

The Eastern Syriac Monastic Tradition on Mount İzlo/İzla

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Abstract

This study comprehensively examines the Eastern Syriac monastic tradition located in the İzlo/İzla Mountain basin, north of the Nusaybin district in the province of Mardin, through the monasteries of Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo, Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo, Mar Ergin, and Kaşgarlı Mar Abrobom. Since late antiquity, Mount İzlo/İzla, situated in the Roman–Sassanid border region, has played a decisive role in shaping Eastern Syriac theological thought and monastic architecture as a geography of intense religious, cultural, and political interaction. Based on data obtained from archaeological surface surveys conducted in the provinces of Mardin and Batman (Tur Abdin) between 2017 and 2024, with the permission of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, this article examines the monasteries in question in the context of their historical development, their relationship with the topography, their architectural features, and their current state of preservation. The study also analyses rock-cut and masonry construction techniques, spatial organisation, liturgical arrangements, and relic applications using a comparative approach. Each structure is evaluated within its natural environment and historical context, revealing the continuity and diversity of East Syriac monastery architecture. The study also addresses deterioration due to natural environmental conditions in rock-hewn and masonry architecture, material usage (rubble and cut stone), structural wear, late-period additions, and modern interventions, discussing the effects of these elements on the original architectural identity of the structures. This assessment ensures that the monasteries in question are considered not only in historical terms but also in the context of conservation issues. In the conclusion, the common architectural elements (single-nave plan, apse arrangement, use of niches, carved crosses and reliquary typology) and distinguishing features of the four monasteries are identified, emphasising that these structures are among the most original examples of East Syriac architecture in Anatolia and reflect the region's uninterrupted monastic tradition in Christian history.

Keywords: Eastern Syriac Architecture, Nusaybin, Mount İzlo/İzla, Rock-Hewn Churches, Monastery Architecture,

Introduction

The monastery and church structures located in the northeast of Mesopotamia, particularly in the province of Mardin, the district of Nusaybin (Nisibis) and around Mount İzla/İzlo to the north of the district, are of fundamental importance for understanding both the spatial and mental world of East Syriac Christianity. Nevertheless, the East Syriac tradition has long remained outside Western-centric narratives of Christian history, often being regarded as a "peripheral" element within the major Roman and Byzantine-focused narratives.²

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² The title "Mar" used for saints and religious figures in the Eastern Syriac tradition differs from the use of "Mor" seen in the Western Syriac tradition; see; Fiey 1965:192.



This study, conducted with the permission of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as part of archaeological surface surveys in Mardin, focuses on the Mar Yohanna Tayyoyo Monastery and Mar Evgin Monastery identified in the Nusaybin–Izlo Mountain, within their historical and architectural contexts, and to discuss the reflections of the Eastern Syriac church tradition in the region. The study first examines the historical background of the East Syrian Church and the historical geography of the region, then analyses the four structures in question along with their architectural features. Finally, the last section evaluates the similarities and differences between the structures to reach a general conclusion.³

Historical Geography: The Eastern Syriac Tradition and the Borderlands of Mesopotamia

The tradition known as the "Eastern Syriac Church" is based on one of the oldest and most deeply rooted Christian communities. Nevertheless, today it appears as a fragile and scattered community with approximately four hundred thousand believers scattered across Iraq, Iran, northeastern Syria, parts of Turkey, as well as Western Europe and the United States (Baumer, 2016: 7).

The East Syrian (Nestorian/Assyrian/Chaldean) tradition is one of the oldest church structures, with roots stretching back to the first centuries of Christianity. However, due to both the church's political isolation from the Roman Empire and its subsequent labelling as "heretical"⁴ in later centuries, it remained marginalised in Western Christian historiography for a long time.

This exclusion was largely due to the centuries-long political and military tension between the Roman Empire and the Iranian (Sasanian) Empire. The Euphrates River, a major waterway originating in eastern Turkey and flowing into the Persian Gulf, effectively formed a "hard" border between the two empires. This border remained virtually unchanged for approximately six centuries (until the Muslim conquests of 636), becoming a line that, under normal circumstances, only allowed trade caravans to pass and severely restricted military and institutional interaction. This border produced critical junctions for Eastern Christianity at the crossing points around Edessa (Urfa) and Seleucia–Ctesiphon, but it also institutionalised a distance between the Eastern and Western churches that would deepen over time. (Wilmshurst, 2000:40).

The repercussions of the Roman–Iranian conflict on the church resulted in a distinct institutional split in the 5th century. In 424, the Eastern Church was forced to declare its legal independence from the churches in the West due to political pressure and insecurity. Thus, outside the patriarchal centres of Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople, a new ecclesiastical focus emerged in Mesopotamia and Iran (Baumer, 2016: 10).

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⁴ Heretic (Greek: *hairesis*): While meaning "different opinion" in the early Christian period, from the 4th century onwards it became a term used for teachings contrary to the doctrine defined by ecumenical councils and accepted as "orthodox" (correct belief). In this context, "official religious authority" refers to institutional structures with the authority to determine the fundamentals of faith, primarily ecumenical councils and the church hierarchy. Theological views opposed to orthodox teachings were labelled heretical and were often considered outside the unity of the church. See "Heresy" entry (Cross & Livingstone, 2005: 918).



However, the major dogmatic disputes of the 5th and 6th centuries also isolated the Eastern Syriac tradition theologically (Scholasticus, 2000: 14).

- the removal of Nestorius from his position as Patriarch of Constantinople (⁵) and the condemnation of his teachings at the Council of Ephesus in 431,
- ⁶Byzantine Emperor Zeno's "Henotikon" text in 482,
- the condemnation of the "Three Chapters" in 553,

pushed the Eastern Church into a position outside the official imperial theology, even branding it as "heretical." In response, the church formulated its own creed in 486; this text particularly emphasises the full and complete presence of both the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. This belief was reaffirmed at the synod of 612, reinforcing an independent dogmatic line.

Thus, after the 5th century, the Christian world was roughly divided into three major groups:

1. The Roman Imperial Church (later the Catholic and Byzantine-Orthodox traditions),
2. The Miaphysite (Monophysite) family of churches: Coptic, Ethiopian, Syriac Orthodox, Armenian,
3. Eastern Church: Assyrian/East Syriac tradition.

The "eastern" in Eastern Church refers to its existence beyond the five major patriarchal centres of Rome, beyond the Euphrates. Today, the traces of the Eastern and Western Syriac branches seen side by side in the geography of Tur Abdin and Nusaybin–Izlo constitute the multi-layered reflections of historical division on the same space; however, despite all these differences, it should not be overlooked that both traditions are based on a common Syriac cultural heritage.

The Eastern Church, closed to the West, directed its energy towards Asia, establishing a vast mission field stretching from Mesopotamia to Central Asia and China. Sources from the 14th century emphasise the extent of the patriarch's authority, referring to a comprehensive

⁵ Throughout history, the Eastern Church has mostly been referred to as "Nestorian"; this name, derived from Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople, who was condemned at the Council of Ephesus, has been almost automatically associated with the label of "heresy". However, from a historical perspective: Nestorius did not establish this church and did not hold any position within its structure. The dogmatic system of the Eastern Church is based not directly on his writings, but on the Antiochian school. Therefore, the term "Nestorian Church" is considered problematic from both a historical and theological perspective. The Eastern Church tradition is actually represented today by three separate churches: the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, and the Chaldean Catholic Church. While the roots of the latter date back to the mid-sixteenth century, the split between the first two churches only emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. The fundamental reason for this split is the calendar issue: while the Assyrian Church of the East adopted the New (Gregorian) Calendar, the Ancient Church of the East retained the Old (Julian) Calendar. The main focus of Christine Chaillot's work is the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East. See: Brock, 2006: XI.

⁶ The Henotikon, issued by the Byzantine Emperor Zeno in 482, is a conciliatory imperial edict aimed at reconciling the Christological divisions (particularly the Monophysite–Chalcedonian tension) that arose after the Council of Chalcedon (451). The text was based on the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), deliberately excluding the terminology of the Council of Chalcedon without explicitly rejecting it. In this respect, the Henotikon is regarded as a political-religious initiative aimed at preserving imperial unity. See (Scholasticus, 2000: 146).

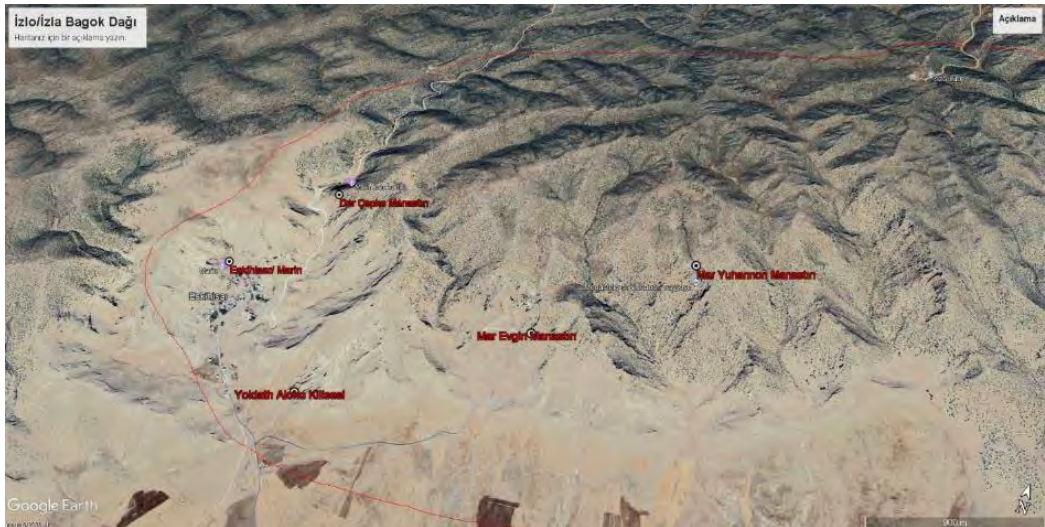
organisational network comprising dozens of metropolitan sees and hundreds of bishoprics (Wilmshurst, 2000). Nevertheless, the post-Sasanian Arab conquests, the political transformations during the Mongol-Ilkhanid period, and the destructions wrought by Timur gradually diminished this vast geographical presence; over time, the East Syrian communities were forced to retreat to mountainous and border regions in order to survive. Tamerlane's (1370–1405) invasions, which spread across the whole of Asia, brought about a major decline in the Eastern Church. As a result of these destructive conquests, most of the bishoprics affiliated with the Eastern Church disappeared. Only communities that found refuge in the inaccessible mountainous regions of northern Mesopotamia (in the Hakkari Mountains, located between northern Iraq and Lake Van) were able to survive (Mooker, 2003: 70). The patriarchal centre was located in Koçanis until 1915. During the same period, small communities also existed around Urmia (in present-day northwestern Iran) and in southwestern India (Kerala). (Chaillot, 2021: 2).

At this very point, the monastery and church structures around Nusaybin and Mount Izlo—particularly Mar Yuhannon, Mar Yoreth, Mar Bobi, and Yoldath Aloho—emerge as important memory spaces where themes of border, retreat, transformation, and continuity can be read in the history of the Eastern Syriacs (Korkut-Elyığit, 2024: 400).



Map 1: Historical-geographical map showing settlements and monasteries in the Tur Abdin region, Access: <http://www.suryoyena.com/>, Access Date: 05.12.2025





Map 2: Monastery settlements on Mount Izlo

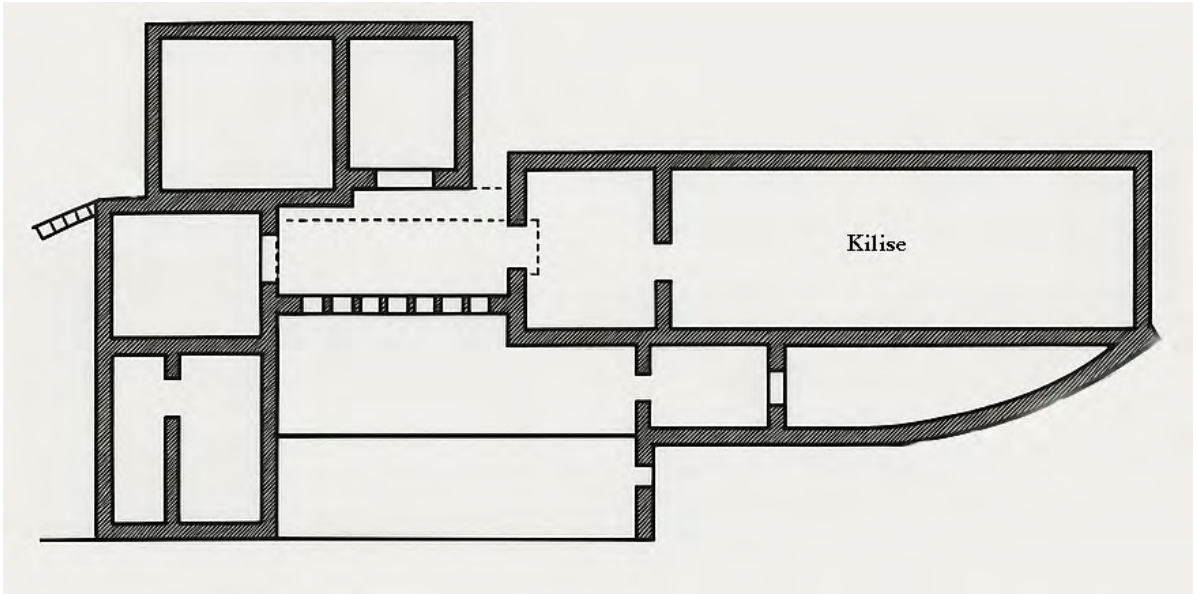
Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery

Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery (7) is located in Dibek Mahallesi, Nusaybin district of Mardin. Situated east of Mar Evgin Monastery, this structure was built on the rocky slopes of Mount Izlo in accordance with the practice of seclusion, which holds an important place in the Eastern Syriac monastic tradition. As it is currently abandoned, it no longer functions as an active monastery. However, some architectural sections, particularly the monastery church, have survived to the present day, retaining their originality to some extent.⁸

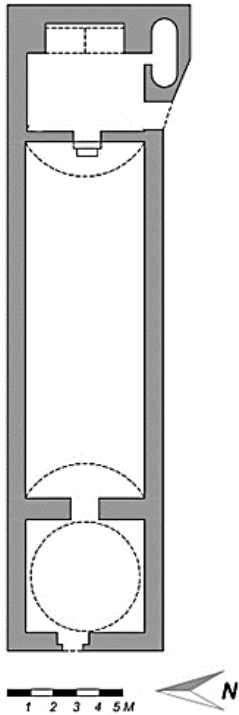
The building complex consists of rock-cut spaces and independent units constructed using stone materials. These spaces, which serve different functions, vary in terms of their layout and have been shaped according to the needs of monastic life.

⁷ Kashgar (Kashkar), accepted as the birthplace of Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo, (the Kashgar Region in southern Iraq, today "al-Wasit") is an important bishopric and cultural centre in the early Eastern Syriac tradition. (Fiey, 1968; Baum & Winkler, 2003). Due to the region's geography, which was densely populated by Arab tribes, it is known that religious figures originating from Kashgar were referred to in Syriac literature with the title "Tayyoyo/Arab" (Brock, 1982; Harrak, 2005). Indeed, the epithet "Arab" in Yuhannon's biographical records should be considered more as an indication of his place of birth and environmental identity than as an ethnic emphasis (Brock, 1999).

⁸ The monastery was registered by the Diyarbakır Regional Council for the Protection of Cultural Assets with its decision dated 22 November 2012 and numbered 941, and also by the Şanlıurfa Regional Council for the Protection of Cultural Assets with its decision dated 21 October 2020 and numbered 5748.



Plan 1: Layout plan of Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery (redrawn from Sinclair by G. Bell).



Plan 2: Survey plan of the Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery Church (T. Korkut-S.P. Emamieh, 2021).





Photo 1: Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery, general view (2021)

Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo is referred to in literature as "the Arab" because he was born in the town of Hira in the Kaşkar region. Mar Yuhannon, who chose a monastic life from an early age, made significant contributions to the formation of the Eastern Syriac church tradition together with Mar Evgin. Sources contain a noteworthy narrative related to the establishment of the monastery. According to this narrative, Mar Yuhannon informed Shem'un Huzaya of his impending death and requested that his body be taken to Mar Evgin Monastery after his death. However, after his death, the local believers did not allow his body to be moved elsewhere. According to the legend, some members of the Armenian community attempted to seize the saint's body but were unsuccessful; it is reported that only his right hand could be taken (Brock, 1980:15; Elyğit, 2023: 205).

Those involved in this incident were apprehended in Midyat, and when the local people sought to take possession of the sacred relic that had been seized, the matter came to the attention of Syndws, a believer from Nusaybin. Syndws then went to Midyat, spent the night in the church, and managed to retrieve the relic. This sacred relic was then considered a fundamental element in the construction of the monastery, with the aim of preserving the memory of Mar Yuhannon.

According to the oldest known account of Mar Yuhannon's life, Mar Yuhannon, one of the important saints of the Eastern Syriac tradition, was born in Hira, later came to the School of Nusaybin, and after his death, the monastery dedicated to him was built in the 9th century. The narrative tradition that developed over time regarded Mar Yuhannon as a student of Mar

Evgin. Herzfeld and Guyer dated the narthex dome, which they noted resembled the dome at Mar Evgin Monastery, to the 9th century; however, recent research has revealed that Mar Evgin's dome dates back to 1271. Ugo Monneret de Villard emphasises that the dome covering the church's narthex can be dated to the later stages of the post-Islamic period, and therefore the structure cannot have been built before the 11th century.

Sources reporting the restoration of Mar Evgin Monastery in 1271 also mention Mar Yuhannon Monastery. These sources indicate that a large number of monks lived in both monasteries during the period in question. Furthermore, records from 1501 and 1607 show that the Mar Yuhannon and Mar Evgin Monasteries continued to exist as active monasteries. As with the Mar Evgin Monastery, it is possible that the Mar Yuhannon Monastery was also used by the Western Syrians in the mid-18th century. The colophons compiled by Barsavam indicate that a strong bond persisted between the two monasteries in the 19th century.

The Mar Yuhannon Monastery, whose exact date of establishment cannot be determined, has survived to the present day largely intact thanks to various repairs it has undergone. The limited availability of consistent data regarding the monastery's construction date makes it difficult to place the building complex within a solid historical framework.

The monastery complex is situated on the steep cliffs of Mount Izlo. The settlement has a multi-unit layout, including rock-cut spaces and independent structures serving different functions. This architectural diversity is an important example reflecting the spatial organisation of the East Syriac monastic traditions in the region.

The monastery complex was designed with a terraced layout to adapt to the topographical features of the rocky terrain on which it was built. The building groups, spread over a fairly large area, are positioned against the rocky slopes. The series of arches, particularly visible on the southern facades of the architectural units that make up the complex, are noteworthy for their portico effect. Among these units, located at different levels, the church stands out due to its size and dominant position.

The monastery church has an east-west oriented rectangular plan, and access to the building is provided via stairs located at a lower level. The narthex section on the west side of the church has a square plan measuring 4.70 x 4.90 metres and is covered by a brick dome with trompes. The dome has a circular covering made of brick, and the bricks are laid in a regular pattern from the centre outwards, giving the dome surface a dynamic appearance. The trompe transitions, which allow the dome to sit on the square-shaped space, are noteworthy for their structural design combining brick and stone, with the horizontal and vertical brick rows in the transition elements creating a decorative effect.

The layout of the narthex in question clearly differs from the narthex typologies commonly seen in churches belonging to Western Syriac monasteries. Its square plan and dome roof contrast with the typical Western Syriac narthex layout, which is transverse, extends north-south, and is usually covered with a barrel vault.

From the narthex, one passes through a rectangular doorway with a barrel vault to the rectangular naos section, measuring 5.35x15.60 metres. The naos reflects a deep spatial understanding with its barrel vault extending in an east-west direction; in this respect, it presents a different architectural approach from the transverse spatial design developing on the north-south axis, which is frequently encountered in Western Syriac monastery churches.



This situation is significant in that it shows that the influence of the Eastern Syriac tradition is more dominant in the plan organisation of the Mar Yuhannon Monastery.

The naos space is separated from the apse section by the templon wall. The cradle vault covering the naos is constructed using brick, and the apse section is similarly emphasised with a brick arch. The triple arch arrangement seen in the 3.60x5,10 m altar section on the east wall is a rare feature in Syriac churches in the region, presenting an unusual architectural characteristic for the structure.

Within the monastery complex, there are numerous architectural units that appear to have served different functions. However, due to the variable dimensions of these spaces and the lack of sufficient written or material documentation, their original purposes cannot be definitively determined. On the upper level of the building complex, which includes the church, there is a structure resembling a watchtower. In addition, various additional spaces have been arranged in the rocky mass on which the monastery stands. These spaces, created by carving into the rock surface, appear to have been used for different purposes according to the needs of the period.



Photo 2: Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery Church, west facade, (2021)



Photo 3: Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery Church, narthex, (2021)



Photo 4: Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery Church, narthex roof, (2021)



Photo 5: Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo Monastery Church, naos, (2021)

Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo (Der Çepke) Monastery

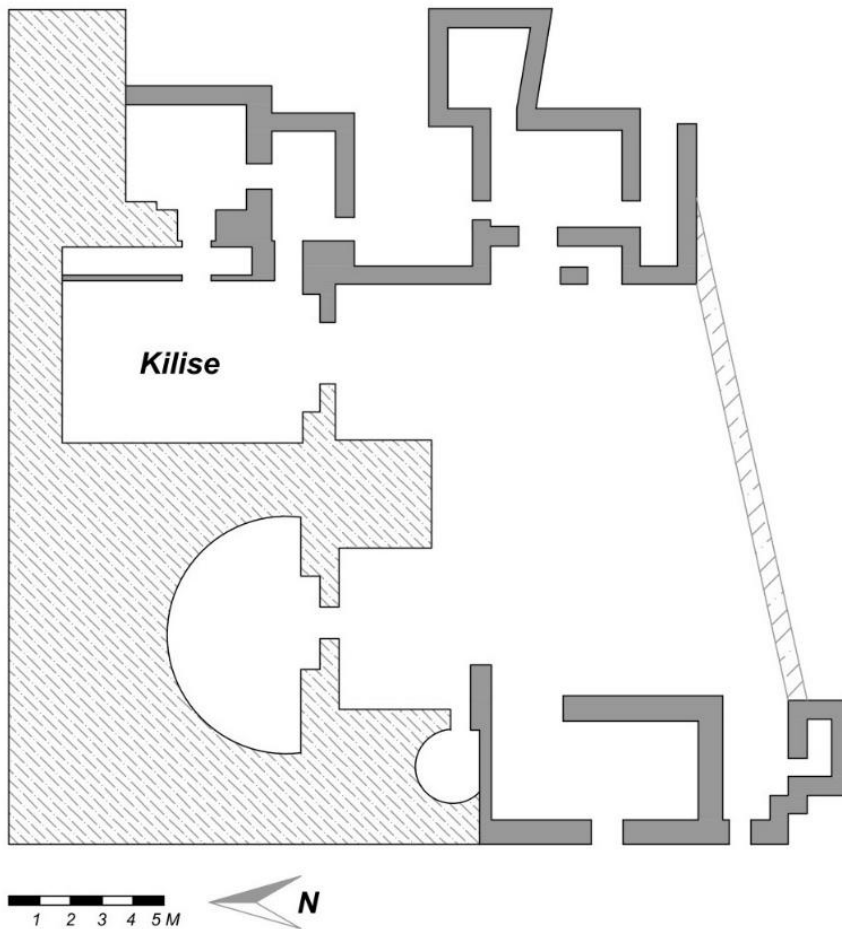
Mar Yoreth (Aleksandroyo) Monastery is a multi-unit, terraced monastery settlement built on a steep slope overlooking the Marin Strait, approximately 1,5 km northeast of the village of Mare (Eskihisar) in Nusaybin. The settlement, located at an altitude of approximately 900 metres above sea level, is harmoniously positioned among the natural rock masses of the mountain, presenting the appearance of a terraced monastery complex with structures spread across different levels.

Mar Yoreth is mentioned in sources as a saint of Alexandrian origin; his arrival in Nusaybin and his activities there have found their place in the Eastern Syriac saint literature (Fiey, 1966: 696).

The monastery settlement is spread over a wide terrace system extending approximately 150 metres in an east-west direction on the southern slope of Mount Izlo. The retaining walls, rising steeply from the rock, define different levels; the building masses have become both technical elements supporting the terraces and spaces accommodating monastic life. In this respect, Mar Yoreth stands out as one of the most complex and large-scale Eastern Syriac settlements on Mount Izlo (Sinclair, 1987:346).

The main church is located to the north of an open courtyard measuring approximately 9x11 m, which is at the centre of the monastery complex. Access to the courtyard is provided by a 70 cm wide rectangular door in the outer wall on the west side. The courtyard consists of mixed structures, with the front section being masonry and the rear section consisting of

spaces carved into the natural rock mass. Within the courtyard, there are three main architectural units that complete the functional integrity of the complex: the first is the church, which forms the main structure of the courtyard. In addition to the church, a cell has been identified that meets the individual worship and contemplation needs of monastic life. Furthermore, within the courtyard, there is another space, probably used for daily service and service activities (storage, preparation, kitchen functions or auxiliary services), used to sustain community life. The church is located at the centre of this courtyard and borders its northern side. The naos space measures approximately 5.35x7.75 m and was created entirely using rock-carving techniques. On the eastern side of the naos, there is a rectangular-plan altar (apse) measuring approximately 3.13x3.90 m. To the south of the altar, there is a cell, probably serving as a pastophorion, located adjacent to the apse space. Another space connected to the west wall of the church could be considered a cell for seclusion, given its layout and location.



Plan 3: Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo (Der Çepke) Monastery Church and surrounding structures, site plan, (T. Korkut-S.P. Emamieh, 2021).



On the west façade of the church, there is an arched entrance portico opening onto the courtyard. The naos and apse are arranged as two volumes close to squares, adjacent to each other, with the apse shifted to the north of the nave to conform to the rock topography. This allows for the creation of side spaces on the south side. On the upper terraces, there are various architectural units that support the functional integrity of the monastery complex. The rock-cut cells located on these terraces are thought to have been spaces used by monks for seclusion, worship, and individual contemplation. Similarly, the watchtower or sentry tower identified in the same area stands out as a strategic element, constructed to ensure the monastery's security and monitor the surroundings. Other structural arrangements scattered across the terraces must have been auxiliary units serving different functions. These sections are thought to have been used as food storage areas, water collection areas, workshops, or short-term accommodation cells. In the rock-cut spaces where the frescoes are located, the plaster layer is separating from the surface, and the pigments are largely faded. Nevertheless, the Mar Yoreth settlement retains its status as one of the most distinguished examples of East Syriac monastic architecture due to its scale (terrace system, and combination of rock and masonry).



Photo 6: General view of Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo (Der Çepke) Monastery, (2021)



Photo 7: General view of Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo (Der Çepke) Monastery (2021)



Photo 8: Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo (Der Çepke) Monastery Church, (2021)





Photo 9: Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo (Der Çepke) Monastery courtyard and south facade of the church, (2021)



Photo 10: Naos and apse of Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo Monastery (Der Çepke), (2021)

Mar Evgin Monastery

The monastery settlements built on the steep rocky slopes concentrated around Mount Izla, such as Mar Yoret and Mar Yuhannan Tayyaya, Mar Awgin and the Kashgarli Mar Abraham Monastery, reflect distinctive spatial features such as the multi-layered architectural developments of Eastern Syriac monasticism. A settlement pattern integrated with the rock, single-nave churches extending east-west, and flat-walled apse plans indicate a conscious departure from the Western Syriac monastic architecture that developed in Tur Abdin (Elygiçit, 2023:189).

A similar design approach seen in the Mar Yoreth and Mar Yuhannon monasteries is also observed in the Mar Evgin Monastery, located on the same mountain range, and these structures are considered to be the product of a common architectural concept in terms of planning and location. Gertrude Bell's assessments of the Mar Evgin (Mar Evgenius) Monastery are largely based on J.-B. Pognon's field observations and epigraphic findings.⁹ The researcher suggests that the monastery's inhabitants at that time belonged to the Jacobite (Syriac Orthodox) community, but that this community's ownership of the monastery did not date back more than a hundred years. In contrast, he notes that there are some historical indications that the Eastern Syriacs maintained their presence until 1505 (Bell, 1982:3). Some sources also indicate that it remained under Eastern Syriac control until 1629 (Courtois, 2014: 33). Pognon's epigraphic studies revealed only one inscription in the monastery that could be dated to the early period. Based on its palaeographic and content- cal characteristics, this inscription has been dated to the 12th century, providing limited but important data on the monastery's phases of use during the Middle Ages. These findings constitute a fundamental reference point for understanding the historical continuity of Mar Evgin Monastery and the processes of change of hands between different Syriac communities. According to him, the church and monastery structures were severely damaged after the change of control of the monastery by the Eastern Syriacs; the existing structure was rebuilt by the Jacobites.

⁹ Pognon personally visited the monastery and briefly mentioned the structure in his work (See *Inscriptions de la Mésopotamie*, p. 109).





Photograph 11: Mar'e/Marin and its Castle (Eskihisar, 2021)

The Mar Evgin Monastery complex is situated on natural rock formations on the mountainside, with the entire structure placed on a narrow terrace extending at the foot of the steep cliffs. This location demonstrates a conscious exploitation of the natural possibilities offered by the topography and the adoption of a spatial preference for seclusion and limited access, frequently encountered in monastic architecture. In the southern part of the monastery area, high walls rise above the rocks and surround the settlement, forming a courtyard boundary. These walls are shaped to conform to the steep and irregular structure of the rocks and should be considered artificial elements that complement the natural lines of defence. Access to the monastery, which is a large-scale complex, is provided via stone steps extending along the southern slope. The monastery settlement reflects an architectural approach that combines natural rock spaces with masonry structures built using stone materials. The spaces created by hollowing out the main rock mass and the independent masonry structures are designed to complement each other functionally and spatially. The structures built using stone material are organised around a closed courtyard and exhibit a holistic and hierarchical settlement pattern in terms of their plan scheme. The complex consists of the main church, the Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Beth Kadişe (House of Saints) and various additional spaces connected to them. In addition, there are cell-type spaces carved into the rocks and building remains within the monastery that appear to have served different functions but have not survived intact to the present day. This architectural diversity reveals that the Mar Evgin Monastery was not merely a complex of buildings intended for liturgical functions; it was also used as a multifunctional monastic centre that met the needs of accommodation, seclusion, and daily life. The natural defensive opportunities provided by the rocky masses and the mountainside were supported by long ramparts, which are now largely destroyed. These fortification elements reveal that Mar Evgin Monastery was designed not only as a spiritual centre but also as a settlement for defence. In this respect, the complex can be evaluated

within the scope of the fortified monastery typology, showing that the character of monastic life, focused on seclusion and worship, was shaped within a fortified architectural order in line with environmental and security conditions.

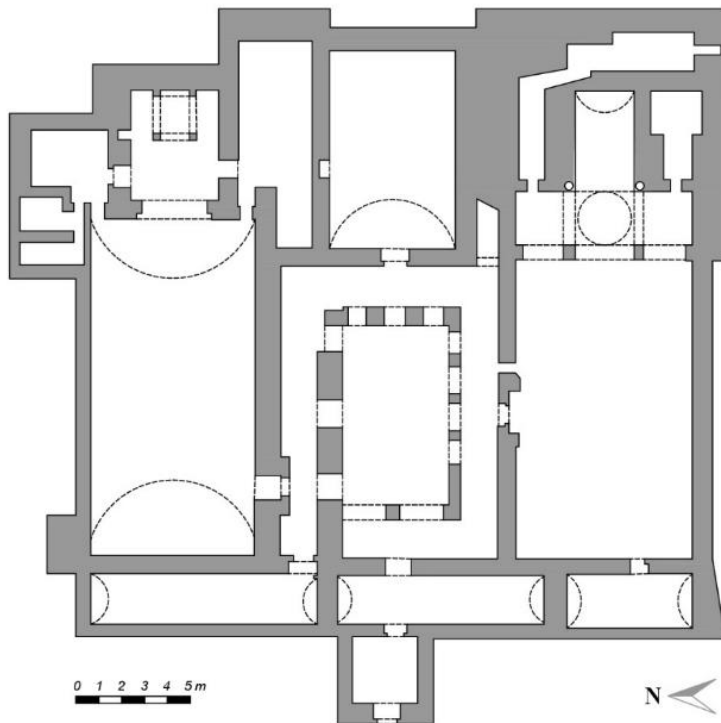


Photo 12: General view of Mar Evgin, (2021)





Photo 13: General view of Mar Evgin, (2021)



Plan 4: Mar Evgin Monastery (redrawn from G. Bell)

Evaluation and Comparison

Throughout the historical process spanning from late antiquity to the early Islamic period in Northern Mesopotamia, the Eastern Syriac communities emerged not only as representatives of a theological schism but also as active elements of regional transformations through their institutional organisation, intellectual production, and spatial practices. The origins of this historical positioning can be traced to the Christological preference that crystallised with the rejection of the Council of Ephesus in 431. This rejection permanently separated the East Syriac tradition from the Byzantine-centred church structure; unlike the debates that deepened in Western Syriac/Miaphysite circles after the Council of Chalcedon in 451, this separation paved the way for a more stable and institutional identity construction for the East Syriac Christians. In this context, the Eastern Syriac tradition has exhibited a theological stance defined by continuity and institutionalisation rather than polemical opposition. This theological orientation is closely linked to the Eastern Syriacs' relationship with their political geography. The Eastern Syriac presence, concentrated particularly in regions under Sasanian rule, entered a new historical phase with the transfer of Nisibis from Roman to Persian rule in 363. Shaped in an environment relatively free from Byzantine dogmatic and administrative pressures, Eastern Syriac institutions not only preserved their existence in this geography but also developed a strong institutional structure and intellectual tradition. For this reason, the Eastern Syriacs should be regarded not as a movement of opposition to Byzantium, but as a form of Christianity outside Byzantium. (Keser, 2021: 35).

The centrality that Nisibis gained in the East Syriac world during the late antique period is one of the most prominent indicators of this process. The transfer of the theological education tradition that began in Edessa to Nisibis in 489 made the city the main centre of intellectual production for the Eastern Church. The activities of leading theologians such as Narsai transformed Nisibis from a mere military town on the border into a centre for the systematic production of theological thought in the Eastern Christian world. The establishment of the Eastern Syriac metropolitanate in 410 institutionalised this intellectual dynamism and enabled the Nisibis-centred church structure to continue for centuries. The continuity of the Eastern Syriac tradition can be traced not only through written sources and institutional structures but also through the architectural and monastic landscape.

It would be appropriate to begin with the settlement of Marine (Merîn / M'arre), which allows us to understand the settlement and historical context of the region, in order to evaluate the Eastern Syriac monastic tradition that developed around Mount Izlo (Izala) and Nusaybin. Located on the southern slopes of Mount Izlo, within the boundaries of the present-day district of Nusaybin in Mardin, Marine, whose name is of Aramaic origin, means "caves." With its rocky topography and natural and artificial spaces carved into the mountainside, it reflects the characteristic features of the Eastern Syriac monastic geography. Following the death of Roman Emperor Julianus in 363 AD, the region came under Sasanian rule through a treaty between Rome and Sasanian Iran. This paved the way for the Christian communities in Marine and its surroundings to develop in line with the Eastern Syriac tradition that took shape within the Iranian borders rather than the Byzantine world. Sources suggest that Eastern Syriacs may have settled in Marine before the Syriac Orthodox community and, consequently, established the first churches and monasteries. This situation reveals that Marine served as both a transition point between the plain settlement and the hermitic life in



the mountains and a strategic hub within the network of monasteries stretching along Mount Izlo.

Historical sources clearly reveal the central role of Mount Izlo in the East Syriac monastic tradition (Palmer, 2010:115). According to the *Seert Chronicle*, Mor Abrohom of Kashgar secretly left the city at night during his studies in Nusaybin and withdrew to Mount Izlo, where he lived an ascetic life in a cave attributed to Jacob. Over time, this ascetic life, together with the monks who gathered around him, transformed into an institutional monastic system; with the settlement of monks from different regions, Mount Izlo became one of the important centres of the Eastern Syriac monastic network (Scher, 1911: 134). This narrative concretely reflects the transition from individual seclusion to institutional monasticism.

According to sources, Saint Abraham spent a long time in places symbolic of early Christianity, such as Hirta, Mount Sinai and Jerusalem, before founding his monastery; he brought the ascetic experiences he gained in these regions to Mesopotamia (Tamcke, 2007: 480). Abraham later came to the School of Nisibis, and after his activities there, he chose Mount Izlo as a suitable retreat for monastic life (Fiey, 1977, pp. 144–150; Van Rompay, 2011, p. 8). This choice demonstrates that Mount Izlo was perceived not only as a geographical centre but also as a spiritual one.

The most fundamental factor increasing Saint Abraham's importance in monastic history is that in 571, he established a monastic order consisting of twelve rules, which was accepted within the East Syriac tradition. This arrangement should be considered a systematic reform movement aimed at disciplining monastic life. The rules established by Abraham institutionalised principles such as seclusion, obedience, communal living, and detachment from the material world, playing a decisive role in standardising Eastern Syriac monastic practice.

Kashgarli Abraham's followers adopted this order, establishing new monasteries in different regions of Mesopotamia and ensuring the spread of this monastic reform across a wide geographical area. In the 19th century, the monastery, along with several other monasteries in the region, was reconnected to the Syriac Orthodox Church. (Bilge, 2006: 21) During this period, the structure was revitalised not only administratively but also functionally, undergoing repairs and once again becoming a centre inhabited by hermit monks. In this context, Mount Izlo should be regarded not only as a place where saints withdrew into seclusion, but also as a centre where the Eastern Syriac monastic tradition was institutionalised and transmitted to surrounding regions.

It is claimed that Abraham of Kashgar (d. 588) established his own monastery near Mount Izlo. After gaining experience in centres where the ascetic tradition of early Christianity was concentrated, such as Hirta, Mount Sinai and Jerusalem, it is no coincidence that Saint Abraham chose a mountainous and secluded area like Mount Izlo for monastic life. Indeed, Gertrude Bell's published report, based on Walther Hinrichs' 1911 field observations, locates the Mor Abraham Monastery not with a specific village settlement, but Bakacık (Kinikê)–Hasantepe (TılHassan)–Günyurdu (Mâr Bâb) line, close to the summit, surrounded by cave cells and dominating the plain (Bell, 1982:79). This description is in complete harmony with Abraham's ideal of a monastery based on the principles of seclusion, discipline and withdrawal from the world. In contrast, the identification of the monastery with the village of Eskihişar (Marine) in modern literature does not correspond with the historical-topographical data

reported by Bell (Pekol-Katrakazis, 2022:87). Our field research in Eskihisar village and its immediate surroundings revealed no architectural remains matching Bell/Hinrichs' description, indicating that this identification requires re-evaluation.¹⁰ Therefore, the location of the Mar Abraham Monastery should be considered not only in terms of administrative or toponymic data, but also in the context of the ascetic monastic understanding represented by Saint Abraham and the spiritual geography of Mount Izlo.



Photo 14: Kashgarli Mor Abrohom Monastery (O. Bell,

The small Church of Mary (Yoldath Aloho), located outside the settlement of M'arre, close to the edge of the plain and on the road to Mar Evgin Monastery, stands out as a meaningful example reflecting both the spatial preferences and theological identity of the East Syrian presence. The East Syriac Yoldath Aloho Church is located near the village of Mare (Eskihisar) in Nusaybin, leaning against a high rock mass in the valley. The structure, named Yoldath Aloho¹¹, meaning "God-bearer," reflects a distinct theological divergence in Eastern Syriac Christology regarding the titles attributed to Mary. In this context, the tradition in question rejected the definition of Mary as "Mother of God" (Theotokos); this rejection is the result of a Christological approach parallel to the views of Nestorius. According to the East Syrians, this title evokes the theologically problematic idea that God, who is eternal and uncreated, was born in time. In contrast, the Syriac Orthodox Church has considered the non-

¹⁰ See: Korkut, T., & Elyğit, U. (2024). 2022 Mardin and Batman provinces (Turabdin) medieval period cultural heritage surface survey. In E. Evcin (Ed.), *39th Research Results Meeting* (Vol. 3, pp. 399–416). Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums.

¹¹ Yoldath (ܝܠܕܬ) is a Syriac term and the verb root ܝܠܕ (yalad) means "to give birth". See: Bulut, 1996:14.



attribution of the title "God-Bearer" (Theotokos / Yoldath Aloho) to Mary as a direct denial of the divine nature of Jesus Christ and has developed a strong theological objection to this view. According to Syriac Orthodox theology, the inseparable union of the divine and human natures in the single person of Christ necessitates that Mary be referred to by this title. As sources indicate, the fact that the Eastern Syriac community formed earlier than the Syriac Orthodox presence in M'arre suggests that this group may have built the city's first church or churches in the settlement centre (Palmer, 2011: 5).

The Yoldath Aloho Church, in terms of its plan, is a church with a rectangular exterior and a single-nave interior with a semicircular apse. This layout is relatively unusual for Western Syriac monastery churches but reflects a more typical plan type in the Eastern Syriac tradition. The nave is covered by a barrel vault resting on rubble stone walls. The parabolic form of the vault and its irregular junction with the apse arch indicate a second phase of construction. There are two niches on the north and south side walls, with painted crosses visible on their rear surfaces. Traces indicating older wall fabric can be seen in places beneath the interior plaster. On the west façade, there is a low entrance opening with a single-piece lintel and corbel. Today, a significant portion of the apse and nave vault has collapsed, and the interior is largely filled with rubble. The church continues to be an important element of Syriac architecture in the region due to its typological simplicity, plan scheme, and its border location between the East-West Syriac traditions.



Photo 15: Yoldath Aloho Church, general view from the south-east façade of the church, (2021).



Photo 16: Yoldath Aloho Church, naos and apse space, (2021).

The Mar Bobi Church in Günyurdu (Marbobo) Village, dedicated to Mar Bobi and believed to be one of the students of Kashgarli Abraham, should be evaluated among the structures belonging to the Eastern Syriac tradition in terms of its historical, theological and institutional context. The structure is a noteworthy example in terms of demonstrating the spread of the East Syriac monastic environment along the Upper Mesopotamia and Tur Abdin line. Mar Bobi (d. 628), one of the leading figures of Eastern Syriac theology and monastic tradition, was raised in the monastic community founded by Abraham of Kashgar; he later established his own monastery in the Beth Zabday region, contributing to the institutionalisation of this tradition (Kayasü,2022:199). This led to Mar Bobi being recognised not only as a saintly figure but also as an influential theological authority in the formation of the East Syriac monastic network. The fact that the church is dedicated to Mar Bobi clearly reveals the doctrinal identity and sectarian affiliation of the structure. The structure was designed as a rock-cut church. Four steps lead down to the entrance; the first two are considered part of the original rock-hewn arrangement, while the other two are regarded as elements added during the process of integrating the church into the new complex. When Mar Aho Church was built, a porch was added to the entrance of Mar Bobi, and the original façade was largely left inside with a new doorway (Hollerweger, 1999:305). One of the most characteristic features of the church is the five pulpits and the richly decorated baptismal font located inside. The pulpits consist of horizontal stone slabs resting on a single vertical stone block, indicating a multi-focal spatial arrangement designed for liturgical readings and prayers. The baptismal font is striking both plastically and iconographically with its vertical stone carved with cross motifs. The altar area is separated from the nave by a three-arched wall. Two of the arches open directly onto the



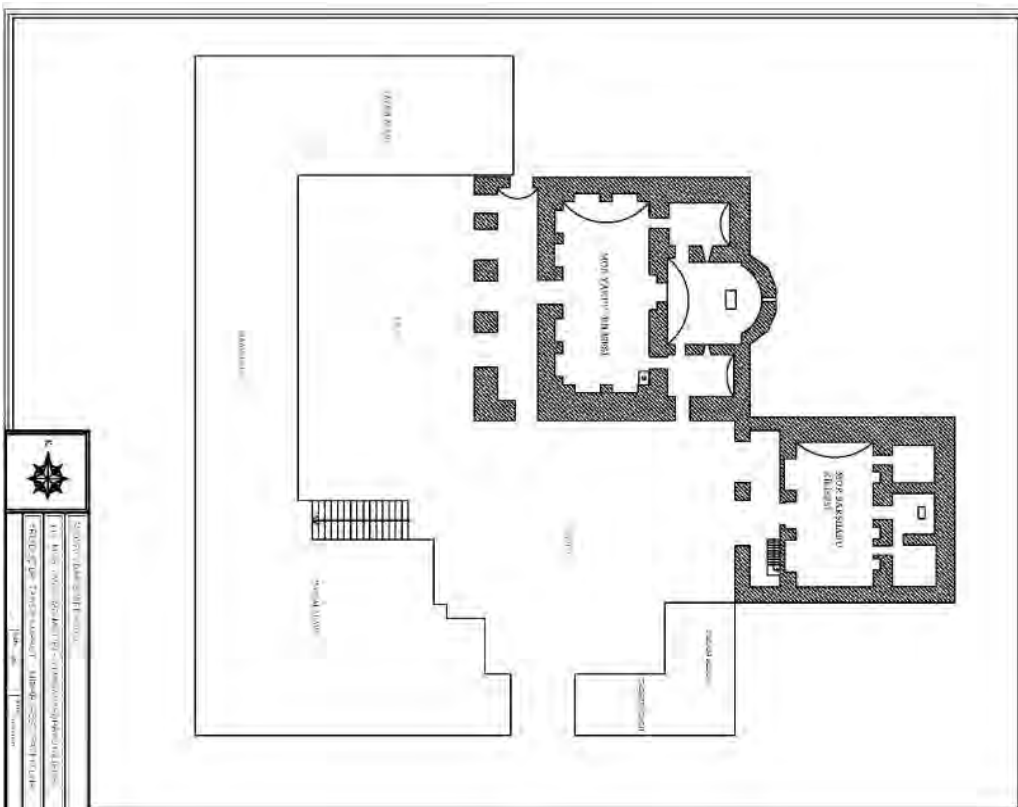
altar area; the third opens onto a small niche, enclosed on three sides and separated from the front by a railing. The window behind the niche provides a visual connection to the altar area. The presence of numerous burial niches in the interior indicates that the church was also used as a burial chapel over time.



Photo 17: Mar Bobi Church, naos and apse spaces, (2021).

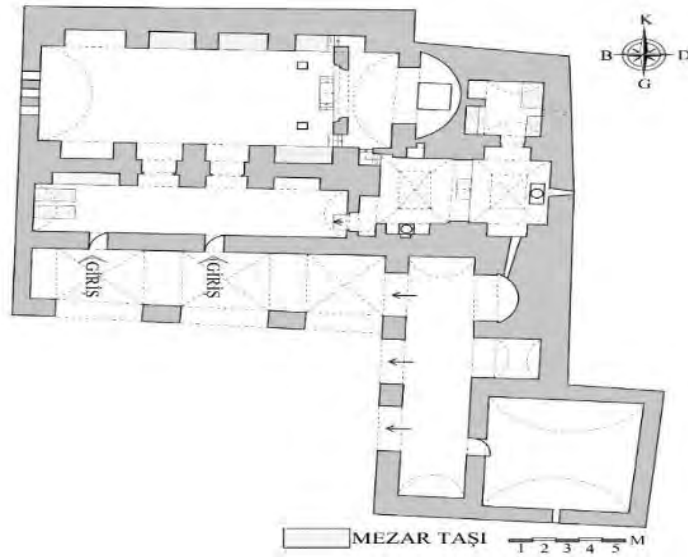
The monasteries of Mar Yoreth and Mar Yuhannon, along with Mar Evgin and Mar Abrohom, are situated on the steep and inaccessible rocky slopes of Mount Izlo (Izla). Their location embodies the architectural manifestation of the concept of asceticism (*askesis*), a fundamental element of the Eastern Syriac monastic tradition. These structures should be regarded not only as religious spaces fulfilling the functions of worship and shelter, but also as sacred landscape elements resulting from a conscious strategy of integration with the natural environment. The rugged topography where the monasteries are situated is both a symbolic choice representing separation from worldly life and a functional element in terms of defence and protection. When these monasteries are considered collectively, some fundamental observations regarding the development of Eastern Syriac architecture around Mount Izla and Nusaybin emerge. Firstly, it is evident that the structures adopt a planning approach that leans against natural rocky surfaces, is shaped by carving into the bedrock in places, or is integrated with minimal intervention into the existing topography. This reflects an approach that is harmonious with nature and does not push its boundaries, rather than an assertion of dominance over nature. Commanding positions overlooking valleys confer both visual dominance and symbolic "height" upon the monasteries.

Another striking element in the spatial design of the monasteries is the high-vaulted plan scheme extending deep in an east-west direction. This arrangement is so pronounced that it cannot be explained solely by liturgical orientation and can be considered a characteristic feature that distinguishes it from other monastic communities in the Tur Abdin region. This spatial organisation, developing along the east-west axis, creates a hierarchical and functional continuity between the church, narthex, cells and communal living areas, while also serving as a spatial backbone that determines the rhythm of monastic life. In the Western Syriac monasteries of Tur Abdin, however, monastery churches mostly have plans that develop transversely, expanding in a north-south direction. Therefore, while the monasteries of Mount Izla present a spatial hierarchy defined by depth and orientation, the Jacobite monasteries in Tur Abdin exhibit a plan scheme based on width and horizontal expansion. Examples include the Mor Loozor monastery in the village of Habsenus (Mercimekli) in Midyat, the Barıştepe (Salah) monastery, the Mor Yakup monastery, the Suruçlu Mor Yakup monastery in the Artuklu district, and the Mor Yuhannon monastery in the village of Nurlu (Derikfan) in the Gercüş district of Batman province.

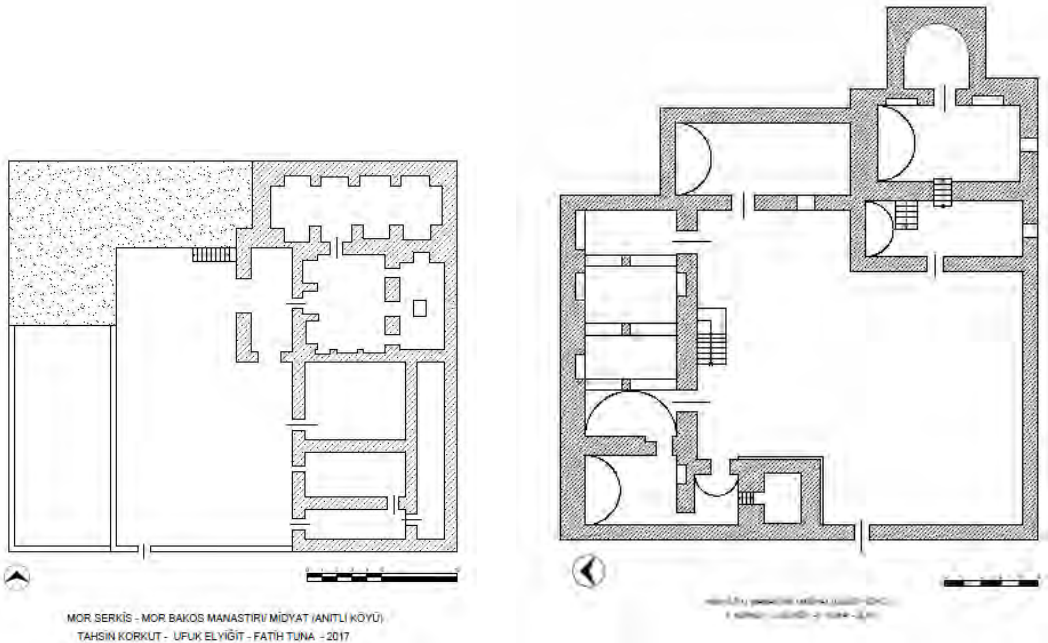


Plan 5: Mor Yakup Monastery (Barıştepe-Salah) (T. Korkut, F. Tuna, 2017)





Plan 6: Yemişli Mor Kuryakos Church (L, Uygun, 2024)



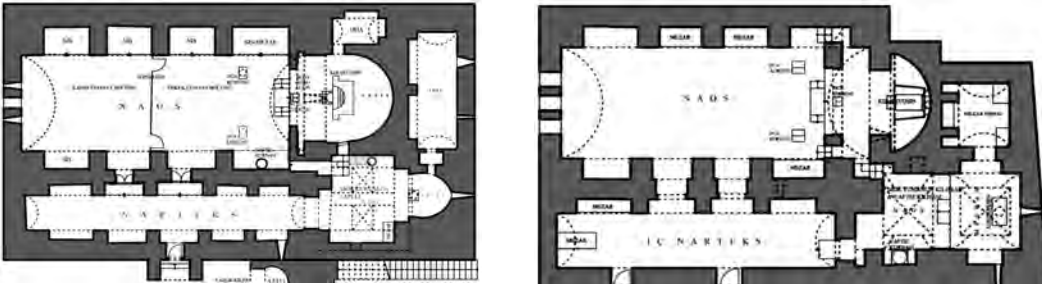
Plan 7: Mor Serkis
F. Tuna, 2017)

Mor Bakos Monastery.

Plan 8: Mor İliyo Monastery, (T. Korkut,
F. Tuna, 2017)

The east-west orientation of the East Syriac monastery churches in Izla resembles traditional village church plans rather than the monastery churches in Tur Abdin. The fact that the churches have a vaulted roof system inside and a flat roof outside is considered to be an architectural arrangement that shows commonality and continuity in terms of planning and roof design between the East Syriac architectural tradition and the Jacobite (West Syriac) monastery architecture. A similar approach is observed in the Eastern Syriac architecture of Hakkari and Iran (Top, 2001: 517).

In Eastern Syriac architecture, the domed narthex, which is arranged before entering the naos space, stands out as a prominent architectural feature, as seen in the Mar Yuhannon and Mor Evgin Monastery Churches. In contrast, in the Western Syriac (Jacobite) tradition, the function of the narthex is often fulfilled by a columned, arcaded vestibule opening onto a courtyard in front of the naos door; this section essentially serves as a transitional space designed as a porch. Indeed, in some churches, it is understood that these arcades were closed off over time, transforming these areas into secondary places of worship dedicated to Mary. It can be said that the tradition of dedicating a space to Mary or a saint has led to the emergence of small spaces, usually located on the south side of the main church and resembling chapels; this practice has become a widespread architectural practice, particularly in the context of traditional village churches rather than monastery churches. This arrangement can be clearly observed in examples such as the Monumental Mor Sobo Church, Mor Azozoyel Church (Keferze), Mor Yuhannon (Kilit), Mor Sobo (Arbaye/Dargeçit) Church, Mor Kuryakos Church Yemişli (Enhıl) and Mor Kuryakos Church (Arnas).



Plan 9: Mor Kuryakos Church (Bağlarbaşı/Arnas) **Plan 10:** Mor Kuryakos Church Yemişli (Enhıl) (L, Uygun, 2024)

This multi-layered architectural development reveals the historical continuity of these monasteries and their capacity to adapt to changing needs. The spaces added, repairs made, and functional changes implemented in different periods demonstrate that these structures are not static monuments built in a single phase; rather, they are living architectural organisms that have been actively used and reinterpreted over many centuries. In this context, these monasteries are among the fundamental reference points for understanding both the typological and conceptual framework of East Syriac monastic architecture as it took shape on Mount Izla and its surroundings.

The formal characteristics of the dome in the narthex of Mar Yuhannon are similar to the dome found in Mar Evgin Monastery, which is dated to the 12th century in the literature. From this perspective, it can be considered that both domes can be dated to similar periods.



The monasteries on the slopes of Mount Izla are large monastery complexes integrating rock-cut spaces with masonry units on terraced rock formations, while Mar Bobi and Yoldath Aloho are more modest in scale but similarly feature worship spaces in direct contact with the rock. The multi-focal pulpit arrangement and baptismal font at Mar Bobi, and the single-nave, apse-shaped layout seen at Yoldath Aloho, demonstrate how the East Syriac liturgical understanding was integrated with local architecture. These plan types differ from the north–south oriented spatial understanding commonly found in Western Syriac churches (Sinclair, 1987:346).

Particularly in the structures of Mar Yuhannon and Mar Yoreth, an architectural approach stands out where rock-carved spaces and stone-masonry facades are used together, and architectural elements built with natural rock texture are integrated. A similar architectural approach can be observed in structures such as the Virgin Mary (Damlayan) Monastery, Mor Behnam Monastery and Suruçlu Mor Yakup Monastery, located north of Deyrulzafaran Monastery and situated on mountain slopes. In these monasteries, cells and auxiliary spaces carved into the main rock mass are complemented by stone masonry walls on the front facades or access points, creating an architectural repertoire based on the unity of rock and masonry.

While Mar Bobi is a church entirely carved into the rock, Yoldath Aloho is a rubble stone structure partly embedded in the slope and partly open to the outside. This diversity demonstrates that the Eastern Syriac communities had a flexible and pragmatic building practice in the mountainous geography. The architectural details of the structures point to a broad historical span from the 6th century to the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern period. The entrance arch and garland decoration of Mar Bobi refer to an early date, while the inscriptions and decorative details seen in Mar Yoreth and Mar Yuhannon are consistent with the 12th–13th centuries (Hollerweger, 1999: 298). Yoldath Aloho, on the other hand, presents the appearance of a modest rural church built in the Late Middle Ages or later.

Mar Yuhannon, Mar Yoreth and Yoldath Aloho still retain legible plan and façade features despite extensive damage, water leaks, rubble infill and destruction. Mar Bobi is relatively well preserved due to active use; however, in this case, transformations resulting from modern interventions and functional adaptations are also a concern. Although each of these structures has different risk profiles and conservation needs, they all deserve to be addressed within an integrated regional conservation strategy.

Another noteworthy feature of the monasteries belonging to the Eastern Syriacs in Izlo is the apse space. The naos and apse are separated by the templon wall. In the apse, the niche where the altar is located in the centre is wider; together with two side niches that support this central emphasis, an apse design with a triple niche arrangement has been created.

There are religious structures belonging to the Eastern Syriacs in the province of Hakkâri. The churches and monasteries identified in the Yüksekova, Şemdinli and Çukurca areas of Hakkâri province, in particular, exhibit a character that is architecturally compatible with the geography, simple and function-oriented. These structures are characterised by a single-nave rectangular plan, a barrel vault covering system, the use of rubble and rough-hewn stone, and a settlement approach leaning on rocky and sloping terrain. (Top, 2001: 517) In contrast, the Eastern Syriac (Syriac Orthodox) monasteries in the Tur Abdin region reflect an institutionalised monastic tradition with their multi-room and courtyard layout, higher quality

stonework and, albeit limited, symbolic decorative elements. This difference should be considered as a direct reflection of the architecture, reflecting not only denominational divisions but also the scattered settlement structure of the Eastern Syriac communities in Hakkâri, security concerns, and challenging topographical conditions.

The Tur Abdin region corresponds to a geography that should be considered within the eastern extensions of the Greek (Roman-Byzantine) world in terms of its cultural and architectural identity. In this context, the civilisation in the region should be regarded not merely as a local or closed tradition, but as an integral part of the multi-layered and large-scale cultural basin of the Hellenistic East. Indeed, while the architectural production that developed in Mosul and its surroundings exhibits a distinctly Persian aesthetic and structural character in terms of its structural design and decorative approach, the northern borders of the Mesopotamian plain and the mountainous areas beyond these borders have been influenced by a different cultural dynamic throughout history. The prevailing understanding in this region reflects a unique cultural synthesis that, on the one hand, reflects the spatial and intellectual continuity of the Ancient Greek heritage and, on the other hand, the synthesis of local and regional elements of Asian origin. This synthesis constituted one of the most powerful and productive areas of interaction that shaped the political, artistic and architectural orientations of the ancient world, transforming Tur Abdin into a cultural geography that served as an interface between the Eastern Mediterranean and Upper Mesopotamia. (Bell, 1982:4) The fact that these structures are deliberately located in rugged and inaccessible topographies, far from settlement areas, demonstrates that in the East Syriac monastic tradition, asceticism (askesis) was embraced not only as a spiritual practice but also as a spatial preference and architectural strategy. In this respect, the Eastern Syriac monasteries on the slopes of Mount Izla bear a strong resemblance to the hermit settlements defined as "hebis" in the Syriac tradition. Indeed, the Mor Barsawmo Hebisi (Place of Retreat) and Rock Monastery in the village of Bülbül, Yeşilli district, Mardin province, and the rock-cut cells, small places of worship and individual retreat units found on the mountain slopes north of Deyrülzafaran Monastery share common features with the Eastern Syriac structures on Mount Izla in terms of scale, spatial simplicity, and direct relationship with the natural rock, share a common ascetic landscape understanding with the East Syriac structures on Mount Izla (.). As in these examples, the structures in question produce a spatial language that prioritises a conscious withdrawal from the world, silence, and a spiritual practice that desires continuity, rather than concerns with defence or representation (Korkut et al., 2024: 365; Korkut, 2022: 154).

In contrast to the rich stone plastic decoration, relief programmes and iconographic narrative repertoire seen in Georgian and Armenian religious architecture, the Eastern Syriac churches in the Mardin and Hakkâri basins display a distinctly simple aesthetic approach. For example, in the medieval Armenian tradition, the Geghard Monastery (12th-13th centuries, Kotayk/Armenia), Tigran Honents (12th-13th century, Ani/Kars), and Akdamar Church (10th century, Gevaş/Van) feature narrative programmes depicting scenes from the Old and New Testaments on their exterior reliefs. Similarly, in Georgian architecture, the facade reliefs of Öşki Monastery (10th century, Uzundere/Erzurum) Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (11th century, Mtskheta/Georgia) create a powerful symbolic surface language with their façade reliefs, cross compositions and figurative elements (Korkut, 2018: 199). In contrast, the East Syrians, due to their theological approach, have been distant from the use of icons and iconographic depictions in church spaces. For this reason, figurative depictions, extensive



relief programmes or fresco cycles are not seen in the East Syrian churches in the Mardin region; the space is defined almost entirely through structural simplicity. The decorative element is mostly limited to a simple cross motif located above the entrance or on the apse axis. It is understood that the same attitude is reflected in residential architecture, with iconographic elements not being preferred in everyday living spaces either. Therefore, the simplicity in Eastern Syriac architecture should be evaluated not only as a reflection of economic or geographical conditions, but directly as a reflection of doctrinal and liturgical preferences in the space.

Conclusion

This study has comprehensively evaluated the Mar Yuhannon Tayyoyo and Mar Yoreth Aleksandroyo monasteries and the Mar Bobi and Yoldath Aloho churches located in the Nusaybin and Izla/Izlo Mountain basin within the historical and architectural continuity of the East Syriac monastic tradition. From Late Antiquity onwards, the political and cultural tension created by the Roman–Sassanid border world not only determined the direction of East Syriac institutionalisation but also enabled this tradition to create a monastic landscape centred on the axis of "mountain–retreat–network" in its spatial production. In this context, the rugged topography of Mount Izla stands out as a dominant element that not only provides a natural framework supporting monastic practices but also determines the functional parameters of monastery settlements, such as defence, access, and visibility.

The architectural analysis of the structures has demonstrated that the Eastern Syriac tradition has developed a typologically distinctive repertoire in the region. The conscious integration of rock-hewn spaces and masonry units at Mar Yuhannon and Mar Yoreth, combined with topographically adapted solutions such as terrace systems, retaining walls, and stepped settlement patterns, emphasises the "mixed-technique" character of the Eastern Syriac monasteries on Mount Izla. At Mar Yuhannon, the square-plan, domed narthex and the naos layout deepening in an east-west direction reveal a spatial preference that diverges from the tradition of transversely developing narthexes/naos commonly seen in Western Syriac churches widespread in Tur Abdin. At Mar Yoreth, the courtyard-centred organisation designed in conjunction with the rock topography, the displacement of the apse, the formation of side spaces, and the location of the possible reliquary space within the plan demonstrate that the monastery was able to meet both its liturgical and daily monastic needs within the same settlement logic. In contrast, Mar Bobi and Yoldath Aloho, while more modest in scale, continue the concept of a worship space in direct contact with rock; elements such as the multi-focal pulpit arrangement and baptismal font at Mar Bobi make visible the integration of Eastern Syriac liturgical practices with local architecture.

Comparative evaluation has highlighted the elements shared by the four structures within a common language: the single-nave scheme, the apse arrangement, the use of niches, carved/painted crosses, and reliquary/tomb niches, which recur as both iconographic and spatial indicators of the East Syrian understanding of sacred space. However, the historical development and phases of use of each structure are multi-layered to an extent that cannot be reduced to a single "type." In particular, the traces of restoration, periodical additions, and material differences observed in Mar Yuhannon and Mar Yoreth reveal that these structures

are not fixed, single-phase monuments but monastic organisms that have been reinterpreted over prolonged use.

In terms of conservation status, field data indicates that the structures have different risk profiles. In rock-cut units, processes such as water seepage, hydrogeological pressure, plaster deterioration, and rubble infill threaten the legibility of the spaces and the integrity of the original materials. In masonry units, joint losses, local stone deterioration, and uncontrolled modern interventions are creating a transformative effect on the architectural identity. Therefore, the East Syriac heritage around Mount Izla should be approached not through individual structures but within the integrity of a "sacred landscape"; documentation (surveying–photogrammetry), urgent structural measures, water management, and qualified restoration principles should be planned as part of the same conservation strategy.

Consequently, Mar Yuhannon, Mar Yoreth, Mar Bobi and Yoldath Aloho are among the most original and characteristic examples of Eastern Syriac architecture in Anatolia, demonstrating that the Nusaybin–Izla line is a powerful geography of memory, reflecting the uninterrupted history of Christianity from its early days and the multi-layered interactions between Eastern and Western Syriac traditions. The architectural diversity of these structures, their liturgical arrangements, and their unique relationship with the topography represent not only a regional heritage value but also offer significant research potential for understanding the cultural production of borderlands in the study of Eastern Christianity.

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