

**Shala Valley Project
Final Report of the 2005 Field Season**

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INTRODUCTION

[Northern Albania is] among the wildest and most inaccessible [areas] of the Balkan Peninsula and peopled for the most part by savage and fanatical mountaineers.¹

During the period June 15-July 15, 2005, and with the financial support of Millsaps College, the University of Louisville, the American Embassy in Tirana, and two private donors, Bud Robinson and John Stevens, we led a team of 14 archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians (Table 1) to Theth, Albania, located in the Shala Valley in the remote north of the country. Our primary goal for the 2005 field season was to survey the cultural resources (archaeological, architectural, and human) of the village of Theth and to describe in detail its unique culture, history, and landscape. Our project's key theoretical question addresses the issue of isolation versus interaction: to what degree through time have the people of Shala been isolated from and/or interacted with the "outside world," and what factors might influence isolation?

¹ Arthur Evans in *Archaeologia* 49 (1885), pg. 1, quoted in N.G.L. Hammond, *Migrations and Invasions in Greece and Adjacent Areas* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1976), p. 35. Evans demonstrates well the general attitude held and expressed by most 19th- and 20th-century writers with regard to northern Albania, including those who had visited Shala. Displaying a less extreme view, Margaret Hasluck in *The Unwritten Law in Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 3, argues that "...the only way from Shalë to Bogë, its western neighbour, is by the Sheep Track Pass, to the northern frontier by the Pejë Pass, and to Nikaj on the east by the Ndermajnë Pass, which are respectively 5900, 5600 [1708 m] and again 5600 feet above sea level and take a day to traverse. It is self evident that the tribesmen of Shalë have never seen much of their neighbours." It is this proposition - that Shala was and always has been unusually isolated - that we seek to test.

The Shala Valley Project: 2005 Field Report

Table 1: 2005 Shala Valley Project Personnel²

Gwen Backwell, volunteer field technician, Liverpool, United Kingdom
John Backwell, volunteer field technician, Liverpool, United Kingdom
Ellen Beilmann, field technician, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Sasha Caufield, field technician, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA
Mario Delia, logistical support, Shkodër, Albania
Ann Christine Eek, photographer, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, Norway
Michael Galaty, project co-director, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, USA
Attila Gyucha, field technician, Munkácsy Mihály Múzeumin, Békéscsaba, Hungary
Petrit Imeraj, logistical support, Shkodër, Albania
Ols Lafe, project co-director, Institute of Archaeology, Tirana, Albania
Wayne Lee, ethnohistorian, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA
Mentor Mustafa, ethnographer, Boston University, Boston, MA, USA
Ajrina Tafilica, field technician, Shkodër University, Shkodër, Albania
Zamir Tafilica, project co-director, Shkodër Historical Museum, Shkodër, Albania
Charles Watkinson, archaeological survey leader, ASCSA, Princeton, NJ, USA
Antonia Young, ethnographer, Bradford University, Bradford, United Kingdom

In approximately 16 full days of field work, we managed to intensively survey all of the cultivated or cleared land in Theth (c. 2 km² in 338 tracts) and all visible architecture (460 structures) (see Figure 1). Each survey tract and all structures were photographed at least once producing 940 digital photos. All structures were mapped and many were drawn. At the time of archaeological and/or architectural survey, preliminary interviews were conducted with the land- and/or home owner. Heads of 18 households later participated in much longer, more detailed interviews conducted by the two project ethnographers. Those individuals who participated in the longer interviews signed forms acknowledging informed consent. All data were entered into a project database using three handheld Pocket PC computers running Filemaker Mobile software. Finally, all survey tracts and recorded architecture were plotted in the project GIS using handheld GPS devices.

Our focus in this report is the archaeological research. We review the results of historical and ethnographic fieldwork in less detail, and primarily as they relate to the archaeological record. Discussions of project methodology have been incorporated below where appropriate.

REPORT OF THE ETHNOHISTORIC TEAM³

During the 2005 season, the ethnohistoric survey team (hereafter EHS), composed of Wayne Lee, Sasha Caufield, and Ajrina Tafilica, completed a survey of all the standing architecture within the Theth area (see map, Figure 1). Our aim was to build a database of the structures within the landscape, a sense of the probable chronology of

² We would also like to extend thanks to the people of Shala, in particular Prek Harusha, mayor of Theth, and most especially, Fran Frashnishta and his family.

³ This section is the work of Wayne Lee.

those structures, and then eventually to combine this information with oral history and archival records to provide a narrative of how the villagers of Theth and the Shala Valley have made choices that modified their landscape over the last hundred years or so. We began with two basic assumptions, both of which have proved largely accurate. First, we assumed that the now-visible landscape around Theth is not nearly as old as it first appears (and as many travelers and writers have assumed). The land, the houses, and most other aspects of the built environment have all been undergoing nearly constant change. Second, we assumed, as one of the main hypotheses of the overall project, that despite the difficult mountains and presumed isolation, the highland villages of the Shala Valley have always been in nearly constant contact with the wider world, and have shaped their environment partly in response to those relationships. The data at this stage

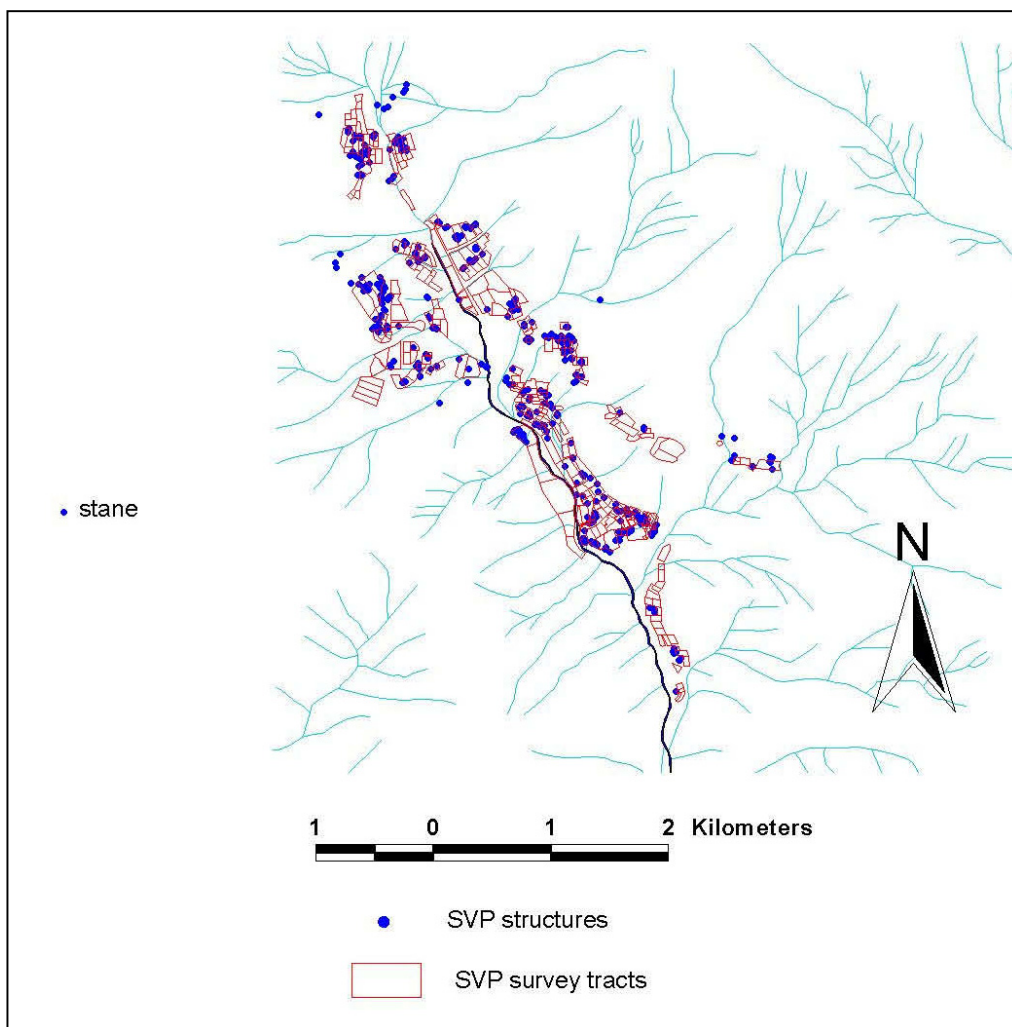


Figure 1: SVP 2005 surveyed tracts and structures, Theth

The Shala Valley Project: 2005 Field Report

are still preliminary, but certain impressions are clearly emerging which we hope to confirm with further study of this year's data, and with the addition of data from the next two seasons of fieldwork.

In the simplest numerical terms, the EHS recorded 460 structures in the Theth area, 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). There were, in addition, 157 barns or other assorted outbuildings, and 38 corn cribs (*koçek*). During the Communist era the state built 21 bunkers in the area, and five 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 seven large barns for collectivised flocks).⁴

This numerical tabulation of homes immediately raises some interesting questions. When Edith Durham visited the Theth region in 1908 she was told that the *bariak* of Theth consisted of 180 houses.⁵ This closely matches our total house count of 162 (our number actually will increase as we separate out those houses which initially appeared to be one building, but upon closer investigation we determined were in fact two separate homes within the same larger structure). Historic documents and our own ethnographic investigations indicate that families in the area have tended to have very large numbers of children, and the only way to understand this apparent stability in number of homes is to assume some form of out-migration. Furthermore, an interesting issue of language arose in our process of trying to understand this situation. When a local is asked how many *shpia* (literally "houses") are in the area, their answer is keyed to the number of what an English speaker would call "households." Perhaps Edith Durham's "180 houses" similarly implied 180 households, not necessarily houses. Further investigation is needed into the nature of regional population and population movement. Further problems with regard to the ratio of "households" to "houses" were created during the Communist regime, and are discussed further below.

As part of our effort to understand house chronology, we will gradually seriate key architectural features that can help indicate the construction date of a house. This process is still under way, and is greatly complicated by the persistence of traditional building methods into the present day, as well as by the clearly evident (in the structures themselves and from interviews), constant process of rebuilding, replacing, or extensively renovating homes. Nevertheless some tentative conclusions can be put forward already. (A brief aside: the study of vernacular architecture in northern Albania is quite

⁴ These numbers do not add up to 461 because some buildings had multiple functions, and are counted for each function.

⁵ Edith Durham, *High Albania* (London: Edward Arnold: 1909; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 123. These numbers can be compared to data from the Austrian census of 1916-18 (published by F. Seiner in 1922), which records for Theth, including Nderlyaj, 98 houses and 131 households, and a total population of 769, all of whom were Albanian and Roman Catholic (p. 26). Curiously, the female to male sex ratio (355:414, or about 7:8) suggests that despite the prevalence of blood feud, men outnumbered women. This may suggest under-reporting of women, out-marriage, female infanticide, males returning home to Theth to avoid WWI, or a combination of all four.

sophisticated, but tends to ignore chronological development, and the changes which have occurred in the twentieth century. Our study thus uses such work, but cannot rely on it.⁶) First, the existence of *frengjis*, the small stone-framed windows designed to provide a bare minimum of light and air, while still preventing an outsider from firing into the house (Figure 2), tends to date a home to the period *at least* before 1950, and probably from before about 1930. In response to a decline in the intensity of the blood feud many of these windows were destroyed or replaced between the 1950s and the present. Houses built from the ground up after this period invariably lack such windows, with a few exceptions such as their reuse in 3rd-floor attic space. Second, Communist-era official buildings tend to be instantly recognizable. Furthermore, in more recent times and probably in response to building techniques imported by the Communist state, many newer, and generally smaller, houses were built with a foundation several courses above ground, that was slightly (4-5cm) wider than the rest of the wall (we call this an “offset foundation”). Finally, modern imported cement also began to become widely available in the early 1970s, and its use can help date renovations, if not entire buildings. More work on specific datable architectural features remains to be done.



Figure 2: Typical *frengji*, Theth

Even without a reliable seriation of building techniques, local tradition and/or buildings with actual dated corner or lintel stones provide an initial insight into the process of home construction within the village. For the most part, even accounting for the substantial “rounding off” created by memory (e.g., “this house is 100 years old...”) we can identify five “bursts” of building or expansion activity.

There are a substantial number of homes which the inhabitants identify as being approximately 100 years old. In some cases such claims have been more or less confirmed by a careful count of the ages of fathers and grandfathers (see additional discussion below). Many of these “older” houses also share certain features, particularly the use of *frengjis* (although most of these have been closed up or replaced). We are not yet certain as to why there might be such a large number of homes constructed near the turn of the century. It is also worth pointing out that many of these identified older homes (although by no means all) were originally constructed as a single story home, and had a second story added later during the burst of expansion that occurred in the 1930s or

⁶ e.g., Pirro Thomo, Ali Muka, Faruk Zarshati, Gjergji Martini, eds. *Vendabanime dhe Banesa Popullore Shqiptare*, 1 (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2004)

The Shala Valley Project: 2005 Field Report

50s (see below).

The old horse road from Theth over the mountains to Boga and then Shkodra (via Hasluck's "Sheep Track Pass," footnote 1) was enlarged to wagon width in 1936, and that may have provided a brief impetus for building in the late 1930s. It is not yet clear how extensive this burst was, but it does exist, and perhaps was truncated by the Italian occupation and World War II. In addition, and possibly in response to King Zog's efforts to suppress the blood feud, there is some evidence that building in this period did not necessarily include *frengjis*.

The end of World War II and the stability of the 1950s brought a surge of expansion and new building. Explaining this process, however, returns us to the problem of what constitutes a "house" and a "household." During the Communist era the state preferred to have families live in a more nucleated fashion, rather than having extended families live together under one roof. Furthermore, the state initiated policies restricting private landholding to a certain number of "*dynyms*" of land per "house."⁷ Extended households found themselves forced to build separate homes to preserve their claim to as much land as possible. 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. Windows and doors were enlarged as the threat of the blood feud continued to decline. Note that these are contradictory trends: the expansion of both the home itself and a simultaneous expansion in the number of homes. Normally it would seem that the one should make the other unnecessary. It is possible, however, that the Communist-era restriction on movement meant that the large number of children, some of whom may formerly have emigrated elsewhere for work, were now having to remain in the village. Since the end of Communism, out-migration has returned on an even more massive scale, and of course, is now also more international.

The next major burst of building activity 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. The state had begun the process of collectivization in the 1950s (for the most part), but the more remote mountains were less affected until the 1960s, when that process peaked.⁸ The state's intervention provided new automobile-based transportation 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). The process also resulted in the massive expansion of built space within the village; not homes, but the administrative buildings and cooperative structures briefly recounted above.

The loosening of the regime's grip in the late 1980s and the early 1990s brought

⁷ 1 *dynym* is equal to a 100 X 10 m or 1000 m² parcel of land.

⁸ Interviews with local inhabitants; Ibrahim Baçi, *Agriculture in the PSR of Albania* (Tirana: The 8 Nentori Publishing House, 1981), p. 36. (The latter source must be used with care, but in terms of the chronology of the process of collectivization is probably reliable.) The Party slogan issued after Congress in 1966: "Let us stick to the hills and mountains, and make them beautiful and as fertile as the plains."

about the most recent burst of home building. The optimism and privatization associated with that era may have spurred this burst of building, but the disaster of 1997 curtailed such efforts until the most recent couple of years. It remains to be seen if a surge in tourism can counteract the pace of out-migration. As of the winter of 2004, only 18-25 families in Theth remained through the winter, and as indicated above, only some 67 houses were occupied during the summer of 2005. Some of our informants report that they prefer to live in Shokdër or even in Italy during the winter, but just as many hope for an improvement in infrastructure that would allow them to remain in Theth.

A bare recounting of the chronological process of home building can hardly convey the nature of the landscape within the village. Theth is actually divided into a number of neighborhoods, each of which is traditionally associated with a kin group, and most of which are actually at some distance from each other (Figure 3): from north to south Okol, Nik Gjonaj, Gjellaj, Gjeçaj, Ndreaj, Kolaj, Ulaj and Grunasii (Gjellaj also incorporates two smaller zones; Stakaj and the high, mostly seasonal, settlement of Nën Rreth). Interestingly, the names of the neighborhoods are somewhat flexible in practice: as members of a kin group move within the larger village, they tend to take the toponym with them. For instance, a family moving from the neighborhood of Okol to a new house

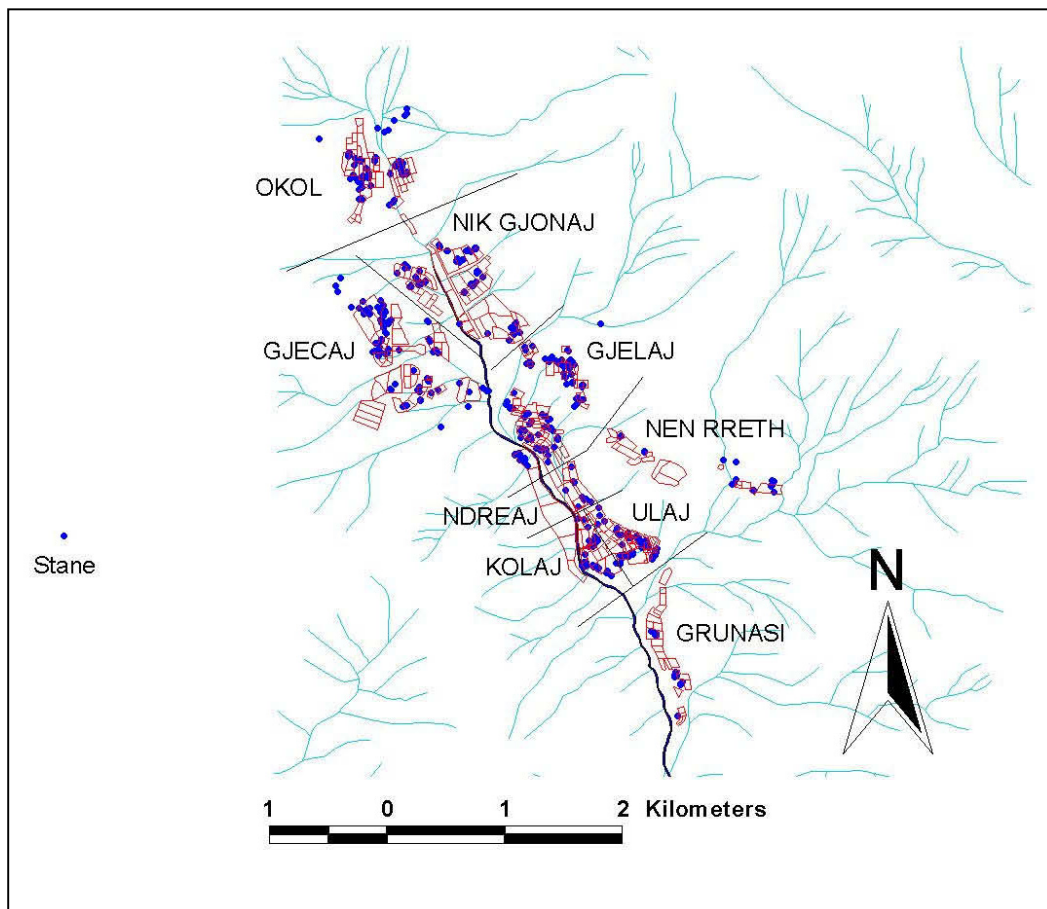


Figure 3: The neighborhoods (*mehalla*) of Theth

in the Gjecaj neighborhood is very likely to refer to their new home as being “in Okol” despite the fact that Okol “proper” is a full 1300 meters to the north. We are still in the process of understanding how neighborhoods are composed, but, with the significant exception of the central, “oldest” part of Theth (the neighborhoods of Ulaj, Kolaj, and Ndreaj), their composition appears to follow a similar pattern. Each consists of a cluster of houses, only one or two of which can be identified as *both* over 100 years old, *and* of a significant size for the duration of its existence. This is particularly true if one counts only those buildings which are old, large, and also have elaborate carvings on their cornerstones (Figure 4). Around these older homes are a number of homes with similar attested ages, but which have been expanded in this century (usually after World War II). Then there are a small number of homes built in the 1960s to 70s, or even more recently. Each neighborhood also revolves around one or two central *shtegs* or paths, clearly very old, and usually heavily walled. Virtually every home also has a number of outbuildings, especially a barn for storing hay (in the loft), and for keeping a small number of animals inside. Finally, each neighborhood has its own water-powered grain mill.

The grain mills bring us to the subject of agriculture. Here the chronology of change is not yet clear, but there are obvious current patterns, and some strong impressions of the past. For at least 100 years maize has been the most important agricultural crop, but the traditions of the region suggest that people first inhabited the area as seasonal pastoralists (mainly sheep), and then gradually became more sedentary (one assumption here is that this early phase of occupation would have produced primarily temporary wood shelters similar to the still existing *stans*--see Annex II below).

Even with permanent settlement, pastoralism continued to be crucial to the regional economy, and is well attested to have provided the major trade goods for inhabitants of the mountain regions. (Although Edith Durham reported Theth to be self-sufficient in maize, other, less well-watered mountain areas depended on trade to fulfill their grain needs, and even Theth used their flocks to produce a trade surplus.⁹)



Figure 4: Carvings on a kulla near Abat

During the Communist regime, the state made a concerted effort to achieve national autarky in foodstuffs, and as a part of that process they embarked on a massive expansion of arable land. In the Shala valley, as elsewhere, the expansion

⁹ Durham *supra* no. 5, pp. 117, 123.

program created terraces in what had formerly simply been cleared pastures. Here again, a language issue provides an interesting insight: villagers do not refer to the oldest agricultural terraces by that word (*tarraca*), but simply as fields. Only those steeper terraces added during the regime merit definition as a “terrace.” In the post-Communist era, pastoralism has returned to its natural environmental prominence. The steeper smaller terraces are now again pasture, and most cultivated fields produce maize (intercropped with beans and more rarely squash), potatoes, onions, and some vegetables. Many fields are wholly dedicated to producing fodder (*jonxhe*), or simply hay. Similarly, the majority of the agricultural field buildings in the existing landscape are for the purposes of maintaining animals. Even the many corn cribs are designed to store food for animals. Furthermore, it is even possible that the proliferation of barns for animals is a post World War II phenomenon created by the expansion of living space into the first floor of buildings, forcing the animals into an outbuilding. Of note in this regard is the fact that in most cases where the expansion and fission of a family from one structure into two can reliably be determined, there is an equivalent construction of barns. That is, a family splitting one house into two homes will invariably build a second barn as well.¹⁰

Our understanding of the built landscape of Shala, and its evolution, is as yet preliminary. Our hope lies in combining this kind of field research with the rich oral traditions of the village (see below), and the spottier, but longer term, written historical sources. There can be little doubt that the villagers of Theth and the rest of the Shala valley have always faced a trying lifestyle - burdened by steep mountains, heavy winter snows, and a succession of essentially unfriendly regimes. Nevertheless, they have persevered - by adapting to their environment and to the changing political and economic systems around them - not by cutting themselves off from the outside world.

Annex I: Defensive architecture

Northern Albania is famed for its defensive stone towers, or *kullas*, designed to provide refuge in the case of a blood feud. These have been amply studied and documented, but a brief overview of their nature, and a broader consideration of the nature of defensive architecture seems appropriate here.

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? Theth has one very obvious and quite well known kulla on the southern edge of the main part of the village (ST242; Figure 5). It is “obvious” because it combines all the supposed characteristics of the type: it is a square tower (three stories); each interior floor is reached by a trapdoor and ladder; the windows are small and stone-framed (*frengjis*), 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 which approach the totality of that description, despite Edith Durham’s and other travelers’ comments that the valley was filled with *kullas*. Durham, in fact uses the word

¹⁰ With regard to the separation of brothers, see *The Code of Lekë Dukagjini* (Book Three, Chapter Seven), recorded by Shtjefën Gjeçovi, translated into English by Leonard Fox (New York: Gjonlekaj Publishing Co., 1989), pp. 45-50. See also, Hasluck *supra* no. 1, pp. 51-72.

“kulla” to describe *all* the houses in the Theth area.¹¹ One source claims that there was a deliberate program of kulla destruction initiated by King Zog, and then continued during the Communist era, but this has yet to be confirmed. (If mass numbers of kullas were destroyed, we found no evidence of their destruction during the course of intensive archaeological survey.) Residents have pointed to a few locations (e.g., ST158, ST030) as the sites of former kullas, torn down to build newer houses, and there are a few structures with very kulla-like qualities (e.g. ST043, ST159, ST228). But the probable solution to this “problem” is that most if not all of the houses in the village during the late 19th- and early 20th century had kulla-esque components. Many of the houses retain, and many of the interviewees recalled, the use of *frengjis* as a defensive mechanism.



Figure 5: Theth *kulla*, SVP ST242

Furthermore many of the older houses were originally built with a ground-level entrance for animals only, which could be barred from the inside, and have trapdoor access to the upper floor. The upper floor could also be reached by an easily defensible narrow exterior staircase. Some houses were also clearly sited with defensive purposes in mind, perched on rising boulders as foundations, or were placed with an eye to viewing as much of the surrounding landscape as possible.

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

¹¹Durham specifically says: “the houses were all kulas [sic] - tall stone towers, loopholed for rifles... Great isolated boulders are scattered over it [plain of Theth], on which stand kulas.” Durham, *supra* no. 5, p. 119.

defense. They were for individual, and in fact, individual *male* protection. Since women were exempt from attack under the Kanun (Book 3, Chapter 5, XXIX), they were free to come and go, bringing food and water to what were essentially refuge forts, not fighting platforms or strategic defenses.¹² A detailed comparison with the tower houses of Crete and the Mani in southern Greece, as well as the fortifications of other feuding societies is merited.

Annex II: *Stane* and *konaks*

In addition to the more traditional houses surveyed in the main portions of Theth, there is ample evidence for the building and use of seasonal huts (*konaks*) for shepherds or even whole families in the high pastures of the surrounding mountains, typically together with *stane* (animal corrals). Some of these *konaks* are in fact still in use as seasonal residences (Figure 6). The survey could not possibly hope to find and map all of them - many fewer are now in use, and their locations are far more widely scattered in much more rugged mountains. We did, however, survey several, and the ruins of others. For the most part they are simple dry masonry walls, extending only 1.5m in height, and when in use, covered with branches and vegetation. In outline the walls form paired hollow squares or circles, with each filling a different function depending on the size of the family using them. Understanding Shala's past



Figure 6: Upland, summer *konaks* and *stane* at Zef e Rushetus, ST203-213

exploitation by pastoralists is an important component of the SVP's research agenda, but given that pastoralists in ancient times probably lived in ephemeral structures similar to present-day *konaks* and owned very little, or no, pottery, we expect that their impact on the archaeological record will have been very slight.

¹²Wayne E. Lee, "Fortify, Fight, or Flee: Tuscarora and Cherokee Defensive Warfare and Military Culture Adaptation," *Journal of Military History* 68 (2004): 713-70.

REPORT OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC TEAM¹³

The ethnographic survey team (hereafter EGS) conducted 18 interviews, composed of 56 questions each, that together provide a representative sample of the households of Theth. We present here patterns that have emerged from a preliminary analysis of the data gathered in the field, in particular as they relate to the archaeology and history of Theth. In terms of fieldwork methods, we adjusted our schedule to best fit the villagers' daily routine. At the beginning of the project we noticed that most people were busy working the fields in the mornings until noon, so most of our interviews were conducted in the afternoon after the midday rest. Whenever given permission, we digitally recorded the conversation, and always took handwritten notes that were later transferred into the project database. Often people recommended other members of the community in the village whom they thought might be more knowledgeable about certain issues.

Kinship and Social Organization

Like all other villages in the Shala Valley, Theth is exogamous. The families are all distantly related to a common apical ancestor, the founder of the village, one Ded Nika. Therefore, the members of the village think of their community as a "brotherhood" (*vllazni*). While most people indicated that they are natives of Theth, only a few of them were able to trace a single patriline to Ded Nika, listing 9-12 generations of male ancestors. Until the 1950s, Theth observed the rule of exogamy with those villages of Shala (villages above Breg Lumi) founded by one Pec Nikaj, a brother of Ded Nika, the descendents of whom were considered Theth's patrikin.

Based on traditional (i.e. oral) knowledge, most respondents claim that they came from lower (i.e. southern) Shala, while some claim to have come from regions near Shkodra and Rrafshi i Dukagjinit. Those who offered an explanation always attributed their settlement in Theth some 300-350 years ago to a need to retreat to the mountains in order to avoid conversion to Islam. One source indicated that the settlement of Theth followed the death of Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeu and the eventual subjugation of Albanian lands by the Ottomans in the late 15th century. Several respondents also noted that the region was sporadically populated by small pastoral groups who were eventually overwhelmed by the Shala clansmen; some of these native populations resettled in the Malesia e Madhe while other smaller groups may have adopted the apical ancestors of the incoming Shala tribe as their own and were thus incorporated into the larger and stronger clans that populated their native territories.

As described above, Theth is internally divided into several neighborhoods (see again, Figure 3). These neighborhoods define spatial units inhabited by patrilocal groups linked through ancestry to a common apical ancestor: Gjeci for Gjecaj, Ndreu for Ndreaj, and so on. Each neighborhood is not exclusive to one particular *fis* (i.e. clan); i.e. a family from one *fis* may currently own and live in a house located in the traditional

¹³ This section is the work of Antonia Young and Mentor Mustafa, with contributions to the sub-section on subsistence by Charles Watkinson.

territory of another.¹⁴ However, each neighborhood is predominantly populated by the members of one *fis* who communally share their pastoral lands, almost always located above the neighborhood in the surrounding mountains. Each neighborhood is further divided into clusters of closely related households. This follows from the traditional splitting of extended families (as discussed above), which was described to us by a few respondents who had witnessed the process first hand.¹⁵ Additionally, most neighborhoods own, maintain, and use at no cost, their own mill.¹⁶ The neighborhoods are also organized to pool labor in working the fields, as the most efficient way to work the land now, but perhaps also in the past. On weekdays the particular owner pays the participants for their labor in working his fields and hosts a lunch for them. On Sundays, such a group may work without compensation for a family in need, but again the celebratory lunch is provided in recognition of the participants' goodwill. The work is seen as a charitable religious gesture. We observed this communal pooling of labor in operation.

We visited the largest household (HH028) which represents the traditional extended family. With 14 members from three generations residing under one roof, it is the largest family now in Theth, and one that stays in Theth year-round. It also includes the oldest year-round inhabitant (86 years old). The respondent was also one of the few to declare that he does not want to leave his home here, though this may also reflect the fact that he has no other option - no family in Shkodra or elsewhere who could take in the majority of his extended family. His nearest connected kin abroad is his wife's brother who lives in Norway - but according to the traditional kinship pattern it would not be considered any responsibility of his to support a married sister and her family.

Thus, the community of Theth appears to be entirely kin-oriented from the household/family level to the village level. These links are strengthened in a number of ways. For example, *kumbar* relationships of which we are aware within the village (traditional first cutting of a child's hair gives the cutter the status of a non-religious godparent) demonstrated strong links between two pairs of families, often from two different neighborhoods.¹⁷

Subsistence strategies

Prior to the Communist period, the economy was pastoral. During the

¹⁴ See "Creating a Brotherhood in a Village" in the Kanun (Book Four, Chapter 12, LVI), Gjeçovi *supra* no. 9.

¹⁵ Most families claim to be guided by the Kanun for the division of property, to resolve conflicts, and for marriage rituals while others voiced concern for conflicts between customary and modern law.

¹⁶ Nik Gjonaj, located on both sides of the river, has a mill on each side. Although the Gjecaj mill is built on Gjellaj land, it became known as the Gjecaj mill since, according to local testimony, it was more and more used by the expanding *fis* of Gjecaj. The traditional Gjecaj stronghold was at Fusha e Gjecajve on the eastern side of the river, but 100 years ago they started moving to the western side, where most of the Gjecaj live today. Communal ownership of mills runs counter to the private ownership of mills described in the Kanun (Book Five, LXIX-LXXII; Gjeçovi *supra* no. 9) and may have begun, or expanded, under Communism.

¹⁷ God-parenting is described in great detail in the Kanun in Book Eight, on honor (*ndera*) (Gjeçovi *supra* no. 9).

Communist era land and animals were collectivized and the villagers secured their livelihood through wage work for the cooperative. Currently, we found that most households have small holdings of crops and animals necessary to meet their domestic needs. Those families that do not over-winter return to Theth for the summer months to enjoy the marvelous mountain air, to maintain their properties, work the land for fruit (strawberries, plums, grapes, apples, pears, cherries, and mulberries) and vegetables (tomatoes, lettuce, onions, garlic, and peppers), as well as the main staple crops (corn, potatoes, beans).¹⁸ The pastures are utilized for cows, sheep, and some goats, as well as for growing winter fodder (mostly alfalfa). Several families also keep beehives. Wild plums, wild strawberries, walnuts, and hazelnuts are available to gather freely. Almost every household makes its own *raki* from grapes or plums (using *kazani i rakise*; Figure 7). Herbs are another plentiful local product. Theth used to be a collection centre for herbs and animal hides in Communist times, but now there is no proper infrastructure for their profitable collection and sale.

Because the intensive archaeological survey team surveyed almost all the cultivated land in the Theth valley (see below), some interesting observations can be made about modern agriculture. In the lowland area, around 35% of the area surveyed

was given over to arable crops, with most fields containing an interleaved mixture of maize, beans, and squash. In contrast to central and southern Albania, many fields were also planted with potatoes (covering a total of around 16% of the survey area). This crop reflects the focus on producing easily preserved foods for the winter, when the valley is completely isolated and must be self-sufficient. Corn cribs (*koçek*) and preserving barrels (*gaviç*) were a familiar sight, and households we visited were engaged in cheese production (using the traditional churn, or *tpi*).



Figure 7: Raki-making, house of Martin Gjoka, ST123, Tract 137, HH100

¹⁸ Intercropping is practiced almost universally and all respondents indicate that this has been practiced as long as they remember. Beans and corn are the most common combination although grape vines may be found surrounded by other produce, as well.

The Shala Valley Project: 2005 Field Report

In areas higher up the hillside, hay was being mown for animals and beech leaves gathered for their bedding using wicker baskets (*kosh*) carried on the back. None of the flocks of sheep observed were very large, few exceeding 50 animals (Pjeter Mhill's flock of 30 in Tract 290 had been reduced by 10 after recent wolf attacks). Two or three cows and a couple of pigs seemed to be the average for most households, as well as chickens. Traditional pastoralism is undergoing a period of change: none of the *konaks* (field huts), where pastoralist families traditionally settled in the summer, whose foundations were occasionally observed in the survey area (for example in Tract 300), were in use, and some families seemed to have no livestock. This may be because of an increasing trend towards moving entire households to Shkodra in the winter months, and the added expenses of transport and suburban pasturage if animals are also taken. A complex system of land ownership is evident, with cultivation rights available for rent to families remaining in the valley: Lule Gjeçaj, for example, was mowing hay in a field owned by Ndue Marku (Tract 278); the aged Kol Marku Sheji, meanwhile, paid a local man 700 lek a day to cultivate his land (Tract 188).

The residential seasonal transhumance observed in Theth has its roots in the old transhumant-pastoral lifestyle that was described by all respondents as their native occupation. We heard about residential movements from the lower parts of the village to the upper pastures in the pre-1950s era. Some full-time families who spent the winter in the vicinity of the church, lived in summer houses in Nen Rreth, thus having easier access to mountain pastures. Respondents also described migrations to more distant winter pastures in Durres, Koplik near Shkodra, and low-land regions of Malesia e Madhe. The pastures over the Qafa e Pejes belong to Kelmend but have been rented for summer use at the cost of 100 lek (\$1) per sheep for the season. Winter pastures also used to be rented out.

Up to the beginning of the 20th century, trade was made with Gusi, Plav, and Peja (over the Qafa e Pejes pass to Montenegro). Although the current borders were drawn by the Great Powers in London in 1912, it seems that the effects were not fully felt until after WWII and the break with Yugoslavia in 1948, after which time access to these old markets was no longer possible. These markets had been utilized for the purchase of corn which, by most accounts, was cheaper and more easily available in Montenegro in comparison to Shkodra. In turn, Shkodra market was mainly used to sell animals and pastoral products and for the purchase of salt, sugar, oil and other needed household goods. By the end of the 1930's the road had been built (under Zog's regime), apparently to serve Shkodra families with summer homes in Theth - this was a time when several foreigners published material about their visits here, so one might assume that this indicates that many more actually visited.

Change and development

This last winter was the longest and hardest in 30 years, and the main (though very poor) access road to Theth was closed for seven months, opening late in May. Even the other, longer, much worse route, through Breg Lumit and round via Koman, was fully blocked for two months. Despite the long, harsh winters, Theth has long had two

advantages over the towns of Albania: a good and plentiful source of pure drinking water and until recently, reliable electricity from local waterfalls. Nevertheless, it is clear that there has been a massive exodus of families since the fall of Communism in the early 1990s, slower at first but particularly dramatic in the first couple years of the new millennium. Only about 17 families are full-time residents now, although many families that have left return to their Theth homes in the summer; about 75% of the families we interviewed were part-time residents. This is not a new phenomenon for Theth, however, since four of the families we talked to had left the village well before the 1990s: one as early as 1935, two in 1957 and the other in 1971, but all currently return to Theth for the summer. While most families have relocated to Shkodra for permanent or winter residence, a good number of them have found their way to England, Greece, and Italy, and some as far as America. 75% of respondents indicated that money from emigrant relatives is crucial to their survival. Lack of employment in Theth is the major reason for the exodus, although the villagers also voiced the need for adequate electricity, a better school and roads, a hospital, phone lines, and an emergency evacuation service.¹⁹ These, and foreign investment for tourist development would lessen the need for the people of Theth to search elsewhere for employment.

REPORT OF THE INTENSIVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY TEAM²⁰

The intensive archaeological survey team (hereafter IAS) covered just under 2 km² in 16 days of active fieldwork. The team consisted of a varying group of five members, 3-4 of whom walked systematically (at 15m. spacing) across “tracts” designated by the team leader (Watkinson) and usually corresponding to natural topography or field boundaries (see map, Figure 1). (A total of 338 tracts were walked.) While almost all project members participated in the intensive archaeological survey at some point, the core team members were Gwen Backwell, John Backwell, Ellen Beilmann, Michael Galaty, Attila Gyucha, Ols Lafe, Zamir Tafilica, and Charles Watkinson. As well as collecting all pre-modern cultural artifacts, team members were asked to notify the team leader of any “features of interest” - ranging from terraces walls to scatters of modern tile. Because of the diachronic nature of the Shala Valley Project (SVP), modern land-use was given equal weight to evidence of past activities. These comments were noted in field logbooks which also contain sketch maps of each tract and standardized information about vegetation, percentage of underlying soil surface visible, structures, and finds. Each tract was digitally photographed and defined using a mobile GPS device. After each day’s fieldwork, the tracts were mapped on the SVP GIS system, with the associated information being entered into the project database.

The methodology used mirrors that of intensive survey projects around the Mediterranean, including the Mallakstra Regional Archaeology Project (MRAP), and

¹⁹ The aforementioned extended family (HH028) has five children attending the local school, one quarter of its population. There is now only one teacher (there were three in 2002, ten in Communist times) serving the entire eight-grade school.

²⁰This section is the work of Charles Watkinson.

the Durres Regional Archaeology Project (DRAP) in Albania.²¹ Initial concerns that a methodology developed in Mediterranean climates would be unworkable in the verdant, alpine environment around Theth proved groundless because even in the higher meadows, where the ground was covered in vegetation, features such as sheep paths and terrace walls always reveal some of the soil surface. Any nervousness about the attitude of residents of the valley to the IAS team's presence in their fields was also rapidly dispelled by the extremely warm welcome we received from local people whose traditional reputation for hospitality is well-earned.

The decision was taken to focus on cultivated fields in the lower part of the valley before moving higher up the hillsides, and this proved to be a good one. 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 (the main cultigens) that were small at the start of the season had grown to be almost impenetrable by walkers 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

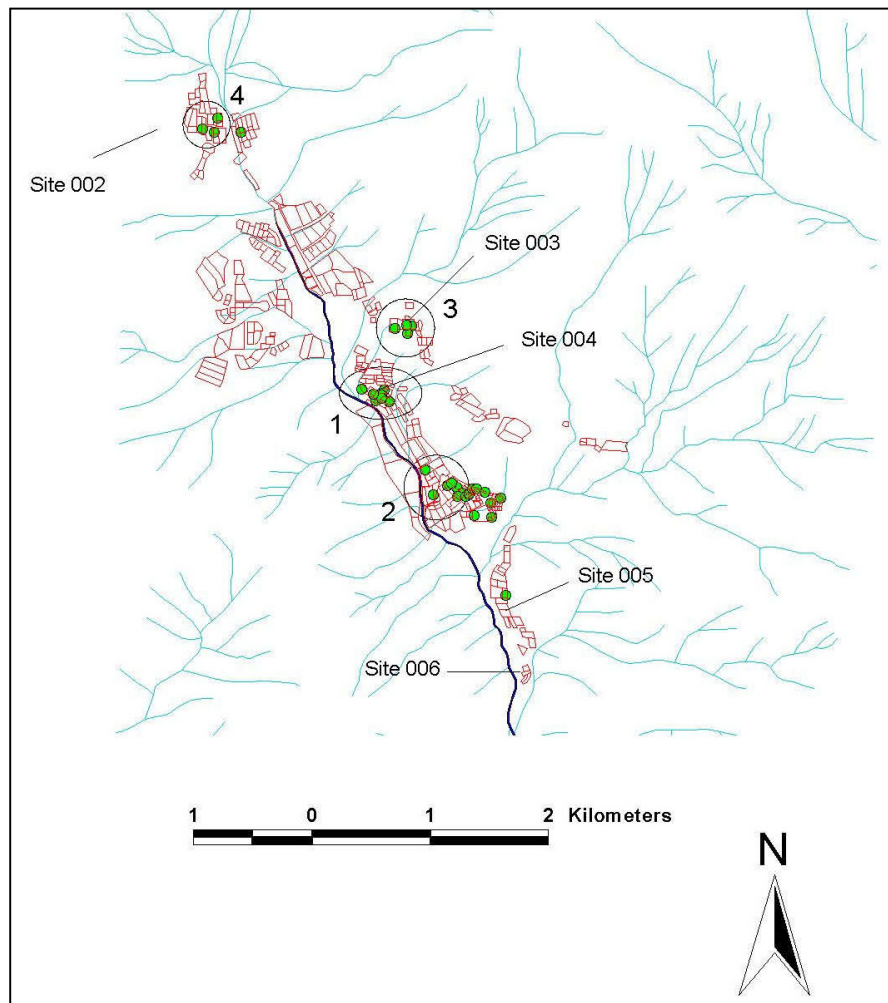


Figure 8: Distribution map by tract of all pottery (green circles) found in 2005, showing sectors and sites identified by IAS

²¹ Our original plan had been to predefine a grid system using GIS, locate grid squares using GPS, and then survey them. This plan proved unfeasible given the steep terrain and complex nature of the built environment in Theth, which is cut by fences, irrigation canals, stone walls, terraces, etc.

than would have been visible in the first weeks of fieldwork.

Material evidence for pre-Modern settlement in the area of Theth is very sparse. Only 133 datable ceramics were found during the entire survey season and most of these are very small and have been dated based on fabric rather than diagnostic shape. Despite this paucity of material, however, four distinct clusters can be discerned (Figure 8). Amidst the rugged topography of the Theth valley it is perhaps no surprise that ancient ceramics were generally found in areas of flatter ground that are still most heavily cultivated and settled. While it is true that ground visibility in these areas was also highest, terracing has allowed so many of the hillside slopes to be cultivated that an adequate, high visibility, sample of many other areas of the valley was obtained. The dating of terraces is a notoriously inexact science, but the fact that so much of the survey area was terraced (roughly 46% of tracts) may reflect Communist agricultural policy (although the massive stone terrace walls in Tract 327, Site 006, at the south end of Grunasii may be older; see detailed report below).

The four distinct areas of pre-Modern ceramics were as follows:

Sector 1: Gjellaj (Lower) (tentatively identified as Site 004, associated with tracts 094, 097, 098, 100). Near the road bridge in modern Theth, the highest concentration of ceramics identified as Late Roman was found in these fields. A scatter of diagnostically Late Medieval to Modern ceramics in the same fields might indicate a later period of land-use, but the picture is made more complex by a very large amount of shattered tile connected with the re-roofing of the old school (ST062), now a private home. This area deserves more exploration in 2006, early in the season when the maize planted in the heavily cultivated fields is less high.

Sector 2: Kolaj/Ulaj (to south of church, ST001) (associated with tracts 012, 016, 017, 019, 020, 037, 038, 052, 057, 063). The ceramics scattered around the church, on a low plateau to the west of Theth river, have been dated to the Middle and Late Medieval periods. This area deserves further investigation in 2006, perhaps by gridded collection at a time early in the season when the cultigens in these fields are less developed.

Sector 3: Gjellaj (Upper) (tentatively identified as Site 003, associated with tracts 142 and 144). The ruins of an old house (ST086) may be associated with the cluster of Late Medieval to Modern ceramics found in these fields, on high slopes to the east of the river.

Sector 4: Okol (associated tracts 240 and 242). Ceramics dated to the Late Medieval period are almost certainly associated with ST175 (Gjon Deda's house), one of the most interesting buildings in the valley with many carved symbols on the masonry.

Two other concentrations, although confined to single tracts, are also of particular interest:

Tract 209 (Nik Gjonaj West), just below the house of Marash Ndoya (ST151), yielded three Late Roman sherds. It is notable that this tract is directly above a ruined building (ST158, Tract 210) which the owner claims is the oldest house in this part of the valley.

Tract 314 (Grunasii) produced only one firmly diagnostic Late Medieval ceramic, but its association with the topographically striking house compound (ST270, Tract 312) in the center of this neighborhood may help date the buildings. A small vegetable field at the bottom of a steep drop to the east of the house, this tract may represent a dump for household waste.

All the material evidence for past land use dates, at the earliest, from the mid first millennium AD. There is as yet no incontrovertible evidence of prehistoric activity in the 2005 survey area, with only two possibly prehistoric ceramics found in and near the Okol caves (Site 002). Some foundation walls (ST277) associated with Tract 327 (at the extreme southern tip of Grunasii), possibly of prehistoric date, deserve further investigation in 2006 (see below).

So why is there so little material evidence of past land use in the Theth valley? Two complementary sources of evidence noted by the IAS team may be relevant:

(1) A historical tradition of relatively recent first settlement: In a number of tracts (038, 108, 131, 155) the team met residents who, when told about SVP's aims, narrated the settlement's traditional "foundation story". This recounts how inhabitants of Nitsaj and Lekaj, tribal areas about 20 kms. southwest of Theth, settled the valley about 200 years ago—cutting down trees and building houses in pasture lands they had traditionally used only seasonally.²² An old man (Tract 108) suggested that the area near the modern bridge was once called "Pylli i Harushes" (Forest of the Bear) and was the site of the first settlement. This is the same area as Sector 1, where the oldest pottery was found.



Figure 9: Wooden vessels for carrying water,
Gumnari family, ST223

(2) The nature of the modern material culture: On a visit to ST223 (house of the Gumnari family), the IAS team was struck by the lack of furniture and the portability of all the

²² Edith Durham was told a similar story, *supra* no. 5, p.123.

family's possessions. In houses and throughout the landscape wood is used for purposes where ceramics or metal might be commonly used elsewhere - for carrying liquids (Figure 9), as pipes for channeling water, or for transporting vegetables. Where ceramic or metal vessels are used in modern houses, their Turkish names (*filxhan* for a cup, *xhezve* for a coffee pot) reflect a relatively recent origin. By analogy, therefore, one might expect past settlers of this mountainous region to have left few archaeologically traceable remains. The large number of wooden structures (fences of briar, wicker sheep stalls) and the tradition of stone re-use mean that even past structures may have left little mark on the landscape - especially in an environment characterized by heavy snows and soil erosion.

SITE CATALOGUE²³

Site 001: Middle Paleolithic²⁴

The site is located along and above the road heading south from Theth to Breg Lumi. It is very near a spring on the east bank of the river near where it meets the Valley of the Deer. The spring is marked by large, recent marble grave marker. The first two tools 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 (Figure 10).

The lithics from the site are large and of Mousterian type. The material is a black, sometimes grey, coarse, very hard limestone, often heavily patinated on one side. Platforms are typically plain, more rarely poorly prepared. Most of the pieces are large secondary flakes, that may have served as flake cores. Several were subsequently subjected to bi-directional thinning and bi-facial re-



Figure 10: Location of SVP Site 001

²³ This section is the work of Michael Galaty, Ols Lafe, and Zamir Tafilica. The detailed description of the building at Site 006 is the work of Tafilica. Mentor Mustafa was of great help in analyzing the lithics from Site 001.

²⁴ Drawings of the lithics from S001 are being done by Adnan Bushati. All photographs of artifacts were taken by Ann Christine Eek.

touching, perhaps for use as tools. At least one piece is Levallois, perhaps intended to be a Levallois point, but the final form appears pseudo-Levallois (Figure 11).

Site 002: Okol rockshelters

Small, shallow rockshelters to the west of and above the neighborhood of Okol. Relatively deep, very red soil is preserved in some. Shovel tests were dug, producing one small plain body sherd. Another possibly prehistoric sherd was found in Tract 204 below and at some distance from the caves. We do not plan to conduct additional test excavations, given the scarce evidence for past, let alone prehistoric, sustained use.

Site 003: Upper Gjellaj

See “Sector Three,” above. Site associated with tracts 142 and 144. 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 Medieval to Modern ceramics. The site will be surface collected in 2006.



Figure 11: Lithic 002, Site 001

Site 004: Lower Gjellaj

See “Sector One,” above. Site associated with tracts 094, 097, 098, 100. Located near the bridge in modern Theth. The majority of ceramics found are Late Roman based on comparisons with fabrics from other Late Roman sites in northern Albania. A scatter of diagnostically Late Medieval to Modern ceramics in the same fields might indicate a later period of land-use. There is also a very large amount of shattered tile connected with the re-roofing of the old school (ST062), now a private home, which complicates matters. This area will be surface collected in 2006.

Site 005: Stone circle near Gerlë (Grunasi)

Just to the north of the building at Gerlë (Site 006), the IAS team discovered a small circle of five boulders that had been inserted into the earth. The date and function of this monument is presently unknown.

Site 006 (ST277): The building at Gerlë (Grunasi)

Position

The building is situated at the southern end of the village of Theth, in the Grunasi neighborhood, on the eastern side of the Theth stream (part of the Shala river). The building is situated on the southernmost end of a small terraced meadow, at the foot of a hill with many exposed rocks. The gaps between these rocks have been blocked with dry stone masonry walls. This is perhaps to create some sort of enclosed space for animals, a technique known also in other parts of the village. The dense vegetation is noticeable, composed of bushes and trees that made it difficult to survey the area.

A Description of the Building

The building has a rectangular shape measuring 7.60x4m, and is composed of a single room (Figure 12). The entrance is 1.20m wide and is situated on the southern side of the building. The walls reach a maximum height of 2m. They have been built with unworked stones, very large, large and medium in size, without mortar. The positioning of the stones is irregular and with large gaps between them. More attention has been paid to the corners of the building and the entrance. The walls are 1.40 m wide.



Figure 12: Site 006, ST277, the building at Gerlë

The front side of the building facing the meadow has a second wall attached to the first one which has the same width (1.40m) and the same construction technique. It is situated 1m lower than the other wall of the building.

The longer walls of the building and the wall in front of the entrance can be seen only from inside the building, because on the other side they rest against the hillside.

The floor is covered with fallen stones from the walls and dense vegetation that prohibits its study. At the current level the walls preserve no traces of windows. On the inner side of the side wall, in front of the entrance and in the center, at a height of 1m from floor level, there is a rectangular niche with the following dimensions: long 0.50m, wide 0.40m, deep 0.50m (Figure 13)

It was found covered with a layer of thick soil (0.05m), the result of water flowing through gaps in the wall. After carefully removing this soil, on the inner right side a



Figure 13: Site 006, ST277, niche

small section of solidified clay was found. This clay had been used to cover a small depression on the niche's floor. The clay preserves the fingerprints of the hands that placed it there. This clay reminds us of the same kind of clay used in prehistoric

constructions for their walls. It is brown in color and breaks very easily, perhaps a mixture of clay and animal manure. On the same wall, under this niche, can be easily seen another square space, three times larger (1mx0.65m), which seems to have been closed with stones at a later time. The lower part of this enclosed part of the wall is level with the floor. This suggests that it may have been a fireplace (see again, Figure 13).

Close to the left side of the entrance a semi-circular wall continues to run along the hill's edge and creates a sort of corridor from the meadow to the entrance. Above it on the slope there is another hole, 3x2m, constructed in stone boulders more or less regular in shape. The upper part of the square hole is level as it is filled with rocks, dirt and vegetation. It may be an auxiliary enclosure, whose function remains unknown.

The Building's Function and Date

A preliminary suggestion regarding the function and date of this building comes from the survey we conducted. Regarding the building, we think that it is a house once occupied by the earliest inhabitants of Shala, those who preceded the Late Medieval arrival of the ancestors of the current inhabitants. It is too soon to say for certain if we are dealing with a prehistoric construction or a prehistoric building tradition that was preserved into historic times, which sometimes happens in remote and isolated mountain areas, the conservative character of which is reflected in all aspects of material and spiritual culture. One's attention is drawn to the architecture of the building and the wall-building technique, both of which are completely different in comparison to all other buildings described by the project. It is the only example of a building that does not have internal divisions (stone walls) and a similar entrance situated on the edge of the side wall; a very simple floor plan.

The original height of the building remains to be determined and we have yet to reconstruct its architectural development: did it have a wooden or stone superstructure? Was the roof covered with hay or with wooden shingles?

The wall typology and building technique are also extremely interesting. The walls have a considerable width (1.40m), giving them strength without the use of mortar. While in Theth we witnessed a large earthquake (6.0 on the Richter scale; 10.07.2005) and saw that many terraces built with small-medium rocks were damaged, while the ones built with larger rocks did not suffer. The positioning of the rocks in an irregular way, sometimes even at odd angles, and the existence of openings between them, incorporating at times the natural bedrock, makes one think that this construction technique lies somewhere between prehistoric naïveté, demonstrating a lack of experience with stone construction, and a more sophisticated medieval aesthetic.

Seeing it in this context, we are convinced that there is here a complex of structures, perhaps including in addition to the "house," the nearby terrace system, the hole (or storage tank), the animal barn on the opposite hill, and another "monument" found during intensive survey, a circle of five boulders, with another one in the center, all stuck in the ground (Site 005). Whether or not these various structures are related,

however, will remain hypothetical until next year, when we plan to clean the structure and conduct limited test excavations in order to determine better its plan and function and to secure a date.

CONCLUSION

Our initial results therefore appear to indicate that several interacting factors influence patterns of cultural isolation. During prehistoric times, the primary determinant of settlement and land-use was almost certainly climate. In the Middle Paleolithic, Neanderthals made good use of the valley for hunting, but this became impossible during the last Ice Age. Humans did not return to Shala until at least the Neolithic, or later, and the valley was probably used for summer grazing only. Unlike periods of prehistory, the Late Roman presence was almost certainly stimulated by increases in trade activity along the valley as people moved back and forth between Late Roman centers to the south along the Drin River and in Shkodër and to the north in southern Montenegro. Shala may have been well integrated into the Late Roman “world system” that preceded Christianization. It was not until the Middle Medieval period (circa AD 1000) that Shala appears to have been reintegrated into systems of extra-valley exchange. At present, it is not clear whether the valley was in fact abandoned for several hundred years (AD 600-1000), was only very lightly used, or perhaps its inhabitants isolated themselves. The wave of settlement that began in the Late Medieval period (circa AD 1400), and accelerated about 300 years ago producing the modern settlement system and culture, may have been stimulated by the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. Many informants claim that their ancestors fled Ottoman programs of forced conversion and sought sanctuary in Shala. In the case of Late Medieval Shala, the limitations imposed by climate and environment were overcome, allowing permanent, year-round settlement, and inhabitants may have carefully chosen when and how to interact with the outside world thereby avoiding Ottoman conquest. The Modern period has been characterized by increased integration into external economies and political systems. The Communist state forced integration, damaging Shala’s traditional systems of architecture, social organization, and local economy in the process, and it seems western capitalism may finish the job. In the Modern period, Shala’s defense mechanism, isolationism, failed.

In archaeology and history, as well as in other related fields, scholars often draw upon Immanuel Wallerstein’s concept of a “world system” composed of cores and peripheries.²⁵ In Wallerstein’s model, Rome and Istanbul were economic and political core capitals of expanding empires, whereas Shala constituted a marginalized periphery located in a frontier zone. According to Wallerstein, and many who subscribe to World Systems Theory (WST), cultures situated in peripheral zones often maintain, or are forced to maintain (rendering them more easily exploitable and/or less dangerous), “simple” (i.e. “tribal”) socio-political and economic systems. WST may explain why in the highlands of remote northern Albanian, a unique culture of tribal chiefs and councils, blood feuds, oral customary law codes, and transhumance survived into the 20th century. However, we are wary of applying WST to Shala uncritically. Given the data collected

²⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern Capitalist World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

The Shala Valley Project: 2005 Field Report

thus far, and based on the oral testimony of Shala's inhabitants, it seems just as possible that in some situations, like that of Shala, societies may turn isolation to their advantage, what Kardulias has called "negotiated peripherality."²⁶ That Shala's people have negotiated their peripherality in the past seems likely; that they continue to do so today is certain.

Based on our work in 2005, we have set out several clear goals for 2006. Provided we obtain funding, we will return to Theth June 15-July 15. The EHS, EGS, and IAS will operate in the vicinity of Nderlysaj, Kaproj, and south along the west bank of the Shala River. We also hope that geoarchaeologist Michael Timpson will join us for a week in order to begin earth sciences research. We continue to think that the terrace system of Shala deserves attention and we may still try to construct a diagnostic chronology of terraces using scientific dating procedures. Finally, we will bring on-line the Extensive Archaeological Survey team (EAS), which will be led by Tafilica and Robert Schon (University of Arizona). They will conduct test excavations at Site 006 and will survey, surface collect, and test excavate known sites in Shala, Shoshi, and Pulti. If excavations reveal preserved stratigraphy and associated artifacts we hope to produce a series of radiocarbon dates. This approach should help us to tie down the ceramic chronology for Shala, if not the whole of the Dukagjin.

The landscape and culture of the valley of Theth, as recorded by the SVP in 2005, are in a state of flux. On July 11 we experienced a large earthquake that caused widespread damage. An earthquake provides an apt metaphor for the profound social and political changes that have affected this region over the last 100 years. Though the rate and scale of change may be different today, we would contend that Shala has always been subject to change, sometimes invited, other times resisted. It remains to be seen whether the landscape and culture we see today survive the current crisis.

²⁶ P. Nick Kardulias, Preface to *World Systems in Theory and Practice: Leadership, Production, and Exchange*, edited by P. N. Kardulias (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), pp. xvii-xxi.