide a fascinating glimpse of the northern tribal system just prior to Communist rule (Bailey 2008). None were stationed in Shala, but at least two British operatives took up residence in Nikaj-Mërtur (they were Tony Neel and John Hibberdine; see Amery 1948) to monitor traffic on the LNR from Kukës to Shkodra, both of which were occupied by the Nazis. Of the mercenary activities of northern Albanians, Amery (1948:9–10) wrote,

*Such enterprise had ever been a time-honoured means of livelihood among the Albanians; and, if the Eastern Question had caused the ruin of their merchants, it had also*

*created boom conditions for their mercenaries. Such indeed had been the influx of gold and arms into the mountains in the past hundred years that it was perhaps not too much to say the whole economy and strength of many of the clans had become dependent on subsidies received for "political services" from the Central Government or from foreign Powers. Nor were the chiefs the only ones to gain, for the profits of a mercenary leader depend on the strength of his following. The rival chieftains competed for the support of the smaller fry; and these passed in and out of the orbits of their betters according to their hopes of wealth or fears of defeat. Thus in time the foreign gold circulated down to the poorest shepherd.*

Albania in 1944 sounds a lot like Albania in 1802, when the Ottomans faced a similar situation. But in the aftermath of World War II and with the rise to power of Enver Hoxha, much was to change for the northern tribes. In 1931, the British vice-consul to Albania, E. H. L. Hadwen, visited Shala and reported that the tribal system there remained "unbroken," still organized under the leadership of its *bajraktar*. But by 1945, their carefully cultivated autonomy had finally failed and the Communist government had begun the slow and systematic process of dismantling the tribal system.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to generalize from such a disparate body of personalities observing a society that many of them did not fully understand. The more informed and specific observations are used frequently elsewhere throughout this book. The overall sense, however, is clearly one of interaction, although an interaction negotiated and contested by the *malësorë* themselves. Trade routes essential to others passed through their territories, and with them came goods from the rest of the Mediterranean and even the wider world (not least the zebra skins mentioned by Coon). Their own trade routes, necessitated by the difficulties of mountain subsistence, extended out into that wider world and often demanded violent efforts to protect them. But even the cyclical disruption of trade routes, and the ability or inability of travelers to enter into certain areas of the mountains, seems to be linked to international, as opposed to purely local, forces.

## Demography<sup>20</sup>

Any social and economic analysis requires some basic demographic data on the community in question.

Population shifts, especially in relation to local subsistence carrying capacity, markedly affect other social formations. For mountain peoples, the issue of carrying capacity is perhaps even more acute. Many of the conclusions in various portions of this book relate to certain basic demographic assumptions. Unfortunately, as sensitive as mountain peoples are to population pressures, they are often the least well documented (but see Viazzo 1989 for the Alps). This section reviews the demographic documents that are available, provides some assessment of their reliability, and, most important, estimates population trends within the Shala Valley over the long term. For the sake of space and ease of understanding, the following analysis examines only those documents that record population counts for "Shala" and, for more recent years, the village of Thethi. It does not attempt to track population change in the wider region, except in the most modern records, in part because the meaning of *Dukagjin* or *Mirditë* has varied substantially over time. Even *Shala* or *Thethi* has meant different things at different times, but we have a better understanding of what settlements fell within those specific toponyms over the past 500 years than we do for the larger regional designations. Even so, no single statistic presented here can be relied upon absolutely, but the trends seem reliable. Chapter Seven returns to the issue of how the population expanded or contracted on a local level, by analyzing the built environment specifically. In addition to presenting the basic data here, this section also addresses three issues directly related to demography: the tribal household structure, the ratio of men to women in the mountains, and the potential role of military work in relieving population pressure.

One further clarification is necessary. Very often population statistics for Albania (especially prior to the twentieth century) were reported in terms of households. As will be discussed further below, the size of Albanian tribal households is a matter of some dispute. Furthermore, the Albanian term *shpi* can mean both "house" and "household" almost interchangeably. If a son and his wife lived inside the son's father's house, as they often did, an Albanian speaking to a census taker (whether an Ottoman official or a priest maintaining parish records) would think of them as part of the larger *shpi*, not as a separate household, even though they might have considered themselves as such (see additional discussion in Chapter Five). Fortunately, many records have provided both a household count and a

count of “souls.” Furthermore, that multiplier has been relatively consistent (6 to 9) through time, at least until the post–World War II era. It is also highly likely that most “household” counts were in fact counts of physical house structures, but in the Albanian case, counting houses would produce a fairly accurate count of extended patriarchal households, if not of married couples.

## The Sources

Demographic information, including population counts, comments on household structure and size, age at marriage, causes of death, number of children, and the overall male to female ratio, can be found in a variety of sources—although they do not always agree. In essence, there are five basic sources for this kind of information for northern Albania. The first, and potentially the most helpful, are the Ottoman cadasters (or *defteri*). Essentially a record of land and taxable persons, the Ottoman cadasters have survived only spottily, and they continue to be only lightly published. Furthermore, an Ottoman census official was taking his life in his hands if he went up into the high mountains of the north, and it may be that only the very early cadasters, recorded during the high tide of the Ottoman conquest, have anything to say about the mountain tribes. Thus far, for the Shkodra *sancak*, only two cadasters have been published or analyzed, one from 1485 and the other covering 1529–1536 (Pulaha 1974a, 1974b; *Tapu defterleri* no. 367, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi; Ulqini 1996). Two further cadasters of the *sancak* of Dukagjin from 1571 and 1591 have been extensively analyzed (Luka 1981; Pulaha 1973). Our initial archival forays in Istanbul suggest that there are additional records there, but it remains unclear how complete or frequent they are, and early indications are that very often the people of the high mountains were left out—a fact that dovetails well with their attested relative autonomy and freedom from normal taxes.

A second crucial source has proven to be the reports submitted at various points between the seventeenth and the early twentieth centuries by the Franciscans assigned as parish priests in Shala. At times the parish was subdivided, but taking the reports together allows for a periodic view into the valley’s population.<sup>21</sup> Catholic missionaries were assiduous counters of souls, and since the Shala Valley was uniformly Catholic from the fifteenth century, the priests’ reports are probably highly

reliable as a complete count of inhabitants. They also demonstrate a strong consistency in the ratio of houses to individuals (more below). For one long stretch in the late nineteenth century, in addition to the overall parish reports, the actual parish records have survived for Shala, recording baptisms and deaths. At least for that period, we can make some conclusions about the natural rate of population increase and compare it to the actual population.

The third group of sources are the observations made by the various travelers discussed in the previous section. They often commented on household size and sometimes even provided rough estimates of the number of households (again, we assume they counted homes or asked a local, “How many families live here?” either of which likely would generate a count of extended patriarchal households). Carleton Coon went further and actually collected marital and age statistics from the men whose physical measurements he was taking. His notes are discussed further below. The travelers’ accounts are best used for what they say about family structure. Their use of total numbers was highly variable, and although likely often derived from talking to the local priest or village chief, they were not always clear about their sources, and the variable quality therefore precludes using them in any kind of statistical way.

The fourth major source is a single remarkable census conducted by a group of Austrian social scientists led by Franz Seiner during the Austrian occupation of Albania in 1918. The overall statistics (down to village and neighborhood level) were published as Seiner (1922). The manuscript census sheets, however, are preserved in Vienna and have been scanned by the “1918 Albanian Population Census” project, led by Helmut Eberhart and Karl Kaser of the University of Graz. They graciously provided us a digital copy of those sheets for the areas relevant to our work. The manuscript census counts provide names and ages for all the residents of individual houses and allow for a much more sophisticated examination of household structure at the beginning of the twentieth century (Austria 1918).

Finally, there are the modern and Communist-era censuses, taken at odd intervals roughly every 10 years. Although district numbers from these censuses are readily available, we have not been able to obtain the detailed village breakdowns. The Shala Valley has been a part of the Shkodra district for most of the century, but its boundaries have shifted significantly, and it contains the

large metropolitan area of Shkodra. A more representative rural mountain zone is the adjoining Kosovë/Kukës district, and its regional trends are used here to amplify and clarify the local modern statistics that we have.<sup>22</sup>

## Population, 1485–2007

The earliest Ottoman cadasters present a conundrum. As the founding legends and subsequent analyses suggest, it is likely that the founders of the Shala *fis* in the Shala Valley arrived in the wake of the Ottoman conquest of Shkodra in the 1470s, possibly in the form of a very small number of patriarchal families—perhaps even the four sons of Nika discussed above. In this sense, the 1485 cadaster's report of 11 households in Shala, 20 in Mavriq, and 5 in Bob (names discussed in the second section, above) makes perfect sense (Pulaha

1974a:149).<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, it is more than probable that the Ottomans would have had difficulty getting accurate counts of households in the upper reaches of Shala, and there may have been a larger movement of people into the valley than that detected by this census. A similar limitation probably applies to the 1529–1536 cadaster's report of 15 households in Shala and 8 in Bop (Ulqini 1996:40). We have been unable to determine if Mavriq is listed in the 1536 cadaster, but if we add in its 1485 total (as we did in Figure 4.4), it suggests a total household count for the valley of at least 43. We do not get another glimpse at the local population until 1671, when Father Gaspari's extensive tour of the mountains reveals a fully developed network of villages, neighborhoods, and parish priests, with Shala reporting 32 households and 200 individuals (Bop appears with 13 and 58, respectively, and Mavriq is not mentioned)

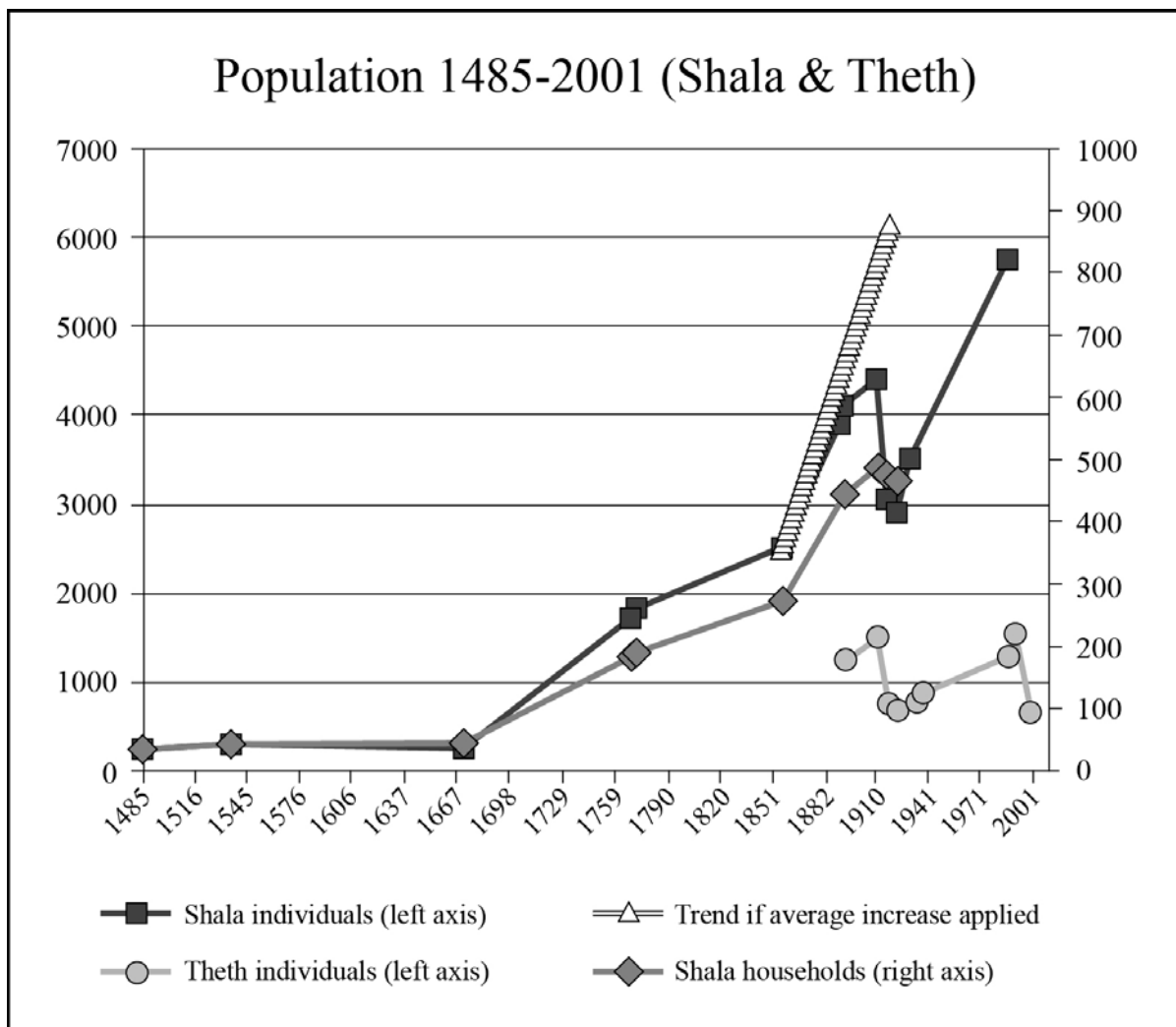


Figure 4.4. Population 1485–2001, Shala and Theth. Wayne E. Lee and Jill Seagard

(Gaspari 1930 [1671]). The completeness and detail of Gaspari's report suggests considerable care and accuracy. If it is true, however, it reflects a pattern of virtually no growth between 1536 and 1671. There are a variety of possible explanations. One is that people had expanded deeper into the mountains, beyond the reach of Gaspari's accounting. We know that they did so at some point, even if not in the first generations as the founding legends recount it (Ulqini 1996:47). Another possibility is that harsh conditions, ongoing struggles with the Ottomans, and, conversely, the attractions of military service for and against the Ottomans drew many sons out of the mountains. In terms of "harsh conditions," it may be worthwhile to consider the role of New World crops—maize and potatoes are now two key staples in the mountains, and travelers consistently reported an inability to grow wheat in Shala. It may be that the valley's carrying capacity remained severely limited prior to the arrival of New World crops. Unfortunately, we have as yet no way to date their arrival, although it seems likely that maize would have arrived by the seventeenth century and potatoes in the late eighteenth or even the early nineteenth century (Andrews 1993:201; Brunnbauer 2004:137; Andrea Pieroni, personal communication, March 2010). Interestingly, Figure 4.4 shows a distinct increase in growth rate for each of those two eras.

The next data points do not occur until 1768 and 1771, when we get the first of a long, irregular series of parish reports, supplemented by an 1856 report by the French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard (1858:143). Between Gaspari's 1671 report and these first parish reports, there appears to have been much more dramatic growth in Shala, now 184 households and 1,720 individuals (representing an astonishing annual growth rate of about 2.25 percent).<sup>24</sup> The ensuing period, however, from 1771 up to 1911 shows a consistent pattern of substantial but restrained growth. Between 1771 and the next Franciscan report in 1889 (which reported 3,936 individuals), Shala experienced an annual growth rate of 0.65 percent (an annual average increase of 9 people), a rate that held more or less steady until 1911.<sup>25</sup>

The parish registers showing baptisms and deaths between 1869 and 1895, however, provide a key insight into these data.<sup>26</sup> Comparing baptisms to deaths suggests that the natural increase in the valley averaged 58 people per year. If we plot that average increase between Hecquard's 1858 report and the 1911 census, we see that the rate of natural increase roughly tracks

with the total population records until the beginning of the twentieth century (see Figure 4.4). *Something* was clearly going on in the high mountains to create or allow such a sustained rate of growth and retention of population in a non-industrializing region and within a highly restricted subsistence environment. At the same time, however, the birth/death statistics average 58 new persons per year, whereas the total population counts suggest an average of only 9 new people per year over the same period. Some surely died in their childhood, but this difference strongly hints at a pattern of steady emigration. There are very limited data from which to draw many conclusions, but it may be that New World crops allowed a small seventeenth-century population to expand rapidly during the eighteenth century, eventually hitting the ceiling for the valley's carrying capacity. Growth then continued at a more moderate pace, perhaps enabled by the potato, with the excess population suggested by the baptismal records migrating outside the valley.

Clearly the disruptions of the early twentieth century, probably most markedly the Balkan Wars and the associated episodes of destruction and forced migration, reversed the valley's population growth of the preceding century. The next parish reports come from 1911 and 1935, with Albanian government counts in 1923 and 1930, and the Austrian census falling in 1918.<sup>27</sup> Given the variable quality and methods of these sources, it would be difficult to posit a consistent trend, but it seems safe to assert a significant population decline. Some of these new reports provide village-level information, and the data for Thethi seem to confirm a similar decline.

Regional data for Kosovë/Kukës for World War II and the rest of the twentieth century support the more limited local data.<sup>28</sup> Population in the mountains seems to have remained relatively flat during the 1930s and World War II, but then as the Communist regime progressively clamped down on the movement of people while also transporting in state-subsidized food during the long winter, the village landscape began to fill up with people again. The regime's statistics are notoriously unreliable, but the trend line in Figure 4.5 seems probable, and, as discussed in Chapter Seven, the built landscape reflects this modern process of growth and the inability to migrate elsewhere for work. Albania as a whole was among the fastest growing populations in postwar Europe, growing annually 2.1 to 2.8 percent from the 1950s through the 1980s, and emigration was

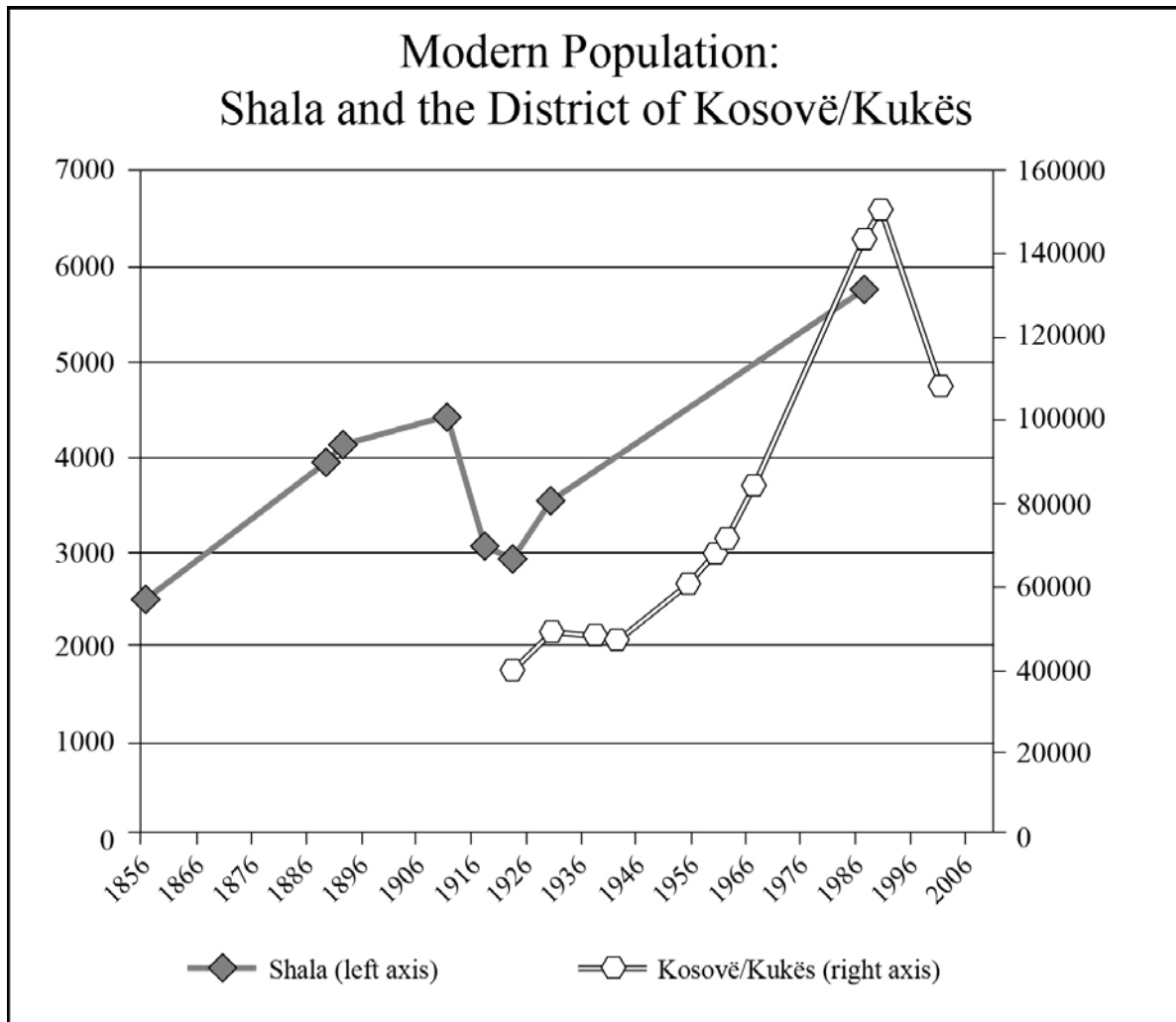


Figure 4.5. Modern population, 1856–2006, Shala and the district of Kosovë/Kukës. Wayne E. Lee and Jill Seagard

essentially eliminated (Bërxfholi 2003:76; Hall 1994:63; Sjöberg 1991:55). As the regime collapsed in the early 1990s, residents in the overcrowded valley rapidly migrated to Shkodra and abroad (Gjonça 2002). Local officials and our own interviews and fieldwork attest to a massive outmigration, and many of those who remain now live through the winter in Shkodra and return in the summer to work their fields and flocks. In 2005, only 17 families remained in Thethi through the winter, dropping to 14 in 2006.

### Other Demographic Issues: Household Structure, Male-Female Ratios, Military Labor

One critical aspect of the social structure of the *malësorë* is the extended patriarchal household. Affirmed by

tradition, suggested by architecture, and reported on by a host of nineteenth- and twentieth-century travelers, the *malësorë* have long been supposed to have lived in large extended households, with sons, sons' wives, and even grandsons and grandsons' wives (and of course their children) continuing to reside in the patriarchal house. The patriarch, known in Albanian as the *zot i shpi* (literally “lord of the house”), ruled as an absolute master. Eventually, in a process described in greater detail in Chapters Five to Seven, the household might fission, sending out brothers (much as in the founding legend of Shala) who established new patriarchal households. Travelers frequently reported staying in homes in which resided 20, 30, or more people. Our own informants attested to the practice, with one elderly woman recalling that when she married into her husband's home, she became the sixty-fourth person then living in the house.

The Franciscan parish records support a more moderate version of this image. All of their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reports (through 1911) consistently show a ratio of just over 9 persons to a household (for comparison, a common multiplier for a nuclear family household would be 4).

The Austrian social scientists working with the unprecedented, detailed 1918 Austrian census have argued that this portrayal of giant households in the Albanian mountains is a myth, or at least greatly exaggerated (Gruber 2001; Gruber and Pichler 2002). Indeed, in that census, the ratio of individuals to houses in Shala dropped to 6.43 (comparing actual houses to the total number of individuals). Interestingly, this ratio accords more closely with that found by Gaspari in 1671 (his numbers show a ratio of 6.25). Examined within the context of the rest of the population data presented here, however, a couple of solutions to this apparent contradiction suggest themselves. First, most of the travelers' descriptions of large households come from exactly the period, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which the population in the valley seems to have been peaking—perhaps even pushing beyond the limits of subsistence. Second, there is evidence that the first large stone houses in the valley were built in the mid-nineteenth century (see Chapter Seven), and the attractions of comfort and security provided by the new stone homes may have kept families together longer than they had in the past. Such large households may have then become “tradition” and persisted into the twentieth century, even when population size and pressure briefly may have declined during the Balkan Wars era. Finally, almost by definition, travelers ended up spending their nights in the homes of the most important families, and such families not only would have had their own very large extended kin group but also would also have been hosting a horde of visitors interested in seeing the foreigners (a process we ourselves have frequently experienced).

Even more problematic than household size is the problem of the ratio of men to women among the *malësorë* and how that relates to the problem of the blood feud. Interestingly, this problem also may reflect the population pressures of the late nineteenth century combined with the prevalence of travelers' accounts from that era. In normal circumstances, the ratio of males to females at birth should be nearly equal at 105:100. Most census data for Albania are not detailed enough to

examine this issue over time, but there are three sources of great interest (other than the truly modern census data): the nineteenth-century baptismal registers from Shala, the 1918 Austrian census manuscript records, and Carleton Coon's notes from his physical anthropology fieldwork conducted in 1929 and 1930. They are dealt with here in reverse chronological order, because it was Coon who first raised the issue and whose findings have generated controversy. Coon collected family data from the men whose measurements he was taking and determined that his sample of 1,060 fathers had 5,466 children, averaging 5.2 per father, of whom 3.2 were boys and 2.0 girls, a ratio of 160:100. Gruber (2001) criticizes this figure as scientifically indefensible and therefore simply adjusts Coon's numbers. But Azar Gat's (2006:74–75) survey of tribal societies' ratios of males to females shows a marked preference for males, averaging 127:100, with some spiking as high as 150:100 or 200:100. In those latter contexts, he acknowledges the role of polygyny, but the more important and consistent explanation for the imbalance was female infanticide.<sup>29</sup> Critically, Gat's analysis focuses on the ratios of males to females *in childhood*. As Gat also points out, over time the male-female ratio in tribal societies evens out due to the very high rates of male violent death. In northern Albania in particular, the death rate from feud violence was almost exclusively confined to men.

The 1918 Austrian census provides some further insight and indeed formed the basis for Gruber's critique. Gruber's (2001) analysis of the census found a much smaller number of children per father, averaging only 2.6. Gruber goes on to reconcile this difference from Coon's report through an extensive analysis of the full census data for Albania. He does so, however, by analyzing data on a national scale, and much of Albania was not as tightly wedded to the tribal system of patrilocality as the high mountains (although Albania is often generally lumped into this category by demographers, and Gruber's intention is to speak to the broader issue of Balkan household patterns). When we turn to the detailed data for Shala, the overall census data show a male-female ratio of 116:100, and for Thethi, it was 117:100. Following Gat's example, when we look at the male-female ratio of children (defined as ages 1–13 years), the ratio of boys to girls in Thethi jumps to 128:100 (of 271 total children).

Furthermore, Gruber used Coon's published data (Coon 1950:23). Examining Coon's field notes, preserved

in the Smithsonian archives (Coon Papers, ca 1920s, Box 22), and focusing on his work in Dukagjin, we found 89 men with one wife each, who produced an average of 5 children, 2.8 sons and 2.2 daughters (130:100). Sixteen men had two wives each (he does not specify if simultaneously or in succession; see Gruber and Pichler 2002), producing 6.9 children at a ratio of 156:100. One man had had four wives, with 5 sons and 4 daughters. An Ottoman report from the 1880s confirms that some Christian tribesmen had multiple wives (Gawrych 2006:32). Finally, our examination of mid-nineteenth-century baptismal registers suggests a varying but consistent pattern of males far exceeding females.<sup>30</sup> The total of the sample, taken from nine different years between 1850 and 1875, was 415 boys to 345 girls, or 120:100. Individual years varied from as high as 157:100 to one aberrant year of 89:100 (average ratio was 124:100).

All in all, Coon's data, the details in the 1918 census, and the local baptismal records suggest the sort of skewed boy:girl ratio associated with female infanticide in tribal societies (especially those not practicing polygyny), which then evens out somewhat as men experience a higher rate of violent death from feud. Coon's evidence, admittedly on a small sample, of second wives producing an even more skewed boy:girl ratio supports this as well. A more mature man, with a number of children already available, would exert more forceful pressure to produce only sons. Although the 9% shift from a childhood ratio of 128:100 to the whole population's 116:100 is substantial, it does not seem to support the famous comment recorded in Nopsca (1925:52–53) that between 1901 and 1905, males in the northern mountains were dying from murder (primarily feud related) at a rate of 21 to 39 percent.<sup>31</sup> Of course, the 1918 census occurred *after* the Balkan Wars, and the overall population decline may have reduced feud-generating pressure on land and resources. Furthermore, as described in Chapter Five, intertribal feuds often took more lives than intra-tribal feuds and were typically generated by marriage disputes. However, by 1918 and, to an even greater degree, by 1929, marriage networks had begun to contract, reducing death by feud even further.

Communist census data from the 1960s support a continued slight skewing of male-female ratios in favor of men in the high mountains, although we can also now detect the intervention of the state. The Shkodra district,

**Table 4.3** Male-Female Ratios in Northern Districts, 1960s

Region	1962	1967	1969
Shkodra	101:100	104:100	112:100
Kukës	104:100	108:100	124:100
Tropojë	112:100	113:100	81:100

with its heavy urban population, represents a kind of control, remaining relatively stable in the 1960s, while the more mountainous district of Tropojë initially shows a more traditional ratio, with a dramatic swing presumably related to the opening of mines in Kukës in the late 1960s and the movement of labor there (Table 4.3).<sup>32</sup>

The final issue of interest is the possible role that “exporting” military labor may have played in tribal demography. The *malësorë* autonomy, and therefore the dearth of archival records, obscures the details of a long mountain tradition of exporting military labor, either as mercenaries or as manpower to the Ottoman state. If true, this continuous pattern of at least temporary emigration for military service would stand in marked contrast to the assumptions of isolation made by European travelers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Durham 1985 [1909]; Hasluck 1954; Lane 1921) and even some modern scholars (e.g., Fischer 1999). Indeed, some scholars have doubted the extent of military emigration even for earlier periods. As noted above, Millar (1976) suggested that the Albanian mercenaries of sixteenth-century Europe (serving mostly in the Italian wars, but also as far away as England) were the expatriate refugees from Skanderbeg's failed war at the end of the fifteenth century, and as the first and perhaps the second generation of those men died, they were not replaced. There is little doubt of the Shkodër *region's* importance in supplying military labor to the Ottomans (see the second section, above), but the real question is whether those tribes that remained Catholic also participated in that particular labor market. The evidence is scant but clearly suggests a long-term and varied martial tradition, not just locally as a tribal force, but as individual emigrants (cf. Pichler 2002). In terms of local service, for example, Hecquard (1858) describes incidents in 1773 and in 1836 of men from Shala taking different parts in internal struggles for the control



of Shkodra. An Ottoman report on the region written in the 1880s suggested that the seven *fis* of the *Male-sia e Vogel*, including Shala and Shosh, could mobilize 2,500 men for imperial service (under their own *ba-jraktars*) (Gawrych 2006:32). In addition, several local informants recalled ancestors serving in the Ottoman army, including one whose six-year absence serving in Saudi Arabia led his family wrongly to assume that he had died, and even to hold his funeral (SVP Interview HH#321 7/10/2007). That they expected his return, and that he in fact did return, suggests the extent of movement in and out of the valley for that purpose—at least by the nineteenth century. But the practice may have been even older, despite the nominal pre-1857 prohibition on Christian military service in the empire. An Albanian scholar claims that many mountaineers in the seventeenth century chose to become seamen in the Ottoman navy, where religion seemed to be less of an obstacle to recruiting (Naçi 1964:26). And in the late eighteenth century, the Ottoman regime began decentralizing their army recruitment system, such that “both the Janissary army (in garrisons outside Constantinople), and the *timariots* [were] largely eclipsed by a parallel federative, contractual, highly mobile, and notably undisciplined military system, which became the main source of their military manpower” (Aksan 2011:152). This evolving “federative, contractual” system no doubt scooped up any number of individual Catholic tribesmen for military service. Coon (1950:43) claimed that when Catholic mountaineers left the mountains to go to the market towns, they simply adopted a temporary Muslim name. Such a tactic would long have been available to those seeking military service.

The Ottoman Empire’s need for men thus served as a key outlet for both excess sons and as a means of interaction with the wider world. Even after the birth of an independent Albanian state, however, the northern martial tradition continued to generate opportunities for experience in the wider world. During the Communist regime, the government deliberately used northern men as soldiers in southern Albania, further exposing them to outside influences.

In short, the male martial tradition of the mountain tribes, famous right through World War II, meant that men were more or less constantly moving in and out of the mountains and must have been a major component of what we believe must have been near-continuous traffic between the highland tribes and the outside

(Brunnbauer [2004] considers other reasons for interaction). Furthermore, it is possible that this adult male emigration may have helped restore the male-female ratio from its skewed childhood version to a less extreme ratio discussed above for the whole population. Feud was not necessarily the only mechanism for shifting that ratio.

## Conclusion<sup>33</sup>

In 1930, *National Geographic* author Melville Chater traveled around the Shala Valley, escorted by a local man who had worked in a diner in Kentucky for five years and who spoke perfect English (Chater 1931). Chater’s guide might have been unusual, but the archival evidence presented here supports not only the idea of more or less continuous movement of individuals and goods into and out of the mountains, but also that the *malësorë* remained keenly and deliberately aware of the outside world and regularly adapted their lifestyles and “policies” to accommodate external pressures and preserve their autonomy. Blumi (2003a) argues for the late nineteenth century that the mountaineers’ supposed cultural rigidity was in fact an image created in the modern West’s imaginative construction of them. In fact, he suggests, the mountaineers’ “social ‘hybridity’ and cultural ‘ambiguity’ empowered” them. Furthermore, “[m]ost village groups had family members serving as guards, merchants, and even Catholic priests in lowland trading towns such as Ipek (Peja), Yakova (Gjakova), and [Shkodra]. Many of these migrants also traveled abroad, serving in Rome or as soldiers of fortune, particularly in Austria, which had cultivated a strong relationship with the Malësorë since the propagation of its *Kultusprotektorat* (protection of Catholic culture)” (Blumi 2003a:238, 240; cf. Boehm 1987:21). What Blumi has detected for this period seems amply supported for many eras, with the exception of the Communist regime’s peak of control in the mountains, when all of Albania was isolated from the outside world.

Perhaps even more important than the movement of individuals were those changes generated in the wider world that had profound effects inside the Shala Valley—a place frankly never as isolated as it has been made out to be. Not least among those considerations was the importation of New World crops (crops that our informants claim “always” to have had), whose significance for changing the valley’s demographic capacity, and therefore its military influence, should not be underestimated

but is rarely discussed by most historians of the region. Similarly, the Ottoman-Venetian competition from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries generated very different possibilities and challenges for the *malësorë* than the later Ottoman-Habsburg confrontations.

In the next chapter, Chapter Five, we consider Shala's "tribal" sociopolitical and kinship systems, including feud and exogamy, based on ethnographic interviews with individuals throughout the valley. As do our historical data, ethnographic data for the Shala *fis* indicate remarkably flexible social and political frameworks, carefully attuned to challenges emanating from the external world, but equally responsive to the valley's ecosystem and economy (discussed in detail in Chapter Six).

## Notes

- 1 This section is the work of Wayne E. Lee.
- 2 The first written reference to a bajraktar is from 1783.
- 3 This section is the work of Eduard Ndreca and Wayne E. Lee, with contributions by Mentor Mustafa.
- 4 There is some disagreement on exact boundaries and the timing of changes, but this is a reasonable summary.
- 5 Current administrative boundaries are a helpful guide to the regional connotations of older toponyms, but have changed several times over the course of the twentieth century. See Bërsholi (2003:13–17).
- 6 Many of these neighborhood names have shifted. It is not clear from what era Gurakuqi drew his list. There are significant differences from the 1918 census and from the present.
- 7 Milani cites Rrok Zojzi's historical study Shala, 1956, Archives of the Shkodra History Museum, typescript, page 10.
- 8 Milani cites Preng Gjika, Gjurmë të trashëgimisë etnologjike në Shqipërinë e veriut [Traces of Ethnologic Inheritance in Northern Albania], 39 and Flavio Kardinjano, Shqipëria përmes shënimeve të misionarit të madh italian Domeniko Patozi 1847–1914 [Albania through the Notes of the Great Italian Missionary, Domeniko Patozi 1847–1914], 135.
- 9 The 1918 Austrian census shows Buçvataj, Marvataj, Preklekaj, Nikushaj, Gjelvataj, Dostanicaj, Niklekaj, Xhaferaj, Gagu (Gak), and Kapree (Kaprej) (Seiner 1922).
- 10 This description is now commonplace about tribal societies' reaction to external pressure. But for a specific analysis of northern Albania along these lines, see Blanc (1960:121).
- 11 This section is the work of Matthew Lubin and Wayne E. Lee.
- 12 The date of this can be fixed as 1389, when Murad I was killed at the Battle of Kosovo Polje.
- 13 Pjetër Budi, Bishop of Sapa and Sarda, during his call in 1621 for a revolt among the tribes of northern Albania against the iugum Ottomanicum, writes, "In another region, towards Croia (Kruja), are the Dukagjini, who rebelled against the Turks thirty years ago. They also consist of the same number [as the Kelmendi] of six thousand warriors, all with arms. They are as

determined and brave as any people one could find on earth and are very skilled in military matters. They live in the mountains above Lezha between Shkodra and Kruja. Up to now, they have done great damage to the Turks with their continual incursions, destroying Turkish castles and lands. They have been victorious in all of their battles with the Turks, their principal enemy, and are all Catholics and very devoted to the Holy Church of Rome. . . . [Strong statements of this order are perhaps to be expected, since the good bishop's goal was to recruit men to his cause] (Budi 2003 [1621]:171).

14 Seven areas are indicated on the three cadasters of 1529–1536, 1571, and 1591: (1) Puka (Malizi), (2) Mirdita, (3) Itballa/Iballeia, (4) Fandi i Madh (the term Fand refers to highland areas), (5) Fandi i Vogël, (6) Dibri dhe Kladra, and (7) Spasi (Encyclopedia of Islam 1954–2000, s.v. "Arnawutluk"; Pulaha 1973, 1974a, 1974b).

15 The document lies in an unpaginated folder after a wrapper labeled "Contabilità."

16 This section is the work of Michael L. Galaty, Wayne E. Lee, and Robert Schon.

17 Many of the periods of banditry and rebellion in Albania occurred at the same time as similar episodes elsewhere in other pastoral societies. Bradburd (1996:3) notes that episodes of hardship and lawlessness tended to occur in nineteenth-twentieth century Iran as a response to "predatory modes of exchange that prevented pastoralists from exchanging goods [such as cheese for sugar] at the generally prevailing rates of exchange." These economic problems were exacerbated for traditional households in which custom demanded hospitality be rendered to guests by serving sugared tea. A similar expectation held in northern Albania, but the drink of choice was coffee. Cronin (2005:10) further notes that uprisings prompted by economic hardship often arose in early twentieth-century Iran in communities of tribally organized cultivators, who could manage a higher level of "communal action" than nontribal peasant communities. Such was also the case in Albania.

18 From an unfinished, unpublished manuscript by Emma Pritchard Cooley of New Orleans, Louisiana. Red Cross Central File, 1917–1934, Stack 130, Row 77, Compartment 20, Shelf 2–3, Boxes 899–902, Folder 962.7 "Publicity and Publications." United States National Archive and Research Administration, College Park, Maryland.

19 Red Cross Central File, 1917–1934, Stack 130, Row 77, Compartment 20, Shelf 2–3, Boxes 899–902, Folder 899.08 "Reports." United States National Archive and Research Administration, College Park, Maryland.

20 This section is the work of Wayne E. Lee and Eduard Ndreca.

21 These are now mostly collected together in the Albanian journal *Hylli i Dritës* with some later reports found in the Albanian state archives in Tirana. Full citations are below.

22 The boundaries in the twentieth century (per the maps in Bërsholi 2003) have been stable, although the names have changed slightly. Depending on the year, we have used statistics for Kosovë/Kukës (1930s and 1940s) or Tropojë + Kukës (Communist era) and then Kukës + Tropojë + Has in 2001.

23 Note that for these early cadasters, "Shala" seems to have referred to one village. In Figure 4.4, we have combined Shala,

Mavriq, and Bop as equating to the population in the Shala Valley.

24 There may have been a change in the parish boundaries between Gaspari's count and the 1768 count. As a check, however, the growth rate between 1768 and 1771 was almost exactly the same as for the longer period.

25 By way of comparison, the seven major countries of Europe between 1800 and 1913 experienced just over 0.8 percent annual growth, while Spain, arguably the most rural of the seven, experienced just under 0.6 percent growth. This is the period during which the European population is considered to have exploded in concert with agricultural and industrial revolutions, and the growth rate reflected in those percentages does not account for substantial levels of emigration to the United States and elsewhere. Data from Livi-Bacci (1999:132).

26 Regjister pagezimesh i viteve 1849–1857 për famullinë e Shalës [Shala Parish baptism register for 1849–1857], fond Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order] 133/A, file 11, year 1849, sheets 1–31; Regjister pagezimesh i viteve 1859–1863 për famullinë e Shalës [Shala Parish baptism register for 1859–1863], fond Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order] 133/A, file 16, year 1859, sheets 1–26; Regjister pagezimesh i viteve 1863–1880 për famullinë e Shalës [Shala Parish baptism register for 1863–1880], fond 133/A Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order], file 19, year 1863, sheets 1–117; Regjister pagezimesh i viteve 1880–1891 për famullinë e Shalës [Shala Parish baptism register for 1880–1891], fond 133/A Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order], file 29, year 1880, sheets 1–95; Regjister i lindjeve dhe martesave ne vitet 1882–1895 për famullinë e Shalës [Shala Parish birth and marriage register for 1882–1895], fond 133/A Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order], file 30, year 1882, pages 1–83; Regjister pagezimesh i viteve 1895–1900 për famullinë e Shalës [Shala Parish baptism register for 1895–1900], fond 133/A Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order], file 41, year 1895, sheets 1–43; fond 133/A Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order], file 23, year 1869,

sheets 1–82. All of these are now in the AQSH.

27 Franciscan: fond 133 Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order], file 1488, year 1911, sheets 32, 33, 39, AQSH; fond 133 Urdhëri Françeskan [The Franciscan Order], file 1102, year 1935, sheet 4, AQSH; Albanian government: fond 374 Nën-prefektura Dukagjin [Zyra e Finances Dukagjin] [The Dukagjin subprefecture [the Dukagjin Office of Finance]], file 18, year 1924, sheet 2, AQSH; fond 374 Nën-prefektura Dukagjin [The Dukagjin Subprefecture], file 7, year 1930, sheet 1, AQSH. For the Austrian census, see above.

28 District census data cited here from 1923 to 2001 come from Alb DeS (1988:25); Boldrini (1940:428); Hall (1994:66); Naval Intelligence Division (1945:129); Sjöberg (1991:25); [http://www.instat.gov.al/repoba/english/default\\_english.htm](http://www.instat.gov.al/repoba/english/default_english.htm), accessed January 24, 2010. The numbers in Figure 4.5 for Shala and Thethi in 1987 and 1991 are estimated from the population records held by local officials and/or the number of houses recorded in Thethi in 2005.

29 There are very few references to the possibility of female infanticide in northern Albania: see Fischer (1999:285, following Hall 1994:83), whose reference to female infanticide is not cited. Hall (personal communication, November 2009) thought the original source might be Prifti (1975), but there is no direct reference to female infanticide there. Durham (1985 [1909]:125) herself noted the skewed sex ratio in northern Albanian but attributed it to girls marrying young and dying in childbirth, an explanation belied by our statistics.

30 The years chosen were not random but rather determined by our ability to read the names and thus determine the gender of the child. Handwriting and reproduction were extremely poor. For references to these registers, see note 27.

31 Nopsca got these figures from the local Catholic priests, who were then actively trying to rein in the feud.

32 Data from Alb DeS (1963, 1967–68, 1969).

33 This section is the work of Wayne E. Lee.

*Chapter Five*SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL PATTERNS IN  
KINSHIP RELATIONS:

## Descent, Marriage, and Feud

Mentor Mustafa, Antonia Young, Michael L. Galaty, and Wayne E. Lee



Ours was a lengthy inquiry into the lives of the people of the Shala Valley, and the process of data collection necessitated repeat visits to people's homes. In most cases, the interview data were collected by the authors from adult heads of household who hosted our stay and answered our questions. We started our interviews from a standard questionnaire, but in most cases, our informants enjoyed a great degree of latitude, telling stories that strayed far from the topics of the survey. These diversions, as well as time spent over early afternoon meals, provided additional entry into their lives and worldviews. We listened, above all, to the many stories of both personal and collective perseverance, despite hardship (both internally and externally caused), that the people of the valley have faced and continue to face. Stories of perseverance and resilience resonate deeply for the people of Shala, at this historical juncture in particular, for they are among the last surviving members of the traditional mountain cultures of the Balkans. Additionally, and more meaningfully, in modern Albania, as the mountains have depopulated, as families have fled to Shkodra, Tirana, and abroad, our hosts were the last holdouts, the last few families who had chosen to maintain a (semi-)traditional lifestyle (cf. Schwandner-Sievers 2001). For many of them, the pride of perseverance emerged through stories of their relations with each other, relations defined primarily through kinship, especially patrilineal descent, finding wives and bearing children, and the maintenance and protection of honor, most notably in the feud. It is perhaps through their networks of kin-based alliances of descent and marriage as well as in relation to their feuding foes (*hasmi*) that our informants most clearly continued to define themselves within larger social collectives, the *fis* ("tribe") in particular, and to defend their unique identity within Albanian society.

If there is one aspect of our data that is consistent across households, it is that descent, marriage, and feuding relations are patterned through time and across space. Preliminary results on these three main social relations indicate that they are meaningful, logical imprints of conscious decisions and careful calculations that reflect both intentional interactions (e.g., seeking marriage alliances) as well as strategic isolationism (e.g., in the aftermath of feuding, or in limiting trade partnerships). These create intricate webs of social relations that mitigate the ways in which the people of the Shala Valley may position themselves as actors in both the local and wider social landscape. Ultimately, the ritualized aspects of life that implicate social groupings of descent (*familja*, *fisi*, *mëhallë*, *katundi*, *bajraku*; i.e., family, "tribe," neighborhoods, village, a "banner"), marriage (*martesa*), and feuding (*gjakmarrje*) are informed by cultural narratives so immense and unique to the people of the valley that entire books have been written about them (e.g., Durham 2000 [1909]; Hasluck 1954). Here we subject the ethnographic data to particular questions about changes in social patterns over time, as they relate to interaction and isolation, and try to provide additional information of broader ethnological significance. As discussed in subsequent chapters, the ethnographic data we present complement and reinforce the historical and archaeological data, and changes in social relations are reflected in the evolving regional landscapes of Shala, the built landscape in particular (see, e.g., Chapter Seven). Social and natural processes are (and were) dynamically and recursively linked in the mountain environment of northern Albania, as were economic, political, and social systems. These shifting relationships can be tracked through time and various meaningful historical trends identified.

In addition to our own ethnographic and statistical data gathered through interviews between 2005 and 2007, the following material also incorporates and analyzes comparable demographic and social-statistical samples from 1918 and 1929 in terms of descent, marriage, and feud and attempts to explain their impact on evolving strategies of cultural resilience in Theth, Shala, and the wider region. For marriage patterns, our samples are drawn from data collected by Seiner (1922) and Coon (1950), as well as by us, and represent marriages brokered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and during and immediately after Communism. The work of Seiner and Coon was discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, and our ethnographic methods were described in Chapter Two. Feud and descent data are derived almost entirely from our interviews, supplemented by other ethnographic work in the region. By taking into account changes in descent, marriage, and feud, we can track Shala's recent strategies of interaction and isolation as multilayered ways of negotiating peripherality. What emerges from our analysis is that social relations of cooperation and conflict provided (and continue to provide) flexible means of buffering change and bolstering resilience, particularly in the short term. The intricate networks of communication created through marriage and feud allowed heads of households and tribal leaders to monitor events outside the valley. Information gathered in this fashion helped them to make smart decisions about whether and how to engage the outside world. Since these behaviors were active, conscious behaviors, they could be deployed selectively and with tactical precision to improve a family's or the tribe's position in the wider sociopolitical landscape. Interestingly, women were key players in decision making as regards marriage and feud, since they typically maintained contacts with their natal family and *fis*, and because inter-*fis* feuds often occurred as a result of marriage disputes.

## Descent

During our long conversations with the people of the Shala Valley, one factor that emerged very clearly was their strong sense of pride linked simply to being there and keeping the doors of their *shpia* (house, household; *shtëpia* in standard Albanian) open. We make use of the word *simply* with some caution, however, because as this and other chapters reveal, there is nothing simple about the complex realities that the people of the Shala Valley

have faced and continue to face in their daily lives. To the few members of households who are full-time residents of the valley, as well as to the families that take seasonal residence there during the summer months, remaining in Thethi, living still in Shala, brings with it the pride of tending to the ancestral lands of their *fis* (patrilineage). In the case of Shala, keeping the hearth of one's patriline going puts identifiable pressures on each member of society: to play particular, prescribed roles throughout one's life, to share in the rights and obligations that come with membership, to live simultaneously as sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, friends and foes, and so forth. The desired result, at least in the way that the people themselves present the imaginary of collectives of blood, is that the patriline persists from one generation to the next. While in this section we treat descent, we note that exogamous marriage and, ironically, feud are yet other important ways whereby social collectives in northern Albania are held together. While descent discourse emphasizes the perseverance of one's patrikin, the concerns of marriage expand to include friends (*miq*) and inter-*fis* marriage alliances as additional, key components in Shala's history of interaction and isolation. To say, for example, that Thethi and Shala marry predominantly with Shosh is to say that people of the Shala Valley interact in a Thethi-Shala-Shosh cluster, or axis, and therefore isolate themselves (although in recent times, isolation was enforced by the Communist state), at the very least in terms of their marriage networks, from other neighboring regions, such as Malësia e Madhe, and even from regions well within their commercial reach (e.g., Gusinje, Plav, Peja, etc.).

Judging from the plurality of responses to a survey question in our 2005–2007 sample, some of the most important concerns for northern Albanians have to do with the much-discussed local category of *fis*. The Albanian *fis* relates to a collective of people, both living and ancestral, who belong to the same patriline by virtue of strict patrilineal rules of descent. Aside from honor (*nderi*) and hospitality (*mikpritja*), family (*familja*), patrilineage (*fis i vogël*), and tribe (*fis i madh*) are the three primary kin-based forms of identification mentioned by the respondents to our survey. Within this particular discourse on blood relations (i.e., consanguinity)—*gjak*, literally “blood”—they placed a heavy emphasis on the rights and responsibilities rendered through these social configurations, which ultimately sort people into categories based on their supposed blood relationships.

These categories and the roles they engender have a large impact on individuals, by strictly determining where they fit within the patrikin and therefore how they interact with other members of the family and *fis* (Backer 2003). What we mean by “strict” is that members of the patriline, all the daughters and sons fathered by the male members of the patriline, and only those who are the biological offspring of the patriline, are considered *gjak* or blood and members of the *fis*. In addition, both village exogamy and patrilocal residential patterns are important aspects of the system that need to be considered (see below) to appreciate fully the effects of descent on the co-dependency of affinal relatives. Shala’s system of descent, in its definition of social roles, is crucial to the functioning of the extensive systems of settlement and land use analyzed in Chapter Six. The growth and elaboration of patrilineages likewise generated the built landscape described in Chapter Seven. In mapping Shala’s patterns of descent and the related behaviors of marriage and feud, through time, we demonstrate that northern Albanian social, political, and economic systems were holistically and structurally integrated such that together they formed a sensitive, dynamic monitoring network, tuned to the internal pulse of the tribe, ready and able to respond to external challenges and opportunities.

To start, we must first note the relevant categories of relationship of which any adult from Shala is most deeply aware (Figure 5.1a). The villages (*katund*) and neighborhoods (*mëhallë*) that make up our study region are situated on both sides of the valley. They are all well connected by an intricate system of trails. Indeed, villages and neighborhoods are also internally well connected by a web of paths and at the same time separated by walls and fences that mark territories (see Chapter Seven). When we introduce the human element into this spatial organization of the valley, we immediately find that social relations mandated by specific rules of descent orient the individual (*individi*) in a particular way. We can in fact trace the different levels of affiliation that affect an individual and measure their relevance for the degree of interconnectedness of the people of the Shala Valley. It is these relationships that generate the reciprocal exchange networks described in Chapter Six, without which the extensive system of mixed agro-pastoralism could not function.

To be a member of a Gjeçaj *fis* in Thethi, for example, means that all those who affiliate with the Gjeçaj *fis* are your patrikin, *një gjak* (lit. “one blood”), and are

members of the patriline; what this means further is that people who associate with Okol in Thethi or Lekaj in Shala are not members of your patriline. Like the walls, fences, and paths that serve to mark and connect the territories under the ownership of particular social units, at different scales of interaction, so, too, do kin relations connect and mark social space by delineating both rights of membership as well as responsibilities and demands placed on the individual by particular social collectives (e.g., *familja*, *mëhallë*, *katund*, *bajrak*, *atdhe*). Descent is mapped onto the landscape and given meaning and structure through the built environment, and vice versa.

Any one occupant of the Shala Valley is born into a *familje* (nuclear family), which in our sample consists of parents and the husband’s parents if they are alive, parents’ unmarried children, and sometimes the husband’s unmarried brother(s) who may reside also in the same house. Sometimes several nuclear families are found living together under one roof, forming a so-called joint family. *Shpia* (lit. “house”) is the structure that shelters the nuclear or joint family, which aside from very rare occasions<sup>1</sup> is almost always situated on land owned and occupied by a particular *fis* (patrilineage). There is a unique overlap between land ownership and *fis* affiliation (analyzed and discussed in more detail in Chapters Six and Seven). The smallest social unit above the individual, that of the household (*shpia*, *familja*), is especially important because it operates as an independent social and economic unit and is always headed by an adult male (*i zoti i shpis*) or female in the absence of the male (*e zoja e shpis*). As we have already indicated, however, this nuclear unit is part of a larger social collective (*fis*) that creates different sets of rights and obligations that individuals must negotiate. At the level of the household, the individual, male or female, has the right to protection by the family and the right to use the residence and the resources it has to offer. In return, the individual is obligated to support the members of the household by performing various tasks (e.g., watching livestock or plowing the fields). Rights and obligations differ between different members of the family, depending on gender, and over the course of different life stages.<sup>2</sup> The oldest male is usually in the position of primary authority (*i zoti i shpis*). When the male is deceased, his widowed wife may fulfill this role (*e zoja e shpis*). But more often than not the eldest brother steps into this role, which may on occasion trigger the dissolution of a joint family

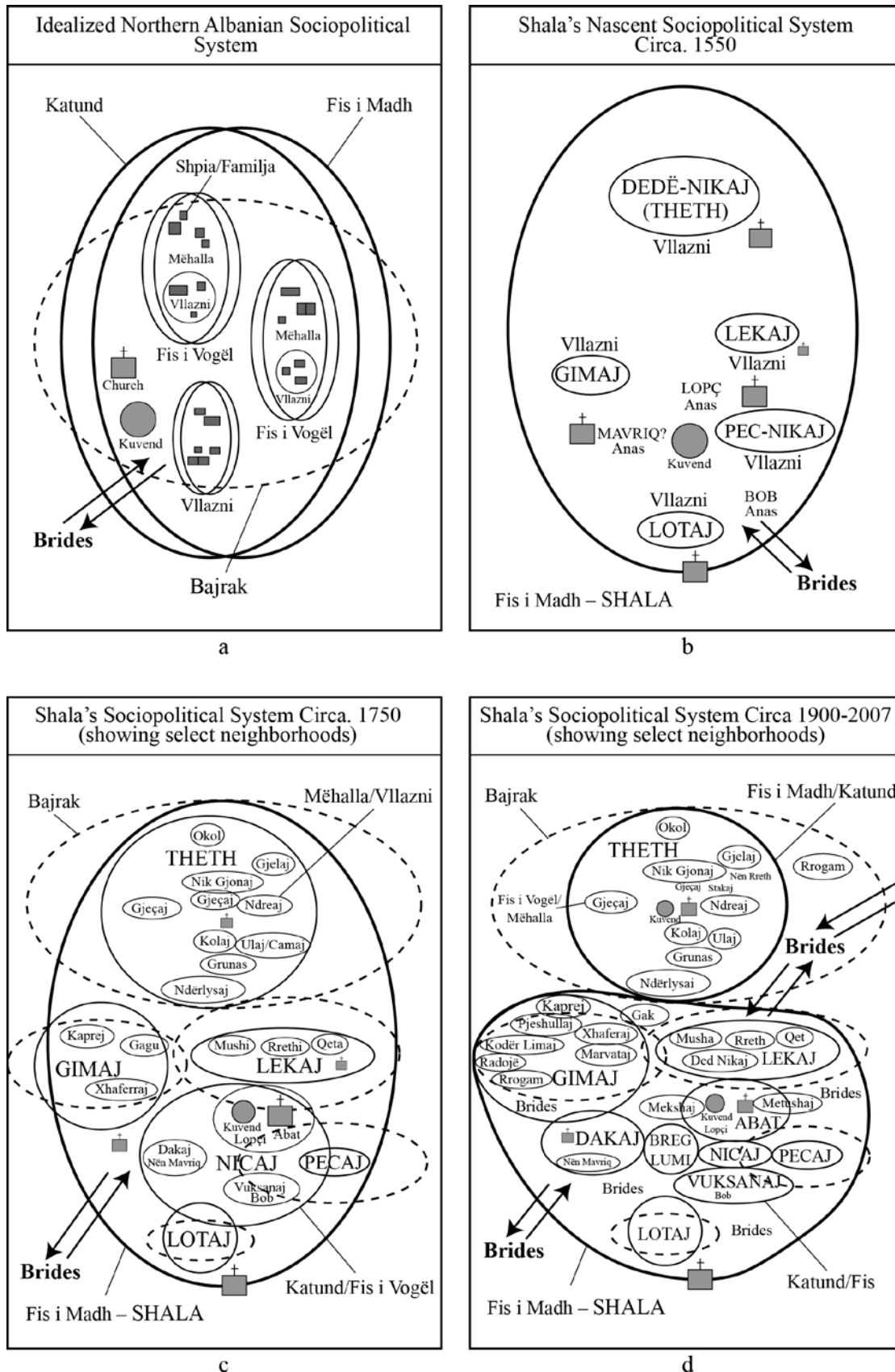


Figure 5.1. Idealized plan of the northern Albanian kinship system depicting its sociospatial elements and charting its evolution in Shala through time. *Jill Seagard*

unit (see Chapter Seven). These and similar rules of inheritance are spelled out in the *Kanun* (Gjeçov 1989).

The head of the household as a voice of authority becomes crucially important when representing the family in public matters, such as in meetings of the village council (*kuvend*), and especially in matters of feuding relations. In cases when someone from the family is involved in a grievance with somebody from the *mëhallë* or *katund*, the head of the household is responsible for representing the family in all subsequent negotiations pertaining to the grievance. The head also handles labor assignments and interactions outside the house, whereas his wife, the head woman, manages all domestic labor assignments among the women of the household. If the family has business outside the valley, it is the male head who undertakes the journey—unless his family is in feud, in which case his wife may go in his stead. Whereas it is the men of the household who represent the family in the political and regional economic arenas, it is women who generally possess better knowledge of the wider social world (if not the political one), by virtue of the exogamous, patrilocal marriage system. Women, for example, actively negotiate marriage arrangements for their sons and daughters, although usually this occurs “behind the scenes.” Once incoming brides (*nuse*) become well established within their husbands’ families (usually when they give birth to a son and can then weigh in on household matters), they may recommend potential brides and bridegrooms from their natal homes. In arranging marriages, albeit with the final approval of men, women become the chief architects of the system of affinal relationships upon which the family and tribe depend in all activities outside the valley. If a man is traveling, for example, he will go out of his way to stay with affines. It is through marriage alliances that a family’s political power may grow, or dwindle, and it is through the system of arranged marriages that women exercise social power.

Above the level of the family/household are the *vllazni* and *fis*. A *vllazni* (brotherhood) is a group of closely related men who had at some point in the past separated but continue to share the same patronym and cooperate politically and in various tasks (Chapter Seven). A *fis i vogël* (small *fis*; e.g., Gjeçaj in Theth) is a somewhat wider line of descent that includes cousins, both immediate and distant. Members of *vllazni* and *fis i vogël* typically live close to each other, within particular neighborhoods (*mëhallë*), and it is these, more intimate kin relations that

our informants usually had in mind when and where they discussed *fis*. These small groups of closely affiliated kin, related by blood, “map onto” the physical and built landscapes of the valley creating social “ideoscapes” that all individuals know and travel, both in terms of the roles described above, but also literally, as they move through neighborhoods, to visit one another, share information, and conduct business. The dynamic relationship that exists between the physical and social landscapes of Shala are reflected in surnames, many taken under communism, which may refer to the natural environment of the valley near which a family lives—for example, Shpella (cave) and Pisha (pine) in Theth and Kuvend (council, referring to the hill on which the council met) in Abat.

Because individual households and *fis* are also land- and property-holding units, *mëhallë* are always associated with well-marked territories, and the protective ownership of productive land and the house is essential to the survival of any family. On the death of the patriarch, land continues to be held by the family or, if the brothers separate, is divided based on each brother’s age and marital status. The house itself usually goes to the youngest brother, presumably because he is most able to care for his aging parents. A family that loses land, through feud or in a land dispute, for example, inevitably will shrink. A family that has committed a nonpardonable offense, such as killing a guest, may lose its house to burning, a decision made and enforced by the council of elders (*kuvend*). Such families may then emigrate from the tribal territory, another source of demographic outflow. If a family is without male heirs, their land reverts to the closest surviving patrikin and ownership may be reassigned to another needy family. Having a male heir was so important that in such cases, northern Albanians allowed a female member of the family to become a “sworn virgin,” adopt the male gender, live her life as a man, and thereby help retain, for a time, the family’s house and property.<sup>3</sup>

While families control their own arable land, a *mëhallë* owns communally the walls that are erected in its territory, the paths and roads that cross it, streams (or at least rights to them), pastures, and mills. While each of the Thethi *mëhallë* once possessed a mill, one of the very few that is still operational and working is that in Gjeçaj. Members of the neighborhood still go there to grind dried maize into flour. The mill channel and the neighborhood’s irrigation system are likewise owned and maintained communally, and special meetings are



held by the *kuvend* to create an irrigation rota among houses. Unlike mills and water for irrigation, there is greater ambiguity about who owns and has use rights to upland pastures. Some pastures are apparently owned by the *fis* at large and are freely used by all members. Communal pasture land can be rented to and by contiguous tribes. The high pastures near the Qafë Peja, for example, are owned by the Kelmendi but are rented for use by Thethi. Other pastures, those at lower altitudes, may be owned by particular *katund* (villages) and *mëhallë* and are, according to our informants, shared without dispute and without management by the *kuvend*. Some pasture land, however, is clearly privately owned by particular families, who built summer homes there, as at Nën Rreth in Theth and Pershulla in Gimaj. This pasture land is apparently quite valuable, and so plots are carefully marked by lines of stones or low walls. It is disputes over such land, as well as arable land, that might lead to feud, as described in more detail below. The situation in Shala therefore resonates well with the overall ambiguity associated with land ownership in Albania in general. It also is exceptional in that, unlike much of southern Albania, there were relatively few disagreements in Shala with regard to land ownership after the fall of Communism—their shared memory of who owned what land easily trumped 30 years of collectivization.<sup>4</sup> The discursive tension in modern Shala over pasture rights and ownership, with some claiming communal and others private ownership, may reflect a form of resilient stretching that buffered Shala, and northern Albania in general, from serious land disputes. Koster (1997) has argued that in pastoral communities, pasture is privately owned under conditions of population pressure, and this must have been the case in Shala for a good part of its modern history. In the aftermath of Communism, however, private ownership of pasture became unnecessary, due to depopulation and changes in the economy, and the social system has evolved to accommodate this new reality.

*Mëhallë* and *fis i vogël* are generally spatially equivalent, although they may grow and sometimes migrate or expand their territories to accommodate growing numbers. Such is the case with the Gjeçaj *fis* in Shala, which necessarily migrated to the western side of the river where they are now mostly situated. A few Gjeçaj families and the Gjeçaj mill are, however, still located on the eastern side of the valley. According to several local informants, this *mëhallë* migration was necessitated by

the sheer numbers of the Gjeçaj lineage and the consequent splitting of growing families. Several *mëhallë* together compose a *katund*, a village. Theth, for example, is a village that today includes 10 *mëhallë*. Lower Shala (i.e., Shala proper), on the other hand, is composed of multiple villages, each of which includes multiple neighborhoods. As described in Chapter Four, Theth was established by migrants from Shala during *fis* expansion; it was a *fis i vogël* of the larger Shala *fis*. At some point in the past, though, Theth began to establish itself as a separate *fis* from the rest of Shala, an independent *katund* (Figure 5.1b–d). Exogamous marriage rules were relaxed, such that the Theth and Shala *fis* began to intermarry. At the same time, exclusive marriage rules between the various Shala *katund* were also relaxed so that by 1918, many Shala women married Shala men. To this day, however, members of the Theth *fis* do not intermarry at all, ever. The marriage system is described in more detail below, but its evolution is certainly linked to changes in the valley's sociopolitical system, changes largely driven by contacts with the Ottoman state. Sometime in the eighteenth century, the Ottomans created the *bajrak* system. Northern Albania was divided into independent military-administrative districts, headed by chiefs—*bajraktars*—appointed by the Ottoman state (see Chapter Four). *Bajrak* boundaries did not always correspond to *fis* boundaries, and in this way, the Ottomans managed to exploit tribal rivalries and weaken tribal solidarity. Theth became its own *bajrak*, whereas four *bajraks* were established in Shala. The process whereby *bajraks* were established in Shala may have helped drive the separation of Theth from Shala, or at least reflects a process of separation that was already under way.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the *fis i vogël*, the *fis i madh* (“big *fis*”)—the wider lineage network composed of all those individuals who trace descent from a single, probably mythical, ancestor, sometimes glossed as “tribe” (i.e., the “Shala tribe”; see Chapter Four)—becomes relevant in regional, even international, sets of relations. Individual *fis* acted independently in their interactions with other *fis*, in particular in situations of inter-*fis* feud, when a *fis i madh* would need to present a united front. Likewise, *fis* would decide collectively, often under the leadership of the *bajraktar*, whether to join in a hostile action against an enemy state. In some of the documented rebellions against Ottoman rule, for example, Shala did not participate, opting to remain neutral, whereas in others they were key players. Sometimes *fis* would join

together into larger confederacies (*farë e fis*), as when for instance Skanderbeg led the resistance effort against the Ottomans in the mid-fifteenth century. At such times, a general *besa* (oath, truce) was declared and inter-*fis* feuds were set aside. These larger social collectives were particularly necessary when the *atdhe* (fatherland, nation) was under assault. At such times, all differences, including those of religion, were forgotten and the tribes fought together as one body, a formidable foe and a thorn in the side of the Ottoman Empire (cf. Fermor 1958:47). Even after the formation of the modern Albanian state in 1912, unification of the northern tribes was feared, for they could shift the balance of power in Tirana. Destroying the tribal system was a top priority for the new nation, especially under King Zog, who assassinated tribal chiefs and sought to disarm the mountaineers. During this time, a Theth-Shala-Shosh “axis” formed, and these powerful tribes appear again and again in historical descriptions of the turbulent transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. This axis could not have been built, however, without the creation of alliances between men across *fis* lines, and it was women, their wives, who, through their external familial contacts, laid the groundwork for these alliances.

## Marriage

Northern Albania fits the so-called Mediterranean marriage pattern whereby individuals marry early and attempt to have as many children, male children in particular, as soon and as quickly as possible (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). This pattern often led to large families who lived jointly under a single roof (Figure 1.3). Exogamous, patrilocal marriages were arranged between families, sometimes with the help of a matchmaker or *shkues* (as described in the *Kanun*, Book 3, Chapter 3, Articles 37–38; Gjeçov 1989:24), and different families and *fis* had preferred zones from which they drew marriage partners. Our interview data indicate, for example, that by tradition, families in Theth primarily preferred marriages with various villages and *fis* in Shala and with Shosh and, secondarily, with nearby, contiguous regions, such as Plan, Mërtur, and Malësia e Madhe (Figure 1.5). Families in Shala preferred marriages with Shosh and only secondarily with Theth and with nearby, contiguous regions, such as Pult, Kir, Nikaj, and Mërtur. There is without doubt a geographical component to these preferences, but they also represent the culmination of

numerous strategic decisions, made over the course of generations, and therefore reflect a certain degree of historical inertia. The evolution of descent systems in Shala, as analyzed above, helps explain these data. Theth had only recently split from Shala in kinship terms and had been separated (or was separating) politically through the *bajrak* system.<sup>6</sup> Theth had every reason to want to intermarry with Shala, its nearest neighbor to the south and a powerful buffer. Likewise, Shala’s main concern seemed to be Shosh, its nearest neighbor to the south and a key ally, or rival, in any regional conflict. In fact, Shala swore a regional *besa* with Shosh (and Mërtur) in 1908 due to the arming of the nearby Muslim Krasniqi tribe by the Turkish government, as vividly described

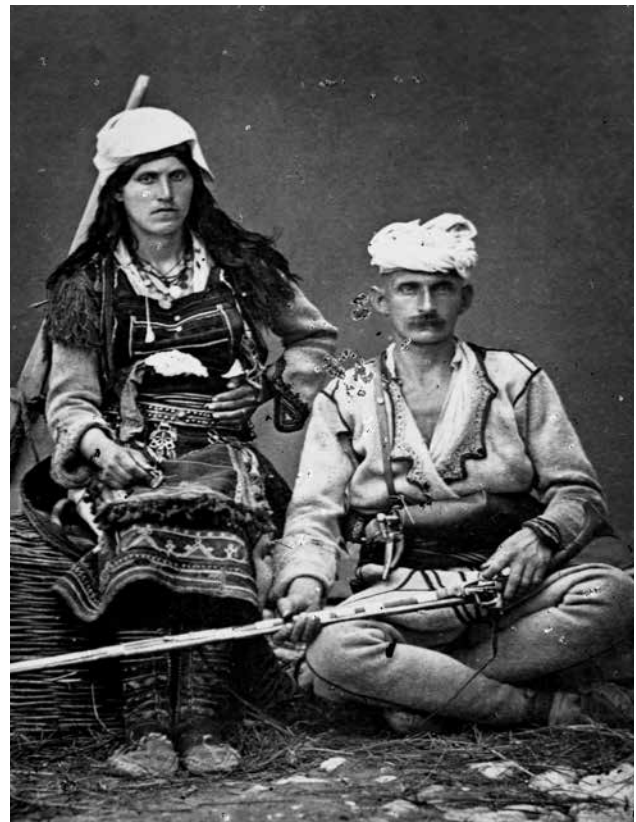


Figure 5.2. Husband and wife from the mountains, 1890–1900. Pjetër Marubi, used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania

by Durham (2000 [1909]:120–121), who witnessed the meeting in Theth at which the *besa* was ratified.<sup>7</sup> By at least the early twentieth century, then, political alliances had helped forge a Theth-Shala-Shosh axis, a confederacy that became a regional military force. But when exactly did this axis begin to form? And does its formation represent a widening of Shala’s interaction



Figure 5.3. Married couple from Lekaj in Shala, 2007. *Ann Christine Eek*

sphere or a narrowing? An investigation of diachronic marriage data can help answer these questions.

The earliest marriage data to which we have access come from the Austrian census of Albania (Seiner 1922), conducted in 1918 and discussed in Chapter Four. The census recorded each male head of household in Shala and Theth and the origin of his wife (Table 5.1; Figure 5.4). These marriages were probably brokered in the late nineteenth century. Several interesting patterns are immediately apparent. First, the 1918 marriage system for Lower Shala mirrors the marriage *preference* data collected in 2005–2007 via interview but is generally wider, encompassing other nearby regions (e.g., Luma, Plan, Dushman, Kelmend, etc.). The same is true for Theth, but with a slightly different geographic orientation. Second, men and women in Theth did not intermarry. But women from Theth married into Shala ( $n = 56$ , 11.5 percent) and vice versa ( $n = 60$ , 29 percent). Furthermore, 192 Shala women (39.4 percent) married Shala men, always between, not within, villages. Theth had no choice but to widen its marriage networks, because intra-*fis* marriage there was prohibited and because Shala preferred marriages first with

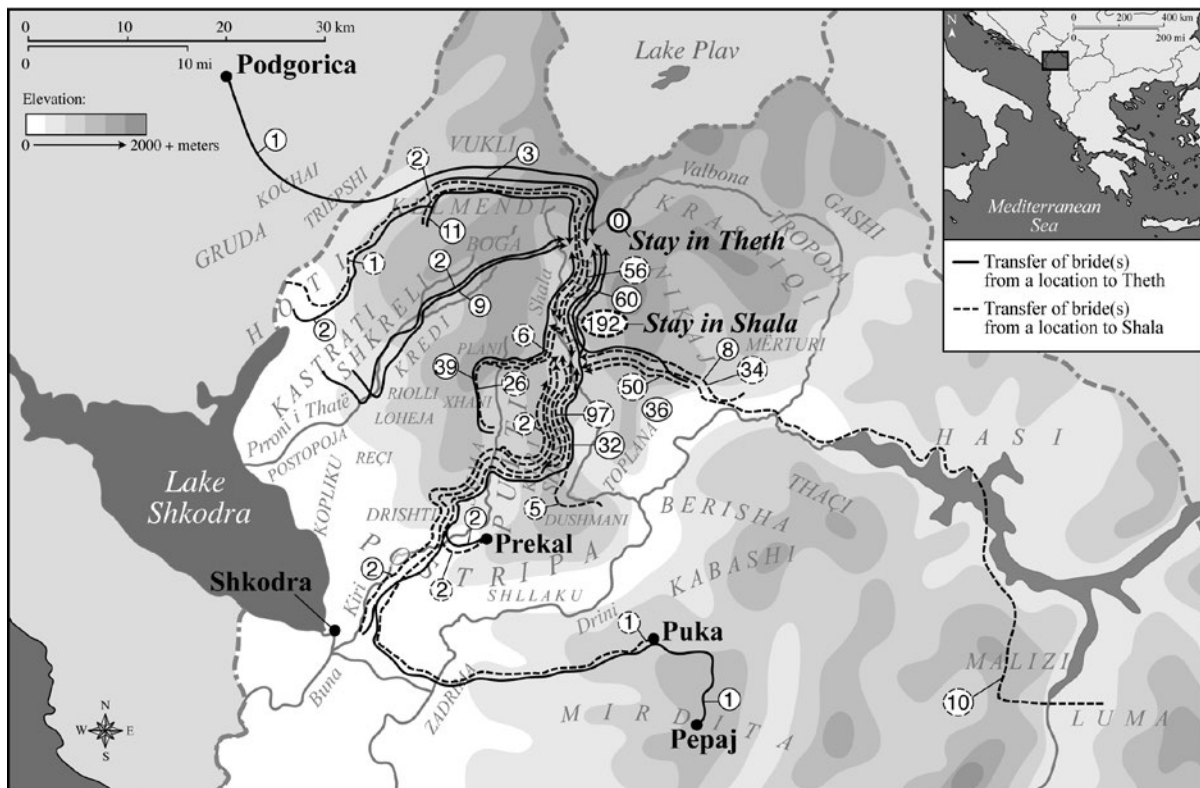


Figure 5.4. Map of Theth and Shala's marriage connections as represented in the 1918 Austrian census. Circled numbers represent brides from that location marrying into Theth or Shala. *Jill Seagard*

**Table 5.1** Overall Marriage Statistics from 1918, 1929, and 2005–2007, Showing Number and Percent of Total Marriages for Each Geographic Pairing of Husband and Wife

Men	Women	1918	%	1929	%	2005–2007	%	2005-7all	%
Shala	Shala	192	39.4	48	59.3	5	55.6	5	45.5
Shala	Shoshi	97	19.9	30	37.0				
Shala	Thethi	56	11.5			2	22.2	3	27.3
Shala	Nikaj	50	10.3						
Shala	Mërturi	34	7.0						
Shala	Pulti	26	5.3					1	9.1
Shala	Luma	10	2.1						
Shala	Plani	6	1.2						
Shala	Dushmani	5	1.0	1	1.2				
Shala	Kelmendi	3	0.6						
Shala	Kiri	2	0.4	1	1.2				
Shala	Prekali	2	0.4						
Shala	Shkodra	2	0.4						
Shala	Gruda	1	0.2						
Shala	Puka	1	0.2						
Shala	Toplana	0	0.0	1	1.2	1	11.1	1	9.1
Shala	Tropoja	0	0.0			1	11.1	1	9.1
TOTAL		487	100	81	100	9	100	11	100
Men	Women	1918	%	1929	%	2005–2007	%	2005-7all	%
Thethi	Shala	60	29.0			12	41.4	14	31.1
Thethi	Pulti	39	18.8			1	3.4	1	2.2
Thethi	Nikaj	36	17.4						
Thethi	Shoshi	32	15.5			4	13.8	5	11.1
Thethi	Kelmendi	11	5.3			2	6.9	3	6.7
Thethi	Shkreli	9	4.3						
Thethi	Mërturi	8	3.9			1	3.4	1	2.2
Thethi	Vukël	3	1.4						
Thethi	Kastrati	2	1.0						
Thethi	Prekali	2	1.0						
Thethi	Hoti	2	1.0					1	2.2
Thethi	Podgorica	1	0.5						
Thethi	Shkodra	1	0.5					2	4.4
Thethi	Pepaj	1	0.5						
Thethi	Malësi e Madhe	0	0.0			2	6.9	3	6.7
Thethi	Tropoja	0	0.0			3	10.3	3	6.7
Thethi	Kiri	0	0.0			1	3.4	3	6.7
Thethi	Plani	0	0.0			1	3.4	2	4.4
Thethi	Lezha	0	0.0			1	3.4	2	4.4
Thethi	England	0	0.0			1	3.4	1	2.2
Thethi	Korça	0	0.0					1	2.2
Thethi	Lek Bibaj	0	0.0					1	2.2
Thethi	Greece	0	0.0					1	2.2
Thethi	Baltoja	0	0.0					1	2.2
Thethi	Thethi	0	0.0						
TOTAL		207	100			29	100	45	100.0

itself, next with Shosh, and only then with Theth. In Lower Shala, a total of 70.8 percent of marriages were within Shala, including Theth, and with Shosh, whereas only 29.2 percent were with 12 other *fis*, and the bulk of those were with Nikaj and Mërtur. In Theth, 44.5 percent of marriages were with Shala and Shosh, whereas 55.5 percent were with 13 other *fis*. Theth had more, wider marriage connections and was consequently less isolated compared to Lower Shala.

Finally, we might have predicted that Shala's men would marry women in places where they had economic interests and to which they traveled often (e.g., women in Gusinje, Plav, and Peja), but such marriages did not take place. This may be because the inhabitants of these towns were mostly Muslim, but equally important may have been the desire to avoid conflicts in market towns. Men could not risk losing access to markets due to marriage disputes and feud.

To sum up, in the nineteenth-century, Shala maintained rather wide marriage networks, but the *preferred* marriage partners, with whom the majority of marriages were arranged, were the same then as they are now, forming the Theth-Shala-Shosh axis. Theth's position within the marriage network differed from Lower Shala due to its strict adherence to rules of exogamy. Theth married more widely and was, therefore, potentially less isolated. The political, rather than economic, nature of marriage alliances is indicated by the avoidance of marriages in market towns; the Theth-Shala-Shosh axis was a (socio)political, not an economic, entity, and Theth may have been more connected politically, both within and beyond the axis.

The patterns identified in the 1918 marriage data are also present in the 1929 marriage data. The 1929 data were collected by Coon and published in summary form in 1950. We accessed his more detailed, handwritten notes housed in the National Anthropological Archive at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Coon collected social statistics from male heads of household in each of 10 tribal zones in northern Albania, including Dukagjin, which incorporated Shala ( $n = 81$ ) and Shosh ( $n = 25$ ) (Table 5.2; Figure 5.5). He recorded the origin of each man's mother and father, so these data should represent marriages brokered a generation after those recorded in the Austrian census. Coon (1950) apparently did not recognize Theth as a separate entity (*fis* or *bajrak*) from Lower Shala, and it is thus unclear whether some of his overall Shala sample might include men from Theth.

However, because he traveled a distinct route through the mountains (in winter, no less), it seems likely that he interviewed men from Lower Shala only. Coon's data represent a (nonrandom) sample of the total population of Shala, excluding Theth, and thus are not easily comparable to Seiner's (1922) data. Nevertheless, they give us some sense of what the marriage systems of Lower Shala and Shosh were like at the turn of the century.

Several patterns are again apparent in the 1929 data and can be considered alongside those of 1918. First, Shala and Shosh remained preferred marriage partners, just as they were in 1918. Second, Shala men continued to marry Shala women at a very high rate (59.3 percent). Shosh also married within Shosh, but at a much lower rate. Both samples include relatively few external marriages, and these are limited to four nearby *fis*: Kir, Dushman, Pulati, and Toplana (Figure 1.5). Third, and finally, Shala continued to maintain a relatively closed marriage system, even more so than Shosh.

The consequences of marriage decisions become more apparent when the 2005–2007 data are analyzed. Our data include all women who married into the families with whom our interviews were conducted (Table 5.1; Figure 5.6). The sample therefore includes marriages that occurred over the course of several decades, before, during, and after Communism, and so the data must be handled with care. Furthermore, our sample from Lower Shala is much smaller ( $n = 11$ ) than that from Theth ( $n = 45$ ). Nevertheless, we may still identify several pertinent patterns. First, marriages within Theth were (and are) still prohibited, whereas Shala continued to allow marriage within the *fis i madh*. Unlike the late nineteenth century, many marriages occurred between Theth and Shala, but very few with Shosh (zero between Shala and Shosh, but this might be a sampling error). Second, Theth's marriage network became extremely broad, broader than Shala (although a direct comparison here is probably misleading) and much broader than Theth in 1918. Many of these marriages probably occurred after 1989, when restrictions on movement began to ease, and the foreign marriages (England, Greece) must have happened after 1991. Finally, unlike 1918 and 1929, the marriage *preferences* described to us in Shala in 2005–2007 no longer matched the marriages that actually had taken place in recent decades. In 2005–2007, both Theth and Lower Shala claimed to prefer marriages with Shosh, but those had in reality become rare. Their secondary preferences had, it seems, become favored

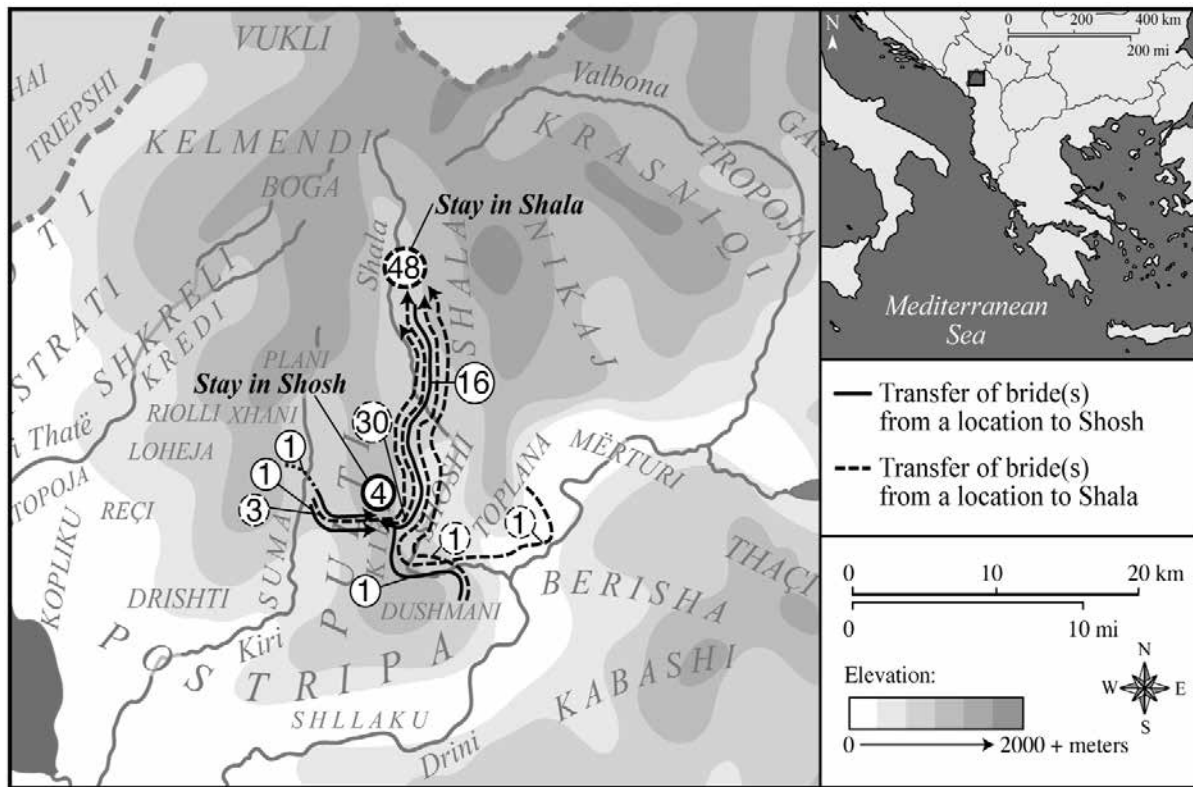


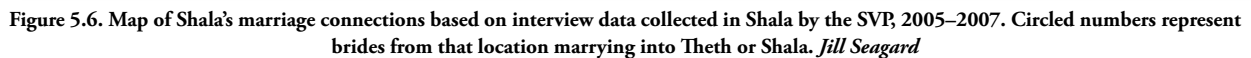
Figure 5.5. Map of Shala and Shosh's marriage connections as represented in Coon's (1950) data. Circled numbers represent brides from that location marrying into Shala or Shosh. *Jill Seagard*

over the primary relationship with Shosh, and, in the case of Theth, a large number of new marriage sources, throughout northern Albania and beyond, had been added. The significance of these patterns becomes apparent when Theth and Lower Shala are compared, when the 2005–2007 data are compared with those from 1918 and 1929, and when the results of comparison are placed in regional historical perspective.

Already in 1918, Theth's marriage system was necessarily wider, more "open," than Lower Shala. Lower Shala was tightly integrated into the Theth-Shala-Shosh axis; Theth less so. Theth therefore had more political connections than Shala, and this historical fact had repercussions before, during, and after Communism. The car road built to Theth under Zog further opened the *bajrak* to contact with the outside world but had little impact on Lower Shala, and this further exacerbated the political divisions between the two. Under Communism, Theth became a national park and destination for workers who had been granted vacation time, providing Theth more exposure to "greater Albania" than was experienced by all other northern Albanian *fis*. In the nineteenth century, Shala was predisposed to marry

**Table 5.2** Marriage Statistics for Parents of Coon's (1950) Subjects, Collected in 1929

Father	Mother	No.	%
Shoshi	Shoshi	4	16
Shoshi	Shala	16	64
Shoshi	Kiri	3	12
Shoshi	Dushmani	1	4
Shoshi	Pulati	1	4
Subtotal		25	100
Shala	Shala	48	59.3
Shala	Shoshi	30	37
Shala	Kiri	1	1.2
Shala	Dushmani	1	1.2
Shala	Toplana	1	1.2
Subtotal		81	100
TOTAL		106	



Among the more important types of social relationship within and without the valley is the feud (*gjakmar-rija*), a highly structured form of both self-redress, or



“justice,” and a mechanism for resource competition and, perhaps, population reduction (although our data present a new light on this latter assumption). The Albanian feud is characterized by powerful notions of masculine honor (*nderi*) and yet somehow manages to be both sanguinary and tightly contained at the same time. Its fundamental role in the lives of the *malësorë* has long been recognized by travelers, ethnographers, and historians, and our own interviews have revealed the extent to which feud affected the lives of the people of Shala. Various behavioral factors, the study of which are central to our larger project, were affected strongly by feud and its requirements, and these will be emphasized here—that is, the dynamics of interaction and isolation, house construction, neighborhood expansion, and marriage choices, in particular. We do not undertake a detailed description of the rules of the northern Albanian feud, which has been done by others (the most useful of which is Hasluck 1954). Nor do we compare the structure of the northern Albanian feud system to other feud systems, in nearby Montenegro (Boehm 1983, 1984a, 1984b), Greece (Fermor 1958; Herzfeld 1985; Peristiany 1965), or elsewhere (e.g., Black-Michaud 1975; Netterstrom and Poulsen 2007; Otterbein and Otterbein 1965). While the Shala Valley Project (SVP) was never designed to study feud exclusively, its omnipresence has meant that understanding its basic outlines is essential to explaining many of the other phenomena described herein. This section thus presents both the data on feud that we collected during our interviews as well as some interpretive implications for understanding the landscapes and social relationships that shaped its structure and practice.

Collecting ethnographic data relevant to feud clearly presents its own special problems. Ideally, one would reconstruct a specific narrative for each feud that outlines an initiating incident, the details of mutual responses, and then, eventually, the form of resolution that restored peace between the contending groups. Because a feud inevitably involves multiple sides and is frequently a multigenerational process, however, a clear narrative is elusive, and as reconstructed through interviews, it is almost always one-sided. The subject itself, although publicly and infamously bound up with the region of northern Albania, was nevertheless a sensitive one, and we are grateful to those interlocutors who were willing to share with us their family’s history and experience with *gjakmarrja*. Often we could not collect details on every

feud event from multiple sources. In some cases, there were no surviving members of a particular patrilineage, or, sometimes, the ones that were found were not willing to discuss their feud histories as this would contradict their settlement agreement (i.e., the terms of the *besa*). Such agreements often demand that the pardoned party not boast or otherwise indulge in discussing the details of a “settled” feud or else cause its reactivation. Most of the narratives presented here were collected in the presence of other family members where crosschecking the information on certain feud events was possible. Table 5.3 outlines the parties involved in particular feuds, the motives for the initial killing as stated by interviewees, the years they may have started, their mediation status, and the manner of mediation where applicable, and Figure 5.7 maps them. Feud grievances were (and are) often over seduction, abduction, runaway wives, or the refusal of a girl to marry the man to whom she was betrothed, which Durham (1979 [1928]:171) identifies as being “at the root of very many feuds.” In addition to these, we include feuds that resulted from land disputes (Table 5.3d,i,k) and some “anomalous” feuds concerning killings of one’s own kin (Table 5.3i–l). The latter killings, thought to be rare, are normally deemed “a waste of blood” in the *kanun*, yet in our sample they make up 28 percent of the documented feud incidents.

## The Basics of the Northern Albanian Feud

To be “in feud” or, in Albanian, to be *në gjak* (“in blood”) is to be in a very specific social state of being—it literally changes the way that a man (and until very recently, those “in blood” were always male) interacts with those around him. *Gjakmarrja* (lit. “the taking of the blood,” i.e., the blood feud) defines the larger social process that sanctions, approves, and structures a killing that cleanses the honor of a person *në gjak*, who is in that state because of a crime against or infringement upon the honor of oneself or one’s family (cf. Elsie 2001). An initial killing can occur for a variety of reasons (discussed further below), but the majority of killings within the feud are those made in response to a previous killing. Customary rules emphasize targeting the original killer, but local practice seems to contradict the textual *kanun* on this issue, since ethnographic and historic accounts make clear that the actual pool of potential targets extends to any male relative of the murderer (a process referred to by



Kelly [2000] as “social substitutability”). Both text and practice agree, however, that women and children are normally exempt from either retribution or reconciliation—targeting them is strictly taboo. Furthermore, even a woman’s presence is deemed an inhibition to the act of killing. Females, however, remain implicated indirectly in the taking and/or the settling of blood. Honor may require that a mother remind her son if he is “owed blood,” or a sister who has no brother may take revenge for her father’s loss to feuding. In addition to losing their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons as potential feud targets, the isolation of men in the *kulla* (discussed further below) further complicated women’s lives, as they then had to take over the role of breadwinners in addition to their already extensive domestic duties.

In some ways, the restriction of killing to men reflects the role of honor within the discourse of the feud. Discussions about what honor “requires” powerfully structure the nature of any feud, regardless of its original cause. We know from our interviews that originating grievances often are linked to marriage, water, and property disputes, but in the language of the *kanun*, it is the infringement of honor that actually necessitates killing. Avenging blood is not considered murder; it is

an honorable act that “cleanses one’s face” (i.e., restores one’s lost honor), and the pride of those involved often prevents requests for state or police assistance. The centrality of honor discourse, however, mandates that the parties subscribe to and follow, at least roughly, a systematic procedure that accords to the customary law found in the *kanun*, although in the specifics of any single feud, one finds that they are “adapted to circumstances” rather than strictly aligned to the textual tradition (Schwandner-Sievers 2001:97).

Consider, for example, this contemporary narrative of an urban feud, in which we can see multiple and often contradictory understandings of *gakmarrja*. The narrative, collected during our interviews, comes from a bystander in a blood feud attack staged by two sisters (their gender already rendering the story less than strictly canonical) who were avenging the killing of their father by a feuding *fis*:

*It was early in the afternoon that it happened. Two sisters carried out the revenge. They had never seen the nip [nephew, brother’s son] of the man who had killed their father; the latter was serving his sentence for the crime committed. One of the sisters took aim at close range but the rifle did not fire. [T]he kanun did not matter that day for they tried again . . . this time successfully executing their vengeful attack.*

**Table 5.3** Summary Blood Feud Data Collected in Shala by the Shala Valley Project, 2005–2007

Parties Involved	Initiated	Reason for Initiation	Mediation Status	Manner
a. Between 2 feuding <i>fis</i>	1991	Public insult - 2 victims	Not settled	Open
b. Between 2 feuding <i>fis</i>	1940s	Intended bride theft	Not settled	Family migrated abroad
c. Between 2 feuding <i>fis</i>	?	Killing	Same day	Reciprocated revenge killing
d. Between 2 feuding <i>fis</i>	1941	Pasture rights - 3 victims	Yes	Elders’ mediation - <i>pleqni</i>
e. Between 2 feuding <i>fis</i>	1800s	Killing of one’s guest	Yes	Reciprocated revenge killing by host
f. Between 2 feuding <i>fis</i>	~1918	Struggle with <i>bajraktar</i> ’s men	Yes	Marriage transfers of two sisters
g. Between feuding parties	~1900s	Unknown	1920	Mediation by Franciscan missionaries
h. Between feuding families	1993	Struggle over woman getting married	Yes	Uneven number of victims
i. Within <i>fis</i> /patrilineage	1992	Land ownership rights	Yes	Settlement after attempted revenge
j. Within <i>fis</i>	~1900s	Killing of one’s own kin	Yes	Expulsion of perpetrator by house burning
k. Within <i>fis</i>	1970s	Water rights - 2 victims	Yes	Even number of victims, justified revenge
l. Within kin-related <i>mëhallë</i>	1948	Killing of kin	Yes	Reciprocated revenge killing
m. Between maternal cousins	~1900	Marriage infraction	1935	Mediation: conditional settlement
n. Between maternal cousins	1997	Accidental shooting - unknown	Yes - conditional	Mediation rule: <i>gan</i> or accidental

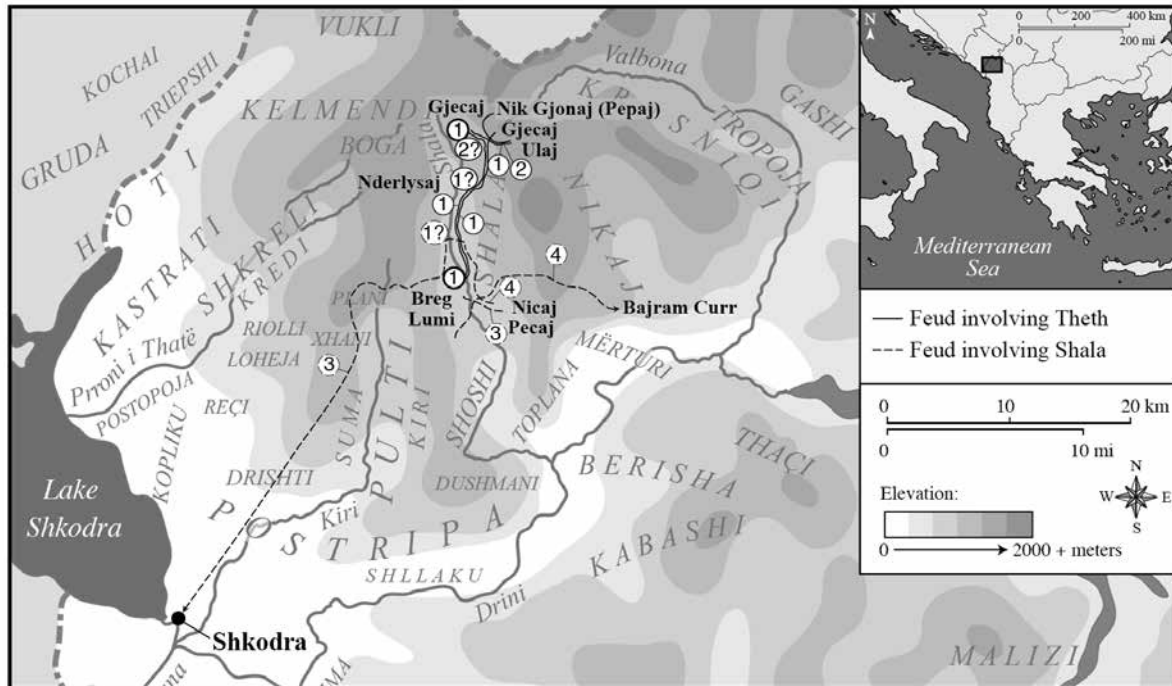


Figure 5.7. Map of blood feud conflicts based on data collected in Shala by the Shala Valley Project, 2005–2007. Circled numbers represent the number of reported feud incidents. *Jill Seagard*

The narrator acknowledges how poorly this revenge attack was carried out with regard to the strictures of the *kanun*. There are notions of proper and improper ways to take revenge, and observers can voice their judgments about particular cases with reference to the *kanun*. In this case, it is generally understood that the target must be forgiven if aim is taken but the rifle does not fire. The local expression for it is that “*e ka fal pushka*” or “the rifle has forgiven him.”

The case is further complicated by current and local understandings of what constitutes an appropriate and expected reaction between feuding parties when blood is owed. It seems to be generally accepted among our interlocutors that upon the public announcement of a killing, the victim’s kin may take revenge upon any of the perpetrator’s kin encountered in the first 24 hours after the original assault. These local interpretations contradict the recorded customary law, which emphasizes the quick negotiation of a temporary truce to allow the offender to attend his victim’s funeral (Book 10, Chapter 22, Articles 854 and 856; Gjeçov 1989:166). In addition to this disagreement over what happens during the first 24 hours, there is a continuing disagreement about the extent of blood debt within the patrikin. Local narratives generally urged that the only sanctioned target was the one who had committed the

crime, once the critical and dangerous first 24 hours had passed. In the case of the two sisters, the proper target should have been their father’s killer, who was serving a jail sentence for his crime. Because they expanded the “pool” of targets, they incurred a new blood debt, now requiring their victim’s father or brother to take his own revenge on the sisters’ family.

This line of reasoning was voiced by the narrator and was individually confirmed on a number of occasions as a widely accepted understanding of feud responsibilities. Current local understandings reflected in our survey data are in agreement with the earlier version of the *kanun* that held that the murderer is the only one to incur the blood feud. The later version was more expansive in extending the blood feud to all males in the family of the murderer, including an infant in the cradle, cousins, and close nephews who could be targeted in the first 24 hours, whereas after this stage, only the perpetrator was to be targeted. His kin and especially those kin members who were not brothers, fathers, the father’s father, sons, or the son’s sons and who did not normally share the same residence usually were not targeted (Book 10, Chapter 22, Articles 898 and 900; Gjeçov 1989:172).

These narratives of inappropriate targeting are not new. Lane (1923:30–31) documents an incident where a husband shot and killed the son of his wife’s abductor.

The latter intended to capture a bride for his son, and according to the *kanun*, the abductor, not his son, should have been killed. Krasztev (2002:54) reports a certain foreign mediator who visited an offended family over a period of six months and unsuccessfully attempted to convince them not to kill the murderer's three-year-old son but to wait instead a few years for the father to get out of prison. These accounts give the impression the Albanian feud is a "maze without a logical solution" (Post 1998:31), because the act of killing is seemingly rooted in intractable and primordial ties of blood and honor, but in fact they are exceptions that prove the rule. As described above, every northern Albanian, every resident of Shala, knows intimately the kinship lines, both consanguineal (i.e., "of the blood") and affinal (i.e., "of the milk"), that link each individual and all families. Rules of descent, built through marriage, are likewise recapitulated in the historical unwinding of a feud. In this way, marriage and feuds are two sides of the kinship coin, serving different goals but equally logical in their application. Feud rules are more often broken in modern times, as traditional kinship and marriage systems have foundered and families have shrunk, but there appears always to have been room for interpretation and adaptation, in particular when a feud was initiated to meet a particular goal, not only to cleanse a family's honor. Feud therefore serves, as does marriage, as well as kinship more generally, as another key means of ensuring resilience in the face of internal stress and external threat.

A tremendous variety of other "rules" apparently existed both within the recorded *kanun* and in the ethnographic record. In Edith Durham's (1979 [1928]:170) words, "The custom of blood was a solemn duty recognized by both sides and carried out according to rule." One such rule was supposedly that "the murderer may not dare to take the victim's weapon. If he commits such a dishonorable act, he incurs two blood-feuds" (Book 10, Chapter 22, Article 847; Gječov 1989:164), or "The murderer must inform the family of his victim and ensure that the body be transported home. He must also see that the victim's rifle be returned to the family and . . . for a 24 hour cease-fire, he is even expected to attend a victim's funeral" (Durham 2000 [1909]; cf. Elsie 2001:44). Some "rules" seemed to impart an endless expansiveness to the feud, demanding more than one life for a life. While the codified *kanun* apparently regards the value of human life the same, the loss of life

is not experienced equally by all; more grievous forms of bereavement like losing a wife, guest, or son to a feud attack have often led to double or even triple vengeance (Hasluck 1954:235). Nor does the textual *kanun* correspond to Hahn's (1854:241) record of a local saying stating that "every man from my *fis* has an equal value of six other men altogether."

The point here is to emphasize the shifting nature of what at first glance appears to be an inviolable and clear set of rules defining the obligations of honor, and especially of revenge. In fact, as the story of the sisters and its contradictions should make clear, the feud's rules are under constant pressure to change even as individuals retain their freedom to improvise their own interpretations of the system. Variations through time and across space as well as multiple understandings of what is accepted as legitimate feud behavior complicate the textbook narratives of the feud. Indeed, there are regionally diverse textual representations of codified law, such as the *Kanuni i Skënderbeut* (Illia 1993), *Kanuni i Maleve të Dibrës* (Martini 2003), and *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit në Variantin e Mirditës* (Meçi 2002). In some ways, this complexity of interpretation and freedom of action contributes to the seeming endlessness of the feud. As the bystander to the sisters' attack commented, "Of course they owe blood. That is why *gjakmarrja* never ends . . . they go after the wrong person instead of the one that committed the last killing and now they risk the loss of the last male survivor in their family."

## Implications

With this basic understanding of the feud in place, we can reasonably inquire about its implications for the socioeconomic structures and relations of the valley's inhabitants, their relationship to the outside world, and even its imprint on the built environment. To begin with the last first, the very shape of the villages and their homes reflects the strictures and requirements of the feud. As discussed in Chapter Seven, in the years since the establishment of an independent Albanian state, and especially after the imposition of the Communist regime after World War II, homes were designed less and less with the needs of the feud in mind. Prior to that time, however, the peculiarities of northern Albanian architecture were almost entirely driven by fear of the feud. Modern tourists and visiting urban Albanians are often directed toward the surviving *kullas* or towers,

which are pointed to as evidence for the feud, and that they certainly are. But closer investigation of the homes and closer attention to our interlocutors revealed that most if not all of the older homes were built with the feud in mind: *frengji* windows, garderobes with bent drain pipes to prevent shooting up through the drain pipe, living quarters above the ground level with defensible staircases or trap doors, rifle slits, “look down” or “murder” holes above the door, and so on (full details in Chapter Seven). Of course, one implication of Chapter Seven’s suggestion that the large stone houses visible in today’s landscape may not predate the middle of the nineteenth century is that there was a significant intensification of the feud in that period, since previous homes made of wood would have been much more vulnerable. Furthermore, the “rules” of the feud created an interesting architectural side effect: the invulnerability of women meant that houses or towers of refuge did not require a walled compound. Women could safely come and go to provision the men hiding out within the home—in stark contrast to other feuding societies that lacked such strong cultural protections for women.

Neighborhood formation as described in Chapter Seven also seems to conform at least in part to the requirements of the feud. Keeping the extended household together for as long as possible does more than maximize the familial use of labor; it also maximized the availability of adult weapon-wielding males and visibly represented that patrikin’s capacity to take revenge if necessary. Barring major casualties in the feud, however, that pressure to keep the family’s men together inevitably ran up against interpersonal friction and physical household expansion until some portion of the family felt compelled to move out and establish a new household. When they did so, they seem almost always to have done so at least as pairs of brothers. Both our interview data and other ethnographic accounts suggest that this pairing (forming the basis for future *vllazni* as discussed above) was done with defense in mind.

Interestingly, however, given the centrality of defensive considerations suggested by the formation of brotherhoods, the rules of the feud seem to have militated against collective investment in regional defensive systems. We have already noted how the very specific exclusion of women from the violence of the feud meant that individual homes did not require extensive fortification. However much it sometimes may have varied, the usual restriction of the Albanian blood feud

to “tit-for-tat” revenge killing may be responsible for the lack of any apparent need for a tribal-level nucleated palisade or regional fortifications, which is quite unlike the earlier Iron Age settlement pattern as represented by Grunas (Chapter Ten).

Although the feud may not have required extensive fortifications, it nevertheless did affect the relationship of Shala’s residents to the outside world in a variety of ways. Indeed, feud played, and continues to play, a critical role in modulating the movement of people into and out of the mountains. At a simple level, some men, having killed and knowing they were now the target for a fresh revenge killing, might seek refuge outside the valley, thus joining the stream of emigrant male *malësorë*. That protection might not suffice, though, and the feud could follow them, even into urban areas and foreign countries, in part because other *malësorë* continued to rely on the towns as the source of key goods, the very goods they considered central to maintaining their honor as men and as prospective hosts of other men (within and without the family): gunpowder, bullets, coffee, tobacco, and sugar. In this way, the requirements of honor and its intimate binding to the feud combined to drive men to the outside world as a regular part of their lives. And in their “trips to town,” they might encounter the target of a feud. A story recorded by Ekrem Vlora early in the twentieth century, but reportedly from 1780 (Vlora 1968, 1:22; translation by W. Lee), clearly conveys the tight interconnections of feud and honor, as well as the way those connections demanded constant interaction with the “outside” world. The story, apparently commonly told as a kind of moral lesson, recounts how during the reign of Mehmet Pasha Bushatliu in the *sanjak* of Shkodër, a *malësorë* from Shala had come down from the mountains to the market in Shkodër. While selling his goods there, he saw two of his enemies with whom he was in feud. He drew his pistol and killed them both. Unfortunately for him, the bazaar on market day was considered a holy asylum under Ottoman law, and no killing was allowed. The young man was hauled before the pasha, who told him that the next day would be blackest of his life (i.e., he was going to be executed), to which the *malësorë* replied that that could not be, because his blackest day had come when he had had a guest in his home and he had nothing to offer him.

As should already be clear, the feud had a substantial impact on the social and economic structures of life. This impact extended to such basic issues as how

many children a man had (or wanted to have), who he married, and how he sustained his claim to land. It has been all too commonly suggested that such a pervasive system of violence must have deeper underlying causes—for example, population control in a restricted subsistence environment. Our findings, however, stress a kind of feedback loop between underlying causes and cultural construction. That is, living in fear of activating a revenge cycle and maintaining honor within that cycle drove social formation perhaps more strongly than the probability of a particular initiating incident. Consider choices about children. The feud and its requirements for defense (or merely the desire to sustain an appearance of retaliatory power) affected not only architecture and neighborhood formation but also played a powerful demographic role. We have reviewed in Chapter Four the evidence for female infanticide in the highlands of Albania, a pattern that corresponds well to other ethnographic examples of feuding tribal societies. And although our interlocutors never mentioned such a practice (nor did we inquire about it), their powerful cultural preference for male children was evident at all times. The birth of a male child was celebrated, a female commiserated (Young 2001:30). It has been suggested at times in the literature that feud functions as a population control measure in a confined subsistence environment, and scholars of northern Albania usually derive this conclusion from the old claim, originally made by a Catholic priest writing to Rome and then re-broadcast for scholarly consumption and repetition by Nopsca (1925:52–53), that between 1901 and 1905, males in the northern mountains were dying from murder (primarily feud related) at a rate of 21 to 39 percent. Our examination of the data suggests that female infanticide, *because* of the social pressures associated with the feud, was the real population control measure, only supplemented by emigration and the male death-by-murder rate. Consider these sample numbers (as presented and explained in Chapter Four): the difference between the normal biological male-female ratio (105:100) and that found in the 1918 manuscript census for children in Thethi (128:100) represents an 11 percent decrease in the potential total population through female infanticide—with all the associated greater long-term population effects given women's reproductive capacity.<sup>9</sup> The ratio for adults at the same time (117:100) represents a post-childhood decline in the total population of 5 percent through male death, not all of which would

have come from feud killings. From this perspective, the actualities of the feud were less of a population control measure than the social pressures for male children generated by *fear* of the feud. Furthermore, this male death rate does not support Nopsca's famous 21 to 39 percent male death rate by feud.

Our interviews further suggest that feud can originate in different forms of social friction, reflecting the kinds of pressures experienced within a mountain society. For example, within our database of 17 feud incidents or ongoing feud narratives, we were able to identify the originating cause in 8. Two were ruled accidental shootings by the family and so were not treated as feuds. One originated because another feud crossed the line by violating the host's obligation to protect his guests. Another originated from a threatened theft of a bride (the killer left the mountains to avoid a revenge attack). Three killings in a single feud were associated with another form of marriage conflict, while three more were over pasture or water rights. Note that the possibility, even the frequency, of conflicts over marriage as the originating cause of a feud virtually ensured that many feuds would be *between* different *fis i madh* since marriage was strictly exogamous.

Taken together, our interview data and our demographic analysis suggest that there is some merit to a functionalist argument for feud. It was not merely culturally driven by idiosyncratic notions of honor. It was very much structured by highly evolved notions of honor and appropriate behavior, but the feud also seems to have "solved" real problems. If it was not really about population control as such, it certainly seems to have developed in response to the more or less constant pressures of needing more land while living in a physically and politically confined environment. Families could gain or lose land through feud, especially through communally perceived misbehavior in a feud. If one household's violations were perceived to have been especially egregious, the tribe could unite against them and drive them out, at which point the land reverted to the whole and was redistributed. A family destroyed by the feud would have their land "reassigned" to the winners (especially if the feud originated in a dispute over land).

In this sense, the nature of the external political atmosphere is critical to the intensity of the feud as a whole. The greater the extent to which the *malësorë* chose to be isolated from an outside regime, the greater the likelihood that such "isolationism" would, over

time, generate more and more intra-fis feuding. In turn, the more intense the feud became, the greater was the desire to regulate it, and therefore more elaborate the code meant to govern it. The *kanun* has grown through accretion since its nominal origins at the outset of Ottoman occupation. We can even consider the post-Communist era's intrusion of state-based justice and the mediation efforts of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as continuing extensions of feud regulatory mechanisms. The socioeconomic pressures generating feud have declined with emigration and local population decline, and although feuding incidents continue to occur, its overall frequency and lethality are certainly far lower than they were in earlier periods, as described in Chapter Four.

### Reconciliation: Past and Present

A key part of the *kanun*, of law, and of NGO mediation is the attempt not just to "regulate" the feud but to reach a peaceful reconciliation between the parties, ending the cycle of revenge. Kinship and the evolving tribal social organization are central to that process. While most feuds are initiated between rival brotherhoods, they may also be a product of conflict within a village united through direct and traceable kin links to a particular male ancestor. In the following case, a feud was started within a *fis* by a brother who threatened his own brothers and later shot over the roof of a house belonging to his own kinsman (*fis* A). The owner of the house shot five times to give the signal to the Shala *bajraktar* who organized his armed men to appear at the place of dispute; the six men who appeared at the scene were from *fis* B. Already this situation as described reflects evolving norms and social systems, since the *bajraktar* was a position created through Ottoman offices. Thus, the *kanun* had been adapted to the presence of a new important personage, and his power had been folded into the possibility of reconciliation. Unpredictability remained, however, as the rest of the story demonstrates. It was the norm that in order to resolve disputes, the *bajraktar* asked the parties involved for tokens (*pengje*), which could be something of value such as a watch or a gun. These would be returned only when each party selected an equal number of elders to represent them in a Council of Elders (*pleqni*) where the dispute would be debated. The *bajraktar*'s men were paid for performing their service (one sheep per mediator was reported by an

interviewee to be an appropriate payment in pre-Communist northern Albania). In this case, they obtained the tokens or *pengje* from *fis* A. They also asked for these tokens from neighboring *fis* C, even though the latter was not directly involved with this dispute. *Fis* C refused to give these tokens. Upon their refusal, the *bajraktar*'s men fired shots and in doing so, eight people were killed, resulting in a feud between *fis* B and C. Two weeks later, two men, one from each *fis*, stumbled upon one another, fired shots, and killed each other, bringing the grim score to 6–4 with *fis* C having lost fewer men in this exchange of fire. The *pleqni* gathered together and decided that the best way to settle the dispute was by having two young sisters from *fis* C (17 and 18 years old) transferred in marriage to two men from *fis* B. They would replace the two extra men from *fis* B, and in this way, it was reasoned, the score was even (cf. Durham 2000 [1909]:30). The families discussed here have maintained friendly relations since that time.

One of the ironies in this particular narrative was the failure of a nominal authority to resolve a dispute; indeed, his actions produced a massive expansion of conflict. The Communist regime, on the other hand, at least seemed to succeed in forcefully suppressing most blood feuds. Interestingly, however, the fall of the regime and especially the process of privatizing the land led to new problems related to land and property ownership and water rights (de Waal 1996). Worse, many old feuds were rekindled. A family living in a village outside Bajram Curri, for example (visited by SVP ethnographer Antonia Young in 1994 and 1995), came under a new threat, even though the man from their family who had committed a blood feud killing had himself died 17 years previously. The perpetrator's death did not satisfy the indebted family, who sent a warning that they expected "blood payment" in the form of the life of a male member of the remaining family. The family under threat consisted of a widow living with her two sons, their wives, and several children. The family had already adjusted to the threatening situation: the eldest son had gone into hiding elsewhere, and the younger remained indoors, unable to leave the house. Obviously, this situation had a drastic effect on the earning capacity of the family. The case, which was still unresolved (as of 2008), was already in the hands of the National Reconciliation Committee, but the process was moving extremely slowly, partly because the threat came from a family in a distant and remote region.

The feuding situation under Communism had been complicated by the collectivizing of arable land, leaving two *dylm* (the equivalent of a 100 × 10-m lot) of arable land per family (as discussed in Chapter Seven). This led to joint families splitting into smaller households to retain more land under the new law. Traditionally, splitting the family involves an intricate process that evolved over decades following the laws of the *kanun*. Family discord in such a situation is not uncommon, sometimes necessitating competent mediators. Traditionally, should a killing transpire, this would not lead to a further killing, for it would be considered a waste of one's own blood (i.e., within the patrikin) whose revenge would only take more members of the same kin-group away, doubling the loss. However, with changing interpretations of the *kanun*, this provision has not prevented feuds within a *fis*. During our interviews, we investigated such cases, finding them in 28 percent of our sample.

This apparent expansion of intra-*fis* killing has only increased the pressure to find mechanisms for feud resolution. Oral histories, archival materials, and the accounts of clergy and travelers all suggest that blood feuds and mechanisms for their resolution have long existed, especially in stateless societies where tribal concepts of political organization persist. Resolution served the purposes of defense of family, clan, or tribe and involved both groups and individuals. Mechanisms for reconciliation include various ritual means, for instance, as well as the exchange of valuables, such as food stuffs, tools, cloth, money, or women. In rural contexts, there were many mediation options, including family mediation, clan resolution processes, and mediations by religious leaders. The Franciscan priests in northern Albania (Durham 1979 [1928]:164) or the Bektashi *babas* (lit. "father," Sufi *shaykhs*) in the northern Albanian districts of Kukës and Dibra (Kaliçani 1997) are examples of clergy intervening in settling feuds.

An important contribution of the *kanun* is its prescription for mediation and conflict resolution closely aligned to localized forms of traditional law. Although the *kanun* specifies that a mediator "may be a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, or even a priest," the role of the mediator according to collected oral histories is usually taken on by the revered male elders (Book 8, Chapter 18, Article 669; Gjeçov 1989:138). Mediation by the *pleqni* (Council of Elders) is a paid position with more experienced mediators often reimbursed double the amount given to less-experienced ones (Ulqini 1991:128).

According to local testimonies, the proceedings of the Council of Elders are as follows: party A presents their case through the elder member that they have chosen to represent them. The other side presents their case through an elder whom they have chosen. Each elder may be paid the equivalent of one working day by the party they represent or may participate in the council on a voluntary basis; such elders are known to have a genuine interest in bringing about a settlement that will end the ongoing feud and are universally respected. After both sides present their case, the elders confer, and their decision is passed on to the *bajraktar* for enforcement.

The elders could rely on a variety of mechanisms for imposing a settlement, from blood money, to enforced relocation, to oaths, and to blends of all these and more. On some occasions, the settlement was based on payments to the party that had incurred the most damage, although our interlocutors regularly pointed out that "blood money," or money paid to the party that has incurred the most casualties in a settlement proceeding, was (and is) not generally regarded as a very honorable way to settle grievances. In other cases, a part of the blood feud mediation was to gain a *besa* (an oath, promise, a binding word of honor) giving one or more of the family members otherwise under threat a promise of unhindered work at certain times (e.g., in times of harvest) and/or in certain places. Families tended to leave the area permanently if the likelihood of a settlement was slim. Indeed, relocation away from native territories might be the requirement of blood feud settlement (Table 5.3c). In the cited case, the party that owed blood settled it by agreeing to the condition that they leave their ancestral lands where they would otherwise be an unbearable presence and a continual reminder of the human loss that they had caused to their feuding counterpart. Other settlement arrangements employed this strategy, and often the argument employed during negotiations was that "they are forgiven as long as we [the feuding parties in question] do not cross paths in public" or "forgiven as long as the party involved in killing last does not make another mention of it." Breaking these kinds of conditions could lead to the renewal of conflict.

When the mediation was successful and reconciliation achieved, the giving of the *pengje* represents a commitment to accept the elders' decision, followed by a ritual *buka e pajtim* (meal of peace) served by the murderer's family, in their home, to the mediators, the victim, and his relatives and friends (Book 10, Chapter

22, Article 982; Gječov 1989:184). Only after all of the above had been completed and any negotiated payment made should the cross be made on the offender's house as a "sign of reconciled blood" (Book 10, Chapter 22, Article 983; Gječov 1989:184).

The men of the *bajraktar* (who are reported not to have taken part in negotiations) enforced the decision of the elders whether or not it was accepted by the constituent parties. Such enforcement may involve cutting down trees owned by the party not respecting the decision of the elders, the destruction of terrace walls on their property, the burning of their house, or even their forced expulsion from the village. This process, however, could easily escalate into other feuds, and both the *bajraktar*'s men and the families of the mediators often invited human loss to their own families as a result of hard feelings that might remain in the post-settlement stage. The strong interaction between feud and the landscape is notable, then, in the case of reconciliation and enforcement, as well.

Since the fall of Communism, there have been initiatives to resolve blood feuds by instilling a change in attitude concerning revenge, stressing the need for forgiveness. This necessitates creating the understanding that honor need not necessarily demand killing but might be attainable through negotiation, understanding, and forgiveness. Founded in 1995, the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation (*Komiteti i Pajtimit Mbarëkombëtar*) publishes a journal *Pajtimi* (lit. "reconciliation") that provides discussions of theories, problems, and solutions, including contributions from international experts. CNR claims a high success rate, but there are not enough workers, finances or resources to focus on all the feuds that remain active today. The committee members (most are village elders) act on feuds in which one party, usually the one who "owes blood," has asked for mediation assistance. The committee is unable to provide protection, and its members' only tools are their words. The committee's objective is to mediate negotiation between the parties so that neither side loses face. Other organizations that operate in Albania are the Peace and Justice Centre in *Shkodër* and *Tirana-based* Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution (AFCR) that was founded in 1995. A further aim of the reconciliation organizations is to change people's attitudes through education in their attempts to curtail the persistence of feud related violence in Albania. Foreign groups such as the Nordic Consulting Group have

collaborated with the Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation in their attempts to curtail the persistence of blood feud in Albania.

These modern efforts to contain the feud are complicated by the mountaineers' ongoing reliance on the *kanun*. Schwandner-Sievers (2004:113, 115) notes that "both killing and reconciliation are ritual actions justified in terms of reference to *kanun* and are both integral to local processes negotiating social status . . . 'reconciliation' constitutes probably the only element of *kanun* which is widely perceived to be compatible with both state law and NGO requirements." The process of reconciliation is extremely slow and sensitive and may yield results only after years of negotiation. Negotiators between feuding parties are very careful not to allow the delicate transactions to be observed by those not directly involved in the conflict undergoing reconciliation. In this respect, film and television crews have sometimes been disruptive and actually caused further aggression.

Present-day feud reconciliations rely on many of the same mechanisms of the old *pleqni*, now used in different combinations, with different enforcement mechanisms, and embedded in an attempt to change the structuring ideology. Now, successful reconciliation concludes with agreement by the offending family to repay the "blood debt" in such a way that the aggrieved family can accept the murder of one of their own. This payment may take the form of money or livestock. It could also be the removal of the offending family to a minimum stated distance from the village. Of prime importance in this payment is the perception that the compensation is sufficient to uphold the honor of the offended family within the surrounding community so that no one could make the charge that their victim's and hence their family's *fis* and the community's lives were dishonored. The resulting *besa* is considered to be a lifelong promise—a religious utterance by which the user is considered legally bound. In addition, offering women in marriage to the *fis* who has incurred more blood feud casualties has turned feuding *fis* into *miq* or friends of the family via marriage alliances (Table 5.3f).

In this way, marriage and feud together modulated political networks in northern Albania. Shala's position and stance within that network were the result of marriage alliances and conflict and reconciliation through feud, all regulated through complex, logical, and rule-bound, yet dynamic, elastic, and powerful, kinship



systems. Sociopolitical structures were supported, however, by systems of economy, which necessarily were integrated with and responded to them. In the next chapter, we explore Shala's economy and demonstrate the intricate ways in which economic decisions were tied to social and political need and wants. Our research demonstrates that the feedback loops that connected the resilient social, political, and economic structures of Shala are further reflected in and determined by the mountain landscapes of the Bjeshkët e Namuna.

## Notes

1 Both informants and scholars sometimes note that the *mëhallë* did not permit the selling of family property to nonkin, but we have at least one case where selling of lands to members of another *fis* (patrilineage) occurred.

2 The tracing of the details of all such relationships—mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, father-daughter, mother-father, husband-wife, grandparent-grandchild, father's brother, and so on—is beyond the scope of this chapter. We focus instead on some of the main categories of the social collective in general and, more specifically in this section, those that have to do with patrilineal rules of descent. For a detailed, holistic discussion of these relationships, see Backer (2003).

3 A sworn virgin lived in the neighborhood of Okol in Theth until her death in 2006. Her story is told by Young in *Women Who Become Men* (2001), a social-anthropological study of Albanian sworn virgins.

4 As depicted in the film *The Albanians of Rrogam*, an installment in the British series *Disappearing World*, produced and directed by David Wason, featuring anthropologist Berit Backer and shot in Rrogam (an offshoot of Theth) in 1990–1991 as the socialist government collapsed.

5 The historical process that led to the current structure of the Shala *fis* presents an excellent example of tribal segmentation, whereby through time, larger social units grow and fission along kinship lines.

6 The political separation of Theth from Lower Shala is reinforced by a letter from the “bajraktar of Shalë” to the “chiefs and youth of Theth” written on 12 May 1907 and preserved in Gjeçov (1989:251–252; see also discussion in Hasluck 1954). In the letter, the people of Lower Shala inform the people of Theth of various new laws passed in assembly that they hope Theth will agree to abide by as well.

7 According to Lane (1923:11), Shala and Shosh were back “in blood” by 1921, when she visited Shala. It is not clear, though, from Lane's description whether the feud was between the two *fis i madh* or was limited to families, perhaps as a result of a marriage dispute. Two pages later, Lane (1923:13) describes meeting on the trail a woman “born of Shala, married in Shoshi.” The linked, oscillating nature of feud and marriage, revealed in Lane's writing, points to the counterintuitive process whereby conflict and alliance together forged regional systems of social and political interaction in northern Albania.

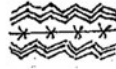
8 This section presents data and interpretations first introduced in Mustafa and Young (2008).

9 This assumes a total hypothetical population of 205 (105:100) and then 228 (128:100), thus an 11 percent reduction.

## Chapter Six

# ECONOMY AND SETTLEMENT

Charles Watkinson



The first part of this chapter presents a descriptive overview of the types of economic activity that were observed in the Shala Valley during the period 2005–2007, with an emphasis on its diverse agricultural basis in arable farming, herding, and the gathering and processing of wild resources. There is no large-scale industrial activity, such as mining, in the valley, and craft activities, such as wood working, are undertaken to fulfill domestic needs only. Some local commodities, such as wild plants, are exported and may have been in the past as well (see Chapter Three), but tourism is fast becoming the primary source of external revenue and may soon overtake in importance the overseas remittances sent by expatriate family members that an estimated one-third of Albanian households still receive (Pieron 2008:1198).

The second part of this chapter examines the organization of the valley's economy, with a focus on households and house compounds as the most important loci of economic activity. This section then shows how households are tied together into larger networks of neighborhoods and villages in ways that facilitate the sharing of resources and labor when necessary. This discussion builds on the outline of social and political organization presented in Chapter Five and provides context for Chapter Seven, in which a more detailed study of the valley's modern settlement pattern and built landscape is provided. Together, these chapters reconstruct an integrated, holistic cultural system that was flexible and, throughout the course of recent history, responded adaptively to change, even those changes imposed by the Communist government that were annoying, at least, or deadly, at worst.

Some concluding comments consider Shala's past economic systems given our understanding of its current

economy. It is clear that one major source of modern Shala's resilience has been a remarkable ability to intensify agricultural production, share resources when necessary, bank excess, and fund external interactions (e.g., trade, defense, feud, intermarriage) when necessary and desired. Decision-making processes that relate to Shala's engagement with the outside world were driven in part by individuals, such as patriarchs (and matriarchs), who chose day by day, year after year, what was best for the households they led. The economic decisions that underpinned these choices were bracketed, though, by the needs of the clan, which were associated spatially within neighborhoods. In theory, neighborhoods functioned as cooperative economic units, and economic decisions of import to the whole village were made by the village council, *kuvend*, under the direction of the head man, the *kryeplak*, as described in Chapter Five. We can assume that a similar system of economic cooperation and decision making existed throughout the course of the past 500 years, following the initial settlement of the valley as described in Chapter Four. However, given the archaeological evidence, such a system seems highly unlikely for earlier periods, the Iron Age in particular, during which time the economy was quite different, as was the system of settlement.

## Types of Economic Activity

### *Arable Farming*

Where the incline of the slope allows it, the modern landscape of the Shala Valley is characterized by an intricate network of small fields and gardens filled with domesticated plants, alternating with terraced pasture and/or fallowed plots. On the valley floor, maize is

the main cultigen, often interspersed with beans and squash. Referred to in the New World as the “Three Sisters,” the species complement each other. The maize stalks supply support for the beans, the squash plants help suppress weeds by providing ground cover, and the beans fix nitrogen into the soil. In the late summer, when the maize and beans mature and can be harvested, the squash plants are allowed to grow and take over the plot. This method of inter-cropping is an excellent way to raise a number of different plants in a small space and so is especially appropriate to the narrow, terraced slopes between the high mountains that are so distinctive of northern Albania (see Figure 3.2). Maize is either ground to produce flour for baking or turned into animal feed. The stems and cobs are also used for bedding or fodder for animals, so every part of the plant is exploited.

The “Three Sisters” are not always grown together, and some fields have beans, squash, or maize on their own. There are occasional bright green fields of alfalfa and some fields of rye and barley. According to our informants, wheat does not thrive in Shala, perhaps because of the high altitude and cold, short growing seasons. Locals say that the Communist government tried to introduce wheat farming to the valley but that this experiment failed and the focus turned to fruit trees. It is unlikely that wheat will not grow in Shala at all; rather, maize grows much better, and so local farmers prefer maize. Another intriguing possibility, however, is that wheat flour for baking bread, which was acquired through barter in market towns such as Gusinje and Peja, functioned as a prestige good. Those wealthy families that could afford wheat flour served white bread, a mark of status. Those families that could not afford or otherwise acquire wheat flour served corn bread, baked in the coals of the hearth. During Communism and following closure of the border, large sacks of wheat were brought into Shala to supplement the local diet, thereby enabling the most recent population boom (see Chapters Four and Seven). Today, most families who serve corn bread to guests are embarrassed to do so, since maize is meant to be consumed by animals.

Potatoes are also a common crop, in contrast to central and southern Albania. Since the Shala Valley Project investigated almost all cultivated land and recorded vegetation cover by survey tract, it can be roughly estimated that about 16 percent of this area is covered with potatoes compared to about 35 percent for the other

arable crops. The rest of the cultivable area is covered by grass or scrub, fields that are abandoned, fallowed, or used as pasture.

The external origin of the “New World” cultigens is acknowledged in the local name *kalamboq* (derived from Columbus) for corn and *kërtolla* (similar to the German *kartoffel*) for potatoes. At what date these crops were introduced into the Shala Valley is uncertain. Archival photographs from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries appear to show the same range of cultigens. Edmund Spencer, traveling through northern Albania in 1850, observed that “the wild vine might be seen twining itself in the branches of trees at an elevation of nearly three thousand feet, and fields of maize several hundred feet higher, while rye, oats, and barley thrive remarkably well at an altitude of nearly four thousand feet. The inhabitants of the few villages through which we passed, appeared well supplied with the necessities of life; always located on the fertile banks of some mountain torrent, their industry was rewarded by abundant crops of the finest corn, particularly maize, and they appeared to be fully aware of the advantages of irrigation” (Spencer 1851:376).

Andrews (1993:201) suggests that maize may have been introduced into newly conquered territories, including Greece and elsewhere in the Balkans, as early as the 1520s, since by this period the Ottoman army was forcing local farmers to grow it to feed the large number of animals accompanying the troops. Brunnbauer (2004:137) also suggests that maize was introduced by the Ottomans to the mountains (although he does not suggest a particular date) and that potatoes arrived in the Balkans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He argues that the introduction of these two cultigens “presented a revolution in the diet and increased the carrying capacity of the mountains” (see additional discussion in Chapters Three and Four). This statement is supported by evidence regarding the nutritional yield rates for herding versus maize agriculture: the caloric return versus energy output ratio for sheep herding in Peru is 1.6:1, and for maize agriculture, it ranges from 5:1 in Guatemala to 11:1 in Mexico (Guillet 1983:565). This ratio climbs even higher when potatoes are added. Nevertheless, despite the low yield rate associated with herding, it is often integrated with maize and/or potato agriculture in mountain environments as a low-risk, alternative production strategy. Furthermore, herded animals are



Figure 6.1. A water-powered corn mill. *Ann Christine Eek*

mobile, suitable for driving to market, and their wool, cheese, and meat are the traditional primary trade goods of the mountain tribes (more below).

Water is plentiful in the valley, with precipitation reaching up to 2291 mm per year (UNEP 2006:5), but needs to be channeled to water-hungry crops such as maize. In densely habited areas such as Gimaj, a rota system is adopted by the residents whereby each farmer receives 24-hour access to the system of channels that can be diverted using basic sluices (see Figure 3.11 and discussion in Chapter Three). In smaller communities such as Theth-Ulaj, the system is more informal. It is clearly understood, however, that keeping the main irrigation channels clear is a community responsibility. Water also powers a number of small water mills (Figure 6.1), often communally owned and maintained by a village or neighborhood (Osja 1998). These mills were (and still are) used to grind corn into flour and were so important to the life of the community that a section of the *Kanun* is devoted to rules regarding mills and milling, as well as maintenance of the mill channel and chute (Book 5, Chapter 13, Articles 331–350, 387–395; Gjeçov 1989:89–92, 93–96).

Immediately around dwellings, garden plots contain onions, herbs, soft fruit, and salad vegetables. This is

also where the vines and fruit trees are concentrated, providing fruit not only for immediate eating but also to ferment and distill to provide *raki*, the clear spirit sometimes referred to jokingly by its makers as “Albanian rocket fuel” (Figure 6.2).

While *raki* is drunk all over Albania, a particularly prized version based on the fermentation and distillation of the Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas L.*) seems to be distinctive to Shala. Pieroni (2008:1200) notes that it is also considered to have important medicinal properties as an antirheumatic when drunk or applied externally. Cornelian cherry *raki* is referred to as *raki thanit*, but the use of this fruit is less common than that of plums, cherry plums, mulberries, and grapes. The fruit is harvested in July and August, fermented for approximately two weeks in barrels built from the wood of black poplars and chestnuts, and then distilled. Pieroni (2008:1200) estimates that each household in Theth produces between 200 and 300 liters of plum *raki* a year.

### *Pastoralism and Transhumance*

When the inhabitants of the valley are not busy tending their crops, there are animals to raise. Small flocks of sheep and goats are a common sight (Figure 6.3), and most



Figure 6.2. *Raki* production. Ann Christine Eek



Figure 6.3. Herd of sheep with local shepherd. Ann Christine Eek

house compounds contain two or three cows, chickens, and a couple of pigs. Horses and donkeys act as pack animals and transport on roads and paths where no car can travel, dogs protect livestock and property, and cats deal with the vermin. None of the flocks of sheep or goats in the valley are very large, with few exceeding 50 animals, and even these probably represent the combined animals of several households in one neighborhood. In the upper reaches of the valley, the sizes of flocks are still regularly reduced by wolf attacks. Pieroni (2008:1198) suggests that “the economy of the upper Shala valley is predominantly based on self-sufficiency,” but, as described below, no household can prosper without cooperation from other households. Self-sufficiency must be balanced by cooperation, and this is clearly reflected in the dispersed settlement system and economy.

As in the mountainous areas of other Mediterranean countries, seasonal transhumance is still a strategy adopted in northern Albania. In a marginal environment such as the Shala Valley, transhumance can be seen as a risk-reducing economic strategy since animals are transported to the available foodstuffs, rather than vice versa, thus using the landscape in an extensive manner and reducing labor (Sterud 1978). On the basis of his analysis of strategies of food production in the Dinaric alps, Sterud (1978:383) argues that “the less conducive the landscape for food production, the more extensive will be the pattern of land utilization,” and the mixed pastoral and arable agricultural strategies adopted in the harsh mountain environment of the Shala Valley seem to bear out this generalization (see additional discussion in Chapter Three).

Unlike the pastoral specialists engaged in long-distance seasonal transhumance studied in areas of the Near East, who will travel hundreds of miles with flocks of up to 500 sheep, as described by Hole’s (1978) investigations in Luristan, the inhabitants of Shala move relatively short distances to seasonal encampments (*stani*) rebuilt every year on permanent foundations established on the upper slopes of the valley (Figure 6.4). The lower temperatures and higher quality of grazing at higher elevations allow the herders to extend the lactation period of the flock (Chang and Tourtellotte 1993:256). With responsibilities for the arable crops to consider, members of the family will move up and down the hillsides, alternating tending of the crops with caring for the animals. Halstead (1996:20) has argued that this sort of activity should more properly be

termed “mixed village farming” or “household herding” to distinguish it from specialized pastoralist strategies that involve larger herds, complex grazing schedules, and the creation of specialized products for exchange. As described in Chapter Three, it may also be the case that changes in forms of land tenure prompted by the Ottoman invasion made long-distance seasonal transhumance from mountains to plains impossible.

Sterud (1978:383) classifies the herding strategy employed in Shala as *normal* or Mediterranean transhumance, in which the permanent village base is maintained at lower altitudes, and the herds are moved to high mountain pastures only in summer. Some inhabitants of Shala also practice *inverse* or alpine transhumance in which the permanent village is maintained in the mountains and the animals are moved down to lower slopes at certain times of year. Pieroni (2008) counted four families in Theth who move their animals to Shkodra in the winter. However, he is incorrect in suggesting that all families with herds do this. In a winter trip to Theth in 2008 (see below), Galaty, Lee, and Tafilica saw many animals kept in barns, fed on hay and leafy fodder, and taken out to graze when the weather allowed.

As we describe in more detail below, settlement in Shala is designed in such a way that households and individuals can take efficient advantage of different horizontal and vertical environmental zones throughout the valley. This strategy, which requires an extensive as opposed to nucleated system of settlement, is commonly found in many mountainous regions and is referred to as *Alpwirtschaft*: “mixed mountain agriculture, a peculiar adaptive strategy, based on agropastoral transhumance, each segment of which is intricately intermeshed with the others and productive only during the short growing season from spring to early fall” (Guillet 1983:562). Importantly, because the system depends on movement and careful timing of agricultural activities, households must cooperate through various communal institutions. In northern Albania, these institutions are tribal in organization, regulated by the *Kanun*, and designed to support economic resilience and sustainability through reciprocal labor exchanges and landscape intensification, like terrace construction.

### *Exploitation of Wild Resources*

In areas higher up the hillside, grass is mown to provide hay for animals and beech leaves are gathered



Figure 6.4. Occupied *stanë* in Shosh taken in 1938. *Shan Pici*, used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania

for their bedding using wicker baskets carried on the back. At both lower and higher altitudes, plants are gathered for specialized purposes, especially by elderly women. The diverse greens gathered for food include *Chenopodium*, *Amaranthus*, and *Rumex* species and are collectively termed *nena* (Pieroni 2008:1210). Some have nonfood uses, most notably for the production of herbal medicines. This activity was commercialized during the Communist period, with an infrastructure developed to gather such plants and export them to other Eastern bloc countries. In the post-Communist period, the German development agency, GTZ, has revived this industry and is sponsoring a number of projects in the valley to cultivate or gather herbs. At one household visited in 2006, a local manager was coordinating around 30 local growers and harvesters in the production of common herbs such as sage, mint, and oregano. Evidence of other deliberate cultivation of specialized species was discovered in the center of the valley, where large fields of sumac (*Rhus coriaria*), known in Albanian as *shqemja*, were connected by local people to another specialized craft use. As the name

suggests (*corium* is the Latin for leather), the plant is rich in tannins and is used in the production of leather goods (see additional discussion in Chapter Three).<sup>1</sup>

The presence of *Rhus coriaria* in Shala, a species native to the Mediterranean but not to Shala itself (A. Pieroni, personal communication, March 2010), and therefore perhaps transplanted, may indicate that the people of Shala grew the plant and exported it to tanneries on the coast and overseas, perhaps as early as the Venetian period. Another species that was introduced to Albania and to Shala is the mulberry tree (A. Pieroni, personal communication, March 2010). Silkworms consume mulberry leaves and their cocoons are collected for the production of silk. As noted in Chapter Three, there is documentary evidence for silkworm production in Lower Pulati (Pulti) (Durham 1979 [1928]:17), so silkworms may have also been raised in Shala. Certainly there was a thriving, well-documented silk industry in northern Greece (Brunnbauer 2004). When that industry collapsed in the early nineteenth century, mountain towns were abandoned (Brunnbauer 2004:130). The same insecurities that affected northern



Albania in the early 1800s (described in Chapter Four) apparently also affected northern Greece.

In their study of traditional phytotherapy in the nearby northern Albanian village of Lepushe, Pieroni et al. (2005:379) identified approximately 70 botanical taxa and 160 medical preparations, mainly derived from plants but also including animal products and minerals. In his more recent study of the ethnobotany of Theth, Pieroni (2008:1200) identified 79 botanical taxa, with 39 percent used for food and 26 percent for medicine. While he also has identified many of these in other parts of Albania, Pieroni comments on some unusual activities, such as the gathering of the toxic fruits of *Colchicum autumnale* L., which are dried and sold in the lower Shala Valley and in Shkodra to intermediaries or traders associated with the pharmaceutical companies, fetching around 30 Euro/kg. He suggests that the most profitable plant export trade from the Shala Valley is in wild orchid bulbs (especially *Orchis morio* L.), which are sold in the Shkodra market for around 50 Euro/kg.

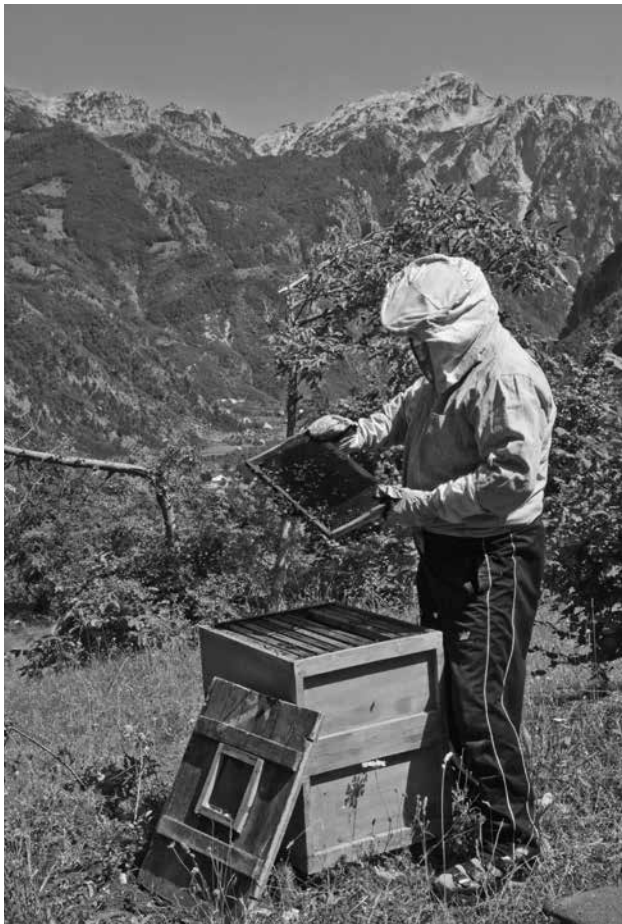


Figure 6.5. Beekeeping. Ann Christine Eek

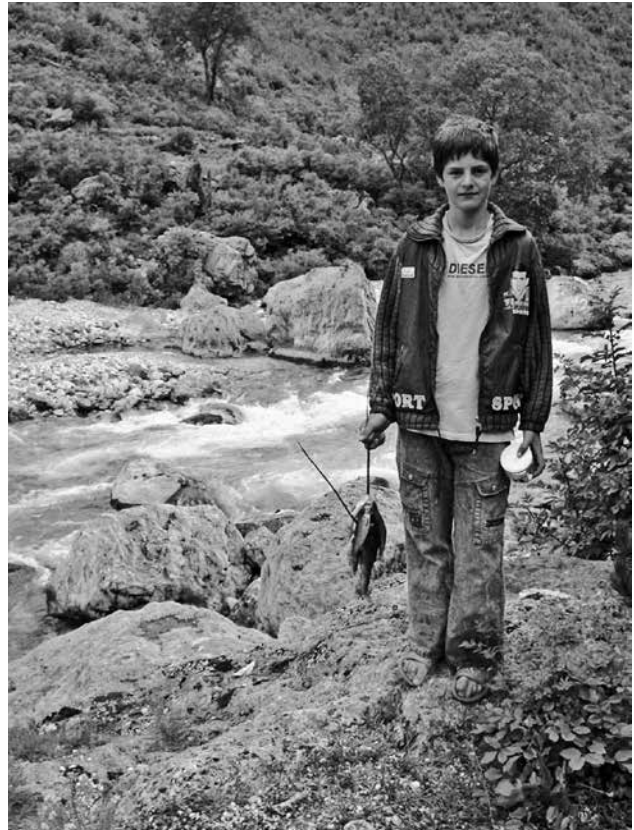


Figure 6.6. Fishing. Charles Watkinson

Many households also keep a few beehives, and some farmers have built up large numbers of hives to produce and sell surplus honey (Figure 6.5). This strategy for bringing money into poor agricultural communities has been encouraged elsewhere in northern Albania by organizations such as the British charity Oxfam, which has provided hives to a number of families (Aguar and Sejdaras 2007). Thirty-five hives can produce around 300 kg of honey in a year. Beekeeping is, however, a practice with deep roots; a section of the *Kanun* is devoted to bees and beekeeping (Gječov 1989:67–70).

Hunting and fishing are small-scale activities that provide raw materials and food for inhabitants of the valley. In addition, various animals are trapped for their pelts. The resource would have been a valuable one before the development of modern fibers, and there is some indication that they are exported in small numbers to Shkodra (see below). UNEP (2006) notes the presence of a number of species valued for their fur in Theth (see Figure 3.12), including the red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), pine marten (*Martes martes*), polecat (*Mustela putorius*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), brown bear





Figure 6.7. Galaty, Lee, and Tafilica at the Qafa Thorës in January, 2008. *Mëhill Çarku*

(*Ursus arctos*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), wild goat (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), and roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*). The marble trout (*Salmo trutta marmoratus*) and Mediterranean trout (*Salmo trutta macrostigma*) are among the fish that can be seen being caught by boys fishing with handlines in the Theth River (Figure 6.6).

Cutting timber is officially restricted in the 2630 ha of the Thethi National Park, which is a protected zone of rare virgin woodland. The state of the roads currently makes commercial logging difficult, but evidence of small-scale timber extraction can sometimes be seen, to produce wooden tools, containers, building materials, and firewood. Some larger compounds have electric saws and other equipment to cut planks. The most common species of tree identified by UNEP (2006) in Shala were beech (*Fagus sylvatica* L.), spruce (*Picea abies*), pine (*Pinus nigra*, *Pinus peuce*, *Pinus sylvestris*, *Pinus leucodermis*, *Pinus heldreichii*), silver fir (*Abies alba* and *Abies borisii-regis*), aspen (*Populus tremula*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), ironwood (*Ostrya carpinifolia*), and rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). At an altitude of 760 to

850 m (Theth itself is at 670 m altitude, surrounded by mountains reaching to 2,500 m above sea level), the oriental hornbeam (*Carpinus orientalis*), the South European flowering ash (*Fraxinus ornus*), and the common hazel (*Corylus avellana*) dominate.

## The Agricultural Calendar

The period in which agricultural activities can be conducted in the mountains is constrained by the deep snow that starts to fall in October and usually only melts in March and April, with roads at higher elevations sometimes still blocked into early May. Snow in the valley can reach a depth of 280 cm (UNEP 2006:5). Families who stay in the valley all winter spend their time in January and February feeding the animals, mucking them out, and providing clean bedding. Winter is also the season during which men trap fur-bearing animals.

In January 2008, Galaty, Lee, and Tafilica made a trip by snowshoe over the Qafa Thorës and into Theth, where they spent several days staying in the house of the

headman (Figure 6.7).<sup>2</sup> This trip generally reinforced our perception that Shala was not nearly as isolated as it is purported to have been. The journey from Boga in Kelmend to Theth through deep snow, guided by a native of Theth, took the better part of a day only. The return trip was equally fast and was made with several males from Theth, one of whom was a septuagenarian. Storms are of course a real danger, and many mountain families can tell stories of loved ones lost in winter storms, but traveling into and out of the valley is generally not overly difficult, especially when one knows the winter trails. Likewise, life in the valley in winter is difficult, in Theth in particular, but not without comforts. All of Shala's houses are stone (see Chapter Seven) and possess multiple stone fireplaces and chimneys. As long as enough wood has been cut, chopped, and put up, houses are kept warm and dry. This is particularly important in those neighborhoods on the western slopes of the valley, like Gjeçaj, which receive very little sunlight during the short days of winter. The fireplaces are kept well fed and stoked by the women of the house, and the place of honor next to the hearth is always given to the

guests. They ate well, too: fatback bacon and goat that had been dried and smoked, boiled sheep, cheese, corn bread baked in the fire, and a wide variety of pickled vegetables. Traditionally, winter may have been a time of ease and plenty (although at least one old man keeps very busy trapping) and, as in many parts of the world, spring a time of want and hard work.

By March, the ground has usually warmed enough to loosen and aerate the soil through an initial, shallow plowing to a depth of around 15 to 18 cm. Horses pulling a moldboard plow are used. The soil is left to dry. The winter's accumulated manure is spread over the fields in April and then they are plowed more deeply, to a depth of 25 to 30 cm. March is also when piglets are purchased in Shkodra (if the roads are passable), to be fattened up during the rest of the year. Vines and trees are pruned.

Maize is planted in April from seed kept from the previous year. A selection of the biggest and healthiest cobs is kept dry and husked in the attic, and then stripped for seeds just before planting. Maize to be fed to animals is dried on the cob and stored in small, upright cribs called *koçek* (Figure 6.8). The potatoes are also propagated in

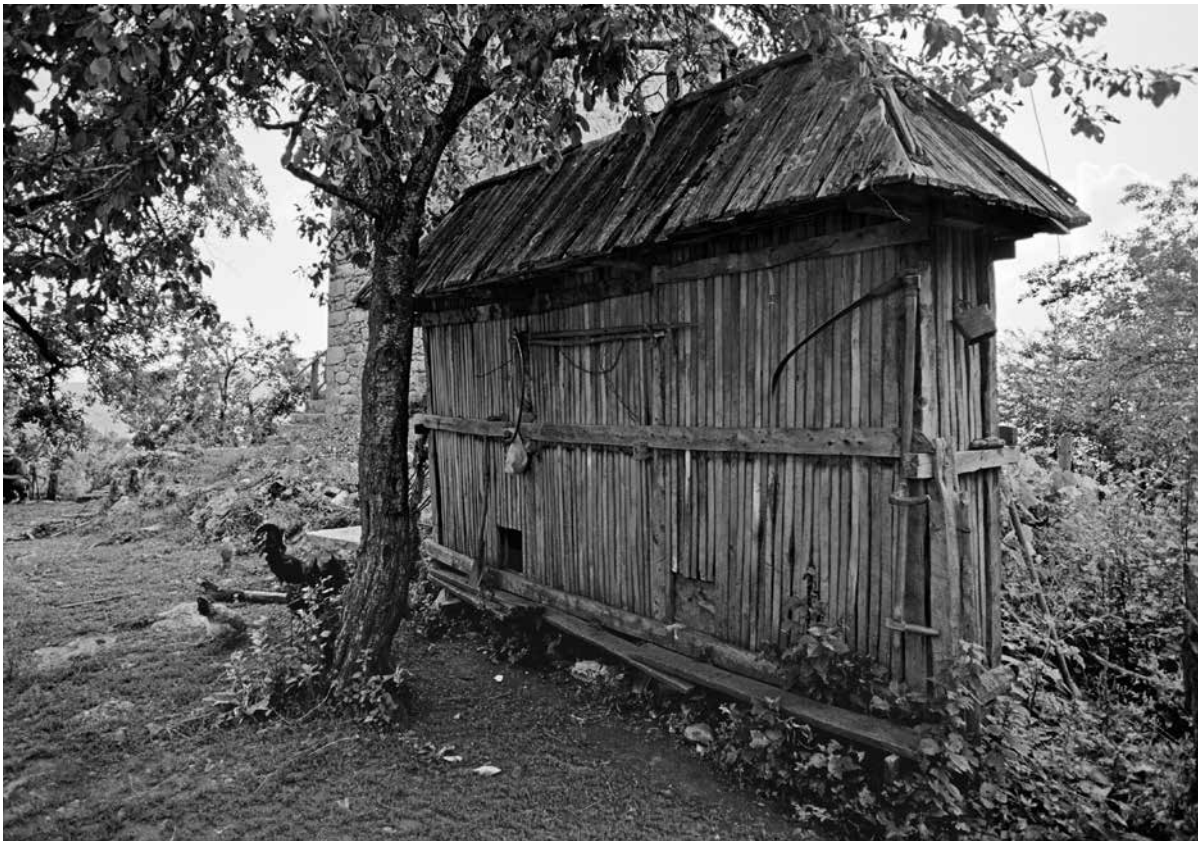


Figure 6.8. A corn crib, or *koçek*. Ann Christine Eek

April from seed potatoes from the previous year kept in pits in the basement of the house. Garden vegetables are also planted. The main arable tasks under way during the months of May through July are weeding with hoes and continuous clearing of the irrigation canals. If there is no rain, corn must be irrigated at least once every eight days, whereas the potatoes are less thirsty and need only very occasional irrigation. Fast-growing alfalfa can be harvested for fodder three or four times over the summer, while hay is also cut from the upper pastures. Summer-only residents return to the mountains from Shkodra in May.

Those with herds of animals move them up to the high pastures (both by truck and on foot) in June and early July and keep their herds up in the mountains until late August or early to mid-September, when the weather starts to become unpredictable. Daytime temperatures range from an average of 19° C in July to 0° C in January (UNEP 2006:5).

If the plums and other fruit are ready, the manufacture of *raki* begins in late June and continues through August. The beans are harvested in August and the corn is harvested in September. Nothing is left to waste. The bean stalks are preserved for animal feed, and even the chaff that is separated from the corn when milled is kept as dietary supplement for the animals. Corn cobs are picked and husked, and the stems left to dry in sheaves. Around 50 percent of the corn on the cobs will go to make animal feed, 40 percent will be ground to make bread, and 10 percent will be kept for seed.

In October, the grapes are harvested, and wine and *raki rushit* are produced. As the November rains start, the priority turns to gathering firewood, laying in hardware supplies from Shkodra, and gathering beech leaves for animal bedding.

When the snows start, the inhabitants of Shala must move their animals inside and maintain them with the corn stalks and other fodder gathered during the summer and fall months. There is an increasing trend toward moving entire households to Shkodra in the winter months, so that animals can graze on pasture all year. In winter 2005, the mayor estimated that only 17 families stayed in Theth, compared to the 80 or so who live in the valley during the summer months. This number dropped to 14 in 2006. Informants told Pieroni (2008) in July 2007 that only 18 families were living permanently (i.e., also during the winter) in the settlements of Theth. Mustafa and Young (2008:90) estimate

that “of the 249 registered families of Thethi, at the northern end of the Shala Valley, in 1991, only about seventeen families remained in the village throughout the winter of 2005, although a large number returned to their Thethi homes in the following summer. Of the seventeen full-time resident families, only twelve remained over the winter of 2007.”

In 2006, around 100 houses in Ndërlysj, Gak, Lekaj-Musha, and Gimaj were recorded during intensive archaeological survey, of which 51 percent were vacant (roofed and locked), 12 percent ruined, and 36 percent occupied. This reflects a pattern of depopulation similar to that identified in 2005 in Theth by the Ethno-historic Survey team where 44 percent of houses were vacant, 15 percent ruined, and 41 percent occupied. By July, most absentee owners planning to spend the summer in the valley would surely have arrived, and the majority of vacant houses were identified by interviewees as belonging to neighbors who had left the valley 5 to 10 years ago and were now as likely to be in the United States, Italy, Greece, or the United Kingdom as in other parts of Albania. Most houses were being kept in some state of repair by relatives (one man in Ndërlysj acted as caretaker for at least six houses), and the land around was often being rented by those who remained in the valley. Forty-six percent of the cultivable area surveyed was covered with grass and, although much of this was being mown, this figure may also be a good proxy for the degree of depopulation. Fewer and fewer of the summer inhabitants stay for the winter: in Ndërlysj, only 8 households (out of 35 in 1990) are present in the summer, and only 2 remain in the winter; in Gak, only 7 households remain in the summer (out of 30 in 1990), and again only a couple stay through the winter; of 18 households still living in Lekaj-Musha, only 4 stay the winter; and of 22 households in Gimaj-Kodër, 13 stay the winter. Those who do not stay move down to Shkodër in mid-October, generally returning in April. In 2007, we were told by two different informants that there are 35 households in Abat, of which 12 to 13 overwinter. This number tallies well with the 1918 Austro-Hungarian census that lists 32 households (Seiner 1922). Of the 15 households in Dednikaj, 5 overwinter. About 10 households still move their animals to pasture during the summer. Gimaj-Camaj is the lowest neighborhood of Gimaj, just to the west of the bridge leading to Breg Lumi. Only 2 families overwinter in the neighborhood,

but there are 13 houses in total (4 of them occupied during the summer). Eight households overwinter in Marnikaj out of a total of 15.

The families who do stay in the valley in winter need to sustain themselves as well as the animals, and the inhabitants of Shala have become expert in processing foods for long-term storage. The milk from the flocks is turned into cheese, potatoes are stored in pits in the basement of houses, and corn kernels are laid out to dry in the attics of houses ready to be turned into flour. To maintain good cheer during the cold nights, *raki* is distilled and stored in large quantities. Andrea Pieroni observed in detail the pickling of vegetables, where cucumbers, cabbages, tomatoes, turnips, and eggplants were harvested; stored in barrels of salt water; and left to ferment. Near the end of this process, chili peppers were added (Pieroni 2008). Although the processing of milk to make cheese (*djathë*) and yogurt (*kos*) was observed in a number of Shala households, Pieroni notes a lesser emphasis on dairy products than Lepushë. He suggests that this may reflect a lesser reliance on pastoralism in

the Shala Valley than in other parts of the Albanian mountains, related to more cultivable areas in the broader base of the valley, and perhaps the availability of other sources of income through tourism.

### *Craft Activities*

Food processing requires special equipment: preserving barrels (*gaviç*) are a familiar sight (Figure 6.9), and households are usually engaged in cheese production using the traditional churn (*tpi*) and *raki* distillation using the *kazani i rakisë* full of fermented grapes and sometimes plums, mulberries, or the Cornelian cherry. There are craft shops within the valley producing many of these artifacts, using traditional techniques and local woods. A craftsman in Lekaj, for example, produces and repairs packsaddles (selling around 10 a year) and other wooden goods. However, an increasing range of more complex agricultural machines are being brought into the valley from outside, including metal honey spinners and plastic containers.

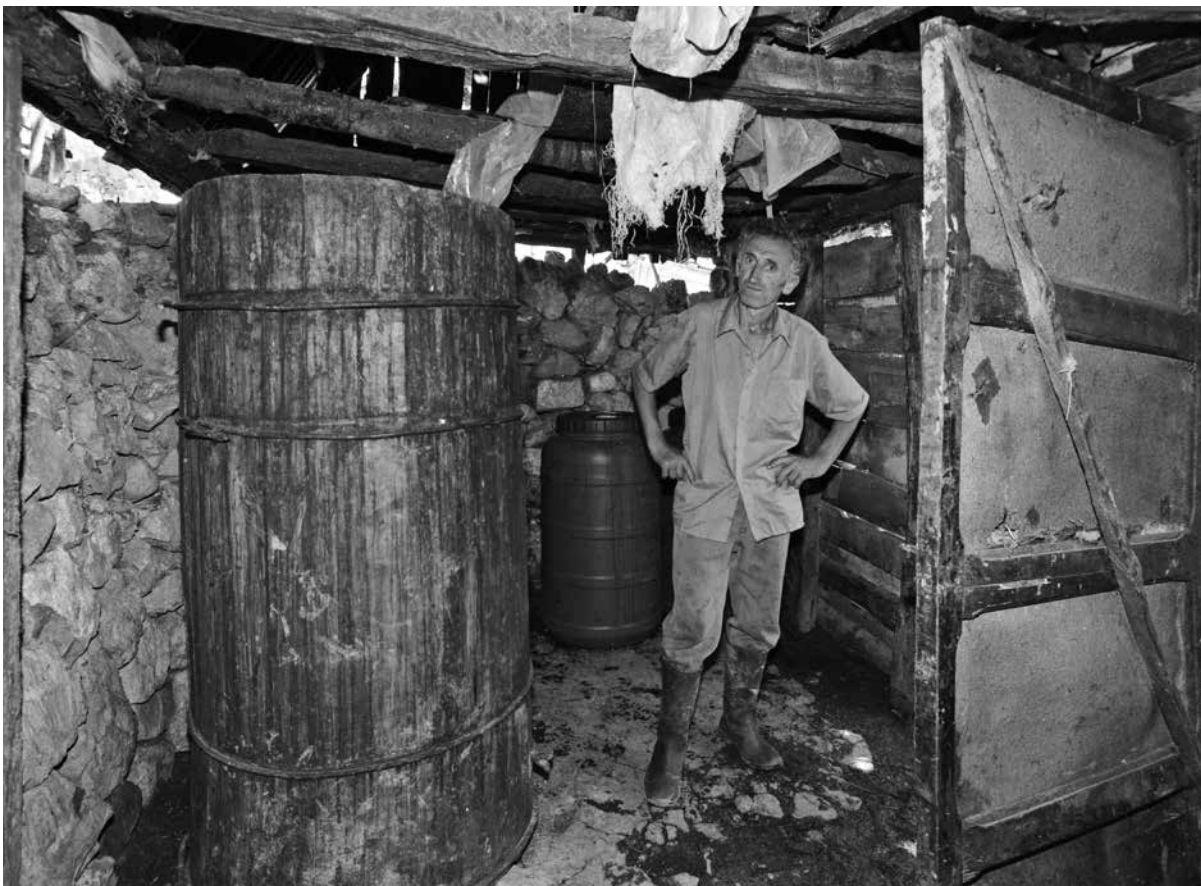


Figure 6.9. Wooden barrel, or *gaviç*. Ann Christine Eek

Equipment that requires less specialist knowledge to create is made in the home. A cottage industry that can be seen throughout the valley is the production of baskets (*kosh*) from the branches of hazelnut (*Corylus avellana* L.) and willow species (*Salix alba* and *Salix purpurea*). Wooden corn cribs (*koçek*) are a familiar site, and corrals for animals are made of interlinked wooden staves.

### Tourism

Migration out of the Shala Valley reduced the population substantially in the 1990s (see discussion in Chapter Four). In 2005, the village of Theth, for example, consisted of 162 homes, of which 67 were occupied during the summer. To keep young people in the valley and to improve the quality of life, local leaders have searched for sources of income that do not require

foreign adventure. While some surplus commodities are sold for cash, the major source of income for the inhabitants of the Shala Valley is now tourism. Not only does the region boast a natural environment of great interest and richness, but it has the exotic appeal of wildness and space in a continent that is increasingly homogenized and crowded.

Income from tourism flows to the valley through accommodation fees and sales of local goods. A number of nonprofit organizations have been promoting the organization of home stays in recent years, including the Balkan Peace Park Project. Pieroni (2008) notes the potential for income to be generated through the sale of the baskets noted above.

Major infrastructural needs must be met if tourism is to be supported and are important for the permanent inhabitants of the valley. In 2008, road links were still

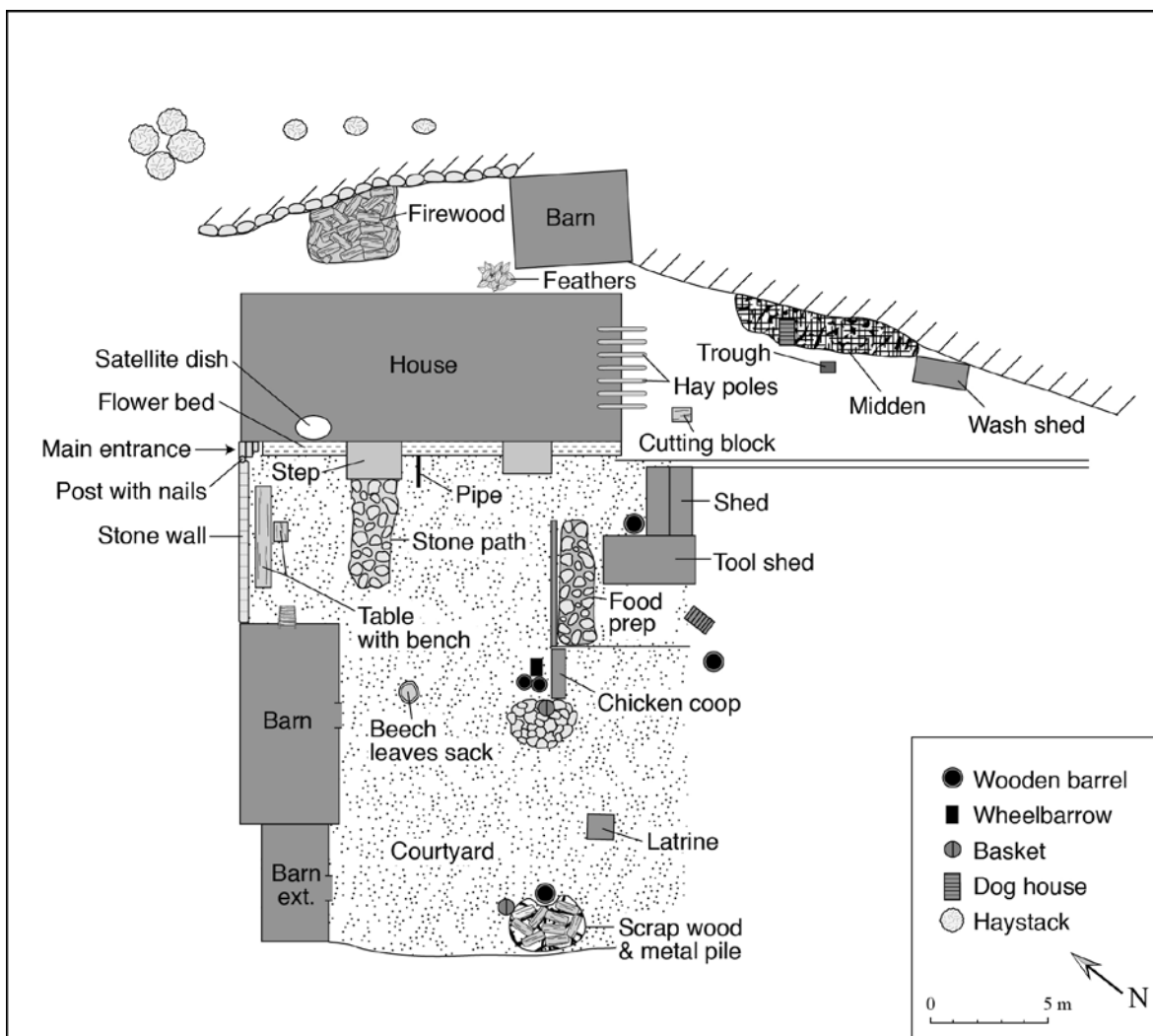


Figure 6.10. Layout of a house compound, ST221. Jill Seagard

bad, medical support was supplied by a single visiting nurse, and the schools were in poor condition. The electricity supply was intermittent. For Theth, power was provided by a small and antiquated hydroelectric plant in the village, supplemented by power from a larger hydroelectric station (refurbished by an Italian company in 2008) in the central part of the valley.

### *Units of Economic Activity: Households, Neighborhoods, and Villages*

As discussed in Chapter Five, the cross-cutting systems of national and tribal law characteristic of the Shala Valley more or less align around three main units of economic activity: extended households (*shpia*), organized into neighborhoods (*lagjal mëhallë*) that form a single village (*katund*). The heads of household are appointed or elected to a village council (a *kuvend*) from whom a single council member is elected mayor (*kryeplak*). The *kryeplak* and *kuvend* together make decisions of economic importance to the whole village. In the past, villages were grouped further into military-administrative units called *bajraks*, lead by a *bajraktar*, a “banner chief,” but these were slowly abandoned following Albanian independence. In the following three sections, we describe the intersecting economic roles played by households, neighborhoods, and villages.

### *Households*

House compounds in the modern Shala Valley have remarkably similar plans, both inside the house and in the yard outside, and are efficiently designed as multifunctional spaces (Figures 6.10 and 6.11). Inside the house, two rooms generally lead off the front hall; the *dhoma e pritjes* (literally, the “waiting” or sitting room) and the *kuzhinë* (kitchen, also with sitting and sleeping space) (Figure 6.12). Upstairs, houses are divided into a number of bedrooms (*dhoma e gjumit*) with storage space and sometimes some extra sleeping room in the attic, under the roof. The translation of the terms used (especially *kuzhinë*) give a misleading appearance of fixity. For example, refrigerators and stoves appear in other rooms, and visitors are often seated in the “kitchen” after entering the house. To be clear, this description applies to the *current* arrangement of most homes; these layouts have changed over the past 50 or 60 years, reflecting not only Communist-era



**Figure 6.11.** Layout of the interior of a large, joint house, ST221 (note the permanent division of the house and the separate entrances on the ground floor). *Jill Seagard*

regulations but also the availability of wood stoves, plumbing, and mass-produced furniture (see detailed discussion in Chapter Seven).

Food materials are spread all around. Maize is hung from ceilings while on the cob and then laid out to dry in the attic after the cob is stripped. Also hanging from the ceilings are chunks of fatty, salted pork (*vjam* or *dhjam*), used for frying and making soups. Vegetables are stored everywhere, and sacks of flour and imported sugar sit on stairs. Barrels of cheese are placed under the stairs, where it is cool, while pits in the basement of some houses provide a dark repository for seed potatoes. Most houses have an open fireplace (*hoxhak*) with a hearth (*vatër*) on the ground floor, with ashes in the grate. A small





Figure 6.12. House interior. *Ann Christine Eek*

wood-burning stove (*shporet*) is positioned either in front of this fireplace or in an upstairs room where perhaps it is more useful for heating the house in the winter.

The courtyard outside the house is a scene of intense activity (Figure 6.13). Fish are cleaned, animals are butchered, and vegetables are washed there and food is often cooked on an open fire, leaving traces of ash. Food preparation is for animals as well as humans, and much of this involves boiling and mixing. Organic refuse is discarded close to the processing area, usually in the courtyard in front of the house next to a source of running water. It is rapidly vacuumed up by the pigs, cats, and poultry who roam free during the day. In a notional circle radiating out from the house, outbuildings including animal barns and the corn crib make a ring around the courtyard (Figure 6.8). Interestingly, many of the barns are relatively new structures. Traditionally, the animals lived in the first floor of the home, but under the Communist regime, health regulations required the villagers to build free-standing barns while also limiting the number of privately owned animals. The toilet is furthest away, with the cesspit regularly cleaned out and the excrement buried, mixed with beech leaves, and then left

for a year before being spread on the fields with the rest of the manure. Fermented fruit for raki making occupies a middle place, in some cases being kept in an outbuilding where the smell is diluted but in other cases being inside the house. Surrounding the compound are fruit trees (deliberately planted) that shed their fruit on the ground to be collected by animals and humans, and stacks (*mullar*) made of corn stocks and hay and topped with bracken.

Beyond the courtyard are vegetable gardens, and beyond those the larger fields of cultigens. Under Communism, the state limited each family to 0.1 to 0.2 ha of land, further tightening this limit in 1968, when collectivization was introduced. Farmers in the mountains were then allowed a limit of 0.1 ha irrigated land or 0.15 ha unirrigated. When the Democratic Party (DP) achieved power in 1992, collectivized land across Albania was again redistributed, with each family receiving an average of 0.37 ha (0.9 acres) (Saltmarshe 2000:328). As a result of depopulation, however, most households in Shala seem to have access to much larger areas of agricultural land, even if some of it is rented from absentee landlords or farmed on behalf of family members who are earning money abroad.



Figure 6.13. Courtyard, ST221 with barn on the left and chicken coop on right. See Figure 6.10. *Ann Christine Eek*

### *Neighborhoods*<sup>3</sup>

As described briefly in Chapter Three and discussed in more detail in Chapters Four and Five with regard to foundation legends and kinship ties, respectively, each village in Shala is divided into a number of neighborhoods, called *lagja* or *mëhallë*. The spatial boundaries of these neighborhoods have developed over time, as two locations on opposite sides of the valley can sometimes be referred to as belonging to the same neighborhood because a household has moved (e.g., Gjeçaj in Theth). There is sometimes lack of agreement about which neighborhoods are part of which village, but those for Theth are relatively straightforward: Okol, Nik Gjonaj, Gjeçaj, Gjellaj, Stakaj, Nën Rreth, Ndrea, Ulaj, Kolaj, and Grunas (Figure 3.4). In Abat, there is more agreement about the number of neighborhoods, but the spatial confusion is greater, perhaps because Abat is older than Theth. A traditional saying recounts that “shtatë mëhallat e Abatit, më e mira ajo e fratit” (“Abat has seven neighborhoods, with the best being that of the father”). The neighborhoods are Metushaj, Mekshaj, Lotaj, Lekaj, Nikpalaj, and Lopçi, with that

“of the father” being the Church (Figure 3.5). However, Metushaj, for example, is a neighborhood with two centers, one being in the center of Mekshaj because a family originally from Metushaj moved there.

Since Shala traditionally has resisted central government supervision and has adhered to a custom of oral rather than written law, it is not surprising that there exists some fluidity in definitions of neighborhood boundaries. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that definitive maps of *mëhallë* are probably impossible to compile or must, at the very least, be regarded as snapshots that will be apt to change within a few decades’ time. As described in Chapter Five, a neighborhood is primarily a social construct, and the physical location is less important than the ties that link its members together into economic support units.

Neighborhoods are also the basis around which everyday economic collaboration is based, supplying the needs for labor or assistance when responsibilities are too great for a single household to bear. When the time comes in the late summer to harvest the corn, the able-bodied men in the neighborhood will band together to complete the task for each of its members.



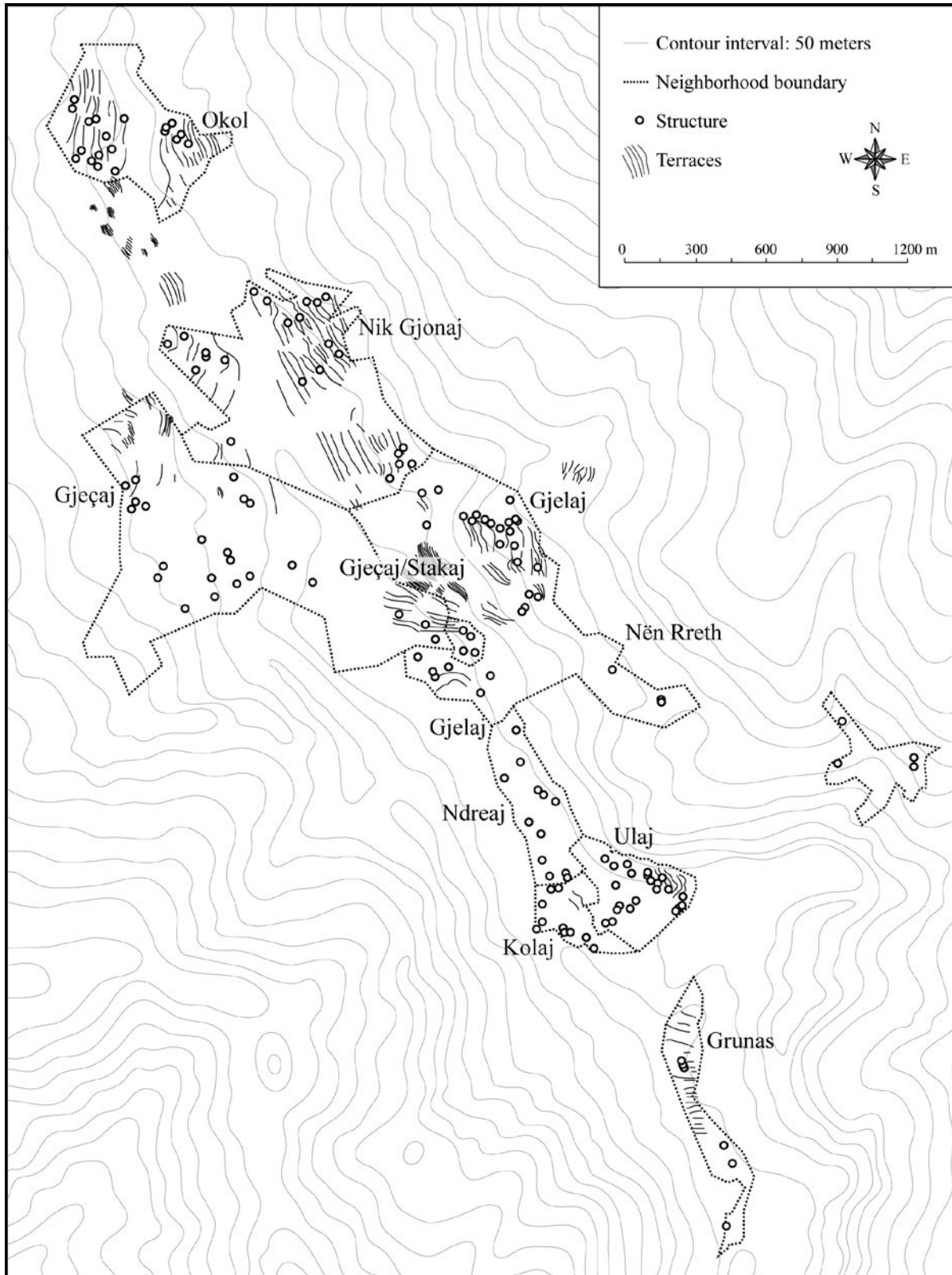


Figure 6.14. Map of Theth showing all houses, terraces, and neighborhood boundaries. *Jill Seagard*



Figure 6.15. A large, old terrace, Gimaj neighborhood, with land owner in foreground. *Michael L. Galaty*

They will also mow hay, harrow the soil, and cut wood, while the women will husk corn and hoe the fields. Irrigation rotas are organized within the neighborhood, so that each household can water their fields on a certain day. Large jobs, such as collecting tree trunks and cutting them up for building supplies and firewood, are also accomplished by a number of men from the neighborhood. Some watermills are also kept running by a particular neighborhood, although in other cases, responsibility for the maintenance of a mill is shared among a group of neighborhoods. Perhaps most notably, for those families who still practice transhumance, the neighborhood will move up to their high pastures together, splitting responsibilities for tending the animals and the crops between their members.

Terraces are a ubiquitous and dramatic feature of all neighborhoods in Shala (Figure 6.14; see again Figure 3.2). Oddly, in our interviews of heads of household, most informants were oblivious to or ambivalent about their presence and upkeep. Our research identified two different terrace types: low, long, usually narrow, and

poorly built terraces that had been constructed under Communism in the spaces between neighborhoods to support fruit trees and much larger, well-constructed, clearly much older terraces that support fields and houses, old houses in particular (Figure 6.15). The former terraces were built at the behest of Communist officials, do not stand up well to earthquakes, and have been largely abandoned. The latter are quite able to withstand earthquakes and require very little maintenance (thus the ambivalence with which they are treated by locals), and some may have been built as early as the Iron Age, as in the case of Grunas (IAS Site 006). The terraces in Shala are of the “step” variety, as defined by Grove and Rackham (2001:107–108). These were constructed in Shala in neighborhoods where flat land for houses, gardening, and farming is not available, typically on slopes of greater than 10 degrees (Table 6.1; Figure 6.14). They thus represent population growth and expansion, as described in Chapters Four and Seven, but also intensification of production and long-term investment, that is, “banking” of labor and therefore energy in land (see

Chapter One). Terraces also would have improved crop yields for households without easy access to flat land, while stabilizing the landscape and increasing capital returns (Fisher 2009). It is also therefore the case that younger neighborhoods (i.e., those established more recently, like Gjeçaj, Gjelaaj, and Nik Gjonaj, with average slopes of 13.5, 19.7, and 11.7 degrees, respectively) include more terraces (Table 6.1; Figure 6.14). Ulaj, Kolaj, and Ndreaj, with average slopes of 7.4, 8.4, and 10.4 degrees, respectively, are older, flatter, and contain very few terraces. Okol and Grunas are also older but are relatively steep and terraced due to their positions at either end of the Theth basin.

As demonstrated in Chapter Seven, the processes whereby neighborhoods were established and grew through time in Shala were, however, anything but random. House and neighborhood locations were chosen carefully, as reflected in their regular, extensive spacing.

This kind of dispersed settlement system is quite common in mountain regions and is designed to allow and encourage forms of reciprocal labor exchange, as described above (cf. Guillet 1983). In a seminal article on the Kofyar of Nigeria, Stone (1991:344) describes a system of agriculture that “relies heavily on suprafarmstead labor groups, farmers regularly traveling on foot to work on other farmers’ land” (*italics in original*). Kofyar neighborhoods are divided into ungwa, “a Hausa word with no English equivalent [that] refers to a settlement grouping, neighborhood, or district but implies a certain formality and distinct identity” (Stone 1991:345). Importantly, ungwa are of the size and shape such that no man travels more than 700 m in a given day to work any other man’s land. The individuals living within this territory are thereby linked in systems of reciprocal labor (and hospitality involving millet beer), which may span and knit together a number of disparate yet contiguous

**Table 6.1** Spatial Statistics Related to Theth Neighborhood Size and Configuration

Neighborhood	Size (ha)	Number of Houses	Average Slope	Average Distance between Structures	
Ulaj	14.29	22	7.4	52.42	
Kolaj	6.94	11	8.4	62.83	
Grunas	12.23	7	8.6	106.36	
Ndreaj	15.68	12	10.4	106.66	
Nik Gjonaj	64.81	16	11.7	69.36	
Okol	29.71	19	12.0	67.28	
Gjeçaj	92.31	20	13.5	108.78	
Stakaj	2.18	3	15.1	60.81	
Nën Rreth	9.99	4	18.6	238.71	
Gjelaaj	70.32	22	19.7	68.57	
Average	31.85	13.6	11.34	94.18	
				78.12	(with Nën Rreth removed)
Average distance between each neighborhood and all others: 1580.40					
Average distance between each neighborhood and its two closest neighborhoods: 717.66 (measured from the center of each neighborhood)					
Average distance between each neighborhood and its two closest neighborhoods: 161.58 (measured from the closest edge of each neighborhood)					

ungwa. Stone (1991:347) concludes that labor and travel “bottlenecks” will limit the average size of any dispersed agricultural territory to about 700 m.

Because we mapped the locations of all houses in the entire village of Theth (see discussion in Chapter Two), we can test Stone’s (1991) rule. To do so, we applied methods of spatial analysis to our settlement data in GIS (Conolly and Lake 2006), generating the results presented in Table 6.1. The average neighborhood size is 31.85 ha, with a range of 2.18 to 92.31 ha. The average distance between houses is about 100 m (or 78 m when an outlier, Nën Rreth, is removed). An average 160-m buffer zone separates neighborhoods, and the average distance between each neighborhood and all other neighborhoods is 1580 m. The average distance between each neighborhood and the closest two neighborhoods, measured from neighborhood center to neighborhood center, is 717 m. This final figure may serve as a proxy measure for the distance any man is likely to walk to meet reciprocal labor responsibilities, and it matches Stone’s (1991) Kofyar figure very closely. These data help explain settlement patterns in Theth specifically, and northern Albania generally.

When men travel to another’s fields to undertake communal labor, such as mowing hay, they are treated to hospitality as dictated in the *Kanun* (in Book Eight, “Honor”; Gjeçov 1989). Such hospitality must include a meal but also various prestige goods, such as white bread, salt, sugared coffee, *raki*, and cigarettes, which are delivered following very strict rules of etiquette related to, among other things, seniority. These gatherings are charged affairs, during which the honor of the host and that of his guests is gauged. Today, as in the past, with the exception of *raki*, these prestige goods all must be purchased or otherwise acquired in the city, and the manufacture of *raki*, *raki rushit* in particular, requires a complex, labor- and land-intensive process. The upshot of all this is that if a household needs and wants help in communal tasks, they must be willing and able to invest in the accoutrements of hospitality. To acquire these takes disposable income in the form of surplus tradable commodities, such as cheese, which requires a large herd of sheep and a large enough family to manage that herd. Feeding livestock and a large family depends on access to and/or ownership of good land. In the absence of good, flat land for the growing of maize and potatoes, that land must be created through terracing, as described above. As should be clear, these

various economic and social processes are integrated across space and time within the context of kinship, through relationships of *fis*, which map recursively onto neighborhoods, as described in Chapter Five. Large, successful families gain political power through systems of reciprocal labor, symbolized through metaphors of “blood” and “honor.” Large families can also afford to engage, therefore, in wider systems of marriage and inter-*fis* feuds, which themselves are systemically inter-related. *Fis*, families, and individuals thereby compete with each other through time, both within and without the valley, and as described in Chapter Seven, these processes, which may promote violence, are reflected in the built landscapes of Shala. The overall system, though, was self-regulating, dynamic, resilient, and stable, except during periods of extreme perturbation, such as during the Medieval Warm Period, prior to the introduction of New World crops, and under Communist domination, when the traditional economy was disallowed or knocked into disequilibrium (see Figure 1.13).

### Villages

As described elsewhere, the villages of the Shala Valley are exogamous units in which all families are distantly related to a common apical ancestor or founder (*i pari i fisit*). They are also, in economic terms, the point at which tribal and state organizational schemes converge. At the time of writing, the Albanian Ministry of Local Government is part of the Interior Ministry, responsible for 36 counties (*Rreth*). Each *Rreth* is responsible for one or more urban municipalities (*Bashki*) and a number of rural communes responsible for a number of villages, each with a council (*kuvend*) headed by a mayor (*kryeplak*). There are 315 communes and 47 municipalities in Albania. The main duties of the *kryeplak* (as stated in Albanian Presidential Decree 7605, September 1992) are to cooperate with the police in the maintenance of public order, as well as to ensure that services to the village are maintained and that common resources are fairly allocated (Saltmarshe 2000:332). The *kryeplak* is also responsible for making sure that state employees, such as teachers, doctors, and nurses, attend to their work and that young men enlist for military service.

Since the collapse of Communism, state government involvement in the economy has remained weak in the Shala Valley. Nevertheless, certain services (such as the distribution of financial assistance where necessary) are

performed, and there is increasing evidence of better infrastructural support, whether in the private-public partnership involved in fixing the main hydroelectric station in the valley or in modest improvements to the road. Where such successes happen, it is undoubtedly due to the lobbying of the *kryeplak* and his *kuvend*.

## Concluding Comments

### *Economic Isolation versus Interaction*

Quantitative information is lacking about the level of income that the modern inhabitants of the valley receive from the sale of agricultural products now or in the past. However, it is clear that not only is the valley currently self-sufficient in terms of basic foods, but it also exports some animals, plants, and other agricultural commodities such as honey. Before the sealing of the border at the beginning of the twentieth century, this trade went north into Montenegro as well as south, but after 1945, the main channel for exports from the valley was and still is via Shkodra, the city of over 100,000 inhabitants that is three to four hours away by four wheel drive vehicle via the Qafa Thorës. The valley was not always self-sufficient, however. Mustafa and Young (2008:90) note that “prior to the Second World War, the traditional markets of Plavë and Gusi in present-day Montenegro, and Pejë and Gjakovë in present-day Kosovo were utilised to purchase flour—sometimes in trade for pastoral products—since small-scale farming did not suffice to feed Shala families year-round.” This is true, although as we have argued above, there was also need for imported prestige goods, foods in particular, and gunpowder that could only be acquired in external markets.

Interaction with the world outside the valley is evidenced at present in the large number of imported plastic goods now in evidence in households. It is also clear in the way that some practices are changing. The Ottoman *sofër*, a low round table, tends now to be stored in the attic or just used for children’s meals. It has been replaced by a regular table surrounded by plastic or wooden chairs, rather than the low wooden stools (*stol*) used in the past. Similarly, the *serem*, a thick iron baking tray, is being replaced by the thinner, imported aluminum *tav* or *tepsi*. The lid to the *serem*, known as the *kaki*, remains in use, although its popularity seems to be fading. In one house, it was being used as an antenna to boost television reception.

The interactions demanded by an Ottoman lifestyle (needing imported coffee and sugar for hospitality, for example, and the accompanying coffee roasters and fine china) are now being superseded by a new set of habits that demand different types of interaction (the mobile phone that constantly needs new recharge cards, or the purchased enzyme used as a starter for cheese in place of the *mullzë* [rennet] extracted from a sheep’s stomach still being used at one of the houses visited). These new interactions are even transforming architecture. Since 2004, a large number of red plasticized metal roofs have begun to appear in the valley. These have become available in recent years from Greece and are easier to maintain and more resistant to rain than the stone slates, tile, or wooden shingles.

Most of the imported objects are bought either directly from Shkodra or through middlemen in Breg Lumi. Up to 10 years ago, gypsies (Roma) would visit houses in the valley offering metalworking and painting services. As well as a visiting nurse, some other specialists, such as a vet to vaccinate or sterilize animals, will regularly visit the valley in the summer months, traveling from Shkodra.

A particularly interesting economic activity in terms of its effect on isolation is transhumance. Nandris (1985:266–267; see also Kasaba 2009) argues that this activity is especially sensitive to the changes in the larger political environment (see again, Chapter Three). He argues that, under empires such as that of Rome or during the Ottoman occupation of eastern Europe, profitable markets were made available and frontier restrictions were eased so that pastoral movement was encouraged. In contrast, the Communist regime discouraged pastoralism by closing the borders and discounting it as an effective, efficient economic practice, perhaps because it involves a level of independence difficult for the state to control. To the extent that pastoralism survived during the regime, it did so as a collectivized activity, with each neighborhood required to build collective barns (*stalla*) for the state-owned flocks.

### *Reconstructing Economic Activity in the Past*

While archival sources provide valuable information about economic activities in the past on a broad scale, archaeological research can usually reveal details of daily economic activities at a much more granular level. While research into the spatial arrangements

of house compounds in the Shala Valley described above was conducted for its own sake, the approach was also informed by an ethnoarchaeological interest in trying to understand what the “signature” of such a household from the past might look like in the archaeological record.

Ethnoarchaeological components are common in archaeological survey projects and are conducted “to collect a body of data that could form the basis for hypotheses about site functions in the past” (Murray and Kardulias 1986:21).<sup>4</sup> It was also hoped that the study of agricultural practices and the ways in which modern material culture is reused and discarded in the Shala Valley would also help the Shala Valley Project’s archaeological teams understand the taphonomic processes by which artifacts deposited in the past may have been affected during burial.

The relative paucity of material remains for past activities, especially compared to archaeological projects elsewhere in the Mediterranean, is undoubtedly partly due to geomorphological conditions, where soils have slumped to bury archaeological sites, and to the agricultural regime, which lacks the type of deep plowing through which artifacts are brought to the surface. However, two aspects of the types of artifact used by the inhabitants of the Shala Valley may also explain the absence of a rich artifactual record.

First, there is the fact that the traditional tool kit observed in households is extremely limited, and most artifacts have multiple uses. When broken, they are mended or reused rather than being discarded. Second, the materials used (mostly wood), moreover, are usually biodegradable, and the archaeological traces they leave would be ephemeral (cf. Vroom 1987).

Barrels present a good example of organic tools with multiple functions (Figure 6.9). These ubiquitous vessels are of two types; the *tinari* or *gaviç* (the latter term used more in the south of Albania) is a large cask, about 5 ft in height, either made from planks or in two solid wood pieces and bound with hoops of iron. This is used to hold water, fermented fruit, raki, or wine. The *shekë* is smaller and generally holds cheese, although it is also used for raki, water, fermented fruit, and other arable goods. We saw both types of cask reused in multiple ways—as dog houses, as steps for getting over fences, and to channel water. In a number of households, the wooden barrels are being replaced by red plastic tubs bought from Shkodra. These are

entirely watertight, while the wooden barrels seep, and they are also lighter and require less maintenance.

The only pottery or glass materials that we saw in houses were coffee cups (*filxhan*) and water glasses (*gotë*). Even decorations and ornaments are mostly made out of knitted wool, animal skins, and other degradable fabrics. Again, the arrival of cheap plastic imports is changing this, which will undoubtedly make the Shala household of the future more visible in the archaeological record.

One key question we might ask is whether the dispersed settlement and agricultural systems of the Shala Valley existed in the deeper past, during periods for which we have some archaeological evidence: the Medieval, Late Roman, or Iron Age, for instance. This issue is taken up in more detail in subsequent chapters, but suffice it to say here that if these systems were extant in earlier periods (and it would seem that they were not), we should have found archaeological remains indicative of dispersal, at intervals that approximate the data presented in Table 6.1. We should have exposed evidence, for example, for a 700-m separation between dispersed archaeological sites (cf. Peterson and Drennan 2005). In earlier periods, people appear to have used the Shala Valley very differently, perhaps for different reasons, than they have in modern times. The idea that Shala was perhaps even less isolated in the past, prior to its fifteenth-century settlement, seems inescapable. This thesis is explored in Chapters Nine to Eleven, but first we take up the architectural evidence for Shala’s modern growth and development. The architectural data enhance and reinforce in interesting ways the trends we have exposed already thus far.

## Notes

1 The uses and characteristics of *shqemja*, a rich source of tannin for curing hides among other things, are described on p. 75 of Mustafa Demiri, 1979, *Bimë të Egra të Dobishme e të Dëmshme të Vendit Tonë*. See also Kokalari, Sima, and Xinxo, 1980, *Bimët Mjekësore në Familje*. Thanks to Maria Musa of Shala for these references.

2 A blog of this trip can be found at [http://millsaps.edu/news\\_events/blog/galaty.shtml](http://millsaps.edu/news_events/blog/galaty.shtml).

3 The Kofyar analogy and statistics included in this section are the work of Michael L. Galaty, helped by Dora Lambert.

4 Ethnoarchaeology is a distinctive subdiscipline of archaeology, employed in a variety of archaeological contexts around the world, and broadly defined as “the ethnographic study of living cultures from archaeological perspectives”

(David and Kramer 2001:2). In the countries bordering the Mediterranean, ethnoarchaeology has been practiced mostly in the context of archaeological survey projects, as the teams of archaeologists attempting to reconstruct ancient landscapes have become increasingly curious about the material remains they encounter in the modern one. These explicitly diachronic surveys have partly undertaken ethnoarchaeological studies in order to conclude regional cultural histories. However, they

have also used observation of artifact use and the organization of space in the present day to inform their understanding of how the archaeological record may have been formed (taphonomy) and to develop hypotheses of past behavior based on observation of present activities (analogy). We did both in the Shala Valley. Even so, we are conscious of the dangers of reifying the past in the present and acknowledge the limits of the ethnoarchaeological approach (Fotiadis 1995).

## Chapter 7

# MODERN SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND THE BUILT LANDSCAPE

Wayne E. Lee



*If someone wants to build a habitation or hut in the upland pasture, with a plot of ground, a garden, or a field, he may do so and no one may hinder him or take his land from him [Book 4, Chapter 12, Article 219 in Gječov 1989:70].*

A fundamental hypothesis of this book is that the northern Albanian tribal system flexed and adapted in response to outside forces. That process of adaptation did not occur without stress and pain, but adapt and persist it did. Archival and ethnographic work has provided some insight into that process, but we can also observe some aspects of how this sociopolitical structure interacted with the outside world through the landscape. We hypothesized that the currently visible built landscape would carry within it markers of change that reflected local adaptations to external forces, modulated by the tribal sociopolitical structure (cf. Lee 2001). The ethnohistoric survey (EHS) team (team structure described in Chapter Two) focused on the past hundred years (or so) of local history to examine the relationships between the built environment (especially houses), household size, settlement size, and population movement. We particularly focused our research in Shala on the villages of Theth and Gimaj, although other neighborhoods were investigated as well (notably Kaprej and Breg Lumi-Marnikaj). This chapter is not intended to present a full catalog of the built landscape.<sup>1</sup> It will instead analyze specific neighborhoods as examples of processes we think were widespread and shared.

Although we believe that the people of Shala maintained a dynamic and interactive relationship with outside powers from the beginning of their presence in the valley, it was particularly marked during very recent periods, and the record of that relationship is readily visible in the built environment of the Shala Valley.

For example, when the fledgling Albanian government under King Zog exerted control over the northern tribes in the late 1920s and clamped down on blood feuds, large families and defensible houses became obsolete (although they did not immediately disappear). Later, when the Communist government under Enver Hoxha restricted movement in and out of the mountains and collectivized the economy, populations and villages grew in response. Finally, the demise of Communism in 1991, as well as the restoration of freedom of movement and private property, has led to the depopulation of the north. Examination of Shala's built environment over the past hundred years has helped us to better interpret the archaeology and history of the preceding Iron Age, Medieval Age, and Ottoman period.

### The "Splitting of Brothers"

Fortunately, our analysis of the landscape has been amply supported by the ethnographic record, and it will be clearest if we in fact begin with the tribal rules that structured the neighborhood formation process described in this chapter: the splitting of households, setting up homes in former pasture, and the progressive enlargement of a *vllazni* into a *mëhalla* and eventually into a village. Those rules were laid out in the *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* (Gječov 1989; key additional details in Hasluck [1954] and comparative discussion in Boehm [1987] on the Montenegrin tribes). In essence, when the patriarch of a household died or decided to step down in favor of a son, the sons divided all the property of the patriarch equally (to include land and moveable goods). But they would not necessarily move out of the house at that time. The house itself generally became the property of the younger son, although the oldest might



continue to serve as the patriarch of that household until he built his own separate house. If the house became too crowded or quarrelsome, some brothers would leave, already possessing some of the family land, and they would build their own houses, setting themselves up as separate patriarchs. An alternative to building a separate house was to put up a partition wall dividing the house into separate patriarchal households. Hasluck (1954:72 [quotation], 130–131, 51–57) summarized this process:

*The separation completed, each new household had its own master and mistress, and its members were no longer under the control of the master and mistress of the old home, who now controlled only their own establishment. It was remembered, however, that the master of this smaller home was master of the house in which they had all lived together. When he was succeeded by his son or another, his former position was still kept in mind. So when the brotherhood [vllazni] formed at the first separation expanded into a kin the master of this house became the 'elder of the kin'. If his kin was the most important in the ward [mëhalla], his name was given to the ward and so perpetuated. The names of most wards were the names of such elders. . . . In course of time so many households split up that a number of new brotherhoods were formed. . . . The agglomeration of brotherhoods then constituted a 'kin' (fis). . . . In the next, fifth state of development, several kins united to form a village.*

This is exactly the pattern revealed in our analysis of the neighborhoods, to include a number of homes with internal partitions (see Figure 7.14, below).

## Neighborhood Creation and Expansion in the Past Century—Theth and Gimaj

As discussed in Chapter Six, settlement in the valley is organized into villages composed of distinct neighborhoods or *mëhallë*, sometimes widely separated. Chapter Four related the basic origins of a neighborhood to the arrival of a brotherhood or *vllazni*. This chapter examines that process as it was manifested in the landscape. We can combine a knowledge of the ethnographic details of how sons left the patriarchal home with a detailed survey of existing homes—dated through architectural analysis, travelers' accounts, and oral tradition—to provide a portrait of how Shala's villages grew and, furthermore, how that process reflected changes in the world around them.

We collected data on the standing architecture in the valley during fieldwork in 2005 and 2007. In 2005, we worked in the village of Theth and created a separate data record for every standing structure in the village, including 162 homes, 67 of which were occupied at the time of survey and 95 unoccupied (and of that latter number, 24 were largely in ruins). In addition, there were 157 barns or other assorted outbuildings and 38 corn cribs (*koçek*) (see Figure 6.8). During the Communist era, the state built 21 bunkers in the area (Figure 7.1) and 5 other military administration buildings. In addition, as part of the attempt to incorporate the village into the national economy, the state sponsored or encouraged the building of 22 other administrative or commercial facilities (including 7 large barns for collectivized flocks).<sup>2</sup> In 2007 (no data were collected in 2006), we moved into the lower valley, beginning with Ndërllysaj (traditionally a *mëhalla* of Theth), which we analyzed in the same manner: that is, we included every standing structure in the survey. From that point

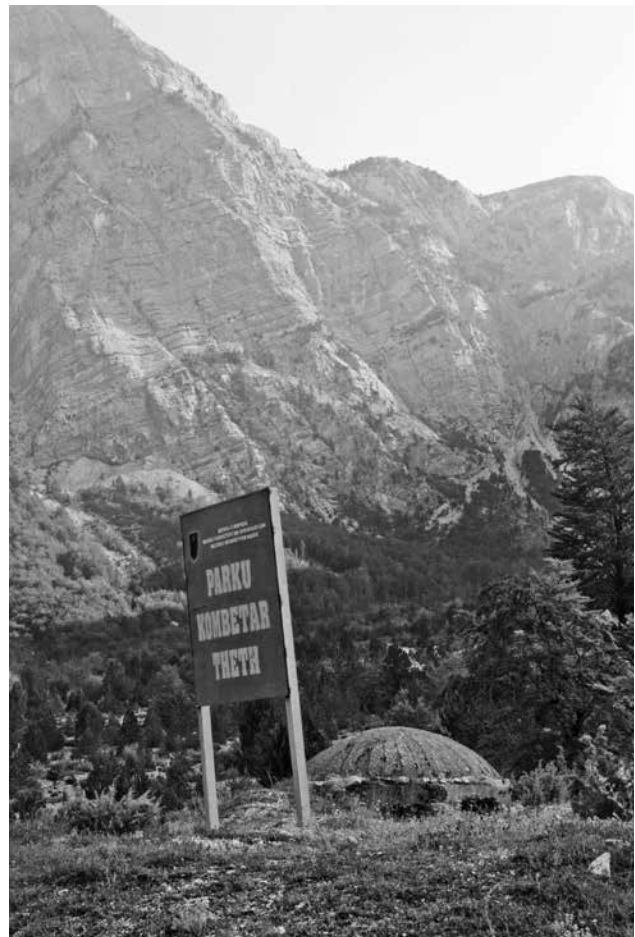


Figure 7.1. A bunker in Theth. Ann Christine Eek

forward, we decided that the best approach was to focus our time on the houses themselves, indicating barns and other outbuildings but not entering them separately into the database. In the interest of time, we also focused our analysis on specific neighborhoods, rather than whole villages. To our 2005 totals, therefore, we added Ndërlyaj (32 houses); lower Kaprej, a distant *mëhallë* of Gimaj (6 houses); Gimaj-Kodër Limaj (26 houses); Gimaj-Marvataj (23 houses); Gimaj-Xhaferraj (22 houses); and most of Marnikaj, now a *mëhallë* of Breg Lumi, formerly of Nica (12 houses), for a grand total of 39 occupied houses and 81 unoccupied (see Figure 3.5). Data from all of these neighborhoods were essential to creating a reliable system of dating standing homes, but the analysis that follows focuses on several neighborhoods in either Theth or Gimaj.

Theth appears to have grown from the two widely separated original cores of Ulaj (some nineteenth-century travelers actually refer to this area as Ndreaj, the toponym now used for a more specific area around the church) and Okol (see Figure 3.4). These neighborhoods' greater (but as yet inexact) antiquity is attested by tradition, by architectural study, and by our intensive archaeological survey. At some point as yet unclear, but possibly as late as the nineteenth century, upland (or intervening) neighborhoods appeared. These neighborhoods began as one or two houses, usually occupied by a pair or more of brothers who had moved out of the patriarchal household onto their patrimony (often pastureland).<sup>3</sup> This newly formed *vllazni* (brotherhood) then grew into a small neighborhood or *mëhallë* (Backer 2003; Thomo et al. 2004:26–27). Similar systems structured neighborhood creation and expansion in Gimaj, although there the record is somewhat more confused as to which neighborhoods are the oldest. Even so, internal to a given neighborhood, the process can still be discerned in the homes themselves.

The point here is the way in which the “normal” household structure of the *malësorë* was adapted to external pressures while remaining true to their own cultural system. The pressures over the past 100 to 150 years have been both political and demographic. The fifth section of Chapter Four presented the available demographic data for the Shala Valley, but the three key trends to recall in terms of pressure to create new neighborhoods were the steep rise in the late nineteenth century, the early twentieth-century decline followed by recovery in the 1920s and 1930s, and then the steep growth after World War

II. Politically, Ottoman reform efforts and Great Power intervention generated a series of local rebellions and international wars in and around the turn of the century (rebellions possibly further spurred by local population growth) that led to a steep decline in population pressure and also devastated parts of the Shala Valley (see Figure 1.13). The Gimaj villagers have a clear oral tradition of the whole village being burned in 1913 by the Serbs (although the stone frames of their homes likely remained). In essence, the long, slow process of neighborhood creation prior to about 1910 is difficult now to detect without excavation, but as population pressure returned in the 1920s and continued through the century, the same cultural system guided its process, although now under other political pressures. First, a suppression of the blood feud, initially by King Zog and then later and more completely by the Communist regime (Fischer 1999), spurred an expansion in the number of homes and in living space within those homes. Second, the building of a wagon-width road over the mountains in 1936 also helped to spur building. And, finally, and especially, the prohibition of emigration during the Communist era saw neighborhoods expand as population pressure grew and as the state restricted private land holding by house, rather than by household (Hall 1994:68; more below). In 1991, a veritable dam burst and much of that population flooded out (Gjonca 2002). In 2005, only 17 families remained in Theth through the winter, dropping to 14 in 2006, although many more families returned to the village for the bulk of the summer.

When specific neighborhoods are examined in detail, these varying demographic and political pressures can be detected archaeologically, as can the *vllazni* to *mëhallë* process of neighborhood creation. We have analyzed this process in two outlying Theth neighborhoods, those of upper Gjellaj and in Gjeçaj, as well as three core neighborhoods of Gimaj: Kodër Limaj, Marvataj, and Xhaferraj.

## Upper Gjellaj

The upper Gjellaj neighborhood lies high up on the eastern slopes of the valley, roughly midway between Ulaj and Okol (Figures 3.4 and 6.14). Its fields, now terraced, would not have been ideal farmland originally (due in particular to its especially steep slope, 19.7 degrees, which includes lower Gjellaj), and it seems likely to have been a relative latecomer to Theth's neighborhoods. Architectural analysis and village testimony confirmed

this suspicion, identifying only five homes in upper Gjelaj as “old”: meaning essentially un-dateable, but clearly preceding the twentieth century (Figure 7.2). Nopsca (1925) suggested that the first multistory kullas (in this case, meaning a large defensible stone home) in Shala were built in the 1850s upon the arrival of a single individual with knowledge of the design and construction process, and that even at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were still being built by itinerant masons from Dibra in east-central Albania (i.e., not by local villagers). Without thorough excavation, this assertion is impossible to prove, but it has been generally accepted by most authors, and nothing in our fieldwork or archival research contradicts it.<sup>4</sup> If true, it may even be that the large patriarchal extended family living together in one stone-walled and defensible building was an adaptation to late nineteenth-century population growth, stress on local resources, and a concomitant rise in feud. This is not to argue that earlier family forms did not have a strong pa-

triarchal system, even to include a dominant role for the patriarch in allocating labor and controlling land, even that of his married sons, but there may not have been quite the same tendency to live under the same roof in the numbers attested by late nineteenth-century travelers. At any rate, the first three decades of the twentieth century saw the creation of a free Albania and a relatively successful effort by King Zog to end the blood feud. Then, in 1936, the old horse road from Theth over the mountains to Boga and then Shkodër was enlarged to wagon width (see description in Chapter Four). These three events in combination created a burst of building activity in the village as a whole, especially in the 1930s. Houses built or renovated during and after that period increasingly lacked the defensive features required in the era of the blood feud, having larger windows and living quarters on the first floor (Hasluck 1954). Gjelaj’s 1930s expansion was modest, apparently just a pair of brothers who built adjoining houses here at the same time (see Figure 7.2).

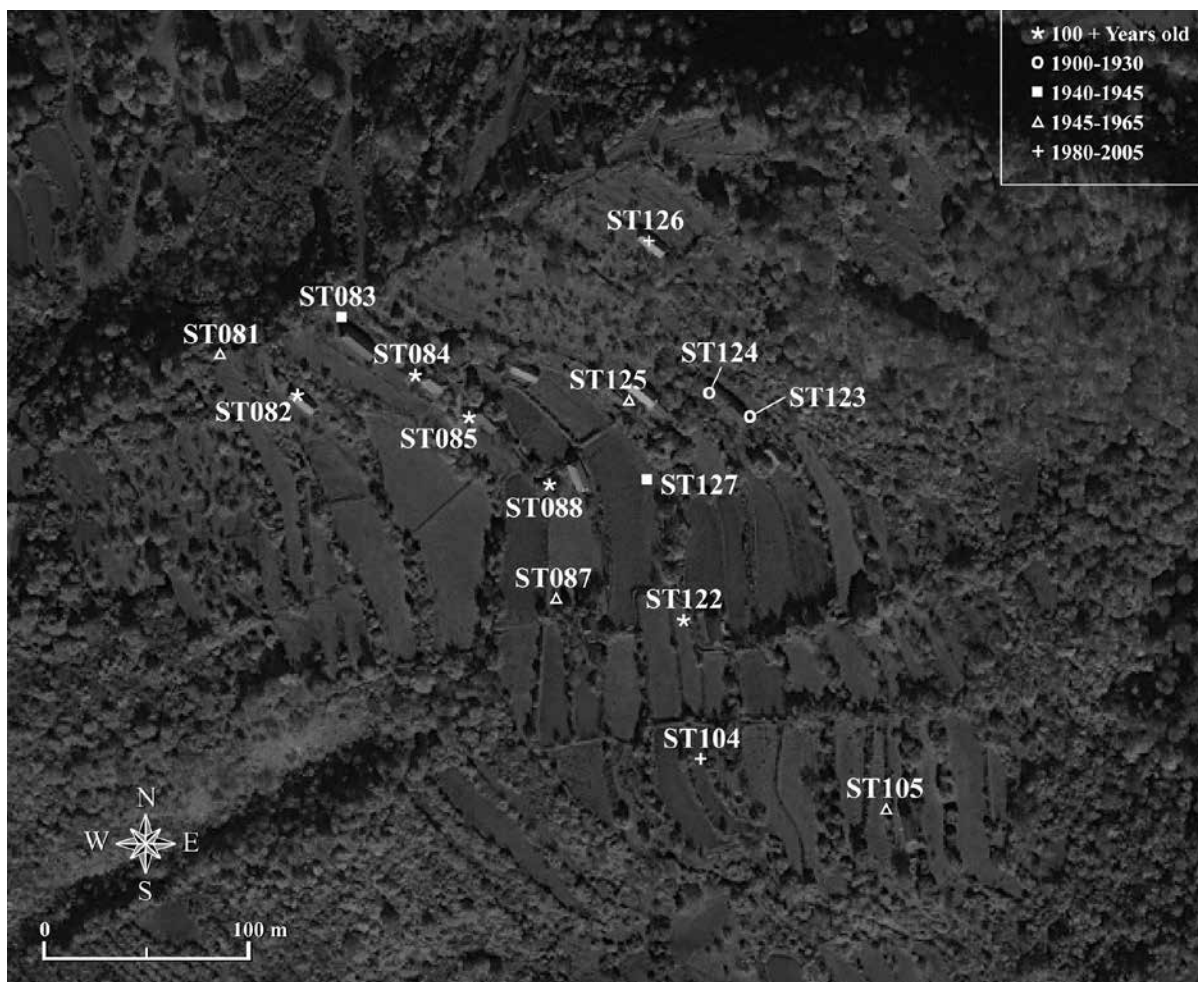


Figure 7.2. The houses of upper Theth-Gjelaj, coded by the approximate date of their construction (outbuildings are not marked). *Jill Seagard*



Figure 7.3. Communist-era postcard of Theth showing the “Campi” in Theth-Gjeçaj where workers were sent for vacation. *Unattributed*

Two more houses appeared during the 1940s, and then four more in the early postwar period as the Communist regime began to establish some control over the countryside, but had not yet imposed collectivization in the northern mountains. Explaining this relatively speedy expansion in the number of houses, however, returns us to the problem of what constitutes a “house” and a “household” (see discussion in Chapter Four). It is possible that some of the motivation behind this burst of home building in the 1950s and 1960s lay in an anticipation of the collectivization process, which expanded into the mountains only in the late 1960s (local interviews, 2005; Baçi 1981; de Waal 1996, 2004; Fischer 1999).<sup>5</sup> During the Communist era, the state pressured families to adopt a nuclear family model, rather than having extended, so-called joint families live together under one roof. Furthermore, the state inaugurated policies restricting private landholding to 1 or 2 *dynym*s of land per each family (also spelled *dylm*, it is equal to a 100 × 10-m or .1-ha parcel). This led many joint family households to divide prematurely (from their point of view) and build new houses to hold on to more land.<sup>6</sup>

It was also in this period that many single-story homes expanded to a second story, or, if already a two-story building, the ground level was transformed from space for animals into living space for the family (see below). Note that these would seem to be contradictory trends: the expansion of both the home itself and a simultaneous expansion in the number of homes. Normally, one might expect that the one should make the other unnecessary. But as suggested by the demographic data presented in Chapter Four, the Communist-era restriction on movement meant that a large number of male children were now having to remain in the village, some of whom formerly may have emigrated elsewhere for work (the state’s suppression of the feud would also have increased male survival rates). Communist restrictions on movement, although at least partly porous, were serious enough to see the average Albanian village population rise from 382 to 654 between 1955 and 1979 (Sjöberg 1991).

The next major burst of building activity, but not *house* building, occurred during the early to mid-1970s and was probably a result of the continued tightening of access to private land and the then-maturing system

of collectivization. Restrictions on private landholding made it difficult for villagers to identify plots upon which to build new homes, but meanwhile, the state's intervention in the mountains provided new truck-based transport of building materials (especially cement) and an expansion of the road network into the individual neighborhoods (in theory, the roads were intended to service the cooperative farming facilities).<sup>7</sup> The new roads and the process of collectivization resulted in a massive expansion of built space within the village—not homes, but administrative buildings, cooperative structures, and state tourism facilities (the state turned parts of Theth into a workers' vacation camp; Figure 7.3). From 1966 to 1980, no new homes appeared in Gjelaj.

The loosening of the regime's grip in the late 1980s and the early 1990s brought about the most recent burst of home building. The optimism and privatization associated with that era may have spurred this burst

of building (not to mention the built-up demographic pressure), but the disaster of 1997 (i.e., the collapsed national "pyramid scheme" and near civil war) curtailed such efforts until the most recent couple of years. In Gjelaj itself, the 1980s saw two houses added, but the beginning of massive emigration (to Shkodra, Tirana, and abroad) in 1991 has discouraged further home building this far up the mountain.

## Gjeçaj

This basic pattern of neighborhood expansion from a couple of key older houses, often built on former pasture, can be traced with even greater accuracy in Gjeçaj (Figure 7.4). Two informants differ slightly on the details, but both agree that structures 33 and 34 were the first in the neighborhood and were built roughly at the same time, around 1900. One informant suggests that

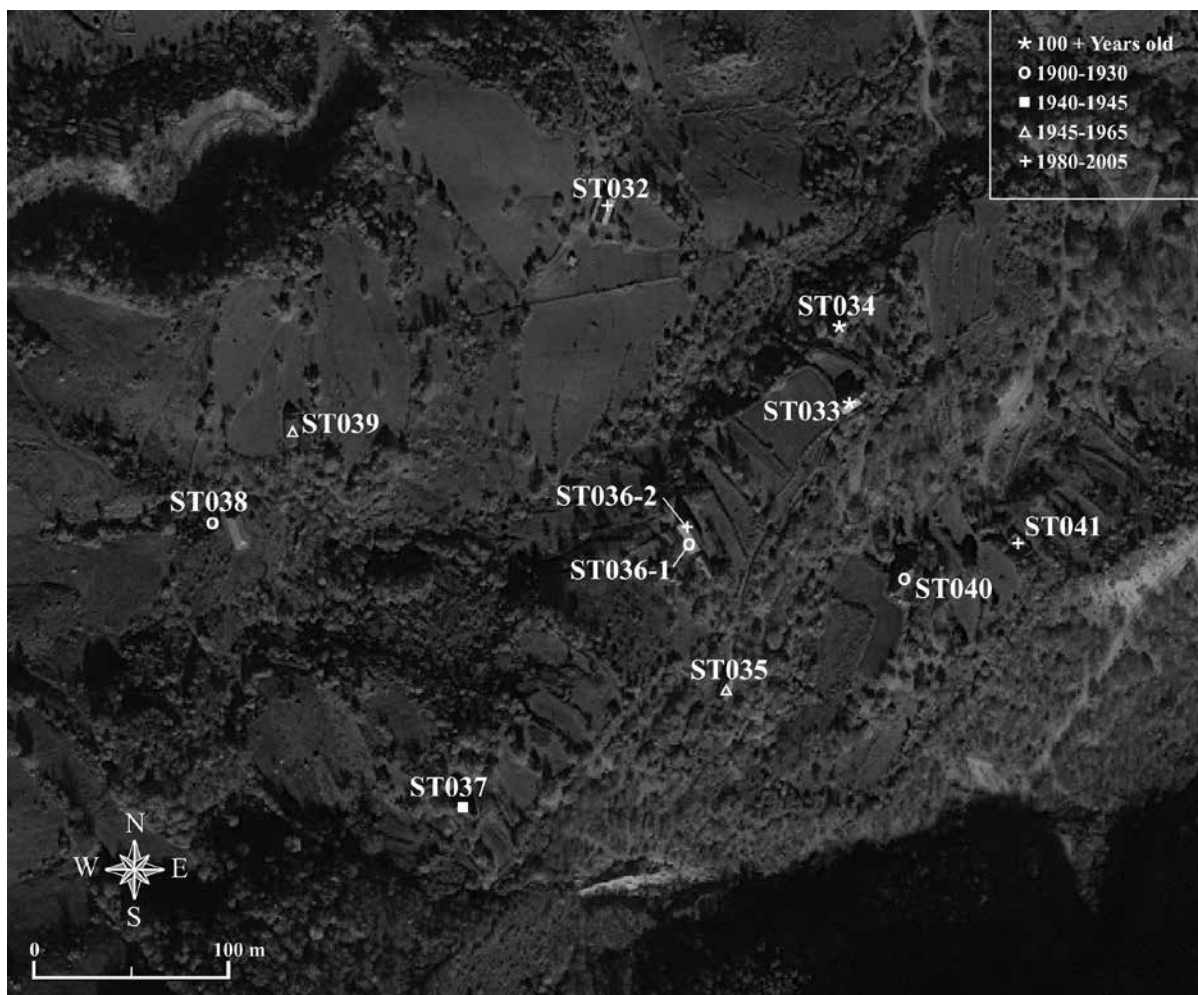


Figure 7.4. The houses of Theth-Gjeçaj, coded by the approximate date of their construction (outbuildings are not marked). *Jill Seagard*

**Table 7.1** Construction Date Estimates for All Three Gimaj Neighborhoods

No Guess	100 Years +	1920s/1930s	1940s/1950s	1960/1970s	1980s	1990s
1	16	9	7	21	11	5

they were built by his grandfather and his grandfather's brother at the same time. The two brothers moved to this location from the other side of the river, originally moving into an existing barn and then building the two homes for the brothers' families to move into. Architectural details are consistent with this story; both houses conform to our expectations for homes built approximately 100 years ago, and there is one other house in the area, the patriarchal house of Kol Dedaj (house 40), that was probably built near the same period.<sup>8</sup>

From these three first homes, the neighborhood progressively expanded. Kol Dedaj built himself a new house in 1957 (house 35), possibly in anticipation of impending collectivization, and then one for his son (house 41), probably in the 1980s. Both of the later houses were abandoned in 1995 when Kol moved to Shkodër. House 40 is now occupied, on a tenant basis, by one of Kol's cousins.

Houses 36-1 and 37 would seem to date to the 1930s, based on the lintel stone on 36-1 and the type of construction shared by both homes. We have no family histories for these homes, but the family in 36-1 clearly later needed to expand and, probably in the 1970s or 1980s, split the house in half, adding the appropriate additional outbuildings (see below for more on splitting homes; house numbers here with a -1 or -2 are single structures with internal dividing walls indicating a split household).

House 39 was built in 1965 (thus in the same pre-collectivization "wave" as Kol Dedaj's 1957 house), and two other homes were added on the edges of the neighborhood, probably in the 1980s (houses 38 and 32, the latter firmly dated to 1986), joining Kol Dedaj's son's home in that same period (house 41) and the splitting off of house 36-2.

## Gimaj

The patterns in the three study neighborhoods of Gimaj are very similar to those in Gječaj and Upper Gjellaj, and it should suffice here to provide a briefer explanation

and a similar graphic representation. Winters are less severe in Gimaj, and there are more remaining residents, so we were able to obtain much more informant-based information, especially on family ownership. As a result, we can easily see the pattern of a core of older houses, expanded upon in the 1930s and then again in the 1960s and 1970s (from collectivization pressures), with a smaller, seemingly materials-availability-based expansion in the 1980s. Table 7.1 combines the construction date estimates for all three Gimaj neighborhoods, while Figure 7.5 graphically delineates how relatives expanded outwards from a core family home in each of the three neighborhoods. It is of note that in our collection of owners' names for the homes, only one surname appeared in more than one neighborhood. The family links indicated in Figure 7.5 are only those made clear to us by our informants; there are undoubtedly more.

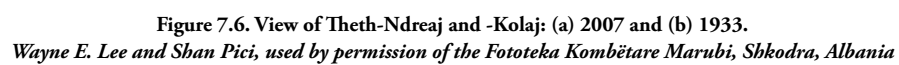
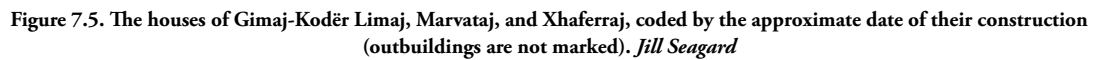
As an example, from Figure 7.5, consider Kodër Limaj. Note the three "old" houses (321, 333, and 341), probably followed in the 1920s or 1930s by the two other relatively early pairs: 330/331 and 324/328. Each of those initial clusters appears to have been an original brotherhood, which later expanded. The initial expansion occurred as a jump to another field (321/333 to 335/337/338, 341 to 342, 330/331 to 345-1/345-2, 324 to 329), and then in the 1980s and 1990s, more modern homes seem to have filled in the intervening spaces (e.g., 340, 322, 325, 327). The other neighborhoods show a similar pattern.

## Additional Evidence for Neighborhood Dating

### Photographic

The relative prevalence of older homes in Gimaj reflects the greater age of those three neighborhoods compared to Gječaj and Gjellaj in Theth. In general, it is difficult to date the oldest homes, as they have been nearly continuously modified. One method available to us, however, is to compare a modern photograph of a village core





with some taken by Shan Pici in 1933.<sup>9</sup> The comparison allows us to see that even the oldest neighborhoods have squeezed in a significant number of homes in the Modern era, supporting our general contention for a sharp rise in the number of homes since the turn of the century, especially since the 1930s. Consider these two photos of the central, and oldest, part of Theth. In the more recent image (Figure 7.6a, taken by Lee in 2007), 22 buildings can be seen (plus the church of Shën Gjini), while in Pici's 1933 photo (Figure 7.6b), only 16 can be detected, an increase of 138 percent. Some of the additional buildings may be barns rather than houses, but most of the barns are too small to appear in the photo. Analysis of other photographic views of Theth-Gjeçaj and Gimaj (including only Kodër Limaj, Marvataj, and Xhaferraj) support this level of change. Gjeçaj increased from 4 or 5 buildings to 10 (250 percent), while the three Gimaj neighborhoods changed from 19 to 36 (189 percent).<sup>10</sup> Although this photo comparison cannot be as definitive as a careful survey, it nevertheless objectively supports the oral testimony and architectural analysis.

### Living Space

The preceding neighborhood analyses were done building by building, but within a neighborhood, we can also document the expansion of square meters of living space (Figure 7.7). Instead of merely counting additional homes, for Gjeçaj and Gjellaj we totaled the addition of living space through new construction, renovation of stable space, and the addition of second or third stories. Adding this layer of analysis at least allows us to confirm the pressure on living space beyond even the construction of new homes.

### Shteg Complexity

To further confirm our sense of the relative age of the various neighborhoods within Theth, we analyzed the system of paths. Paths (*shtegu*) of various kinds wind throughout Theth, connecting households and neighborhoods, and providing access to various natural resources. Different kinds of paths are found in different neighborhoods. A true *shteg* is usually sunk a meter, or more, into the ground and lined on either side with stones (Figure 7.8). Locals say that a good *shteg* allows a man to move from place to place on the landscape without exposing himself to hostile fire (although it also

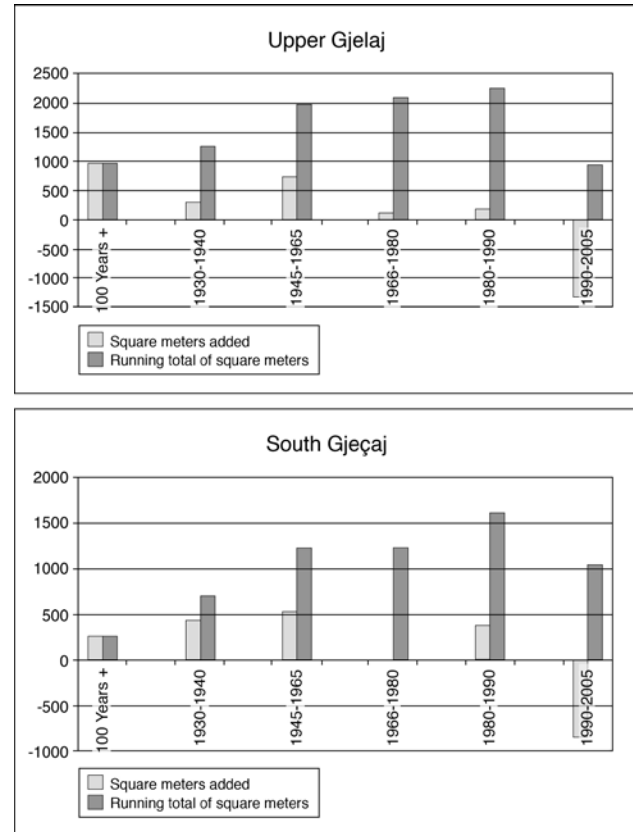


Figure 7.7. Expansion of living space in Theth-Gjellaj and Theth-Gjeçaj, measured in square meters of inhabitable home space within the neighborhood. Recent decline reflects ruined homes. Jill Seagard

clearly reflects a process of piling stones at the edges of fields). Gjeçaj, which we assume to be one of the younger neighborhoods, has only one true *shteg*, which runs from one end of the neighborhood to the other. Older neighborhoods, on the other hand, incorporate intricate networks of paths. We mapped paths in two of Theth's neighborhoods, Upper Gjellaj and Kolaj-Ulaj (Figures 7.9 and 7.10).

On first inspection, the paths in Gjellaj and Kolaj-Ulaj are superficially similar, but the system in Kolaj-Ulaj is somewhat more complex. To compare the path systems, we used a simple form of linear network analysis based on graph theory (Haggett 1966). The path system in Upper Gjellaj is composed of 13 vertices and 12 edges. Its Beta index, or degree of connectivity, is 0.92.<sup>11</sup> The Gjellaj path system can be described as a "tree" graph (i.e., branching, containing no circuits). Trees typically indicate low connectivity and minimal system complexity. The total length of the Gjellaj path system is 652 m, and its diameter is 456 m. Kolaj-Ulaj is composed of 17 vertices and 16 edges, and its Beta index is 0.94,





Figure 7.8. *Shteg*, Theth-Kolaj. Ann Christine Eek

also a tree. The length of the system is 1388 m, and its diameter is 1046 m. When Kolaj-Ulaj is split into its two constituent neighborhoods, Kolaj and Ulaj (which adds an additional boundary vertex and edge), the Beta index for Ulaj changes to 1.125 (Kolaj's Beta index is 0.9). This indicates the Ulaj system's greater degree of

connectivity and circular shape. A graph analysis of the Gjeçaj *shteg*, which runs in a straight line between the upper and lower portions of the neighborhood past several houses, produces a Beta index well below 1.0 and is the least complex graph of the four.

We attribute the differences in the four path systems to chronological variation. Ulaj may be the oldest of the neighborhoods, followed by Kolaj and Upper Gjellaj, and lastly Gjeçaj. These results fit well the results of the 2005 architectural survey, which found the greatest degree of architectural complexity in Ulaj.

## Terraces

As discussed in Chapter Six, the oldest neighborhoods in Theth tend to be situated on the flattest land, necessitating the fewest terraces (see again Table 6.1 and Figure 6.14). Ulaj, for example, which we assume based on architectural and path analyses to be the oldest neighborhood in Theth, has the lowest average slope

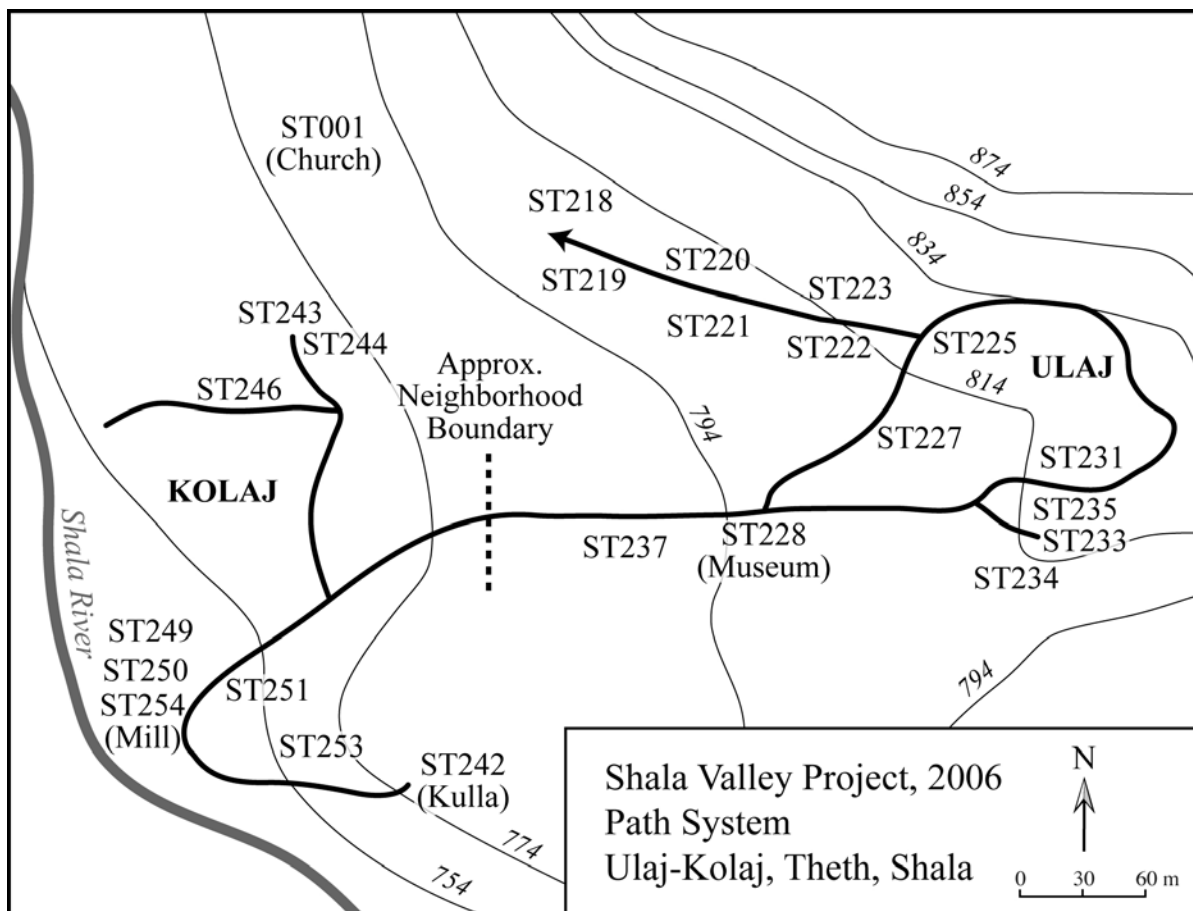


Figure 7.9. The path (*shteg*) network in Theth-Kolaj/Theth-Ulaj, with Beta index of 1.125. Jill Seagard

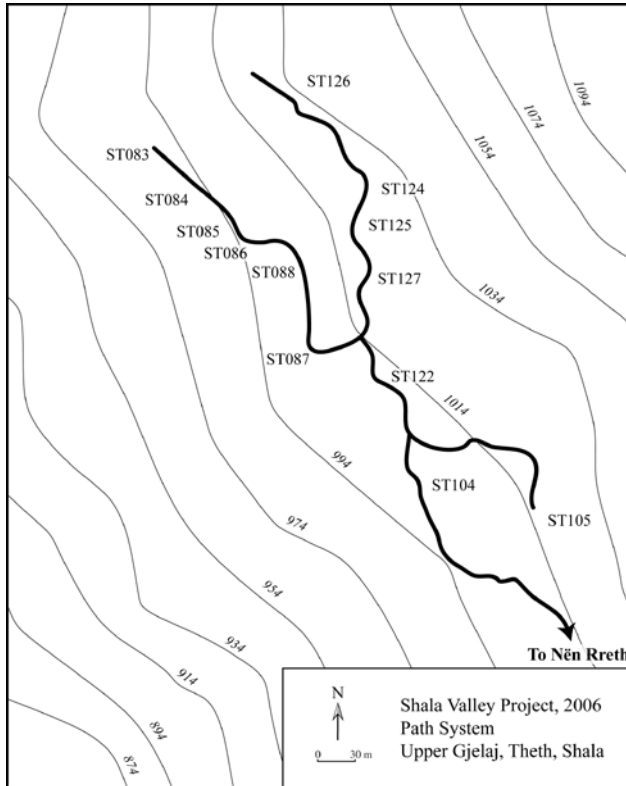


Figure 7.10. The path (*shateg*) network in Theth-Gjellaj, with Beta index of 0.92. *Jill Seagard*

at 7.4 degrees. It possesses only a few, large terraces at the upper edge of the neighborhood. Interestingly, these terraces are interwoven with a complex system of irrigation canals, which carry water from the nearby *përroi* out to fields and ultimately down to Kolaj. Some of these canals actually run through and beneath house compounds. Gjellaj and Gjeçaj, by comparison, which we assume are two of the younger neighborhoods in Theth, have average slopes of 19.7 and 13.5 degrees, respectively. Upper Gjellaj is the steepest neighborhood in Theth and possesses the most terraces. That being the case, it might seem strange that Gjeçaj was not occupied before Gjellaj, but as we discovered when we visited Theth in January 2005, Gjeçaj receives very little sunlight during short winter days and therefore remains snow-covered much later into the spring than other neighborhoods. The evidence from terraces thereby reinforces our dating of Theth's *mëhalla*.

## Architecture

Thus far, we have considered the landscape in terms of settlement patterns and locations. We can draw additional conclusions about the interaction of the local and



Figure 7.11. ST082, Theth-Gjellaj (purported to be the oldest house in upper Gjellaj). *Wayne E. Lee*

the external through a discussion of the changing architecture of individual homes. The people of Shala have constantly built and rebuilt their homes: to accommodate family needs, government regulation, the demands of the feud, or even simply as maintenance. The shifts in style reflect those needs and pressures. Unfortunately, the evidence in some ways is even more difficult to collect and depends on visual inspection, contrasting dateable photographs, and interviews. Worse, the literature on

folk architecture is almost entirely typological, without reference to change over time, and tends to ignore modern changes (Doli 2001a, 2001b; Muka 1993; Thomo 1976, 1981; Thomo et al. 2004). Note that although presented here last, this analysis was essential to building the neighborhood development narrative discussed above.

The first problem is to try to identify the “oldest” houses, of which there appear to be two basic types. The first type is frustrating, from an architectural analysis

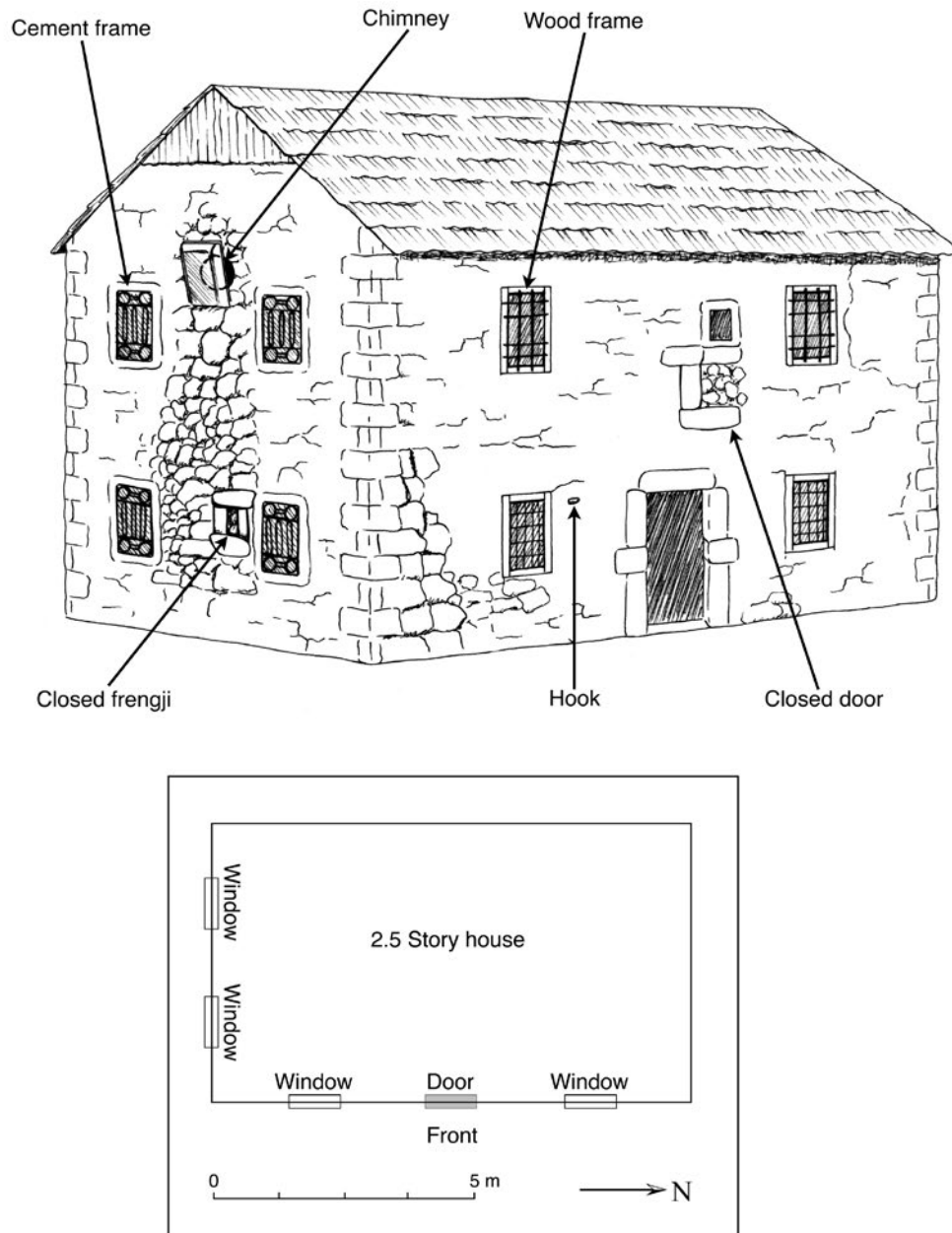
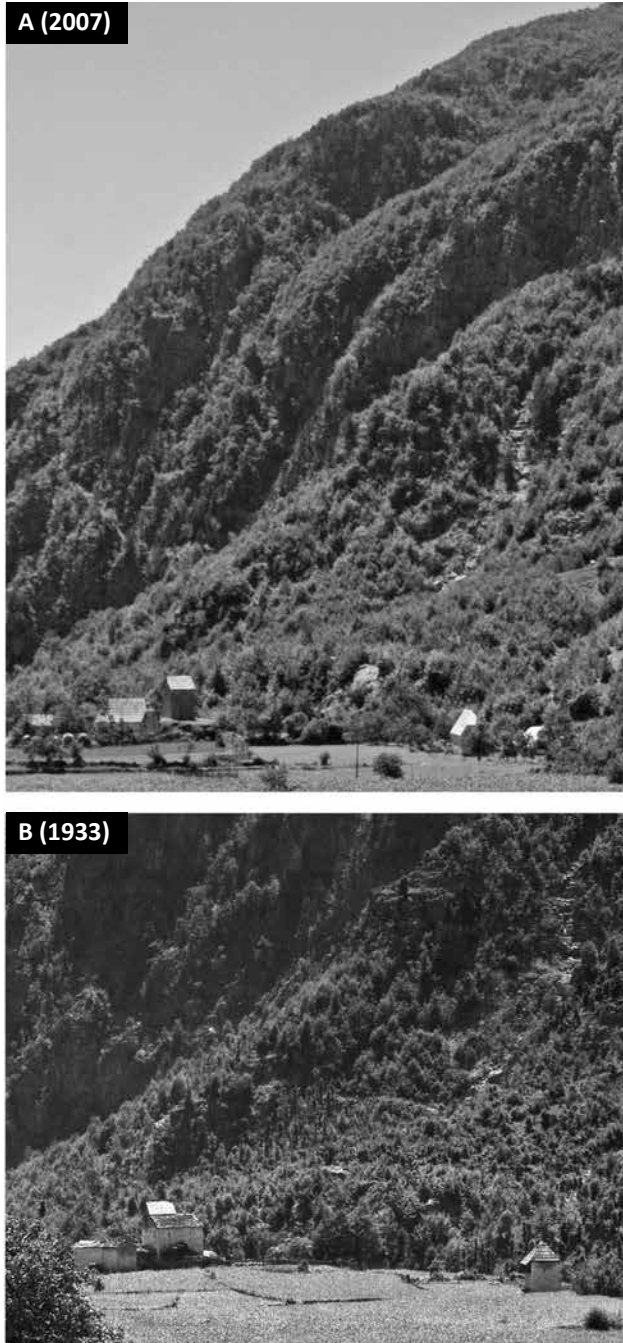


Figure 7.12. ST341. This house neatly demonstrates the recent evolution of a traditional house. People originally entered via a stair to the second story door, now closed up. The animals would have used the lower story (the hook near the animal entrance was for tools or for a rifle). As the house evolved, the lower floor was converted for use by people and an internal chimney was added (leading to the closing up of the *frēngji* on the nearer wall), and windows were enlarged in the postfeud era. *Sasha Caufield and Jill Seagard*



**Figure 7.13. A *kulla* (ST242, the central building) and two homes in Theth: (a) 2007 and (b) 1933.**

*Wayne E. Lee and Shan Pici (excerpted), used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania*

point of view, because it has virtually no distinguishing features. Several houses identified by the locals as the “oldest” in a given neighborhood are simple one-story structures, sometimes divided into two rooms, but many of which have since fallen into disrepair or have been reused as barns. Without a local informant, we would be hard-pressed to determine anything about their age

(see, e.g., Figure 7.11, ST082, which is universally agreed to have been the first home in upper Gjellaj).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, for the most part, “old” merely means over 100 years old, which seems to be as far as local tradition reaches on such subjects, with a few very exceptional houses claimed to be much older. As mentioned above, Franz Nopsca (1925), traveling in the region in 1908, claimed that the tradition of building the large stone homes had only been introduced in 1850, and this may indeed explain the apparent “newness” of the extant buildings, with previous building styles more ephemeral.

The other form for the “oldest” houses is the large stone “*kulla*”-style home. These are often nearly square, usually at least two stories, with extensive carved decorations on the cornerstones and some lintels (the older carvings often include raised carvings, rather than merely incised carvings) (see the discussion of carving in Chapter Eight). They also are marked by certain defensive designs, with the ground floor reserved for animals, sometimes with the only access to the second floor via an internal ladder, while others used a narrow external staircase (of wood or stone) to an elevated entrance (most such second-story entrances are now closed up; see Figure 7.12). These houses can usually be identified visually, although sometimes only after close inspection, and our assessment of their “old” status is usually confirmed by local tradition.

The word *kulla*, often now used only for obvious “towers” built entirely for defense (such as the central building in Figure 7.13a), in fact applies to almost any of the larger stone homes that possess the basic defensive features of narrow stone-framed windows (*frëngjis*), second-story entrances, and sometimes rifle slits and “murder holes” (which allowed shooting straight down at the outside of the door). The *kullas* themselves actually present something of a problem from an archaeological point of view—simply, what qualifies as a *kulla* and how many of them were there? At present, Theth has one very obvious and quite well-known *kulla* on the southern edge of the main part of the village (ST242; central building of Figure 7.13a). It is “obvious” because it combines all the supposed characteristics of the type: it is a square, three-story tower; each interior floor is reached by a trapdoor and ladder; the windows are small, stone-framed *frëngjis*; and it has rifle slits and look-down “murder holes” in projections from each wall of the third floor. In the course of our work, we found very few other buildings

that approach the totality of that description, despite Edith Durham's and other travelers' comments that the valley was filled with *kullas*. Durham, in fact, used the word *kulla* to describe *all* the houses in the Theth area (Durham 1985 [1909]:119). Most if not all houses in the village during the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries probably had *kulla*-esque components. Many of the houses retain, and many of the interviewees recalled, the use of *frëngjis* as a defensive mechanism. Some houses were also clearly sited with defensive purposes in mind, perched on rising boulders as foundations, or were placed with an

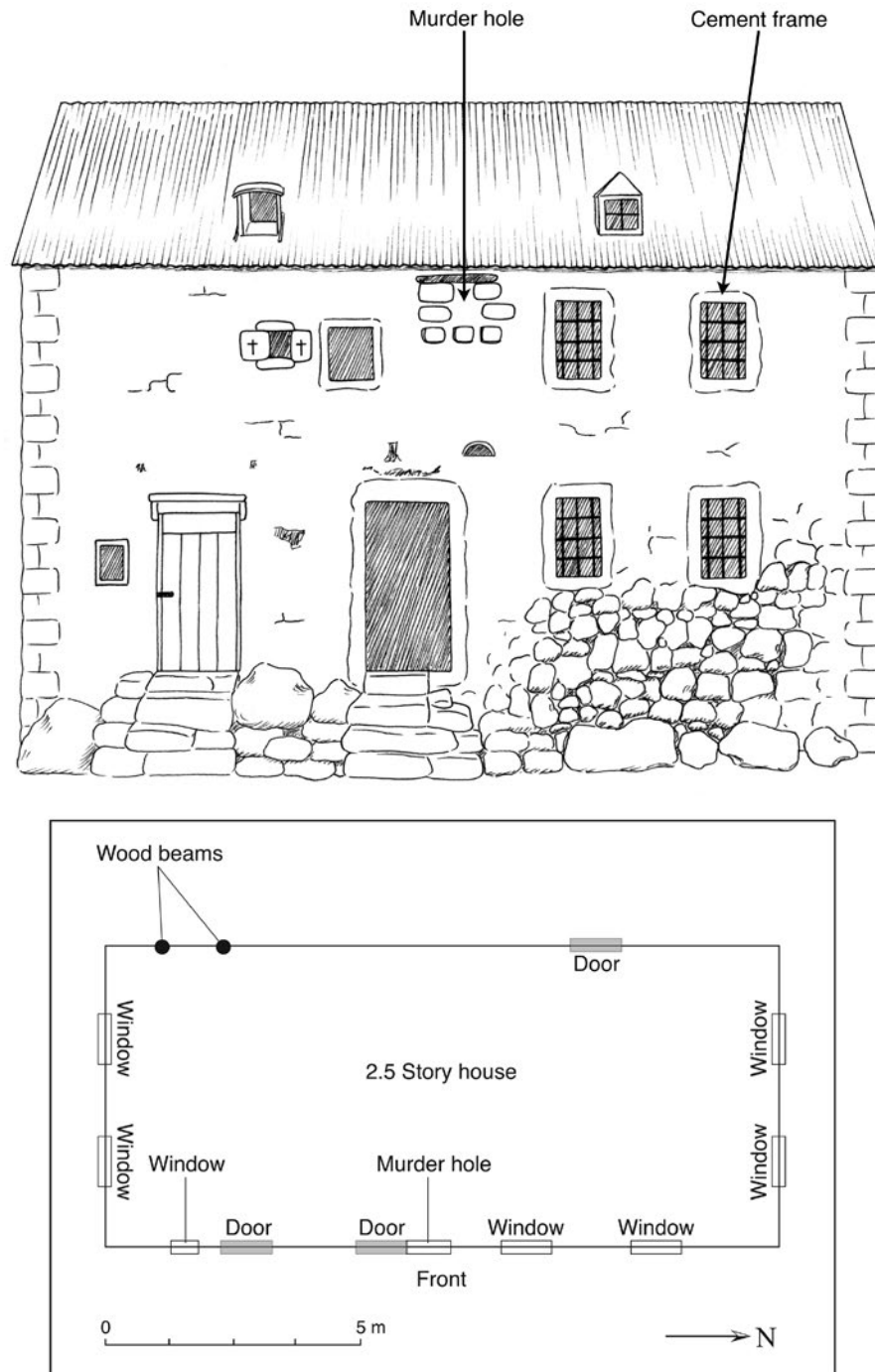


Figure 7.14. ST361-1 and 361-2. This house was divided and a door added to accommodate a new household. Note also the defensive features now closed up, to include a *frëngji* and a “murder hole” that would have allowed someone to fire straight down at the door. The large open windows are recent additions, framed in wood or cement rather than stone. *Sasha Caulfield and Jill Seagard*

eye to viewing as much of the surrounding landscape as possible (see Figures 7.12 and 7.14). Interestingly, if Nopsca is correct, and this large stone house type was not built in the region until after the 1850s, their proliferation may reflect an intensification of the feud, which in turn encouraged a gathering of more men under one roof for defensive purposes, which in turn may explain the large households attested by travelers and villagers (although disputed by Gruber 2001 and Gruber and Pichler 2002).

It is interesting to point out that these “fortification” techniques are highly idiosyncratic and specific to the nature of the blood feud in northern Albania. None of

these features were designed to withstand determined siege or to provide communal defense. They were for individual and, in fact, individual *male* protection. Since women were exempt from attack under the *Kanun* (Book 3, Chapter 5, Section 28; Gjeçov 1989:38), they were free to come and go, bringing food and water to what were essentially refuge forts, not fighting platforms or strategic defenses.

In short, the large *kulla*-style, defensive home represents an architectural adjustment to the nature of life in the valley and the valley’s connections to the



Figure 7.15. Image of large house in Theth-Okol (ST159): (a) 2007 and (b) ca. 1908. Ann Christine Eek and Franz Nopsca (excerpted)





Figure 7.16. House in Theth-Ndreadj (ST245): (a) 2008 and (b) 1933. (c) ST245 as it appeared in 2005. Note window transitions over time and the continuing process of maintenance. Wayne E. Lee and Shan Pici, used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania

outside world. The design originated elsewhere (indeed the word comes from the Arabic, in reference to the fortified homes of Yemen). The design proliferated in the region during a period of surging population and increased rebellions against Ottoman control, both probably contributing to a spike in the frequency of feuding. It accommodated and probably reinforced the extant strong patriarchal extended household. And finally, its design defended its inhabitants according to the idiosyncratic rules of the Albanian feud.

This close correlation between design and local life and outside forces is further reflected in the changes in house design that have occurred since the 1930s. We are fortunate to have a limited but revealing number of photos from Theth from 1910 to 1930, which we have been able to directly compare with modern photos. These pictures should immediately convey some of the basic changes that have occurred in this century (it is noteworthy, however, that the photos have generally merely confirmed our conclusions about

changes in design gathered through inspection and interviews). For example, note the changes in window size and the shifting importance of the balcony/second-story entrance in the three following pairs of photos (the right-hand building in 7.13a–b, 7.15a–b, and 7.16a–b).<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, perhaps the most famous building in Theth, the tower *kulla* discussed above and frequently portrayed in guide books to the region, turns out to have looked very different during Shan Pici's 1933 visit (Figure 7.13a–b, referring to the central building). Although we are unable to document the process, it seems likely that the attached house was removed by the Communist regime as part of its program to make Theth into a kind of workers' vacation camp in the 1980s.

The most notable architectural shift in all of these photos is the change in windows. As suggested in the Nopsca and Pici photos above (and especially in Figure 7.16c), the valley's stone houses were originally built with defensive *frëngjis*, which admitted a minimum



Figure 7.17. Closed *frëngji* (right) and larger replacement window (left) (ST285, Ndërlysay). Ann Christine Eek

of light and air but made it difficult to shoot into a home. Homes were still built with such windows into the 1930s, but as the danger of blood feud declined, *frëngjis* were closed up or replaced with larger windows. Ronald de Coves Matthews (1937:132), who traveled throughout northern Albania in 1934, also describes in detail how the windows of a house in Salce, Nikaj, were being opened and enlarged so that the building could be converted into a school. The “first generation” of replacement windows tended to resemble the earlier small windows, still framed with four large blocks of stone, but now with a much larger opening. With the arrival of cement in the 1960s, whenever a homeowner replaced or enlarged his windows, he tended to do so by framing it in cement, with an even larger opening.<sup>14</sup> Note the sequence of windows in Figure 7.17, from the closed-up small *frëngji* in the center to the larger stone-framed window (ST285) (and compare both to the very large windows standard in the offset foundation/inset porch-style home built in the 1980s, shown in Figure 7.18). Those homes that retain open *frëngjis* are usually on ground level and they survive because they now



Figure 7.18. Offset foundation and inset porch (ST351, Gimaj). Wayne E. Lee

open into spaces used only for animals. Unfortunately, without a witness or a photo, it is now impossible to know if a new, larger window replaced an older *frëngji* or was simply punched through the wall.



Since World War II, traditional building techniques in stone have continued in use, but the availability of cement and new corrugated roofing material has slowly changed the way homes are built and maintained (the recent stucco work visible in Figure 7.16a is but one example). In terms of stylistic change, however, the most interesting shift arising from outside influences appears to be the copying of government buildings. Many of the official buildings scattered around the valley used an offset foundation and inset porch entrance. Both of these features have been widely copied in houses built during that same period—and local informants reported that there were standard blueprints distributed to villagers. Some early versions of offset foundations are dateable to the 1970s, but most come from the 1980s and the early 1990s, as does the inset porch. An example of a home with an offset foundation and an inset porch is ST351, built in 1980 (Figure 7.18).

## Conclusion

Our analysis of the process of neighborhood expansion, its correlation to traditional law as found in the *Kanun*, and then the visible demographic and landscape consequences when the Communist regime clamped down on male emigration suggests a model for understanding how the valley filled over the centuries after the arrival of the first members of the Shala *fis*. Essentially, we would predict a period of growth after initial settlement, followed by a “dynamically stable” population until the Modern era. That is, the valley’s carrying capacity, once modified by the introduction of New World crops such as maize and potatoes, was relatively fixed. The overall pre-Modern population probably rose and fell from year to year within a certain dynamic limit and in response to political and climatic fluctuations. Spatially, we can predict what this looked like. Take the northern valley (Theth) as an example. A certain stable upper population limit was possible under normal ecological and political conditions. For the most part, that population prior to 1900 or so was concentrated around Okol and Ndreaj/Ulaj, relying on nearer, low-altitude pastures in combination with more distant higher pastures. Within that space, however, individual family (or clan) populations were more dynamic. One generation might see more sons born, and the partible inheritance system would see

brothers eventually move off to their own plot and build a new home. The next generation might see the clan nearly wiped out by the feud. Another family could then step in to fill that space within the regional population limit. In fact, the *Kanun* spends a great deal of time laying out rules for this sort of problem, both trying to protect land “vacated” by feud deaths but also setting conditions for others to claim it. In the late nineteenth century, a growing population, with growth having been ignited by changes in crop availability or contained by external political troubles, squeezed itself into a relatively small number of large stone defensible homes. But the process of family fission and new home building was merely in abeyance, awaiting continued population growth. That growth was cut off at the beginning of the twentieth century; a sense of the need for community and protection preserved some of the large extended households for that era’s travelers to see, but by the end of the Balkan Wars and World War I, the fission and expansion process had started up again.

The landscape we see now reflects the last iteration of this old, dynamically stable population: essentially those houses “over 100 years old,” *plus* a postwar adjustment, *plus* a Communist-era squeezing of the population, *plus* a brief post-Communist initial boom of building followed by a more rapid and extensive abandonment. When we architecturally and archaeologically peel back these last three layers to see the Ottoman-era pattern, we are not seeing it “as it always was”—we are merely seeing the last pattern left by the old demographic system, which had been constantly shifting at a local level in response to the fortunes of individual families (as attested ethnographically and described in Chapter Five).

Within that system, people were moving all over the valley all the time. They occupied and reoccupied old houses and built new ones, often by dismantling old ones, each in response to changing family fortunes. When we look at the individual neighborhoods outside the two denser cores of settlement at Ndreaj/Ulaj and Okol, what we see now is the most recent version of clan expansion, on which has been superimposed more recent regional and sustained demographic growth. In their origins, neighborhoods such as Nik Gjonaj, Gelaj, Geçaj, and Geçaj-west (and probably Ndërlyaj, Rrogam, and Kaprej) were probably one or, more likely, two houses, and for the most part they remained that way until the Modern era.

It is also highly probable that there was not one but two different demographic patterns during the Ottoman era: one from before the introduction of New World crops and one from after. This may account for the rapidity of growth starting in the late eighteenth century.

This model has implications for understanding Shala's interaction with the wider world during the pre-Communist era. The demographic data and the tendency to produce large families both suggest that the *malësorë* generated more children than the land could sustain in the long run. The pressure for emigration out of the valley by at least some brothers would quickly have become irresistible.

Some anthropologists have argued previously that blood feuds and their high male mortality rates solved the problem of population pressure on a limited landscape.<sup>15</sup> There is no doubt some truth to the idea that feud might relieve male population pressure, but it is also true that feud led many people to live under one roof as part of an extended family for defensive purposes (Hasluck 1954). Dividing the household was something to avoid, and only when it became unavoidable would brothers move out and establish new houses and neighborhoods, which was clearly relatively rare, or we would have found many more "older" houses. In other words, the desire for large defensible households restricted the number of houses and would have increased the likelihood that those brothers who did depart the extended household would actually depart the village for the outside world. In fact, there is modern evidence that men who become the target of a feud are likely to leave their home territory, in effect going into hiding by moving away (Interviews, 2005; Fischer 1999).

The ending of the blood feud in the 1930s first allowed for a more rapid expansion in the number of homes and in living space, as well as the marked expansion of neighborhoods, but then Communism clamped down on outmigration, initially forcing a further proliferation of houses and then, after collectivization, a proliferation of other kinds of buildings (co-ops, markets, administrative and military buildings, and even state tourism facilities). What our ethnohistoric, ethnoarchaeological, and ethnographic research in Theth indicates is that given northern Albanian sociopolitical structure, and given the severe subsistence limits of mountain economies, changes in population are strongly reflected by changes in the built environment. Population did not hold constant but was influenced by external forces, despite the

seeming isolation of the northern tribes. The social and political forces that shaped Modern settlement patterns and the built environment were also affected, however, by systems of belief, both Christian and pagan, that are likewise reflected in the landscape. It is to this "sacred landscape" that we now turn.

## Notes

1 The full catalog of structures is available from the Shala Valley Project (SVP) archive at the Archaeological Data Service: [http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/archive/svp\\_mellon\\_2009/](http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/archive/svp_mellon_2009/).

2 These numbers do not add up to 461 because some buildings had multiple functions and are counted here once for each function.

3 As near as we can determine, pasture in Shala is and always has been privately owned. According to Koster (1997), this typically indicates resource stress. However, private pasture was held in addition to whatever common pasture might be kept by the village or tribe (see Gjeçov 1989).

4 Unfortunately, the travelers' accounts from before 1850 rarely describe the houses in any detail.

5 Baçi (1981) must be used with care, but in terms of the chronology of the process of collectivization, the text is probably reliable.

6 This pressure was attested by individual interviews, 2005. State-sponsored land reform immediately after the war redistributed land from the large landholders to the peasants, limiting individual owners to 5 ha (a process completed by 1946). This large a "limit" seems unlikely to have had any effect on the mountains. After 1968, as collectivization took hold in the mountains, the limits were tightened. Peasants in the mountains were allowed a limit of .1 ha irrigated land or .15 un-irrigated. Mountain peasants were allowed to keep 1 cow and 10 sheep and goats (increased to 20 if they had joined a collective farm created after January 1, 1966). In addition, they could have 1 pig, unlimited rabbits and hens, and 1 goose or up to 15 turkeys. Beasts of burden were no longer permitted, which severely hampered moving personal goods to market. Statistics from Sjöberg (1991).

7 Individuals were not allowed to own vehicles, but state-owned trucks could bring in building supplies in service of the cooperative.

8 Per our agreement during interviews in the village, Kol Dedaj is a pseudonym.

9 Shan Pici was an Albanian photographer who traveled widely in the mountains from the 1920s into the 1950s (Osmani 2006). His archive of some 50,000 negatives is available at the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi in Shkodra. Digital scans were provided through the kind assistance of the curator, Semiha Osmani.

10 There is the issue here of visibility, but there is more vegetation in the modern photos than in Pici's, and so, if anything, the modern views are undercounting homes.

11 For the purposes of the analysis, a "vertex" was defined as any point where paths diverge or where a path intersects a house compound. An "edge" was defined as the path connecting two

vertices regardless of turns. Degree of connectivity is measured by the Beta index of the graph, which is the number of edges divided by number of vertices.

12 This dual typology roughly conforms to that suggested in Thomo (2004:63–66).

13 The steeper roofline seen in the modern renovations seems to be partly about the availability of sheet roofing, but as Figure 7.17a–b suggests, that cannot be the only explanation. At least one villager claims that this steeper roofline came in as an idea from Serbia later in the century (although note Figure 7.15b!). Gimaj, at a lower elevation, and receiving less snow, has more houses retaining the shallower-sloped roof.

14 One homeowner claimed to have been the first to use

large cement windows in his neighborhood in 1959. Other such expansions have been attested to the 1960s, 1977, 1985, and several in the 1990s.

15 Boehm (1987) and Coon (1950). Coon could be more moderate in his views; in another section, he explained the early spring's lack of food as "the result of a complete economic occupation of the land, coupled with an excess of births over deaths. Raiding brought in more food, but feuding caused more deaths. Between the two, plus a certain amount of emigration, the balance was reached." Coon nevertheless tended to overestimate the sense of isolation based on what seemed to him long and arduous walking distances, which other sources clearly reveal as inconsequential to locals (see, e.g., Lane 1921; Young 2000).

## Chapter Eight

# THE SACRED LANDSCAPE OF SHALA

Zamir Taflica



In earlier chapters of this book, we used architectural analysis of the houses in Shala and Theth to discuss the relationship between social organization and landscape formation. We also saw the ways in which house design reflects shifting internal and external pressures, especially the dynamics of the northern Albanian feud. The homes of Shala, however, have yet more to tell us. During the survey, our attention was drawn to the number and variety of symbolic signs carved into the stones of the houses—especially the older and larger ones. These carvings were located mostly on corner stones as well as on those stones that framed doors and windows, although also occasionally elsewhere on the façade. The corner carv-

ings were usually on the front corners and typically at head height. Most houses have one or two carvings, but some, like the *kulla* in the village of Abat, had as many as 10 different carvings (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2).

The ethnohistoric survey team documented 120 houses with some sort of carving, although more are likely to have disappeared through whitewashing of walls or from changes to façades over time. In general, the sign-carving process was performed during the dressing and squaring of the stones designated for the corners of the building. In some cases, these stones were incorrectly placed or reused, leading to figures oriented in a horizontal or even upside-down position. Most carvings were formed through deep incision, although

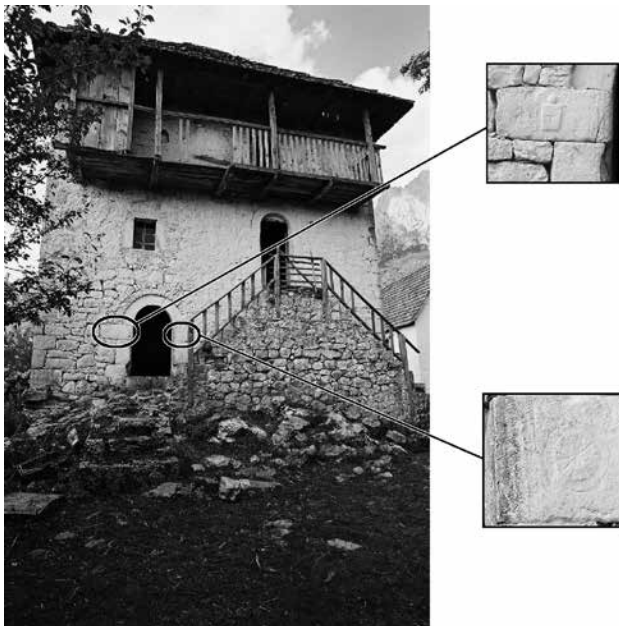


Figure 8.1. *Kulla* in Abat, Shala—front view. Symbols are 79, type 9 anthropomorphic, and 10, type 2 sun. *Zamir Taflica and Jill Seagard*



Figure 8.2. *Kulla* in Abat, Shala—side view. Symbols are largely types 2–4 sun, moon, and astral, with the exception of the bottom carving, which is composed of recent initials. *Zamir Taflica and Jill Seagard*

some used raised relief. Either of these types represented a significant investment of time and labor, suggesting their importance to the inhabitants. It was also common, however, to see some signs simply scratched on the flat surface of the stone, apparently from a more recent period, and generally unimpressive in appearance. These represent hasty sketches drawn by the amateur hand of the inhabitants of the house. Similar sketches, made by shepherds, can be found everywhere in the highlands on the flat sides of rocks. Carvings, whether poorly done or not, convey something of the community, their creative spirit, their sensitivity toward the world around them, their struggle for survival, and their self-defense against occult forces. More important for our project, they are outward, visible signs of features in the natural and built landscapes of Shala that held particular meaning for the modern inhabitants.

The use of symbolic signs on the outside walls of buildings is not unique to Dukagjin. Similar carvings can be found in Malësia e Madhe, Postriba, Tropoja, and further into the regions of Peja and Gjakova (Kosova) (Figures 1.1 and 1.5), with a seeming decline in intensity and frequency proportional to their proximity to urban centers. The carvings have not gone unnoticed by travelers to the region (see Durham 1979 [1928]; Lane 1923), but they have not been subject to any detailed study or catalog.

For ease of study, the signs are classified here morphologically and thematically (Table 8.1; Figure 8.3). Some carvings, either vague or damaged, are difficult to catalog precisely, but Table 8.1 represents a reasonable typological classification and accounting of the 165 identified carvings: group one has 8 examples, group two has 20, group three has 21, group four has 10, group five has 31, group six has 25, group seven has 35, and group eight has 14. As can be seen, the largest group is composed of cosmic signs. In addition to these truly symbolic carvings, three sun dials were found, made through the same stone carving technique. Also, we cannot forget to mention the phenomenon of the vertical appearance of goat horns on the house facades usually on the gate side.

An extraordinary variety of symbols are employed in northern Albania, reflected in the local dialect, folklore, rituals, dress and ornamentation, on wooden objects, and so on. Of these, the carvings remain the most visible manifestation of the importance of symbolism in the material and spiritual lives of the northern highlanders.

These symbols, including the carvings, often reference features of the natural landscape—mountains, rivers, trees, caves, and so on—indicating the inherent importance of the physical environment. Given the importance of symbolic behavior in Shala, key questions are as follows: Who made the carvings? What is their geographical and chronological span? What was their meaning and purpose? What role did they play in the life of the inhabitants of the highlands? And to what extent do they reflect natural and built landscapes that were imbued with sacred power? Even beginning to answer these questions, however, starts with the assumption that the carvings are more than mere idle graffiti; that they are symbols with cultural significance. It makes sense, therefore, to begin with the nature of “symbolism,” the idea of a “sacred” or symbolic landscape, and the connections between the two.

## Symbolism and Sacred Landscapes

Standard definitions of *symbol* refer to a material object or figure standing in for or representing some more abstract entity. This ability to convey abstraction is what renders a symbol powerful. As Jung (1968:310) suggested, a symbol “is an object of the known world hinting at something unknown. It is the known expressing the life and sense of the inexpressible.” Therefore, he argued, “because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define” (Jung 1968:4). In this way, symbols in fact *enable* the human expression of the psychological and spiritual worlds that would otherwise be inexpressible, and which, unwittingly and spontaneously, would, if not expressed in this way, cause distress.

In Eliade’s (1996) formulation, it is only due to symbols and symbolism that humans are able to have a total religious experience where the sacred is both “everywhere and nowhere” simultaneously. This omnipresence, argues Eliade (1996:158–159), meant to the “primitive mind” that everything in the world was interconnected. Each symbol “calls” the others, and in this manner, the different planes of reality communicate with each other. Within this worldview, the universe is understood as an organic whole, and actions on the planes of one reality influence, through the connecting symbols, actions on the other planes. For example, the fertility of the woman influences the fertility of the fields, while in turn the

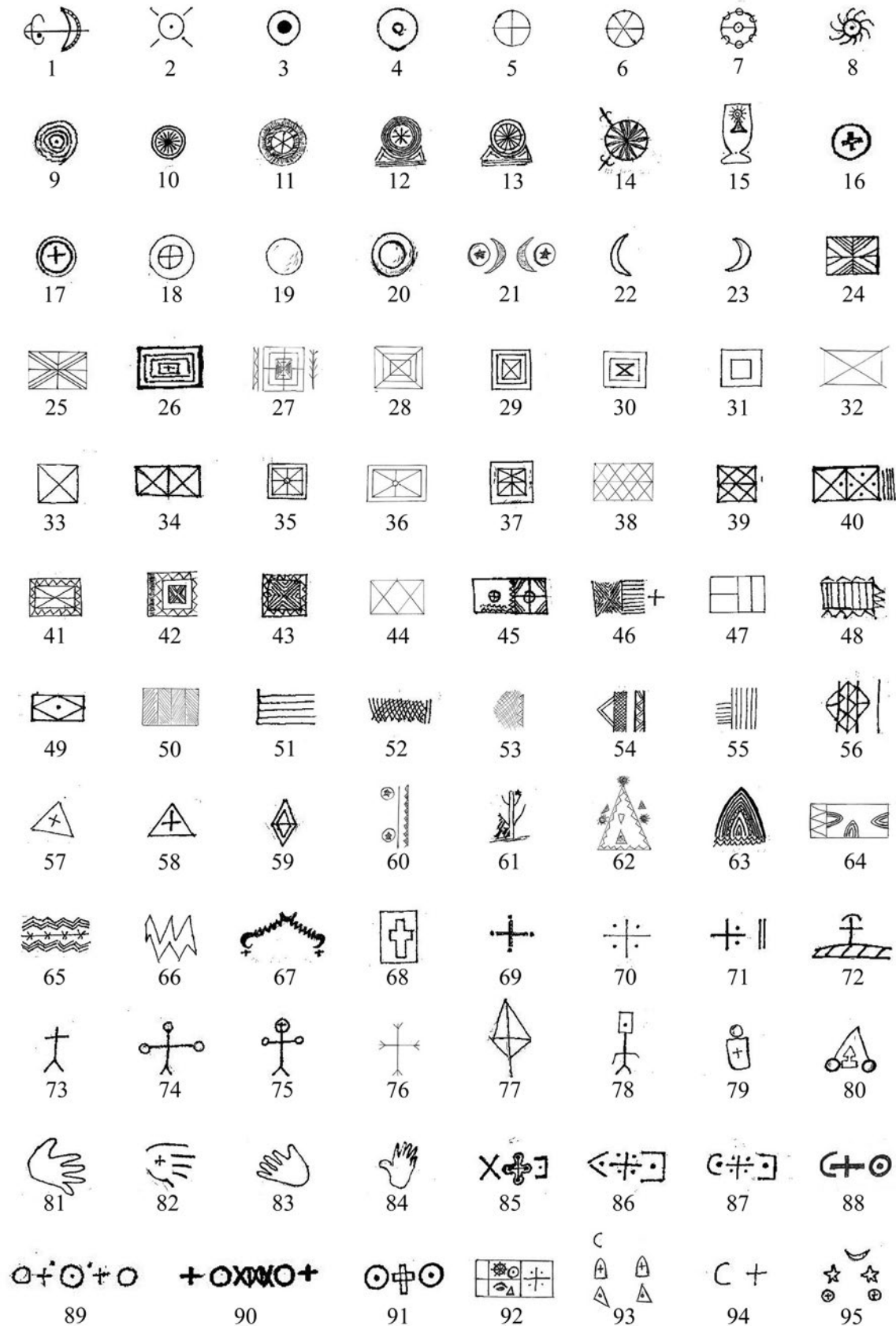


Figure 8.3. House carvings, Theth and Shala. Zamir Taflica and Jill Seagard

**Table 8.1** Number of Carvings by Type and Technique

Nr.	Shape	Separate	Composite	Total	Relief	Deep Carving	Graffito
1	Sun dial	3	0	3	0	3	0
2	Sun with rays	7	3	10	0	0	10
2	Sun in concentrated circles	2	0	2	0	0	2
2	Stylized sun	3	0	3	0	0	3
2	Sun-circle	2	2	4	2	0	2
2	Wheel	2	0	2	0	0	2
2	Point in circle	0	3	3	0	0	3
2	Chalice with sun	0	1	1	0	0	1
2	Flower in circle	0	1	1	0	0	1
3	Moon	2	3	5	4	1	0
3	Lunar orbit	1	0	1	0	0	1
4	Five-pointed star	0	2	2	2	0	0
4	Star in circle	0	2	2	2	0	0
4	Half sphere	16	2	18	18	0	0
4	Half sphere in circle	2	0	2	2	0	0
5	Divided Square	4	0	4	0	0	4
5a	Holy center	11	4	15	1	0	14
5b	Threefold encirclement	4	2	6	0	0	6
6	Cave	1	5	6	0	0	6
7	Triangle	0	5	5	0	0	5
7	Point in triangle	0	2	2	0	0	2
7	Rhombus	2	0	2	2	0	0
7	Hour glass	1	0	1	1	0	0
8	Tree of Life	1	1	2	0	1	1
9a	Anthropomorphic	2	1	3	2	0	1
9b	Palm	4	1	5	0	1	4
9	Two pieces of fruit	0	1	1	1	0	0
10	Simple cross	4	10	14	1	4	9
10	Anthropomorphic cross	2	1	3	0	0	3
10	Cross in triangle	2	0	2	0	0	2
10	Cross in circle	6	0	6	0	0	6
11a	Parallel lines	4	0	4	0	0	4
11b	Zigzag line	3	7	10	1	0	9
11c	Net	1	2	3	0	0	3
11	Horizontal line	1	0	1	1	0	0
12	Masonic ciphers	0	11	11	1	10	0
	TOTALS	93	72	165	41	20	104

yield of the fields helps the woman in her pregnancy. Another classic example elucidated by Eliade (1996) is the moon, which integrated many different symbols into one system: the woman, waters, vegetation, the snake, fertility, death, rebirth, and so on. It is the rich symbolism of the moon, not the moon itself, that creates these connections. Through the symbol, the world becomes understandable and acquires meaning and, perhaps most important, an apparent *order*.

The symbolic source from which the people of Shala appear to have drawn most actively and often was the natural landscape of the valley in which they lived (cf. Ashmore and Knapp 1999). In making landscape features into sacred signs, they thereby lent order to the environment in which they lived and upon which they depended for their survival. Through this landscape also moved various supernatural powers, creatures, and minor deities that had to be propitiated. One of these was the *ora* (pl. *orët*), a female fairy that lived in the mountains and was a source of protection, or danger, to people, especially when traveling (Elsie 2001:194). *Orët* might be found, or heard, in forests, near streams and lakes, and in caves and on cliffs, imbuing the natural world with sacred power. They could also live in the eaves of houses (Elsie 2001:194), and in this way, they connected the sacred and profane, linking the natural to built landscapes. Churches (Figure 8.4) and cemeteries (Figure 1.12) were also powerful landscape features and symbols. Cemeteries in particular were sacred zones where the dead met the living, and ancestors were (and are) remembered and venerated. Imbuing the various landscapes of Shala and Theth with sacred power, linking them to spirits and ancestors, and depicting them symbolically created a cosmographic space, one that elders of the tribe could read like a book. As a mnemonic device, the sacred landscape also recorded the history of the *fis*, triggering mental cues when one moved through or viewed it, encoding the myths and legends of the tribe (Ingold 1993). In this way, Shala was not unlike various other tribal peoples the world over who also recorded their most meaningful stories in the landscapes around them (Basso 1996).

It is critical within this discussion to acknowledge that symbols have power because of human perceptions of them. As human contexts change, perceptions of the same symbol naturally change as well, but their very power tends to exercise a kind of inertia over their meaning. For example, a cultic stone with specific cultural

meanings in one era may retain its spiritual significance in a later era, but now overlaid with different deities or spiritual powers. The “arrival” of a new deity or formal religion may displace old specific practices but often conforms to the symbolism of power still associated with older objects and the landscape. Well-known versions of this phenomenon are the way in which older pagan sites throughout Europe retained spiritual power even as they became associated with the new saints of Christianity. As with sites, so too sometimes with specific symbols. The sun symbol of an ancient god thus retains symbolic significance within a new, intrusive religious system.

This “layering” of meaning is crucial to understanding the original and shifting meanings of the symbols carved into the homes of the residents of Shala. Rituals of the sacred that took place centuries ago, and were represented or empowered by certain symbols, may have lost their specific original meaning, but they retained a remembered, residual power and continued to

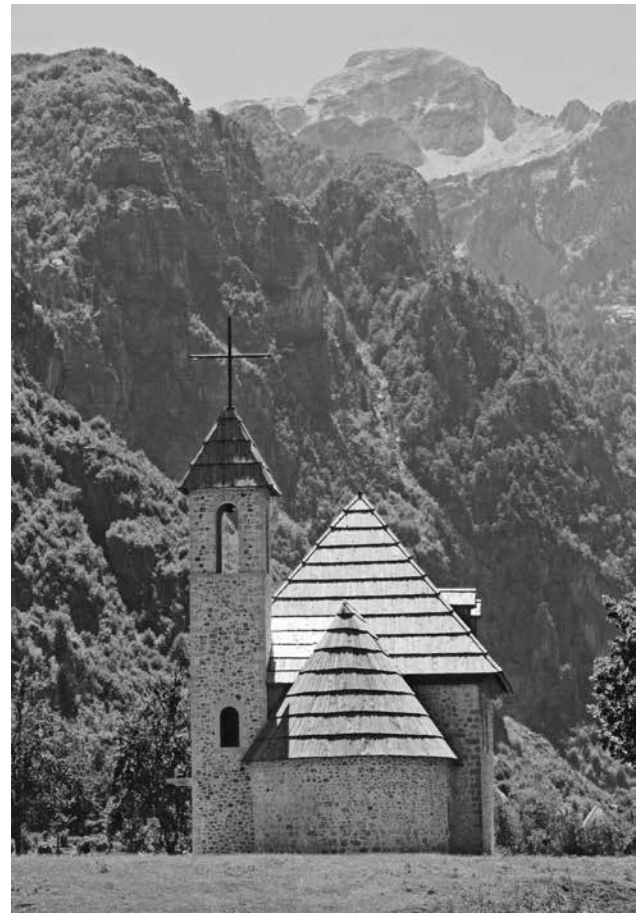


Figure 8.4. The Church of Saint John, Theth, Shala (as restored by the villagers in 2006). Ann Christine Eek



be replicated. In Shala, people combined pagan with Christian beliefs and practices in a way clearly expressed in house carvings. Theirs was a syncretic religious system that drew on both pagan and Christian (and sometimes Muslim) forms of symbolism—the sun, moon, cross, and crescent—often combining them in complex ways. Since these particular symbols are found on houses, a reasonable place to begin should be those rituals and sacred processes associated with the foundation and building of the home.

## The Stone and the House

In the distant past, beginning to build a house may have been as much a religious and ritual act as it was an economic or geographic one. The old rituals associated with laying the foundation or commencing construction, which take different forms among different peoples, always had the primary function of delimiting space and guaranteeing the unobstructed, permanent possession of a piece of territory snatched from nature. The value of these rites was always complex, and their mysterious forms mixed and changed continuously through different ethnocultural influences. However, the final result—entering into a covenant with the divine—remained unchanged.

The earliest ritual forms may have been meant to situate every house “above the head of the chthonic snake,” the vital underworld spirit that held up the world. Specific rites of association are also present in the Catholic religion; in the corpus of *Rituale Romanum*, there is a prayer of blessing the first stone (*Benedictio primarii lapidis aedificae*) and a blessing of the land and house (*Benedictio loci vel domus*). Older beliefs continue to interact with the teachings of Christianity, and the mountaineers have retained strong beliefs in the occult forces around them. During the whole Modern period and until about two or three generations ago, despite persistent attempts by the church to root out tribal superstitions and customs, to a large extent, life was seen to depend on such fatal forces. During World War II, the Franciscan priest, Bernadin Palaj (1944:80), assigned to Shala, wrote,

*What are these oras, fairies, hydras, pixies, sorcerers, monsters, ogres, witches, magicians, dragons, cyclops? . . . witches who eat children's hearts, the oras that watch a man . . . fairies that curse if someone dares to come close to the spring without*

*paying a fine . . . the sorcerers and witches—the old women who do all kinds of things, stop the milk from livestock with mountain plants only they know. . . . What can I describe first? The Buzmi night or the summer days with witches and all harmful living things, who, for each ceremony, use specific words that should not be told anyone even at death.<sup>1</sup>*

These powerful beliefs in an active occult world played a key role in the selection of land, especially for barns and homes. Within the larger Dukagjin region, there were various rituals employed for this purpose, but in one, a prospective barn builder was advised “to find a good piece of land with light shade for the barn” and to examine it “at night before digging the foundation and pouring blood on the earth.” Ashes were then carefully spread on the land at night, in the dark, and in the middle of it a glass full of grape wine was put. On the following day at dawn, the land was examined to see what creature had left its footprints on the ashes. If a wild animal had passed through those ashes, the hunter might never kill it. If a domestic animal passed through, it might never amount to anything. This further meant that a person has passed that way and the barn should not be built there, because death would devour (harvest) the family members.

In another version from the Malësi e Madhe (Gjeçov N.D.; see also Palaj 1943),

*Before they set about to put in the foundation of the new house, the night before they put four glasses of wine on the four corners of the piece of land they like; the next day, if they find them full of wine like they left them the night before, they start working; otherwise they leave that place because orët have seen them. If they find a glass half empty, they move away from that corner and they start digging the house foundation further in. Wherever there are ant nests, that place has a good ora and you can put the house foundation there without it being necessary to test it with the glasses of wine. Wherever the livestock gather together to sleep, if someone desires to build a house there, without a doubt they can start their work there because that piece of land has good orët and brings good luck. After the roof has been put on the new house, it needs to be watched and not left desolate and either the family should move in or farm tools should be put in the yard. If the new covered house is left without anyone in it and without any tools, the orët might settle in it, just like it has already happened and much effort has been required to get the orët out and scare them away (frighten them away, kick them out) of the house.*

Other traditions, which at first glance might appear to be primarily about a form of law, or at least conflict prevention, when studied more closely also reveal a close connection to the sacred. Placing boundary stones to define the edges of property, for example, followed a specific form. A boundary stone was one long stone with 6 to 12 little stones around it called “witnesses.” The long stone is partially buried at the boundary spot, and the small stones are placed inside the hole as well. The person setting the boundary places the stone into the hole, while the small stones are dropped into the hole by other villagers, while saying, “The boundary stone has witnesses behind it.” After filling in the hole, the village elder holds his hand at the top of the marker and says, “May this stone be a heavy burden, in the next life, on the one who moves it!”

This ritual clearly called on the community to “witness” and remember a boundary, surely as much to prevent future conflict as anything else. But there was also sacred power invested here. Every religious language has used the stone to represent an eternal material, able to resist the corrosion of time. It becomes a symbolic expression of the relationship between that which is earthly and heavenly, an *omphalos*, the central point where man and God meet, a privileged place for prayer and to find contact with the supreme being. Stones that fulfill such purposes are almost always either shaped or marked in some way, ways that relate to the mythical and holy universe of the old pagan religions.

## The Benedictines and Other Medieval Orders

In addition to these deep pagan roots, there has been a long presence of Christian missionaries in the Albanian mountains, perhaps none more important than the Benedictines. The Benedictines were the oldest order to operate in the Albanian territories. Their rule dedicated them to spreading the Christian message, which they did throughout Italy and Europe, and they began arriving in Albania in the sixth century A.D. (*Historia* 2002). In the sixth century in Shirgj on the banks of the Buna River, the first Benedictine monastery was built, which, together with other monasteries (e.g., Shëlbueimi in Rubik, Shën Lleshi in Orosh, Shën Maria of Ndërfana, Shën Kolli in Mat) was dedicated to the Order of Saint Benedict and kept alive the Albanian connection with the Roman church (Xhufi 2000).

Benedictines and other orders, especially Dominicans and Franciscans, spread their abbeys and missionaries throughout the Balkans during the Middle Ages. A 1628 church report about the missionary visit of Benedict Orsin to the Shkodra Highlands described the Pulti region as having “37 villages, 78 churches among which 23 were parishes and monasteries of Shën Mëhill in Kir, Shën Mëri in Shosh, Shën Shtjefni in Shala, Shën Mëri in Artivojë, Shën Bartolomeu in Vark, and Shën Sofi in Lushaj” (*Relazione* 1963:393). It is not a stretch to say that the Christian missionaries, in their attempts to stamp out pagan practices, actually helped create the syncretic religious system of the Albanian mountains. It was this system that generated the carved symbols on houses in Shala, visibly affirming the sacred importance of the valley’s physical landscape and environment.

## The Symbols

### 1. The Sun Dial

In a house in the village of Theth, we identified a sun dial in the form of a bow and arrow, where the 12 divisions of the zodiac and the hole for the stick can be seen clearly. It was incised on a corner stone of the house, about 2 m above ground level (Figure 8.3: 1). In the region of Marche in Italy, there are two dials of this type but of a different shape, one at the Santa Maria church in Piè di Chienti in Montecosaro Scalo (province of Macerata) and the other at the church of San Giorgio on the island of Montemonaco (province of Ascoli Piceno). The Benedictine day was carefully scheduled. Its measuring instrument was called the *meridiana* (the meridian), in the form of a half circle, divided into canonical hours, with a stick of any length placed vertically into the face at its center. These devices are often seen on church walls, a very simple solution to tracking time, which could be understood and copied by anyone. Another type of sun dial is made of a circle with a point in the middle and four orienting lines of equal distance. A stick is thrust into a hole at its side. In two cases, we found this type of clock placed on the side of the main entrance to the house (e.g., Figure 8.3: 2). In one case, instead of a stick there was a goat horn.

### 2. The Sun Symbol

It is difficult to find a people who have not defined the sun as a religious symbol, in many different ways and

with many different meanings of course, but always in a positive manner. The sun is well-being, life, positivism. It was a widespread symbol among the Illyrians of early Albania. The Kosovar scholar E. Salihu (1990), referring to the Illyrian culture, argues not only for their role in spreading a sun cult but also for the persistence of sun motifs into the Roman era, and later.

In Christian iconography, the sun symbolizes immortality and a right to rule. During the first centuries of Christianity, the pagan sun cult was almost indistinguishable from the Christian cult. Versions of the sun symbol imported through Christian orders found willing adherents in the Albanian highlands, and it enriched their symbolic repertoire with new content. Edith Durham, traveling in the north early in the twentieth century, found the sun symbol in a variety of contexts: knit into socks, on both Christian and Muslim homes (combined with a crescent moon), and carved into the chairs of the heads of households. Most commonly observed, however, was the sun symbol on the arms of cemetery crosses. Durham (1979 [1928]:125) found the meanings of these various symbols obscure, sometimes even to their makers:

*Most interesting are some quite recent gravestones at Dushmani, whereon strange devices are carved, in some of which the cross and sun are turned into the figure of a man. A woman who came up told me I was drawing the grave of her mother. Asked what was the meaning of the things upon it, she said: 'We poor people of the mountains cannot write. I put this to remember my mother. The sun and the moon are për bukur' (to look pretty).*

Another keen observer of Dukagjini life, American Rose Wilder Lane (1923:25), wrote, "They (the highlanders) still buried the dead uncoffined, with three apples on the breast, and when they put a stone or a wooden slab above the grave they often carved on it, not only the cross, but also the sun. One would note, too, that at the rising and setting of the sun they made the sign of the cross to it."

The sun symbol (with the cross) is the easiest symbol to interpret among the many symbols that appear on the houses of Shala, and it appears in many variants. Some of them appear as separate signs, and the rest are with crosses or combined with other signs, anthropomorphic, geometric, and so on (e.g., Figure 8.3: 15, a chalice or "Cup of Life"). As with all these carvings, those carved in relief are always on the oldest houses. In

the incised variants, the sun appears in the form of concentrated circles, a circle with peripheral radii curved in the form of a helix, a circle in the form of a wheel with a different number of arms, and a stylized circle in the form of radii inside the square (Figure 8.3: 4–6, 8–13). Figure 8.3: 7 might be a sun symbol but could also symbolize the phases of the moon (see below). A special shape is the one in the form of a flower with many petals placed in the circle, with two hooks coming out of the circle (Figure 8.3: 14). During the initiation rites of the Masons, the compass points joined the heart of the student or the beginner with that of the brothers. This connection through the compass serves to explain the wide distribution of this "petal" version of the sun symbol. A typical example of this Masonic symbol, called the "Flower of Life," which is similar to a wheel, is carved into a medieval architectural piece reused on the façade of a later house in Drisht, near Shkodra (see Figure 1.1).

Another old variant is the circle with a point in the center (Figure 8.3: 8–10). For the Indo-Europeans, it represented the sun, the moon, or the wheel. This "universal" symbol is also a sign of the unity of heaven and earth and, as such, implies movement. As a symbol of cyclical change, the circle was considered to be a field of psychophysical energy, some kind of sacred space. Many authors compare this relationship of the circle and the center to that of God and Creation. The point and the circle have some common symbolic characteristics: perfection, homogeneity, lack of distinction, and division. At another level of interpretation, the sky itself becomes a symbol, a symbol of the spiritual world, unseen and transcendent. As such, this symbol has also penetrated strongly into Christian symbolism and was frequently used by the monks and knights of the medieval orders. In the material culture of Dukagjin, this symbol is one of the most preferred and is used in a variety of combinations. It is also one of the oldest symbols carved into the Shala houses, almost always accompanied by the cross with equal arms, the so-called Greek cross (Figure 8.3: 16–18, 88–89, 91).

### 3. The Moon Symbol

No other star or planet has drawn as much human attention to the endless scene of the night sky as the moon. Its increase and decrease, its periodic disappearance and reappearance in the sky, its quick journey

through the stars, the illumination of its light during the night pushing away the darkness, and its occult influence on the movement of the waters, on plants, and on animal life are all motifs that have stimulated the human imagination, creating countless and suggestive myths, symbols, and legends. In most mythologies, the Moon takes either the positive or the negative values of the Great Deity, as protector or as terrible Mother. Expressing maternity since ancient times, the Moon, as a heavenly body, has carried all these meanings in astrological symbolism.

In Albania, beginning in Illyrian times, the lunar principle was personified by the goddess Zana (notice the phonetic similarity: *zana*—*hana*, Alb. for “moon”) equivalent to the Greek Artemis or the Roman Diana, the lady of the woods, the protector of animals, the guardian of springs and streams, protector of women, and distributor of sovereignty. In the region of Shkodra, many statues and other objects related to this goddess have been discovered, perhaps more than of any other goddess of the Illyrian pantheon. Countless myths, legends, and folk poems, dedicated to Zana and her friends, have come down to modern times. They dance in the high Alps, under the shade of oaks and next to crystal clear springs. Out of fear of being cursed (paralyzed, losing speech, memory, etc.), the highlanders do not dare call her by name but rather call her *shtojzovallet* (“nymph”).

In addition to this potentially dangerous connection to an unpredictable spirit, the moon’s cyclical movement regulated many aspects of life. Lunar time is expressed in four phases: full, decreasing, new (dark), and increasing. Each phase comprises 7 days and the total is 28 days, and then the cycle starts over. Each phase is important for the whole community, defining the proper time to plant and harvest, to cut grass, make wine, conserve food, and so on (Elsie 2001:181). The phases of the moon thus symbolize both fertility (increase) and sterility (decrease), the “white” moon and the “black” (dark) moon. This binary opposite—black and white—was of great symbolic importance to the Albanians. For example, a man who owed blood was said to be “black-faced.” In this way, the moon served to symbolically bridge the natural, spiritual, and social worlds and landscapes of Shala. As such, it was frequently carved into houses (Figure 8.3: 21–23).

Edith Durham and other observers have noted any number of ways that the phases of the moon were used

to time certain activities: olives should not be planted during the dark of the moon; harvest should be during the full moon; hair would retain its color if not cut during a “bad moon;” trees would bear fruit in the new moon; new clothes should be worn during the “sitting” (new) moon; and so on (Durham 1979 [1928]; Gječov 1943; Karma 1933; Suma 1932). Christianity sustained the significance of the moon, transposing the Lunar god into the Virgin Mary, who is called Mother Moon by Albanians. When given this new, syncretic meaning, the moon seems to appear often in house symbolism, by itself or together with other Christian symbols (e.g., Figure 8.3: 95).

#### 4. *The Astral Symbol*

The star is a symbol of endless life. It is also a very powerful magic symbol, representing protection and strength of wisdom through witchcraft. In the decorative repertoire of Dukagjin, together with the sun and moon, the star is among the most numerous and varied of shapes and is common on the walls of the Shala houses as well (Figure 8.3: 21, 60–62, 95).

Among the signs, the half-sphere star is found quite often in house corners and only in this particular position (Figure 8.3: 19). It is characterized by carving done in raised relief with a regular shape. It appears separately or in doubles—in the latter case, always in a horizontal plane. Usually, they are found on the same face of a stone, but we have also found one sign on each face of a corner stone. In one case, two corner stones were placed one on top of the other, and each one had a pair of such signs forming a constellation of four half-spheres on the same side of the wall. But in this case, we could tell that the two stones had been reused in a newer house. Even though at first glance these signs might be considered symbolic of breasts or nipples, or even of cosmic eggs, we are, however, more prone to consider them star symbols since, when they are alone, they appear in Saturnal form, that is, half a sphere within a circle (Figure 8.3: 3, 20). On the wall of a house, we also identified a graffiti of a planetary (or lunar) orbit (Figure 8.3: 7). This symbol, by itself and without the circle around it, was also found on a corner stone of an old house in Drisht. However, it is not unknown on the other side of the Adriatic: two half-sphere symbols can be found, for example, on the walls of the Monteobizzo church of the municipality of Frignano in the province of Coserta,

Italy. The old church dates to the sixth century but was reconstructed in the twelfth century and then, again, in 1650.

## 5. The Square

In many cultures, the symbol of the square refers to the earth, which in antiquity was considered flat and often of a square shape. But always the square is subdivided into sacred and profane regions. Sacred places, so called “places of force,” are especially those in which natural features of the landscape take on anthropomorphic form: these include geological shapes, megaliths left from very early times, stalactites and stalagmites, water features, specific trees and plants, meteorites, and so forth. Some of these places, such as forests, mountains, hills, springs, and caves, were transformed into worship places where people felt closer to God. These places often maintained their sacred character even after the introduction of Christianity. In the Albanian highlands, each tribe had its own holy place called *forcë* (e.g., *Forca e Shkrelit*, *Forca e Kastratit*, *Forca e Shalës*). This was an isolated place, remembered and respected even today by locals, where the *ora* (the protective spirit) of the village lives. Places like these are so special that they can be referred to as “holy centers.” They may be co-opted by Christian orders and they are often signified in house carvings.

**5a. The Holy Center.** The square has reciprocal relations with many other geometric shapes, the most interesting of which is the cross. It is quite well known that ancient cities (and Roman camps) were founded over the crossing of two perpendicular lines oriented N-S and E-W (*il cardo* and *il decumano*). The cross in the square is thus a powerful sign, symbolizing the relationship of heaven to earth. The basic structure of the Roman church, for example, has the dome, which represents the sky and, at its base, the square, which represents the earth. The holy center in the middle of the square may also be determined by crossing diagonals. Such geometric signs are found everywhere in the churches and cathedrals built by the Knights Templar. For example, there is the Cathedral of San Nicola Pellegrino in Trani, Italy, which began as a small church in 1099. On its ruins rose a Roman-style cathedral of the twelfth century, which has old symbols, including the “holy center,” incised on its stones. In Shala, the symbol of the “holy center” is more

common in its simple form, doubled but also in other variants (Figure 8.3: 24–25, 32–45).

**5b. The Threefold Encirclement.** In addition to the above, we also see the symbol of the “holy threefold encirclement” or magical encirclement. It is known as a very ancient symbol all over Europe with strong pagan connotations and, later, recognized by the church as a Christian symbol. This sign is similar to that of the holy center, but it also symbolizes the three essential levels of reality as well as the three steps of initiation when one enters a religious community. Sometimes the holy center and threefold encirclement are combined (Figure 8.3: 29). As often happens with exoteric symbols, the threefold encirclement later became a game (Alb. *cic-mic*, *digërxbim*, etc.). The symbol is widespread, carved on Medieval churches and castles throughout Europe, such as the church of San Michele of the thirteenth century in Carpineto, Rimini, and at the eleventh-century castle in Angera, Varese, both in Italy; at the church of Perivoj, Luge-Maruna (Sibenik, Croatia); and in France, England, Turkey, and so on. As with other symbols, such as the Flower of Life and the “holy center,” the “encirclement” also testifies to the Benedictine presence in the area, carved first on churches and monasteries, and from there moving onto house walls. The “threefold encirclement” is also present in two cases at the castle of Drisht, one on a massive block of rock at its entrance and the other on a corner stone of a house nearby. In Shala, it appears in several variants, sometimes by itself and other times in combination with other signs (Figure 8.3: 26–31).

## 6. The Cave

As a dark, wet, and mysterious place filled with the strange shapes of stalactites and stalagmites, the cave is a rich symbolic object in many cults, myths, and legends. In many religions, a cave guides the dead to the afterlife. Caves are dwellings for mountain spirits and dragons, who keep and protect hidden treasures. Normally a mountain is represented as a triangle and a cave as a smaller triangle placed inside the first, thereby combining male and female principles. Caves symbolically encompass and depict the outside turning in and may therefore serve as “holy centers” as described above. The “central” character of caves makes them places of birth and regeneration as well as initiation.

This old symbol appears in Shala in many interesting variations (Figure 8.3: 63–65, 93). They, too, recall older, pagan beliefs but may sometimes incorporate Christian symbols.

### 7. *The Triangle and the Rhombus*

A strong connection exists between the vulva (the triangle, the rhombus) and the cave. During prehistoric times, the vulva played the role of representing the woman, her fecundity and maternity. In addition to this traditional interpretation, which is very evident in northern Albania, the Shala symbols seem to have also been influenced by the Church. Very interesting is a composite sign found on the wall of a house where, in the center of a Christmas tree, the carver put a triangle, which is pointed up, and over it another smaller one pointed down, resembling an hourglass. Two other triangles stand outside the tree, on each side. The tree itself has a regular triangular shape (Figure 8.3: 62). The triangle with the point or cross in the center was also used as a secret sign among various medieval orders. We have noted also on the corners of walls and doorsteps many similar triangular signs with a point or cross in the center (Figure 8.3: 57–58, 92–93). In some cases, the vulvic symbol appears in the shape of a rhombus (two triangles joined at the base) (Figure 8.3: 59), which also often appears as a symbol on the dresses of women from Dukagjin.

### 8. *The Tree of Life*

The tree is an important symbol of the relationship between humans and the natural world and has played a role in many mythologies and religions. Its practical utility, of course, makes it difficult to say whether a tree symbol is referring to something more mundane or ritually symbolic. These two functions, mundane and ritual, are intertwined to the point that, in the case of the tree symbol, they have become inseparable.

Furthermore, the seasonal transformation of deciduous trees, like the cyclical activity of the sun and the moon, conveys renewal, while the permanent green of coniferous trees suggests immortality and magical resistance to winter and cold. Rarely has a tree been included as part of a ritual tradition simply as a tree but always for what is rediscovered through it. At the center of earthly paradise is found the tree of life, where

the Judeo-Christian God had concentrated the power to preserve human life by protecting it from death. In this metaphor, we can see the tree archetype, carrier of medicinal secrets, able to offer healing from diseases. The discovery of the therapeutic potential of plants is one of the most important principles of medicine. This is different from situations in which a tree is connected to cult behaviors or miraculous events; in such cases, its therapeutic power is of supernatural origin.

This symbol, which was seen on three or four occasions in Shala, presents itself in different variants. In one case, a coniferous tree was found accompanied by the symbol of the threefold encirclement and a vertical zigzag column (Figure 8.3: 27). Trees of this kind are also common symbols in the embroidery in clothing. In a second case, a star sits at the top of the tree (Figure 8.3: 61). This symbol recalls the European tradition of the Yule log (see above), the burning of bonfires on the winter solstice, and the lighting of the Christmas tree (Figure 8.3: 62). The Old German practice of hanging colored stones on oak trees after the leaves had fallen was also shared by the Albanians. This tradition was preserved until recently everywhere in the highlands, as attested by the Hungarian traveler Baron Franz Nopsça (1910).

### 9. *Anthropomorphic Symbols*

Anthropomorphic symbols generally have to do with the cult of ancestors, buried relatives who are supposed to have become powerful spiritual beings or, more rarely, to have achieved the status of gods. In general, it is believed that ancestors have the power to influence the course of events or to control the well-being of their living relatives. They may be considered mediators between the supreme God or the gods and the community, and able to communicate with the living through dreams or visions. The attitude toward them is a mixture of fear and respect. If ignored, the ancestors can cause disease and other calamities. Gifts, prayers, sacrifices, and so on are some of the ways whereby the people of Dukagjin communicate with the dead, particularly on All Saints Day, November 1.

This existence of an ancestor cult in Shala, and in Dukagjin more generally, indicates the importance of the continuity of the family, past, present, and future. The anthropomorphic representation of the tribal leader does not appear often in the Shala houses, but when it does, it exists in two versions:

**9a.** In one version, the tribal leader (father god) has been portrayed in a schematic but completely anthropomorphic form (Figure 8.3: 78). This figure is deeply carved, whereas on a doorstep, only the figure's body and head are presented, extremely schematized, with a cross in the center of the body (Figure 8.3: 79). Another figure in the shape of a bust has its chest and head covered with some kind of a hood. The figure is accompanied by a couple of pieces of fruit, apples or cherries (Figure 8.3: 80).

Two pieces of fruit with tied stems is a symbol used since the Bronze Age, as depicted on an ax of the "*al cannone*" type, kept at the History Museum in Shkodra; we see this also in the embroidery of the *xhubleta* (sleeveless woolen coat), the origins of which may date to prehistoric times (Jubani 1969).

**9b.** The palm of the hand is a well-known symbol in many regions of North Albania. Durham (1979 [1928]), who drew the flag of the Zerqani *bajrak* (Puka), depicted on it, among other symbols, the palm of a hand.

In Shala, we saw the hand not only in the plaster on the interior of a burnt house in the village of Gimaj but also on the walls of the outside corners of houses. In only one case was the technique of deep carving used on a corner stone; in all other cases, only the light incision of the contours was used. In one case, there was a cross in the middle of the palm of the hand (Figure 8.3: 81–84).

There are two possible interpretations of the palm carving. On one hand, it might have the meaning of inherited possession (domination) and, on the other hand, might belong to a ritual related to the blessing of this possession. In the former interpretation, the ancient leader of the tribe is symbolized. In the latter, the house is accompanied by a symbol of the Christian blessing (the hand), a sign of good luck and eternity. For both the full human figure and for the hand, we argue that they are the symbolic representations of the leader of the tribe, a protector of the house, one who brings good luck to the family and the whole tribe.

## 10. The Cross

The cross may seem like the simplest of symbols, but it is, on the contrary, one of the most complex. The simple cross of two perpendicular lines, sometimes inside a circle, has been attributed to the sun since prehistoric

times (see above). The early Christians used mostly the "T" cross ("tau" in Greek), which refers to the possible shape of the real cross of Christ. With time, the "Latin" cross (with a longer vertical arm) was adopted. If the vertical and horizontal arms are equal in length, today it is known as a "Greek" cross. A double cross is referred to as a "patriarchal" cross and that in the shape of an "X" as the cross of St. Andrew. In the Dukagjin tradition, it is characteristic for the cross to be accompanied by the sun and, often, by the moon as well. More clearly than anywhere else, it is seen in graves where the arms of the wooden cross always end with sun circles.

We have recorded in Shala a considerable number of crosses of the types mentioned above and with a variety of shapes (Figure 8.3: 68–77). Among them there are those where the arms of the cross branch out toward the ends (76). These resemble crosses incised in Templar churches in Italy, such as the church of Santa Maria del Olmo in Castelmezzano. Also characteristic is the Greek cross, sometimes accompanied by points (70). In one case, it has only two points on the right and is accompanied by a couple of parallel vertical lines (71). In another case, the points have been put at the ends of the arms (69). A preferred type is also the anthropomorphic cross (73–75, 77). To this type also belongs the version with the sun circle at the ends of the arms. In one case, a small cross has been inscribed inside the circle of the upper arm, which is larger than the others (75).

## 11. Geometric Symbols

**11a. Parallel Lines.** In ancient symbolic systems, parallel lines represent the flow of water. Water was (and is) the ritual element par excellence. We find it represented in nearly all religions, within which it played well-defined, binary symbolic roles: creation versus destruction, purity versus impurity, regeneration versus death. The benevolent powers of water sources have been acknowledged since ancient times and later became a constant in Christianity as well, through the presence of fountains and wells placed close to Christian sanctuaries. In Dukagjin, this symbolism appears quite often in decorations in clothing and wooden objects. Also, on corner stones, we found graffiti with bundles of parallel lines placed horizontally, vertically, or even combined on the side of the stone. In other cases, the parallel lines accompany other symbols (Figure 8.3: 46–48, 51, 55).

**11b. The Zigzag Line.** An ancient symbol, the zigzag is taken to symbolize the vital energy of the Great God as the distributor of life. In the iconography of the prehistoric world, water was always depicted with the zigzag sign (Gimbutas 1991). This sign is also found in Dukagjin in the embroidery of traditional costumes. On walls, it is sometimes carved as a separate sign (Figure 8.3: 66) but more often inside two parallel lines forming a kind of column, used in various different compositions (Figure 8.3: 41–43, 45, 48, 53–54, 60, 62–65). In one instance, over the arch of a door, a double chain was carved in relief with a hook at the extremes, which looks like the fireplace chain hanging from the roof beam (67). Due to its zigzag shape, together with the hooks in the shape of horns, this symbol recalls a serpent (see below). This particular symbol does not seem to have been part of the symbolism of the Christian orders, although the fireplace chain was certainly part of the fire cult in the Dukagjin region. With regard to the northern Albanian fire cult, Lane (1923:26–27) wrote,

*The bride carries with her from her home one invariable gift—a pair of fire tongs. When she arrives at her husband's house she takes a humble place in the corner, standing, her hands folded on her breast, her eyes down-cast, and for three days and nights she is required to remain in that position . . . this custom remains from the old days when the father of each house was also the priestly guardian of the fire, and anyone coming to ask for a light from it stood reverently in that position, silent, before the hearth, until the father priest gave it to him. The bride, newcomer in the family, is a suppliant for the gift of fire, of life, of the mystery that continues the race.*

**11c. The Net Symbol.** In different graffiti, the net appears in various combinations with a straight line, zigzag, or a column formed by these two, always vertically (Figure 8.3: 52–54). This, of course, is a motif suggested by the various handicrafts of the locals, such as baskets. According to Gimbutas (1991), the net is a popular symbol in Europe from the Paleolithic period on, as a source and carrier of water that generates life. So the net is a symbol of the water of life.

## 12. The Secret Sign

During the survey, our attention was drawn to some specific signs, smaller than the others, lined up one

after the other. They reminded us of secret ciphers or, perhaps, prayer formulas used by the Christian orders during the Middle Ages and by Masons of the Modern period (Figure 8.3: 85–95). Some of these signs may be linked to the tracing board (Italian—*tabela tripartita*), one of the main symbols used by the Masons. These “secret” signs are a further indication of the influence of holy Christian orders on the people of Shala.

## 13. The Snake

We found this single zoomorphic symbol in an old house, which had many signs at the corners. It is carved in relief and has a spread-out shape with a triangular tail. The locals call it the house *ora*. It is strongly connected to the hearth cult and, above all, it is guardian of the family. It is not just any snake; it is not poisonous and not harmful. It is a special species, which stays always close to the house foundation and connects the living with the dead and the family with the tribe's ancestors. It might be considered the most widespread and respected animal, rooted deeply in the conscious and subconscious of people everywhere in the Albanian highlands. If it is killed, one of the family members will die. In one version, the all-important *orët*, or mountain spirits, were closely connected to snakes and, more specifically, to the snake as the *ora* of the house:

*A superstition as old as man about the snake is to make an oath with the snake. If a constrictor comes out of a house no one can kill it because it is the ora of the house. If you see three snakes together, in Dukagjin the old men won't let you kill them, because it is a bad thing. When encountering the first snake during the first days of spring, an oath should be made by saying these words, 'Snake, we are making an oath between us, you don't bite me and no one from my house and whenever I see you, I will not kill you.' The person mowing the grass, before using the scythe in the field, will say these words to the snakes, 'if you are a snake in this field pull back until I mow the grass because we have an oath that I don't kill you and you don't bite me' [Palaj 1944:83].*

Given this close association between snakes and the *ora* of a house, it is perhaps a bit surprising that it appears so rarely on the walls of homes. It may be that this is one instance where more ancient symbolism *did not* overlap easily with the symbols of modern Christianity, and so it was not retained.



## Conclusion

It would be difficult to identify a more important “object” in the life of a family than its dwelling. This simple observation, however, was all the more true in Shala and Dukagjin, where the tribal social system strongly connected the extended family to the patriarchal home, especially as that patriarchal home, in addition to being the economic and judicial center of the family, also often functioned as a physical refuge. That context immediately suggests significance for the many carvings we found on the walls of homes. As we have seen, however, their original meanings often have been lost or continue to be obscured by the inhabitants. This effort to understand their import, therefore, depends on understanding the region’s spiritual and material culture and that culture’s connections to deeper currents in the Illyrian and Christian cultic universe. In earlier chapters, we explored how the homes themselves, in terms of their design and location, reflected social, demographic, and even political processes and pressures. The carvings are also a part of this landscape, but they clearly point to different pressures: they are one manifestation of a sacred landscape. The highlanders lived in a world suffused with hidden forces, some helpful, some destructive, and all of them seemingly in need of propitiating, encouraging, or guarding against. Some of those beliefs have persisted and can be uncovered through ethnographic interview (one highlander, asked by us if he believed in *orët*, remarked that *he* had never seen one personally, carefully avoiding denying their existence) or linguistic study (we learned with great interest of the northern Albanian dialect word *shetuar*, meaning “has been paralyzed by spirits [fairies]”). But the carvings are a direct survival of this old complex of beliefs, and studying them reminds us of the complexity of those beliefs and the fullness of the sacred landscape that surrounded the highlanders’ daily lives.

Taken as a whole, the carvings point to two, now-fused, bodies of cultic belief. On one hand are the vertically oriented symbols, derived from ancient prehistoric traditions (e.g., the anthropomorphic sign, the net, the

rhombus, the snake, the parallel lines, the zigzag), and on the other hand are the horizontally oriented symbols, derived from medieval Christianity (the symbol of the cross, the threefold encirclement, the holy center). Christianity used or co-opted many of the ancient pagan symbols, some of them archetypes common to much of Eurasia. The nineteenth-century stone carver of Shala joined these symbols into one single figure: man, the cross, and the sun with the same graphic art as his prehistoric great-grandfather.

The mountaineers of Shala negotiated their isolation in this, as in so many other things. Although influences moved in, especially via the Christian church, the process of maintaining their isolation, especially of maintaining their tribal identity in the face of Ottoman pressure, led them to preserve old beliefs and their symbols, even as they adapted new ones. This maintenance of a highland identity was not confined to Shala. In the same way that we can see a similar typology of buildings throughout Dukagjin and beyond, we can document the existence of similar symbols all the way down to Driisht in Postrriba. The ritual act of placing symbols on the wall corners and next to the entrance of the house is possibly a tradition of the Roman period on both sides of the Adriatic. Then, throughout the Middle Ages, the formation of the Benedictine abbeys and the building contribution of the Templar brotherhoods in these areas brought about many changes to the local symbology, modifying the old ones and bringing new symbols. At first they were placed on the exterior of churches and monasteries, and from there they were carried over to the house walls—preserved when those houses began to be built from stone. Together they point to the persistent power of syncretic religious beliefs, still visibly written into the landscapes of Shala.

## Note

1 A *buzmi* (“Yule log”) is a branch or log, carved on both sides with the sign of the cross. It forms the centerpiece of the Buzmi ceremony, which takes place on Christmas Eve (see Elsie 2001:265–267).

## Chapter Nine

# REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND EXCAVATION RESULTS

Michael L. Galaty, Ols Lefe, Charles Watkinson, Robert Schon, and Zamir Tafilica

with contributions by William A. Parkinson and Joanita Vroom



This chapter describes the results of an intensive archaeological survey and test excavations in Shala, as well as extensive archaeological surveys conducted in the regions of Shosh and Pult (Figure 1.5). These data, taken together, allow us to propose long-term, diachronic models of oscillating settlement and land use in Shala and in the wider region. These models, which encompass the Middle Paleolithic, Late Bronze to Iron, and Modern periods, bracketed by several significant chronological gaps, are supported by the conclusions reached already in previous chapters, drawn from the environmental, ethnographic, and archival-, ethno-, and oral-historical records.

The most recent settlement of the Shala Valley appears to have begun during the latter decades of the Late Medieval period at certain key locations, often associated with Catholic churches. From these locations, settlement spread to adjacent lands during the Early Modern period. By Modern times, the occupation of the entire valley was complete, and the dispersed settlement and agricultural systems we see today, described in Chapter Six, were fully in place. This pattern can be observed in Shosh and Pult as well, although population appears to have been relatively more dense there as compared to Shala.

Survey work also indicates that pre-Modern systems of occupation and land use were organized very differently compared to Modern ones, as reflected in the artifact and settlement records. The Middle Paleolithic presence in Shala probably occurred intermittently and during the summer, when Neanderthals could access the valley and hunt. During long stretches of the Pleistocene, this would not have been possible due to glaciation, including during the Upper Paleolithic. In the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age, people again occupied the valley, but settlement was seasonal and nucleated at a few strategic

locations: at Grunas and Dakaj in Shala and at Qafa e Pyllës in Shosh. The dispersed agricultural and settlement systems that characterized the post-Medieval period were not present. Explaining these very different, but potentially equally resilient, forms of land use is a key goal of this book. In the conclusion to this chapter, some of the factors that conditioned variations in settlement through time in Shala are discussed (see Figure 1.13) in light of the archaeological data. These are explored more fully for the Late Bronze to Iron Age in Chapter Ten on Grunas, as well as in Chapter Eleven, where the roles of isolation and interaction specifically are assessed. The archaeological data make clear that events on the outside, even in prehistory, often framed actions taken on the inside, in Shala, by individuals and social groups.

## Results of the Intensive Archaeological Survey<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction: Goals and Methods*

In three seasons of fieldwork (2005–2007), the Shala Valley Project's Intensive Archaeological Survey team (hereafter IAS) searched approximately 5 km<sup>2</sup> of land divided into 1000 individual survey units: 338 in 2005, 346 in 2006, and 316 in 2007. The team consisted of a varying group of five members, three to four of whom walked systematically (at 15-m intervals) across "tracts" designated by the team leader (usually Charles Watkinson, but also Ols Lefe and Michael Galaty) and typically corresponding to natural topography or field boundaries. Team members collected all noncontemporary cultural artifacts, including pottery, lithics, and small finds, but also notified the team leader of any "features of interest"—ranging from terrace walls to house ruins.

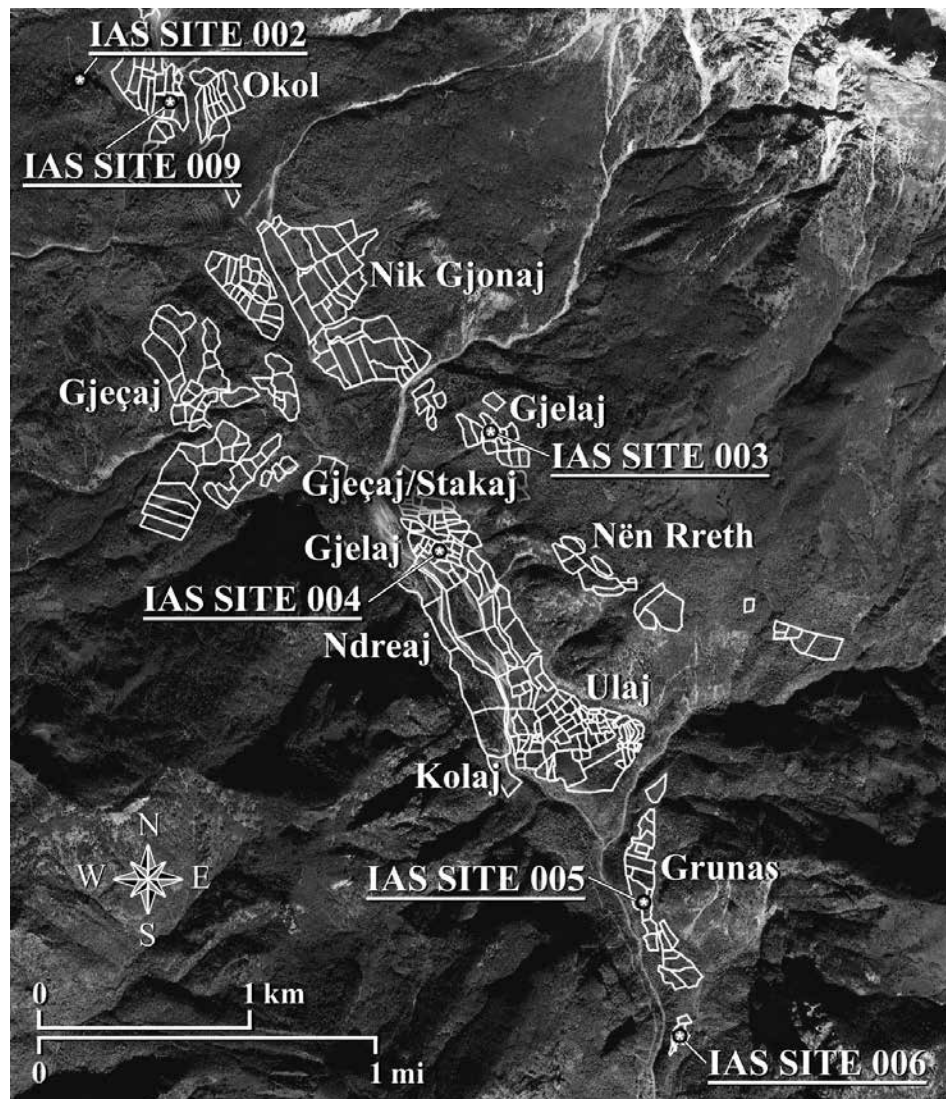


Figure 9.1. Map of tracts surveyed and sites identified in the village of Theth in 2005. *Jill Seagard*

Because of the diachronic nature of the SVP, modern land use was given equal weight to evidence of past activities. Comments were kept in field logbooks, which also contain sketch maps of each tract and standardized information about vegetation, ground surface visibility (measured as a percentage, with 100 percent being fully visible), structures, and finds. Each tract was digitally photographed and defined using GPS. After each day's fieldwork, the tracts were mapped in the SVP's Geographic Information System (GIS), and field data were entered into a relational database.<sup>2</sup>

The methods employed by the IAS, as described in Chapter Two, mirror those of most Mediterranean survey projects, including the Mallakastra Regional Archaeological Project (MRAP) and the Durrës Regional Archaeological Project (DRAP), both of which were conducted

in coastal, central Albania (Korkuti et al. 1998; Davis et al. 2003, 2005). Initial concerns that a methodology developed for Mediterranean climates would be unworkable in the verdant, alpine environment of Shala, that of Theth in particular, proved unwarranted; even in the higher meadows, where the ground was covered in vegetation, features such as sheep paths and terrace walls always revealed some of the soil surface. Visibility was 50 percent or higher in nearly 50 percent of tracts.

During 2005, one team surveyed all cultivated and fallowed fields in the village of Theth, covering each of the village's 10 neighborhoods (Figure 9.1). During 2006 and 2007, we conducted a stratified-sample survey of fields in lower Shala, with a focus on certain villages and neighborhoods of particular archaeological and historical interest (Figure 9.2).

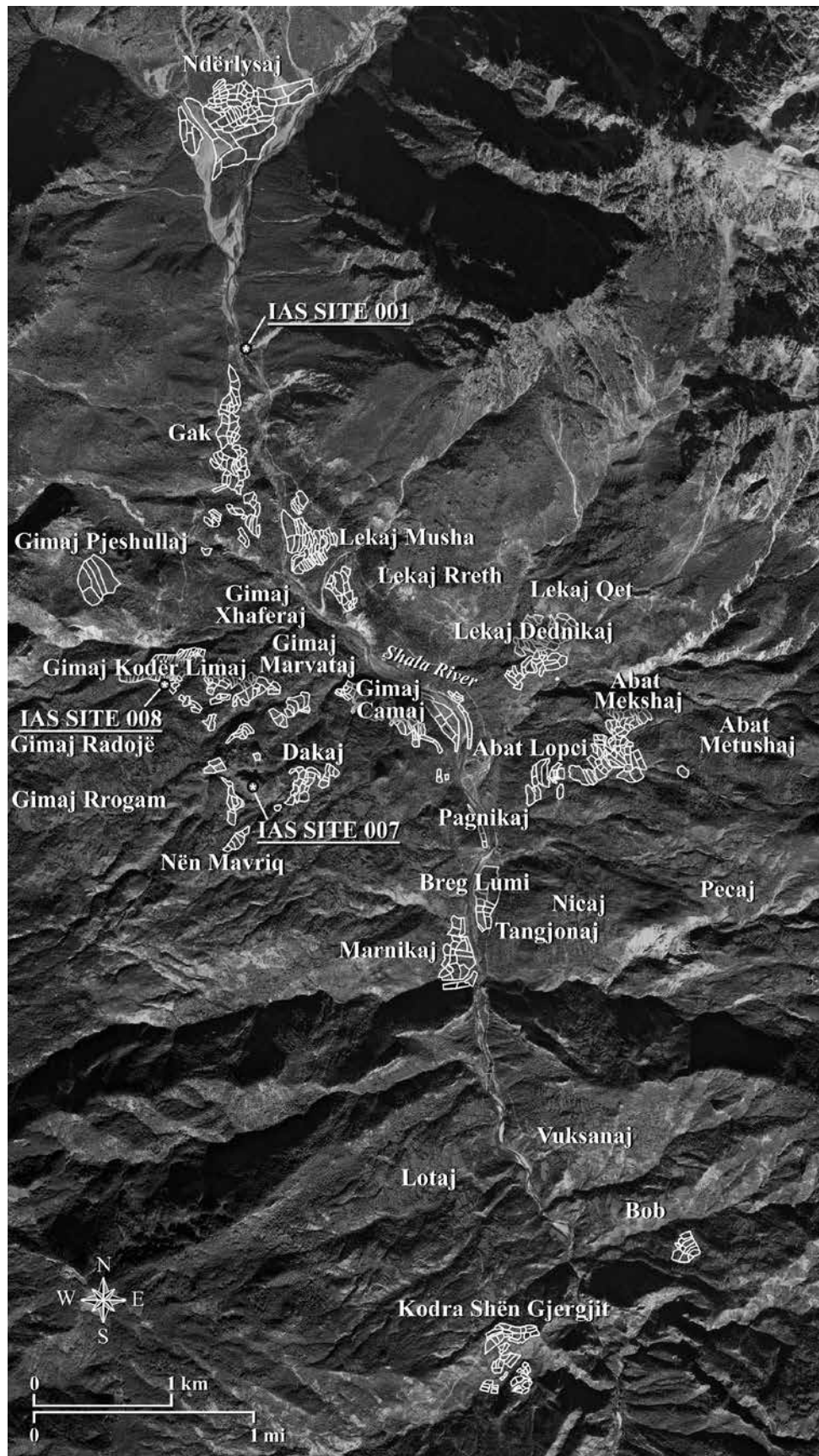


Figure 9.2. Map of tracts surveyed and sites identified in the villages of Shala in 2006 and 2007 (IAS Site 001 discovered in 2004). *Jill Seagard*

All of Theth was surveyed in 16 days of active fieldwork. Material evidence for pre-Modern settlement was very sparse, and, amid the rugged topography of the village, it is perhaps no surprise that artifacts were generally found in areas of flatter ground that are still most heavily cultivated and settled (as discussed in Chapter Three). Five lithics were collected during survey, two of which are Paleolithic (Lithic [L] 008 and L010). L010 (from Tract 2005-277) is a large tertiary flake, perhaps from a discoidal, Levallois core, and dates to the Middle Paleolithic (see Figure 9.5 below). Fewer than 150 datable ceramics were found during the entire 2005 survey season. Most of these were very small and were assigned dates based on fabric rather than diagnostic form or decoration (as was the case with “Late Roman” materials, in particular). Twenty-five potsherds may be Late Roman (A.D. 400–600), 13 were Late Medieval (A.D. 1000–1500, but typically closer to the end of the period), and as many as 66 may date to the Early Modern period (beginning A.D. 1500). (Only one sherd, found in Okol, may be prehistoric, discussed below with regard to IAS Site 002, the Okol rock shelters.) Despite this paucity of material, however, four distinct ceramic clusters were discerned and further investigated in 2006: Sector 1, Gjelij (Lower) (= IAS Site 004, see below): a dense scatter of possibly Late Roman ceramics; Sector 2, Kolaj/Ulaj (associated with Tracts 2005-012, 016, 017, 019, 020, 036 052, 057, 063): numerous Late Medieval to Early Modern ceramics scattered around the Church of Shën Gjijn (Structure [ST] 001); Sector 3, Gjelij (Upper) (= IAS Site 003, see below): Early Modern ceramics associated with a destroyed building (ST086); and Sector 4, Okol (= IAS Site 009, see below): Early Modern ceramics associated with a very large historic house (ST175). Sector 2 is discussed in more detail below, in the conclusion to this chapter, but is indicative of a pattern of distribution, found throughout Shala, in which Medieval pottery is associated strongly with churches. Also found in or near Sector 2 were an imported, bright red flint strike-a-light (*çakmak*; Small Find [SF] 001), several burned chunks of daub (SF004), and three bullets and bullet casings that are date-stamped 1917 and were made in Austria (SF002 and SF005). The latter may date to the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Albania.

In 2005, the decision was made to focus first on cultivated fields in the lower elevations of the valley before moving higher up the hillsides, and this proved to be

a good strategy. A harsh winter, which delayed sowing from late March to late April, made the team’s work fast and easy. Maize, bean, and potato plants that were small at the start of the season had become almost impenetrable by mid-July, but by then we had moved on to the upper pastures. There the grass, meanwhile, had been mown, exposing more of the ground surface than would have been visible in the first weeks of fieldwork. This strategy also was followed in 2006 and 2007.

In 2006, two IAS teams were fielded (Figure 9.2). The first, led by Watkinson and Lefe, completed 20 days of active fieldwork surveying the areas of Ndërllysaj, Gak, Lekaj-Musha, Gimaj-Kodër Limaj, and Gimaj-Marvataj. The second, led by Galaty, completed five days of survey in Gak, Gimaj-Pjeshullaj, Gimaj-Kodër Limaj, and Nënnavriq-Dakaj. The neighborhood of Ndërllysaj (which means “between rivers and oaks”) sits on relatively flat land, near where the Shala River meets a tributary stream from the Kaprej Valley (Figure 9.3). All of the other neighborhoods surveyed are to the south, down river, in the wider part of the valley that ends at the Gates of Shala—that is, Lekaj-Musha, which covers a low-lying wedge of land on the east side of the valley, and those in Gak, Gimaj, and Nënnavriq on the western slopes, the latter encompassing the important historic site of Dakaj (IAS Site 007, see below).

We had assumed that we would find more artifacts in south Shala, as compared to Theth, given its longer history of occupation, better land, lower altitude, and milder winters. On the contrary, very few ceramic, lithic, or other finds were recovered during the survey process. Only 79 pieces of pottery were collected, and the majority of these were Modern. Only 3 might be Medieval and 17 Early Modern. One might be prehistoric and none are Late Roman. As it turns out, the vast majority of prehistoric, Late Roman, and Medieval pottery from south Shala is from the site of Dakaj, a pattern discussed in more detail below. Two lithics were found, one of which (L018) is a denticulated primary flake that dates to the Middle Paleolithic.

In 2007, in the first two weeks of the season, the IAS team concentrated on the village of Abat, the modern administrative center of Breg Lumi, and the neighborhood of Lekaj-Dednikaj, high up on the east side of the south Shala Valley (Figure 9.2). In the third week, the team conducted a gridded surface collection of the historic fortified site of Dakaj (IAS Site 007) and surveyed parts of Nënnavriq-Dakaj and Gimaj-Camaj. In

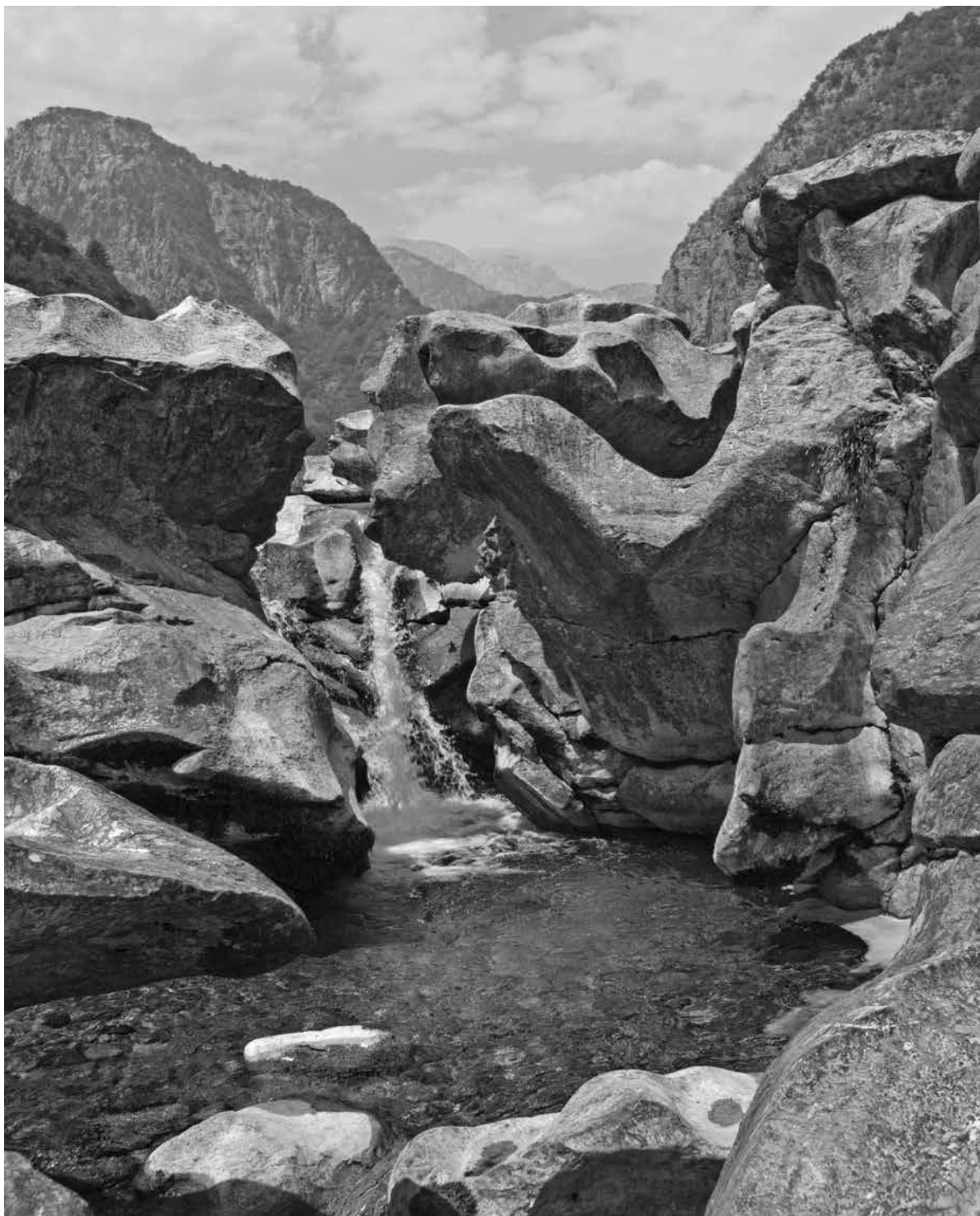


Figure 9.3. The falls at Ndërllysaj. *Ann Christine Eek*

the fourth week, the team worked at the extreme south end of the survey area, around the demolished church of Shën Gjergj (see below and Chapter Four), before surveying near Pylaj, the first village in Shosh. One day was also spent at the village of Bob (sometimes referred to as Bop), high up on the east slope of the valley

opposite Shën Gjergj and, according to tradition, one of the oldest settlements in the valley.

The choice of areas to survey in 2007 was determined by a number of considerations. First of all, we completed the geographical coverage of the lower part of the valley, whose western slopes were surveyed in 2006. Second, we



targeted places that are historically attested: the church at Abat and the settlement of Bob/Bop (“Bobi”) are mentioned in Gaspari (1930 [1671]), while Bob/Bop (“Robbi”) is also shown on the 1688 Coronelli map (Figure 4.3) and recorded in the 1485 cadaster of the *sancak* of Shkodra (as “Bop” or “Pop”) (see Chapter Four). Third, we aimed to sample different environmental zones: both upland slopes (as at Abat and Lekaj) and the valley bottom (at Breg Lumi). Fourth, during the final days of survey on the Kodër i Shën Gjergjit and in Pylaj, we investigated the border area between Shala and Shosh, near the dramatic ridges cut by the river that form their boundary (see below).

It was hoped that these areas of historically attested settlement, closer to the south of the Shala Valley, would yield more artifacts than were found higher up the valley in 2006. However, the number of artifacts found in 2007 was exceedingly small, including no lithics and

no small finds. Compared to 2006, the visibility of the ground surface was slightly reduced because the maize was almost impassably high during the final weeks of the project (a week later in 2007 than in 2006), and more terraces were covered with meadow at the higher altitudes in which we were working. Seventy-six of the 316 tracts walked were covered in maize, while 212 were covered in meadow. Overall, ground visibility was more than 50 percent in only 31 percent of the 316 tracts walked (compared to 42 percent of the 347 tracts walked in 2006).

The most interesting concentration of ceramics in Abat came from the area of Abat-Mekshaj, in the center of the modern settlement, midway between the mill and the church. A prehistoric body sherd was found in Tract 2007-008. Eight sherds, perhaps from the same Early Modern pot, were found nearby (Tracts 2007-015 and -017), associated with an older house, that of Gjon

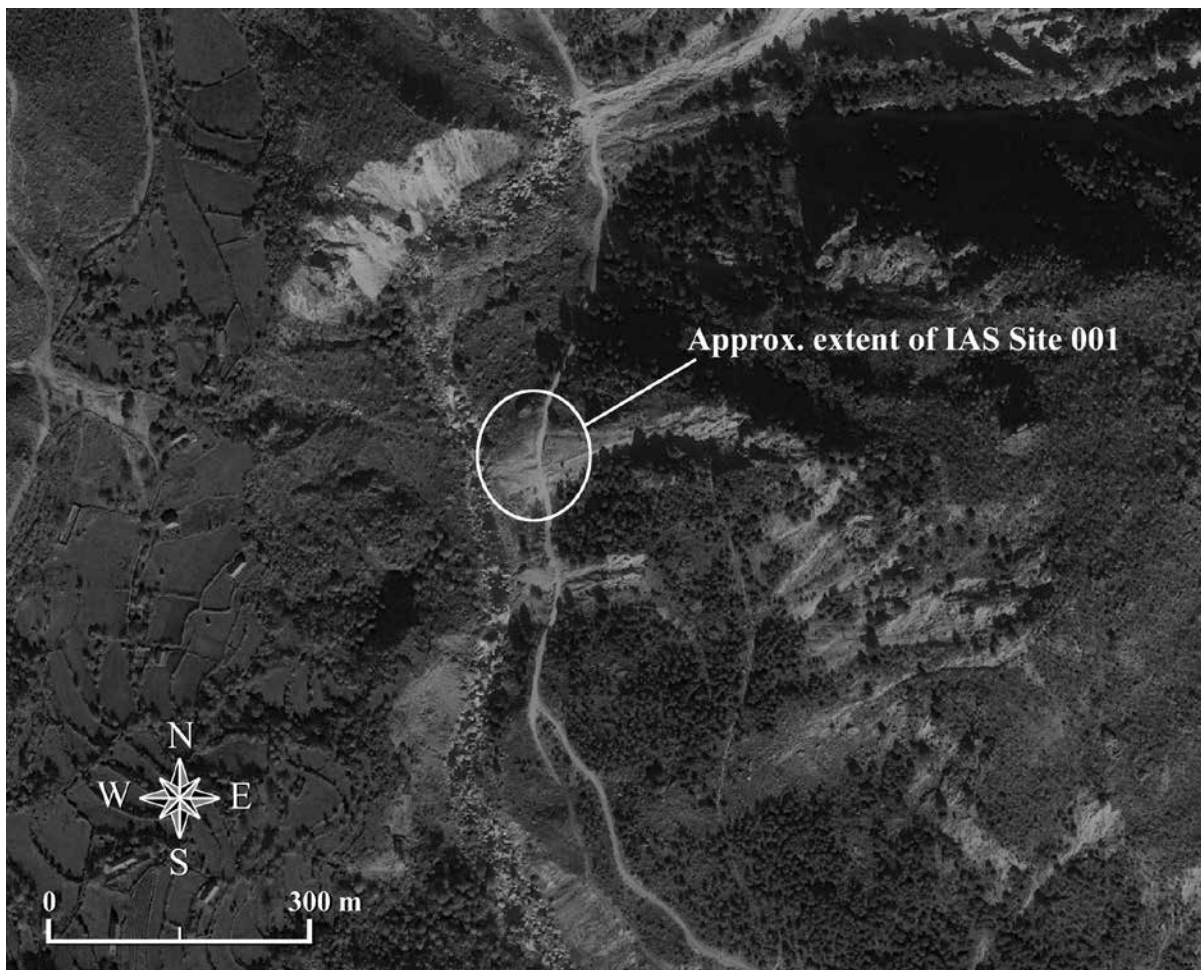


Figure 9.4. Detail from satellite photo showing location and setting of IAS Site 001. *Jill Seagard*

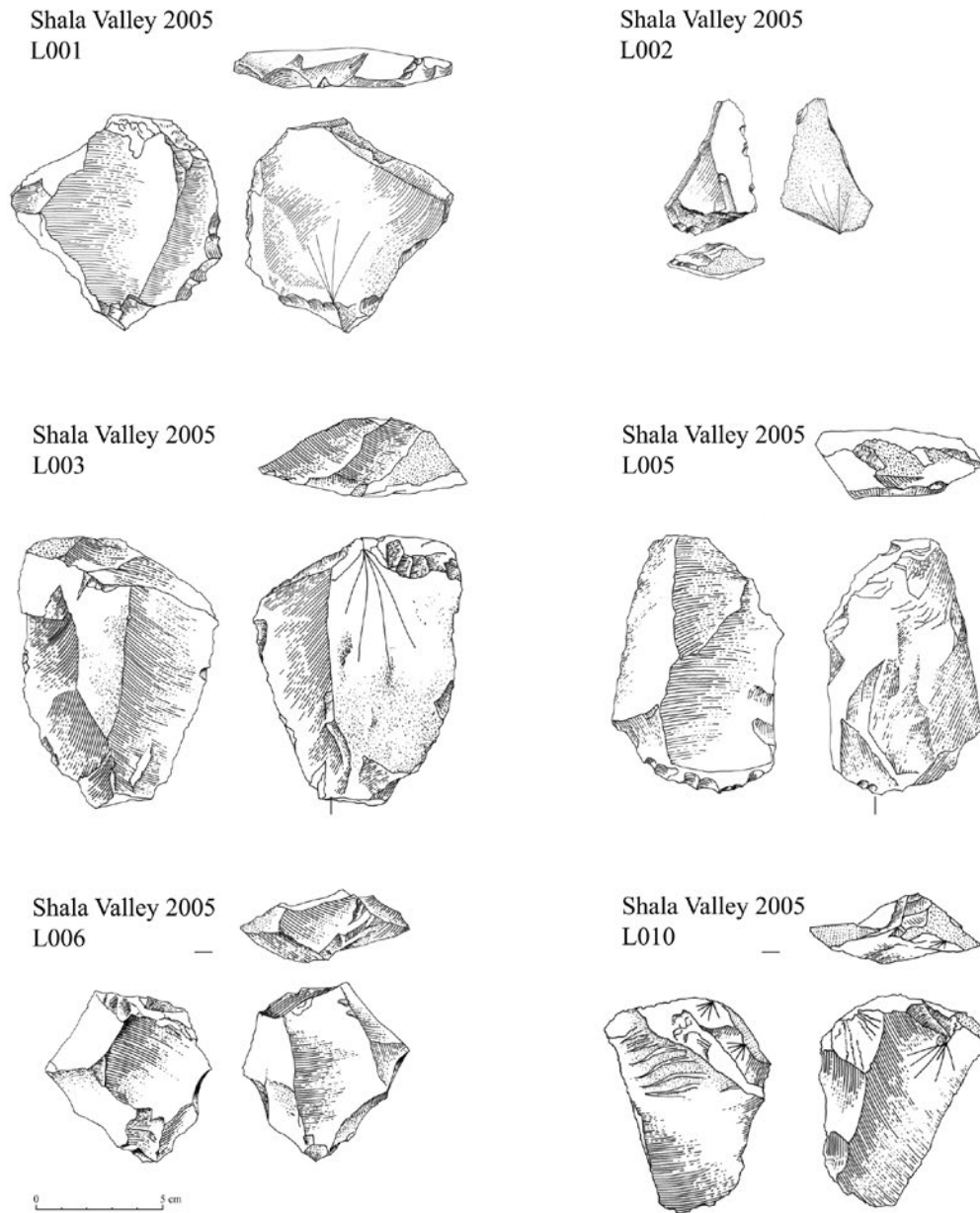


Figure 9.5. Drawings of the Middle Paleolithic artifacts from IAS Site 001 and from the survey (L001, L002, L003, L005, L006, L007, L010).  
Adnan Bushati and Jill Seagard

Cukeli, with carvings on its corners and *frëngji* windows. Only a few possibly Medieval potsherds were collected.

Despite the relatively small numbers of artifacts recovered during the course of the intensive survey, we were able to identify 10 sites, each of which was investigated thoroughly, some of which were test excavated. These are described in detail below and, in the case of Grunas (IAS Site 006), in Chapter Ten. In addition, when mapped, the pattern that emerges from the ceramic data duplicates and reinforces the pattern of growth and development established for Shala generally, based on the

various other forms of evidence (as described in Chapters Four through Eight). These patterns are described and discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

### *IAS Site Catalog*

**IAS Site 001: Middle Paleolithic.** IAS Site 001 is located along and above the main gravel road heading south from Theth to Breg Lumi, just beyond the bridge to Ndërllysaj (Figure 9.4). It is very near a spring on the east bank of the Shala River, marked by a large, recent



marble gravestone. The first two artifacts were found in the road in 2004. The rest ( $n = 4$ ) were found in 2005 and are associated with a large rock slide to the south of and above the spring. The slide likely obliterated the “site,” whether open air or a cave. A trip to the site in 2006 produced no additional artifacts.

The six artifacts from IAS Site 001 suggest a Middle Paleolithic Mousterian date (Figure 9.5). They are made from heavily patinated and calcined raw materials, the so-called black Thethi limestones. The artifacts from this site stand out due to the amount of patination but also because they are larger than most of the other artifacts in the assemblage. The Levallois technique is represented in at least two artifacts—L001, a multiple tool (sidescraper and notch) on a Levallois flake/core, and L006, a typical Levallois discoidal flake core. The remainder of the assemblage includes multiple tools, sidescrapers, notches, and endscrapers. Although this is a very small assemblage, the types represented are typical of Levallois Mousterian assemblages found throughout the larger region. The setting suggests an interglacial Neanderthal settlement, perhaps during OIS 5 (ca. 135–115 kya). While the assemblage bears some similarities to Kryegjata B in Mallakstra (Galaty 2006; Galaty et al. 2006; Runnels et al. 2004, 2009), it lacks the bifacial foliates (Szeletian points) associated with later (OIS 3, ca. 60–30 kya) “transitional” assemblages in the region, which exhibit characteristics of both the Middle and Upper Paleolithic. Although endscrapers are more typically associated with Aurignacian assemblages, they tend to occur in the Aurignacian on large blades rather than on flakes, as they do in this assemblage. Any inferences about site use remain tentative, but the locale may have been employed as a hunting stand (cf. Efstratiou et al. 2011).

Two of the lithics from IAS Site 001, along with several from Grunas and prehistoric sites in Shosh (see below), were analyzed using portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (PXRF) in the W. M. Keck Center for Instrumental and Biochemical Comparative Archaeology at Millsaps College.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, those from Site 001 (L001 and L002) and L010, found during survey in 2005 (see above), are very high in calcium and fall into their own chemical group, group C. Results of the chemical analysis of lithics are discussed again below and in more detail in Chapter Ten.

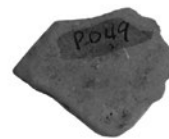
**IAS Site 002: Okol Rockshelters.** At IAS Site 002, small, shallow rockshelters are found to the west of and

above the neighborhood of Okol. Relatively deep, very red soil is preserved in some. Shovel tests were dug in 2005, producing one small plain body sherd (Potsherd [P] 076) that may be prehistoric. Another possibly prehistoric sherd (P077) was found in Tract 2005-204, below and at some distance from the caves. The rockshelters were not revisited in subsequent seasons and additional test excavations were not conducted. The possibility that these sherds are indeed prehistoric is strengthened by the evidence from Grunas (IAS Site 006). Prehistoric pottery at Okol may indicate use of the upper (northern) reaches of Theth in prehistoric times, at some distance from Grunas.

**IAS Site 003: Upper Gjellaj.** IAS Site 003 is associated with Tracts 2005-142 and -144 (see “Sector Three” above). According to local informants, an old house had once stood in the vicinity but had been torn down, its wall stones built into a newer house. The ruins of an old house nearby (ST086) may also be associated with the site, which produced late Early Modern to Modern ceramics (i.e., A.D. 1700–1900). The site was surface collected in 2006 through a process of micro-tracting.

This site was designated and surface collected in an effort to determine whether scatters of historic pottery, found in fields, might signal locations of once extant, but now destroyed, houses. In the case of IAS Site 003, it seems likely given the relatively dense scatter of artifacts that a house once stood in this location. However, additional intensive survey in 2006 and 2007 demonstrated that this particular situation is in fact rather rare in Theth and throughout the whole of the valley. Work by the ethnohistoric survey (EHS) team, including interviews with local informants, further indicated that completely demolishing a house was an exception to the

Shala Valley Project 2005  
**P049** Late Roman  
Tract 2005-097



Shala Valley Project 2005  
**P063** Late Roman  
Tract 2005-100



Figure 9.6. Possibly Late Roman potsherds (P049 and P063) from IAS Site 004. Ann Christine Eek and Jill Seagard

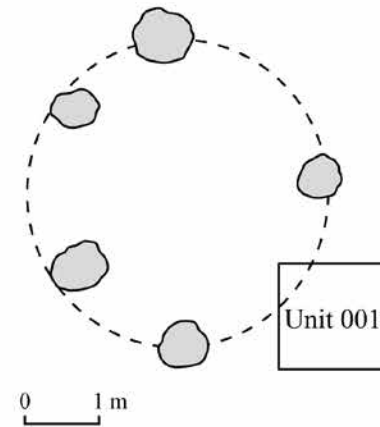


Figure 9.7. Detail from satellite photo showing location and setting of IAS Site 005, with drawing of stone circle and location of the excavation unit. *Jill Seagard*

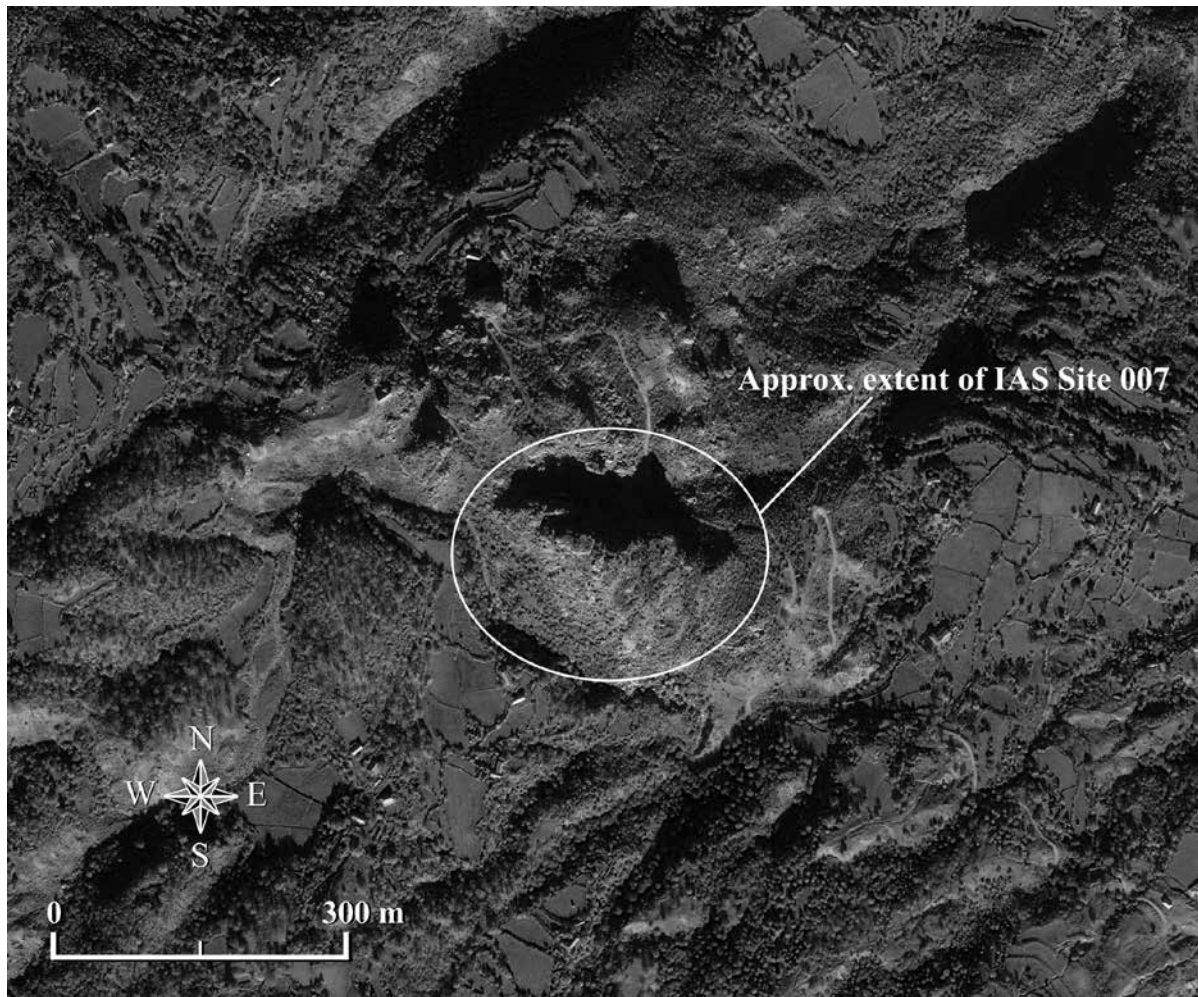


Figure 9.8. Detail from satellite photo showing location and setting of IAS Site 007, Dakaj. *Jill Seagard*

general rule of expanding and embellishing old houses or rebuilding on their foundations. We can therefore be relatively confident in the patterns of modern settlement described in Chapter Seven; nothing found in the course of intensive survey contradicts those patterns.

**IAS Site 004: Lower Gjellaj.** IAS Site 004, which is associated with Tracts 2005-094, -097, -098, and -100 (see “Sector One” above), is located near the bridge in modern Theth. The majority of ceramics found ( $n = 21$ ) are orange or light red in color and dusty and are thought to be Late Roman (fifth to sixth century A.D.) based on comparisons with fabrics from other Late Roman sites in northern Albania (Figure 9.6). This attribution is based on fabric alone, however, and remains tentative at best. A scatter of diagnostically Early Modern to Modern ceramics in the same fields indicated a later period of occupation. There was also a very large

number of shattered tiles in these tracts connected with the re-roofing of the old school (ST062), now a private home, which complicated matters. At least some of the “Late Roman” material could be the remains of broken, very eroded tiles. This area was surface collected in 2006 through a process of micro-tracting.

**IAS Site 005: Stone Circle Near Gerlë (Grunasi).** Site 005 is located approximately 1 km north of the site of Grunas (IAS Site 006), on a large, wide terrace (Figure 9.7). It is a circle of five large stones embedded in the earth, each of which projects several inches above ground level, surrounding a stone at the circle’s center. Given the similarity of this configuration to traditional boundary markers, *guri i kufinit* (see Chapter One), we decided to test excavate the site. In 2007, a 1 × 1-m unit was dug to establish whether the stones were deliberately placed. Four levels were excavated to a depth of 40 cm.

Immediately beneath the surface were many very large boulders, making it unlikely that the “circle” at the surface was a deliberate installation. Only two modern artifacts were found (a chunk of metal and a nail), both in the “plowzone” (0–20 cm).

**IAS Site 006: Grunas.** Near the end of the 2005 field season, at the far southern tip of the southernmost neighborhood in Theth, called Grunas, we surveyed a very large, complex terrace system (Tract 2005-327) associated with the ruins of two seemingly quite old, stone buildings (ST277). These buildings were so unusual (compared to all other structures mapped in Theth) that we decided to conduct test excavations there in 2006. The results of these excavations—the artifacts recovered and a radiocarbon date—indicated a Late Bronze to Early Iron Age date for the site. Additional excavations in 2007 and 2008 confirmed that the terraces and the remains of a fortification wall were constructed sometime prior to 800 B.C. and further indicated that the ruined buildings were houses built during the Early Modern period, inserted into the preexisting terraces. The site of Grunas is discussed in much more detail in Chapter Ten.

**IAS Site 007: Dakaj.** The fortified site of Dakaj, which is referred to by locals as “Qyteza a Dakajve” and in historical sources as Mavriq, is located in lower Shala, to the west and uphill of the Shala River, in the neighborhood of Nënnavriq-Dakaj (Figures 9.8, 9.9, and 9.10). In 2006, we carefully surveyed and mapped the site, and in 2007 we gridded and surface collected a portion of it. Dakaj is the only archaeological site in Shala that had been previously noted in the literature. It was described as a “fortified medieval village” by Jubani (1986:128), but until our work in 2006 and 2007, no evidence had been collected to confirm its date or function.

The site retains some of its circuit walls (Figure 9.11), which are built of stones, some laid dry and others mortared. Local landowners indicated that some of the walls had been dismantled and the stone carted away. Nevertheless, there appeared to be evidence for multiple phases of construction (Jubani 1986:128), certainly during the Medieval and Ottoman periods, but perhaps also prehistoric, given the large size of some of the wall stones in the lower courses. There are also the remains of at least two, perhaps more, large building complexes on the lowest, easternmost terrace. These were likely



Figure 9.9. Dakaj, view from east. *Ann Christine Eek*

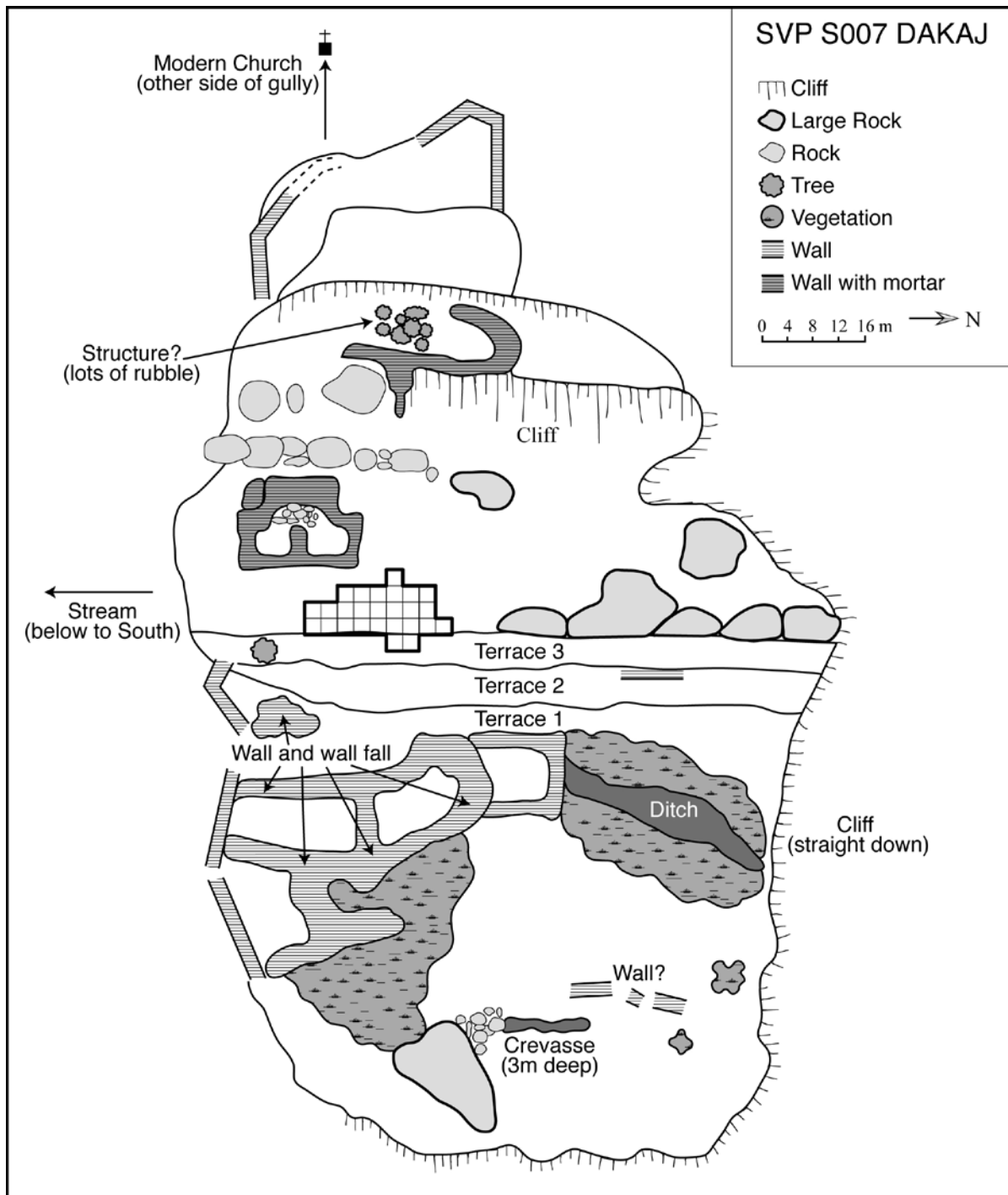


Figure 9.10. Map of Dakaj, showing location of controlled surface collection. *Jill Seagard*

residential, or perhaps administrative, but according to local tradition and historical sources, a church also stood at Dakaj. Jubani (1986:128) indicates that the church was “across the way” (presumably where the new church has been built; see below), where he found lintel stones with “pagan carvings”: of a horse and rider and the sun (see Chapter Eight). Elsie (2001:258) suggests that

the church was dedicated to Shēn Veneranda, but for reasons described in Chapter Three, this identification may not be correct. A new church and cemetery, built in 2005, have been situated one hill to the west of the site. Our survey and surface collection of Dakaj produced a large assemblage of fine and coarse pottery, much of which seems to date to the Late Medieval period (A.D.



1200–1500). There is some ceramic evidence for pre-historic and perhaps “Late Roman” occupations as well. We also found ceramic wasters and pieces of iron slag, which may signal on-site production of pottery and metal. Dakaj was not simply a fortress and a settlement site; it had an industrial function, as well.

Careful surveys of the fields that ring Dakaj produced no artifacts, so there exists no evidence that Medieval houses or a village existed somewhere in the vicinity of the site, below its walls. Certainly Dakaj is well situated for defense and monitoring of the valley. There are excellent views in all directions. It remains unclear, though, who built and controlled Dakaj: were they local elite, representatives of Serbian, Venetian, or Ottoman interests, or church officials?

As discussed in Chapter Four, one tradition says that after the death of Skanderbeg, Lekë Dukagjin and his brother established a base in the Shala Valley at Mavriq (i.e., Dakaj) (Nopsca 1910:31–32). But the site must predate their arrival, and the toponym Mavriq is itself revealing. Durham (1979 [1928]:24) quotes the *Illyricum Sacrum* (Farlati 1817): “in it [Shala] are the vestiges of an

ancient city called Mauricum” (citing Book VII, “Ecclesia Diocletiana, Antibarensis, Dyrrhachienis, et Sirmiensis, cum Earum Suffraganeis”). There is some suggestion that the Mavriq people were non-Albanian speakers (see discussion in Chapter Four). They were believed to be warriors, and one argument is that originally they were under the command or rule of a Roman leader named Mauritius, who gave his name to the site, Mauricum, which was later changed to Mavriq. When the Shala tribe moved in, they expelled the Mavriq people. Pulaha’s (1974b:149) work on the Ottoman 1485 cadaster shows a village called Mavriq adjacent to “Shala.” And Cantelli’s detailed map of Albania, drawn in 1689, depicts a village called “Murichi,” which must be Mavriq. All of these hints suggest a substantial occupation at Dakaj by the Late Medieval period, with a continuing presence in Early Modern times. This scenario fits well the archaeological data.

In 2006, during initial survey and mapping of the site, we collected some pottery ( $n = 22$ ), and in 2007, we gridded and vacuumed the relatively flat, terraced areas located below and to the southeast of the hill top (Figure 9.10; Table 9.1). The average visibility was quite low, 40 percent, and yet we still managed to find a total of 73 sherds and 15 wasters.



Figure 9.11. Wall at Dakaj, from west. Michael L. Galaty

Table 9.1 Pottery Counts from the Gridded Collection at Dakaj

Square number	Pottery count	Other
111	4	
311	2	
312	2	4 (wasters)
313	2	
314	2	
321	2	
322	3	3 (wasters)
323	13	1 (waster)
412	29	6 (wasters)
413	7	
421	6	1 (waster)
422	1	
TOTAL	73	

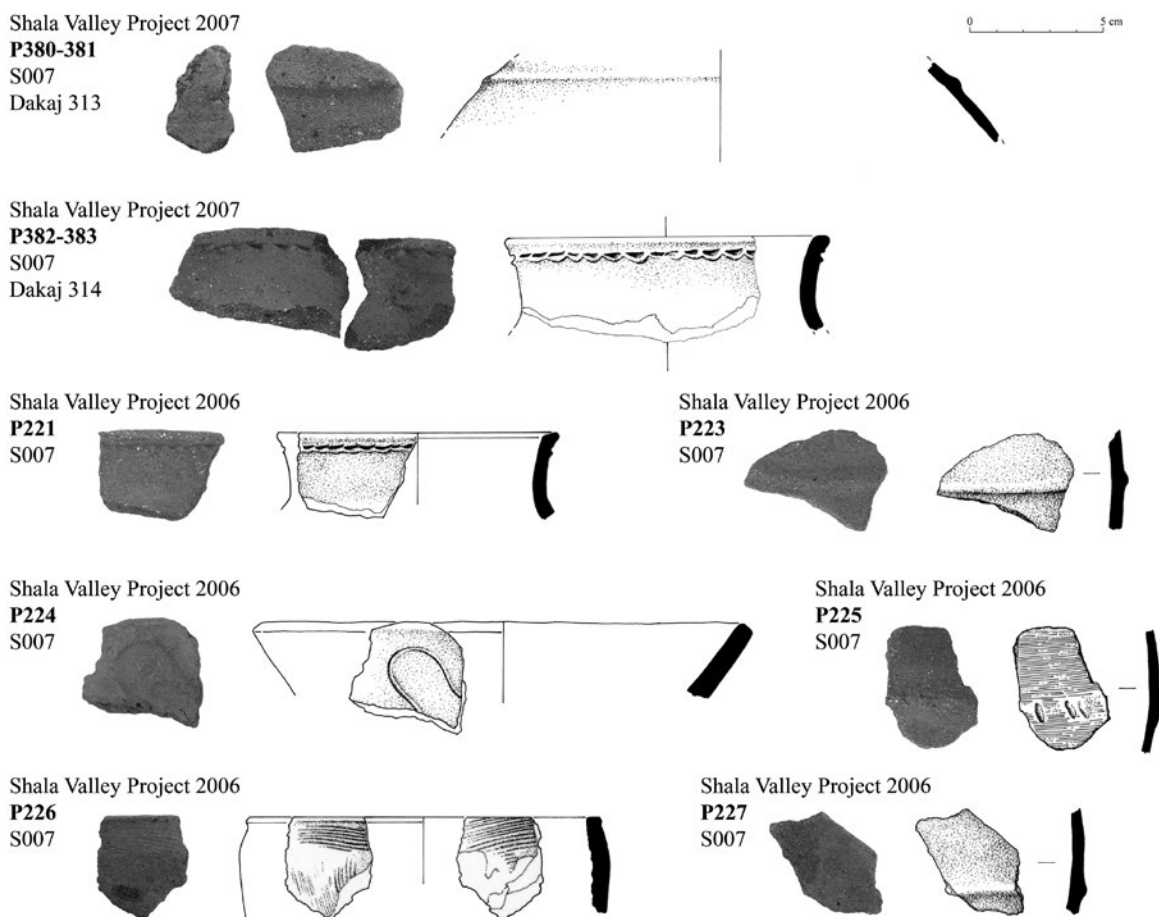


Figure 9.12. Medieval pottery from Dakaj (P221, P223, P224, P225, P226, P227, P381, and P382–383.  
Ann Christine Eek, Adnan Bushati, and Jill Seagard

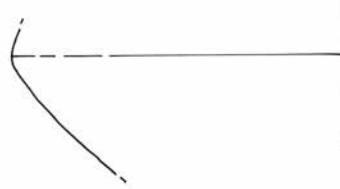
Of the full ceramic assemblage, 13 body sherds may be prehistoric. These are uniformly thick, poorly fired, and heavily tempered with rock grits or sand, red to dark brown in color, occasionally slipped red or brown, and sometimes burned, on the interior in particular, which may indicate their use as cook pots. If these sherds are not prehistoric, they could be Medieval, perhaps Middle Byzantine, in date (i.e., predating the thirteenth century A.D.). The chemical analysis of some of these sherds indicates that most of them, as many as six, are probably prehistoric, since they are chemically similar to prehistoric sherds from Grunas.<sup>4</sup> Another possibility is that they are Byzantine (or later) in date, but made from local clay, and thus similar to those from Grunas. Results of chemical analysis are discussed in more detail in Chapter Ten.

Seven sherds from Dakaj may be Late Roman in date, but this identification is based on fabric characteristics only (see above, IAS Site 004). Fifty-three sherds date to the Late Medieval period (and an additional 11

are dated “Medieval” by context). These are primarily coarse wares, many of which are tempered with very many small- to medium-sized lime particles (Figure 9.12). This fabric is unlike any other Medieval Albanian fabric yet described and so could be of local or regional manufacture. The formal characteristics (such as thin, broad strap-handles) and decorative techniques (such as raised relief bands on the exterior surface) are suggestive, though, of a Late Medieval date. Six sherds are Early Modern (Figure 9.13), five of which are glazed. Two may be Venetian imports.

Seven Late Medieval sherds and one Early Modern sherd, possibly a Venetian import, from Dakaj were included in the chemical analysis. These form their own compositional group and are easily distinguished from all other samples. Three of these sherds are lime-tempered. These results seem to support a Late Medieval to Early Modern date for the pots and may indicate that they were imported into the valley.<sup>5</sup>

Shala Valley Project 2006  
P220 S007



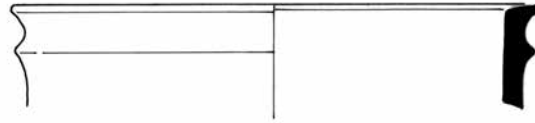
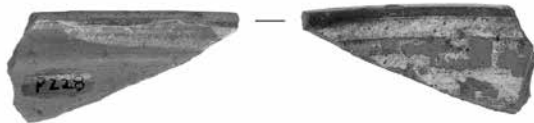
0 5 cm



Shala Valley Project 2006  
P222 S007



Shala Valley Project 2006  
P228 S007



Shala Valley Project 2006  
P229 S007



Figure 9.13. Early Modern pottery from Dakaj (P220, P222, P228, and P229). *Ann Christine Eek, Adnan Bushati, and Jill Seagard*

With the exception of ceramic wasters and metal slag, we did not collect many small finds. We did recover a long, thin strip of bronze that may be a vessel handle (SF052) and may be Medieval in date (Figure 9.14).

**IAS Site 008: Gimaj.** In the village of Gimaj, in Tract 2006-546, we found a complex of very large terraces and walls (Figures 9.15 and 9.16), possibly the remains of some kind of structure. The terraces and walls were reminiscent of those at Grunas (IAS Site 006). In a modern irrigation ditch that cuts across one edge of the site, we found one small piece of possibly prehistoric pottery. It was analyzed chemically and falls squarely into one of the prehistoric compositional groups, as discussed in Chapter Ten. Site 008 was carefully mapped (Figure 9.17) and test excavated in 2007.

Unit 001 was excavated in five levels to a depth of 40 cm. Level 003 was composed entirely of rocks. Most of the rocks in the unit were in its western half and at first appeared to be a wall. Instead, these rocks may have been wall fall or the rubble interior of a large platform at the site center. There were very few artifacts found, but at least one small piece of pottery, found in Level 002, may be prehistoric. A radiocarbon sample was taken in Level 003 and returned a modern date, which indicates that the walls fell recently. Consequently, unlike Grunas, evidence for prehistoric occupation at Gimaj remains impressionistic only.

**IAS Site 009: Okol.** IAS Site 009 is associated with Tracts 2005-240 and -242 (see “Sector Four” above). In 2005, in the course of field survey, a ceramic sherd dated



Shala Valley Project 2007  
SF052 S007

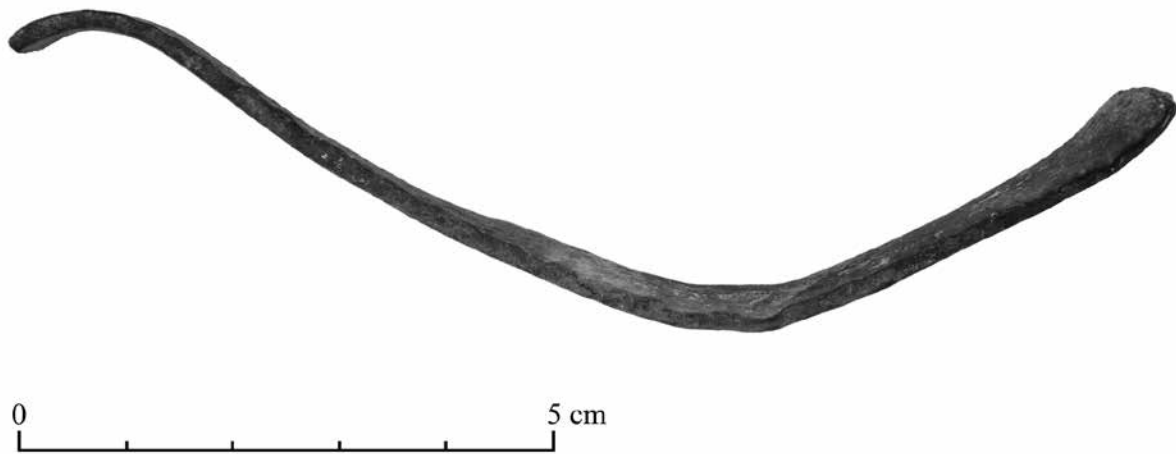


Figure 9.14. Bronze vessel handle from Dakaj. *Ann Christine Eek and Jill Seagard*

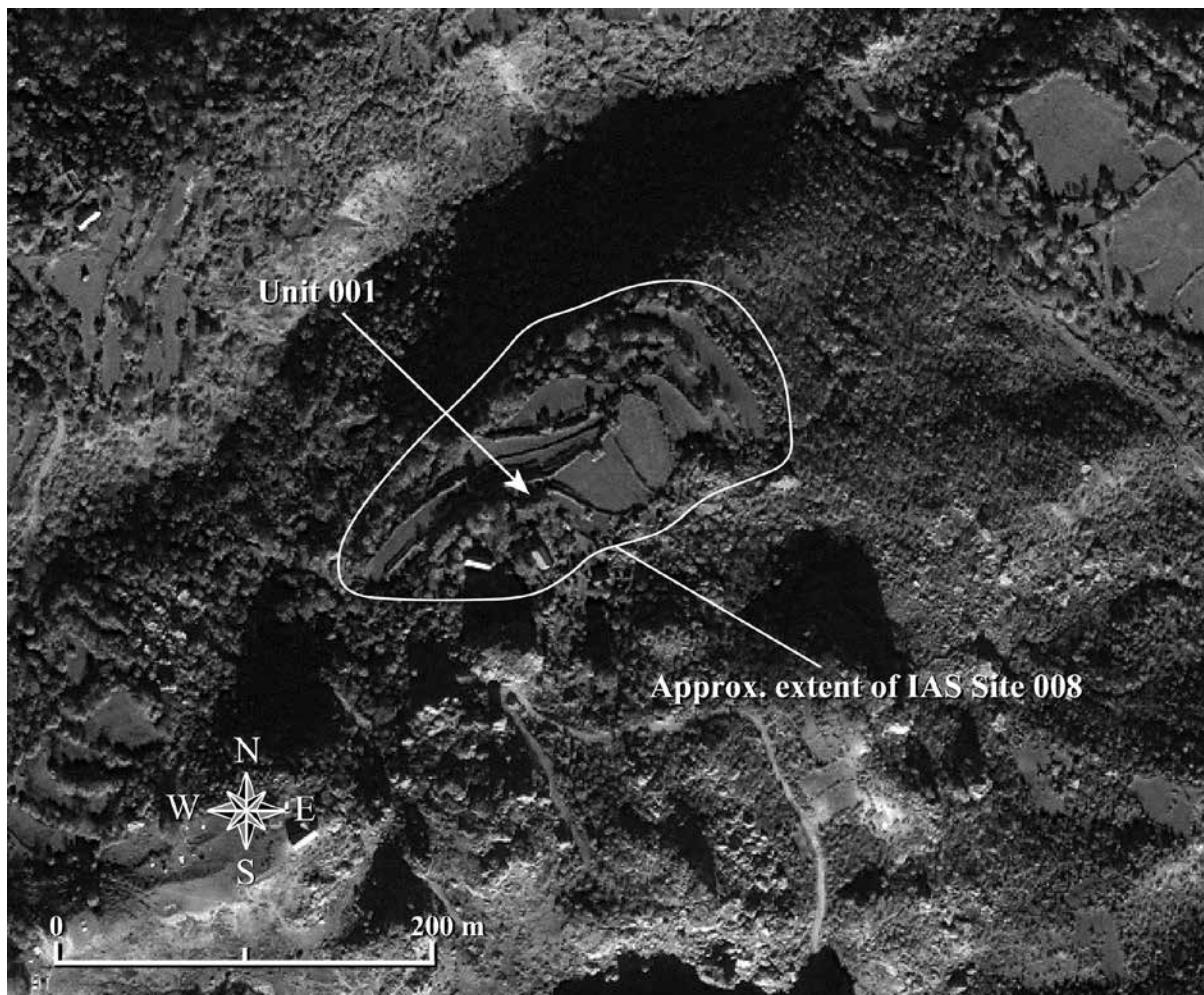


Figure 9.15. Detail from satellite photo showing location and setting of IAS Site 008, Gimaj, and location of the excavation unit. *Jill Seagard*



Figure 9.16. Walls at Gimaj. *Michael L. Galaty*

to the Late Medieval period (P093, a coarse cooking jar) and several sherds dating to the Early Modern period were found in association with ST159, one of the largest and most interesting buildings in the valley. ST159 is described in some detail in Chapter Seven (see Figure 7.15). It was the historic home of Sadri Luka and was visited by Rose Wilder Lane in 1921 (1923:165–170) and by Jan and Cora Josephine Gordon in 1925 (1927; see Figure 1.9). Tract 2005-242 was micro-tracted in 2006 and test excavated in 2007 (Figure 9.18).

Oral and historical testimony had indicated that ST159 was at least “100 years old” or older. In conducting test excavations near the house, we sought to determine, if possible, the entire length of occupation. More specifically, we hoped to establish whether the oldest stone houses in Theth’s neighborhoods, which were probably built in the nineteenth century (Chapter Seven), might sit atop or near archaeological evidence for earlier settlement. We excavated five levels to a depth of 50 cm below the surface. The top four levels (001–004) were composed of “plowzone” over a

transitional B-horizon. The soil was a very rocky, sandy clay loam, and there was much charcoal in Level 003. Underlying the sandy clay loam was clean yellow clay (which appeared first in the northeast corner of the unit and sloped to the southwest, so that Level 004 was found only in the southwest corner of the unit and was only 2 cm deep). The yellow clay, Level 005, is probably alluvium deposited by the nearby river. The top few centimeters of yellow clay were impregnated with much charcoal. Artifacts were few, but at the bottom of Level 003, at a depth of 34 cm below the surface, in the northeast corner of the unit and on top of the yellow clay, amid the charcoal, was a hand-wrought, possibly Medieval, iron nail (SF083; Figure 9.19). Underneath Level 005 was bright red, sterile clay (Level 006).

We associate the nail with the first occupation of the house site, which took place on top of the yellow clay, and began at the end of the Late Medieval period. We did acquire a single radiocarbon date on charcoal from the top of Level 004, and the date is intriguing: A.D. 140 (A.D. 120–230 one sigma calibrated, A.D.

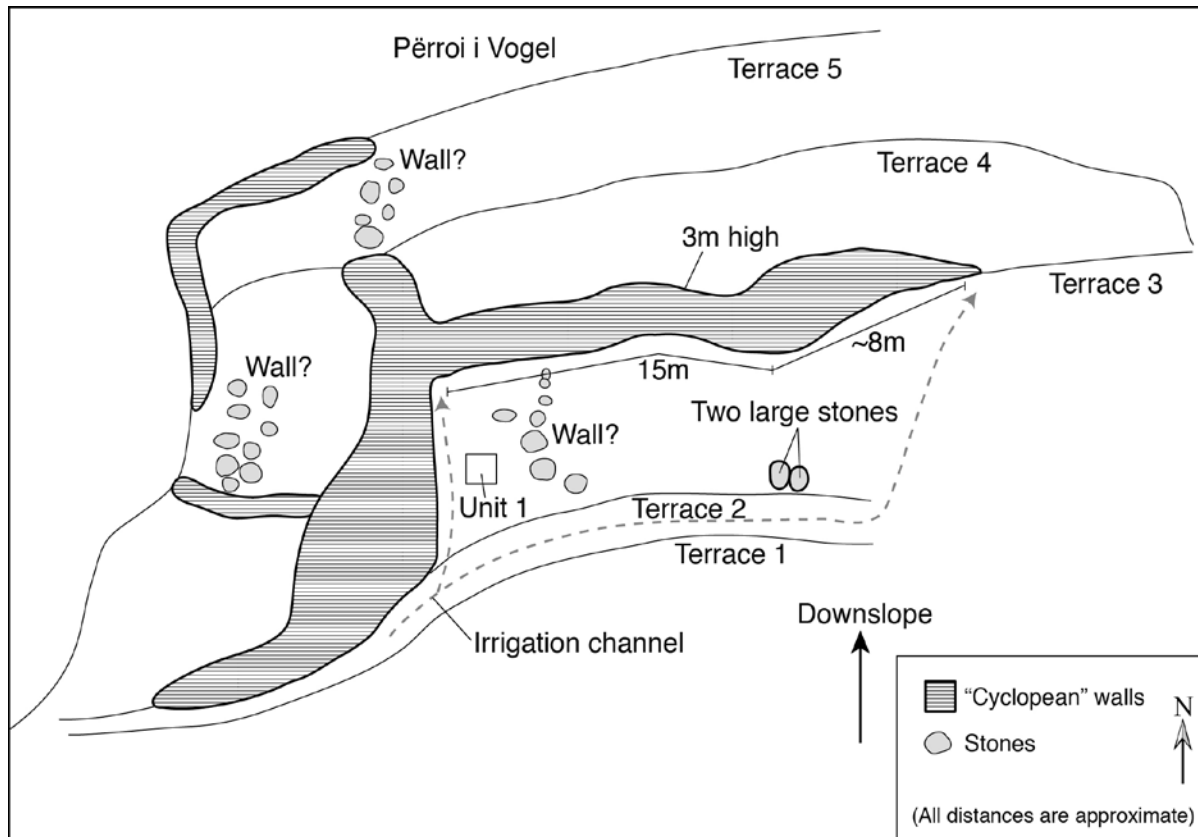


Figure 9.17. Map of Gimaj. Jill Seagard

70–250 two sigma calibrated). The charcoal may well be natural, and there is no artifactual evidence for a Roman-era occupation of Okol, but given the Late Roman material from points down valley, an ephemeral Roman-period presence at the far northern end of the valley is not impossible.

In 2007, the fields around ST159 were also targeted for systematic coring and soil phosphate analysis. This was done to provide interpretive context for soil phosphate data from Grunas: were the soil phosphate data from Grunas patterned in ways that suggested full-time, year-round occupation? These data are discussed in detail in Chapter Ten.

**IAS Site 010: Qafë e Thorës.** In 2005, we visited the *stanë* just below the Qafë e Thorës (through which the modern road runs), an area known as Poti i Nuseve (literally, “where the brides meet”). In early July when we visited, families were just building up the stone foundations with wood and fern (Figure 9.20; see also Figure 6.4). In 2006, we met the owners of the *stanë* again in Lekaj-Musha and were able to discover more about

transhumant patterns in this area by both interview and observation. Several families in Lekaj-Musha cooperated to buy land in the 1920s from families on the other side of the pass. They now move up to the *stanë* together, herding animals on foot, on a date as near as possible to July 1, and keep their herds up in the mountains until around September 15, when the weather starts to become unpredictable. Since harvesting also needs to be done, there is a continual movement of family members between uplands and lowlands (see discussion in Chapter Six). When in the upland pastures, men from the community cement relations while women gather herbs and produce butter and cheese. Although the pastures are common to the community, the individual *stanë* are privately owned. *Stanë* owned by each neighborhood surveyed exist in different parts of the valley and, for families with enough livestock to make it worthwhile, the transhumant pattern is still popular, despite the effort and constant threat of wolves.

In 2007, we excavated a 1 × 1-m test unit at the *stanë* at the Qafë e Thorës, just in front of one of the temporary structures, in hopes of establishing when the site was

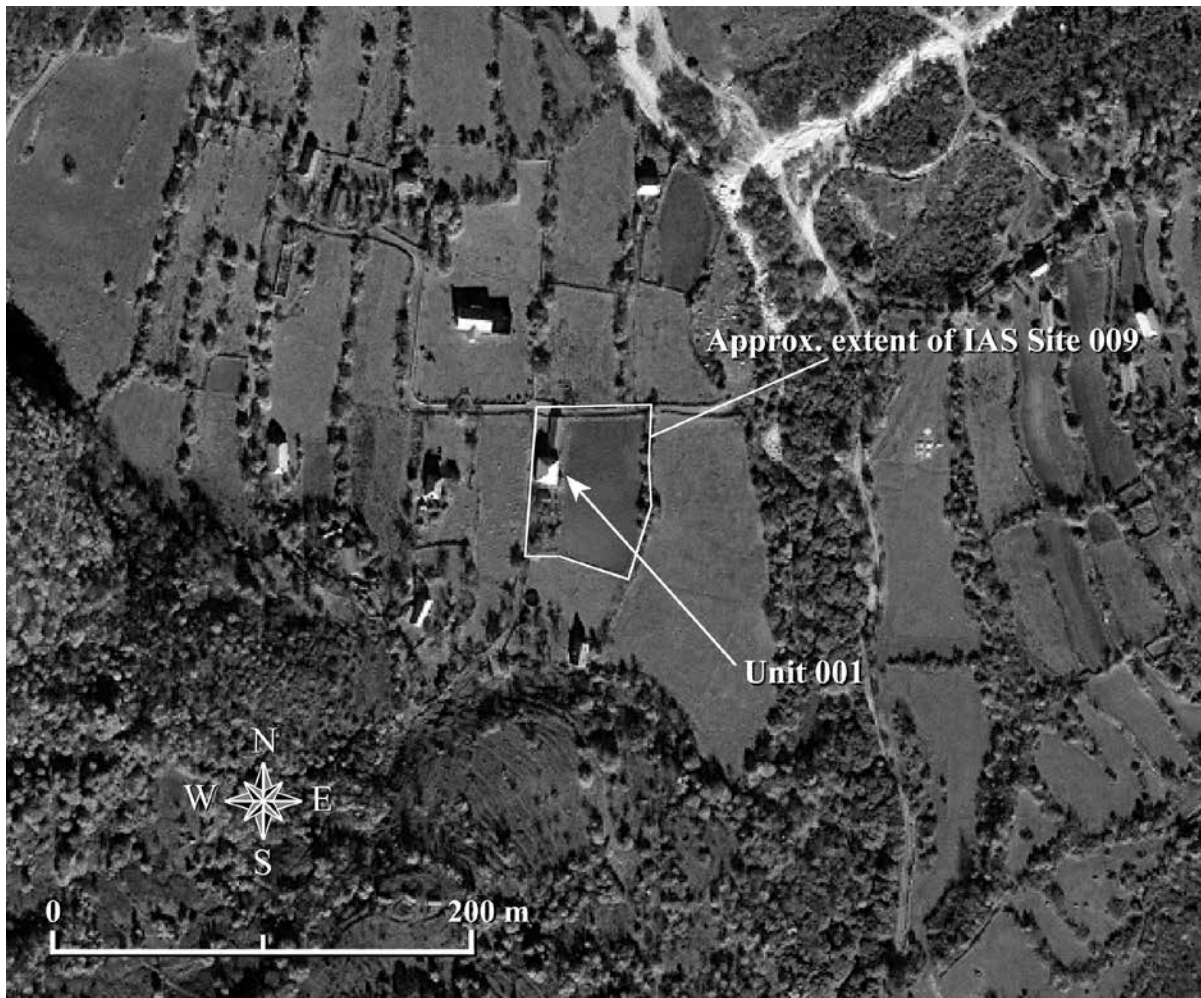


Figure 9.18. Detail from satellite photo showing location and setting of IAS Site 009, Okol, and location of the excavation unit. *Jill Seagard*

Shala Valley Project 2007  
SF083 Okol



Figure 9.19. Hand-wrought iron nail (SF083) from IAS Site 009.  
*Ann Christine Eek, Adnan Bushati, and Jill Seagard*

first used as a summer pasture (Figure 9.21). In other parts of the Mediterranean, this approach had borne archaeological fruit, in some cases indicating occupation of highland pastures as early as prehistoric periods (e.g., Efstratiou et al. 2006; additional examples in Biagi and Nandris 1994). We dug two levels to a depth of 23 cm, and this only with difficulty due to the many, very large rocks just under the surface. We found many modern artifacts in Level 001 (0–17 cm) and none in Level 002 (17–23 cm). We did manage to take two very small charcoal samples in Level 002, but given their questionable context, they were not submitted for radiocarbon dating. We therefore uncovered no evidence at IAS Site 010 for anything earlier than a modern occupation.

Also in 2007, the pastures encompassing the structures at Poti i Nuseve were targeted for systematic coring and soil phosphate analysis. This was done to provide interpretive context for soil phosphate data from Grunas:



Figure 9.20. Shepherd's huts (*stanë*) at the Qafë e Thorës. *Michael L. Galaty*

were the soil phosphate data from Grunas patterned in ways that suggested part-time, seasonal occupation? These data are discussed in detail in Chapter Ten.

## Results of the Extensive Archaeological Survey<sup>6</sup>

### *Introduction: Goals and Methods*

The primary goal of the SVP's Extensive Archaeological Survey team (hereafter EAS) was to collect data necessary to compare the settlement patterns of the Shala Valley to those of the areas of northern Shosh, just south of the "Gates of Shala," and eastern Pult, in order to test the hypothesis that human occupation in Shala was less dense, and consequently more isolated, than neighboring areas outside of the valley and closer to Shkodra (Figures 1.1, 1.5, and 2.3). To do so, it was important to understand the geophysical character of the region and to visit present-day settlements. A limited amount of ethnographic data,

especially about houses, was also collected. Given the time and personnel constraints (two people working for 11 days in very rough terrain), we did not adopt the systematic tract-walking technique of the Intensive Archaeological Survey (IAS). Nor did we concern ourselves with mapping artifact densities or with the area's most recent material culture. Our aim was simply to discover as many sites and artifacts in this particular zone as possible in the limited time allotted.

Focusing on Shosh and Pult made good sense for a number of reasons. First, they are both farther south and at lower altitudes than Shala and closer to the plains along a relatively major route of transportation and commerce (i.e., down the Kir River valley, past the major, walled settlement at Drisht Castle in Postribë, thence on to Shkodra). Second, like Shala, these two tribal zones had never been surveyed systematically for archaeological remains but are of demonstrable regional historical importance. Pult, for instance, was the seat of a bishop in historic times (see Chapter Four; also Durham 1979 [1928]:24), whose residence was at



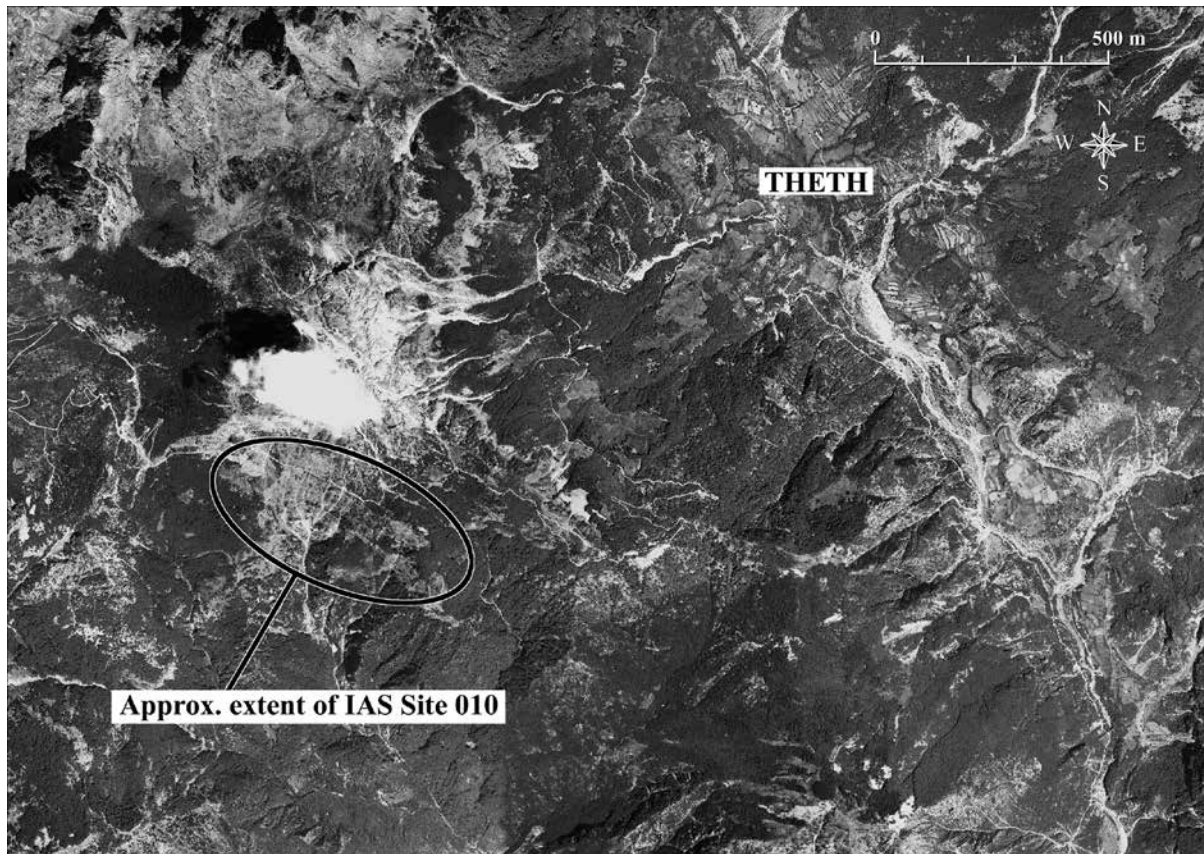


Figure 9.21. Detail from satellite photo showing location and setting of IAS Site 010, Qafë e Thorës, and location of the excavation unit. *Jill Seagard*

Khani/Joani (“Ghoanni”; see description in Durham 1985 [1909]:110–111). As a result, we could predict more densely settled landscapes and less isolation (and isolationism) in both regions in all periods of the past as compared to Shala. Finally, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, Shala preferred marriage alliances with Shosh and, to a lesser extent, Pult, at least in relatively recent times (Figures 5.3–5.5). We therefore also could predict evidence for interaction and exchange between Shala and both regions, with Shosh in particular. Interestingly enough, the best evidence for interaction exists for prehistory, in the form of pottery and lithics that may have been moved from Shosh to Shala, and vice versa.

We used two primary methods of site discovery. The first was traditional topographic prospection (the University of Minnesota Messenia Expedition’s work in Messenia, Greece, is a good example of this approach; McDonald and Rapp 1972). Using this method, we explored places that, in our judgment, would be good candidates for settlement. We began by looking for high, flat terrain where one could see (but not necessarily be seen from) the landscape below. Immediately,

we discovered two locations with possible prehistoric material. To better our chances of finding sites of later periods, we subsequently added the availability of water and terrain suitable for agriculture (which is, in fact, quite rare in Shosh) to our search criteria (see Chapter Six for the effects of water and land on settlement). We also noticed that a number of the sites we discovered were near cemeteries and decided to investigate areas in the vicinity of those as well (with mixed results).

Our second method of discovery was to conduct informal interviews with local informants. During our days in the field, we invariably met local residents who invited us to coffee and *raki*. During these visits, Tafilica would ask them if they knew of any ancient material (large walls, artifacts) in their villages. While they all happily offered information, only one (Mark Zefi of Nica) produced positive results (EAS Sites 010, 011).

Overall, our methods proved quite effective. We discovered material from the Bronze Age through modern periods, including 54 ceramic artifacts, 24 lithics, and 7 small finds. These artifacts, and in some cases associated features, such as walls, terraces, and foundations, allowed

us to identify eight sites in Shosh and three in Pult. We also gathered interesting data in the village of Kir.

### *EAS Site Catalog: Region of Shosh*

Shosh lies downstream from Shala along the continuation of the Shala River south, the lower extremes of which are sometimes referred to as the Lesniquë River (Figures 1.1, 1.5, and 2.3). The bed of the river narrows greatly and later empties into the Drin River. In terms of the physical landscape, Shosh—compared to Shala, with its two linear, parallel mountain ranges and smooth slopes—possesses steep rib-like ridges on both sides of, and running down toward, the river. They crosscut each other and thus enhance, in contrast to Shala, the extreme physical appearance of the region and its rugged look (Figure 9.22). The terrain is made up primarily of *rreshporë* (shale) formations and, here and there, karsts. Smaller streams are present but do not flow with the same intensity as in Shala. The villages of Shosh and their neighborhoods are spread throughout

the valley. Their traditional boundary with Shala is the Kodër i Shën Gjergjit (see Chapters Three and Four; Figure 3.8), a small village with flat parcels that extend across the valley.

Typologically, the modern houses of Shosh do not differ from those of Shala, but their roofs are generally covered with slabs of shale, which is readily available and exploited traditionally as a kind of building material. This type of roof is found also in a few villages of Shala. The buildings of the Communist era and later are covered with tile or other composite materials, such as asbestos or sheet metal. Here, too, we find the same interesting carved symbols on houses that are also present on the exteriors of the Shala houses (Chapter Eight). In recent years, there has been drastic abandonment of the villages as people seek a better life in the cities as well as abroad. During summer, a small number of households return to their homes to make use of the agro-pastoral resources available to them in Shosh.



Figure 9.22. Landscape of Shosh. *Robert Schon*

**EAS Site 001: Kodër i Shën Gjergjit, Ara e Peronit.**

Based on oral testimonies of the inhabitants of this village (Gjergj Kola, as well as others), during the Communist period, an old cemetery that stood on the site of the new one was bulldozed, right next to the ruins of the destroyed church of Shën Gjergj. This was deemed necessary to gain flat terrain above the hill. Based on the villagers' testimony—they described *varre paganësh* or “pagan graves”—the cemetery perhaps belonged to early pre-Christian times. This hypothesis is supported by their descriptions of the graves: “tombs with big slabs of stone in the shape of a crate” (perhaps sarcophagi, but see below in the section on Kir); “many finds of earthen ware and objects made of metals.” Our survey of the area in question did not produce any definite proof of these testimonies. Perhaps these remains were simply pushed over and into the canyon below and are now completely lost.

Some pottery and many fragments of modern brick were found in a terrace just below the cemetery, but none was associated directly with the cemetery itself. In a cultivated field, next to the hill, on the northern side, we found a few ceramic fragments of small- and medium-sized wares made with red clay (P288–289, P293–294, P296). These are relatively nondiagnostic body sherds, perhaps fragments of small bowls and an amphora. Nevertheless, they are not Medieval and so may date to the Late Roman period (fourth to sixth century A.D.). Given the evidence for Late Roman settlement in Shala, this represents a chronological link between both regions. We also found several small finds of indeterminate, but probably Modern, age, including a large, dense piece of metal slag (SF066).

Below and to the right of the foundation of the church of Shën Gjergj—a large church of basilica type with stone architecture that had been totally destroyed in 1967—outside and ca. 2 m below its peripheral walls, we noted two lines of foundations that belonged to an older church. These walls were of worked limestone and were quadratic in shape.

This region was also targeted by the IAS for limited field survey in 2007 (see above). The relationship of the Church of Shën Gjergjit to the villages of Pylaj (to the south of the ridge in Shosh) and Lotaj (to the north of the ridge in Shala) presents an interesting analogy to the situation in Abat (see above), where the church is considered to be a *mëhalla* in and of itself. The link is hardly coincidental since tradition says that the Church

of Shën Gjergjit took over from the church at Abat as the religious center of Shala at some point in the past. In the case of Shën Gjergjit, however, the area of Kodër (lit. “hill”) has a definite physical dimension, with around five houses located on it. Although formally part of Shosh, the ridge top has a distinctly liminal character. Its highest point (Tract 2007-296) is known as Kodra e Drithit (*drithë* = cereal) and was where corn from Shosh and Shala was traditionally collected for processing. The site of the church (of which only a bell dated 1939 remains) is also the setting for a festival held on July 13 involving people from both Shosh and Shala. The role of churches as neutral territory, where disputes could be settled, is attested by Edith Durham's (1985 [1909]) description of blood feud reconciliation outside the church at Theth in 1908.

**EAS Sites 002 and 004: Ndrejaj.** These two adjacent ridges, just north of Kodër i Shën Gjergjit, overlook the Shala River. They sit in the area where the shale (typical of Shoshi) intersects with the karstic limestone (prevalent in Shala). These denuded ridge tops yielded lithics (L035 from S002 and L040 and L041 from S004) of unknown date. L035 is a broken tertiary flake made from light gray quartzite. L040 is a dark gray chert secondary flake with a notch on the inverse left and a burin right proximal. L041 is a brown chert cortical spall from a blade core. The latter two were subjected to chemical compositional analysis (as described above) and fall into a group of brown and purple to dark gray cherts (group A) that were also found at EAS Site 003, EAS Site 010, and IAS Site 006 (Grunas). Those from EAS S003 and from Grunas are Bronze to Iron Age blades, which raises the possibility that EAS Site 004, if not EAS Site 002, also dates to this period.

**EAS Site 003: Qafa e Pyllës.** The site is along a pass (*qafa*) near the road that takes one to Kir (Pult) and onward from there to Shkodra. Just adjacent to a modern cemetery, we discovered a dense scatter of pottery and lithics: 44 artifacts over a 40 × 40-m area, including 16 lithics (Figure 9.23) and 27 potsherds (P300–P335; one of which, P300, may be Medieval). This material is prehistoric in date and most closely resembles the assemblage from Grunas, although no associated architecture, such as large walls or terraces, was found at the site.

The lithic assemblage from this site includes two trapezoidal blades (L037 and L045) and a single flake



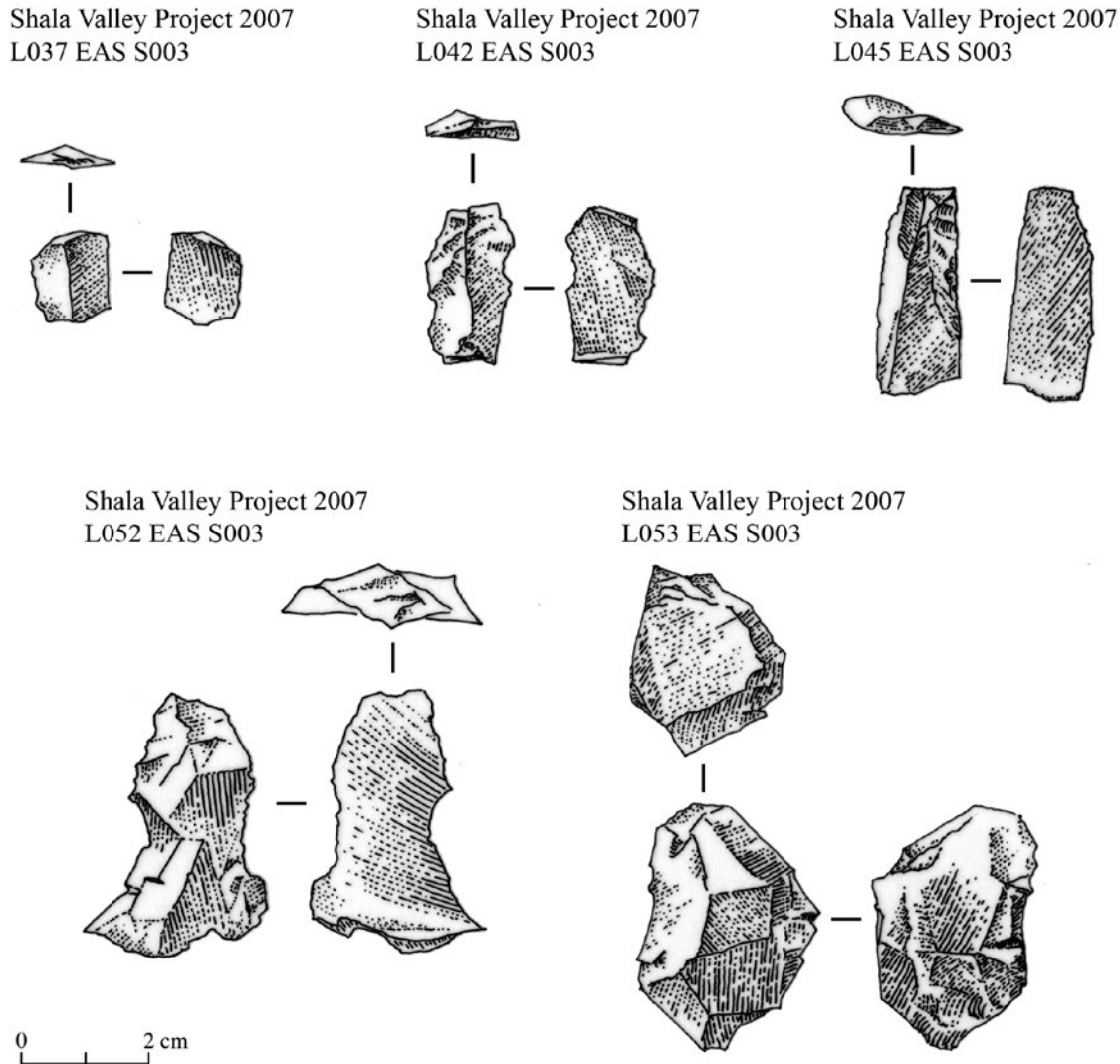


Figure 9.23. Lithics from EAS Site 003 (L037, L042, L045, L052, and L053). *Adnan Bushati and Jill Seagard*

core (L053) but no primary flakes, suggesting that cores may have been roughed out elsewhere. Several of the items bear evidence of bipolar percussion (e.g., L053), suggesting intensive raw material use. Formal tool types include notches on blades and flakes (e.g., L042 and L052), a bec (L052), and an endscraper (L045). The small size of the blanks in this assemblage, as well as the occurrence of several multiple tools (e.g., L052), is indicative either of preferential use of specific kinds of raw materials or of limited access to such materials. This pattern is taken up in more detail in Chapter Ten.

Three of these lithics were subjected to chemical analysis. One of them, L037, falls into chemical group A (see above, EAS Site 004) and two, L042 and L045,

fall into group B, a homogeneous fine gray chert that, when burned, turns reddish-brown. Two tested lithics from Grunas (L106 and L127) also fall squarely into group B, providing good evidence for interaction between Shala and Shosh during the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age. According to the villagers, there are nearby chert sources, but they are more familiar with a chert source somewhere in the neighboring region of Shllaku. We did not manage, however, to locate any of the purported chert sources.

The pottery from the site is low fired and friable. It is almost indistinguishable from the pottery from Grunas. There are no formal types represented, only body sherds. Several are perhaps lightly slipped red, and one may preserve a punctate decoration. A large



Figure 9.24. Structure at EAS Site 007. Robert Schon

number of these sherds were included for chemical analysis; results are described in Chapter Ten.

**EAS Site 005: Leparu.** The 4.5-ha area we explored below the peak of Leparu contains numerous ruined houses, including a niche house (one niche on each of the two short walls). These houses were all in ruins. Locals informed us that the area is currently used exclusively for summer pasture and is not inhabited. No ancient material was found here.

**EAS Site 006: Pepsumaj.** Despite 10 hours of climbing in a steep 8-ha area, we only found one artifact at Pepsumaj (a sharpening stone, SF070). We came upon a number of houses and a mill that had been converted into an electrical tower; all were abandoned. Only one family seemed to be living still on the inhospitable and steep slopes of this range. A block of terraces below this village have been given the toponym *Qytezë* or “town.” This toponym is in widespread use in the vicinity of Shkodra (both variants *Qytezë* [i.e., town or small city]

and *Qyteti* [i.e., city] are found) but also in other regions of Albania and elsewhere in the Balkans (Serbo-Croatian *Gradinë* and *Gradishtë*). Often the toponym indicates a prehistoric settlement. The only possible prehistoric feature we were able to locate was a dry wall (above the electrical tower/mill), worked with large boulders and raised on top of a terrace, along the side of a stream. The wall is much like the walls observed at Grunas and Gimaj (IAS Site 008), both in Shala.

**EAS Site 007: Moll-kuqe/Dardhë.** At Moll-kuqe, we encountered structures and terraces built in a fashion very similar to Grunas, but with no associated diagnostic artifacts. Three chert lithics were found (L055–L057), but they were not dateable. The site sits upon a well-terraced plateau with an excellent view toward Pepsumaj. After passing Qafa e Pyllës, right after the point where the valley takes a steep turn toward the village of Kir, about 100 m below the road and on the side of the mountain, there are several terraces situated in a stair-like fashion. On the second terrace, we found the ruins

of a building worked with dry masonry using mountain stones of large and medium size, similar to the modern structures at Grunas (Figure 9.24). The building pressed along one of its longer sides onto the terrace (the opposite side had disappeared). On the side that remains, the natural cliff had been used as part of the wall. On the interior of this wall, at a height of about 1 to 2 m above ground, there are three *kamarë* (niches), quadratic in shape and spaced at equal intervals from one another. The other remaining wall, the one on the right, preserves still another niche and on the same level. The peripheral walls are preserved up to a height of 1 to 2 m. We could not see any interior divisions of this feature. Coring and shovel tests down inside and outside the building did not reveal any evidence of cultural deposits.

Another village below that of Nicaj is called Dardhë. There our guide from this village, Ndue Zefa, showed us a high, long, and dry wall worked with large blocks and boulders. This wall was found inside the village and formed the lower boundary of a field along the river; the field was cultivated and in use.

The positioning of EAS Site 007 in a strategic place—pressed against the slope of a mountain, terraced, and surrounded on three sides by a deep canyon—is much like the situations in Shala at Grunas and Gimaj. It may be that the site was first occupied during prehistoric times, but there is no direct evidence of this.

**EAS Site 010: Cilkuk.** We explored about 19 ha of the area of Cilkuk. A local informant (Mark Zefi) guided us to a terrace wall composed of enormous blocks (over a meter on each side in some cases) (Figure 9.25). A search of the terraces around it yielded three pottery sherds (P338, P551–P552), a lithic (L058), and several small finds, including a small grinding stone (SF072). L058 is almost certainly prehistoric and falls into chert chemical group A. It is a multiple tool on a tertiary flake. P338 is a fragment from a tan-glazed casserole of Early Modern date. P551 to P552 are twentieth century. As with EAS Site 007, the situation at Site 010 is reminiscent of Grunas: Early Modern homesteading of a possibly Iron Age, terraced landscape.



Figure 9.25. Large wall at EAS Site 010. *Robert Schon*

### *EAS Site Catalog: Region of Pult*

This region, in terms of geography and how the villages are situated in the landscape, is very similar to Shosh. The houses are built using the same style and show the same adaptations over time, especially on their fronts where the wooden stairs that once led to the second floor and the landings theretofore have been eliminated and replaced by stairs on the interior.

**The Village of Kir.** A trip to the village of Kir, neighborhood of Telash, produced interesting results.<sup>7</sup> As soon as one enters the village, over a hill with chestnut trees, there is an old cemetery with about 20 burials oriented east-west. Two types of grave are present. The first and most prevalent type are simple burials. They were constructed with unworked stone slabs of shale and with two longer slabs of stone erected upright like stelae at the foot and the head of the burial, in Muslim fashion. The second type consists of monumental tombs in the shape of sarcophagi (Figure 9.26), two of which are close to one another while the third stands

alone. These were built of worked stone slabs, decorated with geometric ornaments along with a star and moon. Above the graves lay large crosses of stone carved by those of the Catholic faith. It appears that at some point in the past, they stood upright but had been knocked down and built into the graves. It is possible that the third grave was a mass burial of a family because its dimensions are rather extreme.

At an undetermined time, a water fountain on the side of the mountain was built for public use, employing stone that was chipped and shaped to construct two stairs of stone. Below the fountain, there was also a small basin into which the water was deposited. The house of Vat Arra, located nearby, is old, perhaps over 100 years old, and had suffered a number of later rearrangements. In the front yard of the house, there is an archway of worked limestone; it was removed after the front of the house was reconstructed. It was decorated with geometrical symbols along with two knobs and the Latin cross. There were many wooden beehives in front of the house, and here there was also a large cross made



Figure 9.26. Monumental graves at Kir. *Attila Gyucha*

of wood that was erected along with some other wood sticks on which red rags were hanging. The owner of the house mentioned that the cross was brought from the cemetery and that he had heard that the red rags and cross may protect the bees from the evil eye.

Qyteti is the toponym of a small neighborhood that consists of three to four houses. It is located in front of Telash, below a massive rock formation that rises in the middle of the valley like a gigantic obelisk. The neighborhood consists of a block of small parcels, on different elevations, and suspended on steep, harsh, and terribly rugged terrain, creating the impression of a natural castle whose domain of rule was the entirety of the valley. The houses were abandoned. One of them, located on the highest terrace of the neighborhood, had an architecture that was somewhat different from the others; it had a *çardhak* (corridor, lobby) that was open, made of wood, and located on the front side of the house.

During our survey of the terraces, which were reinforced with strong walls, we found a small hill that was located in the middle of flat and cultivated terrain. Like those at Grunas (in the “northern sector”), this mound was also surrounded with a dry wall, built with medium-sized stones, that seems to belong to later periods. On the surface of the hill, where the dense vegetation made it difficult to see, we noted two architectural features: two dry walls of stone in straight lines. One of these served as a retaining wall for the upper surface of a quadratic building. We must add that the front side of the settlement of “Qyteti” was bounded by a wall that followed the relief contours of a harshly rugged mountainside. We found several tracts of this fortification, which may be of Medieval date based on the construction technique.

**EAS Site 011.** Mark Zefi, who directed us to EAS Site 010, also took us to a cave at the border of Shoshi and Kir. While it seems an ideal spot for temporary or seasonal habitation, no associated artifacts were found.

**EAS Sites 008 and 009: Lower and Upper Pog.** Our furthest area of exploration was the village of Pog in the region of Plan. Most of our time was spent talking to locals, although a few hours of work (4 ha in lower Pog and a 3-km walk in upper Pog) yielded numerous sherds, all of which were Early Modern to Modern in date. One resident (Mirash) pointed out a rock face (similar to IAS Site 007 Dakaj in the Shala Valley) that

he claimed housed the ruins of a structure that included stone stairs, a stone arch, and iron rings embedded in stone, as well. Due to time constraints, however, we were unable to explore that specific area. Rose Wilder Lane told a similar story about Pog while in Pulti in 1921 (1923:33–34).

### *Comparative Settlement Patterns*

The Extensive Archaeological Survey team discovered a range of sites and artifacts from numerous periods. Had we been able to work longer or more intensively, we surely would have found more. Considering our positive results compared to the limited discoveries made by the IAS (despite their systematic, intensive, and well-honed methods), we may assert with a good deal of confidence that Shosh and Pult were more densely settled in the past than was Shala. What is more striking is that this pattern obtains despite very limited agricultural land and taphonomic processes that have certainly obliterated much of the archaeological record (although this latter factor applies equally to the terrain within the Shala Valley as well).

The most promising contribution of the EAS lies in the possible prehistoric relationship of Qafa e Pyllës (EAS Site 003) in Shosh with Grunas (IAS Site 006) in Shala. Likewise, lithic finds at Ndrejaj (EAS Sites 002 and 004), Moll-kuqe/Dardhë (EAS Site 007), and Cilkuk (EAS Site 010) may signal prehistoric (Bronze and/or Iron Age) components. The settings of these sites and their associated landscape features, such as the monumental terrace at Cilkuk and the dry stone wall at Pepsuj (EAS Site 006), provide further, circumstantial evidence for prehistoric occupation. In any case, if a connection between the possible cluster of prehistoric sites in Shosh and Grunas in Theth (and perhaps Dakaj and Gimaj in Shala) is assumed, then we have reconstructed a major piece of a network that presumably began on the plains of Shkodra and terminated at Grunas. The presence of Late Roman material at Kodër i Shën Gjergjit and in Shala may indicate some continuity from prehistoric to historic times, as well. Finally, while the date of the structures discovered at Leparu (EAS Site 005) and Moll-kuqe/Dardhë (EAS Site 007) is difficult to determine, their formal similarity to the Early Modern structures at Grunas is remarkable. If they are Early Modern in date, then the settlement of Shosh likely followed a pattern similar to that in Shala:

initial occupation of preexisting prehistoric terraces, followed by slow expansion and, eventually, complete settlement of the landscape.

The position of this cluster of prehistoric sites, at the crossroads between the Shala River valley and the approach to Shkodra via the Kir River, is significant. These loci stand in stark contrast to the seeming isolation of Grunas. Were Dakaj and Grunas in Shala, with their fortified and secluded positions, refuge sites for the prehistoric inhabitants of Shosh? Shala and Shosh appear to have been settled simultaneously, beginning in the Late Bronze Age. Did they together control one route from Shkodra to Montenegro and on to Kosova, via Shala and the Qafë Peja? A second link between the regions of Shosh and Shala may be evident during the Late Roman period. Ceramics at the ruined church at Kodër i Shën Gjergjit may find parallels at Dakaj and elsewhere in Shala. Finally, it is likely that processes of landscape formation and Medieval to Modern settlement growth and organization in Shala, Theth in particular, as described in Chapters Four to Eight, were mirrored in Shosh and Pult, with indications that the latter regions may have been even more susceptible to systems perturbations that originated outside the region.

## Conclusion

Intensive archaeological survey and test excavations in Shala indicate that occupation was not continuous; rather, it was punctuated (Figure 1.13). During some periods, the region was heavily settled, while in others only lightly, and probably on a temporary basis (e.g., only during the summer season). The valley's settlement systems shifted through time as well, from nucleated to dispersed. Population density and systems of settlement responded in part to changes in climate through time; we have already described in some detail the effects of the Little Ice Age (see Chapter Three). But climate was not the only factor that conditioned patterns of human adaptation in Shala. How Shala's various, dynamic landscapes were used and modified, and to what ends, depended in large measure on its position and stance within larger systems of interaction. Networked strategies of interaction produced certain forms of settlement and land use, whereas relative isolation led to others (although in no period were the people of Shala fully isolated from the outside world). The archaeological data we have collected (along with historical and

ethnographic data for later periods) allow us to track these changes through time and explain them.

The Shala Valley was first exploited by humans in the Middle Paleolithic period, probably during OIS 5 (see above), when the mountains were relatively free of ice. Even today, northern Albania shelters remnant glaciers (Hughes and Woodward 2009), so the area would have been inaccessible during the Pleistocene, including and especially during the Last Glacial Maximum. Consequently, whereas there is evidence for relatively dense Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic settlement in the region of Shkodra,<sup>8</sup> there is no evidence for occupation of the high mountains during these periods. This is in contrast to other Mediterranean countries where mountain zones were exploited during the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic—for example, Greece (Bailey 1997), Italy (various articles in Biagi and Nandris 1994), and Montenegro (Mihailović 1999). We can say little about what Neanderthals were doing in Shala, but almost certainly they were there to hunt. However, given the small number of artifacts found, the Middle Paleolithic occupation of Shala must have been short-lived, involving small numbers of individuals, and was perhaps expedient. Shala likely did not fit into wider systems of regional, (semi-)logistical foraging described for Neanderthals for other parts of the Balkans (Runnels and van Andel 2003; cf. Galaty 2006). While the artifacts collected from IAS Site 001 may mark a location of relatively intensive Middle Paleolithic activity, perhaps a destroyed rock shelter, very few additional artifacts were collected out in the wider landscape. This, too, is in contrast to other Mediterranean regions, including central Albania, where there tend to be large numbers of off-site stray finds dating to the Middle Paleolithic (Cherry and Parkinson 2003; Parkinson and Cherry 2010). The short-term, expedient nature of the Middle Paleolithic occupation of Shala is further reflected in the lithic assemblage. The Levallois-Mousterian tools of Shala are much larger, on average, than those of any other assemblage analyzed in Albania (R. Ruka, personal communication, May 2011). This is a direct result of the expedient use of local raw materials, the coarse-grained black Thethi limestone in particular. Despite access to excellent flint in nearby regions (see above), including the Kir River valley,<sup>9</sup> none of the Middle Paleolithic artifacts from Shala were made from high-quality, imported flint. By comparison, Middle Paleolithic artifacts from the Postribë region of Shkodra



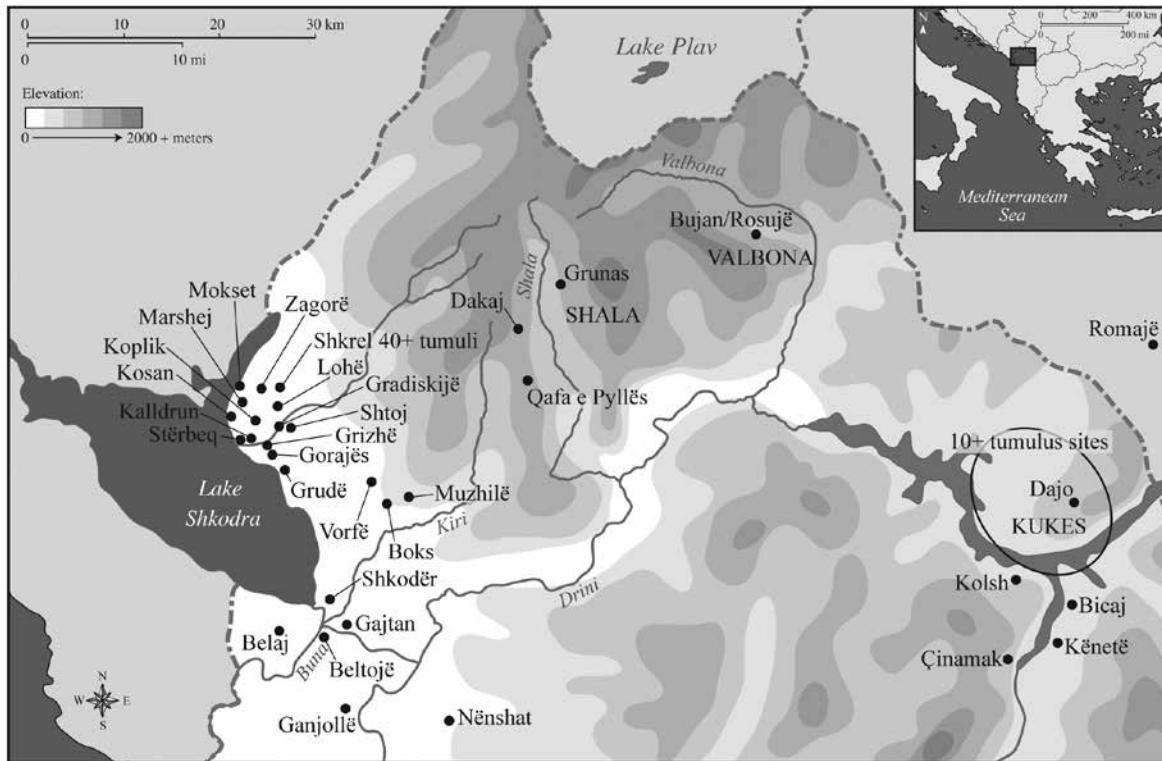


Figure 9.27. Map of the wider region of northern Albania and adjacent countries showing the locations of prehistoric sites contemporaneous with Grunas. Note the clusters in Shkodra and Kukës. *Jill Seagard*

are always made from high-quality flints, especially a fine, black-and-tan flint from the lower reaches of the Kir.<sup>10</sup> Unlike later periods, during the Middle Paleolithic, humans had not yet formulated systems of behavior that allowed or necessitated systematic exploitation of the high mountains. It was not until the Late Bronze Age that this occurred.

There appears to have been a long settlement hiatus in Shala, lasting from the Neolithic through the Copper and Bronze ages. In the low-lying areas near Shkodra, there is also no evidence for Neolithic occupation, so Shala may fit a larger regional pattern. At the start of the Copper Age (ca. 3500 B.C.) and in the Early Bronze Age, in particular, settlement near Shkodra, and along the length of the eastern Adriatic, exploded, characterized by relatively large villages, some open and some hill forts, and, beginning in the Early Bronze Age and continuing through the Iron Age, burial of high-status individuals in tumuli (burial mounds) (Galaty et al. 2012). The same changes in social complexity occurred also in nearby regions such as Montenegro and Kosova, and there must have been some traffic and trade between them (Galaty et al. 2012). Shala does not appear, however, to have been occupied during this period of

growth and expansion closer to the coast. If humans visited the valley during this period, they left no trace of their presence.

It was during the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age that Grunas was built.<sup>11</sup> During this time, the “Illyrian” tribes coalesced (Galaty 2002), and the first proto-urban centers emerged at places such as Gajtan, near Shkodra (Figure 9.27) (Galaty 2007; Galaty and Lafe 2008; Lafe and Galaty 2009).<sup>12</sup> The Illyrian tribes appear to have competed with one another for control of key trade routes that connected the Adriatic coast to areas of importance on the interior, such as Kosova. It was in this context that Grunas was designed and constructed, meant to control a secondary route of travel through the mountains. Grunas, as well as Iron Age Shala in general, is discussed in much more detail in Chapter Ten. Suffice it to say here that Shala’s late prehistoric settlement pattern was very different from that of Medieval to Modern Shala. First, Iron Age settlement in the valley was highly nucleated (Figure 1.13), confined to Dakaj and Grunas, as well as Qafa e Pyllës in Shosh. Almost no off-site prehistoric pottery was recovered via intensive survey (Figure 9.28). An inordinate amount of labor was poured into Dakaj and Grunas to make them





Figure 9.28. Map showing tracts and sites from which prehistoric pottery was recovered. *Jill Seagard*

habitable and to take advantage of their key strategic and defensive characteristics. The effort was communal and must have involved large numbers of people. It is quite likely that these people were “Illyrians” who hailed from the coast and traveled up the valley of the Kir each summer with their animals. Second, their economy was

primarily pastoral, obviously lacking the New World crops available to Shala’s modern inhabitants. The inhabitants of Grunas may have logistically accessed pasture land in Shala, but they did not need to bring large areas of land under cultivation through intensified investment in the physical landscape (Figure 1.13), such as widespread terracing and the construction of irrigation canals. Third and finally, and of key importance, the Iron Age inhabitants of Shala experienced no incorporative pressure (Figure 1.13). No empires sought to conquer them; rather, they were defending themselves from other, similar peoples. Because of this, and because they could move more freely into and out of the mountains, they did not produce (or require) the complex sociopolitical systems of modern Shala, which had such a dramatic, indelible effect on the landscapes of the valley.

Following the abandonment of Grunas, archaeological data suggest another lengthy settlement hiatus in Shala that began sometime around the time of the Roman conquest (Figure 1.13). This is no coincidence. When the Illyrian tribes were incorporated into the Roman Empire, they lost access to (or interest in) the mountains. Interestingly, Shala did not become a “region of refuge” for Illyrian populations as it did for Catholics during the Ottoman conquest. This is almost certainly because the Iron Age adaptation to the mountain environment of Shala was not resilient in the same way the Medieval adaptation was. Returning to the definition of resilience employed in Chapter One—“the ability of a system to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic form” (McAnany and Yoffee 2009:10)—Iron Age Shala could not survive being severed from the coast. The Romans fortified and controlled the Lissus-Naissus Road as the key avenue of trade and travel in and out of the mountains—by doing so, they knocked seasonal transhumance out of the Iron Age system; in Shala, the system collapsed, or morphed, and the valley was deserted. Furthermore, as a settlement, Grunas had provided people access to pastures, but its primary function as a fortification was to defend and control a particular route through the mountains, to the advantage of those who lived there. The Romans would have actively discouraged such behavior, choosing to defend and control the mountains themselves.

It was not until the collapse of Byzantine (“Late Roman”) power in the region, between A.D. 300 and 600, associated with the migration of various peoples into

Shala Valley Project 2008  
P504



Figure 9.29. Possible Early Medieval potsherd P504, excavated at Grunas. *Adnan Bushati, Ann Christine Eek, and Jill Seagard*

and through the Bjeshkët e Namuna, including various Slavic tribes, that people returned to Shala, probably in relatively small numbers. Reoccupation may have been stimulated by Justinian's attempts to refortify, retake, and defend the Balkans. Dakaj was reoccupied (and this may account for the legend of Maritius and the non-Albanian Mavriqi), and a settlement or waystation may have been established in what is today Theth, at IAS Site 004. But the Late Roman settlement of Shala was ephemeral and may have been intermittent. It was not until Medieval times that permanent settlement returned to the valley.

We collected only a very small number of potsherds that may date to the Early Medieval period. Two of these are from Grunas and are almost certainly from the same pot (P498 and 504; Figure 9.29). Others are from Dakaj, but none are securely dated to the Early Medieval period. One (P439) is very similar in form and decoration to P504. (These sherds will be discussed again in Chapter Ten.) It seems likely that there were a small number of people living in Shala during the Early Medieval period. Whether they were newcomers, perhaps Slavs, or descendants of Late Roman inhabitants is unclear, but this scenario fits the documentary and oral historical data presented in Chapter Four. Sometime later (as early as 1335; see Chapter Four), Catholic churches and an abbey were built in Shala, and these must have been constructed to serve an existing, albeit small, population. What is most fascinating about this process is that churches were positioned at or close to places where Late Roman and later Early Medieval presences are archaeologically attested: at Dakaj and in Theth, in particular. Nearly all of the Late Medieval pottery collected in the course of the archaeological survey is clustered in the vicinity of these churches (Figure 9.30). It seems that the Late Medieval settlement of Shala was

nucleated around churches and then spread from these initial settlement loci as time passed and populations grew and expanded (Figure 1.13). This process also was spurred by a nearly continuous flow of refugees who made their way into Shala. As new *fis* segments and new neighborhoods were created, settlement expanded. This process, which was tracked historically, ethnographically, and architecturally in Chapters Four, Five, and Seven, can also be seen archaeologically, when ceramic data are mapped (Figures 9.30–9.32). From Late Medieval beginnings, Early Modern settlement spread to nearby tracts, as indicated by the distribution of Early Modern pottery (Figure 9.31). Modern pottery is found throughout the whole of the valley, in all extant neighborhoods (Figure 9.32).

It was during this time, beginning circa A.D. 1500, that the sustainable, resilient systems described in previous chapters were created, facilitated by the Little Ice Age (Figure 1.13) and the introduction of maize. At first, Early Modern settlers may have exploited existing, prehistoric terrace systems, as at Grunas and perhaps IAS Site 008 (Gimaj) in Shala and various locales in Shosh and Pult. This was a smart strategy initially, but eventually inhabitants had to construct terraces of their own, which were not nearly as large as those at Grunas but allowed intensified production of maize and other crops as the system of mixed-village farming expanded. The first irrigation canals probably were constructed during this time as well, since many existing canals pass through or have been incorporated into old house compounds. Terracing and irrigation likely were introduced following the Ottoman conquest, not earlier, since these forms of land intensification were undertaken on a grand scale during Ottoman times throughout the Empire. We can therefore trace the expansion of dispersed settlement and intensified investment in the built



Figure 9.30. Map showing tracts and sites from which Late Medieval pottery was recovered. *Jill Seagard*

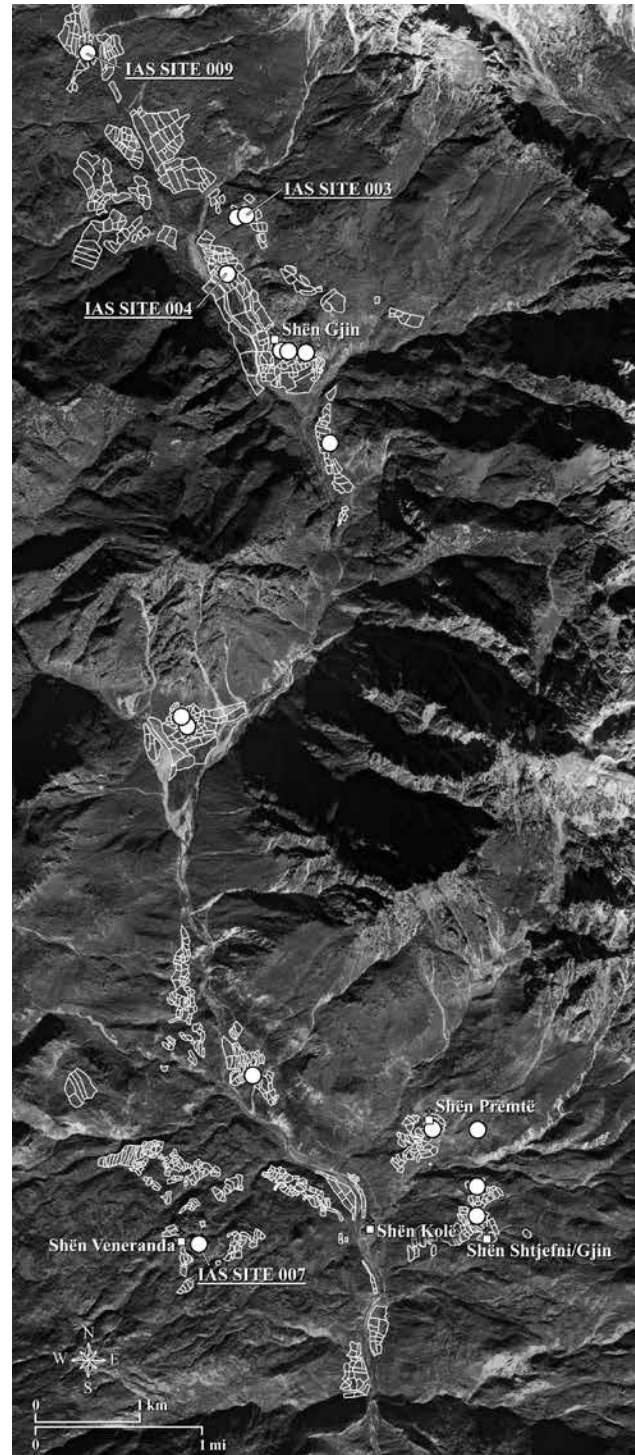


Figure 9.31. Map showing tracts and sites from which Early Modern pottery was recovered. *Jill Seagard*

landscape as modern times pass (Figure 1.13). Interestingly, there is very little evidence for the importation of foreign pottery, with the exception of a few possibly Venetian wares; nevertheless, as argued in Chapter Six, the products necessary to fulfill hospitality rules—coffee, sugar, white bread, salt, tobacco—and to maintain

a viable household—felted cloth, ammunition, matches, iron, and so on—must have been acquired outside the valley. Pottery was probably obtained from local sources, such as Drisht (see above), but apparently was also manufactured at Dakaj. The picture thus painted through an analysis of the archaeological data is one of

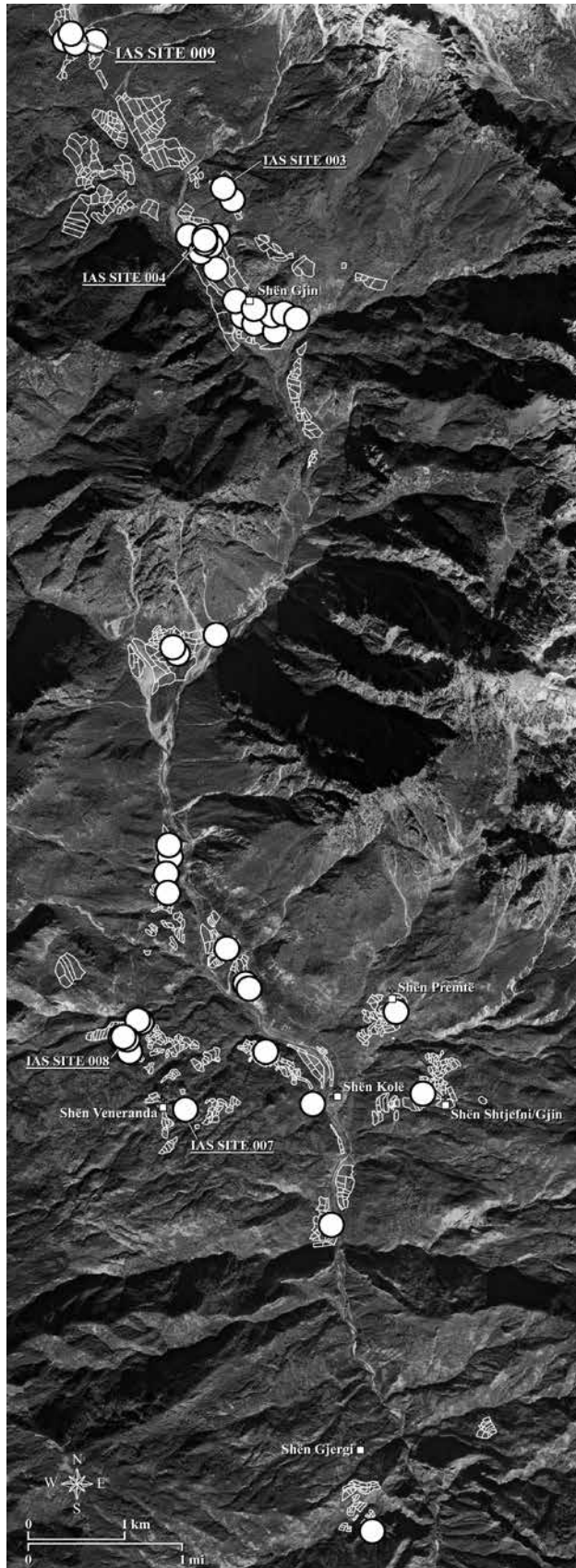


Figure 9.32. Map showing tracts and sites from which Modern pottery was recovered. *Jill Seagard*

independence but not necessarily isolation. All evidence points to a form of strategic isolationism that was quite different from earlier periods but bears striking similarities to conditions in frontier zones elsewhere in the world. Comparative analysis will be attempted in Chapter Eleven, but first we turn to a detailed discussion of the excavation results from Grunas.

## Notes

1 This section is the work of Michael L. Galaty, Ols Lefe, and Charles Watkinson.

2 All database and GIS files, as well as logbooks, drawings, maps, and photographs, generated through intensive and extensive archaeological survey and excavation, are available for download from the SVP archive, hosted by the Archaeology Data Service: [http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/archive/svp\\_mellon\\_2009/](http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/archive/svp_mellon_2009/).

3 These analyses were performed by Timothy Ward and Jiyun Gu. PXR analysis identified four lithic chemical groups, two of which, C and D, are composed of limestones and black cherts, both of which are local to Shala. Groups A and B are composed of fine, more widely circulated cherts.

4 These analyses were performed by Timothy Ward, Jiyun Gu, Nadia Al Hashimi, Erin Redman, and Christie Kokel. Acid digestion followed by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) identified several chemical compositional groups. Half of the coarse sherds from Dakaj fall into a group particular to Grunas and are presumably prehistoric. The others fall into their own group and are presumably Medieval and later, or represent a different, prehistoric compositional group, specific to Dakaj. These results are discussed in more detail in Chapter Ten.

5 In 2011, the Projekti Arkeologjik i Shkodrës (PASH), an intensive regional survey directed by Galaty and Lorenc Bejko of the University of Tirana, collected numerous Late Medieval potsherds from the site of Drisht that are identical in terms of fabric to those from Dakaj. Samples from Drisht are being analyzed in the Keck Center to determine if they are chemically similar as well. A chemical match would prove a direct connection between Dakaj and Drisht, mountain to plain, during the Late Medieval period, with interesting geopolitical implications.

6 This section is the work of Robert Schon and Zamir Tafilica.

7 The visit to Kir took place on July 18, 2007, after Schon had departed Albania, and included Tafilica, Attila Gyucha, and Anisa Selimi. Their local guide was Vart Arra, aged 70.

8 These have been collected by PASH and are as yet unpublished.

9 As also documented by PASH, but as yet unpublished.

10 PASH has recovered numerous Levallois-Mousterian tools in the course of two years of intensive survey (2010 and 2011) in the commune of Postribë, near the city of Shkodra.

11 Throughout this book, we have elided the boundary between the Bronze and Iron Ages. Whereas this transition is a key one in Greece, which occurs about 1100 B.C., it is far less pronounced in Albania. There is, for example, no “collapse”;

rather, settlement expands. As a result, the shift from Bronze Age to Iron Age happens as early as 1000 B.C. in south Albania and later in the north.

12 Site data for Figure 9.27 were drawn from Andrea (1984, 1986, 1987, 1995, 1996), Bela (1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1990a, 1990b, 1992), Bela and Perzhita (1990),

Ceka and Jubani (1971), Hoti (1975, 1981, 1982), Hoxha and Lahi (1988), Jubani (1966, 1968, 1969, 1971a, 1971b, 1974a, 1974b, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1986, 1991, 1992, 1995), Koka (1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1990a, 1990b), Korkuti (1967, 1972), Lahi (1987, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1995), Lahi and Hoxha (1987), and Prendi (1958a, 1958b, 1984, 1987).



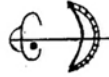


## Chapter Ten

# GRUNAS

Michael L. Galaty, Zamir Taflica, Christopher T. Fisher, Wayne E. Lee,  
Attila Gyucha, and Robert Schon

with contributions by William A. Parkinson, Timothy J. Ward, Richard W. Yerkes, Susan E. Allen,  
Michelle Elliott, Hanneke Hoekman-Sites, Heather A. Rypkema, Jiyan Gu,  
Nadia D. Al Hashimi, Christopher D. Horne, Christie L. Kokel, and James E. Thompson



The various data collected by the Shala Valley Project, presented in the previous chapters, all support identical conclusions: the modern inhabitants of Shala sought refuge in the high mountains of northern Albania just prior to the final Ottoman conquest; levels of isolation and interaction did not hold constant but rather waxed and waned through time; and complex, interconnected systems of settlement and exchange allowed people to survive, and sometimes thrive, in a harsh, unforgiving environment. But the ancestors of the current residents of Shala were not

the first to live there. Excavation results from the site of Grunas (IAS Site 006) amply demonstrate that prehistoric peoples also occupied the remote mountain valleys of northern Albania, although their way of life was quite different from that of modern Shala. Their settlements were large, nucleated, and defensible, and they engaged and modified the landscapes of Shala in very different ways. Their agricultural economy was pastoral; missing were the New World crops upon which Shala's modern inhabitants depend. And occupation was seasonal, confined to the summer months. Prehistoric



Figure 10.1. Largest, westernmost terrace wall at Grunas. *Ann Christine Eek*



peoples traveled to Shala each spring to access high-altitude pastures but also to control key routes of trade. The latter endeavor would have been especially lucrative.

This chapter presents the results of three campaigns of excavation at Grunas (in 2006, 2007, and 2008).<sup>1</sup> Excavation data, along with the results of various specialist analyses, allow us to paint a detailed picture of life there, from the time of the site's construction to the point of abandonment. The terraces at Grunas are huge (Figure 10.1). They were built to block and redirect a tributary stream, rendering the location—a steep, jutting ridge that looks from below like the prow of a huge ship (Figures 10.2 and 10.3)—usable. And the site was once surrounded by a fortification wall, now collapsed. It was a massive engineering project, completed in a short time, and must have required the labor of many. We can assume, therefore, that Grunas was well populated. Analysis of wood remains shows that nearby pine forests were quickly depleted, further testifying to a rather large population, or at least the need for great amounts of certain kinds of wood, pine in particular. The most common artifact recovered at Grunas was pottery, followed

by chipped stone tools. Chemical analyses of ceramic and lithic artifacts, as introduced in Chapter Nine, indicate trade connections south, with Shosh. Residue analysis of pottery points to herding, as does faunal analysis, whereas botanical evidence indicates that wheat was imported to Shala already threshed. The residents of Grunas lived there during the summer, raised sheep and goats, and brought their grain with them. They did not need to bring into agricultural production, via intensification, the wider region of Theth; rather, they used the valley extensively, and labor investments beyond Grunas were limited. Consequently, settlement was nucleated. Soil phosphate analysis indicates patterns of occupation within the walls of Grunas that are not entirely like the permanent, year-round settlement in stone houses or the seasonal occupation in *stanë* at high-altitude pastures that obtain today. Grunas lay somewhere in between these two settlement types. Humans lived in huts on the western part of the site while animals were kept separately, on the eastern part of site.

The radical differences in settlement and land use that separate the prehistoric and modern periods in



Figure 10.2. Photo from below and to the south of Grunas, looking north and up at the site, which is located on the spur of land at center.  
Wayne E. Lee



Figure 10.3. Photo of Grunas, 1938. Note the trail to right. *Shan Pici*, used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania

Shala were addressed in part in the conclusion to Chapter Nine. Excavation data from Grunas help explain more fully these differences. In both periods, people adapted to a broadly similar landscape, but the nature of their adaptations, while stable and resilient, varied in response to completely different external environments. During prehistory, Shala's residents were integrated into and moved through a wider world. It was a dangerous world, but one that they controlled. During modern times, Shala's residents faced a world that was wider still, but hostile and belligerent, one in which an axial empire sought to conquer and incorporate the Mediterranean's disparate peoples. Shala's Catholic residents had no choice but to live in the mountains year-round, and their strategy of isolationism dictated the structure of their particular tribal society. The fact that prehistoric and modern Shala look so very different archaeologically points to the power of interaction, or the lack thereof, to build, warp, or destroy nations. That modern, Catholic Shala survived at all is something of a miracle.

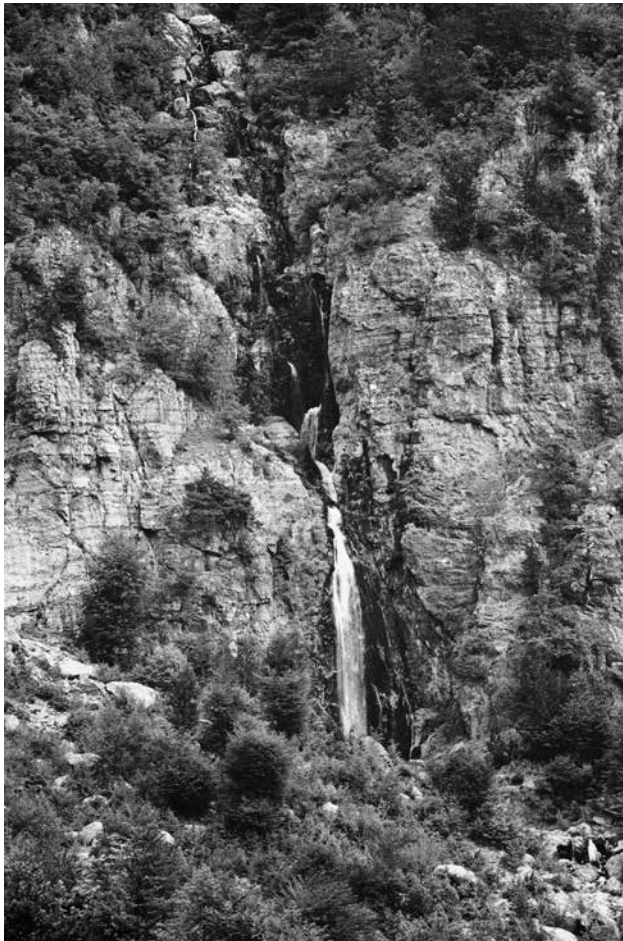
## Discovery

At the tail end of the 2005 field season, we identified a small architectural complex—designated IAS Site 006—at the southernmost tip of the neighborhood of Grunas in Theth (Figure 2.2). The EHS team noted that Structure 001 at Site 006 was unlike any other known structure in Theth. Given that the structures at Grunas were unique, and given its dramatic setting and unusually large terraces, we decided to target the site for future excavation. Test excavations were conducted in 2006 and 2007 and produced good evidence—including diagnostic pottery, lithics, and several accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) radiocarbon dates (Table 10.1)—for three phases of site settlement and use: (1) an initial foundation at the end of the Late Bronze Age or beginning of the Early Iron Age (sometime prior to 800 B.C. calibrated), at which time the site's large terraces were constructed; (2) occupation through the Early and into the Developed Iron Age (circa 800–400 B.C. calibrated), with abandonment sometime prior to

**Table 10.1** AMS Calibrated Radiocarbon Dates from Grunas, IAS Site 006, 2006–2008 (Beta Analytic, Inc., Miami, Florida)

Beta No.	Year	Unit, Level	Date Range (2 Sigmas)	Average or Intercept	Material
Beta-222000	2006	Unit 003, Level 003	cal A.D. 1650–1880	A.D. 1765	Charred material
Beta-222001	2006	Unit 003, Level 004	cal B.C. 840–790	810 B.C.	Charred material
Beta-237574	2007	Unit 001, Level 010	cal B.C. 770–410	590 B.C.	Charred material
Beta-237576	2007	Unit 001, Level 017	cal B.C. 4460–4340	4360 B.C.	Organic material
Beta-249585	2008	Unit 003, Level 005	cal B.C. 790–510	650 B.C.	Charred material
Beta-249588	2008	Unit 003, Level 060	cal B.C. 800–720	770 B.C.	Charred material
Beta-249910	2008	Unit 003, Level 008	cal B.C. 760–390	410 B.C.	Charred material
Beta-249587	2008	Unit 003, Level 010	cal B.C. 910–790	820 B.C.	Charred material

the Roman conquest of northern Albania (which began in 229 B.C.); and (3) a Medieval reoccupation, sometime after which the stone structures at the site were built.<sup>2</sup> These results were confirmed and amplified by larger-scale excavations conducted in 2008.



**Figure 10.4.** Waterfall above Grunas. *Ann Christine Eek*

## Survey and Mapping

In 2008, we completed an intensive, digital topographic and architectural survey of the site. Preliminary mapping of terraces and walls at Grunas, in 2005 and 2006, as well as a complete geoarchaeological assessment conducted in 2007—focused on the site’s soil pedology—had convinced us that the terraces, some of them extremely large, were original to the site and that it had been fortified in prehistory. The terrace walls block a tributary gorge of the stream that stems from a large waterfall and runs along the eastern edge of the site (Figures 10.4 and 10.5). Their construction would have been a complex project, demanding careful planning and large amounts of labor but apparently, given the defensive characteristics of the locale, worth the effort. The site is bordered on the west by the Shala River, which passes through a deep gorge at this point, and is protected by steep cliffs. The spur of land on which the site is situated comes to a point at its southern end, which looks out over the lower, southern part of the valley. Grunas is located therefore in a defensible position at a natural choke point in the valley. The only trail from southern to northern Shala—which predates construction of the modern gravel road—scales the cliffs to the south and runs alongside the eastern flank of the site (Figure 10.6). Its occupants could have easily controlled access to the northern reaches of Shala by controlling this trail.

In a winter trip to Theth in January 2008, when the leaves had fallen from the trees and surface vegetation had died off, we were able to trace nearly in full the fortification walls that once bounded Grunas on the east and west, all of which have collapsed or were reused

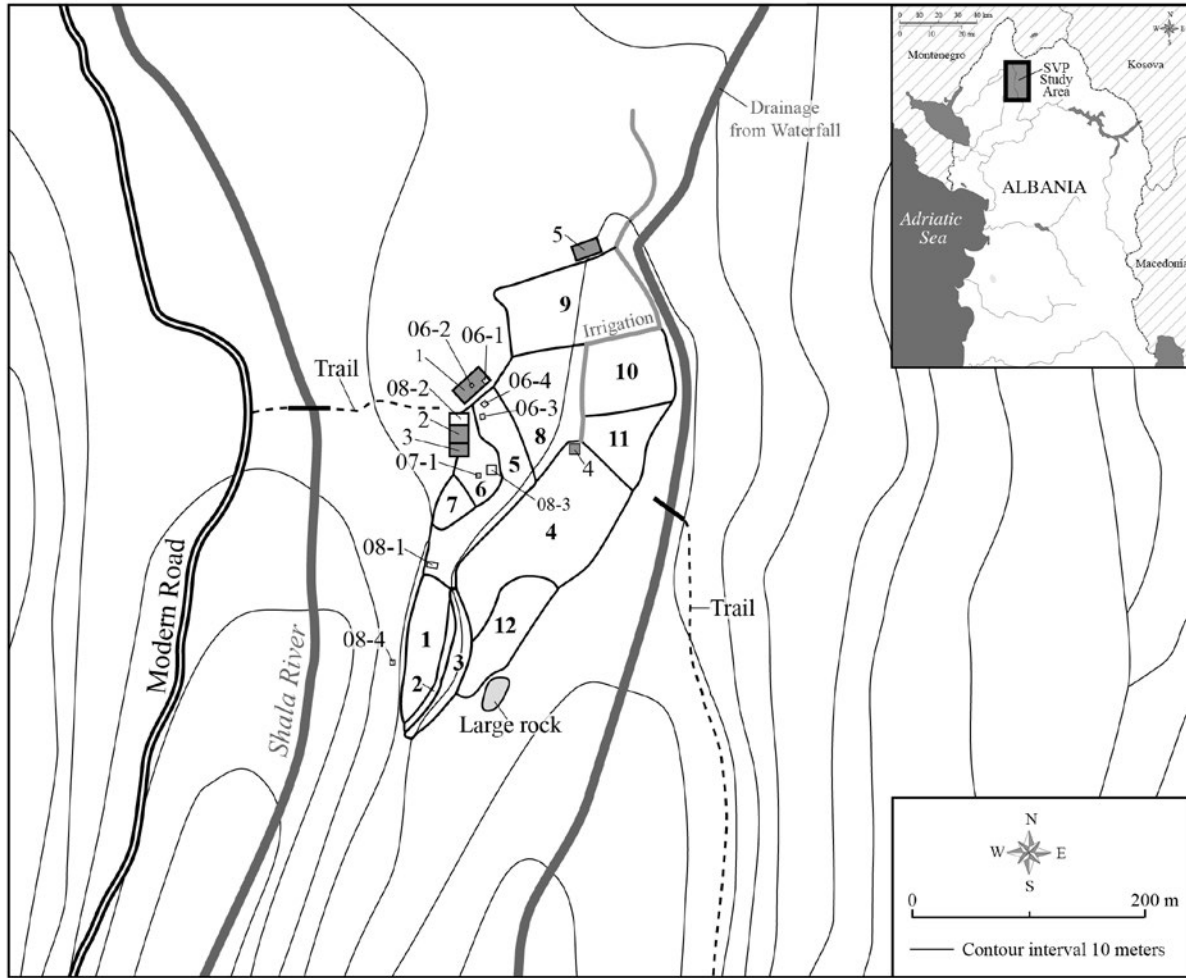


Figure 10.5. Map of the site of Grunas. Dashed numbers indicate excavation units; individual terraced platforms enumerated in boldface; single digit numbers not in boldface refer to individual structures. *Christopher T. Fisher and Jill Seagard*

in the construction of a modern irrigation/mill canal. At the same time, at least one clearly defensive flanking wall was found at the northwest corner of the site. This short wall runs perpendicular to the main western terrace/fortification wall and was designed to prevent easy access to the narrow path that runs along the length and at the base of the western wall.

To produce a high-resolution topographic map of the site and to properly map the site's collapsed fortification walls, a Trimble TTS 500 Total Station and data collector were brought into the field in 2008. Three hundred forty-eight control points were measured across the site. These data were used to generate a digital elevation model using Golden's Surfer 7.0 software. Data interpolation was managed through application of a standard Kriging algorithm. The two- and three-dimensional maps thereby produced (Figures 10.7 and 10.8) demonstrate conclusively the defensive character of the

site and clearly depict the secondary stream bed and gully that were blocked in prehistory to allow Iron Age engineers to build the terraces at Grunas.

When Grunas was first discovered, we considered the possibility that the terraces there, albeit very large, were built during the Communist period, when relatively low, broad terraces were constructed throughout the valley in an effort to promote the planting of fruit trees. Notwithstanding the difficulty of bringing heavy earth-moving equipment to Grunas, the terraces could have been constructed at the request of Communist officials and the soil, packed with prehistoric artifacts, brought in from elsewhere. For a variety of reasons, we now think that there is zero possibility that the terraces at Grunas were built during the Communist period. First of all, in ethnographic interviews, older men did not recall ever building, or even maintaining, the large terraces on which many of their houses were constructed,





Figure 10.6. The old trail from south to north Shala that runs below and along the eastern flank of Grunas. *Wayne E. Lee*

let alone those at Grunas. Second, aerial photos of Shala taken in 1957 and acquired from the Albanian military do not depict the terraces that were constructed later, after private land was collectivized, but the terraces at Grunas are clearly visible (Figure 10.9). Third, our mapping project and subsequent excavation of a terrace (Unit 2008-001, see below) indicate that the terraces at Grunas must have been constructed together, at once, working from the lowest, largest terrace up (from west to east)—that is, they were not built piecemeal, through time. Some smaller terraces and platforms may have been added later, and the tops of terrace walls may have been repaired through the addition of courses, but there must have been an overall plan for the settlement, which was executed in prehistory. In addition, the stone structures at the site—houses, a mill and canal, and a watering “tank” (see Figure 10.5)—must have been added later, in modern times, because they were built into or on top of existing terraces. Finally, in 2007, we excavated a 1 × 1-m sondage (Unit 2007-001) to the

bottom of a terrace (Terrace 6) and radiocarbon dated an organic sample from a buried A-horizon preserved under the terrace fill. This sample dated to 4460 to 4340 B.C. calibrated. There therefore seems to be little chance that the terraces at Grunas were built recently.

We also wondered how the terraces were employed in prehistory. They clearly functioned to render the ridge top usable, by redirecting the stream and flattening the topography. But they also must have had additional functions. It does not seem as though they were used for agricultural purposes, for growing grain, for instance. Botanical evidence from the site makes this unlikely (see below), and if the occupants had wanted to grow grain, they would have been better off planting crops up river, on the relatively flat ground near the church, for instance (see discussion in Chapter Six). Constructing the huge terraces at Grunas seems like an awful lot of work to produce a couple hectares of farmland, particularly when the soil to fill the terraces initially would have been brought to the site from

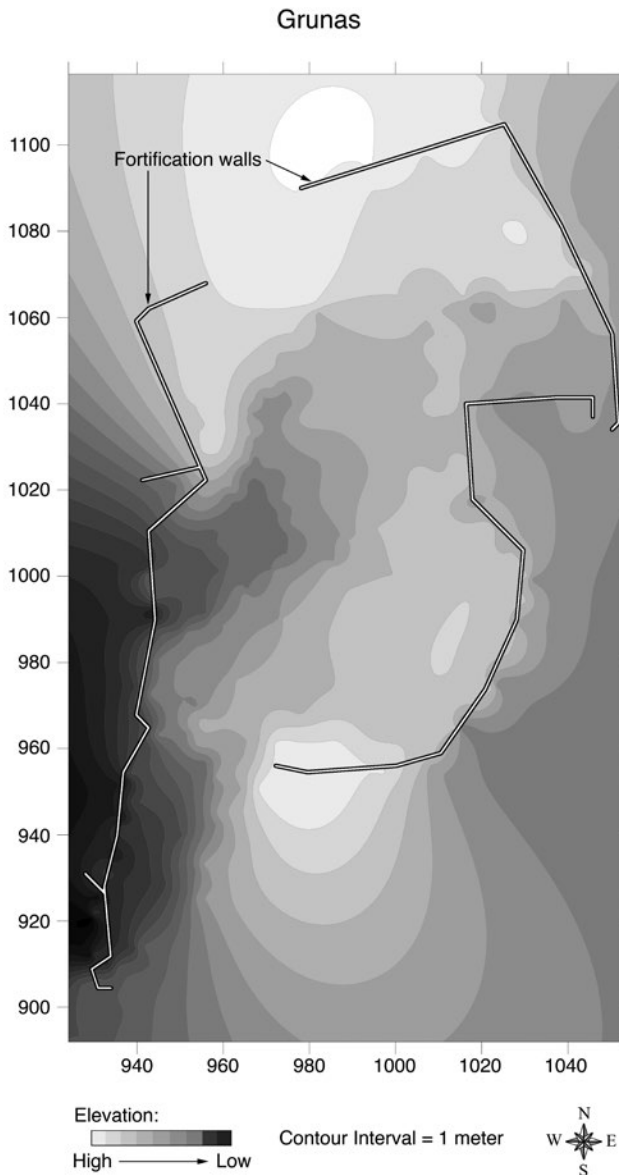


Figure 10.7. Contour map of Grunas. *Jill Seagard*

elsewhere (as described below). We now believe that the lower, westernmost terraces (e.g., Terraces 5, 6, 7, and perhaps 1; see Figure 10.5) supported large huts that would have been seasonally rebuilt. The upper, easternmost terraces or “platforms” (e.g., Terraces 4, 8, 9) may have been open, working or gathering spaces. Currently, they contain very little soil. Any soil that had been there appears to have been eroded onto the lower terraces during occasional spring floods, when the stream overtopped the eastern terraces and washed across the site, following the course of the former gully. These areas also might have been used to pen domestic animals, and several soil samples from Terrace 4 did

have very high phosphate levels (see below). Terrace 10, which opens onto the stream to the east of the site, is still used today for the purpose of penning animals and also has produced very high phosphate levels. High phosphate levels in these areas may well be due to modern grazing, however, and in prehistory, animals may have been kept primarily off-site, in higher altitude pastures. It seems, then, that the most plausible function for the terraces at Grunas was that they were living and working spaces, occupied by a fairly large number of people. This conclusion was borne out through excavation and various other specialist studies.

## Excavation Results

Excavations were conducted at Grunas in 2006, 2007, and 2008 (see Figure 10.5). In 2006, two test units were excavated in Structure 001 (one 1 × 1 m and one .5 × .5 m), and two 1 × 1-m test units and 11 shovel tests were excavated on Terrace 5. Excavations in Structure 001 produced no artifacts. Excavations in Terrace 5 produced prehistoric pottery and lithic artifacts (e.g., P195, a rim, and L031, a small flake of tan/gray imported chert; see Figures 10.16 and 10.18) and, from Unit 2006-003, Level 004, a radiocarbon date of 810 B.C. calibrated (Table 10.1). In 2007, a single 1 × 1-m test unit was excavated. This unit was dug in Terrace 6 down to the buried A-horizon upon which it was originally built. This sondage gave us a good look at the stratigraphy of Terrace 6, which was essential to the larger scale excavations we conducted in 2008. In 2008, we dug four units: Unit 2008-001, a 1 × 2-m trench dug against the lower, western terrace/fortification wall; Unit 2008-002 in Structure 002; Unit 2008-003, a 4 × 4-m unit dug on Terrace 6; and Unit 2008-004, a 1 × 1-m unit dug on the ledge below the lowest, westernmost terrace wall.

In all excavation units, we followed natural stratigraphy. When natural stratigraphy could not be followed, we dug in 10-cm arbitrary levels. All dirt was screened through ¼-inch mesh. In Units 2008-001 to 2008-003, an approximately one-gallon soil sample was taken from each level using the so-called pinch method. These soil samples were later bucket floated and water screened through fine mesh. Artifacts found in situ were point-provenienced using the Total Station. Large charcoal samples found in situ were likewise point-provenienced and collected for radiocarbon testing and wood species identification.

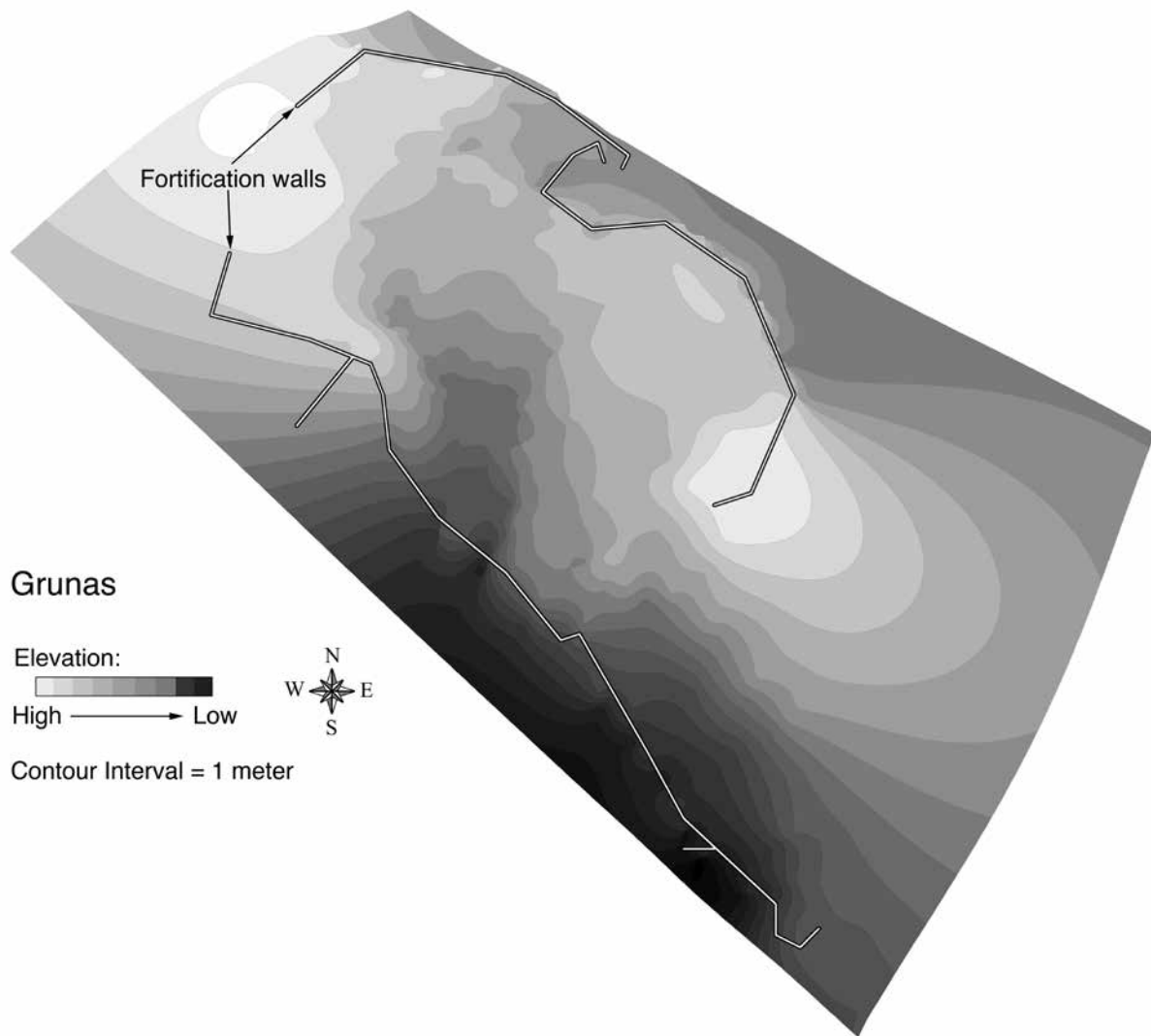


Figure 10.8. Three-dimensional perspective map of Grunas. *Jill Seagard*

### *Unit 2008-001*

Unit 2008-001 was excavated to determine the construction sequence of the lowest, westernmost, and largest terrace/fortification wall at Grunas (Figure 10.10). The unit measured  $1 \times 2$  m, extending 2 m to the east from the interior face of the wall. The terrace walls at Grunas are of “megalithic” construction, with large boulders comprising their base and with smaller rocks in the upper courses. The unit was situated to allow views of the inner face of the terrace wall and the terrace’s internal structure.

Unit 2008-001 produced additional evidence that the terraces at Grunas were built in a single phase of construction at the end of the Bronze Age. Large rocks served as a sloping buttress meant to support the slightly inward-leaning terrace wall from the inside.<sup>3</sup> In fact,

much of the terrace itself was constructed using boulders, which formed a shallow, concave cavity designed to hold soil. This soil was almost certainly brought to the terraces from elsewhere; it did not form in situ.

### *Unit 2008-002*

Heading into the 2008 excavation season, we were still unsure whether the stone structures at Grunas were original to the site or had been constructed later, perhaps in the Medieval or Early Modern period. Units 2006-001 and 2006-002,  $1 \times 1$ -m and  $.5 \times .5$ -m test pits excavated in Structure 001, had produced no artifactual evidence pointing to the building’s construction date, perhaps because it had been reused recently as a *stan* and had been cleaned out. As a result, Unit 2008-002 was





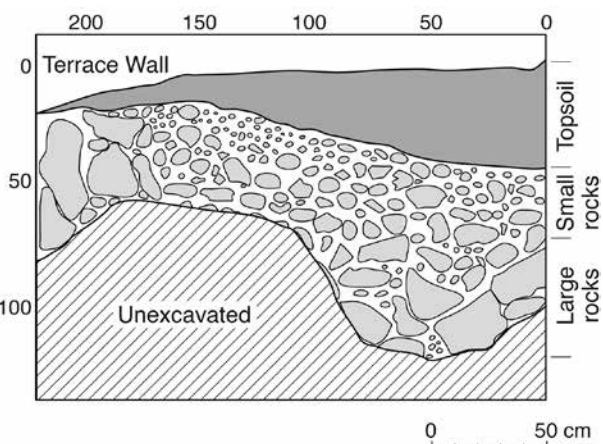
**Figure 10.9.** Cropped aerial photo of Shala taken in 1957 showing the large terraces at Grunas. *Courtesy of the Albanian government*

excavated to settle this question, to determine whether the structures at Grunas had been built in prehistoric or recent times. The unit measured  $2.26 \times 4$  m and was situated within the northern third of Structure 002 (Figures 10.5 and 10.11). Large boulders had been used to construct the original north, east, and west walls of the

building. A modern wall of smaller, loose stones formed the south wall of the unit. As it turns out, once wall fall was removed, only a thin layer of soil, just above bedrock, remained in the structure. This soil included a significant amount of decomposed limestone mortar. To the east, we uncovered a two-course “doorway” and threshold. To the west, we exposed the remains of a clay hearth. Two unfired bullets were found hidden between boulders in the western wall, dated 1880 and 1886.

Given the results of the excavation of Structure 002, it seems unlikely that it was built in prehistoric times. It appears to have been occupied through the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, before being abandoned, which fits the oral history as presented by the land owners. The care and permanence with which Structures 001 and 002 were constructed suggests that they were houses, with an associated storage structure—Structure 003. They were probably occupied year-round, not used as summer residences. Structures 004 (possibly a mill in the past but reused in recent times as an electrical station, now defunct) and 005 (a watering “tank” for animals), as well as the canal that runs along the east edge of the site, were built under Communism, as described by local informants.

Whereas Structure 002 is at least 130 years old, Structure 001, which was test excavated in 2006, is, based on its unusual architectural features, possibly much older. An abandoned structure similar to Structure 001 at Grunas, built into a terrace wall, with niches, was found in 2007 in Shosh, to the south of Shala, by the SVP’s extensive archaeological survey team, designated EAS Site 007 (see again Figure 9.24). It was probably built in the Late Medieval to Early Modern period.



**Figure 10.10.** Photograph and drawing of the northern profile in Unit 2008-001. *Jill Seagard*

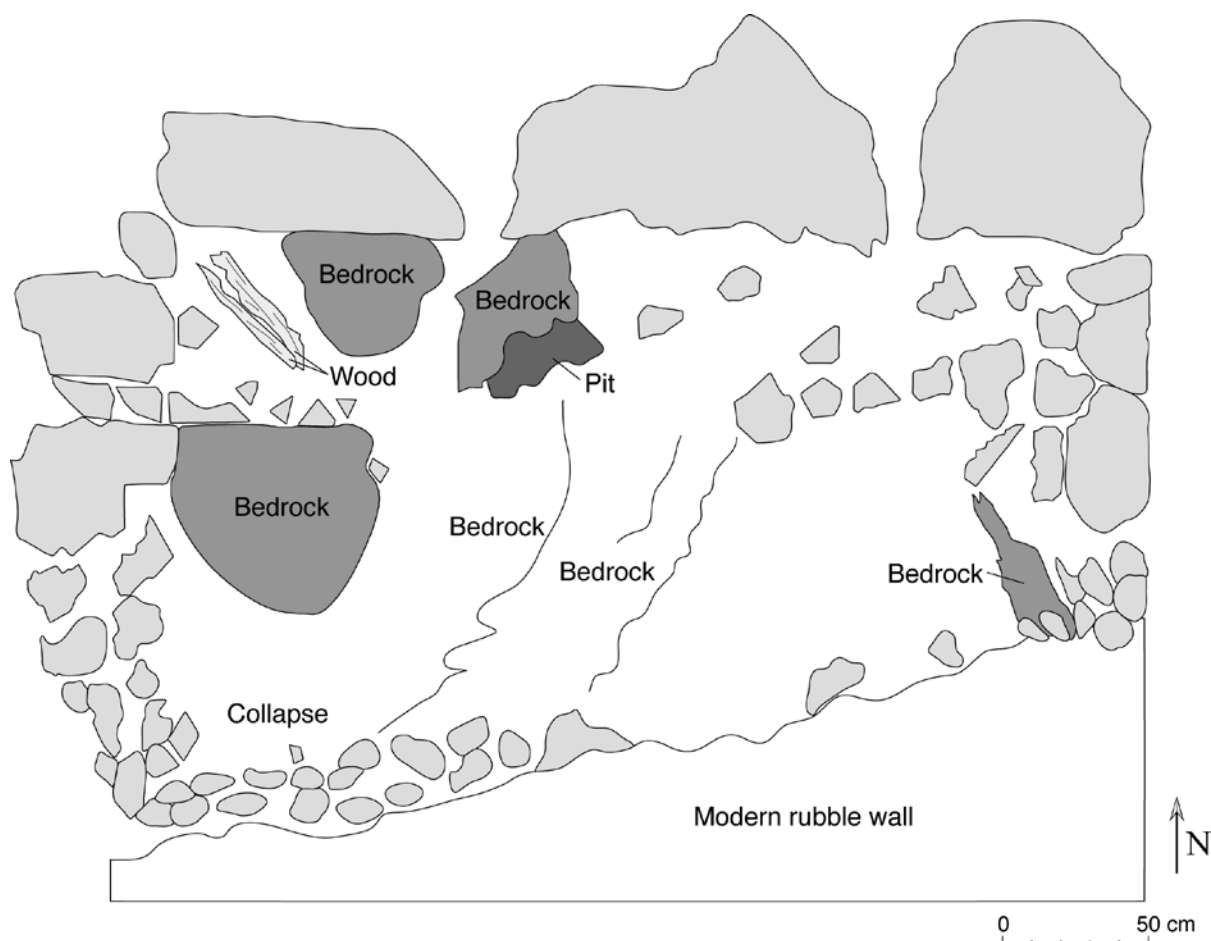


Figure 10.11. Plan view of Unit 2008-002. *Jill Seagard*

These semi-subterranean stone houses were likely single story, were common in northern Albanian into the nineteenth century (Figure 10.12), and were replaced in more recent times by the larger, two- to three-story stone houses common in Shala today (see Chapter Seven). That Grunas was occupied very early in the initial Late Medieval to Early Modern settlement of Theth makes sense given the neighborhood's far-southerly position. In addition, early inhabitants would have found the preexisting prehistoric terraces ideal for construction of their homes and to support their subsistence activities.

#### *Unit 2008-004*

Unit 004 was excavated in an area immediately below the westernmost terrace wall (see Figure 10.5). This particular location was chosen due to the possibility of identifying midden deposits preserved below the western fortification wall. Excavation continued until

the entire unit was exposed to bedrock at a maximum depth of 48 cm. With the exception of a single Middle Paleolithic blade tool (L075), no artifacts were recovered, and it appears likely that refuse was not discarded below the western terrace wall or that it was washed away post-deposition.

#### *Unit 2008-003*

In 2007, we excavated a 1 × 1-m test pit to bedrock in Terrace 6 at Grunas (Unit 2007-001). This excavation demonstrated that there were multiple phases of occupation at Grunas and that the terraces were certainly prehistoric. Geoarchaeological study of the soils on site and from the 2007 unit indicated that most of the fill used to construct the terraces, several clay strata in particular, must have been brought to Grunas from elsewhere, probably from fluvial deposits located closer to the Shala River.



Figure 10.12. House of Prel Nika from Dukagjin, 1930s. *Shan Pici*, used by permission of the Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania

Generally speaking, the excavation of Unit 003 in 2008 confirmed all of the conclusions drawn in 2007. In 2007, we found a diagnostic lithic artifact in Level 002 (L059; see Figure 10.18) and prehistoric pottery in Levels 006 to 007 ( $n = 1$  and 3) and 010 ( $n = 3$ ; e.g., P452; see Figure 10.16). Nondiagnostic lithics (a flake, spalls, and chunks,  $n = 7$ ) were found in Levels 004 to 006, 008, and 015. The same pattern was repeated in 2008: lithics concentrated in upper strata (Levels 002–003 in particular,  $n = 23$  and 17), pottery in lower strata (Levels 005–010 in particular) (Figure 10.13). It seems that the terraces at Grunas were constructed and first occupied in the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age, sometime prior to 800 B.C. calibrated (Table 10.1). A second, slightly later occupation spanned the early to middle portions of the Iron Age, circa 800 to 400 B.C. calibrated, during which clay platforms were built and huts constructed. Finally, the chipped stone in the upper strata may indicate a late prehistoric reuse of the site, perhaps as a temporary hunting or pastoral camp. A more likely possibility is that the upper levels in the stratigraphic sequence represent colluvial fill washed onto the lower terraces from the upper platforms by occasional, seasonal floods. This latter process also helps explain the stratigraphic and radiocarbon sequences at Grunas.

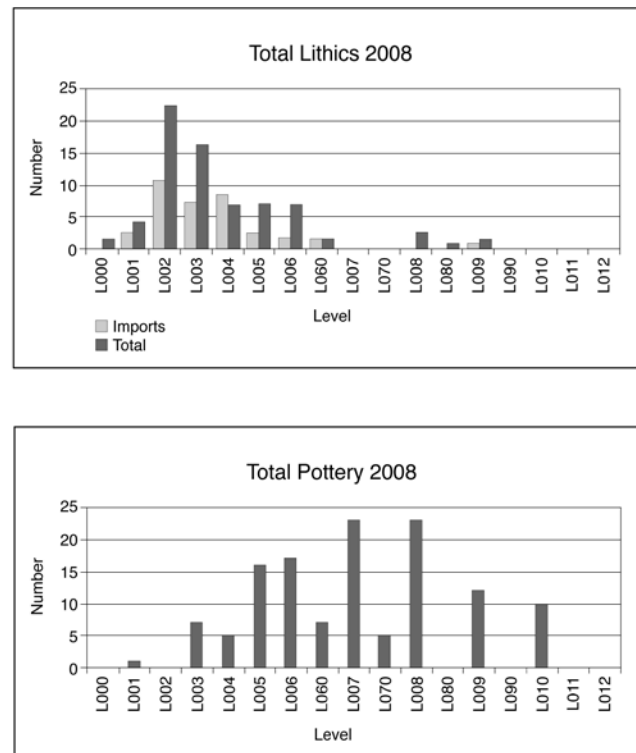


Figure 10.13. Bar graphs showing frequency of lithics and pottery by level from Unit 2008-003. *Jill Seagard*

The earliest radiocarbon date from the site, 4460 to 4340 B.C. calibrated, was on organic material sealed in a buried A-horizon at the bottom of Unit 2007-001, beneath Terrace 6 (Table 10.1 and Figures 10.5 and 10.14). This date demonstrates that the terraces were built in prehistory. The next earliest dates are from the lowest cultural levels in two different units, 2006-003 and 2008-003, from two different terraces, 5 and 6: 840 to 790 B.C. calibrated and 910 to 790 B.C. calibrated. Bearing in mind that, as described above, the terraces at Grunas were built in a gully out of rock and their bases are uneven, bowl shaped, and tilted east to west, following the natural slope of the hill on which they were built, these dates match remarkably well. They represent the initial construction and occupation of the terraces. The next date in the sequence marks the occupation of the clay platform on the eastern, upper slope of Terrace 6: from Unit 2008-003, Level 060, 800 to 720 B.C. calibrated. Levels 010 and 008, from Units 2007-001 and 2008-003, dated 770 to 410 B.C. and 760 to 390 B.C. calibrated, respectively, represent fill accumulation on the terrace slope below the clay platform. This fill is a mixed, sometimes inverted, disturbed cultural horizon composed of midden debris and colluvial wash from upslope terraces. Likewise, Level 005 in Unit 2008-003, dated to 790 to 510 B.C. calibrated, represents the first episode of erosion that covered the abandoned clay platform. It, and the levels above it, contained the bulk of the lithic material, as described above.

A long settlement hiatus was followed by reuse of the site during Medieval times, possibly as early as the Early Medieval period, as indicated by two, possibly Early Medieval potsherds (P498 and 504; see again Figure 9.29). Permanent reoccupation of the site occurred in Late Medieval to Early Modern times, associated with construction of Structures 001, 002, and 003.

The 4 × 4-m Unit 2008-003 was excavated following natural stratigraphy or, when necessary, in 10-cm arbitrary levels (Figure 10.15). In excavating a relatively large area, we hoped to expose features that would indicate whether the terraces were occupied and, if so, by what kinds of structures. We are now relatively certain that the site was plowed during the Early Modern and Modern periods, but not deeply. During these periods, northern Albanian farmers used light wooden plows or ards drawn by animals or humans. Such plows rarely penetrated more than 20 to 30 cm below the surface. As a result, Levels 000 to 003 in Unit 2008-003 are mixed plowzone.

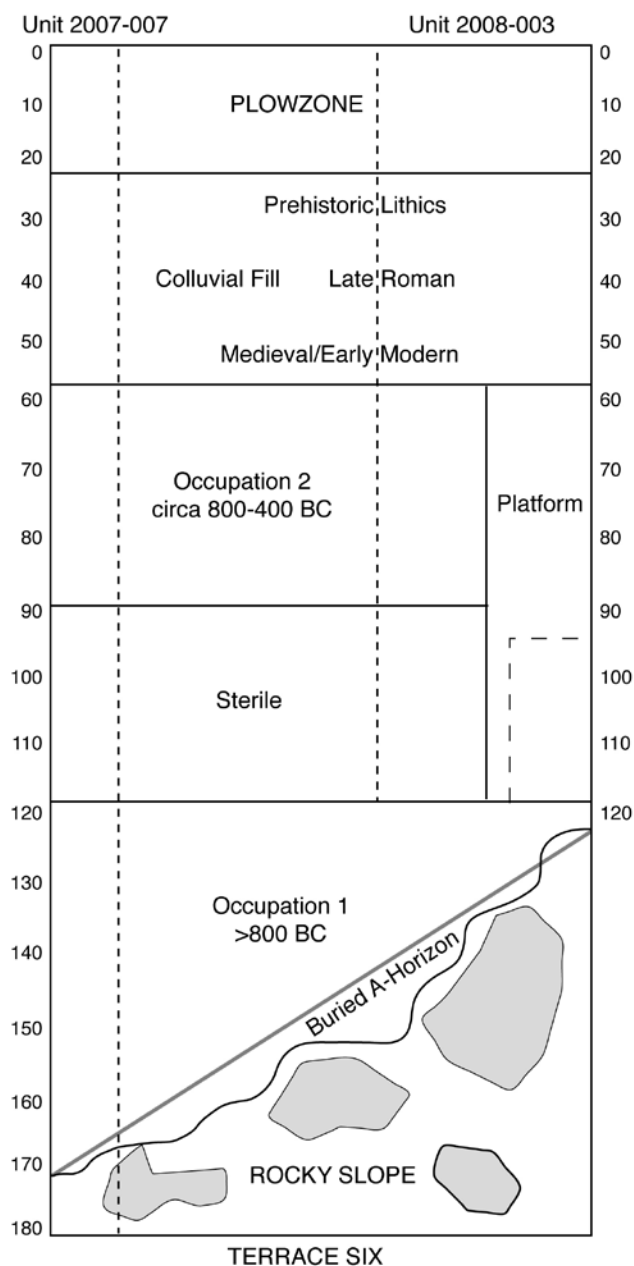


Figure 10.14. Diagram of the stratigraphic sequence at Grunas.  
Jill Seagard

A large number of lithic artifacts were recovered in Unit 2008-003 from upper strata, Levels 002 and 003 especially, including many made from imported, high-quality flint (see again Figure 10.13). These stone tools may indicate a late prehistoric reuse of Grunas, perhaps as a hunting or shepherd's camp. However, given that there were also prehistoric potsherds from these levels, mixed with a few modern artifacts, such as glass and lumps of metal, it may be that Levels 000 to 005

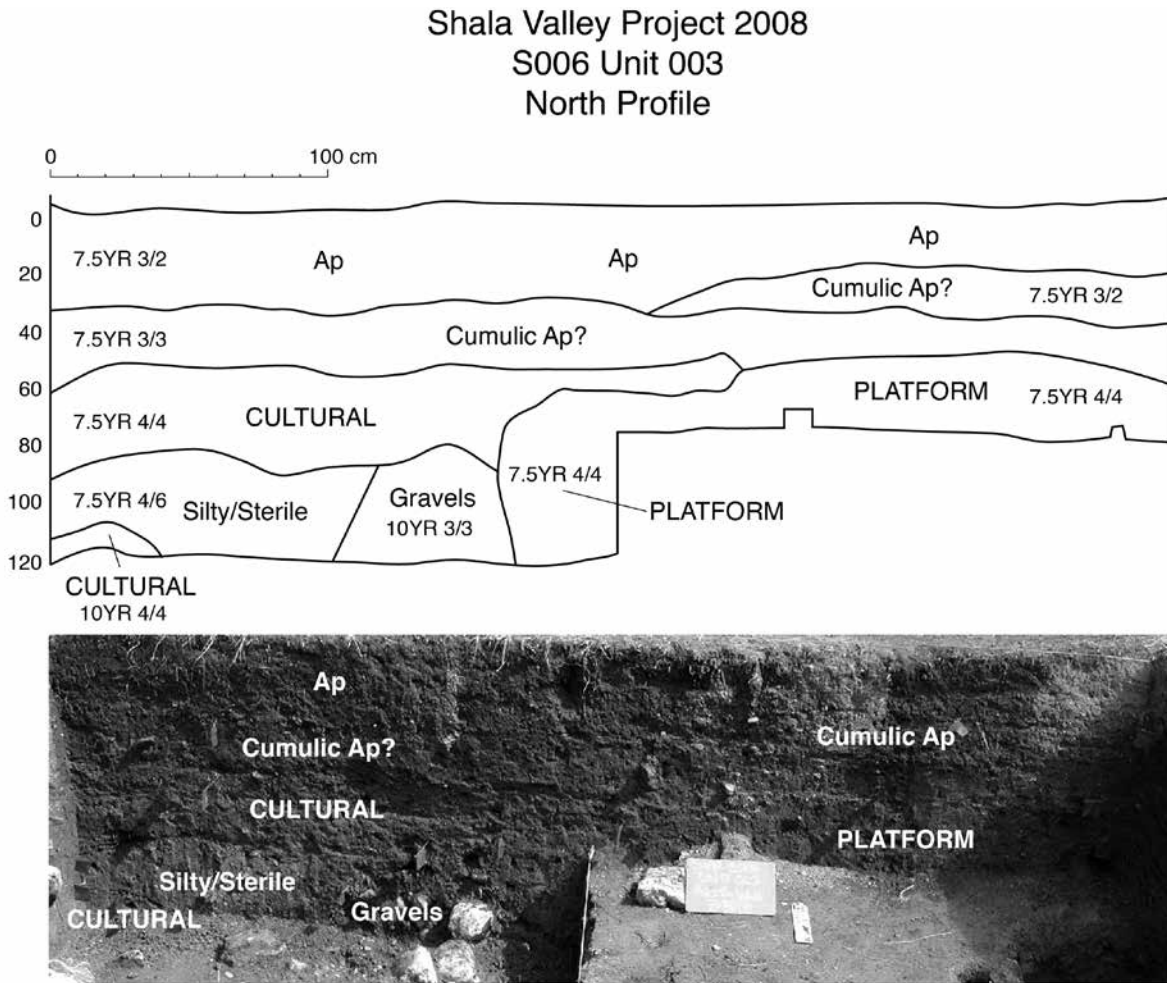


Figure 10.15. Photograph and drawing of the northern profile in Unit 2008-003. *Jill Seagard*

represent soils and artifacts that had eroded onto the terrace following abandonment of the site and an end to terrace maintenance. The majority of the prehistoric pottery, on the other hand, was recovered from Levels 005 to 009. As in previous years, potsherds were generally small, friable, burnished, typically reduced, rarely slipped red, and sometimes incised. Forms were only very rarely identifiable, but in 2008 we did recover several rims and a few bases, primarily of small and large cups and bowls (Figure 10.16). The preponderance of lithic artifacts in the re-deposited soils of the upper strata, as well as the preponderance of pottery in the undisturbed soils of the lower strata, associated with the excavated clay platform (see below), may indicate that there were different activity areas at the site. Lithic artifacts were used and discarded on the upper terraces and platforms, in work zones where animals would have been kept, butchered, and their hides worked, and where other

kinds of heavy tasks, such as woodworking, would have been performed. Pottery was used, broken, and discarded near the domestic residences on the lower terraces, where cooking, serving, and eating were practiced.

At the top of Level 006, in the eastern half of the unit, we hit hard-packed clay, an artificial platform, perhaps the floor for a structure of some sort (Figures 10.15 and 10.17). For this reason, we began excavating the unit in two halves, eastern (floor) versus western (fill/midden): Level 060 versus Level 006, Level 070 versus Level 007, Level 080 versus 008, and Level 090 versus 009. Levels 010 to 012 took the western portion of the unit down to bedrock. The clay “floor” deposit to the east and the midden levels to the west date to the Early to Middle Iron Age, the second occupation phase, as described above. In Level 010, there was evidence for a slightly earlier, initial phase of occupation associated with construction of the site, including the terraces. Study of the

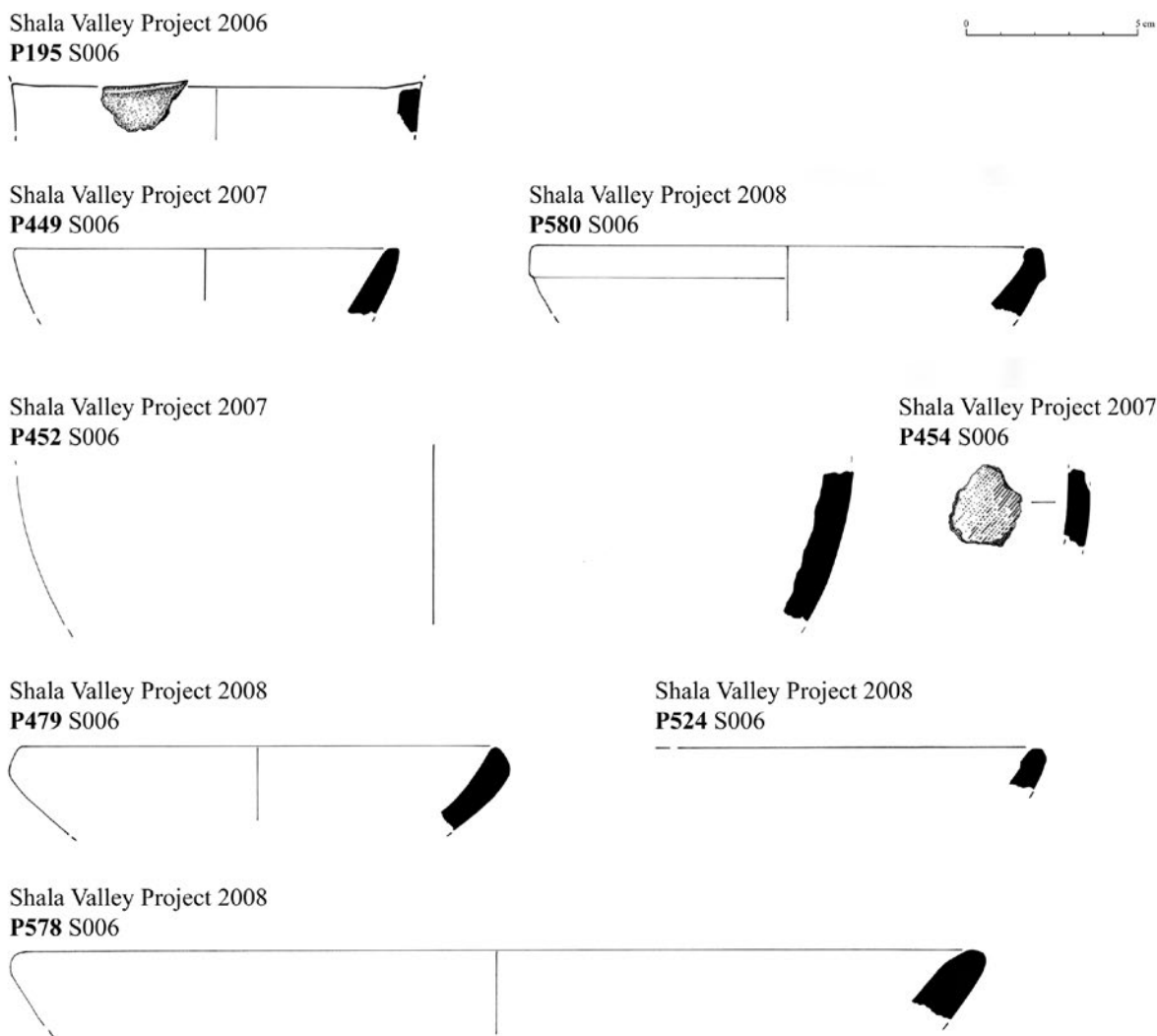


Figure 10.16. Drawings of potsherds collected from shovel test 007 in 2006 (P195) and Units 2007-001 (P449, P452, P454) and 2008-003 (P479, P524, P578, P580). *Adnan Bushati and Jill Seagard*

chipped stone and ceramics from Unit 2008-003 reveals differential patterns of discard for the “floor” versus the fill deposits (see again Figure 10.13). Many more lithic artifacts, made from imported and local material, were found in the fill ( $n = 13$ ) than in the floor ( $n = 3$ ). Of the total number of ceramics found in these levels ( $n = 87$ ), 75 were found in the fill and only 12 were found in the floor (7 in Level 060 and 5 in Level 070). These patterns constitute good evidence that the clay platform was without doubt an artificial construction, made from clay brought to the site from elsewhere, that Levels 060 and 070 were the actual living/working surfaces, and that they were regularly swept clean. These results fit well the results of a soil phosphate survey of Grunas conducted in 2007 (see below), which indicated arcs of high phosphate to the west of low phosphate cores. Low

phosphate values appear to mark places of occupation (i.e., clean, swept clay floors) versus places where waste was discarded or animals were kept.

Excavation of Unit 2008-003 confirmed that the western terraces had once supported clay platforms over their rocky floors. This clay would have been brought to the site from elsewhere. Although we uncovered no post holes or hearths, we assume that light huts would have been built atop these platforms to house the people of Grunas. Given the large amounts of charcoal and fired clay collected, in the lower stratigraphic levels in particular (005–009), we assume these living structures were made from wattle and daub, were burnt periodically, and were probably rebuilt seasonally. If we extrapolate a relative size of 20 m<sup>2</sup> for each hut and, using the soil chemical data to contextualize the archaeological results



Figure 10.17. Photograph of the top of the clay platform, top of Level 060, in Unit 2008-003. Michael L. Galaty

(see below), assume that there were 2 or 3 huts each on Terraces 6 and 7 and perhaps as many as 6 on Terrace 5, we arrive at a total of 10 to 12 huts and a maximum of 240 m<sup>2</sup> of living space. Allowing 4 m<sup>2</sup> per person, these huts might have housed as many as 60 people, and this is a conservative estimate. The total population probably hovered around 100, of whom 20 to 30 would have been men who built and maintained the terraces and walls. Where did these people come from, why did they build Grunas, and how did they adapt to life in the high mountains? Analysis of artifacts and ecofacts from the site, by a variety of methods, helps answer these questions.

## Artifact and Ecofact Analyses

### *Lithics*<sup>4</sup>

During tract walking and excavation, all lithic materials were collected, producing a total assemblage of 215 items. Upon further inspection, 65 items were found to be unmodified natural rocks with no evidence of human

manipulation. Of the remaining 150 items, the majority consist of various kinds of cherts and other crypto- and micro-crystalline silicates, including a black, tectonized, tabular chert that is available locally from veins in the local limestone. Other materials are imported from outside the valley. These include fine gray and reddish-brown cherts. Nearly all Middle Paleolithic artifacts are made from fine-grained, black limestone.

Observations were made macroscopically and with the help of an ×8 hand lens of those formal characteristics of the artifacts that indicate both the method of manufacture (*chaînes opératoire*), as well as the formal tool types generated. The basic terminology employed here follows standard systems of lithic description (e.g., Andrefsky 1998; Bordaz 1970; Brézillon 1971; Crabtree 1972; Movius et al. 1968; Whittaker 1994). Regarding blank description, we use the term *primary flake* to indicate a flake that is completely covered in cortex. *Secondary flake* indicates a flake that retains some cortex. And *tertiary flake* indicates a flake with no dorsal cortex. We use the term *spall* to refer to shatter



or debitage that is angular and exhibits evidence of intentional modification but is not clearly a flake or blade blank, or core. We restrict the term *blade* to refer to blanks that were produced on a reduced, preformed core, as one of several identical removals. This is a more restricted use of the term *blade* than is typically used but is more appropriate for prehistoric Balkan assemblages. We use the term *blade-flake* to refer to blanks that have long parallel edges but were not generated in the manner described above.

The assemblage consists of 150 artifacts, most of which ( $n = 102$ , 68 percent) derive from excavations at Grunas. The lithic assemblage from Grunas generally fits the Early Iron Age date for the site. A handful of artifacts from IAS Site 001 ( $n = 6$ , 4 percent) are consistent with Middle Paleolithic Levallois-Mousterian assemblages from southeast Europe and likely correspond to an interglacial period, as described in Chapter Nine. Another small assemblage derives from EAS Site 003 ( $n = 16$ , 11 percent), a site that also has an Early Iron Age component. The remainder of the items in the assemblage come from sites with fewer than five items or from survey tracts.

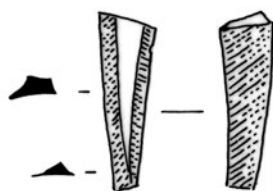
**Table 10.2** Lithic Blank Types from Grunas

Blank Type	Count	Frequency
flake core-irregular	8	8%
natural	8	8%
other	3	3%
primary flake	7	7%
secondary flake	32	31%
spall	1	1%
spall-cortical	9	9%
spall-non-cortical	11	11%
tertiary flake	19	18%
trapezoidal blade	1	1%
triangular blade	3	3%
Total	102	100%

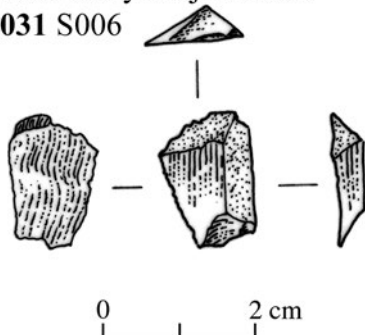
Of the 102 lithics from Grunas, most derive from excavated contexts, but several were stray finds located during site survey. The raw materials include both locally available black cherts as well as some imported materials—in particular, the gray and reddish-brown cherts similar to those from EAS Site 003. All aspects of the flake reduction sequence are represented in the assemblage (Table 10.2). Blades, which tend to be made on imported gray or reddish-brown chert, occur only in their final form.

The distribution of tool types includes several notches and several types of scrapers (Table 10.3). Several retouched tools occur on natural blanks and some on spalls, suggesting very expedient local resource use. Preliminary analysis suggests that locally available materials—such as the black, tectonized chert—were used very expediently but that imported materials were used to produce tools that more efficiently conserved raw materials. For example, of the four blades in the assemblage, three are on high-quality gray and reddish-brown chert that is imported. The other blade (L075), excavated from Unit 2008-004, is white limestone, resembles the artifacts from IAS Site 001, and is probably of Middle Paleolithic date. The wide range of tool types exhibited in this small assemblage suggests a wide variety of different tasks were being carried out at this location.

Shala Valley Project 2007  
**L059 S006**



Shala Valley Project 2006  
**L031 S006**



**Figure 10.18.** Lithic artifacts from Grunas (L031, L059). *Adnan Bushati and Jill Seagard*

**Table 10.3** Lithic Tool Types from Grunas

Tool Type	Count	Frequency
bec	1	3%
blade	1	3%
blade BA/Neo w/ out retouch	1	3%
blade BA/Neo w/ retouch	2	6%
burin	1	3%
denticulate	2	6%
double scraper	1	3%
endscraper	5	16%
grinding stone	4	13%
inverse scraper	2	6%
multiple tool	1	3%
notch	6	19%
perforator	1	3%
sidescraper	4	13%
Total	32	100%

As briefly described in Chapter Nine (see again Figure 9.23), the lithic assemblage from EAS Site 003 includes two trapezoidal blades, made from apparently imported material, that were produced by indirect percussion or by pressure flaking (L037 and L045). Although there is a single flake core in the assemblage (L053), there are no primary flakes, suggesting that cores may have been roughed out elsewhere. Several of the items bear evidence of bipolar percussion (e.g., L053), suggesting intensive raw material use. Formal tool types include notches on blades and flakes (e.g., L042 and L052), a bec (L052), and an endscraper (L045). The small size of the blanks in this assemblage, as well as the occurrence of several multiple tools (e.g., L052), is indicative either of preferential use of specific kinds of raw materials—in particular, the high-quality gray chert—or of limited access to such materials.

The two assemblages from Grunas and EAS Site 003 provide an initial look at Early Iron Age lithic assemblages in the region of northern Albania. Although the size of the samples is considerably different, there are some similarities in the use of local (i.e., black, tectonized) chert versus “imported” (gray and reddish-brown)

materials. Local materials were used very expediently, whereas the higher quality materials were used more efficiently. These latter materials also entered the sites as preformed cores or as finished tools, suggesting the earlier stages of the reduction sequence occurred elsewhere. These patterns may be related to differential use of the raw materials but also can be related to differential access and availability. Identifying the sources of these “imported” raw materials would help place the Shala Valley into a larger, prehistoric social network of exchange. Given the similarity of the imported cherts to those collected by the Projekti Arkeologjik i Shkodrës (PASH), it may be that their source is somewhere in the lower reaches of the Kir River valley and that the blades found at Grunas and EAS Site 003 were brought from lower elevations. Lithic analysis thus helps demonstrate the transhumant lifestyle of the prehistoric occupants of Shala and Shosh. This conclusion is further supported by the chemical analysis of lithic artifacts.

### *Flint Chemistry*<sup>5</sup>

The instrument used to analyze the flint tools from Grunas and EAS Sites 003, 004, and 010 (see Chapter Nine) was a Bruker Tracer III-V Portable X-ray Fluorescence Spectrometer (PXRF). The PXRF has been employed frequently and relatively successfully to analyze both archaeological and geological samples, including flint. The instrument uses X-rays to eject inner-shell electrons, after which new electrons fill the vacancies. This process releases X-ray radiation that is equivalent to the energy difference between the two electrons. The emitted X-rays are then detected by the Si-PIN detector in the PXRF. PXRF analysis is a nondestructive technique that allows quick identification of a sample's composition. However, PXRF typically is not capable of detecting trace elements that are at concentrations less than 1 ppm. The fluorescence signals are also affected by the sample material's matrix, thus making quantitative analysis of unknown samples extremely difficult.

To obtain consistent results, all 12 flint samples were placed directly onto the XRF detector, with the flat face on the scanner, and analyzed for 60 seconds. The settings used for the XRF analysis were 1.50  $\mu$ A current and 40 kV voltage, which are commonly accepted settings for heavy metal analysis. Compositional analysis was performed without vacuum conditions, which were not necessary because the elements analyzed were

sufficiently heavy to produce energetic spectra. Each chert sample was analyzed at least twice. Importantly, surface variation of individual artifacts and analysis time had no effect on results.

The fluorescence signal intensity ratios of various elements were selected for further analysis and processed using Bruker's Artax software. Most samples were homogeneous and surfaces were a single, consistent color (typically reddish-brown, gray, or tan and, in one case, purple). Different from all other samples, sample L106 consists of two colors, mostly dark red with a small patch of gray. Both red and gray surfaces were analyzed by PXRF and found to be chemically similar: Fe/Si ratios of 0.82 and 1.11, respectively. It is quite likely that this artifact had been partially burned, causing it to turn mostly reddish-brown, and so many of the fine reddish-brown and gray flints in our sample are probably from the same source. Burning may have occurred accidentally or perhaps was done purposefully, to improve knapping characteristics.

L074, a black chert artifact from Grunas, was different from all other samples due to an extremely high Sr concentration. The average Sr signal for the other 11 samples was 420, whereas for L074 it was 7684, almost 20 times higher. The elevated Sr in this sample may be the result of residual chalk or limestone in the chert matrix (M. Rockman, personal communication to Galaty, April 2012).

Based on Fe/Si ratios, the remaining samples fall into two groups, A and B, with the exception of L031 (Table 10.4). (As described in Chapter Nine, compositional group C was composed of limestones and group D of local black cherts, like L074, but without high Sr values.) Group A is composed of brown and purple to dark gray cherts and has a southern geographical orientation. Group B is a homogeneous fine gray chert that, when burned, turns reddish-brown. It has a somewhat more northern orientation. These results indicate interaction between Shala and Shosh during the Bronze/Iron Age. It may be that the transhumant occupants of these various sites shared or traded flint, carrying it from its source, to and between these various sites.

### *Pottery*<sup>6</sup>

The pottery sherds from Grunas ( $n = 169$ ) were invariably small, coarse, friable, and poorly preserved. The vast majority ( $n = 132$ ) were body sherds (two from Modern tiles). Only 15 rims and four bases were found. There is one possible waster from Unit 2008-003, Level 010. The remaining 17 sherds were very small, too small to be called body sherds, and some might be daub fragments. Those sherds with preserved rims are from small bowls or large cups (see Figure 10.16), with the exception of P578, a thick, coarse sherd from a large "casserole" dish. Four of these rims (P481, 498, 504, and 518) might be Late Roman or Early Medieval in age. They are from Unit 2008-003, Levels 005 and 006, indicating the stratigraphic inversions and disturbances described above.

Most sherds were very dark brown to black, frequently burned, both in and out, and sometimes burnished. A small number were slipped red, either on the interior or exterior of the vessel (10R 2.5/1 reddish-black). Some are light brown or tan in color. The majority of fabrics are coarse ( $n = 139$ ) and tempered with rock grits or sand. Two are micaceous. Three are decorated with an incised line out, in one case just under a rim.

In terms of the range of shapes, colors, surface treatments, and decoration, the assemblage from Grunas is very typical of the northern Albanian Early Iron Age. Most of the pots were probably used for cooking (see results of residue analysis, below) and some for drinking and eating. A few were large enough to use as serving vessels. There are no closed vessels, which may be because the occupants of Grunas had little to store. Any

**Table 10.4** Results of PXRF Analysis of Flint Artifacts

Sample	Fe/Si ratio	Site	Group
L059	0.143	IAS S006	A
L037	0.178	EAS S003	A
L100	0.187	IAS S006	A
L058	0.319	EAS S010	A
L041	0.354	EAS S004	A
L040	0.378	EAS S004	A
L031	0.688	IAS S006	outlier
L106 red	0.820	IAS S006	B
L127	1.064	IAS S006	B
L106 grey	1.109	IAS S006	B
L045	1.258	EAS S003	B
L042	1.393	EAS S003	B

grain they had, they probably brought with them from lower elevations, perhaps carried in bags or baskets.

The Early Iron Age (EIA) pottery from Grunas is very similar to that from Zagorë, in Shkrel, at a lower elevation and closer to Shkodra (Andrea 1987, 1996) (see Figure 9.27). It is nearly identical to pottery from EAS S003. In an effort to determine whether prehistoric pottery had been exchanged, pottery samples from all three sites—Grunas, EAS S003, and Zagorë—as well as from IAS S007 (Dakaj), IAS S008 (Gimaj), two Shala survey tracts, and Rosujë in Tropoja (Ceka and Jubani 1971) were analyzed by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS). The results point to limited or no interregional trade in pottery vessels.

### *Pottery Chemistry*<sup>7</sup>

A Varian 820 ICP-MS was used to analyze pottery samples.<sup>8</sup> Liquid samples were introduced into the machine's nebulizer by a Varian SPS-3 autosampler and a three-channel peristaltic pump. A low-uptake concentric nebulizer was used to introduce a very fine mist into a glass Scott-type double-pass spray chamber, thereby eliminating large droplets. The spray chamber was cooled to  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  to reduce the formation of oxides and increase its ability to aspirate volatile organic solvents. The fine mists were transferred to the plasma through a stream of argon and ionized at  $7000^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $10,000^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The plasma was confined to a torch consisting of three concentric tubes and maintained by a high radiofrequency generator (1–1.5 kW). Up to 90 percent of the metals were ionized under such plasma conditions. Due to the pressure difference between plasma (100,000 Pa) and the mass spectrometer ( $\leq 0.001$  Pa), a three-stage system design was used to reduce the pressure of the samples. A quadrupole mass filter was used to separate the final ions based on their mass-to-charge ratio.

To prepare a liquid sample for ICP-MS, about 0.100 g of a powdered ceramic sample was placed in a microwave digestion chamber with 6 mL HF and 3 mL  $\text{HNO}_3$ . The 12 microwave digestion vessels were sealed using a torque wrench. The vessels were heated to  $180^{\circ}\text{C}$  in a Milestone ETHOS E2 microwave digestion unit for 15 minutes and then for 30 minutes at a constant  $180^{\circ}\text{C}$ , using 1200-W power settings. Once the microwave cycle was complete and the vessels had cooled to below  $45^{\circ}\text{C}$ , each vessel was removed and

opened under a fume hood. Each vessel then had 25 mL of 3 percent  $\text{H}_3\text{BO}_3$  solution added to it to complex the HF used earlier to dissolve silicate minerals. The vessels were resealed and heated again, using the same settings as before. All samples were digested and analyzed by ICP-MS at least twice. Clay standards (National Institute of Standards and Technology [NIST] 657) were used to check the accuracy and reproducibility of the digestion procedure. The same samples were digested on different days, and there was good agreement found between the value from the ICP-MS and the certified value from NIST.

Ninety-five sherds from Shala and Shosh were analyzed for 32 elements, measured at the ppb level, using the JMP statistical package.<sup>9</sup> Exploratory data analysis using scatter plots and hierarchical clustering (Ward's method) indicated four main compositional groups, A to D, each of which is associated with a different site. Group A is a very large group of black, burnished, often very burned potsherds ( $n = 36$ ). All group A sherds but two are from Grunas. The exceptions are from IAS S008 (Gimaj) and EAS S003. A second large but more variable group, group B, is from both Grunas and EAS S003. Group B can be subdivided into three smaller groups. Group B1 sherds ( $n = 17$ ) are red and often possess reduced cores in cross section. They were found at Grunas ( $n = 12$ ) and EAS S003 ( $n = 3$ ), as well as in two Shala survey tracts, in 2006 and 2007. Group B2 and B3 sherds tend to be sandy, with light and medium fabrics, and fall into slightly different compositional groups. Group B2 sherds were found at EAS S003 only ( $n = 13$ ). Group B3 sherds were found primarily at EAS S003 ( $n = 8$ ), but two were collected at Grunas. Group A and B sherds were not collected at Dakaj at all. Sixteen sherds from Dakaj were analyzed. These fall squarely into two different compositional groups, C and D. Group C ( $n = 9$ ) includes sherds that are almost exclusively from Dakaj, with the exception of P540, from Grunas. They all include large rock grits as temper, are poorly fired, and, with the exception of P439 (which Vroom thought might be "Medieval"; see Chapter Nine), are believed to be prehistoric. Group D includes three Late Medieval samples (P373, 393, and 395). These are thin-walled and incised, with small, white, limestone inclusions. A glazed Early Modern, possibly Venetian, import (P416) also falls loosely into this group. The other four samples, one of which is from EAS S003, are thought to be prehistoric.

When all 95 samples are considered together and analyzed using multivariate principal components analysis, the four compositional groups are easily distinguishable (Figure 10.19). What accounts for the compositional differences between groups A and B is unclear. Pottery from both groups is certainly prehistoric. There do not appear to be strong chronological differences between them, although group A tends to be from the lower levels of Units 2007-001 and 2008-003 and group B1 from the lowest levels of test pits excavated in 2006. This might indicate a spatial component to the results,

with two different compositional groups being generated from two different parts of the site. There may have been two different EIA pottery recipes and/or firing regimes at Grunas and a domestic mode of production. The individuals producing group A pottery do not appear to have had strong ties to EAS S003, and it may be that these pots were produced on site, at Grunas. Group B1 sherds are more widely distributed beyond Grunas, having been found in south Shala and at EAS S003. Groups B2 and B3 are sandy. They are strongly associated with EAS S003 and may have been locally produced.

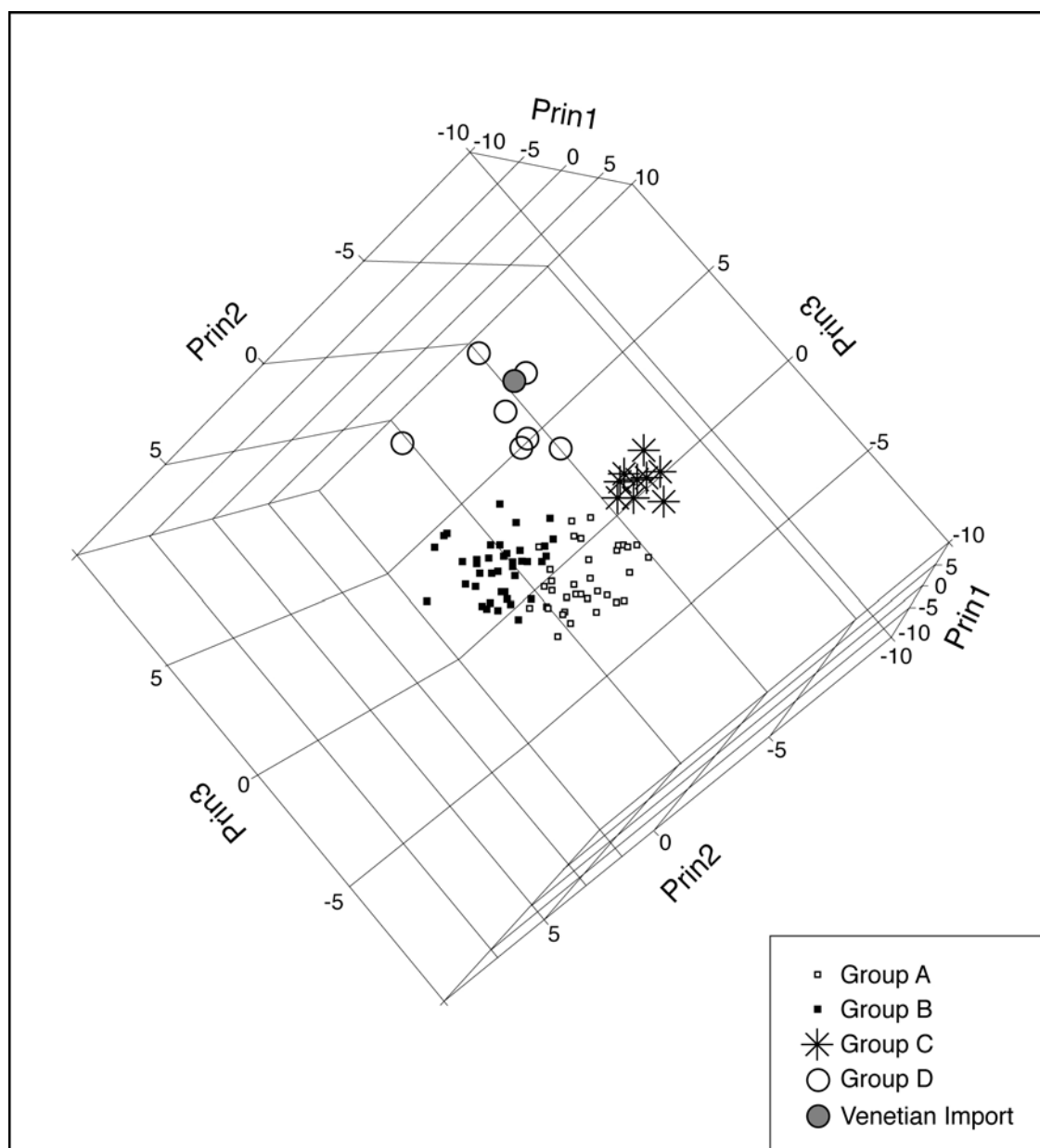


Figure 10.19. Three-dimensional scatter plot of the first three principal components for ICP-MS compositional data for 32 elements from 95 potsherds from Shala and Shosh. *Jill Seagard*

Two B3 sherds were found at Grunas, indicating some additional movement of pottery from Shosh to Shala. Overall, these data point to localized production of pottery and occasional, informal exchange.

The results from Dakaj are quite different and more difficult to interpret. It seems likely that groups C and D represent two different chronological components, a proposition that is difficult to test since the material derives from surface contexts. Coarse Medieval ceramics are notoriously difficult to distinguish from prehistoric ceramics (Vroom 2005), particularly when they have been locally produced, which, given the large numbers of ceramic wasters from Dakaj, was almost certainly the case. It may well be that groups C and D from Dakaj mix Medieval and prehistoric coarsewares. Group C ( $n = 9$ ) includes eight sherds, one from Grunas (P540), that are thought to be prehistoric and one (P439) that is “Medieval” in date. These results point to local production of coarse ceramics at Dakaj during both the EIA and Medieval periods. Group D includes pottery that is definitely Late Medieval and Early Modern in date but also four sherds from Grunas and EAS S003 that, again, are thought to be prehistoric. Ongoing chemical analysis of similar Late Medieval pottery from Drisht Castle near Shkodra, conducted under the auspices of PASH, should help determine if the distinctive Late Medieval pottery from Dakaj was produced there and exported to Drisht or produced at Drisht and imported to Dakaj. In any case, we have indications from Dakaj of long-term, complex, probably specialized manufacture (and exchange) of pottery. In the Medieval period, ceramic manufacture and trade was almost certainly sponsored and controlled by some political entity with strong outside contacts, perhaps the church or Venetian or Ottoman officials. Such being the case, the economic situation at Dakaj in later periods was quite different from the prehistoric situation, at Dakaj itself, but also at Grunas and EAS S003. The Late Medieval to Early Modern system of pottery production and distribution in Shala was much more sophisticated, a conclusion supported by the results of intensive archaeological survey (see Chapter Nine).

In an effort to expand our analysis of northern Albanian ceramic exchange, we collected and analyzed pottery from Zagorë near Shkodra and Rosujë in Tropoja. Seventy-eight samples from Zagorë, dating from the Eneolithic through Late Bronze Age (LBA)/EIA, were analyzed. Here, we focus on the 15 certain LBA/EIA

samples only. Exploratory data analysis identified two different chemical compositional groups, E to F. Group E is composed of sherds ( $n = 5$ ) that were almost certainly manufactured on site, since they match well a shaped lump of fired clay (Z044), a daub sample (Z025), and two soil samples from Zagorë. Group F is composed of sherds ( $n = 8$ ) that are very similar chemically to each other and not entirely unlike those from group E. They are all very porous, light to bright orange in color, and several are very thick, perhaps from pithoi. Two samples, Z033 and Z061, are outliers. Z033 is very high in cobalt and nickel and, given its fine fabric, might be from a later period. Z061 produced lower concentrations of most elements compared to all other samples. The latter is almost certainly an import to Zagorë. It is a body sherd with handle attachment, is tempered with coarse micaceous sand, and sports a raised decoration. The samples from Rosujë are all very similar chemically and match well a soil sample taken on site. We can assume that they all represent local manufacture. When analyzed together, sherds from Zagorë and Rosujë are easily distinguishable, and groups E and F maintain their integrity. The two outliers from Zagorë remain outliers.

When the data from Shala, Shosh, Zagorë, and Rosujë are analyzed together, they form four exclusive and easily separable compositional groups that are site specific. The pottery from Zagorë and Rosujë are more similar to each other than either group is to pottery from Shala and Shosh. These differences may be the result of unidentified chronological differences (i.e., the sites might be asynchronous). But in any case, there exists no evidence for movement of pottery between sites over long distances. The sole exception is sherd Z061, the outlier/import described above. It matches closely two Late Medieval potsherds from Dakaj and therefore might itself be Late Medieval in age (although the form suggests a prehistoric date).

Pottery compositional data therefore indicate an Early Iron Age economy that was domestic in scale. Pots may have been exchanged occasionally between related sites, within regions, and along routes of travel—such as between Grunas and EAS S003, and perhaps Dakaj—but were not traded over long distances, between widely separated regions. The situation was quite different during the Late Medieval period. Manufacture of pottery was a specialized industry, centered in Shala at Dakaj, and pots were traded over much greater distances (e.g., from Venice to Shala and, perhaps, between Dakaj and Drisht



Castle). These differences are not unexpected; prehistoric Shala was a very different place than Medieval Shala, and production and exchange mechanisms differed accordingly. Late Medieval pots were manufactured, carefully decorated, and traded widely. Iron Age pots were made and used within domestic contexts, as cooking pots. This last conclusion is supported by the results of residue analysis, conducted on Iron Age pots from Grunas.

### *Residue Analysis*<sup>10</sup>

Sixteen pieces of prehistoric pottery from Grunas were selected for residue analysis, with the goal of determining whether they had been used to cook and/or store meat (Table 10.5). Originally, we also had hoped to look for indications of dairy production, but this proved impossible due to various forms of contamination, which blocked all dairy (and, in some cases, meat) signatures.

Samples were extracted using a protocol based on work by Evershed et al. (2008) and Copley et al. (2003) with one significant difference: unlike most extraction protocols, samples were not derivatized before analysis. Briefly, 1.5 g of each ceramic sample was extracted in 15 mL of 99.9 percent chromatography-grade dichloromethane. After a 20-minute period of sonication, the

solid ceramic waste was removed and each sample was concentrated through evaporation. Blanks were prepared regularly between archaeological samples to allow for the detection of any cross-contamination due to the mortar and pestle as well as to control for contaminants inadvertently introduced during sample processing.

Samples were analyzed by manually injecting 2.0  $\mu$ L using a splitless injection into a 123-5033 DB-5 high-resolution gas chromatography column made by Agilent Technologies. The 30-m column has an internal diameter of 0.320 mm and a stationary phase film thickness of 1.00  $\mu$ m. The column was placed in an HP 5890 gas chromatograph. The temperature program was as follows: hold at 50°C for 5 minutes, ramp up 15°C per minute to 300°C, hold at 300°C for 5 minutes, ramp down 100°C per minute to 50°C, and hold at 50°C for 2 minutes. Once samples were separated in the gas chromatography column, they were analyzed using an HP 5973 mass spectrometer. The mass spectrometry results were interpreted on HP Productivity ChemStation software (version B.02.05) using both the NIST 98 and the Wiley 7N standard libraries.

Using gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS) analysis, samples were divided into those that contained animal fat residue and those that did not. Animal

**Table 10.5** Results of Residue Analysis

Sample ID	Excavator Code	Sampled Weight (g)	Peak 1	Peak 2	Animal fat residue?
MG-0	blank	1.507	no	no	0
MG-1	P422	1.503	15.73	17.336	1
MG-2	P438	1.520	no	17.351	0
MG-3	P473	1.502	15.727	17.333	1
MG-4	P493	1.533	15.732	blocked	0
MG-5	P519	1.524	15.722	17.334	1
MG-6	P520	1.515	15.741	17.382	1
MG-7	P521	1.507	15.725	blocked	0
MG-8	P522	1.526	15.737	17.331	1
MG-9	P541	1.516	15.727	17.338	1
MG-10	P542	1.513	15.725	17.331	1
MG-11	P549	1.506	15.729	17.335	1
MG-12	P552	1.528	15.731	no	0
MG-13	P559	1.512	15.726	17.338	1
MG-14	blank	1.526	no	no	0
MG-15	P569	1.508	15.731	blocked	0
MG-16	P571	1.508	15.729	17.33	1
MG-17	P577	1.549	15.732	blocked	0



**Table 10.6** Results of Faunal Analysis from Grunas

Grunas IAS S006											
SF#	Unit	Level	Date	NISP	Element	Side, End	Lth (mm)	Wth (mm)	Th (mm)	Wt (g)	Notes
SF024	001	001	6/24/06								
Medium-sized Mammal				1	tibia? shaft fragment	left, distal	45	18	3	5.00	8 refitted fragments
SF031	ST008		6/27/06								
Medium-sized Mammal				4	longbone shaft frags.					1.05	prehistoric
SF032	ST009		6/27/06								
Medium-sized Mammal				1	longbone shafts frag.					1.64	prehistoric, pelvis or scapula frag?
SF033	ST010		6/27/06								
Medium-sized Mammal				1	skull? fragment					1.68	prehistoric
Unidentified Mammal				2	fragments					0.42	
SF034	ST011		6/27/06								
Medium-sized Mammal				3	vertebrae or rib frags.					0.67	prehistoric, burned
SF038	003	002	6/28/06								
Medium-sized Mammal				2	longbone shafts frags.					0.56	prehistoric
SF042	004	002	6/29/06								
Equidae				1	molar or premolar	fragment				7.12	prehistoric, domesticated
SF059	core	100100	6/27/07								
Medium-sized Mammal				1	mandible? Fragment					1.57	
SF108	001	010	7/19/07								
Unidentified Mammal				ca. 12	fragments					0.02	
<b>TOTALS:</b>				28						19.73	
float sample	003	008	7/3/08								
Rodentia sp.				1	mandible	right, frag.				<0.01	
				1	skull? Fragment					<0.01	burned
				2	unidentified	fragments				<0.01	
<b>TOTALS:</b>				4						0.03	
Totals for Grunas IAS S006											
<b>Domesticated</b>											
Equidae				1	molar or premolar	fragment				7.12	
<b>Wild or Domesticated</b>											
Medium-sized Mammal				1	skull? fragment					1.68	burned
				1	mandible? Fragment					1.57	
				3	vertebrae or rib frags.					0.67	burned
				1	tibia? shaft fragment	left, distal	45	18	3	5.00	
				7	longbone shaft frags.					3.25	
<b>Total Medium-sized Mammal</b>				13						12.17	
Unidentified Mammal				14	fragments					0.44	
Rodentia sp.				1	mandible	right, frag.				<0.01	
				1	skull? Fragment					<0.01	burned
				2	unidentified	fragments				<0.01	
<b>Total Rodents</b>				4						0.03	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>				32						19.76	

fat residue has been identified in archaeological samples by the presence of two lipids: hexadecanoic acid ( $C_{16:0}$ ) and octadecanoic acid ( $C_{18:0}$ ). Fresh animal fats contain many triacylglycerols (TAGs), but these TAGs degrade into individual free fatty acids (FFAs) through hydrolysis. FFAs are fairly stable and have been found in archaeological samples (e.g., Copley et al. 2003; Craig et al. 2005; Evershed et al. 2008), thereby indicating the presence of meat. FFAs can further break down into long-chain hydrocarbons with one less carbon than the previous fatty acid. This reaction, called a decarboxylation reaction, causes the entire carboxyl group to be cleaved from the FFA, transforming the FFA into a hydrocarbon. Conditions that promote decarboxylation reactions include heat and a reducing (i.e., anaerobic) environment. While the reaction from free fatty acid to hydrocarbon is well understood and has been observed frequently under heat and in reducing environments, in locations such as crude oil reservoirs, for example, there is no direct way to prove that it has occurred with archaeological samples. There are, however, two possible routes of interpretation, given the results. First, animal fat residues initially present in the samples may have degraded two steps into hydrocarbons. Second, the samples tested do not contain animal fats. Of these two possibilities, the first one is far more likely. Thus, instead of using hexadecanoic acid and octadecanoic acid as markers of animal fat residue, pentadecane ( $C_{15}$ ) and heptadecane ( $C_{17}$ ) were used.

In general, 10 of the 16 archaeological samples contained animal fat residue. (Equally important, the two blank samples analyzed did not show evidence of any animal fat.) There were some serious problems with large contamination peaks blocking some of the data, however. Four of the 16 had enough peak overlap with contaminants that animal fat residue could not be conclusively identified. Nevertheless, evidence for animal fat residues from 62.5 percent of samples provides strong support for the idea that the inhabitants of Grunas were transhumant pastoralists whose economy was meat dependent. This conclusion is further supported by the results of faunal and archaeobotanical analysis.

### *Fauna*<sup>11</sup>

Several small samples of faunal remains were recovered from Grunas. Comparative faunal collections at Ohio State University were used for the identifications, along

with faunal atlases and illustrated publications (Schmid 1972; Sisson 1953; Wilson et al. 1982). Species determination for the *Caprinae* subfamily followed Boessneck (1969), Buitenhuis (1995), Dow and Wright (1962), Halstead and Collins (2002), and Payne (1973).

The 11 samples from the Grunas site (Table 10.6) came from four  $1 \times 1$ -m test units (Units 2006-001, 2006-003, 2006-004, and 2007-001), four shovel tests (ST 008-011) in Terrace 5, a core sample (100, 100), and a float sample from 2008. Level 001 of Unit 2006-001 (SF024) contained eight refitted fragments of the medial shaft of the left tibia of a medium-sized mammal. The size and shape of this reconstructed element were similar to the tibias of domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*) and goats (*Capra hircus*) in the comparative collection, but it also could be from a chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*; Alb. *dhia e egër*).<sup>12</sup> These wild members of the *Caprinae* subfamily are still hunted in the mountains of northern Albania (Dhora 2010).

Level 002 of Unit 2006-003 (SF038) contained two long-bone shaft fragments from medium-sized mammals. While these may have come from domestic sheep or goats, they also could be fragments of bones from wild chamois, deer (e.g., western roe deer [*Capreolus capreolus*; Alb. *kaprolli*] and fallow deer [*Cervus dama*; Alb. *drevi brilopatë*]), or wild boar (*Sus scrofa*; Alb. *derri i egër*).

Level 002 of Unit 2006-004 (SF042) included a highly fragmented high-crowned premolar or molar tooth fragment that is probably from an equid (horse family, *Equidae*). The pattern of the enamel, dentine, and cementum on the occlusal surface of this tooth fragment is most like the pattern seen on equid teeth, rather than the pattern on the teeth of bovids or ovicaprids (Greenfield and Arnold 2008; Halstead and Collins 2002; Schmid 1972).

Shovel test 008 (SF031) contained four long-bone shaft fragments from medium-sized domestic or wild mammals, while shovel test 009 (SF032) included a small fragment of a pelvis, scapula, or long bone from another medium-sized mammal. A cranial fragment from a medium-sized mammal was found in shovel test 010 (SF033), along with two unidentifiable mammal fragments. Three burned vertebrae or rib fragments from a medium-sized mammal were found in shovel test 011 (SF034).

A mandible fragment from another medium-sized mammal was contained in core sample 100,100 (SF 059). The heavy fraction of a flotation sample from

Level 008 of Unit 2008-003 on Terrace 6 contained a right mandible fragment, a burned skull fragment, and two unidentified bone fragments, all from an unidentified species of rodent (*Rodentia* sp.). The rodent remains found in Level 008 could not be identified to species. They may be commensal species, suggesting prolonged habitation in the structure (cf. Tchernov 1991a, 1991b, 1997), or they may be recent intrusive species.

Level 010 of Unit 2007-001 (SF108) included around 12 tiny fragments of unidentified mammal bone.

A total of 32 faunal elements (weighing 19.3 g) were recovered from several contexts at the Grunas site. The molar or premolar fragment from an equid probably was from a domestic animal (donkey or horse?), since no wild equids are known from northern Albania (Dhora 2010). It came from Level 002 in Unit 2006-004 and may be associated with a historic, rather than prehistoric, occupation. Most of the 13 fragments from medium-sized mammals and the 14 unidentifiable mammal bone fragments came from prehistoric levels, and the four rodent bone fragments were from an Early to Middle Iron Age context. The small sample of medium-sized mammal remains includes elements from the skull, mandible, vertebrae or ribs, and long bones (including a tibia). One fragment from a shovel test (ST 009) could be from a scapula or pelvis. The tibia is within the size range for domestic sheep or goats, but it also could have come from a wild chamois. The other fragments could have come from deer or wild boar, rather than domestic ovicaprids.

The results of faunal analysis, while inconclusive, point to herding of domesticated ovicaprids at Grunas and/or the hunting of wild chamois and, perhaps, deer or wild boar. Either or both activities may have taken place during the Iron Age in northern Albania. However, given the other lines of evidence for transhumant pastoralism at Grunas, it seems likely that at least some of the faunal remains of medium-sized animals from test excavations there are from domestic sheep and goats. The idea that the occupants of Grunas were transhumant pastoralists receives additional support from the results of archaeobotanical analyses.

### *Archaeobotany*<sup>13</sup>

Grunas is the only site in northern Albania where excavators employed a systematic strategy for collecting archaeobotanical materials. In addition to Grunas, the

only other Albanian Iron Age sites at which archaeobotanical materials were collected are Bonjakët (Allen and Margaritis 2009), Lofkënd (Papadopoulos et al. 2007), and Sovjan (Allen 2005), none of which provides a good parallel for Grunas in terms of its location and function. Although the absence of comparanda from highland sites in the adjacent areas of Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosova poses challenges for placing the Grunas material in a broader sociospatial context, the botanical assemblage serves as another line of evidence from which to examine questions of site function and area use. Although carbonized examples of cultivated plants such as cereals, pea, and garlic were recovered from Iron Age contexts at Grunas, their rarity argues against the possibility that the terraces there had an agricultural function. All other plants recovered from the site are part of the local flora. In addition, a few carbonized examples of plants recovered from Iron Age contexts, such as *Clinopodium vulgare* (wild basil; Alb. *basilik*), *Crocus sativus*, or *Asphodelus aestivus* (crocus/asphodel; Alb. *sahlep*), as well as uncarbonized examples of *Prunus mahaleb* (rock cherry; Alb. *vishnja*) and *Prunus spinosa* (blackthorn, sloe; Alb. *kullumbria*), have recorded medicinal uses in northern Albania (Pieroni 2008, 2010) or elsewhere in Albania (Allen 2005; Piperi and Kajno 1990) and may point to a great temporal depth for local knowledge of these plants.

Excavators at Grunas collected sediment for flotation from discrete excavation levels and features, yielding a total of 20 samples. To facilitate comparison between samples and to increase processing speed, excavators collected a standard sample volume of 3.785 liters (1 gallon). All samples were processed in the field using a bucket flotation method with a fine cloth mesh for the light fraction.

Samples were analyzed at the University of Cincinnati. They were graded into >2.0-mm, 1.0- to 2.0-mm, and <1.0-mm fractions to facilitate recognition of identifiable plant parts during sorting. All samples were completely sorted using a Leica stereomicroscope at magnifications between ×10 and ×100. All wood charcoal larger than 2.0 mm was collected for potential identification and weighed. For nonwood remains, all potentially identifiable plant materials were collected from all fractions.

Identification of specimens was made using modern comparative plant materials from the region and specimens acquired from the United States Department of

**Table 10.7** Botanical Data from Grunas

Grunas, Macrobotanical Remains from Flotation, Units 2008-001 and 2008-002																	
TAXON / GROUP	Common name	Part	Cond.	UNIT 001 Level 002	Level 003	Level 004	Level 005	Level 006	UNIT 002 Level 000								
<b>Cultivars</b>																	
Cereal sp. indet	Cereal grain	Seed	C	0 [1]	-	-	-	-	-								
<b>Other plants</b>																	
Borago sp.	Borage	Seed	U	-	-	-	-	1 [0]	-								
Chenopodium sp.	Goosefoot	Seed	U	22 [2]	1 [0]	-	-	2 [0]	-								
cf. Malus sp.	Wild apple	Fruit	C	0 [1]	-	-	-	-	-								
Prunus cf. mahaleb	Rock cherry	Endocarp	U	1 [0]	-	-	-	-	-								
Prunus cf. spinosa	Blackthorn / Sloe	Endocarp	U	0 [1]	-	-	-	-	-								
Rumex crispus	Dock	Seed	U	2 [0]	1 [0]	-	-	-	-								
Sambucus sp.	Elder	Seed	U	-	11 [0]	3 [0]	-	3 [0]	-								
Silene sp.	Campion	Seed	U	4 [0]	3 [0]	1 [0]	-	-	-								
cf. Ajuga/Teucrium sp.	Bugleweed/ Germander	Seed	C	1 [0]	-	-	-	-	-								
NON-WOOD TOTAL				30 [5]	16 [0]	4 [0]	0	6 [0]	0								
<b>Wood</b>																	
Charcoal (g)		Wood	C	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.8								
Grunas, Macrobotanical Remains from Flotation, Unit 2008-003																	
TAXON / GROUP	Common name	Part	Cond.	Level 004	Level 005 West Wall	Level 005 East Wall	Level 007	Level 008	Level 009 Feat.	Level 009 Gen.	Level 010	Level 011	Level 012	Level 013	Level 060	Level 070	Level 080
<b>Cultivars</b>																	
Cereal sp. indet	Cereal grain	Seed	C	-	-	-	-	0 [1]	-	-	1 [1]	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pisum sativum	Pea	Seed	C	-	1 [0]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
cf. Allium sp.	Garlic	Corn	C	-	0 [1]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Other plants</b>																	
Carex sp.	Sedge	Seed	U	-	-	1 [0]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chenopodium sp.	Goosefoot/Fat hen	Seed	U	0 [1]	1 [0]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clinopodium vulgare	Wild basil	Seed	C	-	5 [3]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
cf. Crocus sativus or Asphodelus aestivus	Crocus/ Asphodel	Tuber	C	-	-	1 [0]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Juglans regia	Walnut	Mesocarp	U	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 [0]
Lithospermum sp.	Gromwell	Seed	U	-	-	1 [0]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rumex crispus			U	2 [0]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sambucus sp.	Elder	Seed	U	-	1 [0]	-	-	-	1 [1]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Scirpus sp.	Rush	Seed	U	2 [0]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
cf. Vicia sp.	Vetch / Vetchling	Seed	C	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unknown	Root / Tuber		C	-	-	-	-	0 [2]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NON WOOD TOTAL				4 [1]	8 [4]	3 [0]	0	0 [3]	1 [1]	0	1 [1]	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]
<b>Wood</b>																	
Charcoal (g)	Various	Wood	C	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.3	0	0.4	0.1	0.1

Agriculture, together with standard identification keys (e.g., Cappers et al. 2009; Hather 1993; Paparisto et al. 1988).

In general, plant preservation in the deposits at Grunas in Units 2008-001, 2008-002, and 2008-003 is poor. This is most likely due to three primary factors: the proximity of the deposits to the modern ground surface, bioturbation (evidenced by insect carapaces, rootlets, modern seed remains), and a lack of significant burning activity in all areas of the site. Overall, the low density of wood charcoal (ranging from 0.0264–0.2114 g per liter) in the sediments collected for flotation is striking. Although the overall abundance of wood charcoal from Unit 003 was low, the density of wood remains per liter is between one and five times higher than from Unit 2008-001, a historic house with a clay hearth, suggesting a greater intensity of burning and/or refuse dumping behaviors in the prehistoric versus historic areas of the site. The overall low density of fine wood charcoal in both Units 2008-001 and 2008-003 may represent a reliable signal for a general lack of burning activity and/or hearth-related refuse deposition in both areas.

The majority of the nonwood material is uncarbonized and may be modern in origin. As the site's location and environmental setting limit the likelihood of preservation of plant macrofossils not converted to a more stable form through burning or mineralization, carbonized taxa are interpreted as more securely associated with the Iron Age occupation of the site. The nearly ubiquitous presence of *Cenococcum*-type sclerotia in the samples reflects more recent soil formation processes and is consistent with the presence of acidic soils and the site's environmental setting at the interface between temperate and alpine zones.

The uncarbonized plant materials consist primarily of seeds that are less than 1 mm in their maximum dimension that may have been deposited through the activity of burrowing insects. These include *Carex* sp. (sedges), *Chenopodium* sp. (goosefoot, fat hen), *Borago* sp. (borage), *Lithospermum* sp. (gromwell), *Rumex crispus* (dock), *Sambucus* sp. (elder), *Scirpus* sp. (bulrushes), and *Silene* sp. (campion). Most of these taxa reflect disturbed field habitats and are likely to correspond to the modern ground cover. The presence of sedges and bulrushes in the Unit 2008-003 samples, but not in Unit 2008-001 or 2008-002, suggests a slight difference in their settings, with the presence of periodically wet

areas in the vicinity of Unit 2008-003. Near the surface in Unit 2008-001, Level 002, two large specimens that were not carbonized were recovered. The presence of these examples of *Prunus mahaleb* (rock cherry) and *Prunus* sp. endocarps is easily explained by their proximity to the surface. More problematic, however, is the presence of an uncarbonized walnut shell fragment in Unit 2008-003, Level 080, that may reflect disturbance of the deposit.

Carbonized plant fossils that are more likely to be related to the Iron Age occupation of the site include remains of both cultivated and wild species. The only remains of cultivars are grains of indeterminate cereal types (two fragments from Unit 2008-003, Levels 008 and 010); a pea (*Pisum sativum*) from Unit 2008-003, Level 005; and a fragmentary garlic corm (*Allium* sp.) from the same context. Wild plants that were carbonized include a fragment of wild apple (*Malus* sp.) from Unit 2008-001, Level 002, and several seeds of *Clino-podium vulgare* (wild basil), a crocus or ashphodel tuber fragment, a vetch-type seed, and two unidentifiable tuber fragments from Unit 2008-003.

The following sections discuss the macrobotanical remains by context, starting with the Early Iron Age and moving forward in time (Unit 2008-001, Unit 2008-003, Unit 2008-002) (Table 10.7).

Excavation in Unit 2008-001 produced five archaeobotanical samples (Levels 002, 003, 004, 005, and 006). One fragmentary carbonized cereal grain (Level 002), which could not be identified with greater taxonomic specificity due to its spongy condition, was the only evidence for cultivated plants in Unit 2008-001. This cereal fragment was associated with uncarbonized seeds of *Chenopodium* sp. (goosefoot), *Rumex crispus* (dock), and *Silene* sp. (campion) that are characteristic of disturbed habitats and likely reflect surface vegetation. A fragmentary carbonized wild apple (*Malus* sp.) fruit and uncarbonized pits of *Prunus spinosa* (sloe, blackthorn) and *Prunus mahaleb* (rock cherry) were also recovered from Level 002. Although these latter may have been deposited by birds, given the close ecological dependence of rock cherry on birds for dispersal of its seeds (Herrera and Jordano 1981), they are adapted to arid habitats in upland elevations and attest to the presence of fruiting shrubs such as these in the vicinity of the site.

In all levels, the low density of carbonized seeds and wood (0.1 g per 3.785 liters) argues against significant burning or burned debris-dumping activity near the

Table 10.8 Wood Data from Grunas

Season	Site	Unit	Level	Record	Sample Type	Betula	Corylus	Fagus	Fraxinus	Ostrya	Populus	Quercus	Sorbus	Pinus	Unknown	Total	Comments
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	003	008	charcoal	2	0	1	3	0	0	7	0	1	0	14	Most wood in this sample is from twigs
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	004	002	charcoal	0	0	3	1	2	0	1	0	2	0	9	Some uncharred pieces
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	005	003	charcoal	0	2	7	27	3	0	5	0	0	4	48	Lots of twigs (mostly Fraxinus)
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	006	005	charcoal	0	0	5	4	7	4	1	0	0	0	21	
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	007	004	charcoal	1	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	7	Good preservation. Not twiggy
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	008	004	charcoal	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Charred daub
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	009	003	charcoal	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	8	
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	010	001	charcoal	1	0	17	0	0	0	0	2	33	2	55	
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	011	001	charcoal	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	32	
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	012	001	charcoal	0	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	8	
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	013	001	charcoal	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	Very fragile
2007	IAS S006 Grunas	001	015	001	charcoal	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	
						4	2	65	36	16	4	19	2	57	6	211	
						Birch	Hazelnut, Lethi	Beech, Ahu	Ash, Frasher	Hop-horn-beam, Mellièze	Poplar, Plepi	Oak, Lis	White-beam	Pine, Pisha			

terrace wall. The rarity of cultivars provides good evidence that the terraces at Grunas were not agricultural in nature.

In total, 14 samples for flotation were recovered from Unit 2008-003, a  $4 \times 4$ -m square, making it the most intensively sampled area on the site. Despite intensive sampling, however, both wood and nonwood remains were poorly attested, with the maximum density of wood charcoal at 0.132 g per liter in Level 008. The poor preservation likely results from a combination of the shallowness of the deposit and the absence of cultural behaviors likely to preserve plant remains, such as those likely to result in accidental or intentional burning of plants.

In Level 006/060, after reaching a hard clay platform that may represent a house floor, excavators attempted to delineate differences in the botanical signature of the platform and its surrounding fill by sampling these areas separately. However, these samples were very poor in plant remains and showed differences only in the density of charcoal. The platform area had a slightly higher density of charcoal (0.079 g per liter) as compared with the surrounding fill (0.026 g per liter). Although this pattern contrasts with the pattern of a lower density of lithic and ceramic artifacts on this surface as compared with the surrounding fill, it does not necessarily refute the hypothesis that floor surfaces were regularly swept clean, as larger fragments of ceramics and lithics are more readily cleaned away than are fragments smaller than a few millimeters in size.

Sampling for archaeobotanical remains in Unit 2008-002 was not intensive. Excavators collected only a single flotation sample (Level 000) for Unit 2008-002,

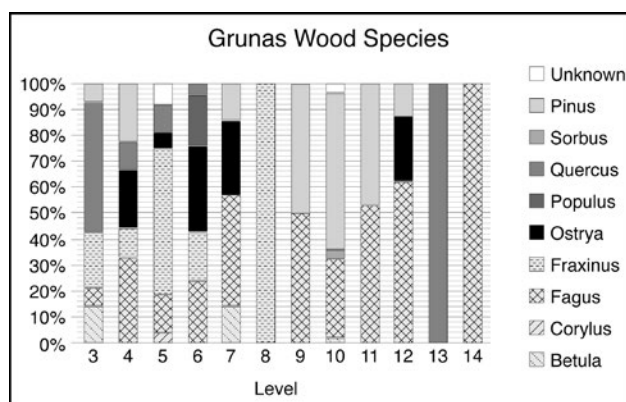


Figure 10.20. Graph of wood species percentages by level from Grunas.  
Jill Seagard

despite the presence of intact features where carbonized materials are likely to have been preserved, such as the clay hearth. The only plant remains recovered from the deposits in Unit 2008-002 consist of 0.8 g of wood charcoal. No nonwood materials were recovered. It is therefore not possible to apply archaeobotanical data to assess the hypothesis that Structure 003 was inhabited year-round.

Despite the poor preservation of archaeobotanical remains, their recovery at Grunas is noteworthy, as it is one of only a few sites in Albania where excavators have made an effort to collect these materials. Of these, the only sites with Iron Age material are the Bonjakët temple site near Apollonia (Allen and Margaritis 2009), the Lofkënd tumulus in the same region (Papadopoulos et al. 2007), and Sovjan, near Korça (Allen 2005). Given the lowland setting of these sites, coupled with the functional specificity of Lofkënd and Bonjakët, none of these sites provides a good parallel for Grunas. As the first northern Albanian highland site of any age for which botanical materials have been recovered, and in the absence of comparanda from highland sites in the adjacent areas of Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosova, it is difficult to place the Grunas material in a broader spatial context. However, even if other assemblages from neighboring upland sites were available, the isolated nature of valley systems in the region suggests that the picture of human-plant interaction in one valley need not parallel that in an adjacent locale. What can be concluded from the results of archaeobotanical analyses is that (1) there is no unequivocal evidence for use of the terraces at Grunas for cultivation; (2) cultivated cereals and pulses were available, however, and may have brought to the site from other areas; and (3) there is good evidence for the availability and possible use of wild plants (e.g., *Clinopodium vulgare*, *Prunus spinosa*, *Prunus mahaleb*, and *Crocus sativus* or *Asphodelus aestivus*).

### Wood<sup>14</sup>

A total of 211 pieces of carbonized wood in 12 samples collected from Grunas, Unit 2007-001, were analyzed (Table 10.8 and Figure 10.20). All pieces greater than 2 mm were snapped by hand and examined with light microscopy at a magnification of  $\times 500$ .

The samples with the greatest preservation (i.e., highest counts of carbonized wood) are in Levels 005, 006, 010, and 011. The taxa with the greatest representation

in the sample column are *Fagus sylvatica* (beech; Alb. *ahu*), *Fraxinus excelsior* (ash; Alb. *frashër*), *Ostrya carpinifolia* (hop-hornbeam; Alb. *mëllëze*), *Quercus* sp. (oak; Alb. *lis*), and *Pinus* sp. (pine; Alb. *pisha*).

There appears to be a strong association between *Pinus* and *Fagus*, with both types more prevalent in the lower/earlier levels of the test pit. This finding may reflect the exploitation of forests at the upper and mid-levels of the valley.

In the test pit's upper levels, the samples appear to be more diverse and contain younger growth wood than in the lower levels. Quantitative measurement of ring width and curvature was not undertaken, but based simply on observation of the pieces, the wood in Levels 003 to 006 tends to be twigs, with few large pieces. While *Fagus* continues to be present in the upper/later levels, albeit in lower proportions, *Pinus* becomes quite scarce. *Fraxinus* wood, and *Quercus* to a lesser extent, appears to become more important in the later period of the occupation.

Given these results, it is possible that the higher pine forests were exploited and exhausted earlier in the Grunas occupation, and later the occupants turned to wood from the valley bottom. The increased diversity of species and appearance of more twigs (i.e., younger wood) may be an indicator of resource stress. To be verified, this hypothesis would have to be tested with a more substantial data set than the one currently available. But, the impact of a large, intrusive population at Grunas, coupled with evidence of climate change at the start of the Iron Age (see Chapter Three), may have caused a shortage of higher altitude, large trees.

### Soil Chemistry<sup>15</sup>

During the first two weeks of the 2007 season, we collected soil samples from three different sites for the purposes of site prospection and interpretation, as well as intersite comparison. Each sample was analyzed for phosphate level, which is a well-established indicator of human habitation and usage (Sarris et al. 2004). The phosphate analysis methodology is summarized below. The first site analyzed was the *stan* (shepherd's camp) at the Qafë e Thorës (IAS Site 010; see Chapter Nine), which is in intermittent modern use; the second was a historic house (ST159) in the neighborhood of Theth-Okol (IAS Site 009; see Chapters Seven and Nine), currently inhabited; and the third was Grunas. In applying soil chemical



analysis, we hoped to understand better how Grunas functioned during the Iron Age. We sought to determine whether the settlement had been divided into different kinds of work and living spaces, which would produce different phosphate signatures. For example, areas within domestic spaces that were kept clean (such as the clay platform described above) should produce low levels of phosphate, whereas areas outside domestic spaces, where garbage was dumped or animals were penned, should produce high levels of phosphate. Results of soil chemical analysis from Grunas were compared to those from IAS Sites 009 and 010, which were also test excavated, to determine whether they were more like those from a seasonally occupied camp, where animals were penned among and next to huts and would have roamed more freely around the settlement, or those from a large permanent house, surrounded by agricultural fields, where animals were confined to a barn when on the premises.

Samples were collected by means of a coring auger and specified on a grid of 5- to 10-m intervals, with additional sampling at spots of potential interest. The target depth was 30 cm, the depth of the cultural layer at Grunas, but rocky soils often prevented us from

achieving the desired depth. Samples were weighed wet to obtain 1.00 g of soil. Very wet soils were air dried, and rocky soils were filtered through a mesh to eliminate mass offset related to rocks. Each 1.00-g sample was digested in 10.00 mL of Mehlich III extracting solution and shaken for 5 minutes for optimal extraction of inorganic phosphate from its insoluble form. The digested sample was then filtered through a 150-micron glass fiber filter by means of pressurized syringe filtration. A 3.00-mL portion of the resultant extractant was combined with .30 mL of developing solution A (ammonium molybdate and sulfuric acid), followed by .30 mL of developing solution B (malachite green and polyvinyl alcohol). Absorbance readings were taken simultaneously at 630 nm and 473 nm immediately after mixing, and the phosphate level was determined by means of the methodology described in Rypkema et al. (2007). Solutions with phosphate levels beyond the dynamic range of the development method (approximately 320 mg P/kg soil) were diluted with extracting solution to maintain consistent sample pH.

Test samples were acquired to assess characteristic soil properties of the region. These samples revealed a water

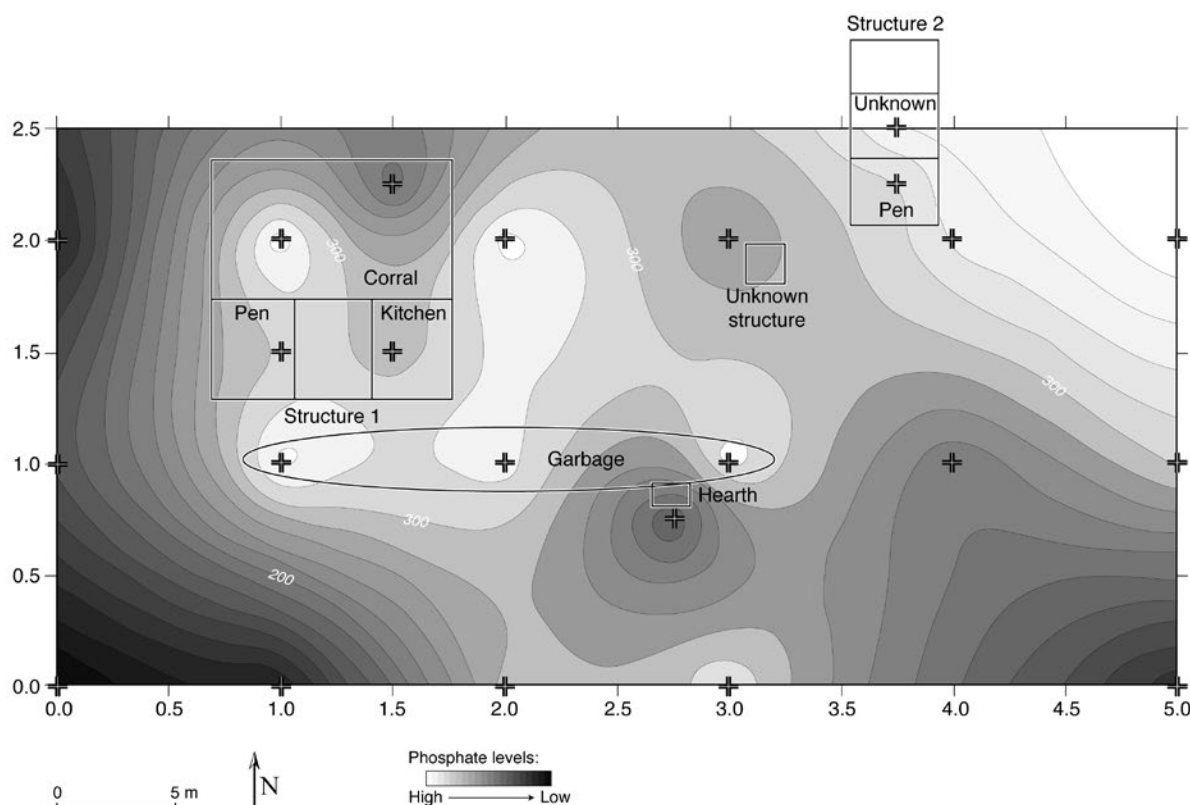


Figure 10.21. Results of soil phosphate analysis from IAS Site 010. *Jill Seagard*

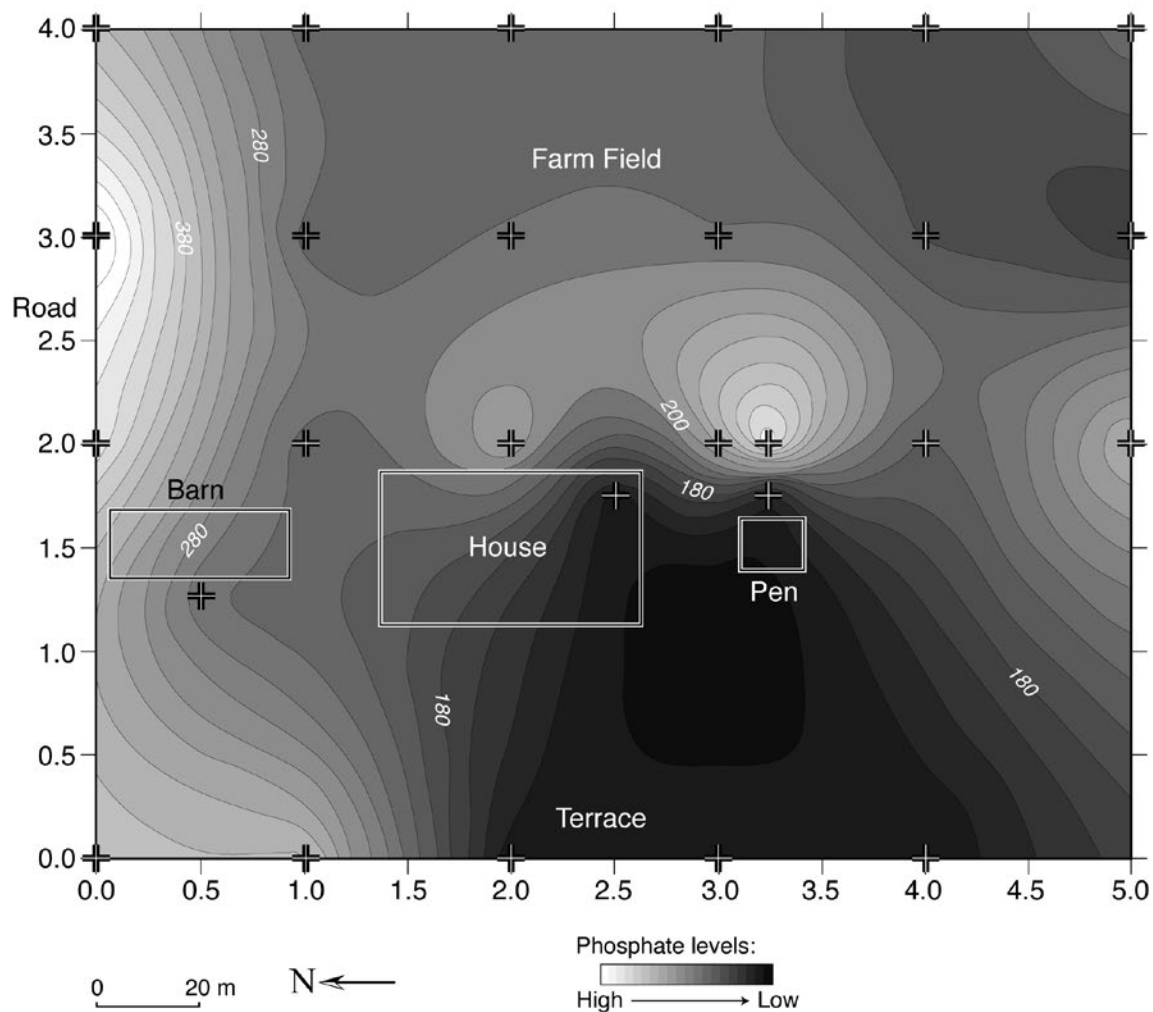


Figure 10.22. Results of soil phosphate analysis from IAS Site 009. *Jill Seagard*

content of 25.5 percent by mass with a standard deviation of 3.0 percent ( $n = 5$ ). Given the small amount of rainfall during the testing interval, we estimate that the water content remained roughly consistent among the sampled soils, well within the error of confident phosphate evaluation. The majority of tested soils contained fine particulate matter, often resulting in turbid samples. To evaluate the impact of this problem, we conducted a turbidity comparison experiment in which analysis was performed on both turbid and clarified soils (the latter of which took two to three hours to obtain). This study demonstrated that the absorption levels at the two wavelengths were affected by a similar magnitude; while the absolute value of both absorbances increased, the difference between the absorbances—the quantity used to determine phosphate levels—remained consistent,

demonstrating an additional advantage of two-color spectrophotometric monitoring over colorimetry. The results of this study suggested that analysis of turbid samples in the field would provide acceptable accuracy, provided the turbidity did not boost absorbance levels beyond the reliable instrumental detection range.

We collected 25 samples at IAS Site 010, in an upland pasture, centered around small residential structures and animal pens (Figure 10.21; see also Figure 9.20). Phosphate levels at the periphery were low, falling off within 10 m of the westernmost structural boundary. Values increased in the region of the structures, with particularly high levels in areas designed for animal habitation. To the south of Structure 001, there was an area where garbage had been dumped. High values continued down slope, further south, probably the result

of erosion and/or the shifting of high-phosphate soils by rain. Values dipped slightly along the path between Structure 001 and Structure 002, between which is a small structure of indeterminate use. Approaching Structure 002, values rose again and continued upward to the east, beyond which was located a third structure. The high phosphate level in the northeast corner of the sampling grid may be due to garbage deposition from this third structure.

Working again on 10-m transects, we sampled soil from IAS Site 009, which had been continuously inhabited for at least several hundred years (Figure 10.22). The westernmost transect ran across a fallow field on an elevated terrace, with phosphate levels decreasing

with increasing distance from the road. Samples near the road were characteristically high, perhaps because animals are herded along them, with lower levels in the majority of the cultivated field crossed by the transects east of the house. One sample with unusually high phosphate was taken just north of the house, directly below the former location of a second-story toilet (see again Figure 7.16). High phosphate levels also were detected further to the east in front of a compost heap that abuts an animal pen. The origin of the high phosphate from the southernmost point is unknown.

The most extensive phosphate survey was performed at Grunas, with nearly 200 samples collected over the course of five to six days (Figure 10.23). We successfully processed between 27 and 37 samples per day, with analysis taking place on site as samples were collected. One eastern terrace, Terrace 10, produced remarkably high phosphate levels. It is situated beyond and below the fortification wall and was probably used to pen live-stock. It is currently accessible via a gate directly in front of a bridge that spans the river to the west, suggesting a similar modern usage. Similarly high phosphate levels from Terrace 4 could suggest a similar function but may merely be due to shallow sampling depths, which tended to yield higher phosphate values. Another elevated region immediately abuts Structure 003 at the western boundary of the site and may be associated with its historic occupation.

When it comes to reconstruction of settlement function and organization at prehistoric Grunas, soil phosphate results from Terraces 5 to 8 are most revealing. These terraces are characterized by medium to high phosphate levels, as might be associated with human as opposed to animal occupation. Areas of high phosphate are patchy and ring areas of very low phosphate. This is exactly what we might expect if these terraces were occupied by huts, as indicated by the 2008 excavations. The various low-phosphate zones are approximately 20 m long and 10 m wide, which matches well the excavation data from Unit 2008-003. Furthermore, this pattern does not match those from either of our two modern analogues, IAS Sites 009 and 010, particularly well. EIA Grunas seems to fall somewhere in between the temporary, impermanent, high-altitude occupation at Site 010 and the permanent, highly structured occupation at Site 009. The latter is characterized by surrounding zones of relatively low phosphate, associated with fields, with singular spikes associated with the modern road, a

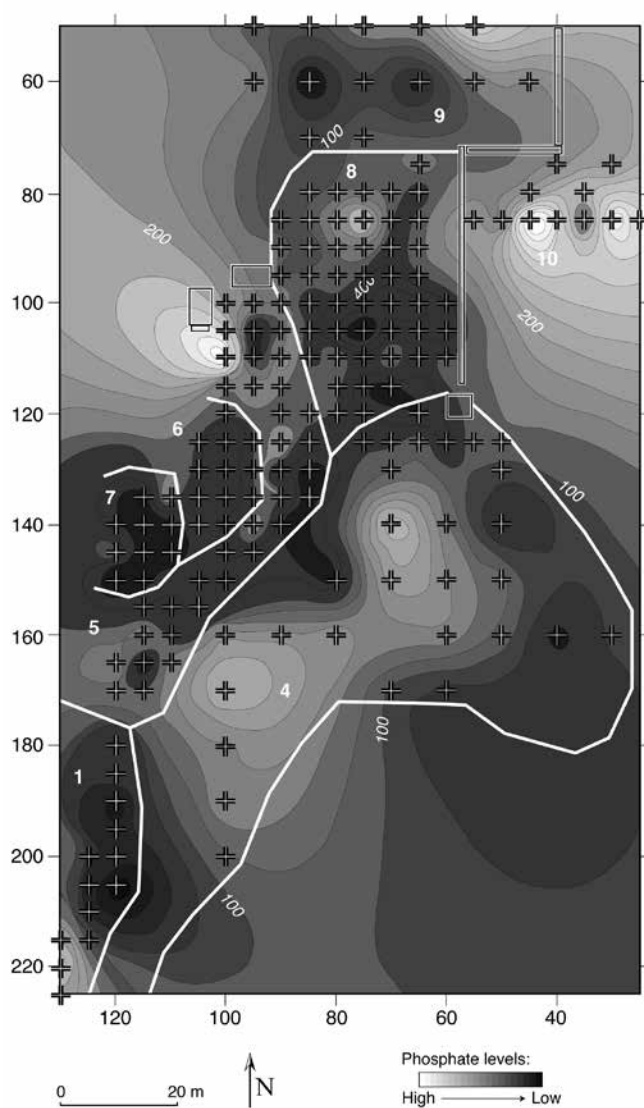


Figure 10.23. Results of soil phosphate analysis from Grunas, IAS Site 006. *Jill Seagard*

defunct toilet, and a permanent animal pen/small barn. The inhabitants of Grunas do not appear to have sown crops on or near the site, and their animals may have been held in large, open-air pens associated with the site's eastern terraces. Instead of a single large structure, such as the house at Site 009, there were many huts, leading to a patchy distribution of phosphate. Site 010, a modern *stan*, is characterized by high phosphate levels throughout, caused by humans and animals living together, cheek by jowl. The settlement at Grunas was less permanent and focused than that at Site 009 and yet more structured than that at Site 010. Soil chemical data reinforce the impressions gained through excavation and strengthen our interpretation: Grunas was a large, well-populated site.

## Conclusion

If the prehistoric occupants of Grunas were indeed seasonally transhumant, where did they come from, and why did they expend large amounts of time and energy to construct such a complex, defensible settlement?

At present, it is impossible to know for sure, but there are two possibilities: they came from either the vicinity of Shkodra or Kukës, or someplace in between (Figure 9.27). Given the evidence for Iron Age occupation in Shosh, at places such as EAS Site 003, a migration route from Shkodra up the Kir River valley and into Shala seems most likely. Perhaps Grunas guarded the route into Montenegro and Kosova via the Qafë Peja, as did the fortress at Rosujë guard the route via Valbona (Ceka and Jubani 1971). In any case, evidence for late prehistoric settlement in Shala points to movement back and forth between the strongholds of Shkodër and Kukës and into the high mountains.

Results demonstrate that Grunas, including terraces and fortifications, was built in one construction phase during the early Iron Age. This may have happened during a climate phase that began about 1000 B.C. and led to colder, wetter conditions (Speranza et al. 2002). Excavations indicated three phases of occupation: rapid construction in the Early Iron Age, immediately followed by an Early to Middle Iron Age settlement of apparently quite substantial population, during which the

lower terraces at least were densely occupied, perhaps by huts or houses, and an Early Modern reoccupation. It is possible that of all of Theth's neighborhoods, Grunas was the first settled. These Early Modern ancestors of Theth's current inhabitants would appear to have followed a path first blazed in the Iron Age.

## Notes

1 Preliminary reports regarding Grunas have been published in Galaty (2012), Galaty et al. (2009, 2010), and Schon and Galaty (2006).

2 Unlike south-central Albania, there are no other radiocarbon dates from prehistoric sites in northern Albania and thus no good absolute chronology. There is an excellent sequence of radiocarbon dates from Sovjan in Korça (Lera et al. 2007–2008), as well as sequences from the Lofkënd tumulus and Apollonia necropolis (Damiata et al. 2007–2008), all of which span the transition from the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age. In southern and central Albania, the Early Iron Age was under way by 1000 B.C. Grunas fits into this sequence well, although the end of the Bronze Age may have occurred slightly later there and throughout northern Albania.

3 A good parallel for this construction technique comes from the Late Bronze Age enclosure of Škrip on the island of Brač in central Dalmatia (see Gaffney et al. 2001).

4 This section is the work of William A. Parkinson.

5 This section is the work of Timothy J. Ward, Jiyan Gu, and Michael L. Galaty.

6 This section is the work of Michael L. Galaty and Zamir Taflica.

7 This section is the work of Timothy J. Ward, Jiyan Gu, Michael L. Galaty, Nadia D. Al Hashimi, Christopher D. Horne, Christie L. Kokel, and James E. Thompson.

8 The reagents used in this study were hydrofluoric acid (HF; 47–51 percent; Fisher), nitric acid (HNO<sub>3</sub>; 67–70 percent; Fisher), and boric acid (H<sub>3</sub>BO<sub>3</sub>; 99.999 percent; Aldrich). A series of external calibration standards containing up to 43 elements ranging from 10 to 500 ppb were prepared from inorganic Ventures 71A. Inorganic Ventures 71D was used as an internal standard. Accuracy of the ICP-MS measurements was checked against the NIST 1643e standard. Hydrogen gas was used to reduce oxide interferences for some elements.

9 We have not included the raw chemical data here, but these are available from Galaty by request.

10 This section is the work of Hanneke Hoekman-Sites.

11 This section is the work of Richard W. Yerkes.

12 No bones of the chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*) are included in the comparative faunal collection at Ohio State.

13 This section is the work of Susan E. Allen.

14 This section is the work of Michelle Elliott.

15 This section is the work of Heather A. Rypkema.



*Chapter Eleven***CONCLUSION**

Michael L. Galaty, Ols Lafe, Wayne E. Lee, and Zamir Tafilica



In studying the Shala *fis*, we sought to identify those characteristics that render some societies “persistent” (Castille and Kushner 1981), whereas over the course of history, others have struggled and disappeared. In today’s world, as climates change and cultures clash, it pays to look to the margins, to those societies on the periphery that have formed resilient, sustainable sociopolitical and economic systems in extreme environments. The people of Shala survived, even thrived, in just such an environment: high in the mountains, in a frontier zone, enemies on all sides. They did so by mastering their fate: investing in the landscapes of their valley, controlling the sources of their food, cooperating as needed, fighting when necessary. But always they were conscious of the world around them. They were remote from that world, but not isolated from and unaffected by it. They practiced a strategy we have called isolationism, interacting with outsiders when it paid to do so and retreating when the costs of interaction were too high. Strategic isolationism required flexibility and a willingness to change, if change was required. In this way, Shala hewed to its traditions but adapted and grew as well. In the case of northern Albania, the challenges of living in the mountains, protected from the Ottoman state in “regions of refuge” (Aguirre Beltran 1979; Scott 2009), led to remarkable cultural diversity, a flourishing of beliefs and behaviors that astonished Victorian travelers to the region. Adversity may be the mother of invention, and if so, nowhere is this more true than in northern Albania. There are lessons to be learned from Shala. About resilience in the face of climate change. About sustainability when times are tough and resources few. About how to live in a world-system bent on incorporating all cultures, including the small ones.

In studying Shala, we identified various factors that

separately and in combination determined the degree to which the *fis* was resilient, sustainable, and able to resist outside conquest (see Figure 1.13). These factors shifted through time, often in response to events in the wider world, and shifts can be correlated with changing levels of isolation and interaction. Moreover, while the ancestors of Shala’s current inhabitants pursued one way of living in Shala, it was not the only way. Shala was occupied in the Iron Age, at Grunas primarily, but the Iron Age occupation was quite different from that of modern Shala. That Shala was settled multiple times in the past, and in very different ways, demonstrates that there are numerous means to engender resilience and sustainability. Diachronic comparison of different life ways allowed us to hone in on those behaviors that worked in Shala in the past and might well work in today’s world. Taking a diachronic, comparative view of Shala required an interdisciplinary methodology that integrated ethnography, history, and archaeology. We operated at various, nested scales of analysis, taking the –scapes of Shala as our primary units of study. This approach revealed the coupled, dynamic nature of Shala’s –scapes, whether natural, built, social, or sacred. In the end, we discovered that the “small world” of the Bjeshkët e Namuna was not as small as it had been made out to be.

### **Factors Affecting Resilience and Change in Shala**

Using the ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data at our disposal, we can define for any point in time those factors that affected Shala’s resilience in the face of various forms of outside influence. If, for example, we draw a line through Figure 1.13 at A.D. 1550, when

Shala's sociopolitical and economic systems were just forming, we can identify those factors that most affected the people of Shala at that point in time and describe how they responded.

In 1550, the world's climate was defined by the Little Ice Age. Temperatures were low, humidity was high, and annual rainfall amounts varied regionally but were generally above average. In Shala, low temperatures, heavy snowfalls, cool summers, and slow snow melts provided optimum growing conditions for the New World crops—maize at first (during the sixteenth or early seventeenth century) and potatoes later (during the eighteenth or early nineteenth century)—upon which northern Albanians would come to depend. This conclusion—that cold conditions at high altitude were actually conducive to northern Albania's developing system of agriculture—runs counter to expectations but is one key insight afforded by our research. In 1550, Shala's population was very low, but it soon began to grow, slowly but steadily. The scant demographic data for this early period, acquired by SVP historians, and the results of intensive archaeological survey all point to expanding populations. Initially, Late Medieval occupation of the valley was nucleated around churches, at places like Dakaj, which was also a fortified center, a magnet for industry and trade. By 1550, however, settlement had begun to disperse as villages and tribal segments grew, and households multiplied and split (see Figure 5.1). This process is recorded in the oral histories of the people of Shala today. Occupation of the valley was year-round and permanent, as it is now for some families, and while we have no way of knowing how large individual families were and how elaborate their houses, we can assume the long-term trend was toward larger families and larger, more elaborate homes. Nevertheless, given the relatively low levels of population in Shala and throughout northern Albania, we assume that in 1550, exogamous marriage patterns were wide, a primary means whereby individuals and groups acquired brides and maintained contacts beyond the local. At this point, the valley was still used extensively, and investment in the built environment was minimal. Shala's inhabitants occupied and tilled areas of flat land or, when necessary, exploited existing Iron Age terraces. The complex irrigation systems used today probably had not yet been built. The trade in pottery and other goods was small but growing, and foreign ceramics were found mostly near churches and at Dakaj. It was

probably during this period that Shala began, under the influence of the Ottomans, to adopt the hospitality behaviors for which it is now renowned. Tobacco, coffee, sugar, wheat, salt—all of the accoutrements of a thriving, politically active household—had to be acquired in market towns. Despite evidence for external contacts, through marriage, trade, and, perhaps, feud, raiding, and war, sixteenth-century accounts of travel to northern Albania, written by outsiders, do not exist. This may be because Shala itself, and Albania generally, had faded from the European (and Turkish) consciousness. In the late fifteenth century, the resistance of Skanderbeg and his Albanian warriors to Ottoman conquest had enthralled and inspired western Europeans, Italians in particular. But in the 100 years following their defeat, few outsiders visited Albania, and there were no recorded rebellions. By the 1600s, though, this had begun to change. There were a series of minor rebellions in which Shala participated, and a trickle of priests and foreign emissaries visited Albania and returned to write about it. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, incorporative pressures on the northern tribes waned. The Ottomans seemed content to leave them be and enlist their services as mercenaries when the need arose. Few attempts were made to tax them. They served as a useful foil, turned occasionally against their northern neighbors, the Montenegrins. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the situation in Shala had evolved and the Ottomans were making their presence felt.

If we now shift our line through Figure 1.13 ahead in time, to A.D. 1750, we can see how the factors affecting the people of Shala had changed in the intervening 200 years and describe their responses, or lack thereof. In 1750, temperatures were still very low, and annual precipitation rates had decreased to more moderate levels. This may have caused problems for Shala if a reduced snowpack led to reduced summer runoff. It may be that Shala's irrigation systems were first constructed during this period of lower rainfall. Despite the change in climate, overall population in Shala continued to climb (perhaps following the introduction of potatoes, but certainly as a result of expanded maize agriculture), and as it did so, settlement dispersed further. The people of Shala would have had no choice but to bring marginal land on steep, rocky slopes into production, through terracing and other forms of landscape intensification. Trade with the outside world continued apace, but it is likely that Shala's system of exogamous marriage began



to contract at this point. During the eighteenth century, a series of rebellions took place, travelers to the region were few, and incorporative pressures on the part of the Ottoman state grew. It was during this period that the *bajrak* system was introduced, marking a major incursion by Ottoman officials into northern Albanian tribal affairs, paralleled by similar contemporary developments in other semi-autonomous zones throughout the Ottoman Empire. The creation of *bajraks* in Shala and the promotion of *bajraktars* to new positions of power may have begun, or hastened, a process of political fragmentation that resulted in the split of Shala and Theth into two separate, intermarrying *fis i madh* (Figure 5.1). At the same time, Shala itself relaxed marriage restrictions between its constituent *fisi* and villages. The Ottoman “divide-and-conquer” strategy had the effect, intended or not, of severing the external marriage contacts forged by Shala’s families in previous centuries, leading to a rapid rise in inter- and intra-*fis* feuds. As a result, Shala entered the tumultuous nineteenth century weakened and ill-prepared to face the challenges ahead.

If we slide our line a little further still, into the twentieth century, we can identify massive changes in Shala. Climate had warmed steadily during the preceding 150 years, and annual rainfall amounts had rebounded but were erratic and unpredictable. Higher temperatures, a reduced snowpack, and occasional summer droughts may have made maize agriculture difficult, leading to food shortages. Population, having peaked in 1900, declined for the first time in 400 years, perhaps as a result of the Balkan Wars and World Wars I and II. During this time, Albania won independence from the Ottomans, in 1912, but also fell under the control of a string of external powers (e.g., Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany). During this period, the number of travelers to the region exploded. Many of them describe poverty and famine. Shala participated in several major rebellions against the Albanian federal and foreign occupying governments, primarily in response to policies that undercut tribal power, such as the confiscation of guns, for which it suffered various reprisals. Where the Ottomans had failed to incorporate the northern tribes, the Communist government succeeded. Population rebounded, the settlement system and economy were forcibly and radically altered, nuclear families in smaller houses became the norm, and Albania was cut off from the rest of the world. The people of Shala were not allowed to travel through the mountains without permission, so trade

and familial ties were severed. Traditional culture was gutted, and both the Catholic religion and the *Kanun* were driven under ground. When the Communist government fell in 1991, families left the valley in droves. Population plummeted. Most families now occupy the valley in summer only, and many are trying to enter the tourist industry, transforming their homes into guest accommodations. Their legacy of hospitality to all will serve them well in the new economy.

This brief analysis of Shala’s modern history points to several factors that played crucial roles in determining its ability to build and maintain a sustainable and resilient society. Strategic responses to these factors were circumscribed by the Ottoman state, whereas the range of possible tactical responses was limited by the mountain environment. Climate change, in particular in its effect on water availability, was of key concern. Shala’s residents might have responded to the Little Ice Age by pursuing long-distance transhumance, but the Ottoman occupation of the coastal plain and the redistribution of land there in the *timar* system made a complete reliance on pastoralism risky. Instead, Shala adopted New World crops that were better suited to the mountain climate and soils, and inhabitants lived in the mountains year-round and in greater numbers. The subsistence system itself was elastic and could accommodate the import of alien species—maize initially, and potatoes later—and this openness was a source of considerable resilience. In addition, when managed carefully, the New World crops provided a sustainable, expandable source of surplus food, especially when combined with herding in a mixed-village agricultural economy. For this reason, for most of Shala’s modern history, population grew without causing pressure. Feud and infanticide were *not* forms of population control; they served social and political ends within the tribal system. It was only when Shala’s tribal system had been undercut by the Ottomans, and its carefully constructed system of isolationism fully breached, that famine struck and population fell. We can say confidently, therefore, that given the proper tools, human societies will administer, deploy, and, if necessary, limit population beneficially. Population growth does not by default diminish sustainability and resilience, although it can create pressure and thus encourage adaptation.

For Shala’s subsistence system to work, several important tactical responses were necessary. Soil and water had to be allocated fairly, and given that these

resources were distributed extensively (and relatively linearly), fully nucleated settlement was not an option. Families dispersed widely throughout the valley and, eventually, brought marginal soils on steep slopes into production through terracing. Intensification in this manner provided successful, growing lineages a means of banking surplus energy and growing larger still, but dispersed settlement and intensification required cooperation within and across *fis* lines. Families had to assist each other, and this was facilitated by a system of shared labor agreements and reciprocal hospitality. Guests were offered various, usually exotic, foods and luxury items: bread, salt, tobacco, coffee, sugar, *raki*, and so on. Cooperation was so important to the life of the community that customary rules regarding labor and hospitality, and all other forms of social interaction, were codified in the *Kanun*. If an individual or family broke the rules of the *Kanun*, punishment was swift and decisive. A council of elders, the *kuvend*, administered justice, and depending on the severity of the offense, a guilty verdict might mean the economic ruin or social death of a family, through the burning of their house or ejection from the tribe. The proper functioning of this system required careful monitoring of the valley's resources, water and land in particular, the latter through the precise demarcation of boundaries and borders. In Shala, natural, economic, and sociopolitical systems were dynamically and recursively coupled; change in one determined changes in the others. Economic decisions and sociopolitical relationships were recorded in the natural landscape through the construction (and destruction) of a particular built environment and the encoding of a particular, syncretic belief system.

Whereas this solution to the needs engendered by dispersed subsistence and settlement systems appears rigid and potentially unresponsive in the face of change, it was in fact a source of considerable resilience. Because the *Kanun* was an oral, rather than written, code, it was a living document. It could be variously interpreted and evolved through time and by region, depending on the specific needs of different tribal groups. The *kuvend* harnessed the wisdom of the tribe's elders, who could and did (and still do) modify the *Kanun* as needed to meet various challenges, in particular those brought to Shala by the outside world. Because change often emanated from the outside, elders needed ways to interact with other tribes, both to gather information and create alliances in times of war. Networks of interaction

were built through the system of exogamous marriage but also, ironically, through feud. Feud, and raiding, allowed a tribe to gauge the military and political strength of other, sometimes distant, tribes. Trade was another, separate form of interaction that facilitated intelligence gathering, often on a wider scale. Shala maintained trade relationships in Gusinje and Peja, thereby allowing them to enter Montenegrin and Ottoman territory. Such trade relationships also were necessary to the system of reciprocal hospitality described above. When Shala was cut off from its traditional markets in the mid-twentieth century, it was a huge blow. Elders still describe the final closing of the border as the single, most memorable event in their lives and the life of the tribe. The economic system of Shala, including the systems of settlement and subsistence, which interfaced directly and tightly with the sociopolitical system, was sustainable and self-regulating, but it was not immune to perturbation. Losing access to the prestige goods that were the basis for reciprocal labor and hospitality agreements severely crippled the system. When this happened, Shala was forced to look elsewhere, to Shkodra primarily, for trade partners, but traveling to Shkodra made them much more vulnerable to control by Albanian government officials. Previously, they had been able to pit competing jurisdictions (e.g., those in Shkodra versus those in Peja) against each other by crossing the "boundaries" between them and thereby maintain a degree of freedom from administration. This option was lost when the borders closed. Likewise, the exogamous marriage system could contract without damaging Shala's sociopolitical system, but it did so at the expense of regional interaction, with a net increase in isolation. Changes to the marriage system, which may have been encouraged by the Ottomans, whether knowingly or not, rendered the tribe less resilient, less able to cope with external threats. Regional interaction and knowledge appear to be key components of a resilient mountain society, of perhaps any society.

It appears that the period of stability and growth in Shala that lasted from 1550 through at least the mid-1800s was generated through its symbiotic relationship with the Ottomans. This symbiosis was threatened by the *tanzimat* reforms of the nineteenth century and the wars of the early twentieth. In the mid- to late 1800s, the Ottoman state sought to tax and variously control the northern Albanian tribes. Ottoman incorporative pressure went from weak to moderate but ultimately



Figure 11.1. The last *bajraktar* of the Shala tribe surrenders his gun to representatives of the Albanian federal government, 1922. He receives a copy of the new constitution in return. *Pjetër Marubi*, used by permission of the *Fototeka Kombëtare Marubi*, Shkodra, Albania

failed to reach sufficient strength to impose formal control. Shala maintained its independence because its economy and sociopolitical system, its whole society, had evolved in parallel and through time with the evolving Ottoman occupation of Albania. To formally incorporate Shala, the Ottoman state would have had to attack and destroy those very aspects of northern Albanian culture it most valued and needed in its west Balkan struggles with the Montenegrins, the Serbs, and the Great Powers, all of which coveted Albanian territory. The Albanian federal and, later, Communist governments, having secured independence and the country's borders, did not need the tribes as a buffer. Nor did they require a mercenary pool. Rather, they sought to integrate the tribes, including Shala, into a new nation, one to which all Albanians were equally committed. To do so, they struck at the heart of Shala's sociopolitical system. They took away honor by confiscating guns (Figure 11.1). The ultimate key to Shala's resilience was, at its very foundation, ideological. It could survive the closing of the border; the

people went elsewhere to market. It could survive religious persecution; its religious practices were syncretic and always had been. It could even survive increased isolation, with a net loss in interaction and access to regional networks of communication. Isolationism was a strength, not a weakness, of Shala's. It could not survive, however, losing the means to satisfy honor, which meant having access to guns and the ability to take blood. Honor was the cultural "oil" that lubricated the northern Albanian sociopolitical machine. Without it, Shala's tribal system seized and nearly died.

### Theoretical Reprise

In Chapter One, we introduced four theoretical frameworks used throughout this book in interpreting the results of our research. These were world-systems theory (WST), landscape theory, micro-history, and resilience theory. In this section, we revisit these frameworks and apply them more diligently to our data, as summarized above. Doing so reveals the strengths and weaknesses

of each but ultimately hones our conclusions. Doing so also facilitates comparison of Shala to other similar frontier societies.

## World-Systems Theory

In Chapter One, we described Shala as “peripheral” to various core powers, Istanbul in particular. In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest, Shala functioned as a “region of refuge” (see Figure 1.7). During this early period, northern Albania was an “interior” frontier, surrounded on all sides by conquered territories. The Ottomans actively sought to incorporate northern Albania, and so their impact on Shala was relatively strong (following Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). First, they created the conditions under which large numbers of Catholic Albanians migrated to the mountains and then, almost immediately, attempted to tax them through the *timar* system. This does not appear to have worked and, ultimately, northern Albania proved more valuable to the Ottomans as a buffer with Montenegro. In this later period of stability and growth, northern Albania existed along an internal “contact” periphery of the Ottoman state. More specifically, the whole of the Bjeshkët e Namuna functioned as a “contested periphery” (Allen 1997), a zone over which two or more external powers competed for control. The ongoing contest between Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire worked to Shala’s advantage, allowing its inhabitants to “negotiate” their “peripherality” in various creative, rewarding ways (Kardulias 2007). As described above, the symbiosis between northern Albania and the Ottomans allowed Shala remarkable latitude in terms of strategic decision making. Elders could choose when to engage the outside world and when to remain isolated from it, but even during periods of relative isolation, Shala never became culturally static. As was (and is) the case with frontier zones the world over, the Bjeshkët e Namuna was a region possessed of remarkable cultural diversity and rampant hybridity, which unfolded at the local level. In Parker’s (2006) terms, northern Albania was a “borderland” zone marked by a fluid frontier, through which people and ideas continuously flowed (see also Gardner 2007). Only much later did a fixed, closed border span the region, and it was only during this period, the Communist period, that Shala became truly isolated, a full-blown dependent periphery of the Albanian state. It was then that stasis set in.

Recent research on frontier zones can further enlighten our analysis of Shala. Work by Turchin and Hall (2003; see also Hall and Turchin 2006) compares human behavior in borderlands to that of plant and animal populations within ecosystemic frontiers. Their primary interest is in explaining periods of “large-scale spatial synchrony” in human history, but their insights as regards the local, endogenous sources of regional synchrony are applicable to Shala. Citing recent research on “ecological thresholds” (see review by Groffman et al. 2006), they argue that new cultural forms (i.e., “hybrids”), just like new species, most often appear at the dynamic edges of territories (i.e., “frontiers”), where ideas, and genes, are most likely to be swapped and recombined in new ways. The edges of ecosystems are therefore marked by forms of “dynamic stability” (Hall and Turchin 2006:78–79) that are primary sources of resilience and long-term adaptability. The hybridity of peripheral communities makes them “emergent” (Kuecker and Hall 2011) in ways that core communities are not and therefore better able to withstand periods of regional climatic, environmental, and world-economic change. In fact, peripheral communities may grow and develop during such periods by actively meeting and harnessing change in ways that diminish a core’s incorporative power. Peripheral individuals thus may fill agentive, determinative roles during periods of world-systemic change (Galaty 2011). Such was the case with northern Albania, which was characterized by dynamic stability in terms of population, settlement, subsistence, and hybridity in terms of language, religion, and identity (Blumi 2003a). As a result, Shala faced diachronic changes in climate, environment, and economy without suffering losses to resilience and regional independence. It was only when the tribal sociopolitical system itself was directly attacked, and northern Albania was thus destabilized, that Shala was fully incorporated into the Albanian nation-state. We were able to track through time changes in the various factors that affected sustainability and resilience in Shala by carefully studying its multiple, dynamic –scapes.

## Landscape Theory

In Chapter One, we argued that inhabited regions such as Shala are characterized by multiple, dynamic, interacting –scapes or, following Appadurai (1996), “fields.” One of these was the *landscape*, which defines

the physical environment of Shala (described in Chapter Three). The valley's physical environment supports a natural environment of flora and fauna, which, over time, have adapted to the particular mountain climate of northern Albania. Humans, too, adapted to life in Shala, by designing a built environment, a *technoscape*, of houses, terraces, canals, walls, paths, and so on, that allowed them to survive the harsh conditions of year-round, full-time settlement in the Bjeshkët e Namuna. The built environment (analyzed in Chapter Seven) reflects growth and change in the social, political, and economic fields that supported the Shala *fis* (Chapters Five and Six). Finally, a sacred landscape, an *ideoscape*, composed of both tangible and intangible elements (Chapter Eight), tied the whole system of –scapes and fields together, past to present, lending meaning to both the natural and built environment, writing the mythic history of the *fis* (as reported in Chapter Four) into the stones of the valley itself.

The landscape of Shala provided the eco- or “earth”-systemic backdrop for the “world”-systemic behavior of the humans who lived there. Figuring out just how earth-systems and world-systems integrate and react to one another through time is fast becoming a top priority for natural and social scientists alike (e.g., Fisher and Feinman 2005; Fisher and Thurston 1999; Hardesty 2007; Hornborg and Crumley 2006). To understand the shifting, often nonlinear relationship of earth- to world-systems, a multiscale approach is necessary, one that addresses change through time, within and across regions (Costanza et al. 2007). The SVP was designed to operate at just such multiple scales, thereby generating data appropriate to the study of one, bounded human group and its diachronic responses to earth- and world-system perturbations. These responses were formulated and enforced in Shala by the *kuvend*, the council of elders (sometimes, admittedly, to their own advantage). They monitored the landscape, measured ecosystemic change therein, adjusted the technoscape and various sociopolitical fields accordingly, and then carefully balanced economic needs and wants against environmental realities. Responses and their results were cognized and remembered through the regional ideoscape (cf. Ashmore and Knapp 1999), which was anchored to meaningful elements of the land- and technoscape (Schama 1995), monuments to the heritage of the *fis*. And it was the *fis*, the tribal network, that, through practices prescribed in the *Kanun*, enabled

long-term “dynamically stable,” resilient human settlement in Shala. Importantly, while explaining Shala's “persistence” required analysis at multiple regional and temporal scales, testing our behavioral models and expectations (summarized in Chapter Two) required that our methods be grounded in the practice of micro-history, focused on the “small world” of the Bjeshkët e Namuna, Shala in particular.

## Micro-history

General models are only useful if, when applied to local contexts, they hold their operational form and function. Stretched too far, models lose explanatory power and mislead rather than enlighten. In Shala, collecting local-scale data required application of a “micro-historical” approach (Brooks et al. 2008). This was accomplished by developing and deploying an “ethnohistoric-archaeological” methodology (Brain 1988). Multiple teams of archaeologists, historians, and ethnographers worked intensively in Shala over the course of four seasons and came to know its –scapes and people intimately. Historians were also sent into archives in Albania and throughout the world. They drilled deeply into the written sources pertaining to northern Albania and Shala, recovering information that added depth and nuance to our field data, the archaeological data in particular. The micro-historical, micro-regional picture thus painted depicts a culture at once inwardly focused and sensitive to the rhythms—*les conjonctures*—that shaped life and yet linked in various ways to the outside (macro-)world, the world of *les événements*. Shala was remote but not isolated. Rather, the *fis* practiced a form of strategic isolationism, opening and closing the valley in response to events in the wider world. The changing nature of Ottoman administration was of particular importance to Shala; in some periods, the Porte took a laissez-faire approach to frontier communities, while in others they sought to conquer and incorporate them. Our micro-historical approach helped us to place Shala within the context of this much wider world, revealing the scope, and limits, of its “negotiated peripherality” (Kardulias 2007).

What we discovered was that the *fis* could not function in the absence of its ideological underpinnings, honor in particular. The tribe's economic, social, and political systems were stable and resilient through time, able to ebb and flow, grow and contract, as the

climate changed and as the Mediterranean world-system evolved and expanded. In the end, it was not the Ottomans who decimated Catholic Shala. It was fellow Albanians, who, in seeking to create a new nation-state, dismembered and destroyed the tribal system, by confiscating guns and murdering chiefs. For Ottomans, such an effort had not been worth the material rewards. For an Albanian government, royal or Communist, in a modern nationalistic Europe, it was. The northern Albanian tribes could and did prosper in the frontier zone of the Bjeshkët e Namuna, despite the challenges of living in an inherently hostile environment. But they could not survive the loss of their symbolic underpinnings. We contend that earth- and world-systems analysts must, if they are to understand diachronic human impacts on the environment and, vice versa, understand the role ideology plays in determining resilience, or the lack thereof (Galaty 2011:19–20; cf. Friedman 2007).

## Resilience Theory

For several hundred years, the Shala *fis* nurtured a stable, resilient relationship with the mountain ecosystem of the Shala River valley. The wider region of the Bjeshkët e Namuna was a frontier zone, on an interior periphery within an expanding empire, spanning the gaps between different languages, religions, and cultures, marked by significant levels of cultural transmission and hybridity. We have argued that Shala's edgewise orientation, situated at the nexus of multiple cultural thresholds, was a source of considerable adaptive strength. The *fis* could be stable and resilient, in an unstable and dynamic world, because it had managed to develop forms of "socioecological," nonlinear problem solving (Barton et al. 2004). Thus, the elders could "rationalize the interplay between change and persistence, between the predictable and unpredictable" (Holling et al. 2002:5). They were grounded—fixed in the landscape, joined to its spaces and places—yet able to adjust when that ground shifted beneath and around them. If in fact resilience is "the ability of a system to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic form" (McAnany and Yoffee 2009:10), then Shala was exceptionally resilient. It can serve as a model for what might work, and what might not, in peripheral places throughout the world, where persistent societies resist incorporation, sometimes violently (Galaty 2010). Comparison of Shala to various other

tribal, frontier societies helps reveal those characteristics of being, those aspects of worldview, that inform stable, resilient socioecological relationships, and those that are counterproductive (cf. Hall 2001, 2009).

## Shala in Comparative Context

### *Shala vs. Montenegro*

A logical first comparison is that of Shala to the historic Montenegrin tribes (Mont. *pleme*) just across the border, studied in detail by Christopher Boehm (1983, 1984a, 1984b). But for differences in language and religion, the Montenegrin tribes were in all respects culturally identical to their northern Albanian counterparts and had adapted to an identical mountain environment. However, unlike the northern Albanian tribes, which survived relatively intact into the mid-twentieth century, the Montenegrin tribes were decimated and largely destroyed by the mid-nineteenth century.

The persistence of the northern Albanian tribes, as compared to those in Montenegro, stems primarily from the very different historical trajectories followed in the two regions. Under the leadership of militant Orthodox bishops, the *vladikas*, Montenegro managed (with Austrian and Russian help) to oust the Turks and form an independent kingdom, a process largely completed by 1850 (Boehm 1983:12–13). Importantly, Montenegro freed itself from the Ottomans in large part because the *vladikas* were able to effect a general truce (Mont. *vjera*, Alb. *besa*) among the tribes, beginning in the 1780s, who then fought under their banner. A similar, general truce among the Albanian tribes had been negotiated at the Council of Lezhë in 1444 by Skanderbeg. It held until his death in 1468, after which the Albanian tribes were never again united. As a result, they were not in later centuries an overt threat to the Ottomans, as were the Montenegrins; nor did they manage to eject the Ottomans from Albanian soil, as they might have done had they fought in coordinated fashion. They also could do little on their own to resist incorporation by the Albanian nation-state, beginning in 1912. Many of the same tactics used to dismantle the Albanian tribes in the twentieth century had been used by the Montenegrin *vladikas* and princes a century earlier: forced settling of blood feuds, restrictions on raiding and cattle rustling, taxation, closing of borders, and so on (Boehm 1983:13–14).

In retrospect, the Montenegrin tribes seem to have been less resilient than the northern Albanian tribes, but, in fact, they were not. The same factors caused both tribal systems to collapse; they simply developed earlier in Montenegro, for geographic and historical reasons. The Montenegrin tribes filled a different world-systemic, frontier position vis-à-vis the Ottomans (and the Venetians) than did the northern Albanians. They were not situated within a contested peripheral zone, as were the northern Albanian tribes, and therefore had less to gain from the status quo. Independence was for them, and their coastal Montenegrin brethren, a real possibility, worth the risks of confederation. In addition, the Montenegrin tribes answered to the leaders of a nascent Montenegrin nation-state, which could not have been created without their help. It was this same state that then betrayed them, denying their political autonomy and assassinating tribal leaders (Boehm 1984b:30). A similar process of state formation did not begin in Albania until 1912 and was only completed after World War II. We might argue, therefore, that the Albanian tribes survived as long as they did because, in fact, they remained “emergent” (Kuecker and Hall 2011) in ways the Montenegrin tribes did not. The “dynamic stability” (Hall and Turchin 2006:78–79) and hybridity that characterized life in the Bjeshkët e Namuna were lost from the Prokletija, and the Montenegrin tribes were absorbed into a new, nationalistic Montenegrin state.

The Albanian and Montenegrin tribes experienced different degrees of stability and resilience through time as a result of differences in geography and history, which must be considered whenever the long-term persistence of cultural systems is addressed. Cultures that are in most respects identical can and will follow very different evolutionary paths, depending in large part on timing and their structural positions within larger, macro-regional systems of interaction and conflict.

### *Shala vs. Lowland Albania*

Upland, northern Albania as compared to lowland and southern Albania provides another comparative case in point: geography and history played major roles in determining the complete collapse of coastal and southern Albanian societies, which experienced Ottoman occupation earlier and far more intensely than did the northern mountain tribes. But here we can also implicate differences in landscape and land use.

The first Turks to arrive in Albania in 1385 found a country divided among various, large “noble” families: the Thopias, Balshas, Aranitis, Dukagjinis, Kastriotis, and so on (Winniffrith 1992). The economy was feudal in form, and the majority of Albanians lived on and worked land they themselves did not own. In the aftermath of Skanderbeg’s death, most members of the noble families fled to Italy (ancestors of today’s Italian Arbëreshë), and their lands were divided by the Turks and reallocated through the *timar* system, some of which went back to those Albanian nobles who remained and became *timariots* within the Ottoman system. The *timar* system discouraged large-scale private ownership of land, as had the earlier *latifundia*. As a result, the *timar* system failed in mountainous northern Albania (see Chapter Four), where private land ownership was the norm. Whereas in northern Albania, individual families intensified production by building terraces and irrigation canals on their own land, to their own profit, there was no such incentive in lowland Albania, where the benefits of intensification accrued to the Turks, or their representatives, not to Albanians.<sup>1</sup> The land- and technoscapes and land-use regimes of lowland and southern Albania were thus quite different from those of highland northern Albania during the Ottoman period. Settlement in lowland and southern Albania was much more nucleated than it was in the mountain north, characterized by small villages and several larger, urban centers. Moreover, the dynamic, integrated “fields” we described for Shala—economic, social, and political—did not exist in lowland Albania or had been disrupted by centuries of feudalism, followed by the Turkish conquest. There is good evidence that a *fis* system and *kanuni*, similar to those of north Albania, had existed in the south but for the most part had collapsed in the centuries prior to and following the Ottoman occupation (Schwandner-Sievers 2001, 2004). During this time, most Albanians converted to Islam, thereby altering regional ideoscapes as well (Galaty et al. 1999). Simultaneously, systems of reciprocal labor and hospitality were rendered unnecessary and less meaningful, and many lowland and southern Albanians subsequently were drawn to urban centers (Brunnbauer 2004). Many aspects of traditional Albanian culture were thereby lost outside of the northern mountains, and it is perhaps no surprise that the northern tribesmen, the Catholics in particular, having survived into the Communist period, were held up as examples of “real” Albanians, relict warriors



from a bygone, perhaps even prehistoric, age (see, again, Chapter One). They were thus pacified by the federal government and confined to the Accursed Mountains, stage props for Communist propaganda pieces. Like the Montenegrins, the Tosk Albanians had lost the tribal systems their Gheg kin retained, which rendered them significantly more vulnerable to disruption and incorporation. A functioning, segmentary tribal sociopolitical system appears to be an incredibly deft, powerful source of resilience for marginal, persistent peoples.

### *Shala vs. the Inūpiaq Eskimos*

So, what happens when we compare Shala to a similarly organized, segmentary tribal people, one separated from Shala in space, if not in time? The Inūpiaq Eskimos of Alaska were hunter-collectors who occupied (and continue to occupy) the Chukchi region of northwest Alaska. Like the Bjeshkët e Namuna, the Alaskan landscape was unforgiving and marginal to the world's Modern expanding economy. Nevertheless, European powers (Russians, and later British and Americans) sought to incorporate the Inūpiaq, in the period 1800–1848, primarily to gain access to ivory and furs. As reported in detail by Ernest S. Burch Jr. (2005), the carefully calibrated, complex Inūpiaq way of life, built on the dynamically stable foundations of tribal alliance and conflict, collapsed relatively quickly once those foundations had been removed.

The Inūpiaq tribes (*nunaqatigiich*, literally “those who have a relationship through common possession of land”; Burch 2005:17) depended on a system of alliances formed between kin-related groups and families. This system, built through marriage and trade, was the primary source of stability and resilience for the Inūpiaq; if and when families needed assistance, they tapped their allies. The Inūpiaq system of mutual aid was thus very much like the systems of “reciprocal labor” and “hospitality” employed in Shala and was propped up by a similar code of ethics. Opposed, and yet linked, to the alliance system were systems of conflict. Conflicts among the Inūpiaq stemmed from breaches of conduct within and between families and, on a larger scale, from raids and warfare between tribes. As was the case in northern Albania, for the Inūpiaq, friendly relations were defined in contrast to enemy relations; the two systems of interaction, alliance and conflict, re-created and reinforced one another.

The Inūpiaq alliance system depended on strong marriage ties between kin groups and families. Inter-marriage was so important that the Inūpiaq encouraged “co-marriages” between couples (Burch 2005:162–164). Very large families and polygynous marriages in northern Albania served a similar purpose. Likewise, trade relationships were so crucial to the functioning of the local Inūpiaq economy and tribal sociopolitical system that men formed exclusive trading “partnerships” (*niivigiik*) and vowed to support one another at regional trade fairs (Burch 2005:180–202). Similar relationships tied the men of Shala to trade partners in regional market towns, such as Gusinje and Peja. Finally, men, working alone or in small groups, often carried out raids within the territory of other Inūpiaq and non-Inūpiaq tribes. These raids could be incredibly violent and often involved mutilation and the taking of body parts as trophies (Burch 2005:91–99). Networks of conflict thereby spanned northwest Alaska, pitting tribe against tribe, but at the same time strengthening ties between allies. Similar networks of conflict spanned northern Albania, where raiding was endemic and the killing of enemies in battle was also marked by the taking of body parts as trophies, heads in particular.

When European powers sought to incorporate the Inūpiaq, they attacked and undermined their systems of interaction. Similar strategies were used in northern Albania by the new Albanian nation, to the detriment of Shala's stability and resilience. Ironically, the first step in subjugating the Inūpiaq involved pacifying them, ending the bloody tribal wars that had raged, in some cases, for generations. Interestingly, once the wars stopped, the system of regional alliances became irrelevant, and co-marriages and trade partnerships were dissolved. The Inūpiaq converted to Christianity and traded with Europeans, for guns, tools, and liquor. The tribal system disintegrated in a matter of years, a process pushed along by epidemic disease. The social fields that had supported the regional economy disappeared, and the Inūpiaq ideoscape, a sacred landscape of mythic people and spirit beings, melted away, preserved only in the minds of elders. The process whereby the Inūpiaq were incorporated into the Euro-American world-system mirrors that whereby Shala was incorporated into the Albanian state: pacification, followed by a collapse of the sociopolitical system, and a rending of the tribal worldview. It seems likely,

therefore, that marginal, persistent peoples stand little chance of resisting incorporation in the absence of tribal sociopolitical systems, which are often strongly linked to wider systems of interaction, including systems of violent conflict. When these latter are targeted by outside “peacekeeping” forces, there is typically a violent response, not because tribal peoples are inherently violent but because tribal leaders know that the termination of tribal conflicts foreshadows the coming collapse of the tribal system generally (Galaty 2011).

### *Shala vs. the Andes*

We might also ask how Shala compares to an analogous mountain society, characterized by dispersed communities and similar extensive forms of land use, and which also resisted incorporation by an expanding empire. In the 1570s, the Spanish viceroy of Peru undertook the forced resettlement of 1.5 million indigenous Andeans into small, European-style villages, *reducción* (Wernke 2007:131). This “grand experiment in social engineering” presumably had an enormous impact on the traditional *ayllus*, “ancestor-focused corporate descent groups,” as well as on settlement and economy, but ultimately local cultures “negotiated” colonization, and survived (Wernke 2007:131).

*Ayllus* bear a striking similarity to northern Albanian *fisi* in that “membership could refer to collectivities of varying scales—from the consanguines to an entire ethnic group” (Wernke 2007:132). Traditional interpretations of *ayllu* organization considered them a unique adaptation to a particular mountain ecology, but more recent analysis suggests that they represent an innovative response to colonial expansion, with origins in the period of Inka conquest (Wernke 2007:132). Our work in northern Albania indicates that the *fis* system served both purposes, functional and social-structural, as well, but ultimately, it was the latter role that mattered more in terms of cultural persistence. In the Andes, throughout the colonial period, local people balanced change to settlement and land use against Spanish interests, employing indigenous sociopolitical systems and syncretic religious practices, working through the Catholic Church, as means to mediate overall dislocation and damage to traditional culture, while displaying remarkable resilience (as was the case with the *ayllus* centered on the town of Coporaque, the *reducción* studied by Wernke 2007:137–138).

*Ayllu* organization was recorded in the built environment, in collections of terraces, irrigation canals, walls, fields, and houses. The built environment was particularly well adapted to the climate and environment of the Andes, thus the parallel-evolutionary similarities with Shala, but also reflects a specific way of organizing society and responding to external threats. In the case of Coporaque, the *ayllu* system bent but did not break; the nucleated settlement system “imposed” by the Spanish was in fact the hybrid result of indigenous Aymara, Inka, and Spanish interests mapped onto the mountain landscape: “the location of Coporaque both appears rational from the point of view of the state and reflects the agency of local communities in negotiating its emplacement” (Wernke 2007:144). Like Shala, the people of Coporaque had learned to “rationalize the interplay between change and persistence” (Holling et al. 2002:5). Hybridity in doing, but also in being, was a source of resilience.

### *Modern vs. Prehistoric Shala*

A final comparison is that of modern to prehistoric Shala. As discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten, the settlement systems, land-use patterns, and built environments in both periods were very different: dispersed versus nucleated, intensive versus extensive, reflecting individual familial versus concentrated corporate investment. This must certainly reflect very different forms of economy, based on different domesticates and year-round as opposed to seasonal occupation. However, the –scapes of modern Shala also reflect a particular form of sociopolitical organization, the *fis* system, that evolved through time in response, in part, to external disturbances, including the waxing and waning of Ottoman incorporative pressures. This evolutionary process was directed by elders of the tribe, through the practice of strategic isolationism, but also through carefully crafted cultural hybridity. If later historical sources are accepted, prehistoric northern Albania was also characterized by a tribal system of sociopolitical organization, but prehistoric Albanians appear to have used the mountains in ways that were quite different from the modern tribes. For the modern Shala *fis*, the valley was a permanent home and base of operations, a refuge from the Ottomans. For the prehistoric tribes, the valley was a destination, one stop in a logistical network that integrated mountains and plains, both

of which they controlled. In modern times, the symbiosis between mountain and plain was disturbed first by the *latifundia* and then severed by the Ottomans. Those in the mountains, and those who fled there, had to adapt to a new world-systemic reality, which they did successfully, although not without difficulty. When the world-systemic reality shifted during the Iron Age, when the Roman Empire conquered northern Albania, the tribes did not respond by retreating to the mountains; they could not. Nothing about their system of economy and interaction prepared them for year-round high-altitude occupation. If their sociopolitical system was in fact tribal, it was, unlike that of Shala, ill-adapted to the mediated flexibility, the “dynamic stability,” required of the mountain environment. This is probably because Shala’s tribal system evolved in situ, in the mountains, but also because the prehistoric sociopolitical system was dominated by hereditary chiefs, who had too much to lose by leaving the plains, and the urbanized, Mediterranean world, behind. They capitulated to the Romans and joined them, as did their fellow tribesmen. In so doing, they left Shala for good, were incorporated into the expanding empire, and sought new sources of livelihood. Places like Grunas were abandoned and forgotten. When in the eighteenth century the Ottomans sought, once again, to incorporate the northern tribes, they began by appointing *bajraktars*, hereditary chiefs who had more to gain by affiliating with the Turks than by opposing them. The Ottomans knew that they could best weaken the northern Albanian tribes by disrupting tribal sociopolitical relationships, a strategy the Romans found unnecessary.

## Final Thoughts

The Shala Valley Project sought to record the history of the Shala *fis*, a unique culture, situated in a unique landscape, uniquely adapted to a specific environment, and remarkably able to resist incorporation by an expanding, predatory empire. It is this latter characteristic, stability and resilience in the face of external domination, that we believe holds general anthropological (and archaeological) significance. There are lessons to be learned from Shala, both in terms of how we explain cultural persistence, and the lack thereof, but also for those marginal peoples the world over who likewise seek to resist domination and extinction.

Our data indicate that cultural persistence depends generally on the following:

- 1) *Frontier location*. Shala was situated in a remote, interior, and later contested-peripheral, border zone, marked by open, fluid boundaries, which allowed and encouraged negotiation versus confrontation.
- 2) *Isolationism*. The tribe used its remote location to good advantage, opening and closing the valley depending on conditions in the outside world.
- 3) *Hybridity*. Shala’s frontier location encouraged hybrid cultural responses, such as syncretic religious practices, that amplified interaction.
- 4) *Dynamic stability*. Shala’s elders modulated change by deploying social and political systems that were fixed yet flexible and could respond quickly and creatively to unpredictable forms of disturbance. Interaction and information gathering through marriage and conflict were necessary to maintaining dynamic stability.
- 5) *Emergence*. Given its marginal location, forms of interaction, and hybridity, Shala’s culture was “emergent” in ways that core and semi-peripheral zones are not.
- 6) *Integrated –scapes*. Shala’s landscape, natural and built environments, and social, political, and economic fields were integrated within a complex system of feedback loops, made meaningful through the regional ideoscape, which memorialized the mythic and sacred stories of the *fis*.
- 7) *Ideological grounding*. The beliefs and worldview of the Shala people guided and motivated them. Ideas about honor, blood, family, *fis*, and hospitality, as codified in the *Kanun*, were essential to the proper functioning of the sociopolitical system but also of the local economy.

When Shala’s resilience failed, it was because the Albanian federal government (1) closed the borders,

truncating processes of cultural interaction and transmission, with a net reduction in dynamic stability and emergent energy, and (2) removed the ideological underpinnings of the cultural system, decoupling the integrated socioecological systems of the valley.

When subjected to comparative analysis, our data further indicate that extant, marginal persistent peoples can amplify and fortify their resilience by

- 1) *Leveraging geography and history.* Unlike Montenegro, Shala distanced itself from external entanglements that limited independence. They resisted confederation.
- 2) *Maintaining traditional systems of land tenure and use.* Unlike lowland and southern regions of Albania, northern Albanian systems of land tenure and use did not change under Ottoman rule. Land was owned and improved by families.
- 3) *Resisting centripetal forces.* The Inūpiaq tribal system collapsed when systems of interaction, based on economic exchange, marriage, and conflict, were undermined by foreign powers. Shala likewise suffered when the Albanian border was closed, its marriage network contracted, and blood feud ended. Overly narrow, or closed, systems resist incorporation with difficulty.
- 4) *Reinforcing local forms of government.* Like the Andean *ayllus*, Shala hewed to its segmentary, tribal form of sociopolitical organization. The decentralized, heterarchical *fis* system was a source of strength, not weakness.
- 5) *Combating hierarchy.* Prehistoric Albanian tribes supported hereditary chiefs who colluded with

the Romans. Shala rejected hereditary leadership, even when the Ottomans appointed and promoted *bajraktars*. The ideology of equality, that “the Kanun of the mountains does not make any distinction between man and man” (Book Eight, Article 593; see Gječov 1989:130), allowed tribes to tap the knowledge and expertise of all members. While Shala was not fully egalitarian (e.g., the *fis* system benefited the patriarchs in particular), the culture militated against overt, entrenched hierarchy.

When marginal, persistent peoples resist incorporation today, often violently, it is because outside powers (1) ignore their unique experiences of geography and history, focusing only on the here and now; (2) force them to enter civil, noncustomary legal and “free-market” economic systems that are inimical to communal life and survival in harsh environments; (3) cut regional ties of interaction based on behaviors, such as arranged marriage and blood feud, deemed immoral; (4) dismantle tribal governments, which are thought to be “anti-democratic”; and (5) encourage hierarchical social organization, thereby inhibiting traditional forms of collaborative, collective decision making. The men and women of Shala struggled valiantly, for 500 years, against just these kinds of impositions. They continue to struggle today. In recording and publishing their story, the story of the Shala *fis*, we honor them, and their ancestors, and hope to strike a blow for all persistent peoples, everywhere.

## Note

1 According to Grove and Rackham (2001:115–117), this pattern—land intensification by small-holding peasants—seems to have held throughout the Mediterranean region during the Medieval period, during which terrace construction in particular appears to have been rather rare.

# GLOSSARY OF KEY ALBANIAN TERMS

<b>ana</b>	name given to an autochthonous, indigenous <i>fis</i>	<b>kryeplak</b>	chief, head, “mayor” of a <i>fis</i> or village
<b>bajrak</b>	a “banner,” a military-administrative zone, often incorporating one or more <i>fis</i>	<b>kulla</b>	a “tower” house; any large, stone, defensible abode
<b>bajraktar</b>	a “banner chief,” the leader of a <i>bajrak</i>	<b>kullotë</b>	pasture, also referred to as a <i>fushë</i> (i.e., a “field”)
<b>besa</b>	an oath (e.g., of peace) or promise; a truce made between parties seeking to end a feud	<b>kuvend</b>	tribal council
<b>dylym/dynym</b>	a unit of land measurement, equal to a 100 × 10–m or .1-ha parcel	<b>lagja</b>	neighborhood
<b>familja</b>	the family, typically an extended or complex “joint” family, composed of several generations and the descendants of multiple brothers living together under one roof	<b>malësorë</b>	mountaineer
<b>fis</b>	a kinship term roughly equivalent to “tribe,” all related men descended from a single male ancestor and their children; wives marry into a <i>fis</i> from outside	<b>mëhalla</b>	neighborhood; from the Arabic for “military camp”
<b>fis i madh</b>	a “large” <i>fis</i> , composed of multiple, related patriline; the tribe as a whole	<b>mik/miq</b>	close friend
<b>fis i vogël</b>	a “small” <i>fis</i> , composed of a single patriline	<b>mikpritja</b>	hospitality
<b>frëngji</b>	a small, stone-lined window, built into a house, designed for defense	<b>nder</b>	honor
<b>fushë</b>	field	<b>në gjak</b>	“in blood,” to be involved in a blood feud
<b>Gheg(s)</b>	the northern Albanians and their dialect of Albanian, roughly north of the Shkumbin River	<b>ora</b>	a mountain spirit
<b>gjak</b>	blood, consanguinity, that which ties the <i>fis</i> together, the balance of which, when owed, determines the course of a blood feud; all those members of a particular <i>fis</i> are <i>një gjak</i> , of one blood	<b>përroi</b>	a small river or creek, often creates a gully
<b>gjakmarrje</b>	blood feud	<b>pleqni</b>	council of elders
<b>guri i kufinit</b>	boundary stones	<b>qafa</b>	a mountain pass
<b>hasmi</b>	enemy, as in a blood feud opponent	<b>raki</b>	a strong alcoholic drink distilled from grapes, plums, or other fruit
<b>kanun</b>	law code	<b>shpia</b>	the house or household
<b>katund</b>	village	<b>shteg</b>	a path, sometimes sunk into the ground
		<b>stan</b>	a settlement, located in the upland pasture zone, to which humans and their animals migrate each summer
		<b>Tosk(s)</b>	the southern Albanians and their dialect of Albanian, roughly south of the Shkumbin River
		<b>vllazni</b>	a brotherhood, phratry
		<b>zoja e shpis</b>	the lady of the house, typically the wife of the <i>zoti i shpis</i>
		<b>zoti i shpis</b>	the lord of the house, typically the oldest male, the patriarch

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