

Gendered Grammar and Social Regulation in an Eighteenth-Century Albanian Ecclesiastical Curse Text

Andreas Dushi

University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the gendered grammar of social regulation in an eighteenth-century Albanian ecclesiastical curse text known as *Mallkimet që lëshon Ipeshkvi t'Enjten e Madhe* (The Curses that the Bishop Releases on Holy Thursday). The study approaches the text as a linguistic and socio-historical case in which normative authority is articulated through grammatical form, lexical classification, and the distribution of agency. After screening the nineteen curse formulae preserved in the sequence, the article concentrates on those in which women are explicitly named or in which male conduct is regulated through its relation to women, especially in matters of marriage, abduction, kinship, pregnancy, separation, and household status. By combining morphosyntactic close reading with language-and-gender analysis, the article shows that women are repeatedly positioned as objects of action, relational persons defined through kinship or marital status, and bearers of social consequence. Male or norm-bearing figures, by contrast, tend to occupy the position of agent, decision-maker, or addressee of sanction. The article argues that this distribution of grammatical and social roles reveals a gendered structure of normative language. As a single-text case study, the Albanian material contributes to historical sociolinguistics and language-and-gender research by showing how ritual formulae may encode social hierarchy through syntax, reference, and repetition.

Keywords: Albanian language; gendered grammar; ritual discourse; ecclesiastical curses; social regulation

INTRODUCTION

Historical normative texts offer important evidence for the social sciences because they preserve the linguistic forms through which social order, authority, responsibility, and sanction were made intelligible within particular communities. A prohibition or a curse must identify an actor, define an act, name a damaged order, and mark a consequence. These operations are linguistic as much as juridical or theological. When the same operations repeatedly assign agency, responsibility, status, and sanction along gendered lines, the text becomes a source for the historical study of gendered language.

This article examines an eighteenth-century Albanian ecclesiastical curse text known as *Mallkimet që lëshon Ipeshkvi t'Enjten e Madhe* (The Curses that the Bishop Releases on Holy Thursday). The text is preserved in the diocesan register AQSH, Fondi 132/a, Viti 1744, Dosja 1, referred to by Sinani as *Codex Antonio Babbi et Pauli Campessi*, and the curse sequence appears on folio 7 (Sinani, 2014, pp. 306, 309). Sinani gives the formulae used here in transliteration and transcription (pp. 316–318).

Existing scholarship has established the document's textual, chronological, and Albanological importance. The present article builds on that work by shifting attention from textual history to the socio-linguistic organization of gendered agency, reference, and status within the curse formulae.

The article adopts a focused approach, examining the curse formulae in which women are explicitly mentioned or in which male conduct is regulated through its relation to women. These include formulae concerning the marriage of female relatives or dependents outside the faith, the abduction of girls and widows, the keeping of two women, marriage with prohibited female relatives, marriage without the ecclesiastical crown, pregnancy and abortion, magical interference with reproduction or marital union, the transfer of engaged female kin after a

death, the separation of crowned women, and the keeping of an engaged girl or sister in a household without marriage. These formulae constitute the wider gender-relevant field of the text. The close reading, however, concentrates on the formulae in which the grammatical relation between subject, predicate, object, and gendered social category is most explicit. The article therefore examines the linguistic positioning of women within the curse formulae, attending to the ways in which they are represented as agents, patients, relational persons, social categories, and bearers of consequence.

The theoretical orientation comes from language-and-gender studies, especially the view that language participates in constructing and maintaining gendered social categories. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue that language should be treated as part of what constructs and maintains such categories (p. 34). They also describe the gender order as an allocation of rights, obligations, constraints, possibilities, power, and subordination (p. 34). This perspective is particularly appropriate for the Albanian material, where grammatical form and social regulation are inseparable: the formula must say who acts, upon whom action falls, and what authority is invoked.

The article argues that the curse text articulates a gendered grammar of social regulation. Within its formulae, the subject is frequently masculine, or formally unspecified yet contextually male, while women appear as wives, girls, widows, sisters, nieces, in-laws, or bearers of pregnancy. These female figures are positioned through categories of marriage, kinship, sexuality, household order, and reproductive consequence. The result is a specific grammatical distribution of agency, responsibility, and consequence within the ritual language of the curses.

Textual and Social Context

The title of the ecclesiastical text already signals its ritual and institutional function. The present article centers on the document's public linguistic form. The formulae are short, repetitive, and easily recognizable. Their recognizability is not merely stylistic: as Bourdieu's account of performative utterance suggests, ritual language becomes effective when the speaker, time, place, and institutional setting authorize the utterance as socially valid (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 8–9). They are designed to name social disorder in a way that can be understood by a community already familiar with the categories of household, kinship, marriage, religion, and local social expectation.

The Albanian wording of the formulae is particularly suitable for a socio-linguistic analysis because it moves from abstract sin to concrete social acts: burning houses, seizing church property, marrying women outside the faith, abducting girls and widows, keeping two women, taking prohibited female relatives as wives, failing to receive the crown from the parish priest, casting down pregnancy, inciting crowned spouses not to have children, separating crowned women, and keeping an engaged girl or sister in the house without marriage. Many of these actions concern the household and the reproduction of social order. The text therefore functions as a ritual catalogue of socially disruptive acts, and several of its most important formulae pass through the figure of the woman.

The social setting must also be read as northern and diocesan. Sheldija's manuscriptal treatment of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Shkodra and its suffragan dioceses provides a local ecclesiastical frame (Sheldija, 1957–1958, pp. 65–66). Sheldija also records that the curse was read to the people on Holy Thursday by the bishop and then successively in all the parishes of the Diocese of Shkodra, confirming the text's public and diocesan performative character (Sheldija, 1957–1958, p. 48). In a complementary historical register, Farlati and Coleti describe Franciscan religious service in the mountainous areas around Shkodra, including Gruda, Selca, Kelmend, Hoti, and Kastrati, and characterize those mountain populations as firm followers of the Christian faith (Farlati & Coleti, 2025, p. 204). This local ecclesiastical and mountainous context is important because the curse formulae do not operate as abstract doctrinal statements, but as public acts addressed to communities already organized around parish life, kinship, marriage, household order, and social reputation. Against this background, the following analysis turns to the linguistic form of the curse formulae and to the social categories through which women are named and positioned within them.

The analysis therefore moves from the historical and social setting of the text to the grammatical organization of its curse formulae. Its central question concerns the distribution of agency and status in those formulae where women are named directly or where male conduct is regulated through its relation to women. For this reason, attention falls on pronominal forms, verbal predicates, object positions, kinship terms, and labels of marital or household status. In this reading, words such as *grue*, *vārza*, *të vejat*, *kunatë*, *motër*, and *mbesë* function both as lexical designations and as markers of position within a social grammar. They make women visible in the text as wife, girl, widow, sister, niece, in-law, engaged girl, pregnant woman, or woman joined by the ecclesiastical marriage rite, and they show how gendered social relations are organized through the formulaic language of sanction.

The theoretical vocabulary of gendered language helps to clarify this point. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) state that language and gender are embedded in social practice and derive meaning from human activities (p. 5). The curse formulae are exactly such activities in written ritual form. They belong to a social practice of naming, classifying, and sanctioning. Cameron's (1985) warning is equally useful: a sexist or patriarchal social order cannot be explained by language alone, but linguistic resources are among the means through which that order is represented and reproduced (pp. 170–171). The article therefore reads the Albanian material as evidence of a gendered normative discourse, not as an isolated grammatical phenomenon.

METHODS

The study uses a qualitative textual method combining morphosyntactic close reading, lexical-semantic analysis, and socio-linguistic interpretation. This methodological focus is supported by Ahearn's account of language and agency, which stresses the importance of examining linguistic form when studying how agency is articulated in discourse (Ahearn, 2001, p. 109). The primary material consists of the Albanian curse formulae as presented in Sinani's transcription (Sinani, 2014, pp. 316–318). The selected passages are those that make visible the linguistic representation of women and the distribution of agency between male and female figures.

The source presents twenty sequential items in Sinani's transcription: nineteen curse formulae and a concluding *Kujtim* (reminder). The present article analyzes a gender-relevant subset and concentrates its close reading on curse formulae V, VI, VII, XIII, XIV, and XVI, because these formulae provide the clearest evidence for pronominal subject marking, female lexical categorization, object position, reproductive subjecthood, mixed-gender marking, and household or marital status. This selection is analytical rather than exhaustive. Because the corpus is limited to a single ecclesiastical curse sequence, the findings are presented as case-specific rather than as a general account of eighteenth-century Albanian gendered discourse. The wider gender-relevant field is slightly broader, but only these six formulae serve as the core evidentiary sample for detailed grammatical analysis. Formulae dealing primarily with church property, clerical jurisdiction, feasting, or other offenses serve as contextual background rather than primary evidence here, since gendered positioning is peripheral to their grammatical relation. Unless otherwise indicated, the English renderings are the author's own functional translations, intended to make grammatical relations visible rather than to reproduce the full historical style of the Albanian original. Albanian quotations follow Sinani's transcription; no silent normalization has been introduced beyond the English glossing required for analysis. Key terms are translated functionally. The term *grue* may mean “woman” or “wife” depending on context; *me kunor* refers to ecclesiastically crowned or ritually married status; *qesin barrën posht* is rendered as “abort the pregnancy” in order to make the regulated reproductive act clear; and kinship terms such as *kunatë*, *motër*, and *mbesë* are retained analytically because they are central to the text's social classification of women. Where an Albanian term carries both lexical and institutional meaning, the analysis comments on that ambiguity.

First, the curse formulae are examined for pronominal and indefinite subject forms: the third-person masculine singular *ai*, the third-person masculine plural *ata*, the third-person feminine plural *ato*, the paired masculine-feminine form *ata e ato*, and the indefinite form *kush* (he, they [masculine], they [feminine], they [masculine and feminine], and whoever). Second, the verbs and complements are identified, with attention to who performs the action and who receives or bears it. Third, the female referents are grouped according to lexical field: *grue*, *grā*, *vārza*, *të vejat*, *kunatë*, *e emtë*, *motër*, *mbesë* (woman/wife, women, girls, widows, sister-in-law, aunt, sister, niece), and related forms. Fourth, the analysis identifies recurrent patterns across the curse formulae in order to determine how gendered agency is produced through repetition. Throughout these steps, grammatical

subjecthood is distinguished from social agency, so that pronominal form, verb choice, object position, and referential category are read together rather than treated as isolated features.

RESULTS

The first result concerns the formulaic opening of the curses. The repeated structure *Kjoftë mallëkuem ai* or *Kjofshin mallëkuem ata* (Cursed be he / Cursed be they) places the sanction before the referent and then identifies the person or group through a relative clause. The basic movement is: curse formula, referent, relative clause, prohibited act. This inversion gives the formula a ritual rhythm and places the curse itself at the beginning of the utterance. The individual becomes socially visible through the act that follows.

In the gender-relevant formulae, the third-person singular referent is regularly encoded through the masculine form *ai* (he). This is especially clear in the formulae *Kjoftë mallëkuem ai qi të mbān dÿ grā* and *Kjoftë mallëkuem ai qi të marrën për grue të kunatën, a të emtën, o tjetër grue qi si ëp Ligjja jon* (Sinani, 2014, pp. 316, 318). The feminine plural appears in *Mallkimi XIII*, where the formula begins with *ato grā, o vārza* (those women or girls), while *Mallkimi XIV* explicitly uses *ata e ato* (they [masculine] and they [feminine]). The distribution is significant: the masculine singular carries the generic force of the ordinary offender, while the feminine appears where the text must mark the female body or female participation explicitly.

This pattern corresponds to a broader linguistic phenomenon. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) note that forms designating males may often be used generically, whereas forms designating females usually cannot (pp. 68–69). They also observe that the incorporation of gender into linguistic forms “calls up” social gender and may make gender difficult to ignore (p. 69). The Albanian curse text does exactly this. The third-person masculine singular form *ai* does not merely identify a male individual in an isolated instance. It functions as the unmarked figure of accountability, while female referents are marked when the social issue turns around women as wives, girls, widows, in-laws, or pregnant bodies.

The main examples are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Gender-Relevant Formulae and Grammatical Positioning in the Curse Text

Curse formula	Albanian formulation	English rendering	Gendered grammatical feature
Mallkimi V	Kjoftë mallëkuem kush të grabisin vāzrat, të vejat, o tjera grā, ende kush bâhet sebet e ndihm.	Cursed be whoever abducts girls, widows, or other women, and whoever becomes the cause or helps.	Indefinite actor; differentiated female objects.
Mallkimi VI	Kjoftë mallëkuem ai qi të mbān dÿ grā.	Cursed be he who keeps two women.	Masculine singular subject; women as object of keeping.
Mallkimi VII	Kjoftë mallëkuem ai qi të marrën për grue të kunatën, a të emtën, o tjetër grue qi si ëp Ligjja jon.	Cursed be he who takes as wife his sister-in-law, his aunt, or another woman whom our law does not give.	Masculine taker; women defined by prohibited relation.
Mallkimi XIII	Kjofshin mallëkuem ato grā, o vārza, qi qesin barrën posht, ende ata qi këshillofshin o ndihmofshin më këtë punë.	Cursed be those women or girls who abort the pregnancy, and those who counsel or help in this matter.	Feminine plural subject appears where female body is central.
Mallkimi XIV	Kjofshin mallëkuem ata e ato qi bajn mëngjī e nxisin njerzit me kunor	Cursed be those men and women who practice magic and incite crowned people either not to	Explicit masculine-feminine coordination; reproduction and

	o për me mos bām fēmij, o për me i dām, ende ata përsëri, e ato, qi qesin short.	have children or to separate, and again those men and women who cast lots.	marital union regulated through mixed-gender agency.
Mallkimi XVI	Kjofshin mallëkuem ata që dajnë grāt me kunor e marrën tjetër; kioft mallëkuem ai qi mbān djalë e vārzë o motrën të fejueme e pa martesë në shtëpi bashkë.	Cursed be those who separate crowned women and take another; cursed be he who keeps a boy and an engaged girl or sister unmarried together in the house.	Plural and singular accountable actors; crowned women as object; another woman as replacement; household authority over unmarried status.

Note. Albanian examples are from Sinani (2014, pp. 316–318).

The table indicates an uneven distribution of gender. Female forms appear frequently, but their grammatical and semantic positions are not symmetrical with the masculine subject of sanction. Women are referred to as the objects of taking, keeping, abducting, giving, separating, or classifying; men or mixed groups appear as the actors whose conduct triggers public curse.

The second result concerns the formulae where women are objects of male action. In *Mallkimi VI*, the subject is the third-person masculine singular *ai*, followed by the verb phrase *të mbān dī grā*: the accountable figure is grammatically masculine, while the two women are numerically identified and placed as the object of keeping. The formula uses them as the object around which the man’s offense becomes legible, while their will, status, or action remains outside the statement. This is a compact example of social regulation through gendered syntax: the male actor is cursed, but the female referent is the regulated field.

Mallkimi VII is even more revealing. The formula *Kjoftë mallëkuem ai qi të marrën për grue të kunatën, a të emtën, o tjetër grue qi si ëp Ligjja jon* (Cursed be he who takes as wife his sister-in-law, his aunt, or another woman whom our law does not give) constructs the man as the one who “takes as wife,” while the woman is defined through prohibited relation: sister-in-law, aunt, or another woman not permitted by law. The phrase *për grue* (as wife) indicates a change of marital status, while the woman does not act within the formula. She is the one placed into the status of *grue* (wife) by male action and legal limitation. Within the normative vocabulary of the formula, law appears as the authority that permits or withholds the woman in relation to the male act of taking.

The third result concerns the classification of women by relational status. *Mallkimi V* specifies more than a general category of “women.” It lists *vārza, të vejat, o tjera grā* (girls/daughters, widows, or other women). The referent is internally categorized, while the agent appears as *kush* (whoever), an indefinite form. The effect is asymmetrical. The actor is grammatically open and socially general, while the affected group is carefully differentiated by female status. This contrast matters because categorization is a form of social mapping. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet stress that the power to dictate categories for society is a form of power (2003, p. 7), and that language labels categories and helps them enter shared social life (2003, p. 228). In the curse formula, the female field is mapped according to social vulnerability and relational identity.

The fourth result concerns abduction and the distribution of consequence. In *Mallkimi V*, the curse falls upon whoever abducts girls, widows, or other women, and also upon whoever becomes the cause or gives help. The curse formula is agentive: it concentrates on the one who abducts and on those who assist. The female referents are the affected objects.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s discussion of agency helps clarify this point. They argue that verbal meanings and word order are crucial cues for assigning causal roles to participants (2003, p. 208). They also note that with verbs such as marry, where mutuality is possible, the subject may still be assigned the leading and most active role (2003, p. 208). This observation applies closely to the Albanian material. The formula “he takes as wife” constructs a marriage-related act from the perspective of the male subject. Even where the relation is socially mutual in theory, the grammar makes one side active and the other side object-like.

The fifth result concerns the female body as a site of sanction. *Mallkimi XIII* curses *ato grā*, o *vārza*, qī *qesin barrën posht* (those women or girls who abort the pregnancy) together with those who advise or assist in the act. This is the only central case in the selected group where the feminine plural appears as the direct grammatical subject of the curse. Yet this grammatical position is tied specifically to pregnancy, abortion, and reproductive order. Women and girls become explicit subjects because the sanctioned act takes place in and through the female body. The expression *qesin barrën posht* gives the act a concrete bodily formulation, while the extension of the curse to those who counsel or assist places abortion within a wider field of shared moral and social responsibility.

Mallkimi XIV is especially important because it explicitly coordinates masculine and feminine plural reference through *ata e ato*. The formula curses those who practice magic and incite crowned people either not to have children or to separate, and then extends the sanction to those who cast lots. This is the clearest case in the selected sample where the text marks accountability beyond a masculine or indefinite form. Instead, it marks both genders as possible participants in a socially disruptive practice. Yet the regulated field remains marriage and reproduction: the action is condemned because it interferes with crowned union, fertility, and household continuity. The formula therefore confirms that the text can mark mixed-gender agency when the offense is imagined as shared, while elsewhere it tends to place male or default-masculine figures in the ordinary position of accountable actor.

The sixth result concerns separation and household status. *Mallkimi XVI* brings together separation, replacement, and household control. In the first clause, the plural actor separates *grāt me kunor* and takes another woman. The two verbs, *dajnë* (divorce) and *marrën* (take), create a sequence of action governed by the same accountable subject: first the existing crowned union is broken, then another woman is taken. The women with the crown are direct objects of separation, while *tjeter* reduces the second woman to a replacement category. In the second clause, the singular masculine form *ai* returns with the verb *mbān*, which does not name a momentary act but a maintained household condition. The figures kept in the house are grammatically dependent on the male holder of household authority. The female referent is more heavily marked than the male one: she appears as *vārzë* or *motrën të fejueme e pa martesë*, that is, as a girl or sister whose status is defined by engagement and the absence of marriage. The formula therefore links gendered grammar to household administration: the man keeps, while the female figure bears the social risk of unresolved marital status.

The results can therefore be summarized in three propositions. First, the curse text regularly places the third-person masculine singular, or a contextually male indefinite form, in the position of the accountable subject. Second, women are repeatedly specified by relational and bodily status: wife, girl, widow, sister, niece, sister-in-law, engaged girl, pregnant woman. Third, the repetition of these forms across different curse formulae turns grammatical distribution into a stable ritual pattern. The asymmetry is not only thematic; it is grammatical.

DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that the gendered structure of the curse text cannot be reduced to the number of times women are mentioned. In fact, women are very visible in the selected formulae. The issue is the kind of visibility they receive. The curse text makes women visible as objects, status-bearers, kinship positions, bodies, and consequences. It rarely makes them visible as autonomous agents. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet propose that one should ask what kinds of linguistic practices support particular gender ideologies and norms (2003, p. 5). In the Albanian text, the relevant practices are formulaic repetition, masculine pronominal framing, object position, relational naming, and the repeated pairing of female reference with male action.

The concept of “genderized discourse” is useful here. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet define discourse as genderized when messages about gender categorizations are superimposed on its basic content, and they identify gendered pronouns, grammatical gender agreement, affixes, and gender-marked lexical items as resources that can perform this operation (2003, p. 254). The Albanian curse formulae genderize social regulation by making the moral issue pass through male and female positions. The content may be marriage, abduction, pregnancy, household disorder, or separation; the form repeatedly asks who acts and who is acted upon.

This reading also explains why the article uses the term “grammar” in a broad but still linguistic sense. Grammar here includes the morphosyntactic relation between subject, predicate, object, and complement. It also includes

the recurring discourse grammar of the formula: curse, referent, relative clause, forbidden act. In this structure, the referent is not a neutral person. The referent is gendered through pronominal and indefinite marking: the third-person masculine singular *ai*, the third-person masculine plural *ata*, the third-person feminine plural *ato*, the paired masculine-feminine form *ata e ato*, the indefinite *kush*, and a series of female lexical categories. The formula itself therefore functions as a grammar of normativity.

Cameron's caution is important. Language participates in patriarchy and may help maintain male power, but social inequality cannot be explained by language alone (Cameron, 1985, pp. 3, 170–171). The Albanian material confirms this: the curse formulae ritualized, condensed, and publicly repeated a hierarchy already recognizable within local social life. Their importance lies in the fact that they show how this hierarchy was made pronounceable in a solemn register. The formula performed classification without extended argument.

Bourdieu's treatment of performative utterances is especially relevant here, since he places curses alongside blessings, orders, wishes, and insults as linguistic acts whose force depends on social conditions of authorization (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 42). The solemnity of the curse formulae should therefore be linked to institutional authorization: authority comes to language from outside, while language represents and symbolizes that authority rather than producing it by itself (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 109).

The internal distribution of the curse formulae shows that female grammatical subjecthood appears only in specific semantic environments. Women become explicit subjects in relation to abortion and reproductive transgression, whereas in formulae concerning marriage, kinship, abduction, and household order they are more often objects or relational categories. This internal contrast is central to the article's argument.

The article's findings also contribute to the history of Albanian social language. The curse text functions as a religious document and as an archive of social syntax, preserving ways of saying responsibility, kinship, marriage, sexual order, and household authority. In such texts, the difference between linguistic and social analysis becomes artificial. The social order appears precisely in the linguistic order.

The most important implication concerns the distinction between grammatical subject and social agency. Ahearn treats this distinction as essential because grammatical Agent and social agency may overlap, but their relation must be determined within each specific context (Ahearn, 2001, p. 123). A female referent can become the grammatical subject, as in the passage concerning women and girls who abort. Yet this does not automatically mean that the text gives women full agency. The subject position is socially meaningful only when read with the verb, the surrounding complements, the act being named, and the expected consequence. Similarly, the abducted girl or widow becomes central within the curse formula not as an autonomous agent, but as the affected person through whom the sanctioned act becomes socially legible. This is why the analysis must move beyond counting masculine and feminine forms. It must ask how grammatical positions interact with social roles.

A second implication concerns the masculine generic. The recurrence of the third-person masculine singular form *ai* has interpretive significance beyond a technical feature of historical Albanian. The text also employs alternative forms of subject marking: the indefinite form *kush*, the third-person feminine plural *ato*, and the paired masculine-feminine plural form *ata e ato*. The availability of these alternatives makes the recurrence of the third-person masculine singular more meaningful. The masculine subject is the ordinary form of accountability; the feminine form appears when the female referent must be marked as such. This pattern parallels the general observation that male-designating forms can function generically while female-designating forms are less able to do so (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, pp. 68–69).

A third implication concerns the social function of ritual language. The curse formula operates as more than a list. Its repetition creates recognizability. The community hears the same structure applied to different acts and learns how those acts are grouped under a shared moral order. Through repetition, grammatical distribution becomes social distribution: those who act, those who are acted upon, those who are protected, and those who are sanctioned. This is the point at which ritual discourse becomes social regulation.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study is intentionally limited to one ecclesiastical curse text and to the gender-relevant formulae within it. This limitation defines the scope of the article: the analysis identifies a pattern in a particular ritual document, but it does not claim that the same distribution of agency, reference, and consequence characterizes every eighteenth-century Albanian text. Future studies should therefore expand the corpus by examining additional ecclesiastical, legal, literary, or folk texts from the same historical period. A broader comparative corpus would make it possible to determine whether similar gendered linguistic patterns are consistently present across other genres or whether they are specific to this curse sequence and its diocesan ritual setting.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the gendered grammar of social regulation in an eighteenth-century Albanian ecclesiastical curse text. The analysis has shown that the relevant formulae repeatedly organize social disorder through a gendered distribution of grammatical and social roles. Male figures tend to occupy the position of agent, keeper, taker, releaser, decision-maker, or accountable offender. Female figures tend to appear as wives, girls, widows, sisters, nieces, in-laws, pregnant bodies, or bearers of marital and household status.

The central finding is that women are highly visible within the normative language of the text, but their visibility is asymmetrical. They appear as the field upon which male action, ritual sanction, and kinship regulation are grammatically organized. The curse text condenses this relation into formulaic religious language, where ritual sanction and social classification are joined in a single grammatical structure. The curse formulae preserve a social grammar in which agency and consequence are unevenly distributed.

The study also shows the value of combining linguistic and social-scientific approaches. A combined reading brings into view the importance of pronouns, relative clauses, verb choice, and object position, while also preserving the social force of marriage, kinship, household authority, and bodily sanction. Read together, the two levels show how this eighteenth-century Albanian ecclesiastical curse text made gender hierarchy intelligible through language.

The Albanian case therefore contributes to broader research on language and gender by demonstrating how a historical ritual text can encode social hierarchy through syntax and reference. It also contributes to Albanian studies by treating the curse text as a source for the history of social language, rather than only as a religious document. The gendered grammar identified here is a grammar of social order: it identifies who acts, who is marked, who is judged, and who carries the consequence.

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