

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Architectural features and typological analysis of historical Syriac churches in Mardin rural area

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**Abstract** This study deals with the architectural features, typological diversity and sustainability of the historical Syriac churches in the rural areas of Mardin province in southeastern Turkey. Mardin countryside, which bears the traces of different civilisations starting from the pre-Christian period, is of great importance especially for the architectural and cultural heritage of the Syriac Orthodox community. Within the scope of the research, 61 churches and monasteries, most of which were built between the 4th and 9th centuries, were examined in detail, preserving their original structural features and survey drawings of these buildings were created. In this context, a typological classification of the churches and monasteries (monastery churches) in rural Mardin was conducted, identifying three main plan types: single nave village churches oriented along the east-west axis, multi-nave churches and monastery-type churches oriented along the north-south axis. Important architectural elements of these buildings, such as Kduskudshin, doors, windows and bell towers, were analysed in detail and their impact on the original character of the buildings was studied. The results of the study indicate that the preservation of Syriac religious buildings in rural Mardin is crucial not only for the conservation of these buildings but also for ensuring the continuity of the multi-layered cultural heritage of the region.

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## 1. Introduction

Mardin, located in the southeast of Türkiye, is a province that attracts attention with its significant Christian population. The region is home to numerous historical churches and monasteries showcasing Christian religious architecture. The majority of these religious buildings belong to the Syrians, one of the oldest communities in Southeastern Anatolia and the Middle East.

The Syrians are a group of Syrian Aramaeans who abandoned idolatry and embraced Christianity during the reign of the Kingdom of Abgar, which ruled in and around Urfa in 38 (Alioğlu, 2000). The Arameans are recognised as the first Christian people in recorded history. Christianity began to spread northwards and eastwards from Palestine, the centre of origin of the religion, particularly from the second century onwards. By the early 2nd century, under the influence of the Patriarchate of Antioch, Urfa-located further east—became a significant centre for the dissemination and establishment of Christianity (Aydın et al., 2019).

In the 200s A.D., the Roman Empire intensified its persecution of Christians by destroying copies of the Bible, the holy book of Christianity, and burning churches. As a result of this oppression, Tur Abdin emerged as a significant centre for Christian monasticism and hermitic movements (Sarı, 2010).

Tur Abdin, known for its unique architectural heritage from Late Antiquity (Palmer, 1990), is a mountainous plateau in northern Mesopotamia. This region includes the districts of Midyat, Savur, Gercüş and Hasankeyf in Southeastern Anatolia. It forms a geographical corridor extending from Mardin to Cizre, reaching the point where the Batman Stream from the north meets the Tigris River (Streck, 1988).

There are different interpretations regarding the origin of the name “Tur Abdin”, a region with a deep-rooted history that has hosted many civilizations throughout history. Leroy (1955) and Brock (1999) refer to it as “The Mountain of the Servants of God”. In Syriac, “Tur” means “mountain” and Abdin means “slaves”, giving Tur Abdin the literal meaning of “Mountain of Slaves” (Akyüz, 1998).

Regarding the name “Mountain of Slaves” (Tur Abdin), Kafone (John) provides the following explanation: “When the Persians came and expelled the Greeks (Byzantines) from Dara, Nisibin and the surrounding areas and took control of the east of the Euphrates, the Christian

inhabitants of Tur Abdin dispersed and joined the Romans (Byzantines). They were settled in the area known today as Dar al-Rum (House of the Romans or Byzantines). Later, the Greek (Byzantine) kings (emperors) attacked this area and the regions of Athur, Nineveh, Banuhadra (Duhok-Zakho region), Bagermi (Beth Garmai, Erbil region) and Beth Seleukh (Kirkuk region). They took many idolater/infidels as prisoners and settled them in the area from Izla Mountain to Arzen, from the village of Fanak to Hisnu’s-Sur and Mardin. When the captives settled in this region, this mountain began to be called the Mountain of Slaves (Tur Abdin) because they were enslaved. Thus, the name of the mountain was derived from slavery and since the time of Emperor Justinian, it has been called Jabal Abdin or Tur Abdin” (Barsaoum, 2008).

Tur Abdin, where the first traces of Christianity appeared at the beginning of the 2nd century, became a significant centre for Christianisation in the 4th century, with numerous monasteries and churches built in the region (Honigmann, 1960; Günal, 2006). The oldest Christian religious structure in the area is the Nusaybin baptistery, constructed between 313 and 320 (Keser, 2002). Some of these churches have remained unaltered until today, preserving their original characteristics in terms of architectural design (Fig. 1). Some of the damaged churches have been rebuilt using local materials and traditional construction techniques, maintaining their original layout and features. The church architecture in the Tur Abdin region has remained unchanged over time. In the restoration practices carried out in recent years, the original characteristics of the church sections have been preserved, though many new additions have been made.

The most extensive restoration projects in recent years, especially between 2000 and 2015, have been carried out by associations and foundations established by Syriac Orthodox believers and Christian groups (Brock 2012; Keser Kayaalp, 2016), with ongoing restoration work.

Construction work is usually carried out by local labor groups under the supervision of the monastery’s head priest or the church’s priest, who also made the key decisions. Critical decisions are also made by them (Keser Kayaalp, 2016). The majority of these repairs, especially those conducted in earlier years, were done without official permission and in violation of restoration principles.



Fig. 1 Mor Yakup Monastery–Barıştepe/Shiluh (a) and Virgin Mary Monastery–Antlı/Hah (b).

## 2. Literature review

As one of the most important centres of Syriac Orthodox architecture throughout history, the Tur Abdin region, which encompasses the countryside of Mardin, has attracted the attention of many scholars. These studies analysing the architectural and cultural heritage of the region provide valuable insights from various perspectives. Among them, [Bell et al. \(1910\)](#), mapped the Tur Abdin region and presented the plans, façades, and ornamental details of several churches and monasteries. [Bell and Mango \(1982\)](#) catalogued the monuments and sites, adopting a more systematic approach with maps and architectural details of the important religious buildings previously studied by Bell. In the third volume of his four-volume study, [Sinclair \(1989\)](#), underlined the architectural diversity of the region by analysing the architectural features and ornamental motifs of some significant religious buildings. [Palmer \(1990\)](#), explored the history of Tur Abdin and the activities of the monks, providing information on the history, art, and architecture of key churches and monasteries, such as the Mor Gabriel Monastery. Between 1981 and 1993, [Wiessner \(1981, 1982, 1993\)](#), documented the architectural heritage of the Christian community in the villages of Mardin's districts through photographs, revealing the transformation of these buildings over time. [Hollerweger \(1999\)](#), introduced some Syriac villages in the region along with their churches and monasteries. [Barsaoum \(2008\)](#), provided information on the borders and name of Mount Tur Abdin, as well as the villages, monasteries, churches, and religious leaders in the region. [Ahunbay \(2021\)](#), based on his research in and around Mardin between 1974 and 1978, has examined the condition of military and religious structures in the Tur Abdin region, focusing on the architectural interactions and typological characteristics of the area. Additionally, he is shedding light on the region's rich cultural heritage through structures such as churches, monasteries, and funerary monuments.

More recently, Keser-Kayaalp has published extensively on Christian religious architecture in Tur Abdin, with her work covering a broad time span from 2002 to 2022. [Keser \(2002\)](#) analysed some important churches and monasteries in and around Mardin, making architectural comparisons regarding the origins of these religious buildings. In her PhD thesis, [Keser-Kayaalp \(2008a,b\)](#) examined the evolution of churches and monasteries in Northern Mesopotamia by evaluating their histories, architectural plans, and structural elements. Focusing on the village of Hah and its surrounding religious buildings, [Keser-Kayaalp \(2012\)](#) emphasized the changes from Late Antiquity to the advent of Islam. [Keser-Kayaalp and Erdoğan, 2013](#) investigated the cathedral complex in Nusaybin, revealing its evolution and architectural details in the light of archaeological findings. Providing a critical assessment of the conservation of Syriac architectural heritage in Tur Abdin, [Keser-Kayaalp \(2016\)](#) evaluated the restoration processes of Syriac churches within different conservation approaches. [Keser-Kayaalp \(2021\)](#) analysed the architectural transformation of the region under Byzantine and Arab influences, examining Late Antique Northern Mesopotamian church architecture within the context of regional dynamics and cultural

continuity. Finally, in the work she edited, [Keser-Kayaalp \(2022\)](#) presented a critical evaluation of some churches and monasteries in the Tur Abdin region, discussing their current condition, risk analyses, and conservation recommendations.

When evaluating these studies, it becomes clear that, with a few exceptions, the important and well-known churches and monasteries in Tur Abdin have been studied in detail, with most of the research focusing on issues related to dating. However, churches and monasteries in rural areas have not been extensively researched due to transportation and security reasons. To address this gap in research, the countryside of Mardin, where Christian religious architecture is densely located, has been chosen as the main research area of this study.

The Syriac religious buildings that are the subject of this study are churches and monasteries located in the Tur Abdin region, in the rural areas of the city of Mardin. Most of these buildings were built between the 4th and 9th centuries, though some are from later periods.

Some of these buildings, which serve as historical documents, are in danger of being completely destroyed. Several of these buildings in rural areas have been restored by their users at different times. In some past restoration practices, it has been observed that the original plan and façade layouts of the buildings were altered, disrupting the architectural integrity of their original designs. One of the main reasons for this situation is that the architectural features of the churches and monasteries in the region are not sufficiently known.

## 3. Methodology

This research systematically examines the architectural features, typological characteristics and historical authenticity of Syriac churches and monasteries in rural Mardin. A multi-stage methodological approach combining historical-architectural analysis, extensive fieldwork and typological classification is adopted to ensure scientific rigour, reproducibility and validity.

The first stage of the research involved an extensive literature review to gather comprehensive historical, architectural and cultural background information. Academic works on Syriac architecture, Tur Abdin and wider regional history, including academic articles, doctoral dissertations, master's theses, historical records, archival documents and reference books, were extensively reviewed. This phase provided the theoretical foundation and comparative framework necessary to understand the architectural evolution, cultural context and conservation challenges associated with the region's religious buildings.

Following a literature review, rural areas of Mardin Province, known to have a significant concentration of Syriac architectural heritage, were identified as the primary research area. Selection criteria included historical significance, architectural conservation status, accessibility and safety. From the initial list, 61 churches and monasteries that were accessible and structurally safe for detailed survey were systematically selected on the basis of purposive sampling. Buildings that posed a security risk, did

not have sufficient structural remains or could not be authorised were excluded from the sample.

Data collection was carried out using a structured combined qualitative and quantitative approach.

Detailed on-site inspections were conducted at each selected building. This included visual documentation through high-resolution photographic surveys capturing architectural details, materials, spatial organisation and decorative elements. Systematic architectural surveys were conducted to produce accurate scale drawings of the architectural plans.

Architectural drawings from the field surveys were systematically analysed to identify common typological patterns. Churches and monasteries (monastic churches) were categorized according to their plan layout (single nave, multi-nave, monastic type), spatial orientation and architectural configuration (presence of narthex, sanctuary arrangements, nave structures). In addition, semi-structured oral interviews were conducted with key informants, including local community leaders, religious officials, academics specialising in Syriac studies and other relevant stakeholders. The interviews provided insights into the historical use of these heritage buildings, community perceptions, past restoration practices, and current challenges they face. The interview transcripts were qualitatively analysed to contextualise and validate the architectural findings.

The collected data were analysed using comparative historical-architectural methods. Architectural features such as spatial arrangements, construction techniques, structural components, decorative elements and materials were evaluated in comparison with the scientific frameworks and historical typologies identified in the literature review.

Multiple validation checks were applied to ensure reliability and consistency, including cross-referencing to photographic evidence, architectural drawings, historical descriptions and interview narratives. The typological classification developed was systematically validated against previously established categories in regional and international studies to establish its validity.

Ethical principles such as confidentiality, informed consent and cultural sensitivity were strictly adhered to during the collection and dissemination of ethnographic data.

Despite systematic efforts, some limitations were encountered, such as restricted access to some remote locations due to security concerns, partial damage or loss of original structural details due to unauthorised restorations in the past, and incomplete historical documentation for some less studied structures. These limitations were transparently recognised and incorporated into the analytical framework.

By rigorously following this structured methodology, the study provides solid scientific validity, enhances the understanding of the Syriac architectural heritage and contributes valuable information to support informed conservation practices.

#### 4. Formation of monasteries and churches

The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ekklesia”, which in ancient Greek means “a gathering of people called

together”. It refers to public gatherings of a religious nature. In the Bible, in addition to this meaning, the church is also described as the body of Christ and at the same time the temple of God (Demir, 2015).

The word “monastery,” which refers to the complex that includes the church (the place of worship) and the group of buildings that meet the basic needs of the clergy, derives from the Greek verb “monakos,” meaning to live alone (Ahunbay, 1997; Talbot, 1999; Doğan, 2003). The word is translated into Latin as “monasterium: monastery” (Özyıldırım and Ünal, 2011). Monasteries, where various functions such as education, discipline, economy and cooperation came together, were located on the way of travellers, but still close to a settlement. They also played an important role in the burial and commemoration of the dead (Keser, 2002).

The first formations of monasteries and churches are traced back to the monastic movement that emerged in Egypt. The initiators of this monastic movement were ascetics who retreated from the society and settled in the desert in order to perform their worship without being disturbed. The hermits settled in caves in the desert and in tombs from the time of the pharaohs. Written sources offer little information about the structures in the desert where these ascetics lived. In addition to the cave and the ruins in which they settled, they may have built small huts with the wood they could obtain from the palm trees on the borders of the desert, or adobe may have been used because its porous texture provided insulation against the sun. As the number of hermits grew, monastic communities began to spread. Around the cell (cave or hut) of the founding ascetic there were cells scattered around the perimeter, each at a distance from the other. Each hermit or monk lived in complete isolation from the others, and visits to one another were rare. In the early stages of monastic communities, the cell of the founding ascetic was the centre, but later a more permanent structure, the “church”, replaced it (Tiryaki, 2007a,b).

In Upper Egypt, the famous ascetic Pachomios introduced a new direction to the monastic movement and transformed monasteries into something close to their present form. He introduced his disciples a way of life behind closed walls, laying the foundation for the monastic institution of the East and West. These monasteries now consisted of a group of buildings (church, refectory, kitchen, cells, library, workshops, guest house, etc.) surrounded by a perimeter wall. The wall not only defined the monastic settlement, but also limited the life within the monastery and controlled the life of the saints. In addition, it symbolised the “house of the saint”, the “holy wall” and served as a wall that physically separated and defined the sacred space from the universe of daily life (Tiryaki, 2007a, b).

Founded in 346 by the ascetic Pachomios/Pachomios, whose death is recorded as occurring in the same year, monasteries were established in remote locations, far from settlements. These monasteries consisted of sheltered structures enclosed by high and strong walls, which served as fortifications against attacks and as barriers to separate monks from worldly life. St. Basileus (329–379), another influential figure in monasticism, advocated for the formation of smaller monastic communities. Unlike

Pachomius' grand monasteries in Aegyptus, which housed hundreds of monks, Basileus' monasteries were situated much closer to or even within cities, facilitating a different kind of monastic experience (Özyıldırım and Ünal, 2011). In the Tur Abdin region, where Syriac religious buildings in the Mardin countryside are located, some monasteries were built near residential areas, such as the monasteries of Basileus, while some others, like the monasteries of Pachomius, were built far from residential areas.

The Syriac community in the studied region constructed churches within the settlement areas primarily for worship. Many of these churches, similar to monasteries, are enclosed by high perimeter walls, isolating them from the external environment. Over time, units such as priests'

rooms, rest rooms, madrasahs/lectureships, kitchens, showers and toilets have been added to the churches by later users.

## 5. Architectural characteristics of churches in rural Mardin

As the scope of the study, the areas where the Syriac villages of Mardin's Artuklu (central district), Yeşilli, Kızıltepe, Midyat, Nusaybin, Savur, Dargeçit and Derik districts are located were determined. In this framework, the locations of the churches and monasteries examined in rural Mardin are numbered (Table 1) and shown on the map below (Fig. 2).

**Table 1** Churches and monasteries examined.

No.	Church/Monastery name	District name	Village name
1	Mor Iliyo Monastery	Artuklu	Çiftlik (Derilya) Village (Vill.)
2	Mor Theodoros Church	Artuklu	Göllü (Gölye) Village
3	Mor Cercis Church	Artuklu	Eskikale (Kal'1t mara) Vill.
4	Mor Yakup/Jacob Church	Yeşilli	Bülbül (Bınebil) Village
5	Mor İstayfan Church	Yeşilli	Bülbül (Bınebil) Village
6	Virgin Mary Church	Yeşilli	Bülbül (Bınebil) Village
7	Protestant Church	Yeşilli	Bülbül (Bınebil) Village
8	Mor Gevargis Church	Kızıltepe	Büyükayrık (Deyra Meşkok) Vill.
9	Mor Stefanos (Mort Mariana) Ch.	Kızıltepe	Halkalı (Kıleybin) Village
10	Mor Circis (Mor Cercis) Ch.	Kızıltepe	Işıklar (İbrahimiye) Village
11	Deham (Dehime) Church	Kızıltepe	Süreklı (Dehime) Village
12	Deyra Kızille/Syriac Church	Derik	Boyaklı (Qızıl) Village
13	Virgin Mary Monastery	Midyat	Anıtlı (Hah) Village
14	Mor Sarkis & Mor Bakos Mon.	Midyat	Anıtlı (Hah) Village
15	Mor Shmuel (Samuel) Church	Midyat	Anıtlı (Hah) Village
16	Mor Sobo Church/Cathedral	Midyat	Anıtlı (Hah) Village
17	Mor İzozoel Church	Midyat	Altıntaş (Keferze) Village
18	Virgin Mary Church	Midyat	Altıntaş (Keferze) Village
19	Mor Gevargis Church	Midyat	Altıntaş (Keferze) Village
20	Mor Abrohom Church	Midyat	Altıntaş (Keferze) Village
21	Mor Yuhanon Church	Midyat	Altıntaş (Keferze) Village
22	Kadıšto Fabriya Church	Midyat	Altıntaş (Keferze) Village
23	Mor Kuryakos Church	Midyat	Bağlarbaşı (Arnas/Urđnus) Vill.
24	Mor Iliyo (Eliyo) Church	Midyat	Alagöz (Bethustan) Village
25	Mor Afrem Church	Midyat	Bardakçı (Bote/Bate) Village
26	Mor Yakup/Jacob Monastery	Midyat	Barıştepe (Selhe/Salah) Vill.
27	Mor Barsabo Church	Midyat	Barıştepe (Selhe/Salah) Vill.
28	Mor Yakup/Jacob Church	Midyat	Karagöl (Derkube) Village
29	Virgin Mary Church	Midyat	Karagöl (Derkube) Village
30	Mor Osyo Church	Midyat	Karagöl (Derkube) Village
31	Mor Yuhanon Church	Midyat	Doğançay (Mozizah) Village
32	Mor Yakup/Jacob Church	Midyat	Elbeğendi (Kafro/Tahtayto) Vill.
33	Virgin Mary Church	Midyat	Elbeğendi (Kafro/Tahtayto) Vill.
34	Mor Estefanos Church	Midyat	Gülgöze (Ayn Verd/Invarđo) Vill.
35	Mor Hadbshabo Church	Midyat	Gülgöze (Ayn Verd/Invarđo) Vill.
36	Mort Shmuni Church	Midyat	Gülgöze (Ayn Verd/Invarđo) Vill.
37	Mor Efrem (Afreim) Ch.	Midyat	Gülgöze (Ayn Verd/Invarđo) Vill.
38	Virgin Mary Church	Midyat	Gülgöze (Ayn Verd/Invarđo) Vill.
39	Mor Şemun d'Zeyte Church	Midyat	Mercimekli (Habsus) Village
40	Mor Loozor Monastery	Midyat	Mercimekli (Habsus) Village

Table 1 (continued)

No.	Church/Monastery name	District name	Village name
41	Virgin Mary Church	Midyat	Mercimekli (Habsus) Village
42	Mor Kuryakos Church	Midyat	Yemişli (Enhil/Bethnahle) Village
43	Mor Eşayo Holoboyo Ch.	Midyat	Yemişli (Enhil/Bethnahle) Village
44	Mor Dimet Church	Midyat	Izbırak (Zaz) Village
45	Mor Aho & Mor Hevoro Ch.	Nusaybin	Dağıçı (Haruptho Bşayno) Vill.
46	Mor Yakup/Jacob Mon.	Nusaybin	Dibek (Badibe/Badip) Village
47	Mor Aho Church	Nusaybin	Günyurdu (Marbobo) Village
48	Mor Eliyo (Iliyo) Mon.	Nusaybin	Güzelsu (Ehwo/Habab) Village
49	Mor Serkis&Mor Bakos Ch.	Nusaybin	Güzelsu (Ehwo/Habab) Village
50	Mor Gevargis Church	Nusaybin	Güzelsu (Ehwo/Habab) Village
51	Mor Izozoel Church	Nusaybin	Güzelsu (Ehwo/Habab) Village
52	Mor Abrohom Church	Nusaybin	Odabaşı (Gündük-Schükrü) Vill.
53	Virgin Mary Church	Nusaybin	Taşköy (Arbo) Village
54	Mor Şalito Church	Nusaybin	Taşköy (Arbo) Village
55	Mor Efreem & Teodoros Ch.	Nusaybin	Üçköy (Arkah/Harabale) Village
56	Mor Malke (Melke) Mon.	Nusaybin	Üçköy (Arkah/Harabale) Village
57	Virgin Mary Church	Nusaybin	Üçyol (Sederi) Village
58	Mor Yuhanon Dilimiyo Ch.	Savur	Dereçi (Kıllıt/Kelith) Village
59	Mor Mete (Catholic) Ch.	Savur	Dereçi (Kıllıt/Kelith) Village
60	Protestant Church	Savur	Dereçi (Kıllıt/Kelith) Village
61	Mor Abay Chapel	Savur	Dereçi (Kıllıt/Kelith) Village

Three main of plan types were identified in the church architecture of rural Mardin. These are village churches with a single nave extending on the east-west axis, multi-nave churches and monastic type (Keser, 2002) churches extending on the north-south axis. Ahunbay characterised village churches with a single nave extending on the east-west axis as “longitudinally developed single nave churches” and the monastic type churches as “churches with transversely developed nave/naos” (Ahunbay, 2021).

The common feature of churches categorized by their plan types is that they have naos/nave and mezbah/sanctuary/bema sections. The naos (nave) is the area where the congregation gathers for prayer (Kazhdan, 1991; Durak, 2011) and prayers are performed (Akyüz, 2010) (Fig. 3(a, b)).

Mezbah (bema/sanctuary) is the place where sacrifices are made and offered. In Christianity, these sacrifices are spiritual in nature, consisting of bread and wine (Akyüz, 2010). Serving as an intermediary between God and humanity, the mezbah/bema symbolizes the tomb of Jesus Christ and can only be accessed by the spiritually ordained from the nave (naos) section (Durak, 2011). The mezbah/bema section at the eastern end of the nave/naos is usually accessed by three steps (Fig. 4(a, b)).

In the monasteries (monastery churches) and churches examined, the nave/naos has a rectangular form, extending in the east-west direction in single-nave village churches and in the north-south direction in monastery type churches. In multi-nave churches, the nave/naos usually consists of three-nave/partition separated by arcades. However, there are a few exceptions with two naves, such as the Mor Eliyo Church in Alagöz Village and the Church of the Virgin Mary in Üçyol Village. In addition,

the Mor Efreem & Mor Teodoros Church in Üçköy Village consists of a single nave. In Gernot Wiessner’s 1983 study, the naos of the Mor Efreem & Mor Teodoros Church in Üçköy Village was shown in the plan diagram as a two-nave church. However, he stated that the naos of the church was previously a three-nave church, and that the church, which was later demolished, took the form of a two-nave church (Wiessner, 1983). This church was converted into a single nave with a comprehensive repair carried out in 2009–2011 through the associations established by Syriac (Yar, 2021).

In village churches with a single nave, there are typically two doors opening into the naos from the south wall (wide façade). The reason for the double doors opening can be understood from an anonymous Nestorian source, which provides a mystical interpretation of the various parts of the churches: “... the men’s section is in the direction of the land of Eden, that is, in the east, and the women’s section is in the west” (Connolly, 1913). This arrangement is similarly reflected in the use of churches in the Tur Abdin region (Ahunbay, 2021).

In the nave/naos, where the congregation performs their prayers, the west side reserved for women is separated from the men’s section by a wooden screen. These wooden screens are particularly noticeable in single-nave village churches with an east-west axis, such as Mor Kuryakos Church (Bağlarbaşı Village) and Mor Şemun d’Zeyte Church (Mercimekli Village). Today, these wooden screens, which are no longer found in most rural churches, nor are they present in churches in larger cities. In such places, women typically occupy the right side of the double row of pews in the middle of the naos (Durak, 2011). The naos section is usually covered with various types of vaults, including pointed vaults, cross vaults and barrel vaults.

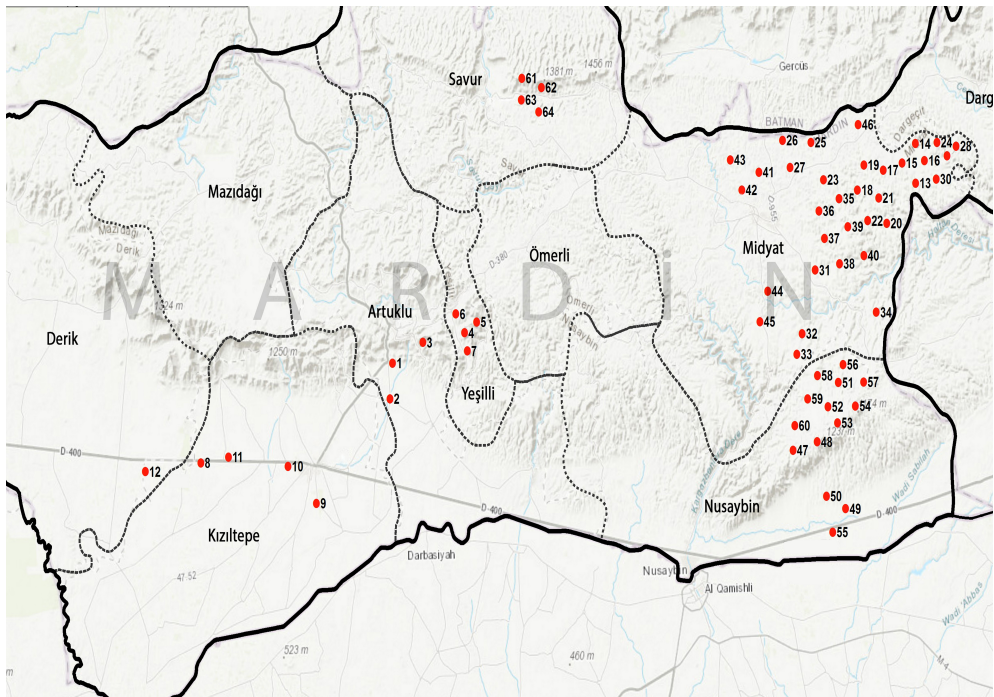


Fig. 2 Churches and monasteries located in the Mardin countryside and analysed within the scope of the study.

Table 2 Single-nave village churches extending on the east-west axis: those without a narthex.

Mor Yakup Church (Bülbül-Bnebil)	Mor İsteyfan Church (Bülbül-Bnebil)	Virgin Mary Church (Karagöl-Derkube)	Virgin Mary Church (Altıntaş-Keferze)	Mor Abay Chapel (Dereici-Killit)
Mor Osyo Church (Karagöl-Derkube)	Mor Efreim Church (Gülgöze-Invardo)	Mor Yuhanon Church (Altıntaş-Keferze)	Virgin Mary Church (Taşköy-Arbo)	Mor Abrohom Church (Altıntaş)
Mor Gevargis Church (Güzelsu-Ehwo)	Virgin Mary Church (Bülbül-Bnebil)	Mor Aho & Mor Heworo Church (Dağici-Haruptho)	Virgin Mary Church (Elbeğendi-Kafro)	Dereici Protestant Church (Dereici-)
Mor Aho Church (Günyurdu-Marbobo)	Protestant Church (Bülbül-Bnebil)	Mor Abrohom Church (Odabaşı-Gündük Schükrü)	Mor Mete Catholic Church (Dereici-Killit)	Kadişto Fabruniya Church (Altıntaş-Keferze)
Virgin Mary Church (Mercimekli-Habsus)	Mor İzozel Church (Güzelsu-Ehwo)			

However, the naos of the Virgin Mary Monastery church in Antlı is an exception, as it is covered with a dome supported by trumpets at the corners.

The mezbah (sanctuary, bema, altar room) at the eastern end of the nave/naos consists of an apse covered with a half dome or three rooms (main mezbah/altar room



Fig. 3 Nave/Naos section of churches.

and pastophorion rooms) covered with three cross vaults (Keser, 2002). In some churches there is a room (pastophorion) north and south of the apse. The southern room (diaconicon) is usually designed as a small church (chapel) dedicated to a saint or saint. However, it remains uncertain whether these south rooms were part of the original design or added later (Ahunbay, 2021) (Table 3). This plan layout is seen in village churches with a single nave extending on the east-west axis. In monastic type churches and multi-nave churches, the mezbah/sanctuary at the east end of the naos consists of three rooms arranged side by side (north-south direction). These chambers are the main mezbah (altar room) in the middle and the pastophorion chambers on the sides. In some churches, restoration work has led to the removal of one or both of the walls between these rooms. For example, as seen in Tables 4 and 5, two walls were removed in Mor Iliyo Church (Alagöz Village), Mor Theodoros Church (Göllü Village), Mor Stefanos Church (Halkalı Village), Mor Loozor Monastery (Mercimekli Village) and Mor Malke Monastery (Üçköy Village), and one wall was removed in Mor Yakup Church.

The bemas/mezbah/sanctuary of monastery-type and multi-nave churches consist of three rooms. However, in some cases, such as the Virgin Mary Church with two naves in Üçyol Village, the mezbah (bema/sanctuary) consists of two rooms, and the mezbah (bema) of the Mor Eliyo Monastery in Güzelsu Village consists of just one room. It is believed that the mezbah arrangements of these two churches have changed due to faulty restorations. Hans

Hollerweger stated that the Mor Eliyo (Iliyo) Monastery in Güzelsu Village was completely destroyed during the disturbances between 1924 and 1928 (Hollerweger, 1999). The restoration of this monastery was started in 2004 with the contributions of local people (Gök, 2021).

The three-room bemas/mezbah mentioned above are covered with three cross vaults, a single barrel vault or, as seen in the case of the Mor Eliyo Church in the village of Bakisian, the central room is covered with a cross vault while the side rooms are covered with barrel vaults.

Apart from the main parts of the church, such as the naos and the mezbah (bema), some churches feature a narthex. The narthex (Kazhdan, 1991), located in front of the naos, functions as an entrance area (Fig. 5 (a, b)), and is reserved for non-baptised individuals to follow the service from a distance (Gabriel Akyüz, 2022). Those who had not yet been baptised and converted to Christianity, called “katekhümen,” were not allowed to participate fully in the religious service. They were permitted to stay in one of the side naves for part of the service, after which they had to exit through the door reserved for them and wait in the narthex until the end of the service. They could only listen to the liturgy from the narthex, but were not allowed to observe it (İşler, 2016).

The narthex has a rectangular form extending in the north-south direction in monastic churches and in the east-west direction in village churches with a single nave. It was constructed either as a closed space or as a portico with open front and side faces.


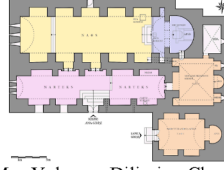
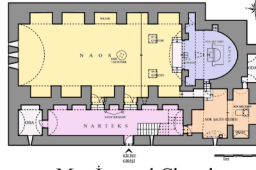
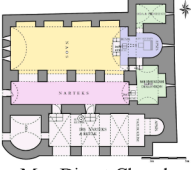
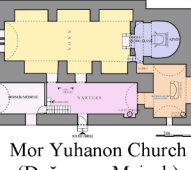
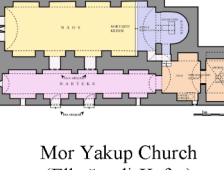
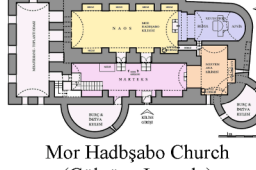
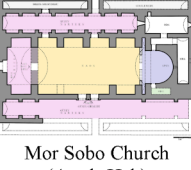

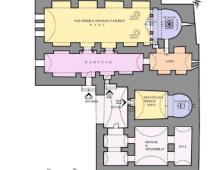
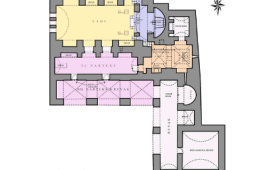


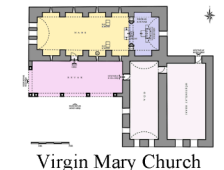
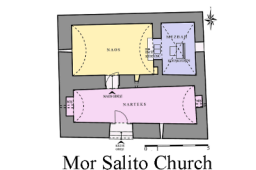
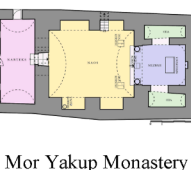

The Virgin Mary Monastery, Mor Sarkis & Mor Bakos Church, Mor Samuel Church and Mor Sobo Cathedral in Anıtlı (Hah) Village, Mor Jacob Monastery and Mor Bar Shabo Church in Barıştepe (Şiluh) Village, Mor Estefanos Church in Güngören (Keferbe) Village, Mor Iliyo Monastery and Mor Serkis & Mor Bakus Church in Güzelsu (Ihvo) Village, Mor Efrehan & Mor Teodoros Church in Üçköy (Arkah) Village, Mor Yuhanon Church in Doğançay (Mzizah) Village, Mor Eşayo Holoboyo Church in Yemişli (Enhil) Village, Mor İzozel Church in Altıntaş (Keferze) Village, Mor Hadbşabo Church in Gülgöze (Ayn verd) Village, Mor Kuryakos Church in Bağlarbaşı (Arnas) Village, Mor Şalito Church in Taşköy (Arbo) Village and Mor Yakup & Mor Bar Savmo Church in Elbeğendi (Kafro) Village are examples of churches where the narthex was built as a closed space.

The Church of the Virgin Mary in Gülgöze (Ayn Verd) Village, Mor Loozor Monastery in Mercimekli (Habsus)



Fig. 4 View of the mezbah/sanctuary/bema at the east end of the naos.

**Table 3** Single-nave village churches extending on the east-west axis: those with narthex.

 Mor Şemun d'Zeyte Church (Mercimekli-Habsus)	 Mor Yuhanon Dilimiyo Church (Dereiçi-Kılıt)	 Mor İzozuel Church (Altıntaş-Keferze)	 Mor Dimet Church (İzbırak-Zaz)
 Mor Yuhanon Church (Doğançay-Mzizah)	 Mor Yakup Church (Elbeğendi-Kafro)	 Mor Hadşabo Church (Gülgoze-Invardo)	 Mor Sobo Church (Anıtlı-Hah)
 Mor Estafanos Church (Güngören-Keferbe)	 Mor Serkis & Mor Bakos Church (Güzelsu-Invardo)	 Mor Kuryakos Church (Yemişli-Enhil)	 Mor Kuryakos Church (Bağlarbaşı -Arnas)
 Mor Eşayo Holoboyo Church (Yemişli-Bethnahle)	 Virgin Mary Church (Gülgoze-Invardo)	 Mor Şalito Church (Taşkøy-Arbo)	 Mor Yakup Monastery (Dibek-Badibe)
			

Village and Mor Aho Church in Günyurdu (Morbobo) Village are churches with a portico-shaped narthex. In addition, the churches of Mor Dimet in İzbırak (Zaz) Village, Mor Kuryakos in Yemişli (Enhil) Village and Mor Şemun d'Zeyte in Mercimekli (Habsus) Village have both inner and outer narthexes. In these three churches, the inner narthex was built as a closed space, while the outer narthex was constructed as a semi-open space, added later to the churches. The outer narthex of Mor Dimet Church was added in 1924, while the outer narthex of Mor Kuryakos Church, not included in the survey plan of [Wiessner's 1983](#) study, was added during extensive repairs in 2009 ([Ergün, 2013](#)). The outer narthex of Mor Şemun d'Zeyte Church, shown as an additional partition in [Wiessner's 1983](#) survey plan, is noted as an addition, although the exact date of its construction is unspecified ([Wiessner, 1983](#)).

### 5.1. Plan layout and typological classification

In this section, the typological classification of the churches examined within the scope of the study was established. Three types of classifications were identified: single nave village churches extending on the east-west axis, multi-nave churches and monastery-type churches extending on


the north-south axis. This classification is limited to the churches and monastery churches found in the rural areas.

The single nave churches, which extend in the east-west direction, have a plan consisting of a barrel-vaulted nave with supporting arches and columns along the north and south side walls, with a semicircular apse (altar room) at the eastern end of the nave ([Table 2](#)). [Metin Ahunbay](#) states that the supporting arches and piers on the north and south walls of the naos in single nave churches were not part of the original design of the building ([Ahunbay, 2021](#)). This observation is corroborated by [Bell's](#) statement that the Mor Sobo Church in the village of Hah (Anıtlı) was originally covered with a wooden roof, but later, when the roof was converted into a barrel vault, supporting arches and piers were built on the north and south walls to reduce the span and carry the extra weight ([Bell and Mango, 1982](#)). However, in some single nave churches, the thickness of the north and south walls was increased removing the need for supporting arches and piers. Additionally, in some churches, the semicircular eastern wall of the altar room was built with a flat wall. In these churches, there is usually a templon wall separating the naos from the mezbah (bema) section at the eastern end. Where there is no templon wall, the mezbah (bema) section is delimited by

Table 4 Multi-nave churches.

 Mor İliyo (Eliyo) Church (Alagöz-Bakısyan)	 Mor Cercis Church (Eskikale-Kal'ıt Mara)	 Mor Theodoros Church (Göllü-Göliye)	 Deyra Kızılla /Süryani Church (Boyaklı-Qızıl)
 Mor Gevargis Church (Büyükayrık-Meşkoğa Mezin)	 Deham Church (Süreklı-Dehime)	 Mor Stefanos (Mort Mariana) Church (Halkalı)	 Mor İliyo Manastırı (Çiftlik-Derilya)
 Virgin Mary Church (Üçyol-Sederi)	 Mor Cercis (Cercis) Church (Işıklar-İbrahimiye)	 Mor Efreml-Theodoros Church (Üçköy-Arkah)	
Mezbah/ Sanctuary/Bema		Narthex	
Nave/Naos		Chapel	
Pastoforion			

Table 5 Monastery type churches extending on the north-south axis.

 Virgin Mary Monastery (Anıtlı-Hah)	 Mor Yakup Monastery (Barıştepe-Salah)	 Mor Barşabo Church (Barıştepe-Salah)	 Mor Loozor Monastery (Mercimekli-Habsus)
 Mor Yakup Church (Karagöl-Derkube)	 Mor Malke Monastery (Üçköy-Arkah)	 Mor Şmuel Church (Anıtlı-Hah)	 Mor Eliyo Monastery (Gülgöze-Ehvo)
 Mor Sarkis & Mor Bakos Monastery (Anıtlı-Hah)	 Mor Afrem Church (Bardakçı-Bote)	 Mor Gevargis Church (Altıntaş-Keferze)	
Mezbah/ Sanctuary/Bema		Narthex	
Nave/Naos		Chapel	
Pastoforion			

raising one step from the naos. At the same time, most of the single nave churches have a narthex to the south of the nave. The narthex is rarely seen to the west and north of the nave in this type of church (Table 3).

The covering system of the churches with a single nave extending in the east-west direction observed barrel vault,

cross vault and, in some cases due to faulty repairs, flat reinforced concrete slabs. For instance, the naos of the Mor Aho Church in Günyurdu/Marbobbo Village was covered with reinforced concrete slabs in 1974 (Gökçe, 2020), the narthex of the Virgin Mary Church in Gülgöze/Invarido Village was replaced with a reinforced concrete slab in 1955



Fig. 5 Narthex section.

(Akay, 2019), and the naos of the Protestant Church in Dereiçi/Killit Village was covered with a reinforced concrete slab in 2010 (Dal, 2024).

The multi-nave churches have a plan type seen in later churches in the region. These churches are basilicas with three naves, supported by wide columns carry heavy arches, which separate the naves from each other. Although this plan type extends in the east-west direction, it includes a three-sectioned altar (mezbah/bema) at the eastern end. This layout appears to combine elements from single nave churches on the east-west axis and monastery-type churches on the north-south axis. This type can be referred to as multi-nave churches (Keser, 2002) (Table 4).

The main churches of the monasteries are typically monastery-type churches, a term coined by Pognon. This type of plan is characterized by churches with a barrel vault extending in the north-south direction, a three-sectioned mezbah (altar room) at the eastern end and a narthex to the west (Pognon, 1907; Keser, 2002). All church plans are oriented to the east, because Jesus Christ will return from the east, and the kudshudshin (altar) in the central part of the mezbah/bema is the crown prepared for him. In Ousterhout's depiction of the Middle Byzantine (824–1204) church altar, the altar consists of three semicircular apses. The central apse is called the bema and it contains a kudşkudşudşin (altar) (Keser, 2002). To the left (north) of the bema is the prothesis, where the necessary ceremonial preparations are made before the sacred objects used in the Eucharist (rite of wine and bread) are brought to the

kidshudshin (altar). To the right (south) is the diakonikon, which typically serves the various space needs of the clergy (Tiryaki and Uzbek, 2015), especially ceremonial vestments and sacred texts (Keser, 2002) (Tables 4 and 5).

The Syriac religious structures identified in rural areas are located in the central Artuklu district of Mardin, as well as the villages of Yeşilli, Kızıltepe, Derik, Midyat, Nusaybin and Savur districts. The plan typologies of 61 churches and monastery churches across a total of 32 villages in the 7 districts of Mardin are presented in the tables below. Of these, 39 are single-nave village churches extending on the east-west axis, 11 are multi-nave churches and 11 are monastery type churches extending on the north-south axis.

## 5.2. Plan and façade elements

Within the scope of this study, kudshudshins/altar, entrance doors, windows, and bell towers were examined as significant plan and façade elements that are specific to the region.

### 5.2.1. Kudshudshins (Altar)

The most important liturgical element of Syriac religious architecture, the kudshudshin (altar), is referred to as the "throne" (because it represents the seat of Jesus) or the "table of life" (due to the belief that the bread and wine in the religious ritual lead to salvation) (Hollerweger, 1999). Kudshudshins/altar serve as symbolic elements that facilitate spiritual communication between believers and the sacred, embodying the sacred as a religious object (Telli and Top, 2021). The veil that covers the kudshudshin and hangs to the west symbolizes the tree in the Garden of Eden that Adam could not comprehend or the shroud of Lord Jesus Christ (Demir, 2015). Other ornaments on the altar represent the adornment of the souls of the believers with virtues (Durak, 2011).

The design of the kudshudshins/altar varies significantly. In churches such as the Mor Malke Monastery in Üçköy-Arkah Village and the Mor Eliyo Church in Alagöz-Bethustan Village, the kudşkudşins/altar take the form of a simple rectangular table (Fig. 6 (a) and Fig. 7). In the kudşkudşins of the Mor Izozel Church in the Altıntaş-Keferze Village and the Mor Şemun d'Zeyte Church in the Mercimekli-Hapsus Village, the sides of the tables are raised, leaving only the front face open and are terminated with a half



Fig. 6 Kudshudshins/Altar.



Fig. 7 Early period Kushkudshins/Altar: (a–c, h) [pre-Christian Pagan altar (d–f) (Hollerweger, 1999)], (g–j) (Wiessner, 1981).

dome (Fig. 6 (b) and Fig. 8 (a–b)). In addition to these, there are also kudshudshins in the form of a dome (kiborium) supported by four columns placed on a simple table, with round arches connecting these columns (Fig. 6 (c) and Fig. 8 (e–f)), such as the one found in the Mor Cercis Church in Eskikale-Kal't Mara Village.

### 5.2.2. Entrance doors

In the Syriac religious buildings in the Mardin countryside, doors that provide entrance and exit to the churches, as well as the passages between different spaces are significant architectural elements. These door openings are usually covered with flat lintels, flat arches, barrel arches or horseshoe arches. Some of the doors formed with flat lintels or arches were framed with three segmented deaf arches surrounding the door, thus giving the doors a more monumental and flamboyant appearance (Fig. 9).

The front faces of these doors, whether flat lintels or arched, are generally made of wood with metal riveted

wings (Fig. 10 (a, b)). Simple Latch/kapazlama locks were used on the examined church doors (Fig. 10 (b)), though in some cases, modern locks with different mechanisms have been installed. Slider and hooks were used on double-wing courtyard and prayer entrance doors to secure the wings and open them when necessary. However, restoration efforts have often led to the replacement of original wooden doors in many of the churches, with metal or modern wooden alternatives.

In later churches, the doors to places of worship became more decorative than those in earlier churches (Keser, 2002). This trend is also evident in early church doors that were modified during repairs, as well as in courtyard doors that were added to the churches later. Among the early churches, several examples display ornate detailing:

- The naos doors of the Virgin Mary Church and Mor Sarkis & Mor Bakos Monastery in Antlı-Hah Village
- The mezbah/bema door of Mor Şmuel Church



Fig. 8 Late period Kushkudshins/Altar.

- The naos doors of Mor Kuryakos Church in Bağlarbaşı-Urdnus Village and Mor Yuhanon Church in Dereçi-Kılıt Village
- The naos door of Mor Eliyo Church in Alağöz-Bethustan Village
- The narthex, naos, and mezbah/bema doors of Mor Yakup Monastery in Barıştepe-Şiluh Village
- The naos door of Mor Yakup Church in Karagöl-Derkube Village
- The narthex and naos doors of Mor Şemun d'Zeyte in Mercimekli-Hapsus Village
- The narthex and naos doors of Mor Efrem & Mor Teodoros Church in Üçköy-Arkah Village

These doors are framed with mouldings (Fig. 11 (a, b)). Only in the mezbah/bema doors opening to the naos, fabric curtains depicting icons were used instead of wooden door leaves (Fig. 11 (c)). The mouldings on the edges of the doors are decorated with floral and geometric motifs (Fig. 11 (d, e)).

### 5.2.3. Windows

The façades of the Syriac religious buildings in rural Mardin are generally quite simple, with the exception of newly

constructed religious buildings and the façades of sections that were added or repaired later. This simplicity on the façades turns into a visual richness and mobility on the interior walls. In contrast to the exterior simplicity, this interior mobility is provided by the supporting arches, pillars and niches as well as embrasure windows. Embrasure windows are narrower on the outside (10–20 cm) and wider on the inside. This design allows for more controlled light intake from the outside, spreading it more evenly and diffusely within the interior space. Some of these windows have flat lintels while others feature arches. In certain cases, the windows may have flat lintels on the exterior, but arches on the inside, enhancing the architectural style and function.

The distribution of the windows on the façades varies according to layout of the church plans. Rectangular churches (both single nave and multi-nave) oriented along the east-west axis generally feature more windows on their western façades, while monastery-type churches aligned along the north-south axis have more windows on their southern façades. Typically, monastery-type churches lack windows on the east and west façades, while rectangular churches extending along the east-west axis do not have windows on their north and south façades. However, during



Fig. 9 Church entrance doors.



Fig. 10 Door leaf with metal riveted front face (a), Latch lock/kapazlama lock (b).

repairs and construction of new churches, the original façade configurations have been altered and windows have been added to these façades. In addition, some churches with rectangular plans extending in the east-west

direction, such as Mor Yuhanon Church in Dereçi Village, had windows added above the apse arches (eastern façade). On repaired façades and in newly built churches, embrasure windows were replaced with larger, flat windows. Most church windows feature wooden or PVC sashes that can be opened and closed. Notably, large windows were added to the north and south façades of the Mor Efreem & Mor Teodoros Church (single-nave church) in 2009–2011 (Yar, 2024), and to the Mor Eşayo Holoboyo Church (single-nave church) in 2008 (Ergün, 2013) with the contributions from the church congregations.

Triple windows are generally found on the west and south façades of churches, symbolizing the commemoration of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Keser, 2002). In these configurations, one window is placed above two others in the same row (Fig. 12 (a, b) and Fig. 13 (a, b)). However, on the southern facades of the Mor Jacob Monastery in Barıştepe Village and the Anastasia Church in the Mor Gabriel Monastery, there are four windows, one above and three below (the lower three in the same row) (Figs. 12 and 13 (c)). These quadruple windows are unique to these two monasteries within the Syriac religious buildings analysed.

#### 5.2.4. Bell towers

The bell (noquşo) (Hollerweger, 1999), which is rung in Syriac religious buildings to call the congregation to the



Fig. 11 Door mouldings with motifs (a, b), door curtains with icons (c), geometric and floral moulding motifs (d–e).

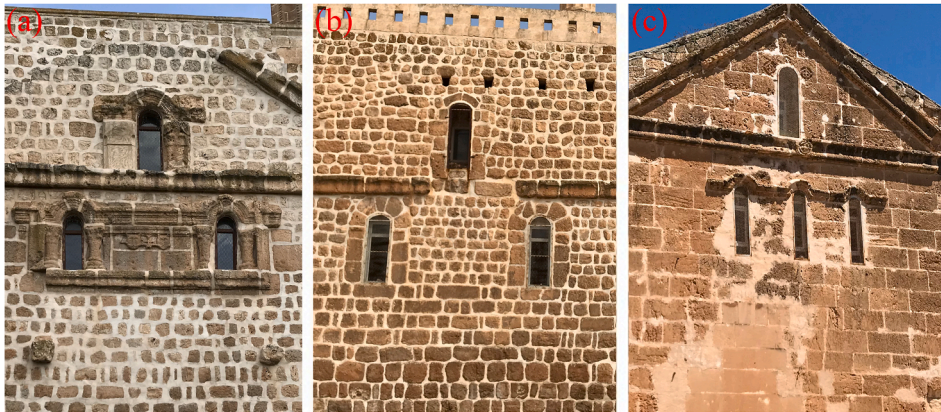


Fig. 12 Exterior view of the windows.



Fig. 13 Internal view of the windows.

service, has been employed in the monasteries and churches of the region under study since the early twentieth century. The bell, placed on the roofs of places of worship, consists of a rectangular piece of metal about 40 cm long, 10 cm wide and one finger thick. It is rung by striking this metal piece, which is suspended from a hanger with a wire or rope threaded through holes in the top, with another metal rod (Durak, 2011) (Fig. 14).

Bell towers were not included in Syriac church architecture in the past centuries. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, bell towers began to be constructed in monasteries and churches in rural areas (Hollerweger, 1999; Durak, 2011). The quadrangular (square), hexagonal and octagonal bell towers made of cut stones consist of three parts: base, body and cap. The base part of the bell towers of monasteries and churches is hexagonal, while the body part consists of six small barrel arches resting on six columns. The upper part is terminated with a segmented dome with a metal cross on the top.

The bell towers analysed were found to exhibit different types. These are classified into five distinct categories:

- The body part has square legs and columns and the base part is short (Fig. 15 (a–d)).
- The body part has a square base, and the pedestal part contains niches/cavities (Fig. 15 (e)).
- The body part is columnar, with a flat pedestal part (Fig. 15 (f)).
- The body part is columned, and the pedestal part is niched/hollowed (Fig. 15 (g)).
- The bell tower consists of a three-section body on a pedestal (Fig. 15 (h)).

## 6. Discussion

This study conducted a comprehensive architectural and typological analysis of 61 historical Syriac churches and monasteries in rural Mardin, identifying three primary plan typologies: single-nave churches oriented east–west, multi-nave basilica churches, and monastery-type churches oriented north–south. These typologies reflect distinct spatial arrangements consistent with findings by Ahunbay (2021) and Keser-Kayaalp (2002), thereby validating prior

research while expanding scholarly understanding to previously under-documented rural areas. Notably, this study fills an important gap in the literature, building on the research of Bell et al. (1910), Mango (1982), Sinclair (1989) and Palmer (1990), which focused on Syriac religious buildings in Tur Abdin.

Beyond plan typologies, the study closely examines spatial and constructional features, revealing patterns and anomalies that offer insights into architectural evolution. The basic liturgical spaces of the nave (naos) and sanctuary (mezbah) are present in all churches, although their configuration varies. Most of the single-nave churches have sanctuaries defined by semicircular apses, while a few have plain east walls, indicating local liturgical adaptations. Structural changes are also evident: in some church's transverse arches and piers across the nave were added later. These interventions often responded to the replacement of the original wooden roofs with stone vaults. As Bell notes, the Mor Sobo Church at Hah was originally timber-roofed and only later vaulted with additional piers for support. In contrast, some churches were originally built with extremely thick nave walls, eliminating the need for internal arches even under vaulted roofs.

Such differences underline the Syriac builders' resourcefulness in balancing liturgical needs with structural solutions. It also emphasises the interaction between Syriac church architecture and broader Byzantine or Eastern Christian architectural trends. For example, the presence of multi-aisled basilical plans at various sites reflects interaction with the basilica tradition prevalent in the late antique Near East, while the persistence of single-nave plans points to local simplicity, possibly shaped by smaller congregations or limited resources. These interpretations are supported by earlier observations, Sinclair (1989), for example, emphasized the architectural diversity of Tur Abdin, and our findings provide detailed confirmation of this diversity at the village scale. Indeed, the spatial analysis of these churches provides insight into how standard architectural forms were applied in a frontier region - sometimes closely following the norms of Syriac and Byzantine centres, sometimes departing from them.

This study also documents the extent of past and recent restoration interventions. Restoration work undertaken by



Fig. 14 Church bell (noqušo) (Hollerweger, 1999).



Fig. 15 Bell towers.

Syriac associations, particularly between 2000 and 2015, has contributed to the stabilisation of many deteriorated buildings. However, the lack of professional conservation supervision in many of these projects has led to interventions that depart from internationally recognised principles of minimum intervention and reversibility. For example, changes in plan typologies, the use of reinforced concrete, and the replacement of original wooden elements with incompatible modern materials have led to irreversible changes to some buildings, jeopardising their historic and architectural integrity. These concerns echo those raised by Keser-Kayaalp (2016), who warned of the risks posed by undocumented and unauthorised restorations in the Tur Abdin region.

Although constraints such as the lack of inscriptions or precise dating limit precise historical attribution in some cases, the integration of research plans, photographic documentation, comparative analysis and oral sources from local communities provided a reliable methodological basis. As a result, this study has not only confirmed previous typological frameworks, but also provided updated, detailed data essential for architectural historiography and regional heritage management.

## 7. Conclusion

This study makes an important contribution to the architectural historiography of Syriac religious buildings by systematically documenting and classifying a large sample of underrepresented rural churches and monasteries in Mardin. The establishment of a typological framework that includes single-nave, multi-nave and monastic type plans enhances our understanding of early Christian spatial

traditions and provides a basis for future comparative studies in the region and beyond.

The detailed documentation of these buildings, including plan schemes, elevation features, construction techniques and liturgical components, provides a critical reference for both academic research and conservation efforts. By identifying original features and restoration-induced alterations, the study supports more informed and sensitive conservation strategies.

The findings emphasise that restoration practices should adhere to the principles of minimal intervention, reversibility and material compatibility. All interventions should be carried out under professional supervision and involve interdisciplinary expertise from the fields of architecture, archaeology and art history. Furthermore, the involvement of local communities and religious stakeholders is essential to ensure continuity, cultural relevance and sustainable maintenance.

This research also opens various avenues for future research and underlines the value of interdisciplinary and technological approaches. A promising direction is a deeper integration between archaeological research and architectural analysis. Excavations in and around specific churches may reveal earlier construction phases or related artefacts, such as inscriptions, ceramics or liturgical objects, which can further clarify the chronology and date of use of the churches. Similarly, art-historical analyses of decorative features such as carvings, frescoes or liturgical furniture may reveal links between the rural churches of Tur Abdin and the wider Syriac and Byzantine artistic traditions.

The application of advanced digital documentation methods is another valuable avenue. High-precision 3D laser scanning and photogrammetry can create accurate

digital models of churches, capturing both geometry and condition with sub-millimetre accuracy. These models can be used to monitor structural deterioration, simulate physical behaviour and even virtually reconstruct missing architectural elements. Furthermore, geographic information system (GIS) mapping of all surveyed areas will enable spatial analysis of church distribution patterns, possibly linking them to historic settlement trends, trade routes or monastic networks.

Finally, comparative studies extending beyond Tur Abdin are crucial as they can reveal insights into cultural exchange, local adaptation to environmental conditions and liturgical differentiation.

Interdisciplinary collaborations involving historians, theologians and anthropologists can further illuminate how church architecture interacts with community organisation, religious practices and social memory. As a result, this study not only documents existing buildings, but also lays the groundwork for holistic and prospective research. By adopting collaborative and innovative approaches, future studies can deepen our understanding of Syriac church architecture and enhance efforts to preserve this priceless heritage. Through scientific and sustainable conservation efforts, the rich and multi-layered cultural heritage of the Syriac churches of Tur Abdin can be preserved and valued within the larger narrative of human history.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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