

Article

Dervish Hatixhe's Veneration in Contemporary Albania: Visual Representations, Devotional Practices and Sensory Experiences

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Abstract: This article explores the veneration of Hatixhe, an 18th-century Sufi saint from Tirana, Albania, whose legacy continues to resonate across religious and cultural boundaries. Despite limited historical records, Hatixhe's sainthood is venerated through hagiographic narratives that portray her as a compassionate healer, spiritual protector, and symbol of resilience. This study investigates the visual, ritual, and sensory dimensions of her shrine, which has become one of the focal points for interfaith devotion in post-socialist Albania. Embodied rituals—such as touching her tomb and lighting candles—allow devotees to connect with her *shenjtëri* ("sainthood"). Through these acts, Hatixhe's legacy as a *grua e shenjt* ("holy woman") or *grua e mirë* ("good woman") is anchored in both religious and cultural contexts, as her *shenjtëri* integrates local and national values, partly transcending Islamic frameworks. Hatixhe's *teqe*, preserved through the efforts of her female heirs during the communist era, serves as a unique testament to a female lineage in Albanian Sufism. By examining the spatial, material, and symbolic aspects of her veneration, this study underscores the significance of Hatixhe's *shenjtëri* as a site of blessing and communal solidarity for women, enriching the understanding of their roles in Albanian spiritual and social life.

Keywords: Sufism; Albania; female mysticism; woman dervishes; visual culture; Dervish Hatixhe



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1. Introduction

Who was Dervish Hatixhe? Attempting to answer this question using historical records alone is challenging due to the limited, inconsistent, and fragmented documentation of her life. However, the hagiographic elements in her biographical accounts—despite their mythologized nature—are instrumental in constructing a symbolic and visually rich narrative of her personhood. This paper seeks to compile both historical and hagiographic records to explore how Hatixhe's legacy continues to shape the collective and individual practices of her devotees, particularly within urban Tirana. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of how devotion to Hatixhe has evolved in the post-socialist era, influenced by a complex interplay of visual representations and sensory experiences. The latter are understood here as embodied practices that use physical actions—such as touch, posture, and movement—to access spiritual meanings. It refers to expressive activities that make use of the body to attain spiritual meanings and understandings (e.g., physical senses, postures, gestures, and motions).

This study posits that Hatixhe's sainthood cannot be fully understood without examining how practices and visual culture coalesce to form a coherent religious experience. Her veneration is an outcome of dynamic, dialectical interactions between narratives shaped by authoritative figures—such as her heirs—and the lived practices of her devotees. These

discourses do not passively inform worshipers; instead, they are reinterpreted and embodied in various forms of devotional acts that engage both sight and the senses. This implies, therefore, that these practices are references to a specific concrete social context and are anchored in certain materiality that is perceived, experienced, and incorporated by the faithful in a distinct and organized manner (Promey 2014; McGuire 2016). These experiences are contextually anchored in the material elements of the shrine, providing devotees with tangible markers of Hatixhe's sainthood. Devotees' physical interactions with these elements—such as lighting candles and touching her tomb—create sensory channels that facilitate spiritual connection.

Following the approaches of this special issue, this paper focuses mostly on the visual representations of this materiality—thus understood as visual culture—as a set of socially shared cultural meanings (Fotouhi and Zeiny 2017). The cognitive perception of the aesthetic configurations of an artifact and an image constitutes a fundamental component of religious belief as it engenders sensory and extrasensory experiences that validate the religious experience (Morgan 2005). However, rather than focusing on the individual level, this paper turns its attention more to a multispatial¹ and multitemporal approach to analyze the case of Hatixhe's *teqe* (from Turkish *tekke*, or Sufi lodge)² in contemporary Albania. The shrine of Hatixhe operates across multiple scales (Kong 2001): local (micro), regional or religious community-focused (middle-middle), and national or even transnational (macro). At the micro level, the shrine becomes a focal point for intimate, sensory-rich devotional acts, where worshipers engage physically and emotionally with Hatixhe. The middle-middle level includes discourses and practices shaped by Sufi and Islamic authorities, as well as by the saint's descendants, who actively curate her spiritual legacy. At the macro level, Hatixhe's veneration connects to broader sociopolitical narratives, such as the Albanian ethos of "religious tolerance" (*tolerance fetare*)³, framing her as part of a national identity that transcends religious divides.

By employing a multispatial methodology, this paper aims to analyze how Hatixhe's veneration emerges through devotional practices and visual symbolism. It privileges the local, sensory-rich experiences within the saint's *teqe*, where devotees encounter the sacred through tactile and visual engagement, connecting the physical space of the shrine with an imagined spiritual legacy. In addition to spatial dimensions, this study explores how historical narratives and temporally layered hagiographies validate and shape contemporary devotional practices.⁴ These stories—often shared orally or through symbolic acts—frame Hatixhe's life and deeds within a continuum that links the past to the present, reinforcing her relevance to contemporary devotees. Examples include accounts of her charitable work, her fraught relationship with her husband, and the heroic efforts of her heirs to protect her tomb during the communist era. These narratives serve to form a sensory heritage that worshipers activate and experience as they interact with the shrine. Visitors often engage with these stories selectively or creatively, creating a multiplicity of interpretations. Finally, this article seeks to document and analyze how these diverse perceptions, which pervade the shrine and the narratives about Hatixhe's life, forge her sainthood in Albanian *shenjtëri*. As we shall see, in the Albanian context, *shenjtëri* takes on characteristics that partially differ from Muslim sainthood, owing to its religious transversality and marked anchoring to the Albanian cultural tradition.

Shenjtëri appears also to be an organic element of the Albanian Sufi tradition, as much as it is rooted in the broader Balkan–Ottoman context. From the Ottoman era to the interwar period in the newly independent Albania, Sufism played a significant role in shaping religious mosaic. It was an active component of daily Muslim life while also serving as a vehicle for social and political mobilization, for instance, the involvement of some Bektashi figures in the independence movement (Clayer 2007). This role, however,

was dramatically diminished, if not entirely, during the communist era, when state atheism was imposed, and all forms of religion were banned in 1967. In the post-communist period, Sufi orders reemerged as part of a broader religious revival across the country. However, their role in this new era has shifted significantly. As we shall explore, many Sufi orders, including the Kadiriyya to which Hatixhe belongs, have experienced marginalization and a redefinition of their place in society. The notable exception is the Bektashiyya, which has managed to achieve an almost hegemonic status in the historical and cultural representation of Albanian Sufism (Bria 2019).

This paper is organized into three main sections: the mystical and spiritual genealogy of Hatixhe, her narrative as a healer and protector of Tirana, and the gendered dimensions of her hagiography and the perceptions of her followers. This study draws upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2017 and 2024, which includes approximately twenty-five interviews with devotees and community members. The interviews were conducted in Albanian; the interviewees were mainly approached at the end of the pilgrims' visits to the tomb of Dervish Hatixhe. Four interviews were scheduled and conducted elsewhere. Most of the interviewees, 21 out of 25, were women. There was no major resistance from the interviewees, apart from the questions concerning gender-based violence. For the interviewees, receiving such questions from a young Albanian-speaking male Italian scholar aroused curiosity and interest sometimes, but other times, distrust (especially for the questions on gender). Primary hagiographic content is sourced from digital media, including interviews with Hatixhe's descendants, while limited historiographic accounts, primarily those of Nathalie Clayer (2003), provide additional context. This approach emphasizes the significance of the material and sensory dimensions of Hatixhe's veneration, reframing her *shenjtëri* not only as a religious or historical construct but as an embodied, visual, and sensory experience that continues to resonate with the urban context of Tirana.

2. Which Legacy for Hatixhe?

Determining the historical identity of Hatixhe presents challenges, as the records documenting her life are limited and marked by hagiographic embellishments. Despite this, her symbolic and visual legacy offers rich insights into her role in Albanian religious culture. According to Clayer (2000), Hatixhe was a woman who lived in Tirana from 1716 (or 1726) to 1798. She was referred to as "Dervish" (from Persian *darvīsh*, "poor"), a term that is often used in the Albanian context (but also elsewhere) to describe those who have completed a particular level of the Sufi path or more simply, those who are members of a Sufi order.⁵ Hatixhe was initiated into the Kadiri path by her grandfather, the Sufi poet Haxhi Islam (d. 1712?). Both belonged to the Horasani family⁶, which contributed greatly to the spread of the Sufi order of the Kadiriyya among Albanians, particularly in Tirana. The Kadiriyya were mostly present in the Dibra area and central Albania at this time, especially in Tirana. One of the four genealogical lines of the order in Tirana, the Horasani family, was active in the political, cultural, economic, and religious spheres of the city (Clayer 2000). Hatixhe is particularly remembered by the local people for helping the sick during the bubonic plague epidemic that struck the area from 1738 to 1740. According to Clayer (2000), she founded a *teqe* that directed as *sheh* (also *shehj*, Arabic *shaykh*)⁷. After her death, she was buried in her *teqe*, where a *tyrbe* (Turkish *türbe*, or tomb) was also created. The *tyrbe*, where her kinswomen were later also buried, formed a complex belonging to the Kadiri order and became a center of pilgrimage in the city of Tirana. With the establishment of Tirana as the capital of the newly born Albanian nation in 1920, Hatixhe's *teqe* turned into one of the country's most visited religious sites, eventually being influenced by the social and urban reforms implemented by the Fascist rule (1939 to 1943). During the interwar period, an intense political and associational activity by some Kadiri *sheh*, such as Hajredin

(d. 1940) in Zërqan (central Albania), is to be noted, although these activities do not concern the center of Tirana (Clayer 2003).

The Hatixhe *teqe* was closed like other religious places during the communist era when the regime led by Enver Hoxha (r. 1944 to 1985) pursued a progressive antireligious policy that culminated in 1967 when all religious groups were banned by decree (Karataş 2020). This decree was preceded by other measures aimed at reducing the status of religion in Albanian society, as well as harsh antireligious propaganda. This propaganda trivialized religion as an obstacle to the material and cultural progress of the Albanian people and the emancipation of women. This led to the promotion of the secular national cult, which was widespread among the population, and the dictator's worship (Tönnes 1982). As a result, Albanian material culture incorporated all of the nation's longstanding emblems of industrial, urban, and cultural advancement.

Most religious authorities were arrested, killed, or exiled; many religious objects and books were confiscated or destroyed (Doan 2023). Many religious buildings were destroyed, closed, or converted to civilian use, including Hatixhe's *teqe*, which was also affected by the regime's antireligious measures. There is currently no historical information available that explains what happened with Hatixhe's tomb throughout those years. On the history of the Hatixhe's *teqe* in communist times, accounts and testimonies exist, mainly from Hatixhe's heirs, at that time Sultana (d. 1984) and her daughter-in-law Rukija (d. 2023). According to them, miraculous events and their interventions prevented the *teqe* from being ruined. In an interview, Rukija stated that in the 1970s, the communist government planned to erect a residential building in place of the *teqe* (Sciarra 1996, pp. 191–94). For one night, the engineer in charge of the construction dreamt of Hatixhe, who threatened terrible disgrace to his children if he carried out the project. Frightened by the dream, the engineer went to talk to Rukija who assured him of the sanctity of the site, confirming his fears. Thus, the engineer strove to change the palace project to be built without using the area of the *teqe*. For this reason, the palace in front of the *teqe* is L-shaped, unlike the others built in the area (ibidem).

According to another account, the government was going to remove the tomb of Hatixhe and rebury her in the cemetery of Tirana, but to prevent the removal and protect the tomb, Hatixhe's heirs at the time covered the tomb with a concrete slab and declared that they had closed the tomb in accordance with the government's requests (Teqja e Dervish Hatixhese 2025). The government inspection confirmed that the tomb was closed, so they moved their offices there. Nevertheless, Sultana and Rukija secretly allowed believers and pilgrims to visit Hatixhe's tomb. Thus, the tomb could remain open during the communist years so that people could find their inner peace. In such a way, Sultana and Rukija rendered a great service to the community by offering comfort and spirituality, regardless of the sanctions that the regime could impose on them. They struggled to ensure that Hatixhe could represent a "light during the dark years of communism". (Ibidem)

These narratives bear significant weight in the story and hagiographic account of Hatixhe as an opponent of the tyranny of the communist regime. The same accounts contribute to legitimizing the role of the heirs as defenders of the saint's *teqe*, and, in many ways, as defenders of Albanians' religiosity.

"Years ago, in that not-so-secret alley on *Rruga Barrikadave* (Barricade Street), people would plan days in advance before entering. This was not because they were not convinced of what they were doing, but because the eyes of the world were always ready to expose them [...] The visitors knew that if they entered the house, they would put themselves in danger, yet this did not stop them from going deep into the religious rituals of the Bektashi [...] Once, after the communist regime closed this mosque, as it did all other religious institutions, the room could only be opened by the owners of the house. According to

Rukija, “how hard I tried to preserve and inherit these religious rites and beliefs. I put myself in danger many times. I was on the verge of being deported, but I don’t know how; maybe something at the last moment they could not take me. I always explained it with the strength of faith and the kindness of my ancestors.” (Jaupaj 2015).

This news item in an Albanian newspaper reports the resilience of the people of Tirana and, especially, the guardians of the Hatixhe *teqe* in fighting at the risk of their own lives for the sake of the saint and the wellbeing of the population. Hatixhe’s tomb was concealed with a concrete slab, officially closed in compliance with the government’s demands while secretly remaining accessible to worshippers. Rukija and Sultana’s commitment allowed for clandestine visits, providing a hidden space for religious solace during a period when spiritual practices were otherwise restricted. These acts of preservation, seen through the lens of visual culture, signify not only a defiance of secular oppression but also a reassertion of Hatixhe’s legacy. Her tomb, physically preserved but visually altered, continued to symbolize an enduring sanctity that transcended political repression.

This made the *teqe*, which was restored on 26 October 1992 (Clayer 2000, pp. 223–28) using money donated by the devout, a tangible and visually significant representation of renewed religious and cultural freedom. The ceremony was indeed attended by the head of the Islamic Community of Albania, Hafiz Sabri Koçi (d. 2004), himself belonging to another *tarikât*, the Tijaniyya, and the head of the Halveti Community of Tirana, Sheh Muamer Pazari (d. 2003).

Thus, Hatixhe’s *teqe*, concealed under layers of historical suppression and symbolic misrepresentation, serves as a testament to the endurance of Albanian religious identity (Clayer 2003). Under communism, the shrine became a covert site of resistance, where believers would risk exposure to honor Hatixhe. Accounts of miraculous protection, such as the engineer’s dream, serve as hagiographic tools that differentiate her benevolence from the perceived blasphemy of communist secularism. These narratives gained renewed significance following the fall of communism in 1991, when religious practices, repressed for decades, resurfaced as emblems of democracy and freedom.⁸ This revival of religious heritage paralleled a broader political distancing from the communist past, positioning figures like Hatixhe as icons of resilience and Albanian religiosity. In this way, Hatixhe’s visual legacy became intertwined with national identity, framing her as a guardian of both spiritual tradition and cultural liberation.

However, in the excerpt from the newspaper story mentioned above, another quite important piece of data comes to light: Hatixhe is considered a Bektashi. The saint belonged to the Kadiri order, as Clayer illustrates, although many media stories and travel guides on Hatixhe tend to overlook the fact that she was a member of the Kadiriyya. A Tirana tourist guide begins with “Dedicated to the female Bektashi saint Hatixhe” (Your Pocket 2022) while a French website reports that “like many people in Tirana and central Albania in general, Hatixhe is a Bektashi”. (Aza 2018) Another travel guide reports “in a small lane in the *rruga* (“street”) *Dervish Hatixhe* you can find the Bektashi *teqe* of Hatixhe” (Travel App 2020). The official website of Hatixhe, which is run by her current heirs, makes no reference whatsoever to the Kadiriyya, let alone the Bektashiyya.

Anyway, the symbolic misattribution of Hatixhe to the Bektashi order highlights a significant aspect of her legacy within Albanian religious culture. This conflation underscores the Bektashi order’s ability to effectively hold a monopoly on the portrayal of Islamic mystical heritage in post-communist Albania. After being banned and persecuted by the Ottoman Empire in 1826, many members of the Bektashiyya migrated to Southeast Europe, where they became involved in and occasionally supported the Albanian independence and nationalist movement (Clayer 2007). Following the establishment of the Albanian state, they positioned themselves as a unique religious path distinct from both Islam and Chris-

tianity, asserting their religious, organizational, and identity-based distinctiveness during the interwar period. In the post-communist era, the Bektashis reinforced this uniqueness by reestablishing themselves as an autonomous religious community. Today, Bektashis aim to portray themselves as representatives of a distinctive faith (see Bektashism), blending Shiism, Sufi heritage, freedom, tolerance, and progressivism, aiming to synthesize East and West as well as tradition and modernity (Clayer 2012). The Bektashi community also restored sacred pilgrimage sites, such as those at Mount Tomor. In contrast, other Sufi groups like the Rifaiyya, Kadiriyya, and Halvetiyya, despite enduring similar communist persecution, have not achieved the same level of recognition and remain marginalized (Bria 2019). This has resulted in the form of a “visual monopoly”, as the Bektashi order symbolically and visually aims to represent all Albanian Sufism. At the same time, the doctrinal and ritual differences between the Bektashism and other Sufi orders appear relatively subtle. Practices and beliefs like the veneration of the Twelve Imams, the semi-deification of Ali, and the observance of fasting during the first ten days of Muharram are shared by the Bektashis and other Sufi orders. These practices are an expression of devotion to the Prophet’s family (Ahl al-Bayt), a piety that is shared among various religious communities in the Anatolian-Balkan region without necessarily signifying adherence to Shiism. Sufi orders such as the Bektashiyya and Kadiriyya, which follow the Hanafi Sunni school, also observe rituals like the fasting of Muharrem, commonly referred to as *matem* (mourning), to honor the martyrdom of Husain at Karbala (Kuehn 2015, 2019, 2023). This common ground facilitates a notable overlap between the Bektashi and the Kadiri path.

The misrepresentation of Hatixhe’s spiritual lineage demonstrates how visual culture can shape religious memory. The Bektashi’s ability to reestablish sacred sites and attract large-scale pilgrimages, such as the one on Mount Tomorr (Clayer 2007), has led to an assumption that all Sufi practices in Albania are inherently Bektashi, despite historical evidence to the contrary. This conflation reflects the visual and cultural dominance of the Bektashi order, which has effectively subsumed the identities of other Sufi traditions within Albania’s religious landscape. The interwoven narratives of Hatixhe’s life and the visual dominance of the Bektashi tradition reflect a complex religious landscape in Albania. Her legacy is both a story of individual women and a cultural phenomenon, resiliently preserving spiritual heritage through visual misinterpretation and sensory devotion.

3. Devotion, Sainthood and Tolerance

The shrine of Hatixhe, modestly located on *rruga Barrikadeve* (“Barrikade street”) in Tirana, bears few external markers. (Figure 1). Its unassuming facade, marked only by a small plaque (Figure 2), positions it as an ordinary home in a neighborhood, underscoring its openness and accessibility. Inside, the spatial arrangement accommodates a range of sensory and spiritual engagements. The entry room on the right, where visitors can light candles to make wishes or request blessings, emphasizes the tactile and visual elements that frame visitors’ experiences (Figure 3). Another room (Figure 4) is adorned with colorful mosaics, twelve seats, and a *mihrab* with the names of the 12 imams in front of which four prayer rugs are laid out. Although rarely accessible to the public, this space reflects the shrine’s quiet spiritual authority. Hatixhe and three of her heirs are interred in a rear chamber, where her tomb, covered in green and white cloth, stands as a focal point for devotional acts and sensory encounters with the sacred (Figure 5). Hatixhe’s tomb is recognizable because her name is embroidered on the sheet. Usually, visitors remove their shoes when entering the tomb. At her feet is a Qur’an in Arabic that worshippers leaf through during the ritual visit of the *teqe* (Figure 6). The Holy Book is positioned there to offer blessing and healing to visitors, most of whom are unable to read it as they do not know Arabic. Some visitors write some prayers in Albanian on the pages of this Qur’an

(Figure 7). Around the room, there are devotional images representing Ali, Husayn, and all twelve imams, as well as local Albanian dervishes, such as Dervish Luzha⁹ and Dede Ahmed Myftar¹⁰.



Figure 1. Entrance to the Teqe of Dervish Hatixhe (Teqja e Dervish Hatixhese), in Rruga Barrikadeve, in the center of Tirana. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

Despite the historical and cultural roots of the site in Islamic Sufism, visitors to the *teqe* encompass a broad spectrum of religious identities, including Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and individuals who profess no formal religious affiliation. This diversity is a testament to Hatixhe *teqe*'s inclusive character and reflects a uniquely Albanian approach to spirituality, where religious boundaries are often secondary to a collective sense of national belonging. Many Albanians regard religious differences as less important than their shared cultural national identity (Endresen 2012), an outlook deeply influenced by both historical multifaith coexistence and the atheist policies of the communist era.

The collective Albanian ethos of interreligious harmony is evident in the varied backgrounds of Hatixhe's visitors and in the shared practices they undertake within her shrine. The *teqe* operates thus as a shared spiritual space, embodying the values of Albanian religious tolerance. Visitors frequently express this perspective, viewing Hatixhe's *teqe* as a place where spiritual connection supersedes religious categorization. For example, some visitors, when asked about Hatixhe's affiliation, describe her as a Bektashi or Orthodox saint, reflecting both the common conflation of Sufi traditions in Albania and a flexible approach to religious identity. One visitor, a pregnant woman, described the space as "neither Catholic nor Islamic, but Orthodox". For that reason, she holds in her hands a Christian rosary that she considers to pertain to the same faith as Hatixhe. Her words encapsulate the site's role as a sanctuary beyond religious labels, emphasizing a sense of peace and spirituality accessible to all.

"We came here to pray. My family was Muslim. Hatixhe, on the other hand, is Bektashiane [...] But you know, here in Albania, all religions are equal; there is only one God in the end, and we all pray to them. Hatixhe is a saint woman, that's why we come".¹¹



Figure 2. Plaque at the entrance to Hatixhe’s *teqe* that reads “Hatixhe’s *teqe* established in the year 1798. Rebuilt by Nene Rukija in the year 1992”. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

Such perceptions of Hatixhe as a religious-inclusive saint illustrate the ways in which her shrine functions as a meeting point of Albanian spiritual values. Many visitors attribute Hatixhe not to her specific religious background but to her benevolent qualities, describing her as a *grua i shenjtë* (“holy woman”) or a *grua e mirë* (“good woman”)—a feminine counterpart to the Albanian concept of *njeriu i mirë* (“good man”). The term *njeri i mirë* or *grua e mirë* serves as a common label embodying the predominant patterns of sainthood (*shenjtëri*) among Albanians. This concept transcends denominational distinctions, emphasizing that a person is considered a saint (*i shenjt*) not for being Christian or Muslim but for possessing miraculous and sacred powers. The origins of Albanian *shenjtëri* can vary: a *njeri i mirë* or

grua e mirë may inherit sanctity through ancestral lineage, be deemed *i shenjtë* (a “saint”) due to their closeness to *Zot* (“God”), or be recognized as *i shenjtë* for providing meaningful support to the local community. Regardless of its source, the *shenjtëri* is inherently linked to the goodness and mercy of a saint, often credited with performing miracles and healings. Hatixhe attained such sainthood through both the support for the people and the healing miracles she performed during her lifetime and also after when buried.



Figure 3. Room to the right after the entrance where people light a candle to make a wish and ask for a blessing and healing from Hatixhe. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.



Figure 4. Interior of the *sema-hane* where there is a mosaic with the names of the twelve imams. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

Although Hatixhe was a Sufi, she is predominantly recognized as a *grua e mirë* or *grua i shenjt* rather than a *walī* (or “friend of God”), the traditional Islamic concept of sainthood. According to Pinto (2008), Islamic sainthood has two different sources: the capacity to mediate access to God’s power and intervene in favor of their followers from a position of proximity to divine justice. Indeed, two concepts would express such sources of sainthood: *walaya*, or “closeness to God”, and *wilaya*, which can be translated as “patronage”, “interme-

diation". A saint is then a *walī* who possesses the *baraka* ("supernatural powers") through which to perform miraculous acts (*karamat*). For Cornell (1998), the *wilaya* model can be assimilated to the ideal type of charisma formulated by Weber as the ability to express "extraordinary abilities" legitimately.



Figure 5. Interior of the *turbe* where the bodies of Hatixhe and her heirs are buried. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

Regardless of whether sainthood is viewed through an Islamic or Christian lens, it is difficult to distill it into a single idealized image (Stauth 2004). Even when considering the influence of Sufi traditions on the expression of sainthood, one element remains essential: its grounding in specific social and historical contexts. Each instance of sainthood is shaped by unique symbolic and narrative attributes linked to its specific local setting. Hatixhe's sainthood is deeply rooted in a specific local context. She is revered as a *grua e mirë* or *grua i shenjt* according to a model of sainthood—that of *shenjtëri*—that transcends religious affiliations and emphasizes more cultural native belonging than the Islamic one. The *shenjtëri* of *grua e mirë* or *grua i shenjt* embodies key elements of Albanian cultures, such as such as *gjaku* ("blood"), *nderi* ("honor"), and *dashuria për atdheun* ("love for the motherland") all of which contribute to the perception of Albanians as culturally distinct and unique (Bria 2019). This implies that a spiritual figure is revered not for adherence to a single faith but for embodying such virtues believed to be divinely granted. For that, the *shenjtëri* pattern partially diverges from that of *wilaya*, as it carries a culturally anchored and identity-specific connotation, although both share common elements, such as the performance of miracles, offering benevolent support to people, and a profound connection to God.

In such a way, the Albanian concept of sainthood occasionally reveals subtle political undertones, as its fusion of religious identities can be interpreted as a reflection of a broader Albanian interfaith heritage. These beliefs, which regard religious tolerance as an essential characteristic of Albanian identity, are reinforced by political and cultural institutions¹² that promote interreligious harmony as a perennial feature of Albanians.¹³ Although tolerance has at times been coopted by political rhetoric, the shared practices at Hatixhe's shrine reveal how this ideal has been embedded in local religious practices. Sites like Hatixhe's *teqe*, where both Muslims and Christians gather, exemplify the cultural pragmatism with which many Albanians approach religious diversity. Hatixhe's sanctity is viewed as inher-

ently inclusive, appealing to individuals across religious divides. Her shrine's welcoming environment, devoid of outwardly distinguishing Islamic or Sufi symbols, allows individuals from various backgrounds to engage with her legacy on their terms (Bria 2019). As an embodiment of *shenjtëri*, Hatixhe represents a unifying spiritual figure, drawing people not through doctrinal affiliation but through shared human values.



Figure 6. Qur'an placed at the bottom of Hatixhe's tomb. Visitors leaf through during the ritual visit to the *teqe* © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

4. Hatixhe: Healer and Patron of Tirana

Hatixhe's *shenjtëri* is deeply intertwined with her historical reputation as a healer and protector of Tirana's people. According to local hagiographic accounts, Hatixhe is celebrated for the support she provided during a bubonic plague outbreak and is regarded as a patron saint of Tirana (Clayer 2000). Her saintly acts of mercy resonate across generations, with devotees viewing her as a spiritual guardian who continues to offer blessings and protection. This veneration is reinforced by stories of miraculous healing associated with

her, framing Hatixhe as a compassionate figure whose benevolent influence transcends religious affiliation.

She dedicated service to humanity during the bubonic plague of 1738 to 1740 in the Balkans. She helped to save lives, even turning her home into a hospital and her properties into a cemetery. People saw her as a person sent by God to save them during those difficult times. (Teqja e Dervish Hatixhese 2025)

This excerpt highlights Hatixhe's commitment, along with her connection to God, which enabled her to miraculously assist sick people without becoming infected herself. This other account, however, is even more detailed:

Hatixhe was no longer seen simply as an ordinary person, thus becoming a phenomenon. She lived in a spiritual reality, so she did not fall ill and could use her consciousness to heal people. Hatixhe earned the title "Dervish" for the impact of her humanitarian work in helping cholera patients, for her dedication to people, and for all the superhuman characteristics that marked her. (Jaupaj 2015)

Hatixhe's generosity, coupled with her miraculous immunity from illness, establishes a vision of her sainthood. Her immunity, regarded as a manifestation of her *shenjtëri*, lends a visual dimension to her legacy, positioning her as a figure whose sacred presence transcends mortality and continues to provide spiritual comfort to her worshippers. The experience of visiting Hatixhe's *teqe* is highly immersive, where devotees connect with her legacy through a series of ritualistic gestures that bridge the visual, tactile, and spiritual. The *teqe* opens into a sacred interior that creating a visual tapestry that conveys the sanctity of the space. Visitors could be alone; many are in pairs, such as mother and daughter, husband and wife, or others are in larger family groups. There are also people who are visibly ill; some disabled people also happen to be there. Younger couples go to ask for blessings for their marriage, for the conception or birth of a child. However, regardless of the request, the rituality is similar.

Some people stay longer than others as they recite a prayer. Then they go to the tomb where the body of Hatixhe is buried. In rigorous silence, the people, one by one, enter the room with their right foot first. They begin by kissing the head of Hatixhe's grave three times. They make their heads and lips take turns touching the grave. In the meantime, some recite a short invocation, and others remain silent. They all go clockwise around the grave, kissing the head and feet of Hatixhe first and then of her descendants. Many also touch and caress the pictures with the sacred images hanging. These acts are sensory rituals that make Hatixhe's legacy felt in tangible ways. These gestures invite worshippers to physically engage with her *shenjtëri*, making their prayers for healing and protection feel immediate and personal.

A number of people carry clothes—probably of their loved ones—and pictures, which they rub on the tomb, as well as sacred images. Some clothes are left directly on the tomb for a night or two to be imbued with the sacredness of the place and thus be beneficial and miraculous for the wearer (Figure 8). Many leave photos of their loved ones in the *teqe*, wishing blessings and healing from Hatixhe (Figure 9). This tactile connection transforms ordinary objects into relics of faith, embedding them with Hatixhe's spiritual presence. Visitors describe feelings of warmth, peace, and even shivers as they move through the shrine, emphasizing an experience that moves beyond sight to encompass touch, sound, and even an extrasensory perception of her protection and presence. This sensory immersion connects visitors to Hatixhe's compassionate spirit, fostering an experience that is both deeply personal and universally resonant.



Figure 7. Prayers inscribed on select Qur'anic pages. © Sara Kuehn, 2024.

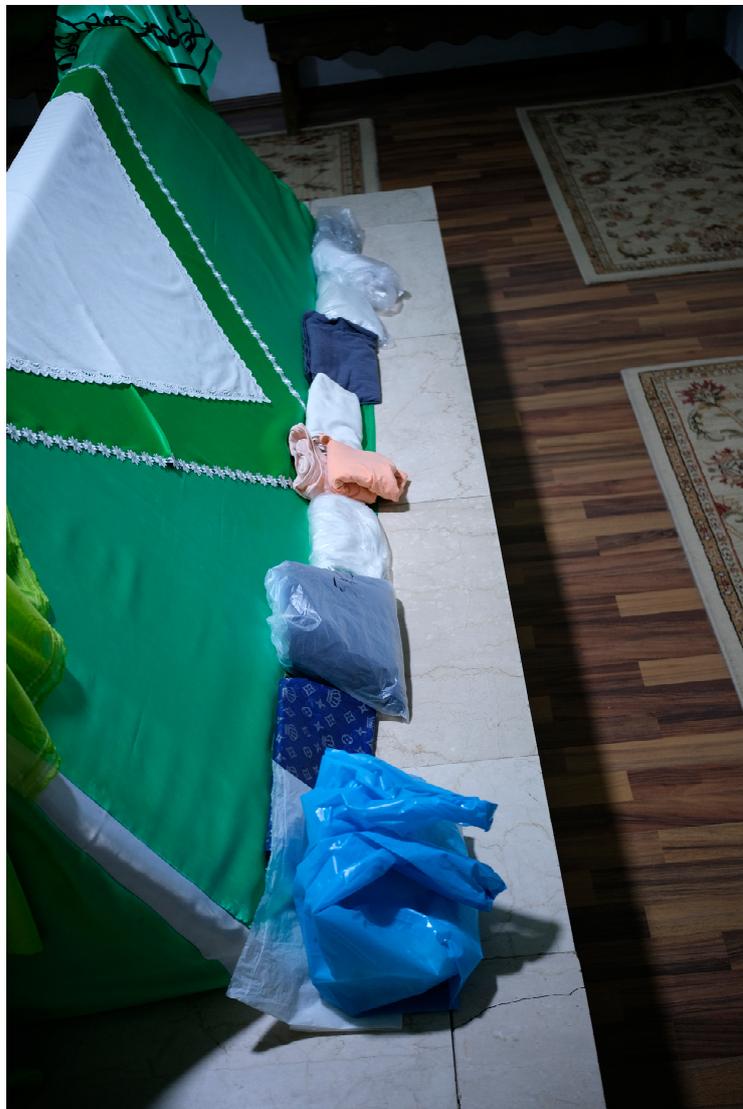


Figure 8. Clothes that the devotees place at Hatixhe's tomb for one or more nights so that they may be imbued with her benevolent and merciful sainthood. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

“We like to come here [. . .] we are here at least a couple of times a month. It is a place that gives peace [. . .] I feel that there is something and that Hatixhe is here, protecting us. I feel it, and I get shivers to think about it”.¹⁴



Figure 9. One of the niches where the worshippers leave pictures of their loved ones, some deceased. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.



Figure 10. A shop near Hatixhe's *teqe* where visitors can buy candles of various sizes and shapes. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

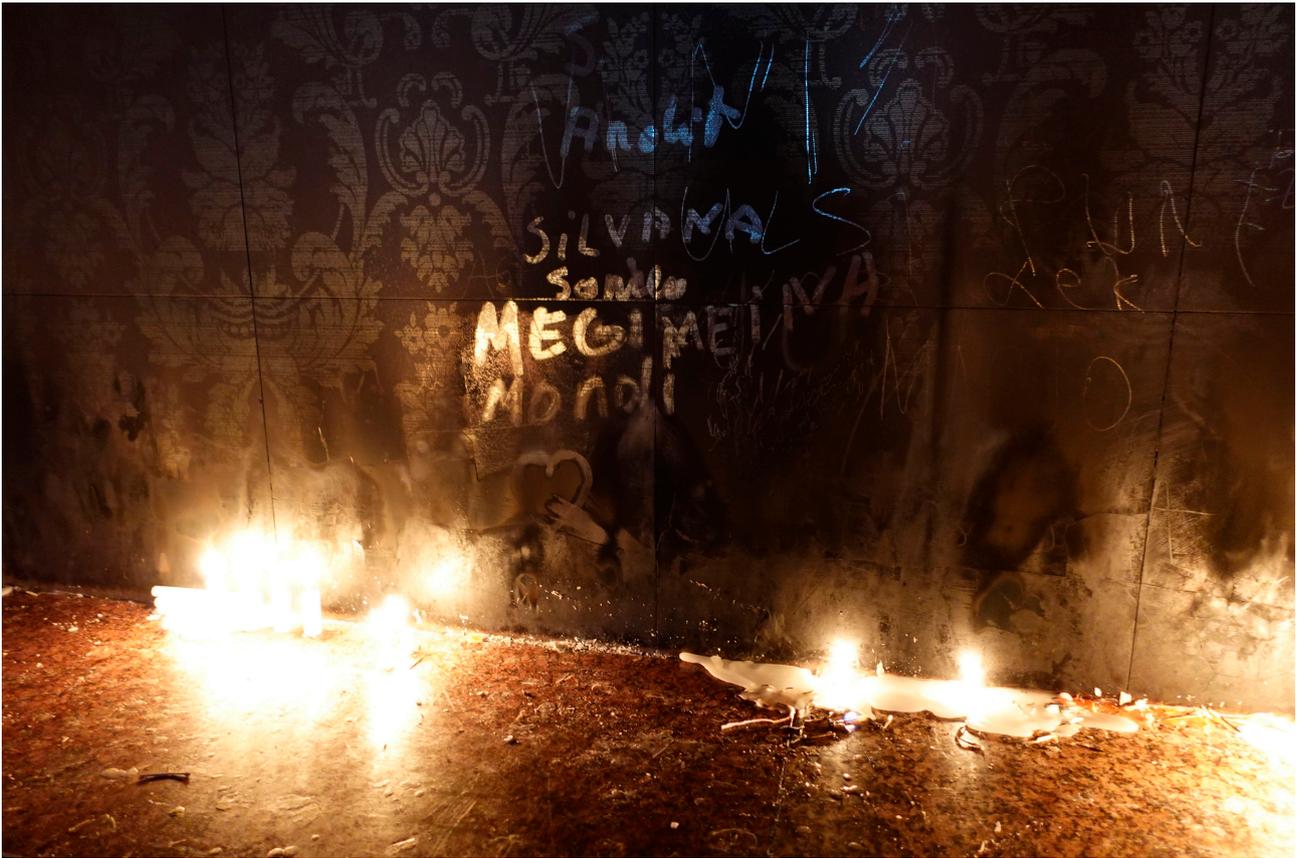


Figure 11. Graffiti left by visitors near candle-lighting spots. © Sara Kuehn, 2024.



Figure 12. The armchair where Nene Rukija used to sit. © Gianfranco Bria, 2024.

Thus, such spaces are deeply infused with local symbolic meanings and are integral to Hatixhe's *shenjtëri*. Even though Hatixhe is deceased, her body still serves as a highly potent and significant medium. Her saintly influx which derives directly from her closeness

to Allah, pervades the entire *teqe*. Hence, Hatixhe's body acts as the medium that sanctifies and blesses her surroundings and the people who touch it. Hatixhe's body thus is a metonymy, symbolizing perfection and inspiration through her connection to God. Because of this link to the divine, it is implied that the saint's ability to bless, bring about peace and miracles, act upon nature and the human world, and incorporate the blessing of the soul and the healing of the bodies. In this way, the relationship formed by the visitors, the body of the saint, and the site of worship produces a meaningful context that involves different feelings and sensory perceptions by visitors.

Hatixhe is occasionally likened to people of international notoriety while being regarded as a local saint. She is compared to Lady Nightingale¹⁵ on one travel guide website. During the inauguration of the *teqe* in 1992, she was compared to the Mother Teresa of Calcutta¹⁶, who was still alive at the time. Some interviewees who perceive Hatixhe as the Mother Teresa of Tirana also draw parallels.

“Hatixhe was like Mother Teresa, a woman who helps everyone, Muslims, Christians. Because she was good in spirit and kind, with a big heart. That is why God gave her such great power to help people”.¹⁷

Viewed through a transnational lens, the comparisons between Hatixhe, Mother Teresa, and Florence Nightingale reveal a shared narrative of feminine sainthood and humanitarian service that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries. Each of these figures embodies a profound dedication to alleviating suffering, becoming symbols of compassion within and beyond their respective cultural contexts. Mother Teresa, born to an Albanian family in Macedonia, rose to global recognition for her work with the impoverished and sick in India, while Florence Nightingale's efforts during the Crimean War established her as a foundational figure in modern nursing. Hatixhe, though not as widely known internationally, occupies a similarly revered position in Albania as a saint who protected and healed the people of Tirana during epidemics. Her legacy resonates with that of Mother Teresa and Nightingale in its emphasis on selfless care and resilience, situating her within a global lineage of female healers. By linking Hatixhe with these figures, Albanians create a narrative that bridges national identity with universal values, framing her sainthood as part of a broader, cross-cultural tradition of women whose sanctity and humanitarian impact reach beyond the confines of their own communities. This comparison not only elevates Hatixhe's local significance but also aligns her story with a global heritage of female-led compassion and healing that speaks to people across faiths and borders.

5. The Wax Ritual: Asking for Blessing and Healing

The ritual of lighting wax candles (Figure 3) is one of the most profound and sensory acts performed by visitors at the shrine of Hatixhe. This simple yet deeply symbolic gesture embodies the devotion and hopes of those who come seeking Hatixhe's blessings, healing, and protection. For many devotees, particularly those facing personal or familial struggles, the act of lighting a candle at Hatixhe's tomb serves as a way to communicate with her *shenjtëri* in a tactile, visible form. The ritual extends beyond an offering; it becomes a sensory bridge between the worshipper and Hatixhe's compassionate spirit.

“I am here since my father is sick [. . .] I lit a candle to ask Hatixhe for help. She assists people in need, the sick. She did it many years ago [. . .] I know of stories of people who are healed through her. She protects us; she is our lady.”¹⁸

Visitors usually buy the candles in the small shops at the entrance to the tomb (Figure 10). The wax candle ritual begins as visitors enter or leave the shrine and proceed to the designated area for lighting candles. This space, often dimly lit, is illuminated by the gentle glow of flickering flames, creating an atmosphere of quiet reverence. Some

visitors also write graffiti on the walls of the room to express their wishes (Figure 11). Each visitor selects a candle (some arrange them in special shapes) and, after a moment of personal reflection or silent prayer, lights it with the flame of another candle. This passing of light from one candle to another symbolizes a shared spiritual connection between visitors, reinforcing a collective act of faith and support that aligns with Hatixhe's legacy of communal compassion.

For devotees, lighting a candle is not merely a visual gesture; it is an experience that engages multiple senses. As the flame is lit, the warmth radiates onto their hands while the faint scent of melting wax fills the air, grounding them in the present moment. Some visitors hold the candle between their palms for a moment, feeling its warmth before placing it gently among the others. Others may close their eyes and offer a silent invocation, allowing the warmth and light to carry their intentions, prayers, or gratitude toward the saint. Through this multisensory engagement, the candle becomes an extension of the worshipper's plea for healing or protection, transforming their personal wishes into a tangible presence before Hatixhe's tomb.

The light of the candle is also seen as a medium that carries the worshipper's prayers to the saint, symbolizing hope, guidance, and resilience. The steady flame is believed to mirror Hatixhe's enduring spirit and her divine ability to protect and heal those in need. Some devotees recount feeling a sense of calm or even warmth enveloping them as they watch the candle burn, a physical manifestation of Hatixhe's protective presence. In this way, the candle's flame serves as both a personal offering and a symbolic representation of Hatixhe's enduring *shenjtëri*—a light that reaches out to bless and soothe each worshipper.

In some cases, visitors may bring candles of different sizes, colors, or shapes, each carrying its own meaning or personal association. Larger candles may represent a deeper, ongoing need for support, while smaller ones may signify gratitude for a recent blessing. This diversity of candles adds visual richness to the shrine, reflecting the myriad ways people connect with Hatixhe and the personal meanings they attach to her blessings. As the candles slowly burn down, leaving pools of melted wax, the ritual becomes a lasting sensory memory for the visitors. The melted wax, the lingering warmth, and the fading light create an atmosphere that draws each visitor into a moment of shared presence with Hatixhe. The candle ritual thus serves as a powerful medium that visually, physically, and spiritually connects each worshipper to the saint, embodying their faith in her compassionate power to heal, protect, and guide them through life's challenges.

6. Gender, Patriarchy and Matrilineal Lineage

Hatixhe's legacy is sustained through a unique female-centered line of spiritual succession. In the Sufi tradition, a Sufi master usually inherits and transmits his spiritual legacy through a lineage chain (*silsila*), which goes directly back to the Prophet. This lineage chain functions to legitimize the authority of a master and concurrently denote his belonging to a specific Sufi order or branch. Rarely are women included within this lineage, which seems to concern only males as they are considered to be endowed with higher rational and suprarational qualities. In Albania, no other Sufi lineage is matrilineal. From Hatixhe, a chain of female descent seems to have been established, passing through mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, who becomes the guardian and manager of the *teqe* and also heir to Hatixhe's *shenjtëri*. The current *teqe* holder is Eva Peza, who inherited this role from her mother-in-law, Rukija (Figure 12) who in turn inherited it from Sultana by analogy. As they are in charge until their death, they serve as a living conduit of Hatixhe's *shenjtëri*. According to Eva, Hatixhe's spiritual lineage passes from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, as women who marry into the family take care of their spiritual traditions.

Today, Eva Peza brings a renewed vision to the *teqe* by expanding its role in the community through programs that resonate with contemporary audiences. Her initiatives—such as the creation of a Yoga Center—aim to extend Hatixhe’s message of peace and healing into modern contexts. Through these additions, Eva amplifies the shrine’s appeal as a space of spiritual and cultural enrichment, fostering a connection between traditional devotion and new forms of sensory and embodied experience, like yoga. In this way, Eva is able to continue Hatixhe’s spiritual inheritance, which passes through a line of mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law.

Such female lineage is a defining feature of Hatixhe’s cult and legacy, establishing a unique framework within Albanian Sufism. This female lineage is significant not only as a form of gendered resistance to patriarchal norms but also as a deliberate preservation of Hatixhe’s compassionate and empowering influence. Each female heir becomes the custodian of Hatixhe’s legacy, tasked with maintaining her shrine, guiding worshippers, and embodying her sanctity and healing power. This female line of spiritual descent has created a distinct space for women within Albanian Sufi practices, allowing them to exercise religious authority and foster a community centered on feminine resilience and support. Through this lineage, Hatixhe’s legacy endures as a testament to the power of female succession in preserving and enriching her spiritual influence, ensuring that her compassionate spirit and saintly presence continue to resonate with new generations of devotees.

Hatixhe was a young bride from Tirana with two children, and like many other women of the time, she lived under the shackles of a harsh reality where society implied the abuse of women. Women did not have the right, as human beings, to think, feel, express, or act toward their own passions and dreams in life. Every choice was made for them by men, by the family, or by the society commanded by men. Furthermore, men had the right to be rude and dislike women. But Hatixhe changed the society and the mentality of that time with her humanitarian work toward humanity. As fate would have it, many of those people who did not respect women needed the help of a woman. This woman would be the redeemer of their lives or comfort them spiritually during their death. Hatixhe made people see the woman with a different eye” (Jaupaj 2015).

This extract from a national Albanian newspaper refers to Hatixhe’s commitment to the empowerment of women. This reference can also be found on the *teqe*’s official website, according to which “generation after generation, the Hatixhe dervish tradition has empowered women. Through the centuries, the history of the women of this family has shown that women are a powerful force in society, who can shed a bright light in our darkest times and places” (Teqja e Dervish Hatixhese 2025). The site also declares that “Hatixhe is the first female dervish in history.” (Ibidem) Hatixhe is therefore presented as an example of female empowerment, having attained a level in the Sufi hierarchy and initiatory path that is often unavailable to women in Albanian Sufism’s history.

However, Hatixhe’s story also touches on another gender-related topic: the abuse she endured at the hands of her husband. There are no written sources that report individual acts of violence, but few oral accounts are more detailed about Hatixhe’s suffering. A woman who was visiting the *teqe* with her daughter recounted:

Once upon a time, Hatixhe, after being treated badly by her husband, went and cried in the garden [...] she prayed and cried, and from her tears, flowers were born. From there, she realized she had saintly powers and decided to help the sick.¹⁹

As Eva Peza pointed out, gender violence is “a very sensitive issue for the women of Tirana who find in Hatixhe an emotional and religious support for the difficult situations they experience every day”.²⁰ Eva Peza highlights the role of Hatixhe as a source of emotional and spiritual refuge for women in Tirana, many of whom experience the

daily struggles of life within a social framework that perpetuates gender inequality and, in numerous cases, domestic violence (Haarr 2019; Çomëni 2022).²¹ Albanian society has long upheld a structure in which men hold significant authority within the household and broader social domains, a dynamic encapsulated in the term *Zot i shtëpisë*, namely “God of the house”. This dominance manifests in various aspects of life, including the household economy, the labor market, and cultural expectations, where men control the public image and behavior of women, especially in terms of sexuality and honor (Vullnetari and King 2008). These rigid norms contribute to a culture where male honor is guarded and reinforced by limiting women’s autonomy and imposing stringent standards on their conduct. When these standards are perceived to be breached, women may face physical, verbal, or psychological abuse—acts that enforce submission and instill self-blame. Despite growing efforts from feminist organizations and the intermittent support of public institutions, violence against women remains an issue across urban Albania, with documented cases of abuse and femicide underscoring the need for societal change. Even though sexism and male dominance are still prevalent in the religious sphere (Pandelejmoni 2011), women in Tirana also go to pray to Hatixhe to soothe and comfort themselves from their daily suffering. Eva Peza said:

“It is difficult for women to talk openly about the violence they suffer at home, but so many of them suffer [. . .] but it is clear that they go to Hatixhe precisely to relieve this suffering.”²²

For Albanian women, particularly, Hatixhes *teqe* has become a site that provides a medium of healing and resilience. The shared sensory practices create a communal experience that allows each visitor to feel Hatixhe’s protective presence. Women describe sensing her warmth and kindness, often leaving with a feeling of inner peace and renewal that reinforces their emotional connection to her. Hatixhe’s legacy as a symbol of resilience and empowerment is deeply embedded not only in her historical and spiritual significance. Her shrine is a space where tactile engagement and sensory rituals come together to forge a unique atmosphere of feminine strength, compassion, and sanctity. The act of interacting with her tomb, seeing her name inscribed, or feeling the textures of the sacred cloths fosters an immersive experience that unites the spiritual with the physical. Hatixhe’s tomb provides a refuge from gender-discriminative constraints, offering an alternative narrative through sensory experience. Visitors often describe feeling a “warmth” or “lightness” when they enter the space as if physically sensing Hatixhe’s protective presence.

7. Concluding Reflections: The Devotional and Sociocultural Layers of Hatixhe’s Cult

The veneration of Hatixhe intricately weaves together hagiographic narratives, devotional practices, and sensory engagements, forming a complex and multilayered cult embedded in Tirana’s social and material landscape. This cult is more than a series of religious practices; Hatixhe’s *shenjtëri* represents a unique and multifaceted phenomenon within Albanian religious and cultural traditions. As a *grua e mirë* or *grua e shenjt*, her veneration partially transcends the conventional Islamic notions of sainthood, as it is not confined to doctrinal boundaries but is deeply rooted in the Albanian context, shaped by narratives of her healing miracles and her role as people (and women) protector. Thus, four interconnected themes emerge, illustrating the unique ways in which Hatixhe’s *shenjtëri* resonates within the local, national, and (at times) transnational context.

Hatixhe’s shrine is a focal point of Albania’s ethos of religious tolerance, attracting both Muslim and Christian devotees. This shared veneration is emblematic of the Albanian cultural identity, where religious affiliations are often secondary to a broader sense of national unity. Many visitors do not associate Hatixhe strictly with Islam or even Sufism;

instead, her identity as a saint transcends religious categorization. While she belonged to the Kadiri order, this detail holds minimal relevance for most worshippers, who frequently misidentify her as a Bektashi or perceive her without a specific religious affiliation. This illustrates how the Bektashi order, with its historical influence and association with Albanian national identity, has largely shaped the country's mystical narrative and collective memory of sainthood. Hatixhe's devotion thus reflects a broader cultural framework that prioritizes shared sacred spaces and figures over strict religious divides, embedding her legacy within Albania's celebrated tradition of interfaith harmony.

Hatixhe is celebrated not only as a saint but as a protector and healer of Tirana's residents during times of crisis, most notably a devastating pandemic. Pilgrims engage in rituals that amplify this connection, such as touching her tomb, lighting candles, and offering prayers for healing. These sensory practices reinforce the hagiographic narratives of her supernatural healing abilities, creating a reciprocal relationship between the saint and the city's inhabitants. Through these ritualistic engagements, the devotion to Hatixhe transcends mere storytelling, turning her shrine into an emotional space where individuals can feel her protective presence. Comparisons to figures like Florence Nightingale and, especially, Mother Teresa underscore Hatixhe's role as a compassionate Albanian healer, anchoring her in both a local and global context of feminine sanctity.

Hatixhe's hagiographic narrative is also rich with themes of resilience and empowerment, particularly in relation to gender dynamics. Stories of her enduring abuse and oppression from her husband reflect the struggles of many women within Albania's society. However, Hatixhe's transformation from a young wife facing hardship to a revered healer and saint portrays her as an empowered and, in turn, empowering figure. For women who visit her *teqe*, Hatixhe represents a source of emotional and spiritual support, providing them with a model of strength and liberation. Her ability to heal and her sanctified status create a powerful bond with female devotees, who see in her an embodiment of compassion. Through devotional practices that engage the senses and emotions, Hatixhe's shrine becomes a space where women can confront personal suffering and find solace, with Hatixhe's presence offering a form of silent solidarity and support.

Hatixhe's legacy is sustained through a female line of succession, a rarity in Albanian (not only) Sufi traditions, where spiritual authority is typically passed from one male disciple to another. This female lineage, carried through daughters-in-law, has allowed Hatixhe's spiritual descendants to act as mediators between the saint and the public, each generation reinforcing her sanctity and relevance. This form of succession has enabled her heirs, including figures like Rukija and now Eva Peza, to continue building a personal connection with the community. By legitimizing their authority through Hatixhe's female-centered lineage, these successors maintain and enhance her shrine's role as a place of healing and comfort for women. This lineage represents a unique gendered adaptation within Albanian Sufism, where the continuity of Hatixhe's legacy remains distinctly feminine and rooted in the experiences of her female caretakers.

In Albania, Hatixhe stands out as a singular figure within the country's hagiographic tradition, as there are no known narratives or hagiographies of other Albanian female saints who endured mistreatment by their husbands. This absence is notable, particularly in contrast with the Bosnian context, where stories of dervish women who suffered abuse have been documented. Research by Hadžijahić (1982) and Palavestra (1987) reveals that several Bosnian dervish women, also belonging to the Kadiriyya order, experienced hardships and mistreatment within their marital lives, yet they went on to be revered as saints. Hatixhe's unique story in Albania—as a woman who endured domestic abuses and emerged as a revered figure—highlights her exceptional role in the country's spiritual history. In this regard, one can agree with the idea put forward in various academic works

that although Sufi women have historically navigated patriarchal constraints and gendered social expectations, Sufism has provided them with relatively greater opportunities to actively engage in religious and social life than other branches of Islam (Schimmel 1997; Buturovic and Schick 2007; Sultanova 2011; Schmeding 2024; Burak-Adli et al. 2024).

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Notes

¹ About the multispatial approach, see Kong (2001).

² The *teqe*, in Turkish *tekke*, in Arabic *zāwiya*, is the space, often a building, where Sufis gather.

³ It should be noted that Albania, a small country in southeast Europe, is home to people of several faiths, including Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians, in differing proportions

⁴ This approach is inspired by Talal Asad's (2009) notion of historically evolving discourses, whereby a given practice or narrative has both a past, a present and a set of potential futures, all of which can be anchored in local and global discourses.

⁵ The title of Dervish in the Albanian Bektashi community denotes a particular position within the organizational hierarchy, which is as follows: first in line is the world leader of the Bektashi, *Kryegjyshi Boterori Bektashinjve*; second is *Dede*; third is *Dervish*; and last is *Myhib*. Sometimes, this hierarchy is borrowed from other Sufi communities in southeastern Europe.

⁶ The Horasani was one of the main family branches of the Kadiri order in central Albania. The term family is used since the lineage; hence, the initiatory chain of lineage (*silsila*) was genealogically based.

⁷ The *Sheh* is usually a Sufi master, the leader of specific Sufi community or branch.

⁸ Likewise, comparable hagiographic occurrences can be found in other contexts, not only Islamic, such as the Catholic Sanctuary of St. Anthony in Laç (Bria and Giorda 2023). ere too, several accounts refer to miraculous episodes that prevented the soldiers from permanently destroying the sanctuary.

⁹ Dervish Luzha (d. 1985) was a Halveti Sufi from Tropoja (northern Albania) who fought against the Nazi Fascists in Kosovo and Albania during World War II. Respected during life, Luzha was enshrined as a local and national hero in the post-communist era for his heroic deeds, regardless of his dealings with the communist regime. For a brief survey about him, see <https://redgold.hypotheses.org/1189> (Consulted on 18 January 2023).

¹⁰ Dede Ahmed Myftar (d. 1980) was an Albanian Bektashi baba and a resistance leader during the National Liberation War of the Albanian People during WWII. From 1948 to 1958, he was the world leader of the Albanian Bektashi Community.

¹¹ Interview, 62 years old woman, Tirana, October 2024.

¹² See, for example, the Interreligious Council of Albania, which aims to promote the institutionalization of religious tolerance in Albania.

¹³ According to Barbullushi (2015), religious tolerance became the dominant identity discourse of the Albanian nation in the post-Communist period. For that, Albanian politicians promoted the public debate on religious tolerance as both the ultimate proof of the Albanian nation's genuine belonging to the European cultural sphere as well as Albania's contribution to European security.

¹⁴ Interview, 41 years old woman, Tirana, August 2017.

¹⁵ During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale (d. 1910) gained notoriety as a nurse manager and educator, organizing the treatment of injured troops in Constantinople. By raising living standards and promoting better hygiene, she dramatically decreased mortality rates.

¹⁶ Mary Teresa Bojaxhiu (d. 1997), better known as Mother Teresa, was an Albanian-Indian Catholic nun and the founder of the Missionaries of Charity.

¹⁷ Interview, 55 years old woman, Tirana, October 2024.

¹⁸ Interview, 55 years old woman, Tirana, August 2017.

¹⁹ Interview, 58 years old woman, Tirana, August 2017.

²⁰ Interview on Zoom, July 2024.

²¹ According to the 2018 National Population-Based Survey on Violence against Women and Girls in Albania, led by the United Nations, "61.1% of women who currently experienced physical violence and more than 1 out of 2 or 56.0% of women who ever experienced physical violence experienced fear, anxiety, depression, feelings of isolation, sleeplessness and/or irritability" (Haarr 2019, p. 5).

²² See notes 20 above.

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