

PAPERS
OF THE
PEABODY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ARCHÆOLOGY
AND ETHNOLOGY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
VOL. XXIII - NO. 3

THE MOUNTAINS OF GIANTS

A RACIAL AND CULTURAL STUDY OF THE
NORTH ALBANIAN MOUNTAIN GHEGS

BY
CARLETON S. COON

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, U.S.A.
PUBLISHED BY THE MUSEUM
1950

KRAUS REPRINT CO.
New York
1970



The Typical Mountain Ghag - Malsia e Madhe.

nor art
lecora-
which
mit of
affilia-

long to
inction.
of the
o won-
ot "re-
logical
vior by
eir ad-
ach are

THE HISTORY OF MALSIA E GHEGNISE

HISTORY is the lifeblood of ethnography, and historians the physiologists of societies. The ethnographer's task is to describe a culture, telling where a given people live, how numerous they are, what technological means they employ to make their adjustments to the landscape, how their families are organized, what other institutions have arisen among them, for trade, for government, for foreign relations, and for the satisfaction of their ritual needs. Although his work is selective, that of the historian must be more so, for the historian is concerned with the motion of societies through time. He must select only those facts which are pertinent to his problem.

In this case our problem is to find out all we can about the origin of the Gheg people, their genetic continuity within their mountain stronghold, and the times, places of origin, and physical characteristics of any outsiders who may have breached it. Since there is, as biologists well know, a selection in migration, we would like to know when and to what extent immigrants have left this country.

These plans can only be partly consummated. History is particularly silent about refuge areas. The geographical factors which have sealed tribal Ghegnia off from the main stream of human migrations and cultural evolution have also hidden it from the eyes of chroniclers, hampering as well the work of archaeologists. Actually we know nothing about its history before the Iron Age.

Only one man, the Freiherr von Richtofen,¹ claims to have found any evidence of Pleistocene occupancy in Albania. He discovered 2 fragments of worked flint directly under a modern road bed at Mali Dajti just outside Tirana. There is no reason to believe that they were not gunflints. Pittard, in a cave near

Korça in the south, located an equally dubious Neolithic deposit.² He based his claim of Neolithic age on the shape of one pot, which could just as well have belonged to the Iron Age. Bronze Age finds have actually been made, but not within our territory. A bronze axe, found near Scutari,³ has been attributed to the late Bronze Age, and is of a type which the Phoenicians are said to have traded with the barbarous inhabitants of the Mediterranean littoral. It has a down-flaring bit and a ring-grooved haft hole, not unlike the iron axes used in the mountains today. Some of the expensive bronze tools such as that described by Vulpe may have reached the mountain tribesmen in trade, but it is unlikely that the Phoenicians themselves wandered far from the sides of their ships, or remained in this desolate region any longer than necessary.

Bronze Age sites have never been located in the highlands. This is not for lack of archaeological research, since a number of Iron Age locations have been discovered and excavated in that area.⁴ These sites consist of tumuli. Such grave-mounds have been excavated in Hoti (Malsia e Madhe), Dushmani (Malsia e Jakovës), Mirdita, and Mati. The material removed from them is of regular Hallstatt type; in fact, Menghin says that the objects from north of the Drin are identical with the type specimens from Glasinac and Dolje Dolina, type sites of the Hallstatt civilization in Bosnia.⁵

This evidence confirms that of tradition, that the Gheg country was a part of the Illyrian domain. Two other sets of facts support this conclusion still further, the facts of modern language and of modern culture.

The Gheg language as spoken today is basically Illyrian—in fact, the only survivor of

the published reproductions of these objects and who is familiar with the Glasinac artifacts, states that the Albanian collections include Roman objects and others which are presumably Thracian. This evidence would set the date of the sites nearer to A.D. 1 than 500 B.C.

¹ Richtofen, 1939, pp. 151-52.

² Pittard, 1921, pp. 271-74.

³ Vulpe, 1932, pp. 132-45.

⁴ Menghin, 1919-20, pp. 197-202; Nopcsa, 1910, pp. [31]-[32]; Ugolini, 1927, pp. 181-88.

⁵ Dr. Robert Ehrich, who has carefully examined

of Nikaj, may have been either a fifth brother or a son of Krasni Laz.

The people of Shkreli, comprising a whole *bairak*, are said to have come from Bosnia en masse about 1600, and taken over a valley whose inhabitants had been killed off and whose church, Shen Kerli (St. Charles, hence Shkreli) destroyed. Three hundred out of 500 houses in Kastrati are said to be descended from a man called Delti, who came from the Kuchi region of Montenegro, with his 7 sons. He was, however, reputed to have been descended from Berisha, the oldest known *fis* in Albania. The 4 *bairaks* of Seltze, Vukli, Boga, and Nikshi in Klementi trace their descent from 4 sons of a man called Klimenti who fled from the neighborhood of Gusinje about A.D. 1600.

All of the inhabitants of Malsia e Madhe do not claim descent from these invading ancestors. Their traditions are so consistent, their genealogies so clear, that we cannot doubt that these invasions took place, or that earlier populations survived. In Gruda, 80 houses belonged to the Berisha *fis*, while in Hoti a small number of *anas*, or aborigines, remained. The newcomers intermarried with them. The descendants of these 2 population elements still intermarry regularly. Two hundred out of the 500 houses of Kastrati are pre-invasion, and are said to be of Slavic origin. Reçi includes a few houses of *anas*. The rest of the population, like Loya, claims as its ancestors refugees from Shlaku and Pulati. All in all, Malsia e Madhe seems to have borne the brunt of this Bosniak invasion, and to have derived from it a large part of its genetic composition (fig. 12, c).

In other parts of Ghegnia we find less evidence of invasion. The Berisha *fis* has been traced back certainly to 1370, probably to A.D. 1270. If it is that old, it may well go back to the pre-Roman period. Merturi split off from Berisha about A.D. 1700. The 2 *bairaks* of Dushman, Temali and Dushmani, are known since 1402, when they appear in written records as allies of Venice. They are probably much older. The people of Drishti, whose predecessors were destroyed by the

Turks, came from different places. The people of Toplana were driven to their present mountain stronghold from Vasojevitch in Montenegro about 1450, being pushed out by immigrants from Herzegovina. The ancestors of Plani came from 3 sources: Klementi, Merturi, and indigenous *anas*. Those of Kiri were from Kuchi and Ipek, in Montenegro. One hundred houses of Nikaj people are said to be descended from a daughter of Nikol by a gypsy, and are called Tsura. This is the only instance known of female descent, and indicates the relative social status of the alleged spouses.

The famous invasion of the Dukagin brothers, Shosh, Shal, Orosh, Spaç, and Kushnen, probably took place before the Bosniak migration.²⁹ Miss Durham derives them from the Pestriku mountains near Jakova, where they were part of the Ipek tribal confederacy. My informants named Marina *bairak* as their home. In Shala they are supposed to have found some small, dark people with whom they intermarried. A few of these *anas* stayed on, and there are said to be 8 houses of them at Abate in Lower Shala, while the rest immigrated to Dechani. The Mirdita brethren found the Dibri and Fan people ahead of them.

One tradition relates that the Dukagin *bairaks* of Mirdita did not stay long in their new home, but when the Turks had taken Scutari and were raiding the neighboring mountains, the settlers retreated to their ancient home, from which they did not return to Mirdita until around 1650. How true this is, and how many people, if any, it involved, cannot be determined.

We know finally that Jakova town was settled by people from various parts of the Gheg mountains, and the same is true of Ipek. These were cities of refuge, like earlier towns before them. More recent than any of these is the village of Vraka, a community of a thousand people lying between Koplik and Scutari. This is the residence of Serbian-speaking, Orthodox farmers, whose ancestors fled from blood vengeance in various parts of Montenegro, Herzegovina, and Bosnia. They have not yet become absorbed, and with modern

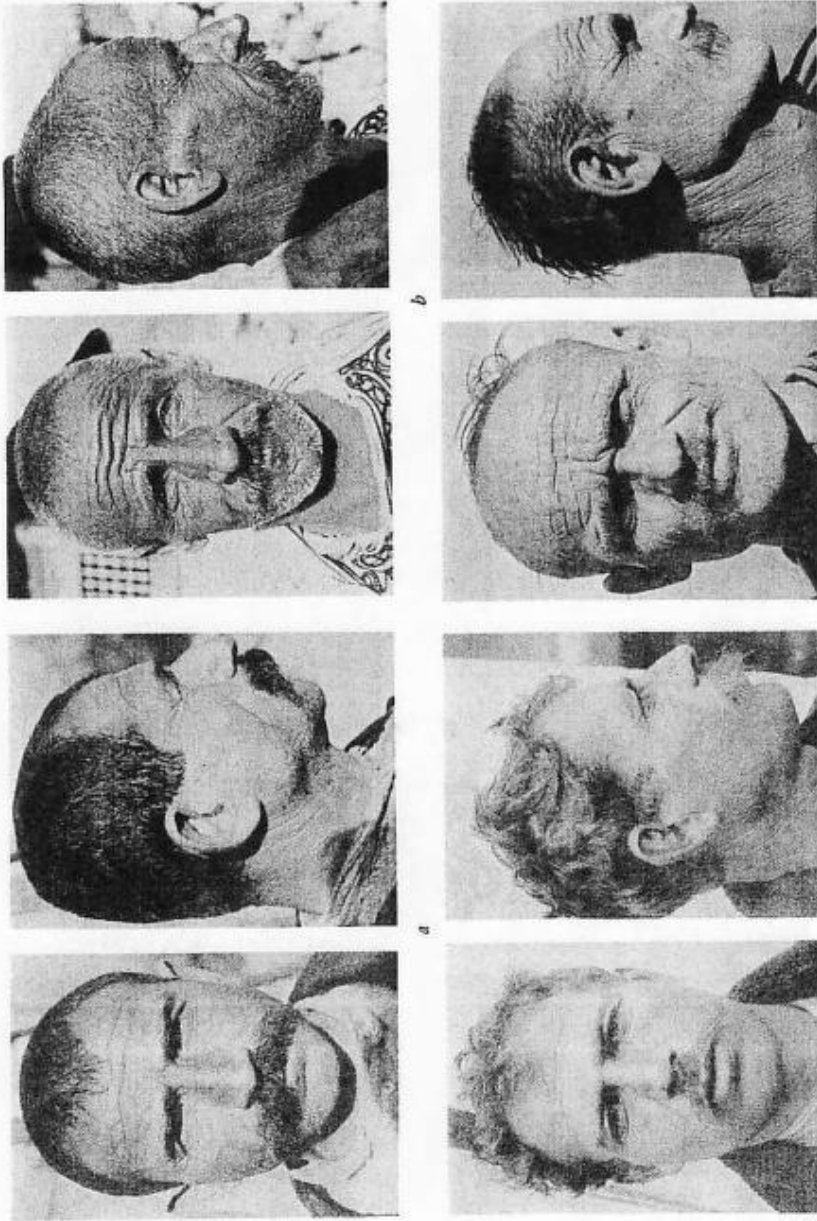
²⁹ The Dukagins are centuries older. See Gegaj, 1937, cited in Fan Noli, 1947.

avy
for
and
uch
ved
ew
not
ew

o 2
rate
lves
oss.
mia
the
ged
os-
ari,

op-
low
nce
hus
rese
and
kish
gles
ther
the
ized
and
: in

zen-
ham
ock,
hile
who
im-
rom
ears
ia e
Geg
nte-
and
stor
Laz,
ia e
, al-
stor



The Gaste Puresorvæn. *Standard Dinaric Montain Gbëg*: a, Zadrina tribe; age, 35; eyes, blue-brown; hair, dark brown; beard, reddish brown; cephalic index, 86; facial index, 83; nasal index, 65; stature, 151.1. b, Dibra tribe; age, 50; eyes, blue-brown; hair, black grayness; beard, red-brown grayness; cephalic index, 80; facial index, 94; nasal index, 58; stature, 178.8. *The Românî type of the norrbauer*: c, Malsia e Madhe tribe; age, 40; eyes, blue; hair, golden; beard, golden; cephalic index, 86; facial index, 86; nasal index, 67; stature, 175.0. d, Dulagîn tribe; age, 48; eyes, green-brown; hair, golden; beard, golden; cephalic index, 90; facial index, 78; nasal index, 67; stature, 190.