CHAPTER 5

Church Building in the Ṭur ‘Abdin in the First Centuries of the Islamic Rule

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1 Introduction

Scholarship today widely accepts that the Christian communities flourished under the first centuries of Islamic rule in the Near East. One scholar has pointed out that “we should not imagine that the churches of the East were isolated by the Islamic conquests; we might rather argue that Constantinople and Rome were now cut off from the intellectual and devotional energy that these centers had provided”.1 Besides their impressive intellectual productivity, especially in the Syriac language, Christian communities also left remarkable architectural remains which are highly relevant for the themes of this volume: authority and control as the building and rebuilding of monumental and religious structures or their ban would inevitably concern the involvement of authorities.

Although architectural evidence from Syria and Palestine has usually been the focus of attention, Christian building in the early Islamic period stretched from Iraq and the Persian Gulf to Egypt and Armenia, each region reflecting various aspects of the situation of Christian communities. My focus here will be on the rural Ṭur ‘Abdin region (Figure 5.1), a limestone plateau located roughly between Mardin, Dara, Hasan Keyf and Cizre in modern south-eastern

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1 Stephen Humphreys, “Christian Communities in Early Islamic Syria and Northern Jazira: The Dynamics of Adaptation,” in Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria, ed. John Haldon (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 45–56. See also Lawrence I. Conrad, “Varietas Syriaca: Secular and Scientific Culture in the Christian Communities of Syria after the Arab Conquest,” in After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers, eds. Gerrit Jan Reinink and Alex C. Klugkist (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 85–105, the conclusion chapter of Philip Wood, ‘We Have no King but Christ’: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400–585) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 257–264 and the doctoral thesis of Jack Tannous (“Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2010)).
Turkey, whose landscape is still dotted with around eighty villages and seventy monasteries dating to various periods.

Under the Byzantines the Ṭur ‘Abdin was a frontier area between the Sasanian and Byzantine Empires and a refuge area for the Miaphysite Syrian Orthodox. A considerable number of buildings, mainly monasteries, were built in the region in the sixth century. Depending on the Christological positions of individual emperors, the Ṭur ‘Abdin either suffered from persecution or enjoyed imperial patronage but because of its location on the border with the Sasanian Empire, it never lost its military importance to the Romans. The Ṭur ‘Abdin was

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2 For the geography of the Ṭur ‘Abdin and its map, see Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur Abdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), xix and fig. 1.

3 For a list of the settlements and monasteries, see Andrew Palmer, “La Montagne aux LXX Monastères,” in *Le monachisme syriaque*, ed. Florence Jullien (Paris: Geuthner, 2010), 251–255.

4 The two most prominent monasteries from this period are Dayr al-Zafaran (for the architecture and architectural sculpture of its main church, see Marlia Mundell, “The Sixth Century Sculpture of the Monastery of Deir Za’faran in Mesopotamia,” in *Actes du xve Congrès International D’études Byzantines* (Athens, 1981), 2:511–528) and Deyrul Umur or Mor Gabriel (see Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, ch. 4).
close to important Byzantine and Sasanian cities with significant architecture, such as Amida, Constantina, Edessa, Dara⁵ and Nisibis. The last two actually defined the south-western and southern boundaries of the region.

The ṬurʿAbdin, together with the rest of Northern Mesopotamia, was conquered in 639/640.⁶ This paper is concerned with the first one and a half centuries of Arab rule in the ṬurʿAbdin. Based on my own fieldwork in the region and other scholars’ documentation of the sites, I will first establish a dating criteria, based on architectural sculpture, lateral arcades, brick work and new architectural features and then argue that the first one-and-a-half centuries of Islamic rule witnessed a large scale building activity in the ṬurʿAbdin and these buildings formed a new and distinctive architectural vocabulary that could be associated with the Syrian Orthodox community. My dating of some churches and monasteries to the second half of the seventh and eighth centuries, if correct, also provides observations about the transformation of villages and monasteries and the landscape more generally.

1.1 Textual Evidence

When one thinks about Christian building activities under Islamic rule, the ban on building new churches recorded in the ShurūṭʿUmar (known as the Covenant or the Pact of ʿUmar) immediately comes to mind. According to Levy-Rubin, the individual peace agreements with the cities during the conquests were generally not favorable from the Muslim point of view, usually merely demanding submission and taxes. She argues that at the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century, dhimmīs (non-Muslim subjects) became the object of a lively debate as a result of increasing contact between themselves and Muslims. Given the Islamic tradition, the earlier agreements needed to be respected and thus, they constituted a problem. According to Levy-Rubin, the introduction of a general ṣulḥ (peace) agreement was a way to solve the problems rising from these individual treaties and to define the terms applying to the dhimmīs in general.⁷ That is why, she claims, the pact of ʿUmar, ShurūṭʿUmar, was produced in the end of the eighth, beginning of the ninth century and not during the rule of ʿUmar I or II. As we shall show below, archaeological

⁵ Dara attracted many workmen to the region who most probably were active also in the ṬurʿAbdin. See Elif Keser-Kayaalp and Nihat Erdoğan, “Recent Research on Dara Anastasiopolis,” in New Cities in Late Antiquity, ed. Efthymios Rizos (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 174.

⁶ See Chase Robinson, Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷ Milka Levy-Rubin, “ShurūṭʿUmar and its Alternatives: The Legal Debate on the Status of the Dhimmīs,” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 30 (2005): 170–206.
evidence from the ṬurʿAbdin may in fact support that until then there was no intervention to Christian building activities in the region.

In the process of the production of the ShurūṭʿUmar, various versions were composed reflecting different positions on the subject, some being more tolerant towards Christians. These versions give interesting insights into the Muslims’ approach towards church building. According to the version of al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), in a city which has a specific peace agreement or in which dhimmīs live separately, the building of churches was acceptable. Levy-Rubin quotes Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805) who writes that the dhimmīs are allowed to keep their prayer-houses or rebuild them: “If the Muslims establish a city in that place, they should tear down the synagogues and churches there, but the dhimmīs should be allowed to build similar ones outside the city.”

This seems the only mention of the countryside in those texts. Their focus is almost exclusively on cities and except al-Shāfiʿī’s version, all of them call for a ban on building new churches.

Due to those accounts of the ban on building new churches in cities, it has been assumed that if there was any construction work done in the churches of the ṬurʿAbdin in the eighth century, it was limited to building monasteries or to restoring and rebuilding, however extensive that might be. An interesting account related by an anonymous Syriac chronicle shows that this was not the case. According to the chronicle, in the first half of the ninth century the governor of the Jazira refused to fulfill the request of the Muslims of Harran, Edessa and Samosata to destroy newly-built churches with the argument that the Christians had not even rebuilt one tenth of the churches which have been ruined and burnt by the Islamic authorities. This shows that the Christians could in fact build new churches but Muslims preferred them to rebuild the existing ones.

In the Qartmin Trilogy, we read that Gabriel (d. 648), bishop of the ṬurʿAbdin received Umar’s written authority “concerning the statutes and laws and

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8 Levy-Rubin, “Shurūṭ ʿUmar and its Alternatives,” 179.
9 Palmer, Monk and Mason, 187.
10 Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 81–82 (Louvain: Peeters, 1916 and 1923), 2:16 (text), 11 (trans.).
11 Palmer calls the text Qartmin Trilogy (published as a microfiche attached to Palmer, Monk and Mason) because it comprises the lives of three monks that were important for the history of the monastery of Mor Gabriel or Deyrul Umur and because the monastery is located near the village of Qartmin. The Trilogy is composed of the lives of Samuel, Symeon (the founders of the monastery, the latter died in 433) and Gabriel (d. 648, bishop of ṬurʿAbdin). Palmer, noting several problems in the text, concludes that it is a “product of several reworkings” and dates its compilation sometime between 819 and ca. 969 (Palmer, Monk and Mason, 13–17).
orders and warnings and judgements and observances pertaining to the Christians; to churches and monasteries; and to priests and deacons, that they should not pay the head tax, and to monks that they should be exempt from tribute and that the (use of the) wooden gong would not be banned; and that they might practise the chanting of anthems at the bier of a dead man when he leaves his house to be taken for burial, together with many (other) customs."12 The text is obviously apocryphal as has been previously argued13 and its composition has been dated to a later period.14 Although Gabriel may not have been in correspondence with ʿUmar, the chronicler may be referring to the caliph to indicate his tolerance or simply to associate the monastery with an important ruler. The Qartmin Trilogy does something similar also with the Byzantine emperors when associating the building of some structures with them, although it is not plausible to date those structures to the times of those particular emperors.15

Under early Islamic rule, the very act of building churches gained symbolic importance. The Life of Simeon of the Olives (d. 734), bishop of Harran, illustrates this notion very well.16 Simeon was a native of Ḥabsenus, a village in the Ṭur ʿAbdin. He was brought up in the monastery of Qartmin. While on a hunting expedition, Simeon’s nephew had found a treasure in a cave of which he transferred gold and silver to Simeon from time to time. With these, Simeon bought numerous properties and planted olive trees from which he later provided the whole of the Ṭur ʿAbdin with oil. That is why he was called ‘Simeon of the Olives’.17 He built and rebuilt churches, towers and a school in his native village Ḥabsenus and considerably restored the monastery of Qartmin, but the Life emphasises his building activities in Nisibis.

Nisibis, ceded by the Romans in the mid-fourth century, was under the rule of the Sasanians until the Islamic conquest and home to a significant East Syrian (Nestorian) community. According to the Life, Simeon asked the local ruler to sell him old places in and around the city of Nisibis, and then sought permission to build churches in the city. With the letter he had obtained from the local

12 Palmer, Monk and Mason, microfiche, LXXII.
13 Palmer, 129.
14 See footnote 11.
15 For example, it mentions emperors Honorius and Arcadius. Palmer, Monk and Mason, 55.
16 Life of Simeon of the Olives, Mardin 8/259. I should like to thank Gabriel Rabo for providing the typed text, Jack Tannous for sharing his English translation and David Taylor and fellow students in the Syriac class for reading the text with me. A summary of the Life was published by Sebastian Brock, “The Fenqitho of the Monastery of Mar Gabriel in Tur Abdin,” Ostkirchliche Studien 28 (1979): 168–182.
17 Life of Simeon of the Olives, fol. 109’.
ruler he went to the caliph. After proving his abilities, he was much honoured by the caliph who issued him a decree (sigillion, ferman) ordering all the Umayyad officials to honour Mor Simeon and the inhabitants of his monastery and his disciples in all their jurisdictions. With the permission he received, Simeon started to build a church dedicated to Mor Theodore. Simeon began construction of the church three times as he was hindered by the Nestorian priests from hiring workmen. Simeon turned to Gawargī, the leader who held authority over the region of the Ṭur ‘Abdin, for help, asking him to write or speak to the inhabitants of the region so that they would help him acquire workers for the construction of the church. As a Christian of a different denomination, Gawargī did not trust Mor Simeon at first, but was eventually won over. He told those in his jurisdiction to help Simeon build his church.

Simeon’s insistence on building the church of Mor Theodore in Nisibis despite the resistance of the Nestorian community signals the symbolic importance of building a Syrian Orthodox church in that city to indicate the presence of the community. The importance of the church is further emphasized in the Life by noting its consecration by the patriarch. The significance of constructing religious buildings is stressed also by the ensuing account of Simeon’s patronage of a mosque and a madrasa next to the church of Mor Theodore. By this act, Simeon was also loved and honoured by the Umayyad officials.

The Life of Simeon of the Olives deals with a limited time period ending with Simeon's death in 734 but other chronicles, most importantly, the Chronicle of Zuqnin (concerning events until 775), cover also the period after the Abbasid revolution. In the Chronicle of Zuqnin, the accounts of the first years after

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18 *Life of Simeon of the Olives*, fol. 111v. This is not the only account of an encounter of a monk with a caliph. Such accounts are probably later inventions to argue that the churches were built with permission. A similar instance can be found in the Qartmin Trilogy which relates the correspondence of Gabriel, metropolitan bishop of Dara (in office 634–648), with ‘Umar, the caliph (Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, microfiche, LXXII, 7 f.)

19 *Life of Simeon of the Olives*, fol. 113v.

20 The symbolic importance of church building, although in a different context, is also emphasized in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (written in the twelfth century). He states that: “In the period when the emperor Justinian died, a pious man had a vision of a fiery furnace being set in the middle of a plain. When the man asked what it was for, he was told that it had been kindled for the emperor Justinian to be thrown into because he introduced corruption into the church. However, the emperor was forgiven because he was merciful to the poor and because he built many churches” (Jean-Baptiste Chabot, ed. and trans., *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian as: Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)*, 4 vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899–1924), b. 9, ch. 34).

21 *Life of Simeon of the Olives*, fol. 114v.

22 For information on this chronicle, see Sebastian Brock, “Syriac Historical Writing: A
the Abbasid revolution include the destruction of monasteries in the region.\(^23\) However, for the mid-eighth century, the chronicle indicates the prosperity of the Christians by saying that the land was productive and shrines began to be built and churches renovated. Although the chronicle also mentions that the caliph issued an order to register the properties of churches and monasteries in 768/769, in general, it does not paint a dark picture of oppression.\(^24\) The account of the Caliph's visit to the region in 769/770 supports a picture of a flourishing province. Seeing the prosperity of the region, "Instead of thanking him for this state, the caliph, who is described as a man who sets his mind more toward the sword than toward peace roared over Abbas saying 'Where is it that you said that the Jazira was in ruins?' Then he took away his assets and treated him with all kinds of evils." The caliph appointed agents to take a census of all the people for a poll-tax and "from here misfortunes began."\(^25\)

It is not possible to go through all the textual sources that concern this period here. The reaction of Syriac Christians to the Islamic conquest has attracted considerable attention and the conclusion reached seems to be the following; although there were also apocalyptic accounts of the conquest and its aftermath, Syriac sources usually saw the Islamic conquest as a punishment for Byzantine ecclesiastical policy and expressed a sense of relief.\(^26\)

Despite providing interesting accounts, literary sources fail to communicate the extent of building and patronage, the changing nature of villages and monasteries, and architectural features.\(^27\) For a thorough understanding

\(^{23}\) Harrak, Chronicle of Zuqnīn, 193.

\(^{24}\) Harrak, 230.

\(^{25}\) Harrak, 246.

\(^{26}\) See Wolfgang Hage, Die syrisch-jacobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit: nach orientalischen Quellen (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1966); Sebastian Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” in Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll, (Carbondale/Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 9–21, 199–203. Reprinted in: Sebastian Brock, Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity (London: Variorum, 1984), ch. 8. See also Jan van Ginkel, “The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography: How did the Changing Social Position of the Syrian Orthodox Community Influence the Account of their Historiographers?” in The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and Mark N. Swanson (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 171–184.

\(^{27}\) Additionally, our main source for the region from that period, namely the Chronicle of Zuqnin, is confusing. This is probably due to the involvement of multiple authors in the writing of this chronicle. See Conrad, “Varietais Syriaica,” and Philip Wood, “The Chroni-
of Christian building activities in a century and a half following the establishment of Islamic rule in the region we have to turn to architectural evidence. The Ṭur ‘Abdin is probably one of the most striking regions of the Near East in terms of concentration of the churches and monasteries which survive from the first centuries of Islamic rule.

2 Architectural Evidence

The Ṭur ‘Abdin has been settled from the Assyrian period onwards but the remains that have survived from the region are almost exclusively Christian. Unlike the variety of church plans of the cities of Northern Mesopotamia, two predominant church plans exist in the Tur ‘Abdin. The nineteenth-century archaeologist Gertrude Bell (d. 1926) was the first to study these churches extensively and she made the following classification: (1) churches which are longer along an east-west axis (hall type churches) and (2) churches which are broader along their north-south axis (transverse-hall type churches) (Figure 5.2). She called the former “parochial” and the latter “monastic.” The main reason behind these definitions was the idea that the buildings functioned as parish and monastic churches respectively. We can safely say that there was a predilection to use the transverse-hall type church in monasteries and the hall type church in parish churches in Northern Mesopotamia, although there may have been some exceptions.

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28 Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 1; Karen Radner, “How to Reach the Upper Tigris: The Route Through the Ṭūr Abdin,” *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 15 (2006): 273–305.
29 I used Marlia Mango’s update of Gertrude Bell’s works. For bibliographic references to Bell’s publications, see Gertrude Bell, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Ṭur ‘Abdin with an Introduction and Notes by M. Mundell Mango* (London: Pindar, 1982), i, ii, 169.
30 Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, viii, ix.
31 Marlia Mango argued that the hall type church at the monastery of Abraham of Kashkar was actually a monastic church, and the transverse-hall church at Ambar served a parish. We should bear in mind that the monastery of Abraham of Kashkar, located on the other side of the frontier, was an East Syrian monastery. See Marlia Mundell Mango, “Deux
Bell was the first also to suggest a date after the Islamic conquest for some of the significant churches of the ṬurʿAbdin. Her short visits to the region allowed her to record only a limited number of churches, four of which she thought dated to the first centuries of Islamic rule. Marlia Mango’s work brought Bell’s research up to date in 1982 and provided a context for the material recorded by Bell by also including her studies in the surrounding cities. Henri Pognon and later Jacques Jarry published the inscriptions from the region and their studies were updated by Andrew Palmer, providing dates for some more churches. Gernot Wiessner, in the 1990s, made the most extensive surveys in the ṬurʿAbdin. His study brought forward much new material for the interpretation of the architecture of the ṬurʿAbdin, providing more grounds for comparison. However, his study does not date the monuments or give any context. Apart from these major studies, the research in the region has unfortunately been very limited.
Of the churches that Bell dated to after the Islamic conquest, three are village churches and one is a monastic church. To be able to present the differences between the evidence coming from villages and monasteries which constitute the rural Ṭur ‘Abdin region, I organised the discussion accordingly. As village churches are predominantly hall-type churches, except the church of Yoldat Áloho at Ḥāḥ that will be dealt with under a separate heading, my classification will also be inevitably according to the plan types. I will first discuss the hall-type churches and then move to transverse-hall type churches and other material evidence that date to the same period.

2.1 Village (Hall-Type) Churches and Their Transformation
There are four hall-type churches in the Ṭur ‘Abdin which share important architectural features: Mor Quryaqos at ‘Ardnas, Mor ‘Azozoyēl at Kafarzē,37 Mor Simeon at Ḥabsenus and Mor Yuḥannon at Qēllet.38 They all stretch in an east-west direction and are entered from south through a doorway leading to the narthex which also extends in the same direction. The narthex and the nave are connected by two doors, serving probably to the different sexes. In the eastern arrangement of these churches, there is a room to the south of the

37 Bell suggested an Umayyad date for these two churches.
38 Bell did not say much about the church of Mor Simeon, nor provide a plan or a photograph of it. She wrote that it was a close imitation of the church at Arnas and that it was dedicated to Simon Peter, as is also mentioned in the Life of Simeon of the Olives. Bell recorded that the sculpture of this church was so rudely executed that it was “obviously a later attempt to carry out the old traditional decoration” (Bell [and Mango], The Churches and Monasteries, 53). She did not visit Mor Yuḥannon.
In the below sections we shall discuss various aspects of these churches that allow us dating them after the Arab conquest.

2.1.1 Architectural Sculpture
These churches have elaborately decorated friezes running through their apse conches and remarkable apse archivolts resting on capitals. Their architectural sculpture is both innovative and conservative. It was described as a stylized version of the sixth-century sculpture in the Ṭur ‘Abdin which is highly classical in character. Similar classical decoration survive also in the nearby cities of Dara, Amida and Edessa. I shall briefly describe the sculpture in the four churches mentioned above but my description will also incorporate other churches in the region with similar style of sculpture, which is in general cruder, flatter and more abstract than the earlier tradition in the region. Vine scrolls, split palmettes and bead and reel bands which were common in sixth-century Northern Mesopotamia continue to appear. On the other hand, some classical bands, such as egg and leaf, seem to have completely disappeared from the decorative repertoire. The flutes, common in the sixth century, became rare. However, new introductions such as plaiting, flower-like motifs, interlacing circles, petals and two rows of dentils started to become part of the repertoire.

Similarities in this type of sculpture with early Islamic architectural decoration help to date them. The winged palmette ornaments which appear in two churches have been likened to similar examples in the palace of Mshatta and al-Tuba, both in modern-day Jordan and both built around 743/4. The plaiting that exists in some of the churches has also been attested in Anjar in Lebanon built in 714–715. The geometrisation of vegetal motifs that can

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39 Some other hall-type churches have rooms behind the apse and others have a northern room. The rooms flanking the apse may have been used as prothesis or diakonikon, or in some cases as baptisteries or martyria. It is difficult to ascertain the functions of these rooms.

40 Marlia Mundell Mango, “The Continuity of the Classical Tradition in the Art and Architecture of Northern Mesopotamia,” in East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period, ed. Nina G. Garsoian, Thomas F. Mathews and Robert W. Thomson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies Trustees for Harvard University, 1982), 115–134.

41 See the Appendix for a list of structures with a similar style of decoration.

42 Some of these motifs, such as a band composed of circles were already decorating the churches of Syria in the early sixth century.

43 Mundell Mango, “Continuity of the Classical tradition,” 127. The winged palmettes can be found on the apse frieze at Mor Quryaqos at ʿArda and on the doorway of the Theotokos church at Ḥāh.

44 Mundell Mango, “Continuity of the Classical tradition,” 127. Plaiting exists also in the
be seen in these churches was also an Umayyad phenomenon, best illustrated in the woodwork of the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem rebuilt in 754 after an earthquake. We find a large variety in the eighth-century sculpture in Tur ‘Abdin where one can hardly find two churches with identical ornamental bands. We should also note that although we have dealt with this particular type of sculpture under the hall-type heading, it can be found also in monastic churches, listed in the Appendix and in the church of Yoldat Āloho at Ḥāḥ which we shall deal with in detail (Figure 5.4).

Apart from its similarities with early Islamic architectural decoration, some textual and epigraphic material confirms the date of this sculptural style. The church of Mor Simeon was extensively rebuilt by Simeon of the Olives. Thus, we have a terminus ante quem (he died in 734) for the rebuilt church and its sculpture as the Life says Simeon completed the church “with every sort of good and fair ornament.” Another evidence for the dating is the templon screen of Mor Quryaqos at ‘Ardnas which has not survived but was recorded by Bell. An inscription next to the screen recorded the building of the templon screen in 1072 Seleucid year, AD 761/762.47

An ornamental feature in the churches of the Tur ‘Abdin which is rare elsewhere48 is the cross in the apse conch. The crosses are about 1.5 m high, are all in relief and show variations in terms of their articulations. For example, some have medallions around the intersection point of the two arms, one has a bird, and another has a boss on top of the cross. Most have bulbous terminations in their arms, while some have a stepped termination and others a rectangular boss at the base of the cross (Figure 5.6). The fact that structures with the above-mentioned style of sculpture also have crosses in their apse conches suggests that they were contemporary. Although three sixth-century crosses survive in Northern Mesopotamia,49 crosses in the apses seem to have

seventh-century Armenian churches, for example in At‘eni (Jean-Michel Thierry, Les arts arméniens (Paris: Mazenod, 1987), fig. 25).

45 Robert Hillenbrand, “Umayyad Woodwork in the Aqsa Mosque,” in Bayt al-Maqdis, Jerusalem and Early Islam, ed. Jeremy Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 271–310.
46 Life of Simeon of the Olives, fol. 122v.
47 Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” c2. Palmer discusses the problems in this inscription.
48 Although there are no real parallels to the apse crosses in the Tur ‘Abdin, crosses in the apses can be found in a few churches in Thrace at Vize, Lycia at Karabel (which are flat) and in Cappadocia at Çavuşin (see Marlia Mundell, “Monophysite Church Decoration,” in Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Centre for Byzantine Studies, 1977), 66).
49 Mor Sovò at Ḥāḥ had a cross of which now only a fragment survives. The other two are in
been especially common and also become more decorated in the eighth century. Cross decoration, together with the aniconic nature of the architectural sculpture in these churches may recall the iconoclastic movement that became powerful in Constantinople in the 720s. It is hard to ascertain if the appearance of the crosses in the apses of the churches of the ṬurʿʿAbdin is related to Byzant-

Akkese near Constantia (see Elif Keser-Kayaalp, “A Newly Discovered Rock-cut Complex: Monastery of Phesithā?” *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 58 (2008): 261–283 and the monastery of Mor Abraham of Kashkar (See Mundell Mango, “Deux églises,” 60)).
tine Iconoclasm as aniconic preference can also be observed in the sixth-century wall and floor mosaics, and may have originated in the local traditions of the region.\textsuperscript{50}

2.1.2 Lateral Arcades

Another significant characteristic of the Ṭur ‘Abdin churches is that they have lateral arcades on their north and south walls (Figure 5.3). Lateral arcades are not unique to the region and period but its popularity in the region in later times is noteworthy. As a result of the continuous restorations in these churches, the originality and the date of the lateral arcades have been objects of dispute.\textsuperscript{51} Although agreeing with Gertrude Bell on the originality of some of the lateral arcades, Marlia Mango is also aware of some of the problems of this argument. Mango thinks that these arcades were introduced to reduce the span of the roof. The width of the naves of most of these churches varies between 8.5 metres and 9 metres. With the lateral arcades, the spanned width is reduced to 6 metres, which makes it possible to use local, cheaper and shorter oak. Since these piers created some problems,\textsuperscript{52} she suggests that they were later enlarged to carry the barrel vaults.\textsuperscript{53} She thus also implies that this later enlargement may have caused problems such as the obscured architectural decoration.

My analysis of the widths spanned by the roofs of these churches shows that piers were also used for churches which had a width of less than 6 metres,\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} See Mundell, “Monophysite Church Decoration,” for a discussion on the non-figural tendency in Syrian Orthodox church decoration. Iconoclasm is too large a topic to be dealt with here. For monophysite approaches to iconoclasm, see Sebastian Brock, “Iconoclasm and the Monophysites,” in Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Centre for Byzantine Studies, 1977), 53–57.

\textsuperscript{51} Gertrude Bell thought some of them were an original part of the design and dated them to the eighth century. Koch, on the other hand, dated the churches to the sixth century and the arcades to the twelfth (Guntram Koch, “Probleme des nordmesopotamischen Kirchenbauen: die Längstonnenkirchen im Ṭūr Abdīn,” in Studien zur spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst und Kultur des Orients, vol. 6, ed. Guntram Koch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1982), 117–135). According to him, the churches had another phase even earlier than the sixth century during which the chapels were built. However, given the continuous restorations in these structures it is not possible to trace the material evidences for this argument.

\textsuperscript{52} For example, at ‘Ardnas the pier at the east end of the north arcade blocks part of the carved apse archivolt, and in most cases, the doorways, which are usually profiled, are not positioned centrally in relation to the piers of the arcades.

\textsuperscript{53} Bell [and Mango], The Churches and Monasteries, ix.

\textsuperscript{54} Elif Keser-Kayaalp, Church Architecture of Northern Mesopotamia, AD300–800 (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2009), v. 2, 25.
which may indicate that building lateral arcades had more to do with the weight of the roof than the distance to be spanned. This argument is further supported by the nature of the outer walls made of irregular blocks and the piers made of ashlar masonry. The facts that the piers hide the ornamentation and that the doors and windows are not placed in line with the arcades strongly suggest that the piers were added later. The question now is why and when they were built or added.

To answer this question, we must turn to the church of Mor Sōvō at Ḥāḥ, a sixth-century structure, which Gertrude Bell suggested as the prototype of the hall-type churches. This church was probably the cathedral of Ḥāḥ, the village with the most exceptional remains in the region. Mango suggests that Ḥāḥ was the seat of the bishopric of Tur Abdion that was listed as one of the three suffragan (subordinate) bishoprics of Dara in the Notitia Antiochena of 576, together with Theodosiopolis and Banasymeon. Although the church of Mor Sōvō in the ṬurʿAbdin is much larger than the other hall-type churches in the region, it is very similar to them in terms of its orientation, apse arrangement and the piers attached to the north and south walls. The church of Mor Sōvō clearly underwent significant restoration in later centuries. It was during that restoration that the piers, built of alternating layers of stone and brick, were added. They hide the fine sculpture of the capitals carrying the apse archivolt and some of the doors and windows. The piers topped with arches carried a brick vault. The vault collapsed and parts of it are still visible in the nave of the church.

It has been suggested that the church of Mor Sōvō, the sixth-century cathedral of Ḥāḥ, served as a prototype for the eighth-century hall-type churches with lateral arcades of the ṬurʿAbdin after lateral arcades were added to it. However, it is likely that Mor Sōvō received its piers around the same time as the other churches. Chronicle of Zuqnin records a number of earthquakes in the eighth century. The one in 717/718 destroyed many churches “particularly in (Beth) Maʿde.” The Old Church of Edessa was also destroyed in the same earthquake that “left marks on even the ones that remained standing.” In 741/742 another “powerful and violent earthquake” took place. The one in 747 was described in similar words. The last earthquake mentioned in the eighth century

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55 Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, iv.
56 It is 27.30 m long and 11.13 m wide. Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, 19.
57 Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, 112.
58 This was identified as a village in ṬurʿAbdin by Harrak (*Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 160). A strong earthquake dating to 712 is also recorded (Palmer, *Seventh Century*, 46).
59 Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 160.
century took place in 755/756 and again destroyed many places. It was probably more strongly felt further south in the Khabur where three villages were destroyed.  

Combining the above presented evidence, it seems likely that after a destructive earthquake, the piers were added to these churches that had been built not long before. In this process, their roofs which were probably originally timber were replaced by brick vaults. Confirmation of this hypothesis is only possible

60 Harrak, 197.
61 Also in the church of Mor Ya’qub, at Nisibis the large stone piers hide the doorways and their fine sculpture. I have argued elsewhere (Elif Keser-Kayaalp and Nihat Erdoğan,
through excavation. Given the use of brick in the vaults, which I shall discuss below, one may suggest that the piers and the vaults were built together. The piers which were introduced probably for purely structural reasons became fashionable, almost a signature for the Syrian Orthodox churches of the eighth century and later.\textsuperscript{62} I have argued elsewhere that in that period the Syrian Orthodox wanted to create an architectural vocabulary in their churches which would be distinctive and identifiable as specifically Syrian Orthodox by repeating certain forms in a creative way\textsuperscript{63} and using lateral arcades is one of the repeated patterns.

It has been suggested that the lateral arcades of the church of the monastery of Mor Abraham of Kashkar, dating to 571, are original.\textsuperscript{64} This makes it the earliest known hall-type church in Northern Mesopotamia with the lateral arcades. The transverse-hall type churches also have lateral arcades but the arcades in the hall-type churches differ from those in the transverse-hall type churches with their tall and narrow forms.\textsuperscript{65} The monastery of Mor Abraham of Kashkar is situated not in the Ṭur ‘Abdin, but on Mount Izla, at the edge of the Ṭur ‘Abdin, about thirty kilometres northeast of Nusaybin. Before the Islamic conquest, this region was in the Sasanian territory. Mor Abraham to whom the monastery was dedicated was an important East Syrian monk who built his well-known “Great Monastery” in Mount Izla in 571.\textsuperscript{66} The church of this monastery has all the main features of a hall-type church in the Ṭur Abdin. However, a significant difference is that this church is a monastic church. As in the West Syrian or Syrian Orthodox tradition, the monastic churches usually had transverse-hall type plans (see below), the adoption of the hall type for a monastic foundation has been interpreted as the desire of the East Syr-

\textsuperscript{62} For an illustration showing all the hall-type churches with piers, see Keser-Kayaalp, \textit{Church Architecture}, pl. 75.

\textsuperscript{63} Elif Keser-Kayaalp, “Églises et monastères du Ṭur ‘Abdin: les débuts d’une architecture « syriaque »,” in \textit{Les églises en monde syriaques}, ed. F. Briquel Chatonnet (Paris: Geuthner, 2013), 269–288.

\textsuperscript{64} Mundell Mango, “Deux églises,” 62.

\textsuperscript{65} However, similar arcades exist in the cistern under the sixth century cathedral of Dara indicating that this technique existed in the region.

\textsuperscript{66} For more on him and his monastery, see Florence Jullien, “The Great Monastery at Mount Izla and the Defence of the East Syriac Identity,” in \textit{The Christian Heritage of Iraq: Collected Papers from the Christianity of Iraq t–v Seminar Days}, ed. Erica Hunter (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009), 54–64.
ians to differentiate their architecture by adopting a different type of plan.\textsuperscript{67} The church of Mor Abraham of Kashkar may have been a source of inspiration for the building of the lateral arcades in the ṬurʿAbdin after the frontier was no longer dividing the Izla Mountain and the villages of the ṬurʿAbdin.

2.1.3 Brick Work

All four hall-type churches mentioned above have vaults with decorative brick work,\textsuperscript{68} achieved by using half-cylinder roof tiles (imbrices) and diagonal bricks (herringbone pattern) on the surface. We find similar ornamentations made by brick in a number of churches in the ṬurʿAbdin (see Appendix). If we could establish a date for one of them, we would have a basis on which a date for others could be suggested. Although it is a monastic church, the vault of the church of the monastery of Mor Yaʿqub at Šālah allows us to do that. It is the most masterly built brick vault that has survived in the region and has the same diagonally placed bricks and half-cylinder roof tiles as decoration. It is divided into three compartments by two transverse stone arches which are painted to look like brick. Palmer records eight Syriac inscriptions in this church, which he dates to 752–755.\textsuperscript{69} One of the two inscriptions which mention a restoration is located just under the vault. It records the names of the people and how much money they gave to the monastery. It does not have a date but based on an epigraphical study, Palmer dated it to the eighth century, between 752 and 755.\textsuperscript{70} The location of this inscription, as well as its red paint also used in the vault may suggest that the inscription is contemporary with the vault (Figure 5.5).

Unlike other brick vaults in the region, the springing of the vault is of stone up to a considerable height. This may indicate that the original vault was made of stone, as is the case in the almost identical transverse-hall type church at Ambar near Dara.\textsuperscript{71} The stone vault of the church, which was most probably a sixth-century foundation, may have later been replaced by brick. This church is one of the four churches for which Gertrude Bell suggested an eighth-century date, based mainly on the sculpture of the pilasters of the apse archway.\textsuperscript{72} This archway may have been added after the restoration. The fact that it has a floral decoration made with similar red paint in the vault may support that. The

\textsuperscript{67} Jean-Pascal Fourdrin, "Les Églises à nef transversale d’Apamène et du Ṭūr ‘Abdin," Syria 62 (1985): 334.
\textsuperscript{68} The vault of the nave of Mor Yuḥannon at Qellet is plastered but the side rooms have the same style brick ornamentation indicating that the nave of the church was also of brick.
\textsuperscript{69} Based on one of them which has a date. Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” B1–B8.
\textsuperscript{70} Palmer, B3.
\textsuperscript{71} Mundell Mango, “Deux églises,” 54.
\textsuperscript{72} Bell [and Mango], The Churches and Monasteries, 82.
innovative nature of this doorway is surprising. Normally, transverse-hall type churches in the region have very simple doorways, in the east wall leading to the sanctuaries. In the case of Mor Yaʿqub at Šālah, the doorway is flanked with highly decorated pilasters topped with a profiled arch. The style of the decoration on the pilasters has no real parallels in the region; although it recalls both sixth-century and eighth-century styles in the region, it is a kind of transition between them, but closer to the latter. I think that the church was not built or completely rebuilt in the eighth century but it went through a major construction work including also the building of the brick vault.  

2.1.4 Beth Ṣlutho

Now I want to turn my attention to another innovation in the church architecture of the ṬurʿAbdin, which is found almost exclusively in village churches. This architectural feature is called *beth ṣlutho*, meaning a house of prayer in Syr-
The term refers to a specific architectural entity which is a free-standing exedra used as an outdoor oratory. One of these structures at Heshterek, which no longer survives, was securely dated by an inscription to 771/772. These outdoor oratories are built of ashlar masonry and inscribed in a square, open at the west side, allowing large gatherings in front of them. They usually have stone tables in front of them to hold liturgical books or other liturgical objects and served as prayer areas. The epitaphs in some of these oratories suggest that funeral services were conducted in front of them. It was probably more convenient not to have the dead in the main church. Given that they are well-lit, sheltered and accessible to all, these oratories are also good places for inscriptions venerating the dead. They are very well executed with ashlar masonry and adorned with decoration, sometimes including a cross in their conch. Based on their sculptural features and inscriptions, six of them can be dated to the eighth century and four others to a later date.

2.2 Monastic Churches (Transverse-Hall-Type Churches)
My focus up to now has been on the village churches. However, monasteries or parts of them were also built in the same period. According to his Life, Simeon of the Olives built a recluse tower in the monastery which was just outside the village of Ḥabsenus and dedicated the monastery to Mor Loʾozor. A tower actually survives in the middle of the monastery and it has an inscription dating its construction to 791/792. The fact that extreme ascetic practices, in this case reclusion in a tower or standing on top of it, continued a century after the Islamic conquest is striking. However, what is more remarkable is the innovative form of the tower, combining the functions of a tower and a stylite column, which may show that they were still experimenting with forms.
On the other hand, old and important monasteries, such as Mor Gabriel, seem to have prospered in that period. According to the *Life of Simeon of the Olives*, he bought fields, farms, houses, shops, mills, gardens and enclosures for the monastery of Mor Gabriel. He renewed and adorned it.\(^{83}\) Simeon’s successor, David, also adorned the monastery with vessels and “gold and silver.”\(^{84}\) Apart from the textual references, there are also inscriptions recording building activities in the monastery in the eighth century, documenting the building of a portico.\(^{85}\) Besides those, I have suggested elsewhere an eighth-century date for the Dome of the Egyptians, a burial chamber (*beth qadishe*) in the monastery, based on the similar brick work that we see in the other hall-type churches, mentioned above.\(^{86}\) Like the building of a recluse tower, having a *beth qadishe* from this period is significant for the continuity of the monastic traditions.

We also have evidence of monastic churches built in the eighth century. The transverse-hall-type plans which were used for these churches are as common as the hall-type churches mentioned above. In the whole early Christian world, nowhere except the Ṭur ‘Abdin, monastic churches can clearly be associated with a certain plan type.\(^{87}\) The transverse-hall-type church can be considered local, with some significant examples built in the sixth century.\(^{88}\) However, some churches with this plan lack any significant architectural feature that would allow a dating. On the other hand, others feature architectural sculpture in the style of the sculpture of the hall-type churches mentioned above, enabling us to suggest an eighth-century date for them based on the decoration.

There are three monasteries in the outskirts of Ḥāḥ that can be dated to the eighth century. Of these, the monastery of Mor Yūhannon can be securely dated to 739/740 by an inscription.\(^{89}\) Although the decoration in that church is limited to a simple vine scroll, the style is very similar to the stylised classical decoration mentioned above. The Church of St. Mary Magdalen, locally known as Deir Habis, has a winged palmette sculpture recalling early Islamic examples such as Mshatta.\(^{90}\) In the case of Mor Sergius and Bacchus, there

\(^{83}\) *Life of Simeon of the Olives*, fol. 108r.
\(^{84}\) *Life of Simeon of the Olives*, fol. 123v–124r.
\(^{85}\) Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” C1.
\(^{86}\) Elif Keser-Kayaalp, “The *Beth Qadishe* in the Monasteries of Northern Mesopotamia,” *Parole de l’Orient* 35 (2010): 329.
\(^{87}\) It is difficult to say if the plan is shaped according to the liturgy or if the liturgy makes good use of it.
\(^{88}\) See footnote 4.
\(^{89}\) Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” A2.
\(^{90}\) Mundell Mango, “Continuity,” 127.
are many Syriac inscriptions, one of which is dated either to 691 or 789,\(^{91}\) and some ornamental features suggest an eighth-century date. The transverse-hall-type church with the most distinctive decoration in the style of the eighth century is the church of Mor Samuel at Ḥāḥ, located just north of Mor Sōvō. Its location, small size and poor quality masonry suggests it was not a monastery but a later chapel built in transverse-hall plan using spolia from an eighth-century building.\(^{92}\)

The high concentration of eighth-century churches and monasteries in and around Ḥāḥ is not a coincidence. From 614 to 1088, the bishop of the Ṭur ‘Abdin resided in the monastery of Mor Gabriel at Qartmin. A separate bishop was consecrated briefly in the mid eighth century and he resided in or near Ḥāḥ, as had probably been the case in the sixth century.\(^{93}\) Furthermore, the Chronicle of Zuqni tells us a story of a false prophet in Ḥāḥ who managed to attract groups of people to the village in 769/770.\(^{94}\) Thus, in the eighth century, Ḥāḥ, enjoyed considerable religious attention. The most important church in the village in that period was probably the church of Yoldat Āloho which is outstanding in terms of its architecture and architectural sculpture. It may have become the new cathedral of Ḥāḥ in the eighth century, replacing the church of Mor Sōvō mentioned above.

2.3 **The Church of Yoldat Āloho (Mother of God)**

Gertrude Bell described the church of Yoldat Āloho (to which she refers as “el ‘Adhra”), as the “crowning glory” of the Ṭur ‘Abdin and dated it around 700.\(^{95}\) As with the hall-type churches the style of its architectural sculpture and brick work are the main references for the dating. The nave is long in the north-south direction and there is a narthex lying to the west of the nave, and thus it has been rightly related to transverse-hall (monastic) churches of the region.\(^{96}\) However, the upper structure of the church makes it different from the transverse-hall churches. The central dome and the three semi-domes below it covering the east, north and south exedras make the church a centralized (not in plan but at a higher level), compact building.

The church is similar to the sixth-century church of Mor Hanania at Dayr al-Zafaran in terms of the north and south conches in plan, the high drum in

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\(^{91}\) Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” B10, 112–114.
\(^{92}\) As also suggested by Wiessner, *Kultbauten*, 1320–123, fig. 121, pls. 67–70.
\(^{93}\) Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 31.
\(^{94}\) Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 249–252.
\(^{95}\) Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, 20.
\(^{96}\) Bell [and Mango], 114.
elevation and the location of the ornamental bands of decoration.\textsuperscript{97} The central sanctuary is connected to the nave with a wide archivolt as is also the case in the hall-type churches of the region, and the church of Mor Hanania at Dayr al-Zafaran. In terms of the entrance portico, the church recalls the transverse-hall churches of Mor Yaʿqub at Sālaḥ and Mor Gabriel. However, with the new restorations in the church, some parts of the facade, which make it very different from both its surviving contemporaries and predecessors, have become visible. The design of the church seems like an experiment based on older formulae, influenced maybe also by the triconch churches of Armenia and the eastern arrangements of the Coptic churches,\textsuperscript{98} although it is much more sophisticated in terms of plan and details.

\textsuperscript{97} For the architecture of the church of Mor Hanania at Dayr al-Zafaran, see Mundell, “Sixth-Century Sculpture,” 511–528.

\textsuperscript{98} There are both seventh- and ninth-century triconch Armenian churches which are similar in plan to the Yoldath Aloho church at Ḥāḥ, (See Thierry, Les arts arméniens). For the Coptic churches with triconch sanctuaries, see Judith McKenzie, The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 700 (London: Yale University Press, 2007), figs. 462 and 473.
The church of Yoldat Āloho at Ḥāḥ is highly decorated and has the best examples of the style of the architectural sculpture of the period. The architectural sculpture is spread to the small apse niches,99 engaged collonettes, drum, apse conch, apse and exedras, doorway and entrance portico. The style of the sculpture of this church and others mentioned above supports the idea of a local team of skilled carvers.100 The squinches of the church are neatly done with mouldings and most probably they were original parts of the design. Although this architectural feature has strong Persian associations, its common use in Armenia in over thirty domed chapels dating to the sixth and seventh centuries,101 makes an Armenian connection more plausible. The church of Yoldat Āloho is covered with a brick octagonal dome. It is difficult to date this dome given its uniqueness. However, the vault in the narthex of the church is very similar to the brick vaults of the hall-type churches mentioned above. Thus the octagonal dome of the church of Yoldat Āloho is a further example of a flourishing tradition of brick vaulting in the region. The church represents the culmination of the eighth-century architecture in the ṬurʿʿAbdin by combining innovative ideas with local traditions. There is no real parallel to it, neither is it foreign to the region. This may suggest that there was an attempt to find a distinctive architecture.

3 Conclusions and Remarks

Above we presented some evidence to date some churches, either their building or rebuilding, to the seventh and eighth centuries. In the Appendix following the text, we have put together the evidence according to which we can suggest such a date for that particular building. List 1 is based on inscriptions

99 These niches also feature in the sixth-century monastery of Mor Abraham of Kashkar mentioned above. This decorative feature appears in the contemporary sixth century churches of Egypt and North Africa (Mundell Mango, “Deux églises,” 60) and later in Armenian churches. However, Armenian examples cannot be compared to those in the Yoldath Āloho church at Ḥāḥ in terms of sophistication and neat decoration.

100 There is more textual evidence that supports this. The chronicle of Zuqquin says that craftsmen from the whole of the Jazira were sent to rebuild Melitene in 760–761 (Harrak, Chronicle of Zuqquin, 201). Similarly, an inscription in the quarry near the village of Kamēd in the Baqʿa valley in Lebanon, dated to 715, mentions workmen from the Jazira who carried out the stone quarrying. See Paul Mouterde, “Inscriptions en syriaque dialectal à Kamēd – Beqa,” Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph 22 (1939): 81.

101 Florence Antablin, “The Squinch in Armenian Architecture in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries,” Revue des études Arméniennes 18 (1984): 504–507.
and textual material. List 2 brings together the churches and monasteries with similar architectural decoration in the apse archivolt and apse cornice. List 3 names the churches and *beth šlutho* with similar crosses in their apse conches. List 4 records churches and monasteries with similar brick work, with half-cylinder roof tiles (imbrices) and diagonally placed bricks (herringbone) on the surface and list 5 enumerates those with bricks in their piers. Finally, list 6 shows, based on textual sources, the church building or rebuilding recorded in wider northern Mesopotamia.

Some churches and monasteries appear in more than one list and to be able to distinguish each church, the names of the churches and monasteries are written in bold when they first appear in the Appendix. Based on the discussion above and the appendix below, we can suggest that around twenty-eight of the churches and monasteries that have survived in the ṬurʿAbdin can be dated to the late seventh and eighth centuries. This covers both the Umayyad period and the first fifty years of Abbasid rule. Political changes naturally affected the landscape and architecture of the region. However, not being able to date the structures precisely, we cannot draw confident conclusions about any changes taking place as a consequence of the Abbasid revolution. The impression that one gets from the lists in the Appendix of this article is that up until the ninth century, the ṬurʿAbdin enjoyed a considerable freedom in building churches and monasteries. Moreover, an identifying style of architecture was tried out, with its decoration, apse crosses, *beth šlutho* and brick work. As discussed above, the building works explained above also provide confirmation for the later-eighth century date of the Pact of ʿUmar and let us question the arguments that there was a prohibition of the building of new churches based on treaties drawn up immediately after the conquest.102

Ḥāḥ seems to be the only village in the ṬurʿAbdin where we have architectural remains from the sixth century, namely the church of Mor Sōvō. In the other villages, the evidence seems to come mainly from the eighth century. This may indicate that either the village churches were built on existing churches of which nothing or little has survived103 or villages and for that matter village churches increased considerably after the Islamic conquest in that region which previously was mainly a refuge area for Syrian monks, and dominated mainly by monasteries. In the absence of further epigraphic104 and archaeological investigation, it is difficult to decide which was the case.

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102 For example Palmer, “La Montagne,” 214, fn. 203.
103 As has also been argued by Palmer (Palmer, Monk and Mason, 186).
104 There is a considerable lack of inscriptions in the region dating from the period before
In the newly built or rebuilt churches, there are repeating patterns which may have resulted from a desire to create a distinctive architecture. The Syrian Orthodox communal identity is a subject that has attracted considerable scholarly attention and it seems that in the first centuries of Muslim rule in the region, this identity found a material representation through the churches.

The capacity and initiative of the villagers in terms of building is well illustrated in an inscription in the church of the monastery of Mor Yaʿqub at Ṣālah mentioned above which lists the names of the benefactors (twenty-five of them), together with the amount of money they gave. As Palmer noted it is important that the monastery received money from the village of Ṣālah and probably from the surrounding villages. The collective act of rebuilding the church for whose restoration the neighbouring villages provided money, may illustrate the importance of private patronage in that period. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the region was thriving. It may, on the other hand, also indicate that monasteries were losing power and wealth. In the first centuries of the Muslim rule, the established monasteries, especially the monastery of Mor Gabriel, seemed to have maintained their importance. In addition, new monasteries were continued to be built. However, it is remarkable that they were smaller than the earlier ones.

Building and rebuilding churches and monasteries is a territorial claim. Today the Syrian Orthodox villages can be identified with the monumental churches built in the most prominent locations of the villages. Areas away from the villages are marked with a small monastery, either built or carved, and thus the whole territory is marked as Christian. The freedom extended to the Christians to build and rebuild their ecclesiastical structures may be seen as an intention to create loyalties. This situation recalls the present situation. In an

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105 Keser-Kayaalp, “Églises et monastères,” 269–288.
106 See the Church History and Religious Culture 89 (2009) for various articles on the identity issue in the Syrian Orthodox. See especially Bas ter Haar Romeny et al., “The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project,” Church History and Religious Culture 89 (2009): 1–52. See also Wood, ‘We Have no King but Christ’, where he uses the term ‘cultural independence’ throughout the book while he talks about the Syriac speaking communities in the fifth and sixth.
107 Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” 82.
108 Palmer, Monk and Mason, 186.
109 For the situation of the monasteries in Egypt in the Umayyad period, see Arietta Papaconstantinou, “Between Umma and Dhimma: The Christians of the Middle East under the Umayyads,” Annales Islamologiques 42 (2008): 149–150.
analysis of the restorations in the churches and monasteries in the ṬurʿAbdin in the past twenty years, I discussed how important it is for the community to keep their churches and monasteries in good shape. Although the community diminished over the past fifty years, the interest in restoring churches increased. In the same article I discuss the attitudes of the state authorities and how they are perceived by the community. In the sense that the current authorities describe themselves as “positively discriminating the Syrian Orthodox by letting them restore their churches as they like” may echo the attitude in the period that we discussed above.\footnote{Elif Keser-Kayaalp, “Preservation of the Architectural Heritage of the Syriac Christians in the Tur Abdin: Processes and Varying Approaches,” \textit{TÜBA-KED} 14 (2016): 57–71.}

\textbf{Appendix}

\textit{Church Building in the ṬurʿAbdin in the Late Seventh-Early Eighth Centuries}

When the churches are mentioned for the first time, their names are printed in bold.

List 1. According to Textual Sources and Inscriptions

643–664 \textbf{Monastery of Mor Awgen} – cells built – text (Sebastian Brock, “Notes on Some Monasteries on Mount Izla,” \textit{Abr-Nahrain} 19 (1980–1981): 13).

691 – Ḥāḥ – \textbf{Mor Sergis and Bacchus built} – inscription (Jarry, “Inscriptions,” 47). The dating of the inscription is not certain. After 1000, comes a date starting with one of the rectangular letters. Palmer suggested qof (instead of a beth which gives 691) and thus a date of 788/789 (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” B10).

698 (shortly before) \textbf{Monastery of Mor Theodotos} near Qēllet was built – text (Palmer, \textit{Monk and Mason}, 167) – ruins.

c. 700 Monastery of Mor Awgen rebuilt – text (Fiey, \textit{Nisibe}, 135).

Early eighth century \textbf{Monastery of Mor Gabriel} at Qartmin – building of a Portico – inscription (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” C1).

Before 734 – Ḥabsenus – \textbf{Church of Mor Simeon} – text (\textit{Life of Simeon of Olives}).

739/740 – Ḥāḥ – \textbf{Monastery of Mor Yuḥannan} Theotokos church inscription (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” A2).

752/775 – Şālah – \textbf{Monastery of Mor Yaʿqub} – 8 inscriptions with an approximate date (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” B1–B8), 2 of them record
restoration, 2 others record the financial contribution of the locals to the monastery.

761/762 – Arnas – Church of Mor Quryakos – templon screen – inscription (dated to ninth century, Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” c2).

771/772 – Heshterek – Church of Mor Addai – church and/or beth slutho built – inscription (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” A5).

775/790 Monastery of the Cross in Beth El – building of a beth qadishe – inscription (possible dating, Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” B9).

778/779 (before) – Keferbe – Church of Mor Stephen – inscription (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” A7) – brick work.

784/785 Wine press at the monastery of Mor Gabriel at Qartmin – inscription (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” A8).

791/792 – Habensus – Tower in Mor Lo’ozor monastery- text (Life of Simeon of Olives) – inscription (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” A9).

793–811 Dayr al-Zafaran refounded (Leroy, “L’état présent,” 490).

794/795 or 734/735 Beth Svirina Church of Mor Dōdhō – building of the beth slutho – inscription (possible dating, Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” C3).

Eighth–ninth centuries Monastery of Mor Gabriel at Qartmin – 8 inscriptions, 2 of them recording building (Palmer, “Corpus of Syriac Inscriptions,” C4–C11).

List 2. Churches with Similar Architectural Decoration in the Apse Archivolt and Apse Cornice.

References in brackets are for illustrations.

Mor ‘Azozoyēl at Kafarzē (Bell [and Mango], The Churches and Monasteries, pls. 161–163).

Dayr Qub (Wiessner, Kultbauten, 2:47, part 2)

Yoldat Āloho at Ḥāḥ (Bell [and Mango], The Churches and Monasteries, pls. 137–145).

Mor Samuel at Ḥāḥ (Wiessner, Kultbauten, 1:14, 114, part 2).

Mor Quryakos at Arnas (Bell [and Mango], The Churches and Monasteries, pls. 99–104).

Mor Yuḥannon at Qēllet (Wiessner, Kultbauten, 2:85–86, part 2).

Mor Simeon at Habsenus (Wiessner, Kultbauten, 2:338–141, part 2).

Dayr Habis (St. Mary Magdelen Church) at Ḥāḥ (Mundell Mango 1982a: fig. 13, Wiessner, Kultbauten, 3:43–52, part 2).

Theotokos Church at Ḥāḥ (Yoldat Aloho, also known as Mor Yohannan and Deyr Sorho) (Bell [and Mango], The Churches and Monasteries, pl. 147, Wiessner, Kultbauten, 3:55, part 2).
Beth ślutho of Dayr Salib (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pl. 186). Church and *Beth ślutho of Mor Sōvō at Arbay* (Wiessner, *Kultbauten*, 2:64–65, part 2).

*Beth ślutho of Mor Quryakos* at Anhel (Wiessner, *Kultbauten*, 2:65, part 2).

Mor Sergius and Bacchus (not the apse archivolt but two templon screens, especially the one in the altar, Wiessner, *Kultbauten*, 2:52, par t 1).

List 3. Churches and *beth ślutho* with Similar Crosses in Their Apse Conches

*Beth ślutho of Church of Mor Dōdhō* (dated 794/795 or 734/735) (Wiessner, *Kultbauten*, 2:124–125, part 2).

Mor ‘Azozoyēl at Kafarzē (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pl. 161).

*Beth ślutho of Mor ‘Azozoyēl* at Kafarzē.

Mor Quryaqos at ‘Ardnas (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pl. 131).

*Yoldat Āloho* at Ḥāḥ.

Adjacent chapel at Mor Yuḥannon at Qēllet.

Mor Simeon at Habsenus.

*Beth ślutho of Mor Sōvō at Ḥāḥ*. The church itself also has a fragment of an earlier, more simple cross (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pls. 121 and 126).

*Beth ślutho* of Deyr Saliba (fragments of the cross incorporated to the arch, Wiessner, *Kultbauten*, 1:66, part 2).

List 4. Churches with Similar Brick Work, with Half-Cylinder Roof Tiles (*Imbrices*) and Diagonally Placed Bricks (Herringbone) on the Surface

Mor Yaʿqub at Šalāḥ (752/755) (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pl. 244).

Mor ‘Azozoyēl at Kafarzē (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pl. 164).

Room to the south of the apse, Mor Quryaqos at ‘Ardnas.

Narthex of *Yoldat Āloho* at Ḥāḥ.

Transverse chapel next to Mor Yuḥannon at Qēllet.

Mor Simeon at Habsenus (the part towards the apse).

Dome of Egyptians at Monastery of Mor Gabriel at Qartmin.
List 5. Bricks in the Piers
Mor Sōvō at Ḥāḥ (arches and alternating courses in the piers) (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pl. 120).
Mor Yuḥannon at Qēllet (arches on the south wall and alternating courses in the piers) Figure 5.3 of this article.
Mor Stephen at Kfarbe (arches on the piers. piers and vaults are plastered, they also might have bricks) (Hans Hollerweger, *Turabdin: Living Cultural Heritage: Where Jesus’ Language is Spoken* (Linz: Friends of Tur Abdin, 1999): 246, Wiessner, *Kultbauten*, 2:114, part 2).
Mor Philoxenus at Midyat (Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, pl. 175).

List 6. Church Building or Rebuilding Recorded in Wider Northern Mesopotamia
(This list is based on Marlia Mango’s list in Bell [and Mango], *The Churches and Monasteries*, 162–163.)

678/679 Caliph Mu‘āwiya rebuilt the dome of the cathedral of Edessa which had been destroyed by the great earthquake of 678/679 (*Chronicle of 1234*, I, pp. 288/224; *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*, xi.xiii).
699 – Harran – Syrian Orthodox church built.
ca. 700 Athanasius bar Gurmaye, built the church of the Mother of God in Edessa. He also built a baptistery in the same city (Dionysius, 132 and 133).
707–709 – Nisibis – 5 Syrian Orthodox churches and monasteries and a hostel was built (*Life of Simeon of the Olives*).
713–758 – Nisibis – The baptistery has been converted to a church dedicated to Mor Ya’qub by rebuilding the northern part.
748 – Büyük Keşişlik monastery was built
ca. 750 – Amida – St. Thomas church restorated
ca. 750 Monastery founded above Tell-Beshmai
752 Bishop Athanasius Sandalaya, built a “magnificent church” in Martyropolis.
766/767 Üç Kilise near Edessa was built.
768–769 The people of Amida “executed a major and splendid renovation of their great church which had been built by the God-fearing emperor and believer Heraclius” (*Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 259).
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