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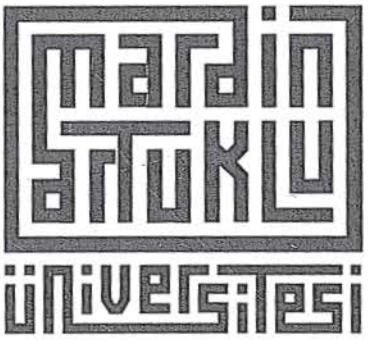

SEMPOZYUM BİLDİRİLERİ
SYMPOSIUM PAPERS

T.C.
MİDYAT
KAYMAKAMLIĞI

Saints, Scribes and Survival
The Renovation and Replacement of the Manuscripts and Monasteries of Midyat

Azizler, Katipler ve Hayatta Kalanlar
Midyat El Yazmaları ve Manastırlarının Yenilenmesi ve Değiştirilmesi

Andrew Palmer*

Abstract
In Tur 'Abdin many settlements have one or more monasteries. These are usually situated at an easy walking distance from the village. From Midyat you can see two monastic sites: that of Mor Hobel and Mor Abrohom, one kilometre to the east; and that of Mor Ya'qub (since about 1890, of Mor Sharbel and Mor Ya'qub), one kilometre to the north. The former was founded at the foot of the pillar on which Hobel lived in the second half of the fifth century. The evidence for this is in saints' Lives, where history and legend are mixed. The first hard evidence for this monastery is an inscription of 1271, published here for the first time. The church of Mor Ya'qub (demolished in 1930) is said to have resembled the church of Hah and so may have been ancient; if not, at least it went back to the sixteenth century. Since 1926 the site has been occupied by the Turkish army. The belief that the bones of the saints and martyrs are sources of healing and security for the settlements which possess them is no longer the cause of struggles for possession, as it was in late antiquity; but it is still attested in an interview given by a pious woman in 1995, which is published here for the first time. Some may feel that 'the lady doth protest too much'. But the will to believe is stronger than the evidence against belief. The saints – and even their monasteries – are conspicuous by their absence from two contemporary accounts of the siege of Midyat in 1915 – those of Odo and Henno – which are here translated into English and compared. The account of Henno is largely based on that of the poet Gallo Shabo, who was an eye-witness. Either none of the eye-witnesses were believers to begin with, or their belief in the protective power of monasteries by virtue of the saints who are thought to be present in them did not survive their experience of what actually happened in 1915. The article is bound together by the antithesis between survival and eradication. The monasteries are presented as incapable, perhaps, of saving lives; but as responsible, alongside the priests whom they have trained, for the survival and apparently perpetual renewal of the traditional Syrian Orthodox way of life. By this is meant the involvement of the people in the maintenance of the monasteries and the dedication of the scribes to passing on the handwritten and oral knowledge which constitute (or constituted) the communal memory.

Keywords: Armenian Catholics, army, Assyrians (see Suryoye), Barsawm (Ignatios Afrem, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch), baptisteries, bishops, bones, burial, burial of martyrs, burial of monks, burial of nuns, Byzantine emperors, Chaldeans, chronicles (of the events of 1915), churches, colophons, copying, copyists, demolition, desecration, Dolabani (Yuhannon, Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Mardin), East Syrians, epigraphy, eyewitnesses (to the events of 1915), faith, fire, Gallo Shabo (of 'Aynwardo), Hanno Use, Henno (Khuri Süleyman), inscriptions, late antiquity, Kaymakam of Midyat (in 1915), Kurdish tribes, legends,

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maintenance, manuscripts, *Maqdesi*, martyrs, massacre, Midyat, monasteries, monasticism, monks, Mor Abrohom, Mor Hobel, Mor Sharbel, Mor Ya'qub, Muslims, nuns, Odo (Israïl, Chaldean Bishop of Mardin), oral history, patriarchs, regeneration, relics, replication, requisition, restoration, rusticity, saints, scribes, *seyfo*, sieges (of Midyat and 'Aynwardo in 1915), simplicity, stylitism, survival, Surayt, Suryoye (*Suryoye*), Syriac, Syriac inscriptions, Syrian Christians, Syrian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Protestants, tombs, tradition, Tur 'Abdin, Turoyo, Yeshu' (Ignatius IV, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch).

Özet

Tur' Abdin'in birçok yerleşim yerlerinde bir veya birden çok manastır vardır. Bunlar genellikle köyden bir yürüyüş mesafesi kadar uzaklıktadır. Midyat'tan iki manastır alanı görülmektedir: doğu yönünde bir kilometre uzaklıkta Mor Hobel ve Mor Abrohom manastırı ile kuzey yönünde bir kilometre uzaklıkta Mor Yakup (yaklaşık 1890'dan beri Mor Şarbel ve Mor Yakup) manastırı. İlki beşinci yüzyılın ikinci yarısında Hobel'in yaşadığı yerin hemen dibinde kurulmuştur. Bunun kanıtı tarihin ve efsanenin birbirine karıştığı azizlerin yaşamıdır. Bu manastırının sağlam kanıtı 1271 yılından kalma bir yazıt olup burada ilk kez yayımlanmıştır. (1930'da tahrip olan) Mor Yakup Kilisesi ise Hah Kilisesine benzediği söylenmektedir ve böylece çok eski olduğu anlamına gelmektedir; eğer değilse en azından on altıncı yüzyıla dayanmaktadır. 1926'dan beri bu alan Türk orduları tarafından işgal edilmektedir. Azizlerin ve şehitlerin kemiklerinin oradaki yerleşim alanları açısından iyileştirici ve koruyucu olma inancı antik dönemin sonlarında olduğu gibi artık buna sahip olmak için bir mücadele sebebi değildir, ancak 1995'te dindar bir bayanın verdiği bir röportajda bu durum yine de tasdiklenmektedir ve bu röportaj burada ilk kez yayımlanmaktadır. Bazıları "bayanın çok protesto ettiğini" hissedebilirler. Ancak, inanma isteği inanca karşı olan kanıtlardan daha güçlüdür. 1915'teki Midyat kuşatmasının iki çağdaş hesaplarında azizlerin - ve manastırların bile- olmaması göze çarpmaktadır; bu iki kuşatma Odo ve Henno olup burada İngilizceye çevrilecek ve karşılaştırılacaktır. Henno kuşatması rivayeti büyük ölçüde görgü tanığı olan şair Gallo Shabo'ya dayanmaktadır. Görgü tanıklarının hiçbiri inançlı insanlar değildiler ya da manastırlarda var olduklarına inandıkları azizlerin koruyucu gücüne olan inançları 1915 yılında gerçekten ne meydana geldiği konusundaki deneyimlerini devam ettiremedi. Makale hayatta kalma ile yok etme arasındaki antitez ile bitmektedir. Manastırlar belki de hayat kurtarma açısından aciz olarak gösterilmektedir, fakat eğittikleri rahiplerin yanı sıra geleneksel Süryani Ortodoks yaşam tarzının açık bir şekilde sürekli yenilenmesi ve hayatta kalması için sorumlu gösterilmektedir. Bunanla anlatılmak istenen ise insanların manastırların onarımına katılması ve katiplerin ortak bellek oluşturan (ya da oluşmuş) yazılı ve sözlü bilgiyi aktarırken buna bağlı kalmasıdır

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermeni Katolikleri, Ordu, Asurlular (Suryoye bakınız), Barsawm (İgnatios Afrem, Antakya Süryani Ortodoks Patriği), Vaftizhane, Piskoposlar, Kemikler, Mezar, Şehitlerin Defni, Keşişlerin Defni, Rahibeler, Bizans İmparatorları, Keldaniler, Kronoloji (1915 olayları), Kilise, Baskı Bilgisi, Kopyalama, Kopyacılar, Yıkım, Saygısızlık, Dolabani (Yuhannon, Mardin Süryani Ortodoks Piskoposu), Doğu Süryanileri, Epigrafi, Görgü Tanıkları (1915 olayları için), İnanç, Yangın, Gallo Shabo (Aynwardolu), Hanno Kullanımı, Henno (Khuri Süleyman), Yazıtlar, Antik Çağın Sonları, Midyat Kaymakamı (1915), Kürt Aşiretleri , Efsaneler, Bakım, El Yazmaları, Maqdesi, Şehit, Katliam, Midyat, Manastırlar, Manastır Sistemi, Keşişler, Mor Abrohom, Mor Hobel, Mor Sharbel, Mor Yakub, Müslümanlar, Rahibeler, Odo (Israil, Mardin Keldani Piskoposu), Sözlü Tarih, Patrik, Rejenerasyon, Emanetler, Çoğaltma, Talep, Restorasyon, Köylülük, Azizler, Katipler, Seyfo, Kuşatmalar (1915 Yılında Midyat ve Aynwardo), Basitlik, Üslupçuluk, Hayatta Kalma, Surayt, Suryoye (Suryoye), Süryani, Süryani Yazıtlar, Süryani Hıristiyanları, Süryani Katolikleri, Süryani Ortodoks, Süryani Protestan, Türbeler, Gelenek, Tur 'Abdin, Turoyo, Yeshu' (Ignatius IV, Antakya Süryani Ortodoks Patriği).

Introduction

My talk at the Symposium was about the changing face of Midyat. In this published version I shall concentrate on what I there called the two eyes of the city: her monasteries. The first part of the paper is about the monastery of Mor Hobel and Mor Abrohom; the second (a short one – not much is known) about that of Mor Sharbel and Mor Ya'qub. The third about the siege of Midyat in 1915 and the absence of both monasteries from two accounts of that siege.

The focus here will be on the alleged living presence of *saints* such as Mor Hobel in the churches built on their relics; and on the involvement of lay believers in the construction and maintenance of such buildings. As an example of the way this is traditionally acknowledged, an unpublished thirteenth-century inscription from this monastery will be quoted (Appendix 1). A brief analysis of some recently published colophons written in the fifteenth, sixteenth and nineteenth centuries will make the transition to the *scribes*, who assured the continuity of the tradition by copying its ritual texts.

The monastery of Mor Sharbel and Mor Ya'qub is no more. It was demolished in 1930 to make room for an army base. Part of my aim is, quite simply, to document its former existence. Out of sight is out of mind. Only the church of Mor Sharbel, Mor Afrem and Mor Ya'qub keeps the name alive in Midyat. The monastery of Mor Ya'qub the Teacher (St Jacob of Serugh), the predecessor of the late nineteenth-century monastery of Mor Sharbel, is unknown to history before the fifteenth century, when the name of Mor Ya'qub is first found paired with that of Mor Sharbel at Kfar Shāma' (Barsawm 2008, 1, 496). But this silence tells us only that it is a region where much of the historical record has been lost. The construction of the church of Mor Ya'qub was 'like that of the church of Hah' (Socin 1881, 257). Whether the church of the Mother of God or that of Mor Sobo in Hah is meant, this likeness – assuming it was a close one – could mean the church of Mor Ya'qub, like those two churches, dated from the fourth, the fifth, or the sixth century.

Like any organism adapted to a hazardous environment, the Syrian Orthodox faith-community has developed the ability to regenerate its own worn and damaged tissues. In an analogical sense, its sacred buildings and its liturgical books together form a body which preserves a life and an identity while renewing its own component parts. It does not matter that a church or a manuscript is new, if only it be a copy of a copy of a copy, going right back to the beginning. A church embodies a presence, an invisible person: that spiritual and immortal entity on whose physical relics it is built. The *Suryoye* (Christians of the Syriac Churches) it will be argued, have shown by their actions that they really believed in their saints as men and women, once of flesh and blood, now, as it were, embodied in stones and mortar. They have sought, as laymen, to be variously involved in the repair and maintenance of monasteries, where their brothers, the monks, were frequently engaged in copying and correcting the texts which constitute the voice of this tradition.

Paradoxically, the saints and the scribes of Midyat play no part in the narratives of *survival* (Figures 1 and 2). Odo's Chaldean narrative and Henno's Syrian Orthodox account of the siege of Midyat in July 1915, though written by clergymen, give no causative role to the supernatural. Had the outcome been less dismal they would no doubt have given credit to the saints, whose cult the people of Midyat had not neglected. Strangely enough a belief in the protective power of the saints returns, even after this power has signally failed; my evidence for this is an interview with a

woman from Beswirino (Appendix 2). Never have the *Suryoye* come closer to their beloved saints than in dying for their Faith. Mor Sharbel died for his Faith under Trajan. If Odo and Henno do not speak about the saints as protectors and the monks as martyrs, that may be because, on this occasion, neither supernatural protection, nor monastic heroism could truthfully be reported. And we should remember that the eye-witnesses who reported the siege of Midyat to the clerical chroniclers were survivors; most such were young males who put faith in their own strength and skill. Such people may have considered the saints, the scribes and their monasteries a side-show.

Figure 1. Window in citadel tower.

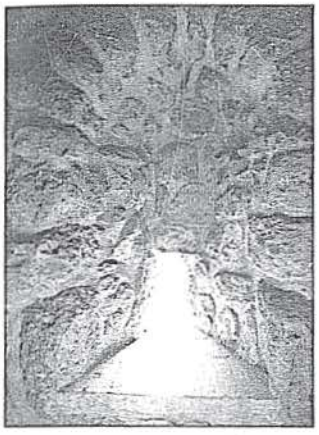
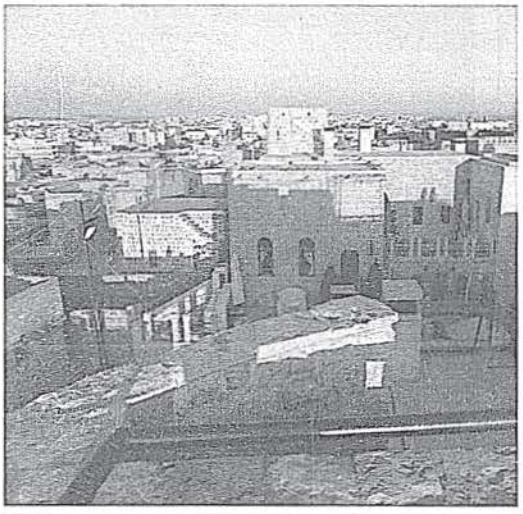


Figure 2. View of citadel from tower.



Figures 1 and 2. The *Kasr-ı Nehroz*, the citadel of Midyat, from the tower of Mar Shem'un.

Part One: The Monastery of Mor Abrohom and Mor Hobel

Figure 3. View of monastery at the end of a road between vineyards

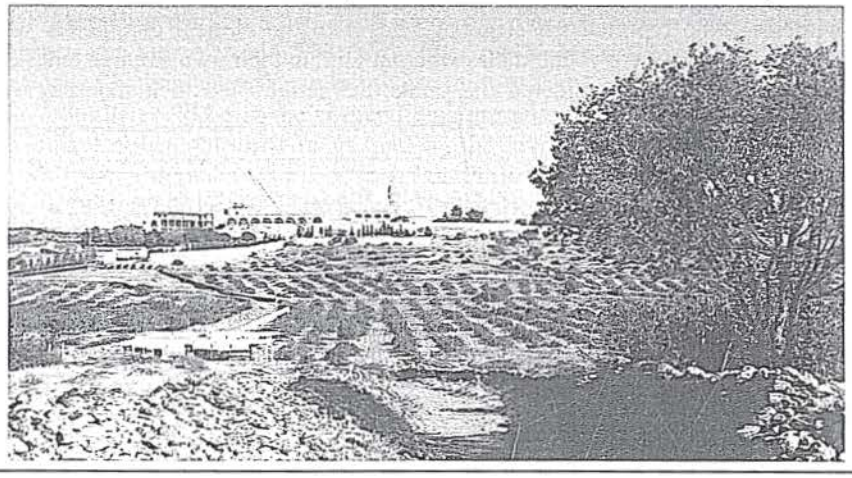


Figure 3. The monastery of Mor Hobel and Mor Abrohom 1km to the east of Midyat.

The best known monastery of Midyat is that on the east side of the town (Figure 3). It is known by various slightly different names (each attested by a number of colophons in Öğünç 2006 and Barşawm 2008). The Ottoman names 'Kilise-i İbrahimiyye' (Göyünç 1972, 148) and 'Abraham Kilisasi' (Mardin map 1:200 000, AH 1333 = AD 1914/5) are based on the name Mor Abrohom (3 MSS [manuscripts] dated 1502, 1583 and 1880). This is short for Mor Abrohom and Mor Hobel (3 MSS dated 1494, 1821 and 1857). More frequently, however, this long name is abbreviated as: Mor Hobel (8 MSS dated 1473-78, 1559, 1827-61). Most frequently of all, in the literary sources, we find these two names in reverse order: Mor Hobel and Mor Abrohom (13 MSS dated 1471-3, 1502-10, 1826-69). Two manuscripts, dated 1472 and 1599, call it by an even longer name: the Monastery of Mor Hobel, the Stylite; Mor Abrohom, the Master of Mor Barsawmo of the North, Chief of the Mourners; and Mor Philoxenos, Bishop of Mabbugh. Nevertheless, it is known to the people as 'Mar Awrohom'.

Nowhere is it called 'the monastery of Midyat'. Contrast the monastery of Qartmin (Yayvantepe), a short name for the monastery of Mor Shem'un of Qartmin, Mor Shmuyel of Eshtin and Mor Gabriel of Beth Qustan, also known as 'Deyrulumur (manastırı)'. The faithful of the Syrian Orthodox Church, however, will never use these impersonal names. For them the monastery near Qartmin is simply 'Mar Gawriye', or 'Saint Gabriel'. Note again the people's tendency to personalise their monasteries. Simple people will even personify them. *Maqdesiye* Sayde from Beswirino (Haberli) spoke to me in Giessen on 8 November 1995. Her actual words are recorded in Appendix 2. Here they have been slightly paraphrased:

The saints used to keep us safe. All night long until day dawned they used to keep watch over the village, they kept the village safe, they protected it. As for now, I don't know, have they remained there, or not? By night and by day our defence was

in those saints, God knows, we depended on those saints. There were twenty-five saints in our village. Every neighbourhood had one. Ours was Mar Shalito, we looked after him. Mar Gorgis was opposite him, he had no one to look after him, so he said to Mar Shalito, "You have servants, I have none. If we become brothers, you and I, they will serve us both." So he arose and spoke to his servants, "I want you to serve Mar Gorgis, too, as you serve me".

This way of talking is revealing. For simple religious people, the building evidently embodies the saint to whom it is dedicated, the caretakers of the building are the servants of the saint. The building itself, however old, is not what the people venerate. If it is ruined or taken away, it can be repaired or replaced. It does not matter if it looks new. So long as the saint himself does not abandon it, the church embodies that saint. (One ought still to object, in the name of conservation, to the insensitive renovation of ancient churches.)

Even if the church is ruined, the saint may be thought to dwell in it still. *Maqdesi* Skandar, the son of Brahim, from Giremira, (*Maqdesi* is an honorific title for a man who has made the solemn pilgrimage to Jerusalem: Kaufhold 1991; the above-mentioned *Maqdesiye* Sayde exhibits the feminine variant) told me that a man was deterred from stealing stones from the ruined church of Mor 'Zozoyel in Giremira when the saint told him in a dream that the stones were still his property.

The first saint to be thus embodied at the monastery on the east side of Midyat was Hobel. Ten years after the burial of Hobel the relics of Abrohom, the master of the great West Syrian ascetic Barsawmo, were reburied nearby. These relics were acquired to provide a second church with a spiritual foundation. Tradition relates that this church was built by the architects Theodoros and Theodosios, the sons of Shufnay, at the behest of the emperor Anastasius (Figure 4).

The little church of Hobel continued in use as a Baptistery-cum-Tomb-Chamber, whereas that of Abrohom became the main oratory of the monks. This explains why Abrohom is sometimes placed first in naming the monastery, giving rise to the custom of calling it just 'Mor Awrohom'. (Palmer 1990, p. 114, note 3.) The association of baptism with death and resurrection is made by St Paul in Chapter 6 of his Letter to the Christians at Rome. In Nisibis the mid-fourth-century church covering the tomb of St James was also a baptistery; the Greek inscription uses the word 'was resurrected' (*anègerthè*) in the sense of 'was built anew' (Sarre & Herzfeld 1920, 337-8).

In a recent Syriac book on the history of Midyat (Öğünç 2006) there is a chapter on the monastery of Hobel and Abrohom. The chapter starts with stories about these two saints.

Figure 4. Interior of a church with horse-shoe arches.

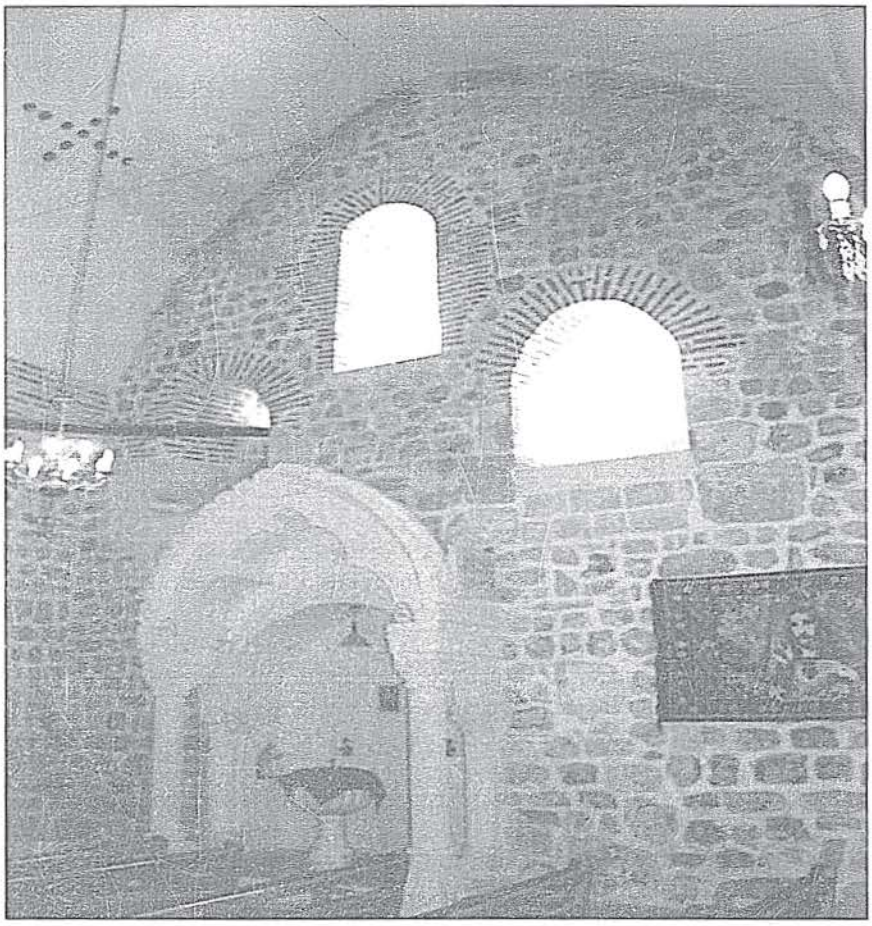


Figure 4. The church of Mor Abrohom in the monastery of that name just outside Midyat, looking south-south-east. This church is said to have been built by Emperor Anastasios.

That is a significant choice. Bell (1924, 316f., note 2; 1982, 35-8; Plates 176-83) wrote only of the buildings and the precious possessions of the monastery, showing no interest at all in the two patron saints, whom she calls 'Mâr Ibrahîm and Mâr Hôbel', or 'Mar Ubil'. Had she asked which Abraham was meant, she would have realised he was not Abraham of Kashkar, of the Great Coenobium of Mount Izla (Bell 1982, 37f.). Parry was no historian of art, but he, too, begins (Parry 1895, 207) with the buildings, which were being thoroughly restored at the time of his visit in 1892; only later (Parry 1895, 208) does he say, facetiously, 'I preferred to stay with the holy shades of Mar Abrahum and Mar Evgen (!), who long ago spent lives of unparalleled holiness upon two pillars'. These are typical Europeans. A traditionally minded *Suryoyo* is more likely to be interested in the power of the saints of a monastery; how old it looks does not matter. It should be well looked-after.

Hobel was a monk of Qartmin and a contemporary of the Syrian Orthodox Church Father, Philoxenos, bishop of Mabbugh (Manbij). One day Philoxenos visited Hobel to ask for his blessing. Taken literally, this implies that Hobel was the elder of the two; but the encounter between Hobel and Philoxenos (see below) may have originated in a folktale about a dialogue between their personified churches, which are 'neighbours' in Midyat. Compare the dialogue between the Beswirino churches of Shalito and Gorgis in *Maqdesiye* Sayde's interview (Appendix 2). All the same, there is a biography of Philoxenos which claims that he was schooled at Qartmin (Mingana 1920, 151-3; Brock 1996). Now, Hobel lived on top of a pillar, like St Symeon the Stylite; indeed, according to the *Book of Life of Beswirino* he was the first monk of Qartmin to adopt this way of life. According to the *Qartmin Trilogy* Hobel's pillar bowed down, allowing the two holy men to embrace each other, without obliging either the first to climb a ladder, or the second to descend from his perch. Philoxenos died a martyr and his head was brought to Midyat, where a church was built in his honour, near the monastery of Hobel. The head was transferred to this monastery in 1145, which explains the addition of Philoxenos' name to those of Abrohom and Hobel. (Palmer 1990, 113-5.)

There is a story about Abrohom, too (summarised by Nau 1914). He was called 'Mor Abrohom of the Highest Mountain, the spiritual father of Mor Barsawmo'. But Abrohom's life will be passed over in silence here. It has already been established that a sanctuary in Tur 'Abdin is personalised. For the old-style believer it is a numinous place, a place where an ancient hero of the Faith is still present and active. The heroic acts of a saint are told, to cries of willingly credulous amazement, in the circle of pilgrims to the sanctuary. After that they will often keep vigil (*shahro*), or sleep, in the sanctuary, hoping to be healed. The saints were specialists; in this respect also, they are personalised. Hobel's intercession with God was particularly effective on behalf of those who suffered from a disease of the eyes, or from paralysis (Peeters 1908, 7 August). From his high vantage-point Hobel had a distant view, which provides an associative connection with good eyesight. Miraculously, he relaxed the stiffness of his pillar in order to embrace Philoxenos, showing (no doubt) that he could overcome immobility in others.

Hobel's was a voluntary martyrdom in a time when real martyrdoms had ceased to occur, because the government was Christian (though shortly afterwards, when the successors to Anastasios tried to impose religious conformity, it became possible for opponents to the imperial doctrine to suffer martyrdom, as indeed Philoxenos did). But just like a proper martyr, who literally gave his life as the price for not denying his faith, he is now believed to be in heaven and to have privileged access to God. An ordinary person, suffering from eye disease, might pray to God for healing without success; but if he visit the shrine of a saint who is one of God's favourite courtiers, the chances of his petition being heard are greater.

A plaque on the gate of the monastery of Midyat records the dates 481 and 491. The first is meant for the date of the church of Hobel, the second for that of the church of Abrohom (Öğünç 2006, 9f.). These claims are not implausible; they are presumably based on sources for the life of Philoxenos (De Halleux 1963). Even if his friendship with Philoxenos is an old wives' tale, the first stylite of Tur 'Abdin is likely to have been a younger contemporary of his model, Symeon Stylites, who died in 459. A sanctuary was probably dedicated to his memory towards the end of that century; this probability overrides Bell's vague feeling that she should date no element of the architecture before the late sixth century.

The earliest epigraphic evidence for the existence of the monastery is an inscription dated 1271 (see Appendix 1), which ends with the following standard formula: 'Let everyone who reads this pray for all those who were involved!' The *Suryoye* have traditionally been keen to be personally involved in maintaining the fabric of their local monasteries. This involvement takes various forms: a material contribution or a month or two of labour without a wage. They believe that such personal involvement will bring them blessings. Manual involvement contributes to the community spirit; others can then be involved in catering for the labourers free of charge. Many an occasion is recorded when a whole village – regardless of confession and even of religion – was involved in building or rebuilding its local monastery. If it is true that the whole village of M'are (Eskihisar) under her leader, Husayn, was involved in restoring the East Syrian monastery of Mar Eugen in 1271 (Mingana 1933, 372-4; Brock 1981, 3-4), this included Syrian Orthodox and Arab Muslims, resident there beside the East Syrians at that date, as will be documented in a book now being written on *M'are and her Monasteries*. One imagines that the men sang while they worked and sat down afterwards in the shade to enjoy a picnic with a jar of wine. For the rest of their lives they will have looked on the work of their hands with pride and joy and this will have made them eager to go to the monastery and show it to their children.

Another kind of witness to the existence of a monastery throughout the centuries is the *colophon*. A colophon is a note such as that recording the restoration of Mar Eugen in 1271, penned by a scribe at the end of a manuscript which he has just finished. Such manuscripts are usually copies of books. Still now the *Suryoye* consider the use of printed books in church regrettable, though in practice modern monks spend more time entering texts digitally than copying by hand. Two recent publications contain colophons from the monastery of Hobel and Abrohom (Öğünç 2006, 60-66; Barṣawm 2008, vol. 1: 59, 65, 66, 79, 81, 126, 139, 259, 274, 340, 376, 377, 380, 437, 457, 480; vol. 2: 145, 190; vol. 3: 199, 416). These colophons are clustered in the fifteenth, sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Colophons dated 1473, 1583, 1599 and 1880 show that the Bishop of Midyat was resident at the monastery in those years (another residence of this bishop was the Church of Mort Shmuni: Palmer 2010, 204, 216, 238). There were thirteen monks in 1473, seventeen in 1494, five in 1559, nine in 1599, three in 1854 and six, joined by a *maqdesi*, in 1858 (Öğünç 2006, 60-63; Barsawm 2008, vol. 1, 59, 380). 'Aziz, the son of Saliba, from Midyat, was active as a scribe from 1477 to 1510 (he signed six of the colophons); Barsawmo, the son of the priest Shabo, flourished his feather between 1832 and 1850 (he signed eight of them).

In 1832 there was a fire. A wax taper was not properly extinguished before being stored in a wooden choral lectern. The whole lectern went up in flames, together with the twelve manuscripts which were kept there. These were the work of the priest Shabo, from Midyat, the father of the monk Barsawmo, who has just been mentioned. This event is emblematic. It encapsulates the whole theme of this paper. Whether twelve manuscripts are lost in a fire caused by the negligence of the monks, or the monastic buildings left in ruins by some invader, or indeed ordinary men, women and children killed by the forces of the State which should protect them, the *Suryoye* of Tur 'Abdin have always stoically resumed the work of regeneration, starting again in their old village, or in a foreign country; rebuilding their ruined houses, churches and monasteries; copying out the books which connect them with the Fathers of the Church.

Barsawmo will have learned the scribal art from his father, Shabo; after twelve of the father's manuscripts (twelve years of his life, perhaps) had gone up in flames, his son produced at least eight new copies to replace some of those that had been lost. No doubt his handwriting resembled his father's (Palmer 1989). Biological reproduction is paralleled by cultural regeneration; and just as an organism replaces most of its body several times in the course of its life, so the Syrian Orthodox tradition has constantly replicated its older self. Even though it is substantially new, yet, in a sense analogous to personal identity, it is the same as the Church of its earliest Fathers.

What happened to the monks of the monastery of Hobel and Abrohom in 1915 will be told in Part Three. In 1926 the monastery was requisitioned by the Turkish army. Perceiving, no doubt, that the *Suryoyo* community draws strength from them, they removed the relics:

The *shekinto* of the saint [Hobel] was treasured in a special tomb and preserved until the year 1927, when the Turkish army took up residence in this monastery and made it (the church of Hobel) a stable for animals. When they saw the tomb of the saint, they opened it and took out the great treasure of his mortal remains and threw it away or buried it in a place unknown. No one dared to ask where, for fear of reprisals. (Öğünç 2006, 9)

Note the word *shekinto*, which designates the corpse of the saint. It is cognate with the Hebrew word *Shekinah*, which designates the glory of God, present on Mount Sinai, in the tabernacle, or in the temple built by Solomon. So holy were these relics for the *Suryoye*; and the man who gave the order to do this thing will not have been ignorant of that fact.

Nevertheless, the monastery has continued to be inhabited by monks and nuns from time to time. The most recent were Rabban İbrahim Türker, of the Midyat family of *Maqdesi* Elyas, and Dayroyto Ferida. The former died in 2010 and is buried near the inner door of the church of Abrohom; forty days later, the nun Ferida died and was buried in the lay necropolis to the south of that church. Is it because they do not copy out manuscripts that nuns are not considered as holy as monks? In the twelfth century there was a special burial-ground for nuns in Beswirino (Palmer 1990, microfiche 2, H5; Palmer 2010, 226). There are special burial-services for nuns (Brock 1992). Eloquent and lasting memorials to women religious are consistent with early *Suryoyo* tradition (see the inscriptions A4 and A 10 in Palmer 1987; Palmer 1990, 208f., 218). C. S. Lewis says somewhere that old books can help us to discover the blind spots of our own age (for every age has them); old stones can do the same.

This walled necropolis is an important feature of the monastery today. It was not noticed by Gertrude Bell in 1909 and perhaps did not yet exist. The oldest gravestone dates from 1941, shortly after the monastery was given back to its owners (Figure 5). Of late the custom has arisen for the Bishop to make the Offering for the Faithful Departed every Easter Monday in the church of Abrohom, after which cakes and eggs are shared in the necropolis, including the dead in a ritual meal (photographs in Hollerweger 1999, 108-11).

Figure 5a. A gravestone in the shape of the lid of a small sarcophagus.

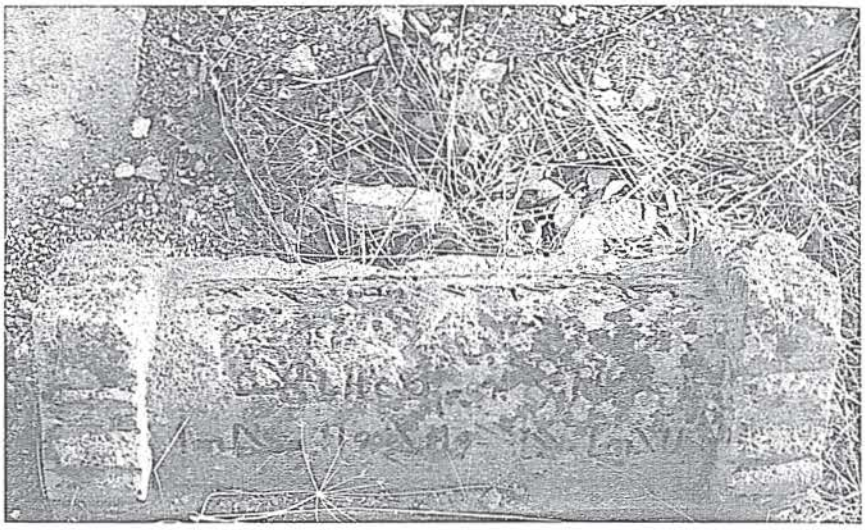
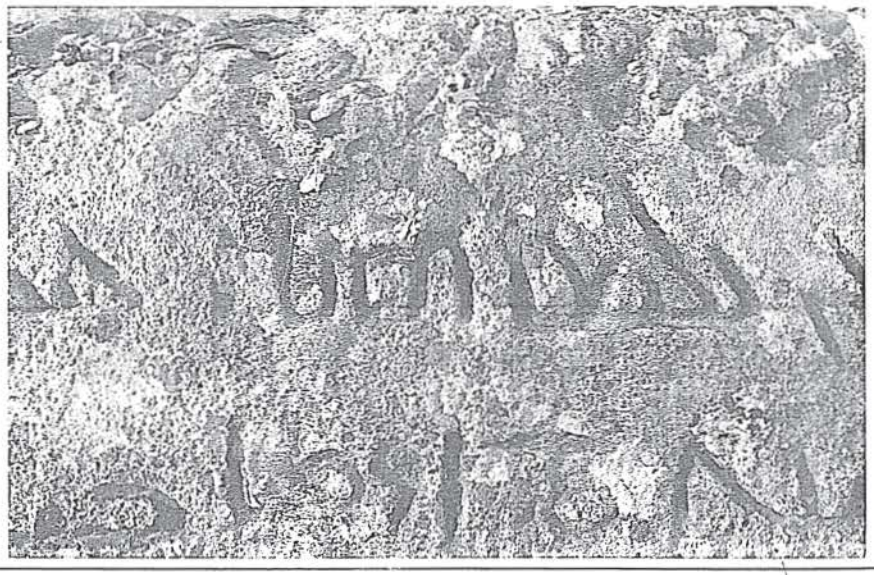


Figure 5b. Detail of the Syriac inscription on the same gravestone.



Figures 5a and 5b. General view of and detail from a loose stone resembling the lid of a small sarcophagus in the necropolis of the monastery of Mor Abrohom, Midyat. The text illustrated in Figure 5b reveals that someone departed from this world in AD 1941; it seems to have been a child.

Part Two: The Monastery of Mor Sharbel and Mor Ya'qub

There was once, on the north side of Midyat, a Syrian Orthodox village called Mar Ya'qub with a well-preserved church, much the most interesting in Midyat, in the opinion of Socin (1881, 257), who visited it in 1870 (the only European ever to do so). He adds in German:

This (church) is like the church in Hah [Anıtlı]: here, too, there is a roof of red tiles. The inner vaulting consists of red, white and a few black bricks; the walls are very thick.

It seems that the village of Mar Ya'qub which Socin visited was a monastery with lay people living in it for lack of monks. No village of this name appears in the register of patriarchal dues drawn up in 1870 – the year of Socin's visit – (*cf.* Bcheiry 2009), though 'the monastery of Mor Abrohom' *is* noted in the margin of p. 65 of the manuscript. Again, the monk Khalaf, from Midyat, is listed on p. 201 as resident in 'Mor Abrohom'. It seems to be implied that the monk Yaqo (Ya'qub) and the old monk Yawsep, who are listed under the monk Khalaf without the mention of a monastery, were also there. The omission of the Syrian Orthodox village of Mar Ya'qub from this register means, probably, that it was counted as a suburb of Midyat, its residents being listed as residents of Midyat.

Twenty-two years later, in 1892, three monks came to live there. Money was found to repair the buildings for this new venture. The lay residents stayed on in the capacity of 'servants of the monastery'. The source is not given; we must assume we are dealing with a more or less complete transcription of the colophon of an unidentified manuscript (Öğünç 2006, 74). Here is the record, translated from the Syriac:

(This book was copied out at) the monastery of Mor Sharbel (by) the monk Barsawmo, the son of Na'me from the clan of Be Çafçaka, in the year 2203 of the Greeks (AD 1891/2). (Other members of the community were) the monk Yuhannon (and) the monk Shem'un. (This happened) in the days of the patriarch Peter III and Mor Qurillos Shem'un, from 'Urdnus, (bishop) of Tur 'Abdin. And in this year we built (*i.e.* repaired) the great church dedicated to Mor Ya'qub and the portico (*iwan*) above the door (of that church) and the room on the north side of the outer courtyard and the *sahrinç*, the cistern south of the monastery. The servants of the monastery are: the deacon Malke, Ya'qub Bsheri, 'Isa from Hesno (*i.e.* Hasankeyf), Sawme, Behke and all those who live at the monastery of Mor Sharbel.

The monks Barsawmo, Yuhannon and Shem'un had evidently taken up residence at the village of Mor Ya'qub not long before 1892, reclaiming its church as their monastic oratory and renaming the monastery 'Mor Sharbel and Mor Ya'qub'. Presumably they had a legal right to do this. The monastery of Mor Ya'qub had belonged to the village of Kfar Shama' (Kershaf, Budaklı), a village 'one hour [5km] south of Midyat' (Socin 1881, 260), where the old monastery of Mor Sharbel was situated (Barsawm 1964, Syriac 72 and 168f.). There is reason, then, to assume, provisionally, that the monks Barsawmo, Yuhannon and Shem'un were from Kfar Shama'. They had probably been forced to abandon the old monastery of Mor Sharbel when Muslims took over their village (Öğünç 2006, 79). The foundation of the new Mor Sharbel can be placed around 1890. The map of Tur 'Abdin by A. Andrus (Parry 1895, 168-169) shows 'Deir Sharbah' just to the north of Midyat. By 1892 Mor Abrohom was '*one of the monasteries* just outside Midyat' (Parry 1895, 179; my italics).

The new monastery was named for Sharbel, who, according to a tradition which was already in place by the fourth century, suffered martyrdom at Edessa under the emperor Trajan. This saint is not to be confused with the nineteenth-century Maronite ascetic named after him, as has happened on the website www.morephrem.com > parochies > St. Sharbil, where the famous painting of the Lebanese Catholic saint has been posted in the belief that it represents the second-century Edessene.

Some colophons written at the old monastery of Sharbel call it the monastery of Sharbel and Ya'qub; others add the martyr Febronia, Esha'yo of Aleppo and Heraqle (Barsawm 2008, vol. 1, 265 & 496; vol. 3, 107 & 161, dated between 1210 and 1517; Palmer 2010, 215). Nearly all include Ya'qub, as if his church, too, were in the monastery of Sharbel at Kfar Shama'. In actual fact, the monastery of Ya'qub was a separate dependency. Basilios Shem'un, the son of Malke of Kfar Shama', a Maphrian of Tur 'Abdin, received the monastic tonsure at the monastery of Ya'qub, which belonged to his paternal village, in the middle of the sixteenth century (Barsawm 1964, 72 & 168f.). Barsawm seems to have thought this monastery was also at Kfar Shama'; but the sources do not say this, they say it *belonged* to Kfar Shama'. The monastery of Ya'qub and the village of Mar Ya'qub are the same. The village, being a suburb of Midyat, was most probably built as a satellite monastery, not as a separate village.

There are more than one possible reasons why the monastery of Abrohom was separately taxed by the earliest Ottoman administration (Göyünç 1972, 148), while that of Sharbel and its daughter-house at Midyat were not (Göyünç 1972, 147f.; Göyunç & Hütteroth 1997, 209-12). Those of Sharbel and Ya'qub may have had incomes below the taxable threshold; or they may have belonged to another monastery, which was taxed for its dependencies; or all monasteries may have been exempt as such, though some may have had taxable lay communities attached to them.

In the memoirs of Yuhannon Dolabani, metropolitan bishop of Mardin (1947-69), we read the following lovingly observant account, which concerns the monastery of Mor Sharbel and the church of Mor Ya'qub which was within that monastery:

[My cousin 'Abd al-Masih] went to the monastery of Mor Sharbel at Midyat and was tonsured on 1 January 1907 by the Patriarch 'Abd al-Masih [...] in the monastery of Mor Sharbel. In August I went to Midyat with [...]. When we arrived at Midyat, he first took us to his house, where we broke our fast, and afterwards he went with us to the monastery of Mor Sharbel, which was close to his house. When we got there, they were coming out of the church after the noon-day prayers and they sat down in the arcade which is in front of the church of Mor Ya'qub. Each of them took his jug and peeled a head of garlic; and after they had crushed it and poured water on it, making a paste, they spread it on their bread and began to eat a simple meal. The community consisted at that time of the monks Barsawmo, Yuhannon, 'Isa, 'Aziz, Shem'un and Zayto, the father of the monk Estefan. When dusk fell they turned to spiritual exercises. (Dere & Isik 2007, 27)

The erudite young visitor appears to have delighted sincerely in the rustic simplicity of the monks. The monastery of Sharbel was also visited by Afrem Barsawm, a scholar and future patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, around 1910. He calls it a 'renovated' monastery: *dayr mustahdath*, in Arabic (Barsawm 2008, 113). It was seen from a distance in the same year by Conrad Preusser, who was told that it had been completely renovated 'not all that long ago' (Preusser 1911, 35: on the way

from 'Mar Ibrahim' to Salah 'zogen wir bei dem vor nicht allzu langer Zeit erst vollständig erneuten Dêr Sharbil vorbei'). Everything written by the present author about this site to the north of Midyat needs revision in the light of the present article (Palmer 1990, microfiche 2, G5: 15; Palmer 2010, 214f.).

Figure 6. Intentionally left blank (for explanation, see caption).

Figure 6. The ancient and beautiful church dedicated to Mor Ya'qub which was incorporated around 1892 in the new Monastery of Mor Sharbel, requisitioned by the army in 1926 and demolished soon afterwards, probably in 1930. No image of the church is available and there is a law against photographing military objects in Turkey, so this blank is a protest. Not content with occupying a holy site illegally, the army has wiped out every trace of the ancient *vakf/waqf* there.

Figure 7. View from citadel towards the north, showing a number of towers on the horizon.

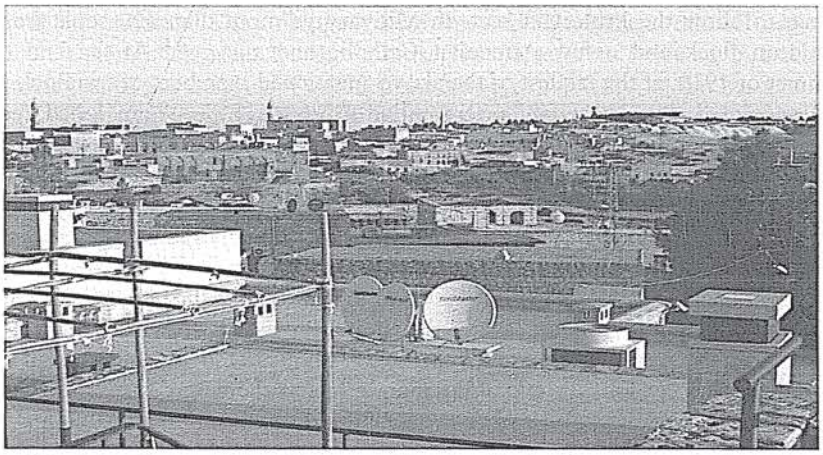


Figure 7. View from the roof of Mor Shem'un's tower in the *Kasr-ı Nehroz* Hotel, the former citadel of Midyat, looking north. On the horizon, from left to right: the two belfries of the church of Mor Sharbel and of the Protestant Church, with its big

windows, unusual in Midyat; the minaret of an unidentified mosque; and a water-tower near the site of the former monastery of Mor Sharbel.

Part Three: The siege of Midyat in 1915 and the eclipse of both monasteries

At the end of July 1915 the trust which had existed between the Syrian Orthodox population of Midyat and the Ottoman Government was broken. The Syrian Orthodox came to believe that promises that they would be spared the fate of the other Christian communities, as had happened at Mardin, had not been made in good faith. They refused to surrender their weapons and made ready to resist the Government. The Government called for auxiliaries from the surrounding regions. These were Muslim tribes of Kurdish ethnicity. The Syrian Orthodox were overwhelmed and the town left empty. It was two years before some of the survivors returned. They will have found both monasteries deserted. The monks who eventually resettled them were not the ones who were living there in June 1915. Most of these fell victims to the disease which raged in the overcrowded village of 'Aynwardo, to which stronghold they fled. It is a striking fact that the fate of the monks is passed over in silence by the foremost contemporary chroniclers. Even more striking is the absence of any reference to the saints as the protectors of the *Suryoyo* community (contrast Appendix 2). This is presumably because the *Suryoye* were defeated at Midyat. It is instructive to compare excerpts from the second-hand accounts of the Chaldean Israïl Odo, bishop of Mardin (unknown to De Courtois 2004) and of the Syrian Orthodox Süleyman Henno. Henno gives generous space to the eyewitness account by the Syrian Orthodox Gallo Shabo of 'Aynwardo (Çiçek 1981, 31-70).

Odo

Midyat is a little town in Tur 'Abdin, situated about two days' journey to the north-east of Mardin. All its inhabitants are Syrian Jacobites (a name used by outsiders for the Syrian Orthodox) and their dialect is vernacular Syriac. The number of their households is about 1,200, of which about 80, including some from the surrounding villages, follow the Protestant sect. In Midyat live more than 300 souls from our Chaldean flock and a few Armenian Catholic and *suryoye*.[1] At the end of the summer of 1910, at the request of the above-mentioned members of our flock, I sent and appointed there a certain priest called Giwargis [...], whom I had recently ordained especially for them. (Here the author devotes some lines to the Chaldean school in Midyat.) It operated successfully until the beginning of June 1915, when the persecution began.[2] In this month, while one deportation after the other was occurring at Mardin, the rumour that Midyat had risen up against the Government was repeated incessantly by rulers, citizens and ordinary people. For the Kaymakam of Midyat had begun to stretch out his hand to destroy the surrounding villages. He began by arresting more than 100 Chaldean and Protestant men from Midyat itself, together with certain Armenian and *suryoyo* Catholics who were there, and he put them in prison. Towards the end of the month, he had them herded outside the town,

[1] Odo uses *suryoye* without further specification of the Syrian Catholics. 1,200 households might contain 6,000 souls or more. Compare Henno 1987, 65 (German p. 76): 7,000 souls, most Syrian Orthodox, 80 households of Protestants, 50 of Muslim Kurds (Awdo does not mention these), and 30 Catholics. Note that the last figure is half that given by Awdo for the Chaldeans alone.

[2] Henno 1987, 66 (German p. 76), says that news reached Midyat on 6 June of a massacre of Christians in Hasankeyf; and that the tribesmen who invaded the village of Habsenus on 11 June were driven out by the Kaymakam of Midyat.

where he exterminated them all.[3] In order the more easily to destroy the Jacobites who were there, he required them to surrender all their weapons. At this point, as though awaking from sleep, the Jacobites saw that they, too, with their families, were in the utmost danger, so they refused and prepared themselves for battle. When the Mutasarrif Badri heard that the people of Midyat had refused to surrender their arms to the Kaymakam, he summoned the above-mentioned Hanno Use, one of the well-known Jacobites of Mardin, and sent him there with instructions to urge them to surrender whatever arms they had to the authorities; but they would not listen to him either.[4] Then the Kaymakam sent for all the (leaders of the) Kurdish tribes which live in that mountainous area and ordered them to destroy the inhabitants of Midyat, because they refused to obey the authorities. When the people of Midyat saw that the utmost evil was upon them, many of them found a way to escape by night.[5] They took refuge in two villages, 'Aynwardo and Anhel, the inhabitants of which are Jacobite *suryoye*; and both are situated on top of hills. To this village of Anhel fled the above-mentioned priest Giwargis. He brought with him those that were left of our flock; they found a refuge there and stayed there for two years.[6] But the unfortunate people who had stayed in their houses and had been unable to make good their escape were surrounded by a force of soldiers, assisted by many Kurdish auxiliaries, in mid-July. For one week, like thunder and lightning, the sound of shooting by both sides, from within and from without, could be heard.[7] At last, however, those within were unable, on account of their weakness, to overcome the strong army of their enemies and they were worn down and vanquished. Then the bodies of those courageous warriors, who had fought to the last breath to preserve their lives, fell lifeless in their yards and their blood was spilt all over their two-storied houses. When the persecutors heard that the sound of the arms of those within had fallen silent, they made a furious assault on the yards and dragged out the corpses of those who had been shot and made a fire to burn them. Then they rushed back to invade the yards and to make a thorough search of the houses in order to amass plunder from the possessions of those they had destroyed; and there they found them, hidden in cubby-holes and in underground cellars: the women, the old men and the children. They dragged them out and drove them out of town and slaughtered them all, except for the infants. The persecutors behaved in the same way in the rest of the villages of the Jacobite *suryoye* which are in that mountainous area [...]. (Excerpts from Odo 2004, 80-82, translated from Syriac for this paper.)

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[3] Awdo alone mentions Chaldeans and Syrian Catholics here. Like Henno, Armalet, a Syrian Catholic at Mardin in 1915 says leading Armenians and Protestants were arrested on June 21 and executed a week later (De Courtois 2004, 203).

[4] Of Hanno Use, who was, according to an earlier chapter of Awdo's book, one of those who had secured the release of the Syrian Orthodox in Mardin by distinguishing between them and the other Christians, there is no mention in Henno 1987.

[5] Henno 1987, 68 (German p. 78), says it was the massacre of the Christians of Salah on 3 July by the combined forces of the local Kurdish tribes and soldiers sent by the Kaymakam of Midyat which first alerted the Syrian Orthodox to the fact that they, too, were under threat from the Turkish government. He says nothing of the flight of Syrian Orthodox or Chaldeans from Midyat to 'Aynwardo and Anhel at this point. There are said to be rock-cut tunnels making escape into the country from certain houses in Midyat possible (Öğünç 2006, 10).

[6] Awdo acknowledges in this way the help given by Syrian Orthodox to Chaldeans. Henno 1987, 73 (German p. 82) says that the Kurdish agha 'Aziz, of the Mahmado family, from Midyat, allowed neither the government nor the tribesmen to attack Anhel, which was under his protection, during the First World War.

[7] Henno 1987, 69, says that the attack on Midyat began on 16 July (German p. 78f.) and lasted a week, agreeing with Awdo. The discrepancy with the date 6 July given by Gallo Shabo (Çiçek 1981, 50) is explained by Henno 1987, p. 69 (German p. 79) by the difference between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars.

Henno

Midyat is the centre, or capital, of the villages of Tur 'Abdin. She is situated on a broad plateau with hills all around her. Her jewels are her vineyards and her trees. Her people drink from rainwater cisterns. There was a Kaymakam there, representing the Ottoman government and the bishop of a part of Tur 'Abdin, but at that time the see was vacant. The priest Afrem of the Safar family from Midyat was the Vicar of the Patriarch. The secular leaders were Hanne Safar of the family of long fame, 'Isa Zatteh, Gawwo of the Gawwo family and Isroyel Masso. There were four priests in addition to the above-mentioned priest Afrem. The population numbered 7,000 souls, most of whom were Syrian Orthodox, with about 80 Protestant, 50 Kurdish Muslim and 30 Catholic households, *suryoyo*, Armenian and Chaldean. The following is what happened at the time of the atrocities. [The first paragraph has been omitted; it is summed up in footnote 2.] In the early morning of Monday 22 June the army began to go around the Christian houses, searching for weapons. With them were the priest Afrem, Hanne Safar, 'Isa Zatteh and the Kurdish agha 'Aziz; at their head was Rauf Beg, the Chief of Police. [The rest of this paragraph is omitted.] They arrested more than 100 Armenians and Protestants and kept them in the murderers' prison for a whole week. [...] A certain (Qur'anic) scholar went and [...] found eight (*suryoye* – meaning Syrian Orthodox – among the prisoners), one of whom was Gallo Shabo, head of 'Aynwardo village, and released them. [...] In the night of Monday, 28 June, the soldiers put chains around the necks and shoulders of the prisoners [...] and they went to Kfar Heworo [...] and there they tortured them, stripped them in their usual way, killed them and threw them in the Well (of Sito). [...] When the *suryoye* of Midyat heard about the massacre of their fellow-*suryoye* in Salah [...] they took refuge in their houses until they could find a way of escaping the cunning of the Kaymakam; but he continued to contemplate placing soldiers in their houses to guard them. [...] On 16 July the Kaymakam ordered all the soldiers to shoot bullets at the houses of the *suryoye*; and the *suryoye* took up positions to resist; and they fought from daybreak until evening. Then the Kaymakam sent for the Kurdish tribes from Amid (Diyarbakır), Mardin, Siirt and Cizre; and they came [...]. They went on fighting the Christians for a whole week, until they had killed them inside or outside their houses. They knifed children and suckling infants. Then they stripped them, collected their corpses around Midyat and burned them. Some of them they threw into a well. Gallo Shabo, from 'Aynwardo, was an eye-witness of the atrocities committed in Midyat. In his poem, he says: 'At noon on Monday 6 July (according to the Eastern calendar), while we were resting, we heard the noise of rifle-fire from the siege of Midyat. Then 25 prominent men from 'Aynwardo set off for Midyat to help raise the siege. In that night they entered the town and fought hard for it; the yelling continued until dawn. The following day, I set out with 100 men for Midyat; we reached the top of the hill opposite the town and stayed there a short while. Then, approaching the town, we reached the monastery of Mor Sharbel, which is situated to the north, and stayed there until it was dark, then entered the town and began to fight and kill. On the Wednesday there was a great battle in the main street. Blood flowed like water in every direction. The Lord gave us the victory; we killed many of them, including the (Qur'anic) scholar Sharif [...]. On the Thursday I stayed on with ten famous men to fight (while the rest went back to 'Aynwardo) [...] At noon the pagans (meaning the Muslims) surrounded us on every side [...] No help came [...], not even from Anhel [...] (That night) the people began to flee. Some were killed [...], others got away and reached

'Aynwardo. I was wounded three times [...], but God saved me. [...] Afterwards the soldiers [...] found about 500 men and boys in caves and other hiding-places. They impounded them in Musa's inn for two days. Then they took all those between 5 and 70 years of age by night on the road to Estel and killed them. The children under five they spared and took to Anhel village.[8] (Excerpts from Henno 1987, 65-72, translated from Syriac for this paper.)

Comment

Neither Odo, nor Henno say anything, here or elsewhere, about the monasteries of Midyat; but from both accounts it is clear that the monks must either have fled, or have been killed along with the other Christians of the town. Gallo Shabo waited with 100 men at 'the Monastery of Mor Sharbel on the north' of Midyat before entering the town (Çiçek 1981, 51, line 14). Neither he, nor Henno, says what happened to the monks in either of the monasteries.

The only source for this is the book edited by Öğünç. This book is of uneven quality, an uncritical collection of sometimes contradictory materials. In one place we read the following statement, more rhetorical than accurate (Öğünç 2006, 86f.; my emphasis) :

There has been nothing like this deportation and persecution since the beginning of the world. The whole people fell by the mouth of the sword (*seyfo*). Blood flowed like water in the streets and in the houses. In Midyat thousands were killed: men, women, priests, deacons *and monks*. The Midyat priest Afrem Safar, (patriarchal) Vicar of Midyat, [several families of victims are mentioned here by name]; *the monks of Mor Sharbel and Mor Hobel*; the leaders of the lay community [...] were slaughtered like lambs [...]. Some were choked with smoke, others killed by the sword; not one of them escaped.

Elsewhere in the book we are told with circumstantial detail that the monks Safar, Yeshu' (from Midun), Estayfo dBe Karkenny (from Midyat), Malke dBe Qasho Gergo 'Azar, Gawriye dBe Yakko (from Midyat) and Yuhannon (from Midun), who was head of the monastery that year, all fled from the Monastery of Mor Hobel and Mor Abrohom to the village of 'Aynwardo and died there of disease (Öğünç 2006, 67f.). If these monks, of whom it is said in the passage quoted that they were among those killed, actually fled to 'Aynwardo, the same may well apply to the monks of Mor Sharbel.

When the Monastery of Mor Sharbel was resettled after the war it was not by any of the monks whom Dolabani had met there in 1907 (see Part Two). The men he describes in his memoir probably died, like their brothers from the Monastery of Mor Hobel, from disease during or after the siege of 'Aynwardo.

In 1915 it (Mor Sharbel) was left empty by the general exile and massacre. In 1918 the novice-monks Afrem and Gawriye settled there. In 1922 the monk Yawsef of Arbo was ordained priest for this monastery by Mor Sewerios Shmuyel of Mor Malke. He served there until 1926, when the Turkish army evicted the monk (read: monks?) and made the monastery a food store for the garrison and the army. (Öğünç 2006, 73)

As to what ensued, the following record seems the most plausible:

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[8] Armalet, according to Courtois, says that the city's resistance lasted a week and that a thousand 'Syriacs', mainly men, escaped to 'Aynwardo, while the children were brought to Anhel (De Courtois 2004, 204).

In the year 1926 the Turkish Government, provoked by the rebellion of the Kurdish lords, sent its army to Midyat. They seized the churches and the monasteries and lodged in them. They made of the monastery of Mor Hobel a stable for animals; a *binbaşı* (commander of a thousand men) lived with some others in the upper storeys, with soldiers below in the rooms. The monastery of Mor Sharbel became a store for food and weapons, the church of Mor Barsawmo a grain-silo, the church of Mort Shmuni a prison. The bishopric became the residence of the head of the army judiciary. The church of the Mother of God was a barracks, as were the houses, shops and inns where soldiers lived without rent. This troublesome state of affairs continued until 1939. In the year 1930 they demolished the monastery of Mor Sharbel from its very foundations. (Öğünç 2006, 93f.)

The ancient hill-top sanctuary (Figure 6; for an evocation of its natural beauty, see Öğünç 2006, 70) is now occupied by the army. Instead of the stillness in which a few believe they can hear the Voice of God, the ears of all are assailed by the threatening din of a helicopter bristling with machine-guns.

This is not quite the end of the story.

When the faithful people of Midyat saw the tragic destruction of the monastery of Mor Sharbel they suffered keenly; then they took the initiative and spurred each other on to build a church in the name of the saint, lest their town (be deprived of) his festival – and his blessings. They took possession of a threshing-floor – or rather, its owners, the family of Mirza Hadodo, gave it as a gift – and the people of Midyat arose and offered to help with the work. They began to build the church in 1954 and with the help of God it was brought to completion within two years. It was adorned and decorated with sculpted stones, beautiful tall columns and bright colours. The altar was high and broad, with beautiful ornaments on every side. The church was consecrated by Mor Philoxenos Yuhannon Dolabani, (Bishop) of Mardin, and Mor Iwannis Afrem, Bishop of Midyat and Tur 'Abdin, on New Sunday, 1957, in the names of Mor Sharbel, Mor Afrem (St Ephraim of Nisibis) and Mor Ya'qub. There was a vast congregation of laymen and clergy from every place and everyone made his own offering [...]. (Öğünç 2006, 74f., excerpted)

The initiative of the people of Midyat to build a church in honour of these three saints (Figure 7) shows that old habits die hard. This church may have been built for a practical reason; families living in the north of the town would no longer have to walk all the way to the church of Mor Barsawmo, or even further to that of Mort Shmuni on a Sunday morning. We saw earlier that some families used to go to church at the monastery of Sharbel 'because it was closer to their homes'. Is it just rhetoric, then, to give as the real reason that the people wanted to prevent Midyat being *deprived of the festival and the blessings of Mor Sharbel* ?

However that may be, the idea of building a new church – Turkish law evidently permitted this – brought people together. In the words 'they took possession of a threshing-floor – or rather its owners made a gift of it', we can almost feel the social pressure operating on the Mirza Hadodo family to give up their hill-top threshing-floor for this purpose. The community spirit shines out from the phrases 'the people of Midyat spurred each other on [...] and offered to help with the work'; and 'everyone made his own offering'. There may have been an element of pride involved: the community was showing its Muslim neighbours that the *Suryoye* were alive and well in Midyat.

Conclusions

The monasteries of Mor Abrohom and Mor Sharbel on the east and north sides of Midyat were both thought by casual observers to be modern. In fact, both are the sites of very old monastic cults. The site of Mor Sharbel ought now to be returned by the army to the Syrian Orthodox Church; the Turkish judiciary might accept the documentation in this article as sufficient proof of that Church's right to this property, for which, perhaps, deeds can no longer be produced.

The important thing is neither the age, nor the architecture of its buildings, but the faith of those who built these monasteries and continue to maintain the one which has been returned to them by the army (after authorized desecration), believing, in spite of moments when everything seemed lost, in the very real and effective presence of the saints – or at least repeating this belief like a charm.

The inscription dated 1271, provisionally edited in Appendix 1, is hard to read; but its deeply scored lines are testimony to the will of the writer to ensure that coming generations pray for those who were practically involved in maintaining the monastery.

The surviving manuscripts copied out by the monk Barsawmo make up for the manuscripts written by his father, the priest Shabo of Midyat, lost in a fire. What is important is not the age of the manuscript, but the continuity of the tradition.

The Monastery of Mor Sharbel and Mor Ya'qub provides an example of continuity, despite the loss of place. This monastery used to be in Kfar Shama'. When Kfar Shama' was taken over by the Muslims, Mor Sharbel was resurrected on the site of its former dependency, Mor Ya'qub. For some time (from about 1892 to 1926) both saints watched over Midyat from an eminence just to the north of the town. Then the new monastery of Mor Sharbel and Mor Ya'qub, too, was lost, this time to the army. A quarter of a century later a new home was provided for those saints in the shape of the church of Mor Sharbel, Mor Ya'qub and Mor Afrem at the top of the town of Midyat – a place reminiscent of its former wind-swept hill. Now there is a church of 'Mor Sharbil' in Amsterdam, the incumbent of which, Chorepiskopos Sëm'an of the Midyat family Bë-*Maqdesi*-Elyas, used to be the priest-in-charge of the church of Mor Sharbel in Midyat.

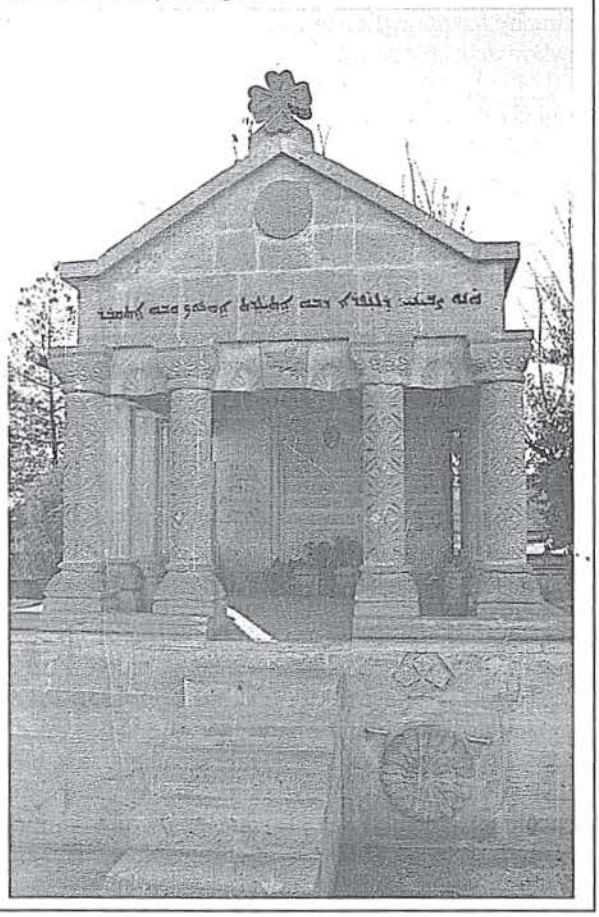
Is it significant that Khuri Sëm'an was unable to tell me whether relics of Mor Sharbel had been rescued from the monastery on the hill north of Midyat and placed in the foundations of the new church in Midyat? Does that mean relics are no longer felt to be important? No bones of saints were brought into Europe. Even the three monasteries in Europe, one of which is named for Mor Ya'qub the Teacher of the Truth, the co-patron (with Mor Sharbel) of one of the monasteries of Midyat, were not founded on relics of the saints, though this was the rule in the homeland.

People fall victim to murder, disease and old age, yet the human race is renewed; manuscripts fall victim to plunderers, flames and decay, yet new manuscripts are perpetually being written; monasteries fall victim to occupation, requisition, demolition, yet they rise again, on the same spot or on another. The familiar name becomes once more a place where the tradition is cherished. And yet it is not the same. The thread which connects the *Suryoye* with their past has become more tenuous, less tangible. Perhaps that is why some who have lived abroad choose to be buried next to the monastery of Hobel and Abrohom (Figure 8).

'The saints are very good. By God, we relied on those saints! They guarded us, they defended us. They defended the *Suryoyo* community, they really did.' Thus spake *Maqdesiye* Sayde of Beswirino (Appendix 2). It is indeed a miracle that *Suryoyo*

culture has perpetuated itself for so long in Midyat. It is wishful thinking that the very appearance of the saints on the scene was enough to make the enemy go away (though believers may have actually seen them). No ghostly heroes intervened to prevent the blood-bath of July 1915, only Gallo Shabo and his fellow-heroes from 'Aynwardo. But it is surely thanks to the monasteries that *Suryoyo* culture itself has survived for so long; and for someone like *Maqdesiye* Sayde, to whom the churches and monasteries *were* the saints whose relics they contain, these 'saints' really did defend *Suryoyo* life, though they were not able, in 1915, to save the lives of individual *Suryoye*.[9]

Figure 8. Funereal monument resembling a classical temple façade.



[9] 'The name used (by the Assyrians/Syriacs) in the spoken language when referring to themselves in *Tur 'Abdin*' (Atto 2011, 11) is *Suroyo*. The Syriac equivalent is *Suryoyo*. Far from being a " 'new term' " (Atto 2011, 12), this was introduced into the Western academic vocabulary as early as 1981 (Atto 2011, 12, n. 11, referring to Ulf Björklund's book *North to another country*) and it remains the only truly neutral designation in English, since my late father's suggestion, to use the term 'Old Syrians' (*cf.* Sūryani Kadim), has not been generally taken up. Atto seems originally to have preferred this term and only to have adopted Assyrians/Syriacs after her audience in Sweden raised objections to the use of 'Suryoyo'.

Figure 8. 'This is my will, that I return to the soil in which I was born and be buried in it.' Syriac inscription on the grandest monument in the necropolis of the Monastery of Mor Abrohom.

Appendix 1
An inscription of 1271

What is left of this inscription is on the two fragments of a limestone column 40cm in diameter which stands up in the yard in front of the entrance to the necropolis, up against the south wall of the church of Mor Abrohom. One fragment (the bottom part) is 75cm high and the other 48. The smaller of the two fragments is all that is left of the top half of the column. Bell's plan (1982, 36) shows the chapel of the Mother of God at the east end of this courtyard and the yard in front of this domed chapel as another building, which has gone.

The inscribed area is what students of Latin inscriptions call a *tabula ansata*. *Tabula ansata* is a two-word Latin description of a rectangular writing-tablet (Latin: *tabula* = tablet), hollowed out on one side to receive a smooth surface of wax, usually stained red, with two *ansae*, or handles (the Latin singular is *ansa*; *ansata* = [two-]handled), in the middle of the short sides. These handles are usually wider on the outside, narrowing towards the point at which they merge with the wooden tablet, for the handles and the tablet were of a piece.

The handles of a real wooden *tabula ansata* were designed for holding the tablet up above the head to publish information. It is as though a sign used in a public place on a real occasion and read out loud in the hearing of a crowd had then been reproduced in stone as an incised outline (not in relief).

The stone tablet, which hangs, as it were, vertically, so that the writing is horizontal (Syriac was originally written from top to bottom), measures 18 x 48cm; the handle from which the tablet appears to hang is 8.5cm long and 9.5 across; the other one, at the bottom, is 6cm long and 5 across. A later text, containing the words 'bones' and 'grave', has been written outside the *tabula* across the lower *ansa*.

Of the top part of the inscription I could read a number of letters belonging to unrecognizable words, but I could only recognize the following words: *ba-shmo d-alloho* : 'In the name of God' (reminiscent of the Qur'anic formula : *b-ismi 'llah*) and, after an interval, *hono* : 'this'. The text will originally have read something like this : 'In the name of God: [A certain person, whose name has not been preserved, made] this – [here we have to supply a word describing the object made].' The person named would not have been the craftsman, but the donor, or else, perhaps, the head of the monastery.

With the bottom part I had more success. After one line in which I can make out letters, but no words, I read: *katboh den yesh HaTT[oyo] / yeshu' da-bshem dayro[y]o / ba-shnat olap / w-Hameshmo / wa-tmonin / w-tarten / d-yawnoye / b-yawmay mor / ignaTios / pa[T]ryarko / kull d-qo[r]e [nSa]le / 'al kul d-[eshtaw]tap* : 'As for the inscription, it was written by ~~Yesh~~ the sinner Yeshu', in name a monk, in the year one thousand five hundred and eighty-two of the Greeks, in the days of Mor Ignatius, the patriarch. Let each man who reads this pray for all those who were involved.' (Figure 9; Palmer 1988)

Figure 9. Much worn Syriac inscription on stone (the larger of the two pictures).

Figure 9. A detail of the inscription dated 1271, showing the misspelled name of the Patriarch 'Mor Ignatios'. This was the fourth Ignatios on the throne of Antioch, Ignatios Yeshu' (1264-82).

Figure 10. Another detail of the same inscription (a smaller picture).

Yeshu' (Jesus) is both proud and modest. It is touching to see that he had chiselled the first two letters of his own name, before he remembered to write 'the sinner' before it (Figure 10). After it, conscious of not deserving such a noble title, he added 'in name a monk'.

Figure 10. The words: 'As for (the inscription), ~~Yesh~~ the sinner Yeshu', by name a monk, wrote it.'

Appendix 2

An interview given on 8 November 1995 at Giessen, Germany.

Extracts concerning the saints as protectors of the *Suroye* , in simplified transcription, from a longer interview given by *Maqdesiye* Sayde from Beswirino to Andrew Palmer. I travelled to Giessen with a grant from the British Academy. The introduction to this source was effected by Qashisho Ken'an Budak, from Këfärbe, of the church of Mor Barsawmo, Giessen. The inscription was transcribed by Dr Heidi Armbruster of Southampton University. Michael Gabriel, Swirinoyo by birth, of Amsterdam, corrected the spelling, explained that the word '*sawgo'* is *swirinoyo* for '*syogho'* and told me that *Suroyutho* included all the Syrian Churches, Syrian Orthodox, 'Nestorians', Syrian Protestants, Syrian Catholics and Chaldeans, but not the Armenians. Hanibal Romanos and Rabban Sa'id corrected my translation.

A Hamsho w-'esri qadishe kitwa b-beswirino, Hedhr i qritho, xdu-sawgo wayne.

Translation: There were twenty-five saints in Beswirino, all around the village, they were like a fence.

B saymiwa Harb, aT-Taye w aS-Suroye saymiwa Harb. aq-qadishe othänwa bu hawaraydhan, mHarbiwa a'mayye, mHarbiwa 'am aT-Taye. annaqqa towriwa aT-Taye qumayna. mun masaleyo hathe, manne hani d-kothän kom'awnën-xu? aq-qadishaydhan-ne. aq-qadishäthxun-ne? omri, qaïmi? hedi, haw faïsh Taye bad-dukkothanëk. annaqqa baq-qriawothe d-Hedhorayna wayne, annaqqa bi-qrithedhan Taye lät-wa.

Translation: They used to make war, the Muslims and the Suroye *used to make war. The saints came to our aid, they made war against them, they made war against the Muslims. And then they used to break the Muslims in front of our very eyes. What is this business, who are these who are coming to help you? They are our saints. Are they your saints? said they, Have they risen (from the dead)? And lo and behold, there are no longer any Muslims left in those parts. There were (Muslims) in the villages around us, but in our village there were none.*

C aq-qadishe noTri-waylan, noTri-waylan. b-lälyo hod-nohärwa soymi-wa jasusiya di qritho, noTri-wa i qritho, mastri-wayla, maHafdhi-wayla. annaqqa o'do lo kodh'ono, faïshi tamo, lo faïshi. b-lalyo w b-imomo u hawaraydhan baq-qadishanëk-wa, b-aloho w baq-qadishanëk kalye-wayna.

Translation: The saints used to guard us, they really did. All night long until daybreak they kept watch over the village, they guarded the village, they protected it, they defended it. Now, though, I do not know whether they have stayed there, or not. By night and by day our help was in those saints. We owed our peace of mind to God and to those saints.

D aq-qadishaydhan ghalabe Towene. b-aloho w baq-qadishanëk kalye-wayna. noTri-waylan, maHafdhi-waylan. maHafdhi-wa i Suroyutho, maHafdhi-wayla. aH-Hamsho w 'esri qadishe othänwa bu-hawaraydhan, e ashär othän-wa.

Translation: The saints are very good. We owed our peace of mind to God and to those saints! They guarded us, they defended us. They defended the Suroyo *community, they really did. The twenty-five saints used to come to our aid, yes, they really did.*

E [Qasho Ken'an:] Muqsiye, qayyo kul kmo bote saymi-wa 'edho d-Ha maq-qadishani? [*Muqsiye* Sayde:] ... kul-Ha ... , ax d omrina adyawma eli kitli Ha, elox-

ste kitlox sahmo ebe, l-hano-ze kitle sahmo, l-hano-ste kitle. di-tareyo, kul tare howe-wayla Ha. [Unusually, for an inhabitant of Beswirino , the *Maqdesiye* uses the Kurdish word *tare* instead of the *Surayt* word *shwitho*]
*Translation: [The priest Ken'an:] Muqsiye, why is it that every few houses used to keep the feast of one of these saints? [*Maqdesiye *Sayde:] Everyone (used to keep the feast of his own saint) – Let's say, today I'm keeping one, you also will have a part in it, and this person will have a part in it, and this person, too. It is a neighbourhood feast, every neighbourhood had one.*
F annaqqa mar shaliTo didhan-wa, w mar gorgis miqabel didhe, lät-wa leh xodume. annaqqa omar: mar shaliTo, elox kitlux xodume, eli lätli. omär, d-howena aHunone, ono w hat? be aydärbo? [The *Maqdesiye* mumbles indistinctly at this point.] qaïm amirle lawghul lax-xadome, omär kobo'eno d-xodmutu mar gorgis-ste xëdwothi.
Translation: Well then, Mar Shalito was ours, but Mar Gorgis, just opposite him, had no servants. So (Mar Gorgis) says, 'Mar Shalito, you have servants, I have none.' (Then) he says, 'What if we become brothers, you and I?' 'How do you mean?' [The Maqdesiye *must have said something like this: 'If we are brothers, your servants will look after me as well.'] (So) he arose and spoke to the people who looked after him from within (the sanctuary), saying, 'I want you to look after Mar Gorgis, too, as (you look after) me.'*

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I should like to thank the following for support, which ranged from tips and help with vernacular Aramaic to the suggestion of titles to read and the gift of books: Malfono Eliyo Aydin, Sebastian Brock, Michael Gabriel, Volker Menze, Hanibal Romanos, Jan Beth-Sawoce, Herman Teule and three monasteries: that of Mor Awgin on Mount Izla, that of Mor Ephrem in The Netherlands and that of Mor Gabriel in Beth Rishe. Martin van Bruinessen helped me improve the structure, style and substance of the paper. The photographs were all taken by me on 7 and 8 October 2011, thanks to the organizers of the symposium, who bore the costs of my trip to Turkey and allowed me to conduct research for my paper while the symposium proceeded.
I should like to share with my readers a translated extract from a personal communication in *Surayt* from Hanibal Romanos, who lives in Sweden, dated 22 November 2011:
You offer a very fine analysis concerning the monasteries, how great a part they play in the life of the people, how dear they are to the hearts of the people, and that they are the reason for mutual bonding at their vigils *etc.* But at the same time this question troubles my mind a little : night and day they were mindful of God and his saints, why did these, then, not come to their aid in 1915?
These words seem to me sufficient justification for treating in one article the monasteries and the epic siege of Midyat.

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