

*Main Article—Extensive Review Essay and Research Note*

## What (Little) We Know about Albanian Tribes: Reflections and Tabulations

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Robert Elsie, *The Tribes of Albania: History, Society and Culture* London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015, 368 pages. ISBN: 978-1-78453-401-1 (hardback) / 978-0-85773-932-2 (e-book)

*In Honour and Memory of Dr Robert Elsie (1950 – 2017)*

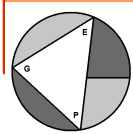
*This essay is about major findings in Elsie's Tribes of Albania, some of his related works, and other sources. It is based on a much shorter book review solely focused on Tribes of Albania that already has been published in the preceding issue of our journal (see Ten Dam 2018: 38-45). The latter review—and perhaps parts of this essay as well—will form part of a broader yet shorter review essay on several of Robert's Elsie last works on the Albanians, which the peer-reviewed journal Iran and the Caucasus (Brill) intends to publish sometime this or next year.*

*NB: citations and other references from Elsie's Tribes of Albania—the main book under review—are indicated only by the relevant page numbers of that work, e.g. '(p. 1)', '(p. 100)', etcetera (sometimes e.g. '(Elsie p. 100)' in order to distinguish it clearly from citations and references of other sources in the same paragraph). The other source references in the main text and the footnotes of this article are shown in the Author-Date version of the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) referencing style i.e. '(Author Year: page number)', the preferred referencing format of this journal.*

### Introduction

*The Tribes of Albania: History, Society and Culture* forms an outstanding, insightful and sorely needed addition to the field of ethnic studies in general and the oft-neglected field of Albanian studies in particular. Indeed, it should help to overcome the “glaring lack of knowledge and scholarly information about the tribes of northern Albania” ([http://books.elsie.de/bo86\\_tribes-of-albania](http://books.elsie.de/bo86_tribes-of-albania) (last acc. 23-4-2019) ).<sup>1</sup> This is all the more important once one realises that particularly the region of northern Albania has contained, like Montenegro, one of the few truly tribal societies on the European subcontinent that survived more or less intact at least up to the mid-twentieth century.

For decades, Dr Robert Elsie has been one of the most prominent specialists on Albanian poetry and literature, who has continuously sought to “present to the Western reading public



—works of Albanian literature which may be seen to be of major cultural relevance” worldwide (Elsie 1996: ix-x). With his numerable translations over the years, Elsie has combatted the “glaring lack of literary translations from Albanian into English” (Elsie 2006: x). His untimely death in late 2017 (see announcement on [www.elsie.de](http://www.elsie.de)) leaves a gaping hole in Albanian studies for years and even decades to come, that few if any non-native scholars would ever be able to fill given his in-depth knowledge and vaunted mastery of the Albanian language.

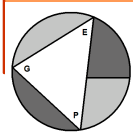
As a prolific writer, editor, translator and interpreter, Elsie had in more recent years broadened his studies and publications—including translations, editorships and republications of other works—to Albanian politics and society as well, including the history, structure and saliency of the clans or tribes among the Albanians.

The primary book under review mainly deals with the “about 70” (p. 10) <sup>2</sup> mostly ethnic-Albanian tribes in northern Albania who mainly speak the Gheg-dialect, as opposed to the Tosk-dialect spoken mainly in southern Albania south of the river Shkumbin, because most of these tribes have been historically concentrated and most salient in that northern region, even to this day. Albanologists and other scholars generally agree that contrary to the Ghegs (or Gegs) in the north of Albania where the “clan-tribal structures were exceptionally strong”, the Tosks in the south of the country “to a much smaller extent, followed the rules of common law” (Czekalski 2013: 10 (quotes), 81) i.e. customary *Kanun* (lit. law, rule, rod) law. The Tosks had hardly any tribal patterns left, certainly since the Ottoman conquest, and much more followed feudal patterns of agricultural landownership instead—though some small village-based clans or *farë* (lit. seeds) had continued to exist until at least the eighteenth century (Skendi 1967: 16). <sup>3</sup>

Arguably, religious and other “historical differences between northern and southern Albania” due to divergent “outside forces and institutions and internal leaders” led amongst other things to Catholicism taking root in the North and Orthodox Christianity in the South in pre-Ottoman times (Doll 2003: 148,149,152 (incl. quotes) ), whose traces can be found to this day.

Also geographical differences between the mountainous, isolated highland North difficult to be ruled by others and the relatively flat, lowland South which it made it easier to be incorporated into the Ottoman empire (Doll 2003: 153), could account for the Gheg-Tosk divide. Still, Christian presence in Albania appears to have dwindled further vis-à-vis the Muslim majority ever since the 1945 census (72.5% Muslims of which 15-20% Bektashi Sufis; 17.2% Orthodox; 10% Catholic) (Czekalski 2013: 119-120). As shown in Table I in the Appendix, Elsie has not distinguished a single Orthodox tribe in the Gheg-speaking Albanian North.

Elsie’s *Tribes of Albania* also describes other Albanian(ised) tribes—and smaller clans, sub-clans and large families however delineated and defined—in other Albanian-inhabited lands in South-Eastern Europe, notably in Montenegro, Kosovo and FYR (Former Yugoslav Republic of) Macedonia, since recently renamed Republic of North Macedonia. Yet apart from such introductory geographical, historical and cultural differentiations between Albanian communities, few if any scholars mention—let alone provide in-depth analyses of—the actual, *precise* structure and fate of the (northern, Gheg) clan system prior to, during



and after the communist period in Albania. As we shall see, even Elsie's *Tribes of Albania* exhibits this shortfall of detailed analysis and data on the continuing existence if any of Albanian tribes to this day.

Indeed, apart from *Elsie's Tribes of Albania*, (relatively) recent studies on Albanian clans or tribes, sub-clans and other kinship groups in and beyond Albania are few and far in between, and typically limited in breadth and scale. Only one other relatively recent comprehensive study in the English language comes to mind: Gjergj Rrapi's study of the extended family (*Großfamilie*) or "complex family" (*komplexen Familie*) in Kosovo (Rrapi 2003: 7).<sup>4</sup>

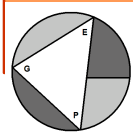
According to Rrapi, the extended family, rather than the clan or sub-clan if above the extended-family level, is the most salient kinship group in Kosovo—unlike among Albanians in northern Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia (Albanians in southern Serbia and other places are not mentioned); in these localities Albanian extended families are actually nearly extinct according to him (Rrapi 2003: 12). Consequently, he does not focus on (sub-)clan and other levels and kinds of kin grouping in and beyond Kosovo among Albanians. Thus he comes up with a number of 151 extended or "complex" families in Kosovo (Ibid: 35, Table 5)—and hardly says anything about the characteristics, salencies and numbers of (any) higher-level kin groups in Kosovo.

### Definitions and delineations of kinship groups and related concepts

Elsie endeavours to come up with lucid, distinct definitions and classifications. Thus he prefers to translate the primary Albanian patrilineal, exogamous kinship-group concept of *fis* as 'tribe', though he acknowledges that the term also generally is, and can be, translated as 'clan' (p. 3; see also p. 5, note 6). Nevertheless, some prominent scholars exclusively translate *fis* as 'clan' (e.g. Fischer 1999: 282; Doll 2003: 151). Generally, few if any scholars identify separate Albanian terms for 'clan' and 'tribe', and rather translate the single Albanian term *fis* as both 'clan' and 'tribe' (and occasionally just 'kin')—and consequently apply the latter English terms interchangeably.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Elsie, I generally prefer the term 'clan' rather than 'tribe' to denote the basic kinship group. In the strict sense, I distinguish between the tribe as a "kin group without residential unity ("ethnic" if with perceived common ancestry)" and the clan as a "kin group with residential unity" (Ten Dam 2010: 344), though I more loosely use the term 'tribe' to denote a collection of closely related or allied clans. Still, each time Elsie describes in *Tribes of Albania* a 'tribe' that has wandered partially, largely or totally away from its original homeland (be it mythical or factual, or a mixture of both), or even a 'tribe' that lives no longer in any concentrated area at any rate, then its description concords with my tribe definition. Elsie himself circumscribes the *fis* or tribe in the strict sense, and in "the northern Albanian context", as "a patrilineal kin group, i.e. a tribe in which all male members regarded themselves as being of common descent" (pp. 3-4).

For each tribe Elsie considers to be or have been as such in the strict sense, he defines the *fis* as a "community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back



to one [mythical, purported or factual, provable] male ancestor" (e.g. p. 20). In contrast, any tribes in the broader sense are deemed "ethnographic regions of northern Albania with a distinct history and identity that are not strictly tribes but are often regarded as such" (p. 5; see also his note 6). Thus the Gruda tribe was of "polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor" (p. 38). Apparently, at least according to Elsie, there were and are no (ethnic-)Albanian matrilineal tribes to speak of.<sup>6</sup>

Another major, originally Ottoman concept is *bajrak* (banner, standard), which is also often translated as 'clan' or 'tribe'. Yet actually it "was more of a political entity, usually entailing a specific geographical territory" (p. 4) headed by a hereditary *bajraktar* (standard bearer) that may concern one or multiple *fis* or part of a *fis*. With the *bajrak-fis* "constructions and constellations sometimes being fluid" (Ibid), it became quite challenging for both outside and inside contemporary observers to designate and distinguish between (northern-)Albanian kinship groups and political-military entities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, let alone those in earlier times.

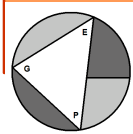
Consequently, major explorers like Karl Steinmetz (?–1910), Baron Franz Nopcsa (1877–1933) and Franz Seiner (1874–1929) circumscribe and apply these terms markedly differently from each other, all of whom Elsie extensively cites without explicitly judging or commenting on their observations. Commendably, Elsie himself seeks to overcome such definitional disagreements and obfuscations by applying a broad concept of the tribe "so as to cover not only the *fis* and the *bajrak*, but also some ethnographic regions" (p. 5).

At any rate, I circumscribe the *bajraktar* as a more purely military entity, or rather military leader of many a (supra- or sub-)clan established under (early) Ottoman rule, when "Albanian clans had to elect military leaders (*bajraktar*: standard-bearer) and supply one fighter per household" (Ten Dam 2011: 255) for military duty in the Ottoman army.<sup>7</sup>

True, eventually practically each of these clans or tribes came to be called a *bajrak* whereby the *bajraktar* became a hereditary post for the (leading) sub-clan or extended family within the clan or tribe concerned; at first alien to egalitarian clans except the Catholic *Mirditë*, the *bajrak* became an "organic part of the clan system" (Malcolm 1998: 16-17; see Ten Dam 2011: 256). Indeed, the *bajrak(tar)* was one of the "Ottoman inventions" that became successfully "incorporated into the *fis* system" (Doll 2003: 154) and generally functioned until well into the early twentieth century.

### Structure and main sources of the book

Elsie's *Tribes of Albania* distinguishes and describes altogether 74 discrete tribes (rather than "69 different tribes" according to the book cover), including semi-tribes and sub-tribes, in eleven separate chapters covering distinct areas within northern Albania, and occasionally bordering areas in southern Albania within the state of Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia and Greece as well.



For each distinguished (sub-)tribe, Elsie seeks to describe, as succinctly yet as exhaustively as possible, its historical, demographic and cultural characteristics under at least some of the following sections and headings: Location of Tribal Territory; Population; Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History; Travel Impressions (by foreign visitors); and (domestic, native) Figures of Note. The characteristics of the better-known or well-documented tribes are described under all or most of these sections and headings, the lesser-known or ill-documented ones only under some of these.

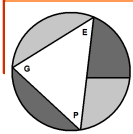
In order to present a clear summary and overview of some major characteristics of the Albanian tribes described in Elsie's work, I have constructed Table I as shown in the Appendix. The table also presents additional categories on tribal features that can be extracted in most cases from Elsie's work. Most significantly, this concerns a category on a tribe's religious makeup, and one on the extant saliency i.e. current existence of a tribe if any—and on the history and extent of its blood-feuding if any. This table counts 77 tribes as actually distinguished and discussed by Elsie, also counting and adding separately the three overarching composite tribes encompassing multiple discrete tribes each: the Mirdita, Mati and Dibra.

For most of the tribes, Elsie consults, refers to and often extensively cites from a relatively limited number yet authoritative set of individual and collective sources, which include amongst others: <sup>8</sup>

- the 1671-2 ecclesiastical reports by Pietro Stefano Gaspari, "the apostolic visitor to Albania .. who travelled through the region in 1671-2" (e.g. p. 19);
- the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli;
- the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola;
- the 1866 and 1868 reports by Emile de Wiet, the French consul at the time in Shkodra (Alb: Shkodër), 'capital' and largest town in northern Albania;
- the 1916-1918 Albanian census reports by the Austrian journalist and scholar Franz Seiner (1874-1929), rapporteur of "the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austrian-Hungarian administration" (e.g. p. 19);
- the travel reports, field researches and analytical treatises on the Albanians by the Austrian diplomat and scholar Johann Georg von Hahn (1811-1869); the Hungarian-born Viennese scholar Baron Franz Nopcsa (1877-1933), who could have become King of Albania in 1913 or fulfilled another major public function later in life had he not committed suicide (Elsie 1999); the Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz (?-1910); and the British writer Mary Edith Durham (1863-1944), all of whom frequently travelled through the region in the mid-nineteenth, late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

Notably, one of the generally recognised experts Elsie does not consult, refer to or cite at all in *Tribes of Albania*, is Margaret Hasluck (1885-1948), who, just like Edith Durham a few decades before her, had diligently observed and recorded the traditional law codes, customs and beliefs among the Albanians *in situ*, in northern Albania most of all. Yet for some reason Elsie appears to hold Durham's work in much higher esteem than Hasluck's. <sup>9</sup>

In contrast, many others including myself hold both Durham and Hasluck in equal esteem,



notwithstanding any observable differences between their analyses, interpretations and viewpoints of the Albanians in their works. Sadly, “Durham was ridiculed, and Hasluck died of leukaemia in 1948 before she could complete her work. Their publications arrived too late to influence the Great Powers” (Ten Dam 2011: 265)—“many of them ... ignorant of Balkan affairs” (Vickers 1998: 97) and Albanian affairs most of all—in fairly and equitably determining the fate of the Albanians at the time.

### Past and current blood-feuding and related violence by and among Albanian tribes—need for clarification and research

The many old and new sources, descriptions, factual details and insights that Elsie does use, refer to and cite in his *Tribes of Albania* largely concord with, confirm and enrich my own findings on Albanian honour through *besa* i.e. solemn oath, or oath-of-honour<sup>10</sup>, martial valour especially through the predatory raid, blood-revenge, and hospitality and mediation codes within their customary *Kanun* laws, kinship groups and other cultural traits (e.g. Ten Dam 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015).

As indicated for column H of Table I (see Appendix), the focus here is on the blood-feud in the narrow indigenous sense—not in the broader sense of martialism, fierceness, warlikeness and rebelliousness. Blood-feuds in this narrow sense do not necessarily include or involve revenge and defence against foreign invaders, nor internal “separatist tendencies (most frequently of a clan or religious basis)” (Czekalski 2013: 13). Still, all these latter norms and practices—including marauding and plundering—often coincided with or were expressed through blood-feud norms and practices, though their precise causal interlinks with e.g. the *Kanun* codes “is open to debate” (Elsie p. 10).

One also must keep in mind that the *Kanun* constitutes a “particular system of tribal justice” not only based on honour-pledges and blood-feuds if pledges and honours are broken, but also on day-to-day regulations about “social issues” like “property, marriage, relations with the church [or mosque], rights of women and [ordinary] crime” (Doll 2003: 148).

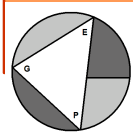
### *The blood-feud vis-à-vis religion and the Kanun*

Thus most of the “about 70 northern Albanian tribes” (p. 10) adhered to the honour-centric *Kanun* codes for many decades or even centuries, until at least the early twentieth century. Arguably these honour-codes lasted at least until the post WW-II Stalinist regime of Enver Hoxha (1908–1985), whose efforts to annihilate or at least subjugate the tribes that practised these codes appears to have been successful in part (see e.g. Fischer 1999: 291-292; Fischer 2007: esp. 260; Czekalski 2013: esp. 27-29).

The adherence to these codes may account for the endemic blood-feuds—and often closely related raiding and pillaging, though these often emanated from extreme poverty rather than any other reason—within between many of these tribes at the time.

This honour-bound culture may account for their numerous rebellions against Ottoman,





Austrian-Hungarian, Serbian and other conquerors and overlords as well. Rightly or wrongly, “these codes have been linked to ... Albanian blood-feuding (*gjakmarrje*). Whether the *kanuns* were responsible for institutionalising revenge and promoting the widespread vendettas that caused the extinction of a good portion of the male population a century ago, or whether they simply reflected an already existing tribal mentality, is open to debate” (Elsie pp. 9-10).

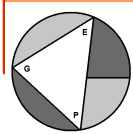
Some scholars assert that the “blood-feud (*hakmarrje*) actually predates” the canons of *Kanun*, which together constitute a “codification of centuries of unwritten law and tradition” (Fischer 1999: 282-283(incl. quotes) ). If true, this suggests that the blood-feud may reflect a quite ancient, even pre-*Kanun* mindset and phenomenon among (northern) Albanians. At any rate, the *Kanun* was codified particularly by the anti-Ottoman Albanian leaders Lek (Lekë) Dukagjin(i) (1410–1481?) and Gjergj Kastrioti (1405?–1468) who became known as Skanderbeg (“Lord Alexander” from Turkish İskender, “Alexander”), reputedly a reference to Alexander the Great.

Historically, the Code of Lek Dukagjin was the most dominant, best preserved and codified *Kanun* Code; this was mainly due to the fact that the Franciscan Albanian priest Shtjefën Gjeçov (1874–1929) wrote it down in 1913 as it was practised by the large, composite Catholic *Mirdita* tribe; his text was eventually published also in English in 1933 (see Ten Dam 2010: 344; Ten Dam 2011: 254-256).<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, we know a lot less or hardly anything about how other tribes actually practiced this Code of Lek Dukagjin and perhaps other, diverging *Kanun* Codes—and whether or how they changed these practices across decades and centuries. We particularly know relatively little about these practices among Albanian tribes who partially, primarily or fully followed Muslim beliefs of Sunni or Bektashiya or other Sufi varieties—including their particular *Kanun* ‘mountain law’ codes having directly to do with blood-revenge.

Indeed, how the particular *Kanun* codes—including those regulating blood-feuds—were related to and coexisted with the particular religious beliefs upheld by and within Albanian tribes, remains obtuse and contested. Thus the “ambiguous relationship between the *fis* system and the Catholic Church” (Doll 2003: 155) or any Orthodox Patriarchy (if any), may resemble those that tribes following Islamic laws and practices had to cope with, seeking to marry these with their own particular *Kanun* codes and practices. Thus at tribal “courts, assemblies and private gatherings people took oaths—and transgressors asked absolution—on the Gospel, Koran, sacred object or at a holy place”, or even on “a rock, a stone-and-earth on a shoulder, or on the head(s) of one’s sons” according to ancient pagan custom (Ten Dam 2010: 352; from Gjeçov 1989: §531-537, 541-542, 553, 556, 565, 592(d,e) ).

Generally, the *Kanun* “competed and intermingled with *Shari’a*, Church doctrine and “modern” nationalism” (Ten Dam 2010: 352); it still tends to supersede “Islamic, Christian, and modern-secular norms” (Ibid) to this day—for so far still uphold by surviving tribes or even non-tribal communities among Albanians. The primacy of *Kanun* particularly appears to be true when matters of honour and feuding are concerned.



### *Frequency and saliency of the blood-feud*

Whether caused by the *Kanun* codes, wider tribal culture or any other reasons, intra- and inter-tribal blood-feuds seem certainly to have been prevalent among some of the large, powerful or otherwise well-known tribes like the Shala and Nikaj, both Catholic tribes who were each other's "hereditary enemies" (p. 151).

Whether such feuds have been prevalent among small, marginal or otherwise lesser-known tribes like the Bobi and Gimaj in the Shkodra district, appears to be generally unknown. For none of the 23 'minor tribes' Elsie identifies, he has been able or ready to describe their degree of (blood-)feuding; thus for all these tribes, the degree of this phenomenon if any remains empty in the last column of Table I in the Appendix.

What one could state with a high degree of certainty is that the blood-vendettas in Albanian society were indeed widespread, endemic and lethal. Thus in Albania "as late as the 1920s the death toll in some areas of the north was astonishingly high, as high as forty percent of all deaths" due to these vendettas (Fischer 1999: 284; from Vlora 1973: 131). Indeed, the extremely high mortality rate of nearly 18 deaths per 1000 inhabitants in Albania overall each year until well into the late 1930s (so well before the ravages of WWII) "could be explained not only by poverty, but also the practice of *bloody revenge*" (Czekalski 2013: 81; from Hall 1994: 61-63).

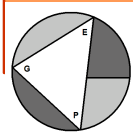
Nevertheless, the new-fledged Albanian state in the 1920s and 1930s sought to introduce central law and order through new penal and civil codes, new police forces and a new national army. Especially outlawing the blood-feud and the prohibition to bear arms in public—with the partial exception of King Zog's own tribes and the few other tribes loyal to him—did significantly curtail and reduce "bloody revenge" (*gjakmarrja*) (Czekalski 2013: 93(quote)-94; Fischer 1999: 287-291; Fischer 2007: esp. 48).

At closer look, however, this achievement was rather ephemeral and hollow. Already long before he became king, Ahmet Zogu and the governments he was part of had to resort to time-honoured tribal customs like *besa* and blood-money to restrict blood-feuding, whereby the tribal "chieftains were being paid simply to refrain from attacking the government" and in turn declare a "recurrent *besa* that set aside blood feuds for a prescribed period of time" (Fischer 2007: 27).

Moreover, this reduction in blood-revenge, particularly in the late 1930s and especially in King Zog's own tribal region of Mat, suggests that the number and frequency of feud-based killings were even higher and more widespread during preceding decades (and centuries). The tensions, chaos and enmities ensuing from the Italian and subsequent German occupations of Albania during WWII, actually heightened blood-revenge once more—both between tribes and other kinds of factions and against the occupiers.

Hoxha's Stalinist regime in its early days ruthlessly targeted and punished blood-feuds by (summarily) executing and dispossessing many of those accused of participating in them; yet it seems highly unlikely that these feuds were "entirely eradicated" according to the regime's own unreliable, partisan and politicised statistics (Fischer 2007: 260 (incl. quote) ).





The overall extent of Albanian blood-feuding in past and present appears to be chequered and partially obtuse. As can be deduced from Table I, among the 77 tribes (also counting the three composite tribes) distinguished by Elsie, according to Elsie('s sources) just four are or have been fully, mostly or likely characterised by blood-feuding to this day or until fairly recently; eighteen are partially or uncertainly characterised by blood-feuding; and just one (sub-)tribe—the Kryezezi—explicitly is hardly ever or never characterised by blood-feuding (see Explanation of Table I's Column H below Table I).

At least according to Karl Steinmetz during a visit in August 1905, the Kryezezi tribe “is the most peace-loving of all the Catholic tribes of northern Albania” (Elsie p. 200; quote from Steinmetz 1908: 5). For about as many as 54 tribes it remains unknown or unmentioned in Elsie's *Tribes of Albania* whether they have ever been involved in blood-feuds amongst themselves, against other tribes or against non-Albanian outsiders. The overall extent of blood-feuding would only be considerable if most of or all of these tribes were shown to be or have been heavily engaged in blood-feuding.

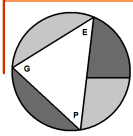
### *Judging the blood-feud*

Revealingly, Elsie—much like most outside visitors to northern Albania from earlier generations he describes in his book's recurrent ‘Travel Impressions’ section—is quite scathing about the “senseless carnage” of blood-feuding, which especially during the early twentieth century “decimated the male population of entire regions of northern Albania” (Elsie 1991a; Elsie 1996: 86). He condemns blood-feuding, “that ever so Albanian characteristic—an inexorable call for revenge” (Elsie 1993: 867; Elsie 1996: 148), in other reviews and other publications too—while generally neglecting to discuss any positive, negative, nuanced or conflicted judgments by native observers of this phenomenon.

Still, Elsie acknowledges that some reconciliation and feud-curtailment efforts by and among Albanians have borne fruit, like the “anti-vendetta campaign” in Kosovo during 1990 “led by prominent Kosova Albanian intellectuals” resulting in “the ‘pacification’ of more than 900 blood feuds” (Elsie 1991c: 343; Elsie 1996: 94 (quotes); see further Elsie 1991a: 165; Elsie 1996: 86-87).<sup>12</sup>

Elsie is not alone in adopting a judgmental perspective on the “controversial and much-maligned concept of the blood-feud” (Doll 2003: 148). Thus Bernd J. Fischer bluntly states that the “impact of the blood-feuds” among the Albanians has been “exclusively and profoundly negative” (Fischer 1999: 284). He argues that the blood-feud became endemic mainly due to the low thresholds of insults to one's honour and oath-of-honour (*besa*) that require blood to be shed in retribution—like “spitting on someone” and the fact that “no distinction was made between an accidental and an intended slight” (Ibid: 283).

However, I have argued more than once that one should keep an open mind about the possibility of morally ambiguous, positive or even commendable aspects that a phenomenon like the blood-feud—and related customary norms and practices—might sometimes entail. In other words, the blood-feud among Albanians and any other communities in the world might possess understandable or even commendable attributes—even from the perspective



of international human rights and humanitarian norms:

Until recently Western scholars differentiated between modern “laws” and traditional “customs”, and refused to consider customary, unwritten rules as laws at all (Leach 1977: 6). They yet have to look beyond their own value-system when observing physical and “structural violence”. ... It [the bias] implies that Albanians should eventually conform to Western culture. Such Western bias extends to local customs and aspirations generally. ... One should seek [however] the best combination of Western and local values, whereby international law might accept or adopt beneficent Mountain laws. ... Some “traditional” violence actually may conform to humanitarian and human rights norms, but in guises we are unfamiliar with. If some actions do violate international norms, these may follow local norms that are as valuable and ethical (Ten Dam 2011: 358-359).

These observations of mine do or should not imply that one should be wholly ‘relativist’ and non-judgmental about blood-feuds and other customary laws and practices. Thus I have pointed out in my comparative research and publications that traditional, often tribal “Chechen and Albanian customs primarily violate the dignity, equality and humane treatment of women. ... Even enlightened patriarchy often constitutes *structural violence* (Galtung 1969: 170) against women” (Ten Dam 2011: 358).

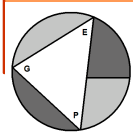
Still, one must seek to maintain an open mind, a balance of perspectives, and not judge too quickly and harshly ‘alien’ phenomena through preconceptions which one consciously or subconsciously presume to be true, self-evident or morally uncontestable and unassailable.

Thoughts of native figures on their own culture—need for clarification and research

In his *Tribes of Albania*, Elsie applies a rigid dividing line between non-Albanian outsiders described in the ‘Travel Impressions’ section for most of the identified tribes, and well-known native sons and sisters of many of these tribes described in the ‘Figures of Note’ section for these tribes. As far as I have been able to determine, Elsie does not mention or elaborate on any ideas and judgments these native Figures of Note might have had about their own tribes, other Albanian tribes or Albanians in general, including particular characteristics like blood-feuds and other manifestations related to customary *Kanun* laws.

I am particularly interested in native views on “distinctive “societal values” of *martialism* .. , *resistance* .. and (male) *egalitarianism*” (Ten Dam 2011: 265) among most or many Albanians. I am most of all interested in their “essential violence-values ... , which I have grouped under the concepts of *honour*, *blood feud*, *raid*, *hospitality* and *mediation*” (Ibid; see further Ten Dam 2010: 333-335).

In contrast, the Travel Impressions of generally Victorian and early post-Victorian visitors and scholars from the West as described in *Tribes of Albania*, contain plenty of ideas and judgments on such actual or perceived traits among Albanian tribes or Albanians in general. Many or most of these seem rather prejudiced if knowledgeable—such as about the



“primitive, rather violent and extremely patriarchal groups” among (northern) Albanians (Fischer 1999: 281).<sup>13</sup> Such biases from outsiders are almost unavoidable—as are those from insiders regarding their own communities and nations, though some of the latter may be as critical about the customary honour-codes interpreted, practiced and even abused by such tribal institution as the council of Elders.

Of course, one must keep in mind the given that relatively few ethnic Albanians were educated and able to read and write—and thus express their own views on their own cultures—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; even fewer of them were literate in earlier periods. This given accounts in part for the relative dominance of views about Albanians expressed and written down by foreigners particularly from the West. Indeed, one of the fundamental factors accounting for a “relative lack of knowledge about Albanians’ immaterial culture, their beliefs, morals and customs” is simply the longstanding “absence of indigenous script” (Ten Dam 2011: 262).

This absence in turn accounts the relative lack of expressed views by Albanians about their own culture, beliefs, morals and customs. Educated Albanians only incrementally adopted the Latin script between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the persistently low literacy rate among ethnic Albanians lasted until well into the twentieth century. Thus “in 1988 still 72.6 per cent of Kosovar-Albanian women were illiterate” (Ten Dam 2011: 263). In Albania itself the overall illiteracy rate was nearly 90 percent during the 1920s (Fischer 1999: 289) and was still well over 80 per cent—with up to 95 percent in the mountainous highlands—by the late 1930s (Stavrianos 1958: 730; Fischer 2007: 40,45; Czekalski 2013: 65,105).

### *Elsie and other scholars on native viewpoints and perspectives*

Elsie rarely refers or alludes to native viewpoints in his *Tribes of Albania* or in his other, mostly earlier works—nor do most other available sources for that matter. Many of the often highly educated political, religious, military and/or literary Figures of Note described in *Tribes of Albania* may actually have had expressed positive, negative or ambiguous, conflicted viewpoints about their own histories, cultures and traditions—apart from their ‘modern’ national(ist) aspirations that are more easily apparent to the outside world then and now.

Indeed, major native figures may have harboured such views, including those from large, powerful or otherwise well-known predominantly Catholic tribes in northern Albania like the Kelmendi, Shala, Shllaku, Nikaj and Mirdita (composite), and predominantly Muslim tribes like the Krasniqja, Mati (composite) and Luma. Think of the following figures described in *Tribes of Albania*:

Prekë Cali Hasanaj (1878–1945)<sup>14</sup> of Kelmendi;

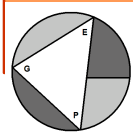
Mehmet Shpendi (1851–1915)<sup>15</sup> of Shala;

Bernardin Palaj (1894–1946)<sup>16</sup> of Shllaku;

Ndoc Nikaj (1864–1951)<sup>17</sup> of Nikaj;

Ambroz Marlaskaj (1884–1939)<sup>18</sup> of the Kushnени tribe within the composite Mirdita tribe;

Haxhi Mulla Zeka (1832–1902)<sup>19</sup> of Krasniqja;



Ahmet or 'Ahmed' Muhtar Zogolli, or Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961) <sup>20</sup> of the Zogolli family within the composite Mati tribe <sup>21</sup> ; and  
Muharrem Bajaraktari (1896–1989) <sup>22</sup> of Luma.

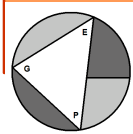
For instance, Ahmet Zogu—who had made himself King of Albania in 1928 with the title “King of Albanians” (*Mbret te Shqiptareve*) which initially alarmed the neighbouring countries given its seemingly irredentist overtones <sup>23</sup> —had a low opinion of Albanian culture and customs. He stated at the time of his coronation that Albania and the Albanians are “centuries behind the rest of Europe in terms of civilization. The people can neither read nor write; there are few written laws which are obeyed, and blood-feuds are still prevalent in many parts of the country. It is my determination to civilize my people and make them as far as possible adopt Western habits and customs” (*Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 1928; apud Fischer 1999: 287).

This stated ambition, for so far sincere given Zogu's bent toward tactical opportunism to maintain power, is at odds with the assessment by some scholars—contrary to Elsie, Czekalski, Fischer and others—that Zogu's entire political career was characterised by a total “lack of desire” and sincere effort to “reform the outdated social structure” of Albania (Doll 2003: 156).

A few decades later, the communist regimes in Yugoslavia and especially Albania actively discouraged and at times severely punished any deviating viewpoints on traditional Albanian culture by their own intelligentsia, all the more so if these were or appeared to be laudatory. Still, some Albanian poets and writers must have harboured independent opinions on traditional phenomena like tribal identities, honour-codes and blood-revenge—and at least obliquely expressed these in their poems and writings, and quite openly in their poems, writings and autobiographies after the demise of Hoxha's Albania and Tito's Yugoslavia.

Certainly a literary giant like Ismail Kadare (1936–), “the only Albanian writer to enjoy a broad international reputation” (Elsie 1991b: 259; Elsie 1996: 10) <sup>24</sup> , has done so in some of his works. This is most obviously true for Kadare's *Broken April* (*Prilli i thyer*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1980 (or 1978, 1982 editions) ). This novel explicitly deals with *Kanun*-based revenge—starting with the main character's fascination with the “feudal and feuding mountain tribes of the north” (Elsie 1991c: 343; Elsie 1996: 93). Much the same could be said of Kadare's *Wedding* (*Dasma*, Shtëpia Botuese Naim Frashëri, 1968), containing “a full range of examples of backward Albanian villages, from bloody revenge to circumcision of boys” (Czekalski 2013: 112).

Essentially the same is true for Adem Demaçi (1936–2018), a well-known Kosovar-Albanian dissident, writer, activist and politician <sup>25</sup> —including controversially as spokesperson of the Liberation Army of Kosova (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, UÇK or 'KLA' <sup>26</sup> during the 1998–1999 Kosovar war. Particularly Demaçi's *Snakes of Vendetta* (*Gjarpëjt e gjakut*, Lumi, 1958 (1990 ed.) ) deals with blood-feuding as one of the most persistent ‘scourges’ in Kosovo just like in northern Albania. This novel tells the tragic tale of the “patriarchal head of a conservative Kosovo family” who “sees no alternative to upholding vendetta as the only means of



preserving male honour, whereas the son comprehends its destructive effects, and fights, in vain, to put an end to the feuding” (Elsie 1991a: 165; Elsie 1996: 88).

Revealingly, even major dissident and semi-dissident writers like Kadare and Demaçi appear to have nurtured highly critical if nuanced notions of tribal identities, honour-codes and blood-revenge. Still, more structural in-depth analyses of their works appear to be needed to assess their perspectives on these tribal and other traditional phenomena among Albanians.

Therefore, Elsie did in fact review some works by Albanian literary and political giants like Ismail Kadare and Adem Demaçi. He also did show in some of his other works and edited volumes some critical views by lesser-known natives on their own traditions and societies, particularly by post-WWII and younger generations of Albanian writers.

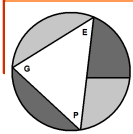
For instance, the Macedonian-Albanian writer Kim Mehmeti (1955–) paints a quite bleak picture in his short story “The Men’s Counsel Room (*Oda e burrave*)” of the pernicious role played by an elder-council in the sexual abuse of a man’s wife during the man’s absence from home. The bereaved and humiliated man eventually takes lethal revenge against the direct perpetrator—without him daring to attack the council itself, though losing all his erstwhile respect for it: “Balan looked once again toward the light shining in the Men’s Counsel Room and went to take a pee” (Mehmeti 1997, apud Elsie 2006: 19 (quote); 11-20).<sup>27</sup> Yet such presentations of inward-oriented critical views by natives are virtually absent in Elsie’s *Tribes of Albania*.

Moreover, in his 1991 article ‘Evolution and Revolution in Modern Albanian Literature’ (Elsie 1991b: 256-263; Elsie 1996: 1-22) <sup>28</sup>, Elsie does not discuss viewpoints on tribes and other aspects of their own culture by any major Albanian poets and prose writers. Likewise, Elsie rarely discusses native viewpoints—from either pre- or post-WWII Albania, Kosovo, other Albanian-inhabited areas and Diaspora communities like the Arbëresh in southern Italy—in his selected “fifty-seven literary reviews” (Elsie 1996: x) in the journal *World Literature Today* during the 1980s and 1990s. Still, some of these reviews do contain oblique or brief references to an Albanian writer’s or average Albanian’s background, outlook or culture as a subject matter.

### *Elsie and Mathie-Heck on native viewpoints and perspectives*

One more example of a serious dearth of references to native Albanian views and observations, concerns Robert Elsie and Janice Mathie-Heck’s otherwise excellent co-authored –and (re)translated *Songs of the Frontier Warriors (Këngë Kresnikësh)*, based on the ground-breaking 1937 collection of written-down oral verse by Donat Kurti and Bernardin Palaj (Palaj & Kurti 1937 (reprint 1996) ). Elsie and Mathie-Heck do not mention, let alone explicate the following:

- a) what they themselves think of the (customary, pre-modern) norms and codes contained in each collected verse;
- b) what the original collectors and authors Donat Kurti (1903–1983) and Bernardin Palaj (1894–1946) thought of the norms and codes contained in each collected verse;



- c) what Palaj and Kurti thought of the norms and codes of the tribes or regions they themselves belonged to or at least were born in <sup>29</sup> ;
- d) what the dozen original bards (five of them anonymous)—whose songs of the collected verses are reproduced in both the 1937 and 2004 editions of *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* (see esp. Elsie & Mathie-Heck 2004: 375-379)—thought of the norms and codes contained in the verses they sang, and of the tribes or regions they themselves belonged to; and
- e) whether and to what degrees the collected verses themselves actually reflect the norms and codes of any tribes of the bards in question at the time, or of any other particular, identifiable tribes.

To be sure, the twenty-three songs recorded in the 1920s and 1930s and presented in Elsie & Mathie-Heck's 2004 edition of *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*, represent one of the most significant and best-preserved parts of a body of oral epic verse in the Balkans. This epic, which revolves around the mythical Muslim warrior-adventurer Gjeto Basho Mujo, was originally a Serbo-Croatian epic according to most but not all scholars on the subject. <sup>30</sup>

According to Elsie and Mathie-Heck, the epic "crystallized in the 17th and 18th centuries in a border region of the Balkans which separated Christendom from the Islamic world", with the heroes being "Muslim rebels living in the *krahina* [region] who delight in crossing the mountains to go raiding in the *krajli* [kingdom], the Kingdom of the Christians" (Elsie, apud Elsie & Mathie-Heck 2004: xvi; 370 (meaning of terms) ).

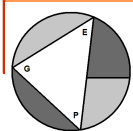
Elsie and Mathie-Heck posit that after transmission, the Albanian epic version of the *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* "evolved in a solely Albanian milieu and took on purely Albanian characteristics, values and extra-linguistic forms of expression .. . Though the toponyms remained, the background conflict in the narrative shifted from warfare between the Muslims and the Christians to warfare between the Albanians and the *shkjas*, i.e. the Slavs" (Elsie, apud Elsie & Mathie-Heck 2004: xvi-xvii).

However, Elsie and Mathie-Heck do not specify which particular Albanian tribes if any were instrumental in shaping and retelling this Albanian epic (perhaps this is unknown or contested; yet then they should have indicated this). Nor do they explicate the tribal antecedents if any of the dozen identified and anonymous, and apparently all ethnic-Albanian singers for the twenty-three selected and transcribed songs (Elsie & Mathie-Heck 2004: 375-379)—let alone indicate whether each singer's renditions of the song(s) in question reflect the latter's tribal antecedent if any.

Therefore, any singer from any particular Muslim, Catholic or religiously mixed tribe might render a particular epic verse a bit or rather differently than any other singer from any other tribe or clan.

Why does Elsie rarely discuss, however succinctly, native perspectives on native if partially extinct and still controversial practices like blood-feuding in any or most of his other works—most of all in his *Tribes of Albania*? After all, such perspectives arguably constitute in many a culture and society central themes by many a native writer on his or her own culture and





society. Even the emasculated literary scene in Communist Albania (especially during its most repressive episodes) would not form an utter exception to this general rule.

Elsie's apparent unwillingness to discuss native perspectives on native traditions, norms and practices in his *Tribes of Albania* or other works, is the more surprising given that he at times let his quite negative views known on such traditions, norms and practices in his other, earlier works—particularly on the blood-feud, as we have shown some examples of before.

### Past and present saliency of Albanian tribes—need for clarification and research

As abundantly shown in the preceding sections, relatively little is known about the tribal system among ethnic Albanians in Albania and beyond—and about the fate, current saliency or bare survival if any of the tribes in question. The available, consulted and discussed sources contain few mentions—let alone in-depth analyses—of the actual make-up, degree of survival and vibrancy of any tribes in pre-communist, communist and post-communist Albania. Indeed, Elsie's *Tribes of Albania* is not the only major study on Albania(ns) in recent years that exhibits this shortfall about the continuing existence if any of Albanian tribes.

Generally, up-to-date, extensive and exhaustive field research on the (non-)existence and (non-)vitality of tribes or clans among Albanians remains sorely needed. It is rather telling that Franz Seiner's 1918 census reportedly contains the last comprehensive and reliable demographic study of ethnic-Albanian and other kinship groups in Albania and the larger region inhabited by Albanians to this day (see for an overview Figure I in the Appendix).

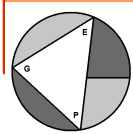
Hence, the presently “known data on the numbers, denominations and other characteristics of the Albanian clans seem rather outdated and confusing” (Ten Dam 2010: 352, note 30; Ten Dam 2011: 254, note 24). Even Elsie's *Tribes of Albania* does not succeed in determining and clarifying the precise fate of all known Albanian tribes.<sup>31</sup>

### *Anti-tribal measures and repressions in Albania during the Interbellum*

What we do know is that the rise of Ahmet Zogu in the 1920s severely affected many (northern-)Albanian tribes. Zogu's drive, ambition and cunning helped to stabilise and develop the young, fledgling state of Albania declared at Vlora in November 1912 mainly by “Albanian national activists from southern part of Albania and from some diaspora communities” (Czekalski 2012b: 206).<sup>32</sup>

Albania as a new country was hotly contested and belittled as an “artificial quasi-state” by neighbouring (Slavic) states, some of whom had invaded, ravaged, divided and nearly destroyed it during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and World War I (Czekalski 2012a: 87(incl. quote)-89).<sup>33</sup> These wars severely affected the Albanian tribes as well—though arguably Zogu's policies constituted an even greater danger to their survival.

Zogu—who came to be known as ‘Zog’ and ‘King Zog’ since his coronation in 1928, and ruled Albania as an autocratic monarch until he fled to Greece after the Italian invasion and



occupation in 1939—introduced severe anti-tribal measures; only tribes from his Mati region and the few other tribes who had pledged loyalty to him (usually in exchange for money and positions) were partially exempted.

These anti-tribal measures mirrored the ones Zogu already took as Interior Minister, Prime Minister and then President of Albania during the earlier part of the 1920s apart from the short-lived June Revolution led by his nemesis Fan Noli in 1924—and prior to and during that entire period and beyond as chieftain of the composite Mati tribe (see Fischer 2007: 19-49).

Therefore, Zogu was not simply a pro-Gheg politician who gained the full “support of the clan chieftains centred in the northern mountains” (Doll 2003: 156) as some analysts assert. True, Zogu did appoint northern tribal chiefs as “salaried government officials” and allow them to continue ruling their own tribes to some degree (Jacques 1995: 383 (quote); Doll 2003: 156)—but this only concerned those chiefs willing to serve or be subservient to his (government’s) rule, which were preciously few outside ‘his’ composite Mati tribe.<sup>34</sup>

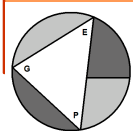
Moreover, Zogu also had to rely on many progressive civil servants and politicians from the former Noli government he would or could not replace after 1924; and most of them were Tosks, who generally professed even more radical reforms at the expense of the tribal system among the Ghegs in the North than Zogu was ever willing or able to do.

Repressive ‘reform’ and ‘modernisation’ measures included the banning and confiscation of privately owned weapons, closely related to the outlawing of the blood-feud (see section ‘Past and current blood-feuding and related violence’). The latter measures—inadvertently or not—“drove some tribes from mere destitution into virtual starvation”, dependent as they were to sustain and protect their livelihood by force of arms against raids, blood-revenge or subjugation by other families, clans or foreign invaders (Fischer 1999: 289-290 (quote); Fischer 2007: esp. 27 (“importance of guns to the mountaineers”)).

Thus in November 1926 the tribes of the Dukagjin region—supported and instigated by Mussolini and exiled Albanians mainly residing in Italy who had unsuccessfully opposed Zog’s rule—rebelled against the confiscation of their weapons. The government had to deploy “some 10,000 troops with several batteries of mountain guns” to suppress the uprising; the rebels had very nearly taken the main northern city of Shkodra (Shkodër) until Zog successfully intervened with this massive deployment of force (Fischer 1999: 290 (quote); Fischer 1984: 111-112; Fischer 2007: 35-36).

This episode could be seen as a *déjà vu* of sorts of Zogu’s role as interior minister in successfully defending Tirana in March 1922 against an approaching rebel army militarily led by Elez Isufi from Dibra and politically led by Hasan Bey Prishtina (actual name Hasan Berisha) from Vushtrria and Bajram Curri from Gjakova (Elsie 2013: 93, 215, 370-372).

Likewise, this earlier 1922 revolt occurred in part to do away with the hated weapons-confiscation programme at the time. Still, the primary objective by the leaders if not the rank-and-file of the rebel army was to further the unification of all Albanian lands by deposing Zog and his supporters in the government, who as pragmatists had acquiesced to



the incorporation of Kosovo into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in order to prioritise the development and security of Albania within its current borders.

Hasan Prishtina was, with Bajram Curri, one of the Kosovar-Albanian founders of the irredentist Committee for the National Defence of Kosova (*Komiteti i Mbrojtë Kombetare ë Kosovës*) in 1918—and of the broader *Kaçak* (outlaw, bandit, rebel; from Turkish “fugitive”) resistance movement against foreign occupiers (Ten Dam 2011: 257-258). Prishtina had briefly been Albania’s Prime Minister in December 1921 and had tried in vain to dismiss Zog from the government then (the latter actually managed to depose the former). Now his attempt to depose the new government with Zog in it directly led to “street fighting between the rival’s supporters” in Tirana (Kola 2003: 19).

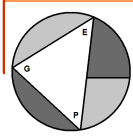
Yet Zog then had no large force to rely on <sup>35</sup>; it was the British envoy to Albania Sir Harry Eyres who somehow managed to convince part of the rebel army to withdraw from the capital (see esp. Elsie 2013: 136). The subsequent sentencing to death—often initially *in absentia*, followed by actual assassination many years later—of dozens of rebel leaders by a military court installed by Zog succeeded in temporarily discouraging rebellions mainly from the tribal North, yet brought “down on his head many blood feuds” (Fischer 2007: 27 (quote); Fischer 1984: 203).

Similarly, Zog’s repressive measures after the 1926 revolt (effectively crushed by the beginning of December) did succeed in curtailing and diminishing the power of the tribes in the North. Yet eventually, due to the suppression of this and other tribal revolts, Zog reportedly incurred as many as “600 blood-feuds on his own head” accompanied by “an almost endless series of assassination attempts” which even as king forced Zog to nearly continual, self-imposed house-arrest at his own palace (Fischer 1999: 290 (quotes); Fischer 2007: 35-36). <sup>36</sup>

Possibly, the enmity and numerous blood-feuds Zog incurred among many or most tribes, paradoxically helped to invigorate the morale and customs of these tribes. The same could be said of Zog’s recurrent tendency to act as chieftain of the composite Mati tribe, often at the expense of other Gheg tribes, rather than as a true national leader for all Ghegs and Tosks, however much he proclaimed and may have wished to be so.

### *Anti-tribal measures and repressions in Albania during Communism*

Within a decade the tribes were to face an even more dangerous enemy than Ahmet Zogu and his regime(s) have ever been able to become: Albanian Communism. Certainly they were severely affected by the WWII victory of the Communist Party of Albania (CPA, *Partia Komuniste Shqiptare*) later renamed Albanian Party of Labour (APL, *Partia e Punës e Shqipërisë*). <sup>37</sup> Most CPA-leaders and representatives came from the Tosk-speaking South, like Enver Hoxha (1908–1985), who came from a “well-heeled Muslim family from Gjirokastra” (Czekalski 2013: 18). Apparently, this imbalance could be traced back in part to the pro-Tosk leaning and composition of the revolutionary if short-lived Fan Noli government (Jacques 1995: 377; Doll 2003: 156,157).



In contrast, many or most of the anti-communist leaders and resistance fighters came from Gheg-speaking North, and were also prevalent in the broad-ranging nationalist-irredentist resistance movement National Front (*Balli Kombëtar*) formed in November 1942.

Certainly the fact that in 1944 “a few anti-communist groups were formed with representatives of the northern clans” near Skhodër (Czekalski: 23) must have solidified Hoxha’s mistrust and hostility toward the clannish North—even if he did at times self-servingly cooperate with *Balli Kombëtar* and other nationalist movements during the war (see Kola 2003: 24, 27-29, 41-43, 48; Fischer 2007: 244-248).

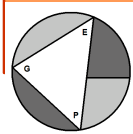
These confrontations, divisions and mutual suspicions appear to manifest a growing North-Gheg – South-Tosk divide at the time, with the latter linguistic-cultural ‘sub-nation’ gaining (ever more) ascendancy under Hoxha. The latter trend became especially pronounced after the communist takeover at the end of WWII, as evident in measures against the use of the Gheg alphabet, dialect and writings from the early 1950s onwards, seeking to make Tosk the standard language in government, education and beyond (Jacques 1995: 471; Doll 2003: 159).

The Albanian Party of Labour (APL) took many legal, policy and practical steps to repress religion, irrespective of tribal structures and despite the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion—at least until the more restrictive Constitution of 1976. Or rather, the authorities sought to marginalise religion by encapsulating it into government-approved clergies and government-controlled religious schools, publications and institutes. These steps were particularly directed against ‘pro-fascist’ Catholics in the North (most of all Franciscans) and to a lesser extent against recalcitrant Orthodox believers in the South heavily dependent on church properties and arable lands which were taken away from them.

This repression intensified in the 1960s as shown by the increasing destruction or appropriation of hundreds if not thousands of mosques, churches and other places of worship—and even religious objects found in private homes during ‘collection rounds’. Until well into the 1970s, priests and ordinary people caught praying, worshipping or expressing any ‘illegal’ religious beliefs and practices in secret, were imprisoned, sent to labour camps or even executed.

Despite these draconian measures, numerous Albanians were able and willing to practice their religious or tribal convictions in private while claiming in public to be true communists and atheists (a well-practiced dissimulation already adopted in Ottoman times). Even the omnipresent security services or *Sigurimi* were incapable to survey and control each and every private home all the time. Anti-religious policies and laws were eventually annulled in late 1990 (see esp. Czekalski 2013: 119-134, 143-144; Doll 2003: 160-161; Jacques 1995: 447-460).

In short, both religion and the tribe in Albanian society managed to survive even the darkest days of the Hoxha regime, though both social phenomena were grievously weakened by it. Actually, Czekalski posits that Hoxha’s attack on “all backward customs and ceremonies” in the late 1960s was mainly directed against “principles of customary law (i.e. *Kanun*)” rather than religious dogmas and practices as such, even though for some reason this priority was neither explicitly expressed nor was *Kanun* “formally forbidden by law” (Czekalski 2013: 127 & note 34 (quotes) ) like many religious ceremonies, expressions and other practices were.



Be that as it may, there were a series of uprisings in and from northern Albania after the communist takeover, at least partially in response to anti-tribal, anti-religious and other repressive measures accompanied by intensive propaganda campaigns, intended to turn Albania into the ‘first atheist state in the world’, declared as accomplished in 1967 (Prifti 1978: 150; Doll 2003: 160; Czekalski 2013: 128).

After all, besides “imaginary threats, the communist government also had to face real threats in the form of the armed underground units in the north of the country” mainly due to the “lack of political base for the communists in the north” (Czekalski 2013: 28)—which in turn was ironically perpetuated by the lack of trust shown by south-based communists toward the North.

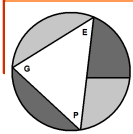
The first major uprising in the communist era was by the National Mountain League (*Lidhja Kombëtare e Malëve*) mainly consisting of the mainly Muslim northern tribes from the composite Mirdita tribe under its last *kapedan* (captain, prince) Mark Ded Gjomarkaj (1912–1946)<sup>38</sup> who at the same time led the Mountain League. Later on, the United Committee (*Komiteti e Përbashket*), formed and led by Murat Haxhia and other resistance activists and Shkodran (Catholic) intellectuals, spearheaded the Posttribe Uprising of September 1946.

The government forces of the People’s Republic of Albania crushed these uprisings (whose leaders perished) only after pitched battles, aided by their superior manpower and firepower against a few hundred or few thousand insurgents at most—and by the less-than-expected support among the populace for the rebels. The subsequent “wave of repression in the years 1946–1949 affected almost half of the Catholic clergy” with many of them incarcerated, executed or downright murdered, though Muslim clerics were persecuted as well (Czekalski 2013: 28-29, 95 (& note 7), 122 (quote); see also Elsie pp. 233-234).

In sum, Hoxha’s “initial moves against the tribes were carried out with characteristic ruthlessness. Many of the old leaders were removed—imprisoned or executed—and replaced by more compliant leaders, often from families who before the war had been of low status” (Fischer 2007: 260).

Albania’s communist regime was also able to crush the incursions and attempted insurrections, by mainly Ballist and Monarchist forces from the Albanian Diaspora, during the early 1950s for much the same reasons: the insurgents were amateurish and lacked popular support; support from the British and American intelligence services was insufficient to compensate for these weaknesses. Thus information leaked by Soviet double agents like Kim Philby in the British MI6 spy agency that reached Albania’s Directorate of State Security (*Drejtoria e Sigurimit të Shtetit*), commonly called the *Sigurimi*, played a crucial part in this outcome as well (see Czekalski 2013: 38-39, 97-98 (*Sigurimi*)).

After that debacle public protests let alone insurrections were virtually absent in Albania. A rare exception was the May 1973 uprising in the notorious labour camp ‘303’ at Spaç village in north-central Albania, which *Sigurimi* units quickly put down (Czekalski 2013: 33); nowadays Spaç Prison is a recognised yet still dilapidated, endangered World Monument heritage site (Ibid: 148).<sup>39</sup>



Albanologists, other scholars and their sources often disagree on the particular reasons, triggers, courses and outcomes of Albanian uprisings as the ones described above—even regarding particular events, circumstances and supposed facts. Thus according to Czekalski, the rebel leader Mark Gjomarkaj, “being heavily wounded in the [final] battle” on 13 June 1946, “committed suicide in order not to fall into enemy hands” (Czekalski 2013: 28-29 (incl quote) ).

Yet Elsie offers a quite different account of what happened: in June 1946 Gjomarkaj was reportedly “murdered in his sleep in Prosek, near Kthella, by his brother-in-law who hoped thereby to buy reprieve from the communists. Mark’s brother Skënder then took bloody revenge for the deed and extinguished the brother-in-law’s whole family, i.e. the brother-in-law himself, his own sister and their children” (Elsie pp. 233-234).

### *Emasculated survival of (some) tribes and tribal customs during and after Communism*

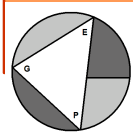
Further research is required to determine which tribes were affected to what extents by policies like Maoist-inspired “revolutionisation” in Albania during the 1960s and 1970s when China was its main ally and protector (certainly since Tirana’s definite break with Moscow in 1961).

What we do know is that the ‘voluntary’ “re-education through physical work” of educated civil servants, writers, artists, artisans and other *intelligentsia* was a central part of revolutionisation, intended to both asphyxiate decadent bourgeois-capitalist tendencies from the West and “destroy the [tribal] social structure and other [tribal] common laws which a large part of society were still faithful to” (Czekalski 2013: 50 (2nd quote), 114 (1st quote) ).

Other policies related to revolutionisation also targeted tribal society with its *Kanun* and distinctly (pre-)Ottoman codes and practices. These policies included literacy drives which were claimed to have eradicated illiteracy among the younger generations by the mid-1950s, educational and gender-equality reforms, and literary and other cultural programmes geared toward indoctrinating especially the younger generations with Hoxha’s tenets of revolutionary socialism made possible by the Partisan victory in WWII (Czekalski 2013: esp. 105-109, 112-115). These policies also included socio-economic measures like constructing residential buildings designed for married couples in rural areas in the North intended to undermine and destroy large, extended families so typical of clans and sub-clans (Ibid: 88, note 24; see also Cook & Rakaj 1995: 87).

However, tribal and other traditional customs and norms proved to be tenacious in many cases—and thus perhaps the particular tribes that underpinned them as well. For instance, a case study in the north-western village of Bogë found that the introduction of agricultural cooperatives and consequent collectivisation of property ownership did only to a limited extent change the “lifestyle and habits of local society” in the village, including “arranged marriage, exogamy, and traditional dress” (Czekalski 2013: 72, note 32 (quotes); Cook & Rakaj 1995: esp. 85-89). Overall, traditional life still existed to some considerable degree in that village by the mid-1990s—which may surprise some scholars and readers. <sup>40</sup>





Outside pressure may have emasculated some vestiges of traditional identity—yet at the same time may have helped to sustain other vestiges of that identity. Generally, communist and other alien “institutional forms and regimes that have been imposed” on the “Ghegs of northern Albania” created a counter-reaction out of martial defiance (an integral part of their culture) and the oft-observed human need to protect one’s identity (in this case a tribal one), accounting for “why so many people have continually turned to the *fis* system and unwritten law to help them structure their lives” (Doll 2003: 160 (quotes); see also Saltmarshe 2001: esp. 34-35).

Therefore, some ‘revolutionary’ measures in communist Albania may have inadvertently helped to sustain tribal codes and customs, like gun ownership and ‘gun culture’. Thus due to the ‘revolutionisation’ of the Army from garrisons into people’s militias in the mid-1960s, “responsibility for national defence was also given to the youth working in volunteer brigades, and even children, for whom a rifle became an important element of daily fun” (Czekalski 2013: 51). Yet Albanian girls and women were trained in shooting skills as well, which signified a major departure from the tribal(-Gheg) tradition of male dominance in general and of male gun-ownership in particular.<sup>41</sup>

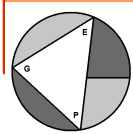
At the time “state propaganda focused mostly on the necessity to educate the “new socialist man”, on the class struggle and on the fight against “old traditions and mentalities” ... For the “new socialist woman” emancipation would mean waging war against traditional customs and beliefs” (Pandelejmoni 2011: 20, 21 (quotes) ) that still were predominant before the communists came to power.

Thus in 1939 just 2.4% of secondary school students were female (Hall 1994: 82). Yet despite the often compulsory and repressive “crusade against the unequal status of women” (Doll 2003: 159) in traditional religion and customary law, the successes and degrees of female emancipation were limited (see esp. Fischer 1999: 293-295; Fischer 2007: 259-262; Czekalski 2013: 83-87). Concomitantly, tribal patriarchal culture was repressed and emasculated during the communist period—yet survived at least partially intact, and regained some of its former strength after the fall of communism.

Last but not least, Hoxha’s own personality, politics and tactics may have sustained tribal codes and customs as well, in part because he in effect allowed compliant tribes to operate and introduced an overarching ‘blood-feud’ concept by stressing that “all Albanians owed blood to the party and that only he and the party were allowed to carry out revenge killings” (Fischer 2007: 260).

Hoxha essentially copied Zog’s tribalised ruling system and style during the 1920s and 1930s, yet widened it beyond any politically dominant tribe or collection of tribes to the Communist Party and the state it controlled—a state much larger, more centralised and effective than the one Zog was ever able to create and maintain during his rule.

Indeed, the Gheg-Tosk, highland-lowland, tribal-nontribal divide could still be detected during the dying days of the ‘pro-Tosk’ communist regime, whereby the “southern part of the country in 1991 was hostile towards the growing democratic opposition, and its leaders were



regarded as “outsiders”—representatives of the northern part of the country” (Czekalski 2013: 139).

By then the regime had managed to stumble on under Ramiz Alia as Hoxha’s successor since the latter’s death in April 1985, until the multi-party elections and the consequent declaration of the Republic of Albania during the Spring of 1991, compelled by mass demonstrations demanding democratic change during the preceding year. The APL still won these elections, though as the renamed Socialist Party of Albania (*Partia Socialiste e Shqipërise*, PSSh) it lost the next elections in March 1992 to the Democratic Party of Albania (*Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë*, PDSH), the main opposition party which had strengthened its base in the north and managed to win more votes in central and southern Albania.

The PDSH’s party leader Sali Berisha succeeded Alia as President, ushering in an era of understandable yet ill-advised economic privatisation (rushed through in some sectors while delayed in others), political intolerance and persecution of former communists which lasted at least until the late 1990s. These characteristics sustaining the Gheg-Tosk divide reappeared in much the same form after Berisha and his Democratic Party once more won the parliamentary elections after the Socialist Party had ruled the country between 1997 and 2005.

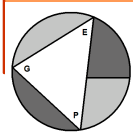
During the time Berisha was Prime Minister, between 2005 and 2013, his ruling party spearheaded the concept of *Rishikimi i Historisë* (Revision of History) in political, historical and educational discourse in order to discredit the communist era as a repressive and anti-national (rather than anti-tribal or anti-Gheg) one, arguing that nothing good came of Hoxha’s rule, being detrimental to the entire Albanian nation (Czekalski 2013: 147-149).

Similarly, Berisha’s government successfully discouraged the maintenance, or even encouraged the dismantling, of many or most communist monuments and structures like memorials for WWII (pro-)communist partisans. Nevertheless, even former dissidents and other diehard anti-communists argued that such objects should be saved so as to serve as a dire warning to future generations and thus be kept in Albania’s collective memory.

### *Assessing the survival and saliency of Albanian tribes*

Given the above observations taken from Czekalski’s *Shining Beacon of Socialism in Europe* and other sources, I must take issue with Elsie’s sweeping statement that—due to repression, poverty and instability (collapse of the communist regime in 1990, temporary collapse of the Albanian state in 1997, etc.) and consequent migration to the cities and depopulation in the home regions—the remaining tribes that still had survived Hoxha’s rule “have been scattered” and that Albanian “tribal identity nowadays involves little more than an awareness of the origin of their families” (p. 11).

Elsie appears to be not alone in this view on current tribal saliency among Albanians or lack of it. Indeed, he appears to follow the assessments of scholars like Gert Robel, who at one point asserted that “the old order with its customs and traditions had disappeared” in Albania long before WWII (Elsie 1999: 340, from Robel 1996: 137 (transl. quote) ).



Elsie has made a similar if less drastic assertion more than once, also regarding the Kosovar Albanians, such as in his co-authored –and (re)translated *Songs of the Frontier Warriors* (*Këngë Kresnikësh*):

Unfortunately, the 1997–1999 war in Kosova left deep scars, in particular in the present homeland of epic verse, the Rugova highlands. .... It is still too early to assess the impact of this wanton destruction ... . The Albanians of Kosova are, however, extremely attached to their country and their national traditions, much more so than are the people of the Republic of Albania. In Albania itself, the native culture of the northern mountains was given the last blow, so to speak, by the 1997 uprising which resulted in a final wave of mass emigration of the highland population to the shantytowns of Tirana, Durrës and other coastal towns (Elsie, apud Elsie & Mathie-Heck 2004: xv).

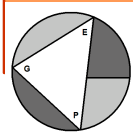
Most Albanologists and other scholars knowledgeable about Albanian affairs actually take a middle position in this debate on tribal longevity and saliency, by asserting that the “Gheg inhabitants of Northern Albania are ... the only example of a true tribal system in Europe *until the mid 20th century*” (Saltmarshe 2001: 89; italics added).

However, even if such observations are true, many Albanian tribes, sub-tribes and extended families in and beyond Albania appear to have survived in the broader sense in spite of or rather because of their scatterings, even if most of them no longer are tribes in the strict sense as I describe them: kin groups without residential unity (see section ‘Definitions and delineations’).

Thus even during the communist period, extended families in Albania “would break up and their members move to different areas, but they would still function as a family in terms of communal resources and the patriarchal power structure” (Elsie 1999: 296). Therefore ‘mere’ “awareness of the origin of their families” (p. 11) should be more properly seen as the true nucleus, the hard core, of tribal identity. Whether a tribe still lives in its ancestral homeland (be it mythical or factual) as a clan in the strict sense, has moved to another area, or dispersed to many areas even far abroad, is a secondary if significant question and possible attribute.

I hesitate to question Elsie’s overall assessment of the apparent demise of the Albanian tribal system, given his nearly unique expertise in all matters Albanian. My statement that “Albanians live in exogamous patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal families (*shpi*), extended families in walled communes (*zadruga*), brotherhoods (*vllazni*), kinship groups (*gjini*), sub-clans (*mëhallë*, *vëllazëri*, multifamily brotherhoods), clans and tribes (*fis*) and multi-tribal communes or banners (*flamur*)” (Ten Dam 2011: 253) perhaps misleadingly implies that *all* or *most* Albanians in and beyond Albania live and have lived in such traditional kinship groups. I just mean to say that still quite many Albanians in present times and recent past, and most Albanians in the more distant past, do and did live in such kinship groups.

Indeed, Fischer’s stark prediction in the late 1990s that tribal society and “traditional life in general in northern Albania will not survive” the fall of communism despite the temporary



resurgence of patriarchy and blood-feuding (Fischer 1999: 296-298 (quote) ), appears not to have materialised in full or at all.<sup>42</sup> Thus the “mass exodus of primarily young Albanians” in the early 1990s (Ibid: 298) has been partially reversed in later years, and the “end of isolation on the tribal society of the north” (Ibid) after communism has not necessarily weakened let alone destroyed it.

On the contrary, it may well be that many tribes, sub-tribes and extended families have managed to retain the essential features of their values and customs despite their opening up to the outside world. In that regard I tend to agree with Doll's assessment that “the clan system has been able to persist in norther Albania” (Doll 2003: 160). He does caution that “it may be still too early to judge whether the kinship model as espoused in the *fis* system will continue to thrive during Albania's post-Communist transformation” (Ibid)—and whether “an institution or a new form of governance” can ever gain their confidence so that “they will not be as bound to unwritten law and clan culture as they have been in the past” (Ibid: 161).

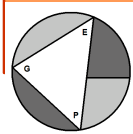
Still, Doll's remark ‘*continue to thrive*’ is remarkable. It suggests that many or most Albanian tribes have continued to survive and even thrive during the communist period, and may be able to do so during the post-communist period—up to the present day and the foreseeable future. This observation starkly contrasts with the negative assessments of Albanian tribal resilience and longevity made by Elsie, Fischer and others.

Moreover, many (Gheg) Albanians abroad do maintain their tribal-patriarchal values and customs as much as they can and are willing to, while keeping contact with the family and clan members in the home country or region as much as they can and are willing to. This seems also to be true of the younger generations, contrary to Fischer's argument that the traditions will die out with the older generations (Fischer 1999: 299)—though the former do appear to do away with some of the patriarchal and female-unfriendly features of the traditions upheld by the latter.

In essence, ‘traditional’ and rural Albanians, mainly from the Gheg-speaking North, do continue to maintain their tribal identities at least in part, though there are many ‘modern’ and urban Albanians mainly from the Tosk-speaking South—and some from the North—who are decidedly hostile towards and embarrassed about the persisting tribal beliefs and practices. In that sense, Albanian communities within and outside Albania are sharply divided along tribal and non- or anti-tribal lines.

The fault lines appear to cut across (extended) families and (sub-)clans in both ‘Tosk South’ and ‘Gheg North’ nowadays, rather than simply between these linguistic and geographical regions. The number of salient, functioning Albanian tribes appears to have diminished in comparison to communist and pre-communist times. Yet, to reiterate, few if any scholars come up with concrete and precise analyses, data and numbers regarding the surviving tribes.

Therefore, I ask the following: even if poverty, instability including state collapse and warfare, and consequent migration to cities in and beyond Albania, do account for many a tribe's demise, does these and any other factors account for the demise of *all* or even *most* tribes? I have several reasons for this question and the caution contained in it.



First of all, even if the bleak assessment by Elsie, Fischer and other scholars of the demise of Albanian tribes is generally true, it must be shown to be so—and in grounded detail. Elsie himself fails to do so in his *Tribes of Albania* in any systematic fashion. He could have done so by specifying the potential and actual lifespan of each and every identified tribe in his ‘Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History’ section or any other section.

Elsie does occasionally indicate for certain tribes that these have effectively perished, if not always specifying when, how or why. Thus the once “large and powerful” Muslim and non-*fis* Luma tribe (p. 281) was “decimated by Serbian forces” during its uprising against Serbian rule in 1913 and during World War II (p. 283), implying that the tribe largely ceased to exist and function after these devastations.

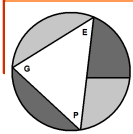
The neighbouring composite Dibra tribe—consisting of twelve tribes distinguished by Seiner in his 1918 census, which can be found among the twenty-two ‘minor tribes’ distinguished by Elsie—suffered the same fate: during 1913 “most of the tribes of Dibra were decimated” (p. 303) by Serbian forces. Some of the other minor tribes outside the Dibra composite tribe, like the Bobi and Komani, “largely disintegrated as a tribe a century ago” (pp. 309, 314) as well, though Elsie does not specify the reasons and circumstances of their demise.

For many more cases, Elsie merely implies that the tribe in question has ceased to exist at a certain unidentified point in time, by repeatedly referring to this tribe in the past tense. Yet those references in the past tense are insufficient to categorise these tribes as certainly or fully ‘extinct’ in the last column ‘H’ of Table I in the Appendix. In the same way, mere references in the present tense are insufficient to categorise tribes as certainly or fully ‘extant’.

Second, after textual analysis of Elsie’s book, I have found that for 57 of the 77 tribes including the composite tribes distinguished in Elsie’s book, it remains unknown or unmentioned whether they still exist and function today or when they ceased to exist and function (see Explanation of Table I’s Column H below Table I). Perhaps many of these 57 tribes are alive and even thriving today after all—the lack of clarity on their current fate makes this at least theoretically possible. Therefore, after carefully going through Elsie’s text, one cannot really be sure at this stage that my counting of just five fully, mostly or likely surviving tribes and eleven partially or uncertainly surviving tribes to this day (Ibid) presents a true picture and confirmation of Elsie’s bleak assessment of the general state of tribal configuration in and beyond Albania.

Third, even if the said sombre picture turns out to be (largely) true, Elsie seems to partially contradict his own rather strong statement about the near-total lack of current saliency of Albanian tribes, by giving quite a few if somewhat ambiguous examples of tribes that seem to be alive and kicking today.

For instance, the primarily Catholic Nikaj tribe in the Gjakova Highlands seems to exist in some shape or form to this day or until quite recently: in “1990, there were 911 households and 3,167 inhabitants in Nikaj” (p. 150)—though Elsie neglects to identify the source of this demographic data, and fails to specify whether some, most or all of these inhabitants belonged to the traditional Nikaj tribe.



Elsie is more unambiguous about the current existence of the Muslim Bytyçi tribe in the same highland region: in “2004, Bytyçi had a population of 2,078, and in 2008 of 2,185 inhabitants” (p. 170). Even here he does not really specify the source, or whether some, most or all of these inhabitants still belong to the original tribe of the same name; he does mention that there are “still many Bytyçi families in and around Ferizaj, Gjakova and Suhareka” in Kosovo (p. 171).

The primarily Muslim Hasi tribe concentrated in the Upper Drin Basin region—though partially or mainly Catholic on the Kosovo side of the border—appears to be extant today or until quite recently, given Elsie’s remark that the “border separating the two halves of Hasi remained more impervious until 1999” (p. 277).

It would have been insightful, indeed illuminating, if Elsie had explicated the reasons why at least these tribes appear to have survived even the most recent upheavals in Albania and the former Yugoslavia—and why (most?) other tribes have not, or why many of the latter have perished in earlier devastating periods and events.

### Conclusion

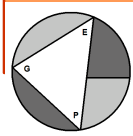
Robert Elsie’s *The Tribes of Albania: History, Society and Culture* forms a crucial, ground-breaking addition to the field of ethnic studies in general and of Albanian studies in particular. Nevertheless, given the limitations described in this essay, even Elsie’s comprehensive book does not fully succeed in filling all major, perhaps irredeemable, irreversible gaps in knowledge on the Albanians.

Thus even if some of the better-known (ethnic-)Albanian tribes were and are known for frequent, endemic blood-feuds based on *Kanun* honour-codes, the extent to which any and all surviving Albanian kinship groups and other kinds of groups still practice blood-feuds and other tribal norms today remains largely unknown. At best such knowledge is known among a small group of experts only, who so far have been unable to disseminate their knowledge to the wider academic community, let alone the general public. Even Elsie’s book does not truly resolve the sad given that the known data on the Albanian kinship groups in the recent and more distant past still remain outdated, fragmented and maybe lost forever to this day.

The data that have survived remain contested and confusing given the triple translations of *fis* as ‘tribe’, ‘clan’ or ‘kin’ by and among scholars in Albanian studies over the last decades and even centuries. As most of the 74 discrete tribes identified and described by Elsie do concur with and occur in Seiner’s 1918 classification of 65 discrete tribes as shown in Figure I in the Appendix (see esp. Seiner 1922: 102, 108–112), we can surmise that most Albanian tribes were alive and kicking by the end of WWI. Yet more often than not Elsie does not specify what precisely appears to have happened to these tribes after that world war—and what happened to them specifically after WWII and the establishment of Enver Hoxha’s Stalinist regime in Albania.

Hoxha’s regime lasted till the early 1990s, largely relying on Yugoslavia (mid-late 1940s), the





Soviet Union (1950s) and China (1960s-1970s) consecutively (after falling out with each preceding patron) until its period of near-total isolation in the 1980s. It was arguably characterised by “regression and destruction” given the “cruelty of its system of repression” through severe punishments ranging from death penalties to lengthy internment in brutal prison and labour camps (Czekalski 2013: 10 (quotes), esp. 93-103). These brutal characteristics led to “suffering and persecution whose scale seems to have been much greater than in other Soviet Bloc countries” (Ibid: 149). In short, it was characterised by “forty-six years of mute horror” (Elsie 1996: 120).

Consequently, the “contemporary Albanian discourse on communism marginalizes the events that took place after Hoxha’s death, focusing on proving the thesis of the Albanians’ consistent and long-term resistance to communism, and on discrediting Enver Hoxha and his associates, as responsible for the “communist catastrophe”” (Czekalski 2013b: 74).<sup>43</sup>

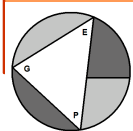
Still, we ought to ask ourselves to what extent any (ethnic-)Albanian tribes or clans did manage to survive all these periods full of turmoil, warfare and repression—including that of communist rule in Albania and Yugoslavia, and the wars and violent unrest that followed their collapse. Internal factionalism and feuding appear to have debilitated, decimated and even exterminated many (northern-)Albanian tribes in recent and more distant history—perhaps as much as any repressive measures by the communist regimes in Albania and Yugoslavia against tribal, religious and other traditional structures and customs that continued well into the 1960s and beyond.

Nevertheless, further research is required to ascertain whether and to what degrees any of the internal resistance movements and short-lived insurrections were established along tribal lines, were dominated by certain tribes—or actually consisted of an amalgam of tribes able to cooperate with each other in spite of intermittent feuding, in such cases being exceptions to the apparent debilitating effects of endemic feuding.

Perhaps Elsie could have added for each identified tribe in his *Tribes of Albania* a section titled like ‘Extant Saliency (to this day or last known date or period)’ on which sufficient information can be given. Such a section would have helped to specify the degree of vibrancy and longevity of each tribe about which there is sufficient reliable data to do so, and indicate whether it has survived partially or wholly intact to the present day—at least as a cultural entity if it has moved or scattered away from its ancestral homeland or area of geographic concentration.

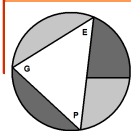
A concluding section at the end of Elsie’s book would also have helped to summarise the main attributes, histories and saliencies of the identified Albanian tribes in and beyond northern Albania for so far as these can be deduced from available sources (including some of Elsie’s other works)—preferably ending with a ‘to-do list’ of required additional research. Such research Elsie—who in more recent years has focused his research on other aspects of Albanian culture than poetry and literature, like the history of the tribal system—sadly will no longer be able to do himself, given his untimely death.

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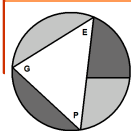
### Endnotes

1. The author once did approach Elsie on the subject of such sorely lacking research on the Albanians; at the time he responded as follows: "I am currently working on a book about the Mountain Tribes of Northern Albania ... . It should be, in your words, the first "systematic nationwide research on Albanian clan-culture" " (email-communication, 20-07-2013).
2. In my earlier research and publications, I referred to a much lower estimate of "thirty or so Albanian "clans" or "tribes" " (Ten Dam 2011: 253). Yet I cautioned that the "known data on the numbers, denominations and other characteristics of the Albanian clans seem rather outdated, and confusing [also] given the triple translations of *fis* as "tribe", "clan" or "kin" " (Ibid: 254, note 24).
3. Some scholars assert that "when the Ottomans entered the southern region, they discovered" that "the tribal system [already] had disintegrated amongst the Tosk population" (Doll 2003: 155; from Skendi 1963: 16 —or Skendi 1967: 16 (later edition) ). Yet even they are convinced that there once were tribes amongst the Tosks in a more distant past.
4. According to Rrapi, the Albanian term for extended family (whether or not as a walled commune), is *shtëpia e madhe* (Rrapi 2003: 32). The Serbo-Croatian term meaning walled commune is *zadruga* (actually *zadrugas* or *zadruge* in plural) (see Ten Dam 2011: 253).
5. There appear to be no separate Albanian terms for 'tribe', 'clan' or 'kin', apart perhaps from e.g. *gjin(i)* being translated as 'kinship group(s)' (see Ten Dam 2011: 253 & note 23); yet *gjini* is more often translated as 'gender' and *gjin* as 'male/clan(nish) (sur)name'.
6. The following kinship concepts are relevant here. Exogamy: marriage outside tribe/group. Endogamy: marriage inside tribe/group. Patriarchal: "authority in the hands of old men"; patrilineal: "inheritance through the male line"; patrilocal: "girl moves to husband's place"; matriarchal, matrilineal, matrilocal on the female side accordingly (Dupree 1997: 181 (quotes) ). I generally follow Louis Dupree's kinship typology in his classic *Afghanistan* (Dupree 1997: 183-192), even though Dupree fails to offer a formal, precise definition of 'tribe' in that book.
7. Household heads selected male member for military duty—yet at times had to join the "army of the Banner" themselves (Gjeçov, *Code Lekë Dukagjini* 1989 (1933): §25.6, 26.b4). Hasluck applies the terms *deli* (desperado), *spahi* and *bajraktar* for all rank-and-file levies (Hasluck 1954: 115; see further 116-129).
8. Oddly, not all major individual sources are mentioned separately under their own names (authors, titles, publishers a/o other publication details) in the Bibliography of Elsie's *Tribes of Albania*.
9. This 'bias' is evident from Elsie's following remark when recommending multiple sources to me: "They have much better information on the Albanian clans than Margaret Hasluck, whose book "The Unwritten Laws" is not particularly informative. Nopcsa and Durham are better" (email-communication, 20-07-2013). Nevertheless, Elsie clearly praises Hasluck's general expertise in his review and edition of *The Hasluck Collection of Albanian Folktales* (2015): see ([http://books.elsie.de/bo85\\_hasluck\\_folktales](http://books.elsie.de/bo85_hasluck_folktales) (last acc.25-4-2019)).
10. The concept of *besa* is translated as 'honour', 'oath', 'loyalty' or sometimes 'truce', 'trust' and kindred terms in most scholarly works on the subject (e.g. Saltmarshe 2001: viii; Doll 2003: 148; etcetera); I take a middle position by translating it as "oath-of-honour, a vow on one's life" (Ten Dam 2010: 351).
11. Many scholars only speak of the 'Code of Lek (Dukagjini)', implicitly or explicitly considering it either the primary or only true Kanun (e.g. Fischer 1999: 282-283; Doll 2003: 150-151). Yet with other scholars, I stress that there are or have been until well into the twentieth century other distinct Kanun codes as well, promulgated by or identified with other major

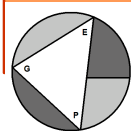


figures in Albanian history, most notably Skanderbeg, who “developed his own code” (Ten Dam 2010: 344; from Fox, apud Gjeçov 1989: xiii,xvii; Hasluck 1954: xi,13-15). Still, most scholars “deem Dukagjini’s Kanun geographically dominant, and ascribe it to the Dukagjini of 1410-1481, Skanderbeg’s military deputy yet political superior” (Ibid: 344, footnote 17).

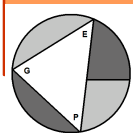
12. In 1990 “2,000 Kosovar families reconciled or postponed their feuds through *bese-lidhje* (oath-binding) in order to better resist Milosevic’s regime in Serbia, releasing twenty thousand people from self-imposed confinement (official 1987 estimate: 10,000 people of 900 families confined)” (Ten Dam 2010: 355).
13. Bernd J. Fischer applies the pejorative term ‘primitive’ more than once, e.g. when referring to “Albania’s primitive state of political development” (Fischer 1999: 286). One conceivably could apply the term non-judgmentally—as Fischer may have done—though it may lead to misunderstandings as the term is being used and understood more often in the pejorative sense.
14. See further on Prekë Cali Hasanaj or ‘Prekë Cali’ in short e.g. Luigj Martini, *Prek Cali, Kelmendi dhe kelmendasit* Camaj-Pipaj, 2005.  
See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prek\\_Cali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prek_Cali).
15. As head of “the *Djelmina e Shalës* (Young Men of Shala)” (p. 127), Mehmet Shpendi apparently supported traditional native customs over even longstanding Ottoman ones (p. 322).  
See further on Mehmet Shpendi or ‘Sokol Shpendi’ e.g.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehmet\\_Shpendi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehmet_Shpendi).
16. Bernardin Palaj, co-author of *Songs of the Frontier Warriors and Legends*, was a major “folklorist and poet” (p. 136; see also Elsie, apud Elsie & Mathie-Heck 2004: xi; see Palaj & Kurti 1937 (reprint 1996) ). See further on Palaj e.g. Robert Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History* I.B.Tauris, 2015, esp. pp.88–89.  
See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernardin\\_Palaj](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernardin_Palaj).
17. See further on Ndoc Nikaj, the ‘father of the Albanian novel’, e.g. Robert Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History* I.B.Tauris, 2015, esp. pp.88–89.  
See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ndoc\\_Nikaj](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ndoc_Nikaj).
18. See further on Ambroz Marlaskaj e.g. Fr. Zef Pllumi, *Live to Tell: A True Story of Religious Persecution in Communist Albania*, Volume 1; Volumes 1944-1951 New York/Bloomington/Shanghai: iUniverse, 2008.  
See also [https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambroz\\_Marlaskaj](https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambroz_Marlaskaj) (only in Albanian).
19. See further on Haxhi Mulla Zeka e.g. Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967, e.g. p.271.  
See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haxhi\\_Zeka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haxhi_Zeka).
20. Ahmet Zogolli “later removed the suffix ‘-olli’—the Turkish ‘-oğlu’, ‘son of’—and became simply Zog” (Malcolm 1998: 276). See further on Ahmet or ‘Ahmed’ Zogu or King Zog of Albania: e.g. Bernd Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* East European Monographs, Boulder, 1984; O.S. Pearson, *Albania and King Zog* I.B. Tauris, 2005.  
See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zog\\_I\\_of\\_Albania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zog_I_of_Albania) (e.g. “taking the surname Zogu in 1922”).
21. In stark contrast to Elsie, Fischer asserts that Zog assumed as “second son of Xhemal Pasha, chief of the Mati tribe ... the leadership of his *relatively small tribe*” (Fischer 2007: 21-22; italics added). Perhaps Fischer actually refers here to the influential Zogolli family within the Mati tribe, historically one of the most populous composite tribes among Albanians (see Table I in the Appendix).
22. See further on Muharrem Bajaraktari, e.g.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muharrem\\_Bajaraktari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muharrem_Bajaraktari).



23. Thus “soothing comments of American and British diplomats calmed Belgrade’s suspicions about the real ambitions” of King Zog I in a few months’ time; in contrast, the “Turkish veto lasted much longer” and Ankara only recognised King Zog I and his title in 1931 (Czekalski 2012a: 91 (quotes) & note 16).
24. In Albania, with “the notable exception of Ismail Kadare, no Albanian writers were allowed to express any non-conformist views or even leave the country” during communist rule (Elsie 1991b: 259; Elsie 1996: 9). Kadare’s unique position was mainly or partially due to the fact that he “enjoyed a privileged relationship with Enver Hoxha, also from Gjirokastër” (Ibid: 259; Ibid: 10)—a relationship that both were obviously willing and able to maintain. Undoubtedly this privileged (and envied) relationship enabled Kadare to “give full expression to his creative talents” (Elsie 1996: 106).
25. Known as the ‘Yugoslav Mandela’. Demaçi was finally released in April 1990 after a total of twenty-eight years in prison, especially for allegedly founding the ‘Revolutionary Movement for Albanian Unity’ in 1961 (see Nikolić, apud Petković & Filipović 1989: 231). If true, Demaçi was a militant irredentist at least in his younger years. Still, Elsie hardly seems convinced that Demaçi ever truly harboured irredentist viewpoints (see e.g. Elsie 1991a: 165; Elsie 1996: 86).
26. The English acronym ‘KLA’ distinguishes the Kosovar rebel group from the short-lived National Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombetare*, UÇK) in FYROM Macedonia (since recently renamed Republic of North Macedonia), which I identify by the acronym ‘NLA’ in my other research and publications.
27. See K. Mehmeti, “*Oda e burrave* (The Men’s Counsel Room)”, in *Lulehëna* (Moon Flower) Peja: Dukagjini, 1997 (Elsie 2006: iii, 143).  
See also [https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim\\_Mehmeti](https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Mehmeti).
28. Elsie asserts that this article of his “offered the first substantial survey of modern Albanian literature since the fifties to be published in English” (Elsie 1996: x). Incidentally, in his 1996 book he includes the English (translations of) titles of all Albanian works in his selected 57 literary reviews (Ibid: x). Such English (translated) titles are generally missing in Elsie’s original reviews in *World Literature Today*.
29. Donat Kurti’s connection to any particular tribe is unknown, unspecified or non-existent; we do not appear to know much more about his ancestry than that he “was from [born in] Shkodra” (Elsie 2010: 255).  
See further on Donat Kurti e.g. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donat\\_Kurti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donat_Kurti).
30. Elsie cautions that the original Frontier-Warriors epic was “more properly, [sung in] Bosnian” (Elsie 2010: 425). Albanian scholars like Fatos Arapi, however, more strongly question the view that “the ‘Muj and Halil’ cycle” is basically or “simply .. a translation from Serbo-Croat folk poetry” and rather support the view that this cycle of songs originates “almost from Illyrian [i.e. proto-Albanian] times” (Arapi 1996: 138). Still, Arapi acknowledges the “beautiful, significant epic poetry” of the Serbo-Croat peoples (Ibid: 141).
31. Elsie admits as much: his book *Tribes of Albania* is “admittedly, a motley collection of information and texts with many lacunae of which the author is painfully aware” (p. 12).
32. Reportedly delegates from the tribal North and elsewhere were unable to attend the Vlora meeting in November 1912 due to “specific circumstances” created by the First Balkan War (Czekalski 2012b: 206). Incidentally, I cite here from the summary in English of the publication in question; most of the publications by Prof. Tadeusz Czekalski (Faculty of History Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland) are in Polish, with only a few of those having English abstracts.

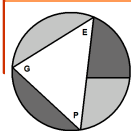


33. Crucially, American President Woodrow Wilson “vetoed the efforts” and agreements by (all) the other Powers to dismember and divide the Principality of Albania among some of them after WWI, thereby effectively saving this fragile state from annihilation (Czekalski 2012a: 89).
34. As Doll’s analysis of the nature of the Zogu regime contrasts with those by Elsie, Fischer, Czekalski and others I am familiar with, I put more credence in those made by the latter—at least for now. Thus I question Doll’s statement that “Zogu garnered so much support among the chieftains of the fis system that he was even able to outlaw the practice of blood-feud” (Doll 2003: 157). Rather, Zogu outlawed the blood-feud despite widespread, even violent opposition in the tribal North, which was only partially and temporarily successful mainly given this opposition (see section ‘Past and current blood-feuding and related violence’).
35. Fischer appears to suggest that Zog faced the rebel forces virtually on his own in March 1922 when he was the only senior government minister who remained behind to “defend Tirana with only his personal retainer” (Fischer 2007: 27). Yet Elsie, just like other scholars (Malcolm 1998: 277; Kola 2003: 19; Destani & Tomes 2011: 344, footnote 178), speaks of apparently evenly matched “forces of Ahmet Zogu” fighting “those of Elez Isufi and Hasan bey Prishtina” in the streets of Tirana until Sir Harry Eyers successfully intervened (Elsie 2013: 136).
36. Zog had to take extreme security measures, such as usually taking his mother with him whenever he had to leave the palace on rare occasions, as her presence and ‘non-combatant’ status as a woman according to *Kanun* codes “served as protection from blood-feud violence” directed against him (Fischer 1999: 290). Even so, he invariably was accompanied by a “detachment of cavalry .. from his own Mati tribe” (Fischer 2007: 35)—whether or not he was accompanied by his mother. Zog clearly hoped yet did not presume that his tribal enemies would fully and invariably uphold the *Kanun* codes of violence.
37. The party’s name—also rendered as e.g. *Partia Komuniste e Shqipterite* (Doll 2003: 158)—was changed to Albanian Party of Labour (APL, *Partia e Punës e Shqipërisë*) in 1948 to reflect both the party’s peasant roots (Czekalski 2013: 34 & note 34) ) and Stalin’s preference for such a name change (Ibid: 36 & note 44).
38. I adopt Elsie’s spelling of ‘Gjomarkaj’ (p. 233) rather than Czekalski’s ‘Gjonmarkaj’ (Czekalski 2013: 28). There is no particular reason for my choice, apart from the fact that Elsie’s *Tribes of Albania* is the main reviewed and discussed book in this treatise.
39. See on Spaç Prison and the famous 1973 prisoners’ revolt there:  
[www.wmf.org/project/spa%C3%A7-prison](http://www.wmf.org/project/spa%C3%A7-prison) (acc. 11-2-2019).  
See also Fatjona Mejdini, ‘Albanians Hope to Turn Political Prison into Museum’ *BalkanInsight* (BIRN)—Balkan Transitional Justice, 28 May 2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/28/albanians-hope-to-turn-political-prison-into-museum-05-25-2018/>.
40. Thus “despite the introduced changes in property ownership, the lifestyle and habits of local society did not change much” in Bogë village (Czekalski 2013: 72, note 32 (quote) ). Yet Cook and Rakaj actually summarise their own findings regarding aspects of traditional life in Bogë in a more sober(ing), less ‘upbeat’ fashion: “Only tiny vestiges of the once rich unique dress styles exist. Only a quarter of the current households exhibit traditional patriarchy. The marriage ceremony has fared better, appearing unchanged by communism while village exogamy continues with some alterations” (Cook & Rakaj 1995: 84).
41. I deduce from Czekalski’s following observation that Albanian women and girls were militarily trained as well: the “duty to defend the country and the constant improvement of shooting skills was regularly mentioned by the women’s weekly *Shqiptarja e Re* (New Albanian Woman)” (Czekalski 2013: 51).



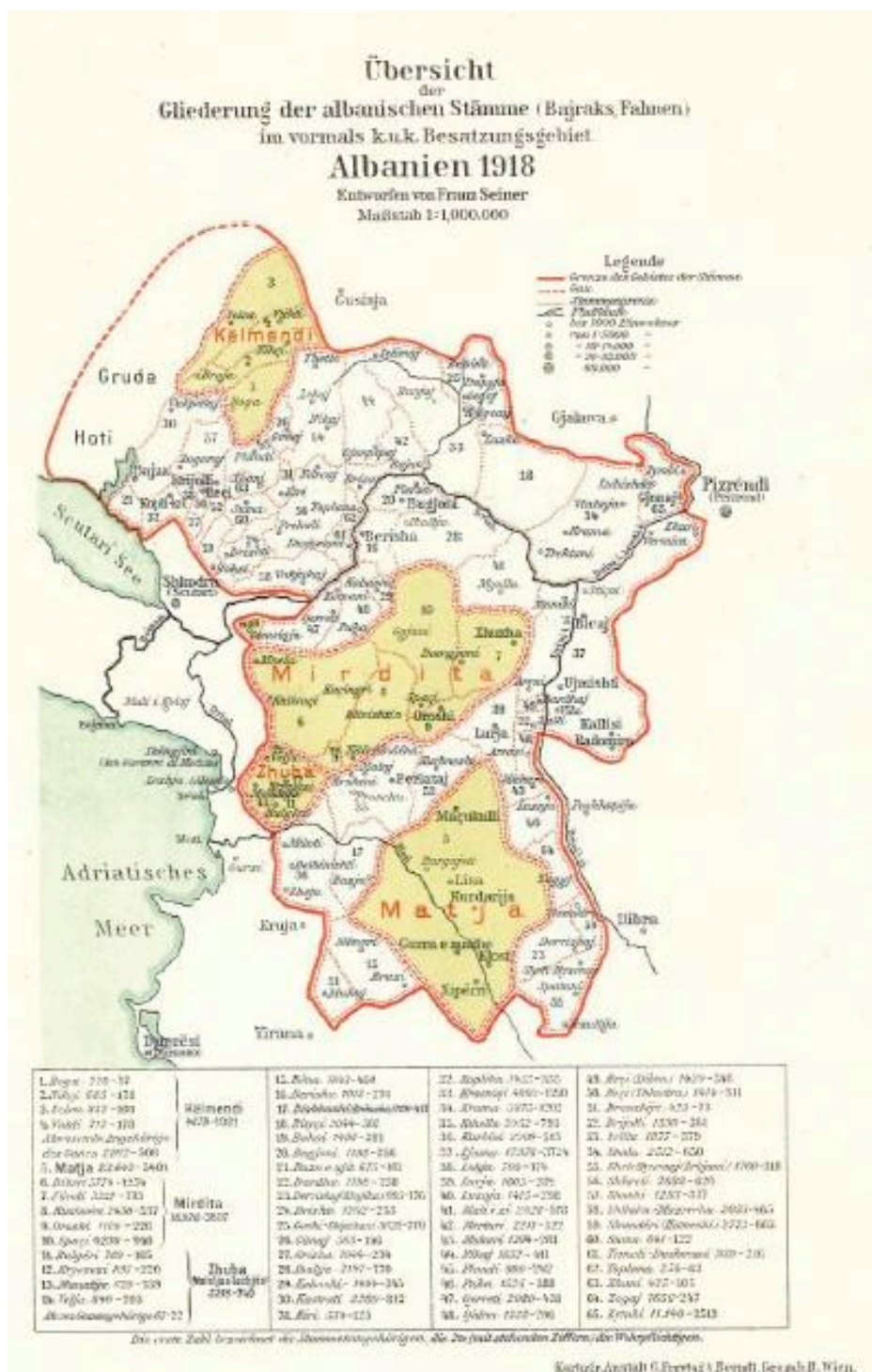
42. Fischer appears to have quietly dropped his initial expectation that tribal, highland a/o patriarchal society in Albania's North "will disappear entirely" (Elsie 1999: 300) in his later works. In that regard, it seems rather odd that Elsie has maintained his own stark assessment of tribal demise in his *Tribes of Albania*, despite Fischer and other scholars having long since backtracked from or at least nuanced their earlier assessments of it.
43. Here I cite from the English summary of the publication in question; most of Czekalski's publications are in Polish, with only a few of those having English abstracts.





## Appendix

Figure I Classification and distribution of Albanian tribes, 1918



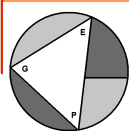
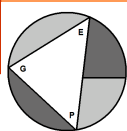


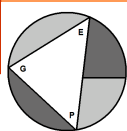
Table I Major Characteristics of Albanian Tribes in Elsie's *Tribes of Albania* (2015)\*

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Tribes (name) it.: <i>fis</i> i.e. patrilineal kin group	Tribal region (esp. 1850- 1950)	Bajraks number of (if any)	First known record tribal name (year)	Population size Seiner 1918	Number of households Seiner 1918 [ ]: other source	Religious affiliation C(atholic) M(uslim) O(rthodox) o(ther)	Extant saliency tribe it.: of <i>blood- feuds</i>
1	<i>Kelmendi</i>	Malësia e Madhe	4	1497	4679	779	C	(Y)/Y? (Y)
2	<i>Gruda</i>	Ibid	1	1648	[3000]	[500]	C →/ M	
3	<i>Hoti</i>	Ibid	1	1330	[4000]	[500]	C (M)	(Y)/Y? (Y)
4	<i>Triepshi</i>	Ibid	1 (2+)	1485	[593]	[111]	C	(Y)
5	<i>Kastrati</i>	Ibid	1	1416	3280	516	C (M)	(Y)? (Y)
6	<i>Boga (fis)</i>	Ibid	1	1688	228	34	C	(Y)
7	<i>Shkreli</i>	Ibid	1	1416	2688	415	C	(Y)/Y
8	<i>Lohja</i>	Ibid	2 (1)	1348	709	94	C →/ M	
9	<i>Reçi(of region)</i>	Ibid	1 with Lohja	1614	1414	172	M	(Y)?
10	<i>Rrjolli</i>	Ibid	1 (2)	1416	1530	211	C	
11	<i>Plani</i>	Pulat region	1	1628	980	171	C (15% M)	(Y)Y?
12	<i>Xhani</i>	Ibid	1	1671	435	62	2/3 C 1/3 M	(Y)Y?
13	<i>Kiri</i>	Ibid	1	1474	534	87	3/4 C 1/4 M	
14	<i>Suma</i>	Ibid	1	1332	641	95	C/M (40% M)	(Y)Y?
15	<i>Drishti</i>	Ibid	1	743 AD	1191	169	M	
16	<i>Shala</i>	Dukagjin region	4	1634	2512	431	C	(Y)/Y
17	<i>Shoshi</i>	Ibid		1671	1293	272	C	(Y)
18	<i>Shllaku</i>	Ibid	1	1641	2023	276	C	(Y)
19	<i>Mazreku</i>	Ibid	1	1641			C	
20	<i>Dushmani</i>	Ibid	2	1581	939	181	C	(Y) Y
21	<i>Toplana</i>	Ibid	1	1671	254	52	C	
22	<i>Nikaj</i>	Malësia e Gjakovës	1	1671	1652	289	C	Y Y
23	<i>Mërturi</i>	Ibid	1	1629	2211	354	C	Y (Y)
24	<i>Krasniqja</i>	Ibid	1; later 2	1634	4803	864	M	
25	<i>Gashi</i>	Ibid	2	1634	3628	591	M	
26	<i>Bytyçi</i>	Ibid	1	1571	2044	354	M	Y
27	<i>Qerreti</i>	Puka region	1	1703	2080	327	C (15% M)	(Y)
28	<i>Puka</i>	Ibid	1	150 AD	1525	234	M	
29	<i>Kabashi</i>	Ibid	1 (2)	1621	1494	223	C → M	
30	<i>Berisha</i>	Ibid		1691	1013	171	C	Y (Y)
31	<i>Thaçi</i>	Ibid	2	1841	4395	688	C	Y



**Table I Major Characteristics of Albanian Tribes . . . (continued)\***

32	Mali i Zi	Ibid	1	1444	2528	385	M	
33	Bulgëri ( <i>fis?</i> )	Malësia e Lezhës	1; with Mirdita	1866	769	122	C	
34	Kryezezi ( <i>fis?</i> )	Ibid	1; ibid (1818)	1866	879	138	C	(N)/N
35	Manatia ( <i>fis?</i> )	Ibid	1; ibid (1818)	1621	629	96	C	
36	Vela ( <i>fis?</i> )	Ibid	1; ibid (1818)	1621	840	130	C	
37	Kurbini	Malësia e Krujës	1	1570	2209	253	C	
38	Rranza ( <i>fis?</i> )	Ibid	1		423	79	C?	
39	Benda ( <i>fis?</i> )	Ibid	1		1643	317	C?	
40	Mirdita (composite)	Mirdita region	3 -> 12 (1818)	1571	16926	2376	C	(Y)/Y
41	Dibrri ( <i>fis?</i> )	Ibid	1; with Mirdita	1571	5774	800	C	(Y)
42	Kushneni ( <i>fis</i> )	Ibid	1; ibid	1795	2430	318	C	
43	Spaçi ( <i>fis</i> )	Ibid	1; ibid	1866	4230	598	C	
44	Fani ( <i>fis?</i> )	Ibid	1; ibid	1515	3332	504	C	(Y)
45	Oroshi ( <i>fis</i> )	Ibid	1; ibid	1671	1160	156	C	
46	Kthella	Ibid	3	1610	3952	839	C	(Y)/Y
47	Selita	Ibid	1; with Mirdita	1672	1877	393	2/3 C 1/3 M	(Y) (Y)/Y
48	Bushkashi	Mat region	1; ibid	1689	2191	473	C (70%)	Y
49	Mati (composite)	Ibid	6	1308	23643	3986	M (mostly)	(Y)?
50	Hasi	Upper Drin basin	2	1570			Ibid – C in Kosovo	(Y)Y (Y)?
51	Luma	Ibid	7	1571	17978	2781	M (+ Shiite dervish)	(N) 1912 (Y)/Y
52	Lura	Ibid	4	1641	1605	265	M (→ 19 <sup>th</sup> c)	Y
53	Arrëni	Ibid		1641			M	
54	Dibra (composite)	Ibid	1	1107				(N)/N 1912
55	Bobi (Shkodra) ( <i>fis</i> )	Minor tribes: area	1	1671-2	[58]	[13]	C/C?	(N)/N 1912
56	Boksi ( <i>fis?</i> )	Postripa	1		1498	158		
57	Buza e Ujit ( <i>fis?</i> )	Malësia e Madhe	1		675	201	M (C)	
58	Çidhna	Dibra	1	1641	1338	268		
59	Dardha ( <i>fis?</i> )	Dibra	1 (Lura)	1671	1198	229		
60	Dervishaj ( <i>fis?</i> )	Bulqiza	1		995	150		
61	Dushi ( <i>fis</i> )	Shkodra & Puka	1	1671			C	
62	Gimaj ( <i>fis?</i> )	Shkodra	1		565	103	C	(Y)



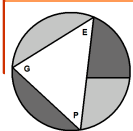
**Table I Major Characteristics of Albanian Tribes . . . (continued)\***

63	Grizha ( <i>fis?</i> )	Malësia e Madhe	1	1416	1044	130	M (vast majority)	
64	Kastrioti ( <i>fis?</i> )	Dibra	1					
65	Komani ( <i>fis?</i> )	Shkodra & Puka		1629				(N)/N
66	Kopliku ( <i>fis?</i> )	Malësia e Madhe	1 (3)	1200	1455	208	M (vast majority)	
67	Luznia ( <i>fis?</i> )	Dibra	1		1415	258		
68	Mëgulla ( <i>fis</i> )	Shkodra	1	1638			C	
69	Morina	Morina Pass; Kosovo						
70	Muhurri ( <i>fis?</i> )	Dibra	1	1641	1304	236		
71	Ploshtani ( <i>fis?</i> )	Dibra	1 (Lura)					
72	Reçi ( <i>fis?</i> ) (of Dibra)	Dibra	1 (Lura)	1641	1429	239		
73	Sheh Hysenaj ( <i>fis?</i> )	Bulqiza	1		1760	305		
74	Skandëri ( <i>fis?</i> )	Bulqiza	1		2773	612		
75	Trojaku ( <i>fis?</i> )	Dibra	1					
76	Ura e Shtrejtë ( <i>fis?</i> )	Shkodra	1		[360]			
77	Zogjaj ( <i>fis?</i> )	Dibra	1		1656	434		
	Total nr. Seiner 1998				162268	25998		

\*: Any empty cell in a column for a certain tribe indicates that the required information is unknown, lost or at least not mentioned by Robert Elsie in his *Tribes of Albania*. The table itself is constructed by Caspar ten Dam, not by Robert Elsie. A more extensive version of the table, that includes some more separate columns on e.g. saliency of blood-feuds and miscellaneous facts, and some more intricate or nuanced information within the cells of the columns, can be found at [www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/](http://www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/); see [robertelsietribesalbaniafeatureslist2018](#).

#### Explanation of the Table I's columns

**A = Tribe:** as identified by its most common a/o etymologically, linguistically correct name according to Elsie, and so used particularly during the relatively well-recorded and salient 1850-1950 period. If the tribe is deemed a *fis* i.e. patrilineal kin group in the strict sense in *Tribes of Albania*, it is indicated as such after the tribe's name in the same column A. If not, it is generally explicitly deemed of "polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor" (e.g. p. 38). If the tribe is



not expressly identified as a patrilineal *fis* by Elsie yet apparently or likely is so according to him<sup>i</sup>, then it is indicated between brackets as '(*fis*)' in column A. If it is uncertain whether the tribe is a *fis*, because Elsie neither specifies it as *fis* nor non-*fis*, then the indication is between brackets and a question mark i.e. as '(*fis*?)'. Among the 77 distinguished tribes in the table—that also counts the three composite tribes (the Mirdita, Mati and Dibra)<sup>ii</sup> encapsulating many or all of the tribes in the respective regions—17 are explicitly *fis*, 7 implicitly or likely *fis*, 23 possibly or unlikely *fis*, and 30 explicitly non-*fis* i.e. polyphyletic according to Elsie.

**B = Tribal region:** the most durable, stable and well-known, well-recorded area of concentration of at least a significant majority of the tribe, generally sometime during or across the 1850-1950 period.

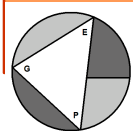
**C = Bajraks:** any number if specified; often the (overarching) tribe is a single *bajrak* (lit. banner, standard) i.e. military entity as well. Usually the number '1' in any cell for a certain tribe in this column signifies this too if that tribe has known no other *bajraks* within its ranks. Any specified names of the *bajraks* are indicated in the more extensive table ([www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/](http://www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/); see [robertelsietribesalbaniafeatureslist2018](#)).<sup>iii</sup>

**D = First known record:** date (generally AD) of the first reliable, ascertainable reference of the tribe or tribe's name in a historical record—at least as indicated or suggested by Elsie in his book (normally under the 'Population' section)—that has survived to this day or is cited in another record that has survived; the name may be differently spelled or rendered in that source.<sup>iv</sup>

**E: Population size** of the tribe according to Franz Seiner, *Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von Österr.-Ungarischen Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete*, mit Anhang *Die Gliederung der Albanischen Stämme* (1922); see Bibliography here for a full reference. If this source is not used i.e. does not contain such information on the said tribe (because apparently Seiner had not recognised, identified and separately classed the tribe at the time), then the column's cell in question remains empty—unless another source around the same or nearby period is available and cited in *Tribes of Albania*: then the estimated population size is shown between square brackets.

Notably, according to Seiner's 1918 census, all the 65 tribes identified by Seiner were made up of 162,268 people and 25,998 households at the time (Seiner 1922: 112). This appears to suggest that less than a third of all Albanians within Albania at the time were part of recognisable and functioning tribes, as Seiner's census counted 379,078 inhabitants in 'Upper Albania' and 145,139 inhabitants in 'Lower Albania', so 524,217 people altogether—including small communities of ethnic Serbs, Greeks, Roma and other minorities (Ibid: 6, 7-8, 10).<sup>v</sup>

**F: Number of households** in the tribe according to Seiner's 1918 census in (northern) Albania if mentioned in that source (also the primary source for column E). If according to another source around the same or nearby period, then the estimated number is shown between square brackets.



**G: Religious affiliation** of the tribe or a predominant majority of it during particularly the 1850-1950 period, if known and mentioned in Elsie's *Tribes of Albania*. One must keep in mind that (m)any of these tribes—if still extant and functioning after 1950 (very rare according to Elsie)—nowadays have become more Muslim than in earlier periods.<sup>vi</sup> Among the 77 distinguished tribes also counting the composite tribes, 40 are or have been fully, mostly or likely Catholic, 7 are partially or uncertainly Catholic with large Muslim minorities or Muslim groups of roughly equal size, and 12 are fully, mostly or likely Muslim according to Elsie—with 18 remaining tribes of unknown or unmentioned religious affiliation.

**H: Extant saliency** of the tribe and occurrence of **blood-feuds** within or by it (latter grading shown in *italics*) particularly during the relatively well-documented 1850-1950 period. This column shows the degree of survival a/o vibrancy of any tribe to this day or last known date or period, for so far specified in Elsie's *Tribes of Albania*. If there is room for it in this table, the last known date of existence or (near-)decimation is shown too if mentioned in *Tribes of Albania* (such dates are shown more extensively in columns I and J in the more elaborate table at [www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/](http://www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/); see [robertelsietribesalbaniafeatureslist2018](#)).

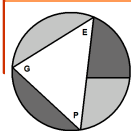
The ordinal grading scale is as follows: Y: strong 'yes' i.e. fully/strongly so; (Y): somewhat/partially so; (N): a partial 'no', so hardly/weakly so; and N: strong 'no', not at all so. The same kind of grading is shown in *italics* for the saliency or lack of it of blood-feuds within or by the tribe in question if specified in *Tribes of Albania*. If a tribe has been known for marauding, plundering and fierce resistance to outsiders as mentioned by Elsie yet not explicitly for blood-feuding, it is generally graded '(Y)' in Column H of the table, as the former phenomena often coincided with or were expressed through blood-feuding norms and practices.

NB: if no grading i.e. 'empty': unknown, or at least unspecified by Elsie. If I am still uncertain about a definite grading, then both possible, most likely valid grades are shown separated by a slash, e.g. (Y)/Y. High uncertainties are emphasised with a question mark. If for instance the first possible grade clearly is the less likely or more questionable one of the two, then it is indicated with a question mark, e.g. as (Y)?/Y.

According to Elsie('s sources), among the 77 tribes including the composite tribes, just 5 are fully, mostly or likely extant to this day or have been so until fairly recently, 11 are partially or uncertainly extant (including the grades with a question mark), and 4 are fully, mostly or likely non-extant by now or since a fairly long time. For about as many as 57 tribes it remains unknown or unmentioned in Elsie's book whether they still exist and function today or when they ceased to exist and function.

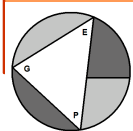
According to Elsie('s sources), among the same 77 tribes, just 4 are or have been fully, mostly or likely characterised by blood-feuding to this day or have been so until fairly recently, 18 are partially or uncertainly characterised by blood-feuding (including the grades with a question mark), and just 1 tribe explicitly is hardly ever or never characterised by blood-feuding. For about as many as 54 tribes it remains unknown or unmentioned in Elsie's book whether they have ever been involved in blood-feuds amongst themselves, against other tribes or against non-Albanian outsiders.





## Endnotes—to Explanation of the Table I's columns

- i. Generally, unspecified yet apparent '*fis*-tribes' in *Tribes of Albania* can be pinpointed by Elsie's references to a "legendary [male] ancestor" (e.g. p.79 on the Boga tribe) or "[legendary] ancestral father" (e.g. p. 315 on the Mëgulla tribe) for these tribes.
- ii. Logically, a composite tribe is polyphyletic as such, even if its composing (sub-)tribes are or were in a certain timeperiod all patrilineal *fis*-tribes. Thus the composite Mirdita tribe "as a whole was of polyphyletic origin ... although some of its bajraks [at once composing (sub-)tribes], such as Oroshi, Spaçi and Kushneni, did trace their [male-line] origin back" (p. 222).
- iii. One must keep in mind that many *bajraks* within larger tribes are or were "considered tribes in their own right" (p. 121, on e.g. Gimaj and Theth as two purported *bajraks* within the Shala tribe).
- iv. In the more elaborate table ([www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/](http://www.ctdamconsultancy.com/other-projects/); see [robertelsietribesalbaniafeatureslist2018](#)) also possible other dates are shown between brackets in column D. These may concern other, later recorded references, sometimes less certain and more contestable, or mythical, purported or likely dates or periods of origin of the tribe in question—certainly regarding its arrival in "their present territory" (e.g. p.106) as circumscribed in column B (typically indicating that the tribe is actually much older as a kin group yet once lived in one or more other regions).  
These 'mythical' dates—mostly mentioned in Elsie's section 'Tribal Legendry' for the tribe in question—are put between single parentheses. More often than not, such an ancestral 'birth date' of a tribe predates its first recorded reference that can be traced, typically for many decades or even centuries prior.  
Sometimes however, this ancestral date according to tribal legendry if specified in *Tribes of Albania* postdates the first known or preserved mentioning of the tribe's name (referring to a kin group) in a written-down historical record (see e.g. on the Kastrati: pp.68 ("land register in 1416"), 70 ("figure called Dedli ... who lived at the end of the sixteenth century").
- v. According to the 1918 census the total number of ethnic Albanians in Albania was 363,664 in Upper Albania (Seiner 1922: 7, Tabelle II). Yet Seiner's *Haupt-Übersicht Tabelle II* fails to mention the total number of ethnic Albanians in Lower Albania in the bottom row of that table (Seiner 1922: 8, Tabelle II).
- vi. If the predominant religious affiliation is uncertain, it is shown with a question mark, e.g. M? for 'Muslim?'. If the numerical spread of affiliations is approximately equal between two or more affiliations, at least for a considerable period of time (many decades), it is shown by one or more slashes, e.g. M/C (Muslim/Catholic) or M/C/O (Muslim/Catholic/Orthodox)—in the latter case roughly one-third of the tribe follows one of these three denominations.  
If a significant minority follows another denomination, then that denomination is shown between brackets, e.g. M(C) (Muslim(Catholic) ). If there was a major(ity) conversion trend prior to or during the 1850-1950 period, this is indicated in a short arrow, e.g. C→M (Catholic → Muslim).



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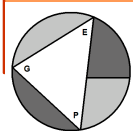
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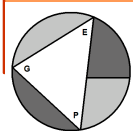
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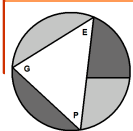
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