

Jacob Haasnoot (2017) – *Anthropological Notes on the Shekkacho People (Not for publication)*

The Shekkacho language is spoken by the Shekkacho people in the forested highland of Southwest Ethiopia. The two major towns in the area are Maasha and Geecha. According to the 1998 Census, there are ca. 54,900 mother tongue speakers of Shekkacho.

The old, derogative name for the people and language is 'Mocha'. The people themselves refer to their language as *Shekki noono* (meaning: Shekka language). The Shekkacho's are mainly farmers with *Enset* ('false banana tree') as their staple food. They are also known for bee keeping and honey production.

Date of event: 1997, April or May

Date of journal entry: 26/02/98

Type of information: reported (2nd? hand)

Location: Shekicho area; don't know exactly where

Keywords: traditional religion; rituals; sacrifice

Data: Matti told me that a lady schoolteacher worked in the Shakicho area. She had taken her brother of around 10 yrs. old with her to her working place to help her with different things (fetching water etc.). One day the boy didn't return from a chore and was found dead. He had cuts at his ankles and near his throat. Matti explained that this was a ritual murder: the blood of a child can make the soil fertile. This is all what I remember from his story.

Question(s): Lots of questions about the traditional religion and their practices.

Date of event: 1998, 07/08

Date of journal entry: 10 July 1998

Type of information: Reported

Location: Mettu, Haasnoot's home

Keywords: marriage

Data: We were talking about marriage and then Belatsaw told us that in Masha most boys married from the age of 18 onwards and most girls from the age of 15 onwards. He also said that the bride price to the girl's family was (=had been?) a problem.

Date of event: 1998, 07/22

Date of journal entry: 24 July 1998

Type of information: reported

Location: Mettu

Keywords: marriage

Data:

1. Christians marry by love only, no bride price, only ring;
2. non-Christians give a few thousand birr from groom to her family;
3. old days: to give a watch was important;

4. Christians have one wife. If they have 2 already, they can keep them (EECMY). Mulu Wengel has different opinion.
5. it is allowed to marry somebody from elsewhere (diff. tribe).

Date of event: 1998, 10/07

Date of journal entry: 7 October 1998

Type of information: Literature

Source: W. Lange, A History of Southern Gonga

Keywords: religion

Data: Names of possession cults:

1. Kawin Mandinihoch:i
2. Bachoch:i
3. Bulafo
4. Tadono Woderano
5. Kakoch:i
6. Ach:e Kuch:och:i
7. Ganne Tateno
8. Bushafo
9. Gallito Bushafo

'The Sheka mediums were thought to be able to predict the future, possess extra-sensory perception and heal illness through special drugs, which they alone possessed.' (p. 178)

Date of event: 1998, 10/21

Date of journal entry: 22 Oct. 1998

Type of information: heard & seen

Location: shuwanna, kada, kangu

Keywords: war; churches; k'alicha; baboons

Data: I made a trip into the Shekicho area and I have noticed the following things:

- * In houses and churches there are prints of hands & circles on the wall.
- * In the forest we saw large ditches. These were made during the war against the Kaficho's. Their horses would get stuck in the mud of those ditches.
- * In churches there was a curtain in front of the 'liturgical centre'. Also pictures of Jesus and Mary in EECMY churches.
- * K'alicha's are without power nowadays, according to Christians.
- * You don't eat baboons!

Question(s): Pictures and curtain seems like an Orthodox influence, can that be?

Date of event: 1998, 12/31

Date of journal entry: 02 January 1999

Type of information: interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: food; beverages; planting; harvesting; hunting

Data:

Food: the Shekicho people prefer to eat 'quiche', i.e. enset bread. This is most often eaten

with green cabbage. Normally they eat this 3 times a day. On special days they can also eat injerra. Meat is eaten when it is available, normally only a few times a month. They eat sheep, goat, cow meat or chicken.

Beverages: people make mead (t'ej) and local beer (t'ela). They make it for their own use, only traders sell it. Alcoholism is not a big problem. Christians don't drink alcohol.

Planting and harvesting of the enset tree is men's work. The preparation of qocho is women's work.

Taboos: in the old days women were not allowed to eat chicken, eggs and cabbage. K'alicha's wouldn't eat sheep meat. Now only a few women of the older generation keep to this taboo. Men won't eat porridge or soup (still true for country side).

Hunting: people hunt for antelope (Amharic: doula), for wild pigs (Amharic: asama), for buffalo (Amharic: gosh) and for a kind of antelope (midaqqwa). They use spears, guns, rope and nets (traps) for hunting. Now there are only a few hunters left because there is new work. Hunting skills are not being taught anymore from father to son.

Date of event: 1999, 01/01

Date of journal entry: 06/01/99

Type of information: interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: food; wedding; funeral; social classes

Data:

**** Food preparation:** food is always prepared inside the house, in the kitchen. The preparation of food is women's work. Man can sometimes do some simple things, especially if they have no wife (e.g. making coffee or preparing maize). An exception to this is times of wedding and funeral: then the men prepared everything that has to do with meat. Women only make qocho at that time. Normal pattern of meals: at 9 a.m. breakfast with coffee and something to eat. At 5 p.m. a meal and a meal somewhere between 9 and 10 p.m. If people have a field to work on, they wake up at 6 a.m. Women spend 4 to 5 hours a day on making food (if there are no guest!). In times of harvest: men and women work together on the field. Normally men and women eat together. If there are guests, the men will eat with the guests, the women separate.

**** Energy sources:** To cook the Shekacho people use wood fires. In town also kerosene burners are used. To gather wood is men's work.

**** Maanjo:** The maanjo's are a despised social class within Shekacho society. They collect fire wood and make charcoal to sell. Some of their features:

- they live in houses in the forest;
- they have a darker skin colour;
- they eat the gureza monkey;
- they don't visit people and don't eat with other people;

- their language is closer to Kaffa.

If they become Christians, they have to stop eating gureza.

Question(s): What is the basis for forbidding Manjo's to eat gureza?

Date of event: 1999, 01/04

Date of journal entry: 22/01/99

Type of information: Interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: hygiene; illnesses; health

Data: ** **Bathing**: For bathing people go to the river or they do it inside the house, there is no special place for that. People that have been to school take a bath once every two weeks, they wash their hair every week though. Other people take a bath less frequent.

** **Sleep**: As an average, people sleep for 7 to 8 hours.

** **Toilet**: In towns: toilets available. Country side: before people always went to forest. Now in some villages there are toilets.

** **Illness**: Most prevalent illnesses: TB, colds headache & stomach problems. People know about AIDS but up to now it hardly occurs in Shekacho area. Figures from Tegbaru about TB: 1987 (EC): 37 cases in Maasha; 1989: 347 cases.

** **Traditional healers**: the 'client' gives money or cattle to the healer. Healer could give some sort of medicine or tell the patient to use soil or grass as a medicine. The Derg regime was (also) bad for the k'alicha's.

** **Healthcare**: Health education among Christians is difficult: Jesus gives health, they say, that is enough. Or also: it is not the church's job to give health education. There are several clinics in the Shekacho area. Vaccination program is fully accepted, 'everybody' joins this program.

** **Invalids** are kept in the home if there is no money for treatment. People fear them.

** **Mental diseases**: People see different causes for mental diseases: Satan (Christians), alcohol, 'family sickness', cursing (non-Christians).

Comment about TB: I (Jacob) saw a video about prostitution in AA where it was said that a lot of Aids patient get TB. So could it be that TB is increasing in Masha because of Aids?

Date of event: 1999, 01/05

Date of journal entry: 06/01/99

Type of information: reported

Location: Maasha

Keywords: clan; history

Data: Ato Yonas told me that there is one clan in the Shekacho area who claims to be descendants of the Jews. This clan is called something like 'basuse'.

Date of event: 1999, 01/11

Date of journal entry: 25/01/99

Type of information: interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: animals

Data:

**** Animals for work:** oxen (field), horses (cargo), mule (cargo), donkey (cargo). Animals are very important for the economy.

**** Domestic animals:** dog & cat.

**** Dangerous animals:** lion, leopard, fox, snake (list not complete).

**** Forbidden to eat animals:** monkey (gureza), fox & wild boar (list not complete).

Date of event: 1999, 01/15

Date of journal entry: 16/01/99

Type of information: interview

Location: Mettu, tea house

Keywords: churches

Data: Tegbaru told me in a conversation that most people in Maasha belong to the Orthodox church or to Mulu Wengel. Outside Maasha town you hardly find any of those. There is also a small group called 'Only Jesus Apostles'.

Question(s): More info on 'Only Jesus Apostles'.

Date of event: 1999, 01/15

Date of journal entry: 25/01/99

Type of information: interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: work; occupation; social classes

Data:

**** Traditional occupations:** agriculture; trade; animal husbandry; hunting/fishing.

**** Despised social classes:**

1. Maanjo: charcoal & hunting;

2. Maanno: potters & tanners;

3. K'edz:o: blacksmith (only marry within the group).

4. Ch'ap'aro: honey production (before: did not intermarry)

Date of event: 1999, 01/18

Date of journal entry: 12/02/99

Type of information: interview
Location: Mettu
Keywords: work; visit; free time; lazy

Data:

**** The daily routine of a farmer:** 6 am: wakes up, goes to field, works; 8-9 am: coffee & breakfast; after 9 am: to field again; 1 pm: back to house, field work is finished; after that: work around the house; 5-6 pm: gathers firewood, brings cattle inside; after that: stays in the house; 10-11 pm: eats dinner, goes to bed.

**** The daily routine of a woman:** 6 am: wakes up & starts to prepare breakfast; 8-9 am: eats breakfast together with husband; after that: works in/around the house; if there is market, she leaves for market after 10 am; 1 pm: lunch time; after that: work around the house; after 7 pm: start preparing dinner.

**** Visiting:** you visit when you have time.

**** Laziness:** a man is lazy if he doesn't work, if the house is not nice, if he hasn't got a field, no inset and if he wanders around. A woman is lazy if the food/coffee is not ready quickly, if there are no vegetables around the house and if she doesn't collect food(?).

Date of event: 1999, 02/09
Date of journal entry: 12/02/99
Type of information: interview
Location: Mettu
Keywords: transport

Data:

**** Means of transportation:** by foot, by horse, by mule, by taxi.

**** Reasons for travelling:** market, lek'so (funeral), wedding, family visit. Man travels more than woman: somebody (=woman) has to look after house, garden and family.

Date of event: 1999, 02/09
Date of journal entry: 09/02/99
Type of information: interview
Location: Mettu
Keywords: bee wax; cooking

Data: Beeswax (in Shekkacho: gippo) is used to make the injerra pan greasy. The also use it as candles for light.

Date of event: 1999, 02/09
Date of journal entry: 09/02/99
Type of information: interview
Location: Mettu
Keywords: dialect

Data: Tegbaru told me that in past times the people in 'Sheki Baddo' spoke a different dialect. Now there is no difference anymore though.

Question(s): When was this? Is it really one now?

Date of event: 1999, 06/14

Date of journal entry: 15/06/99

Type of information: Interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: economy

Data:

** **Main work** in Shekkacho area: work on fields. How do they earn money: by selling crops, cattle or honey. In towns: people can have a job. A farmer has an average yearly income of 1000 etb, a government worker of 3600 etb.

** **When is somebody rich?** If he has a lot of cows, enset, horses and/or crops. If he doesn't have children though, he is not seen as rich. Traders in towns are also rich. You get rich by working hard. It is clear for people who is rich. If someone presents a lot of food for breakfast, he must be rich.

** **What do people buy?** Coffee, clothes, household items, salt and berbare (pepper). Sometimes people interchange food on an individual basis.

** The **big market** is in Maasha. Other markets in the Shekkacho area are: Jinna, K'eedza, Ts'aago, Jappo, Jofo (= Kafacho area), Geech'a and Sheke Baddo.

** There is a system of '**communal labour**' in Shekacho culture, it is called 'dafo'. People work on each other's fields without payment. There is no formal 'co-operation' (= kind of business) though between farmers, only dafo.

Question(s): More info on 'dafo'.

Date of event: 1999, 06/16

Date of journal entry: 29/06/99

Type of information: Interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: needs; problems; health

Data:

** **Main problems** in Shekacho area according to Tegbaru:

1. There is no big source of economy in the area. There is of course a lot of Enset but that is not meant for sale.
2. Lack of education.
3. Lack of water (at some places).
4. Lack of electricity.

5. Lack of good medical services (no hospital, few clinics).

** Some comments about **solutions**: More work comes into the area (tea & coffee farms) but this provides work for a limited number of people. People want to change, that is not the problem, according to Tegbaru.

Question(s): What do other people think about the 'needs'?

Date of event: 1999, 06/17

Date of journal entry: 29/06/99

Type of information: Interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: fight; reconciliation; mediator; compensation

Data:

** What happens if there is a fight/**disagreement** between a father and a son in a **family**? A mediator (can be everybody) will come and reconcile the two parties. If a disagreement between a man and his wife is 'open', becomes public, they also need a mediator. Some people get a reputation of being a good mediator.

** If there is a **disagreement in a community or village**, the 'unit leader' will come to mediate. For bigger problems: (in this order) a. k'ebele chairman; b. k'ebele council; c. court (Maasha).

** Before the Italian occupation (before 1936), Geech'a was the important place, there was the 'awuraja' office. At that time **court** and **prison** were in Gore. The road Gore - Tepi was built in 1986 (Ethiopian Calendar).

** **Compensation**: If somebody has done something wrong to somebody else, a mediator can tell the wrongdoer to pay money or 'pay' sheep to the other party. The sheep is then slaughtered and the two parties will eat together with their families.

Date of event: 1999, 06/18

Date of journal entry: 29/06/99

Type of information: Interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: circumcision; traditional practices; health

Data:

** **Circumcision**: for all boys on the 8th day (Bible) or after 1 month up to 1 year. Lots of variation possible. If it isn't done, other people will get angry (why isn't he circumcised yet?). It can be done by somebody from the clinic (they come to the house for 10 birr) or by a traditional 'specialist' (3 to 5 birr). You also have to feed the specialist (t'ella, doro wot'). He uses a razor blade. There is no big party afterwards. In the old days (long, long ago): some men were circumcised when they were between 20 and 25 yrs. old. Women circumcision is not known in the Shekacho area.

**** Teeth:** If a child is sick or doesn't grow very well, the parents could decide to have the 2 'upper-corner-teeth' taken out by a 'specialist'.

**** Tonsils:** If a child is sick or doesn't eat or drink very well, a specialist could come to pull the tonsils out. Some people also know how to make medicine for this from plants/herbs.

Date of event: 1999, 06/18

Date of journal entry: 29/06/99

Type of information: Interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: education

Data:

**** Formal education:**

1. only government schools;
2. language of instruction is Amharic;
3. A lot of the teachers are Shekkacho;
4. Schools outside towns go up to 6th grade.
5. School in Geech'a goes up to 9th grade, only Maasha has high school.

**** Students from countryside go to Maasha if they can afford that. They stay with family or rent a room.**

**** Fees: (to be checked)**

- grade 1-9 = 10-15 birr for enrolment;
- grade 9-12 = 25 birr for enrolment.
- After 9th grade: uniform compulsory (Male: 80 birr; Female: 65).
- Evening school: 10 birr a month.

Date of event: 1999, 06/23

Date of journal entry: 29/06/99

Type of information: Interview

Location: Mettu

Keywords: smoking; tobacco; books; radio; tape recorders; ethnic groups

Data:

**** Smoking:** People like smoking very much. "We don't want to believe because we don't want to give up smoking", they say. Pipe is the most important feature/attribute of the k'alicha. Tabaco is homemade (tobacco plant grows in the area).

**** Neighbours:** Oromo, Majangir (& Sheko), Kafacho. In recent years no problems between these ethnic groups.

**** Books, Radio, Tape recorder:** There are not many books (Amharic) available but people are eager to read. Radio: some around, esp. in the towns. Tape recorder: few available. People like songs & music.

Date of event: 1999, 07/02
Date of journal entry: 16/07/99
Type of information: interview
Location: Mettu
Keywords: sickness; medicine; social classes; animals

Data:

** **Maanjo's** eat gureza but also porcupine.

** Some people (also non-Manjo's) eat **porcupine** as a medicine for cancer or leprosy. If they are not Maanjo's, they eat it secretly otherwise other people will say that they are like Maanjo's.

Date of event: 1999, 07/14
Date of journal entry: 16/07/99
Type of information: interview
Location: Mettu
Keywords: funeral; clan; Bulafo; k'alicha; religion

Data:

** About **funerals**: When 'big people' or k'alicha's die, the family could leave the body for 1 up to 3 months in the house in order to prepare the funeral. Reasons:

1. preparation for the lek'so takes time when 5000-6000 people could come;
2. they have to wait for family which lives far away. Lek'so is paid for by own property (we talk about rich people now) and by gifts from others. Tegbaru had heard about a recent funeral of a k'alicha where they had put 4 mattresses in the grave, at each side one. This is not common though.

** **Bulafo** (real name: azagè) is a famous k'alicha. He lives in Geech'a and is very rich. He has several cars and 3000 – 4000 pieces of cattle.

** After a k'alicha dies, his son has to wait for 40 days to see if the spirit of the k'alicha comes back. This spirit comes while dancing. Signs are: 1. speaking in tongues; 2. prophecy.

** The traditional **clan-leaders** still exist. They are chosen by the people (normally men from one family, by succession). This structure exists next to the government structure.

Question(s): What is the role of the clan-leader?

Date of event: 2000, 03/13
Date of journal entry: 14/03/2000
Type of information: interview
Location: Mettu
Keywords: Clan

Data: Tegbaru told me that there are over fifty (50) **clans** within the Shekacho people. Everybody knows to what clan he belongs.

Date of event: 2000/10/01

Date of journal entry: 2000/10/25

Location: Maasha

Keywords: blood ; traditional believes

Data:

I asked Tegbaru if he knew anything about the killing of children as a sacrifice. His answer was that he had no heard about that. He did not know about the Mettu story (see april/may 97). He had heard about 2 things concerning blood.

One is that they need one litre blood to inaugurate the engine of the Mill. The story goes that they bought 1 litre of blood from the Majangir area for a lot of money. Tegbaru said himself that this is more of a rumour.

Secondly, for the T'imqet holiday people make a sacrifice. It can be a black or red sheep or another animal, according to what the Kalich'a tells you. At that occasion they could also make a small cut in their child's finger (e.g.) to get some blood. That will bring prosperity.

Question(s): Is the Mettu story true?