

Outlines compiled in greater detail

Shala Valley Project ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT Antonia Young Dec. 2005

During the month mid-June to mid-July, 2005, I carried out 18 intensive interviews, composed of 56 questions each, that together provide a representative sample of the households of the village of Theth, concerning the recent history of the village, its alliances and restrictions. Whenever given permission, conversations were digitally recorded and were always taken in handwritten notes that were later transferred into the project database

Kinship and Social Organization

Like all other villages in the Shala Valley, Thethi 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.

Based on traditional (i.e. oral) knowledge, most respondents claim that they came from lower (i.e. southern) Shala.. Those who offered an explanation always attributed their settlement in Thethi 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

Theth is internally divided into several neighborhoods. These neighborhoods define spatial units inhabited by patrilocal groups linked through ancestry to a common apical ancestor: Gjeci for Gjecaj, Ndreu for Ndreaaj, 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 territory of another. 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, which was described by a few respondents who had witnessed the process first hand. Most families claim to be guided by the *Kanun*¹ (traditional law). Additionally, most neighborhoods own, maintain, and use at no cost, their own mill. The neighborhoods are also organized to pool labor in working the fields, as the most efficient way to work the land. On weekdays one 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.

¹ See: *The Code of Lekë Dukagjini*, New York, Gjonlekaj Publishing Company, 1989. This records the traditional laws practiced in the region over many centuries, and defines exactly how all aspects of life should be followed, including retribution for all kinds of crime, even the laws on blood feud vengeance.