Reyhan Durmaz

"TO GO THERE SEVEN TIMES IN FAITH IS LIKE GOING TO JERUSALEM": HAGIOGRAPHICAL TRADITIONS AND HIEROTOPICAL PERCEPTIONS IN ṬUR 'ABDIN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with the specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2012

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By

Reyhan Durmaz

(Turkey)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with the specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Budapest
May 2012

I, the undersigned, Reyhan Durmaz, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with the specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 16 May 2012

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ABSTRACT

Christian landscape of the plateau of Ṭur ‘Abdin in Late Antiquity is a result of the Roman-Persian frontier dynamics, trade and pilgrimage routes, and struggles emanating from the doctrinal controversies. Medieval hagiographical compositions that narrate the lives of holy men in the context of the early history of the region, on the other hand, emphasize certain themes in the ecclesiastical history of the region, indicating specific hierotopical perceptions that prevailed in the Middle Ages. Analyzing a group of saints’ lives, this thesis presents the main themes emphasized in the hagiographical compositions. Having explored the distinct hagiographical traditions, it examines the hierotopical perceptions in Ṭur ‘Abdin in the Middle Ages, reconstructed through the literary representations of sacred spaces, i.e. churches, monasteries, hermit’s caves, in the texts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

> "Dear Reyhan, no, no, and a very certain no!" (V. Menze, for one of my "scholarly" ideas, Fall 2010)

First and foremost, I cannot overstate my gratitude to Volker Menze, whose supervision, guidance, faith and friendship made this research possible.

> "Reyhan, sorry, but you seem to forget the verb forms and this makes me nervous." (I. Perczel, Spring 2012)

My dear *malfono* Istvan Perczel patiently instructed me in Syriac for more than a year. I would like to thank him for giving numerous invaluable suggestions and discovering the delightful *Life of Aho* with me.

I am heartily thankful to *malfono d-malfone* Sebastian Brock for countless inspirations he gave during his brief visit to Budapest, and for reading and commenting on my humble research.

> "Bounce your ideas off me. There is no pleasure like feeling that one is playing an important role in the development of another human being" (A. Palmer, Fall 2010)

I owe greatly to Andrew Palmer for not only generously sharing with me his books, manuscript transcriptions, unpublished works and photographs, but also patiently and faithfully guiding my ideas through our correspondences with a never-ending energy.

> "In your brief presentation you used five terms: 'sacred landscape, sacred space, sacred place, holy place, and Christian landscape;' what do you mean by them?" (J. Laszlovszky, Fall 2011)

There are very few people who can turn every scholarly enquiry into a satisfactory and inspiring learning experience. One of them is Jozsef Laszlovszky, and even the brief chances of working close to him immensely improved this research.

> "I listened to you presentation on Tur 'Abdin for the fourth time now, and one question still remains: 'So what?'" (D. Ziemann, Fall 2011)

I should like to thank all of the faculty and friends at the Department of Medieval Studies for listening to me speak about Tur 'Abdin time and again, and supporting this research in any way they could. My special thanks are to Katalin Szende, Annabella Pal, Csilla Dobos, Judith Rasson, Dora Ivanisevic, and Linda Wheatley-Irving.

I am very thankful for the scholarship provided by CEU, together with the research grants given by Turkven Private Equity and the Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, from which this research greatly benefitted.

> "Explain to me the 144-year gap between the cede of Nisibis to the Persians and the foundation of Dara!" (JMW, repeatedly since Fall 2011)

James M. Wollen deserves my deepest gratitude for his wonderful company, ceaseless care after my accident, and for occasionally correcting my poor English.

Lastly, I would like to thank my dear mother and brother. Even though it is a trivial thing compared to their limitless love and support, this thesis is dedicated to them.

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ܐܢ ܠܐ ܡܪܝ ܩܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܢܛ̈ܪ̈ܝ ܩܪ̈ܝܬܐ ܥܠ ܫܘܐ ܥܡ̈ܠ̈ܝ ,

"If God does not build the house, builders labor in vain.
If the Lord does not guard the village, guards stay awake in vain."
Psalm 126 (Pshitto)

This verse has been recited in Ṭur ʿAbdin for many centuries. Monks, clergymen and lay people; men, women and children gave voice to a significant belief: it is God who builds; it is again He, who protects. Beholding the churches, monasteries and hermits' caves surrounding them on the 'Mountain of the servants (of God)', this was one of the sentiments they carried. With this insight in mind, the current research reconstructs the perceptions of and approaches to sacred spaces in Ṭur ʿAbdin in the Middle Ages.

Ṭur ʿAbdin, the limestone plateau resting to the south of the Tigris basin in northern Mesopotamia, has been inhabited by Christian communities since approximately the fifth century. Particularly after the establishment of the Syrian Orthodox (West Syrian) Church in the sixth century, the region became one of the prominent strongholds of Christianity, with its significant monastic centers and Christian settlements that complemented the former.

The disposition of the early Christian monuments in the landscape of the plateau was a product of trade and pilgrimage routes, dynamics of the Roman-Persian frontier

and splits in the Church due to Christological controversies of Late Antiquity, as elaborated below. These facts notwithstanding, hagiographical compositions, from about the ninth century onwards, present Ṭur ʻAbdin and its ecclesiastical monuments as immensely holy places, founded by ancient holy fathers through the intimations of God. In fact, these texts shed light on changes in perceptions of sacred spaces, parallel with political shifts. Therefore, it is of significant value to examine the content of medieval hagiographical compositions thoroughly and to study the underlying religious, social or political implications.

The essential background, that is, the dynamics that shaped the landscape of Ṭur ʻAbdin in Late Antiquity, is provided in the Prolegomena of this thesis. The subsequent two main chapters analyze the textual sources. The first chapter constitutes a content analysis of a group of West Syrian hagiographical compositions. Although the focus is on the doctrinal discourse they do or do not comprise, the chapter also gives some basic background information about each source and compares them to each other in terms of common themes. The aim of this section is to provide the reader with a general introduction to the hagiographical traditions that flourished in the region of Ṭur ʻAbdin. The presentation of doctrinal controversies is a significant factor that distinguishes these traditions from one another. Essentially this difference appears to have led to varied approaches to sacred spaces and to the region in general, at least as it is represented textually.

The second chapter thoroughly elaborates upon textual representations of the sacred spaces in Ṭur ʻAbdin in the hagiographical sources. In this section four major saints' *lives* are used as the basis of the enquiry, as these texts are directly related to the most prominent monuments of the plateau, which can be analyzed through archaeological evidence as well. All of the hagiographical texts narrate the foundation stories of monasteries or the building of churches. These textual presentations of the

past will be contextualized within the socio-political milieu of the times when they were composed or edited. Thus, it will be demonstrated that the perception of Ṭur ʻAbdin or of its particular ecclesiastical monuments as immensely holy places is neither a late antique phenomenon as the textual sources claim, nor a modern one as some scholars argue. Rather, it seems to be a particular medieval development that occurred as a reverberation of drastic socio-political shifts in the region.

A Review of the Scholarly Literature

The region of Ṭur ʻAbdin is rich in centuries-old ecclesiastical structures, inscriptions and mansucripts of various kind. The region owes this abundance to the continuous existence of Christian communities and to an active monastic movement from approximately the fifth century until the present day. Therefore, scholarship on the history of the region, producing a significant output for more than a century, has acquired a prominent position within the wider discipline of Syriac Studies. Scholarship on Ṭur ʻAbdin has hitherto been conducted into three major intersecting fields, namely architecture, epigraphy and literature.

Ecclesiastical Architecture

The first prominent study on the ecclesiastical architecture of Ṭur ʻAbdin was that of Gertrude Bell, who traveled to the region in 1909 and 1911, documented and published extensively the foremost ecclesiastical monuments of Ṭur ʻAbdin. Her monograph, *The Churches and Monasteries of Ṭur ʻAbdin and Neighbouring Districts* (1913), was updated and expanded by Marlia Mundell Mango, with an introduction and explanatory notes, in 1982.[1] Despite focusing solely on the prominent monuments of the plateau, this study has been one of the essential sources for the current research, as it

is for any work on Ṭur ʻAbdin, for it provides a brief and foundational overview of the ecclesiastical history of the region.

Gernot Wiessner's four-volume monograph, *Christliche Kultbauten im Ṭur ʻAbdin* (1981-3)[2] is an extensive work that has explored many more ecclesiastical structures of the plateau. In this massive work, Wiessner describes the physical characteristics, and provides ground plans and photographs of a total of 111 structures from the region, including some of the rock-cut architecture. His work introduces many lesser-known edifices of Ṭur ʻAbdin, and contextualizes them in three detailed maps. However, the architectural descriptions in this work are brief, and most of the time they do not include architectural sculpture or epigraphic evidence. Moreover, Wiessner's work has been questioned with regards to the identification and dating of structures.

The most recent architectural study on Ṭur ʻAbdin was conducted by Elif Keser-Kayaalp in 2009.[3] In her dissertation she discusses the ecclesiastical architeture of northern Mesopotamia in various dimensions. She analyses the urban and rural churches, other types of ecclesiastical structures, such as baptisteries, architectural sculpture, as well as building techniques and materials. Her work brings together many issues that previously had been studied separately. It constitutes an essential and the most up-to-date study on the ecclesiastical architecture of the region.

Epigraphy

Inscriptions are a long-established tradition on the plateau. Since the very beginning of the Christian presence in Ṭur ʻAbdin, church walls were used as significant media for preserving various types of information, such as building activity

[1] *The Churches and Monasteries of Ṭur ʻAbdin and Neighbouring Districts* (London: Pindar Press, 1982).
[2] Gernot Wiessner, *Christliche Kultbauten im Tur Abdin*, 4 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrosowitz, 1981-3).
[3] Elif Keser-Kayaalp, "The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Northern Mesopotamia, 300-800 AD" " (PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 2009).

and funerary memorials. The epigraphic tradition, changing in many respects through time, has continued until the present day. However, most often it has been used as an auxiliary source of information in scholarship. In 1987 Andrew Palmer published "A Corpus of Inscriptions from Ṭur 'Abdin and Environs",[4] and the next year "The Epigraphic Diction of Ṭur 'Abdin and Environs".[5] The forthcoming publication of the Mardin Museum and Andrew Palmer, "Syriac and Greek inscriptions of the Western Necropolis of Dara", will contribute greatly to studies of the inscriptions and epigraphic traditions of Ṭur 'Abdin.

Hagiography

The least-explored field in Ṭur 'Abdin studies is the manuscript tradition of the region. The perennial existence of numerous monastic communities resulted in libraries of manuscripts, a small proportion of which have been preserved in churches, monasteries and private hourses in the region.[6] Gospels, prayer books, chronicles, saints' lives and other types of literature produced in Ṭur 'Abdin have only been partially edited and translated. Notably the saints' lives, which constitute the majority of the textual sources to be utilized here, have only attracted a limited amount of scholarly attention.

A number of lives have been published in Syriac in major publications, such as the *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, yet they have not been translated into modern languages or critically edited. There is a vast corpus of publications undertaken by the Syrian Orthodox clergy members particularly in the twentieth century. Many saints' lives have been published in Syriac, Arabic or Turkish, by lesser-known publishing

[4] Andrew Palmer, "A Corpus of Iinscriptions from Ṭur 'Abdin and Environs," *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987): 53-139.
[5] Andrew Palmer, "The Epigraphic Diction of Ṭur 'Abdin and Environs," *Oriens Christianus* 72 (1988): 115-24.

houses. Even though the authors of these books probably had access to and made use of important manuscripts, these publications have only been partially used in Western scholarship due to language restrictions or poor distribution of the publications.

Andrew Palmer studied many of the saints' lives in his monograph, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier*,[7] in order to reconstruct the early history of Ṭur 'Abdin. His research brings together a large corpus of archaeological, epigraphic and literary material. Moreover, in this monograph, he edited and translated a major hagiographical source, the *Qartmin Trilogy*,[8] the foundation story of the most prominent monastery of Ṭur 'Abdin. Dale Johnson also published a selection of saints' lives in his monograph entitled *Monks of Mount Izla*.[9] He has also written brief commentaries on each of the lives. Although useful for scholarly studies, the book was written for a general audience.

Besides these monographs, hagiographical traditions of Ṭur 'Abdin were analyzed briefly by Palmer in his article "Saints' Lives with a Difference: Elijah on John of Tella (d.537) and Joseph on Theodotos of Amida (d.698)".[10] Furthermore, Sebastian Brock's immense contributions to this field in recent years cannot be overstated. "Saints in Syriac: A Little-Tapped Resource"[11] and "Syriac Hagiography"[12] are essential articles for an introduction to Syriac hagiographical literature. Yet, both Palmer and Brock focus on better-known and generally early examples of the Syriac hagiographical literature of Syria and northern Mesopotamia. A study that thoroughly

[6] Arthur Vööbus, "In Pursuit of Syriac Manuscripts," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 37, no. 2, Colloquium on Aramaic Studies (1978): 189-90.
[7] Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990).
[8] Microfiche supplement to Palmer, *Monk and Mason*.
[9] Dale Johnson, *Monks of Mount Izla* (USA: Lulu Press, 2004).
[10] *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 229 (1987): 203-16.
[11] *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 181-196.
[12] In *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, Volume I: Periods and Places, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011): 259-284.

analyzes the content, discourse, diction, authorship of Syriac hagiography, or changes in any of these aspects, does not exist yet.

Other Relevant Secondary Literature

Along with the scholarly works on the history of Ṭur ʻAbdin, the current study will extensively utilize the secondary literature on sacred spaces and landscapes. Alexei Lidov's *Hierotopy. Making of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*[13] is fundamental amongst the studies utilized. The articles collected in Lidov's edition analyze how sacred spaces are formed as deliberate products of human creativity. Since the current research analyzes the formation of a sacred landscape in Ṭur ʻAbdin, methods underlined in the book will be significant tools there for approaching the physical material – i.e. monuments and landscapes- of Ṭur ʻAbdin. Nevertheless, Lidov's hierotopical approach does not help one in analyzing perceptions of sacred spaces or their echoes in literary activity, a prominent research direction of the present study.

The volume edited by Jan van Ginkel (et al.), *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, consists of articles that reflect upon literary activity in the Middle Ages.[14] The main argument of the collection is that Christian communities in the Near East, after the Arab conquests, engaged in intense writing activity that was heavily charged with doctrinal disputes to build, solidify and protect communal identity. The articles extensively analyze written sources, mostly historiographicalal writings, in order to support this argument, yet, these studies do not pay attention to hagiographical writings. They also do not comment

[13] Alexei Lidov, *Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006).
[14] J. J. van Ginkel, H. L. Murre-van den Berg, T. M. van Lint, ed., Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 134 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers & Department of Oriental Studies, 2005).

on impact of socio-political dynamics, such as territorial claims, on historiographical writing.

Building upon the scholarly foundation discussed here, the present thesis analyzes a selection of literary and epigraphic sources from Ṭur ʻAbdin in order to trace changes in content with regard to perceptions of Ṭur ʻAbdin itself and its sacred spaces. Archaeological and architectural evidence will be used concurrently to reconstruct the human creativity behind the formation of the physiscal milieu.

Theory, Methodology and Limitations

The present thesis employs two main theoretical frameworks. The first is cultural memory and its relation to spaces. The term used by Pierre Nora, *lieux de mémoire*, is applicable to the issues raised in this research, for both Ṭur ʻAbdin as a whole, and its specific monuments were objects of reconstructed memories in the Middle Ages.[15] In order to retrieve the collective memory related to them, sacred spaces were not only renovated and rebuilt, but also extensively written about, mostly in hagiographical texts. The memories of the founding fathers of many churches and monasteries were preserved and reinforced in brief forms in the liturgy, and in more elaborate forms in saints' lives, in order to promote the veneration of ancient holy fathers and specific monuments, and to reinforce the Syrian Orthodox identity. Jan-Eric Steppa argues that "hagiography was more than edifying stories, […] it was an instrument for organizing the collective memory of monastic culture."[16] Considering that hagiographical compositions' circulation was not confined to the monastic milieu,

[15] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (1989): 7-24.
[16] Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), xxix.

but also reached lay persons, one can argue that hagiography reinforced the collective memory of both monastic and lay communities.[17]

As Jan Assmann states, "the past is needed [to form community identity] because it imparts togetherness" and that communally remembered knowledge is objectified in the shape of cultural forms, and collective memory is displaced and made visible in writing.[18] Alan Kirk explains the notion as such:

> Writing is "an extraordinarily efficient medium of symbolic objectification" […]. In societies with scribal technology, writing takes on particular importance in the event of a "breakdown in tradition" (*Traditionbruch*). For emergent groups, this refers to the point of serious breakdown of communicative memory. Analogously, at the level of long-established societies, it indicates crisis times when historical disruptions and changes suddenly problematize the immanent, organic connections of a society with its past, as well as the smooth functioning of usual forms (including oral) of transmission. In such cases a society is confronted with loss of connection to memory and so turns more intensively to writing as a means of stabilizing group memory, of working out connections to the past in the midst of drastically altered circumstances.[19]

The significance of writing for reconstructing and reinforcing collective memory in a specific community, coupled with the fact that "the memory of foundational persons and events bears the ethos distinctive to the group's identity",[20] and that "the past is appropriated to legitimize particular sociopolitical goals and ideologies and to mobilize action in accord with these goals,"[21] bring forth the second theoretical framework of this research, that is, literary analysis, particularly cultural poetics. As Louis Montrose explains, cultural poetics refers to the dialogue between the

[17] Derek Krueger, "Early Byzantine Historiography and Hagiography," in *Writing 'True Stories': Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 19.
[18] Jan Assmann, "Remembering in Order to Belong: Writing, Memory and Identity," in *Religion and Cultural Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 94-5; Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 72.
[19] Alan Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory," in *Memory, Tradition and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2005), 6.
[20] Ibid.18.
[21] Ibid. 11-12.

poetics and politics of a culture and argues that "our comprehension, representation, interpretation of the texts of the past always proceeds by a mixture of estrangement and appropriation".[22] According to this theory texts not only reflect the social, political, economic dynamics of the time in which they are written, but their meanings and interpretation change diachronically. Thus, the present thesis attempts to contextualize texts within the socio-political culture(s) in which they were written and later interpreted. Its basic assumption is that the socio-political dynamics of a time period has a deep impact on the creation and veneration of sacred spaces, which is consequently reflected in the literature. Therefore, the endeavor of this enquiry is to extract and analyze the hierotopical references in each text in order to reconstruct the general perceptions of, and approaches to sacred spaces. Hagiographical compositions comprise most of the primary sources used in this research, although historiographical texts, epigraphic and archaeological material are also referred to, when relevant.

Out of the 471 holy men of the Syriac-speaking world (from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages), of whom Jean Maurice Fiey gives an account, more than 40 are related to Ṭur ʻAbdin.[23] However, the hagiographical texts directly related to prominent sacred spaces in the region, which constitute the backbone of this research, are the following:

- *Qartmin Trilogy*
- *Life of Shemʻun d-Zayte*
- *Life of Aḥo of Rishʻayno*
- *Life of Yaʻqub of Ṣalaḥ (Jacob the Recluse)*

The hierotopical reconstructions of Ṭur ʻAbdin will be based on these texts, for their narratives are directly related to major sacred spaces located there. In addition to these

[22] Louis Montrose, "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. A. Veeser (London : Routledge, 1989), 24.
[23] *Saints Syriaques*, ed. Lawrance I. Conrad (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 2004).

texts, other hagiographical compositions will occasionally be referred to for the purposes of comparison. These secondary texts are:

- *Lives* in the *Awgen Cycle*
- *Life of Barṣawmo of the Northern Mountain*
- *Life of Aaron of Serug*
- *Life of Malke*
- *Life of Theodotus of Amida*

All translations from Syriac are my own, unless stated otherwise. This thesis focuses, from the geographical point of view, on Ṭur ʿAbdin and, from the literary point of view, on West Syrian texts. The English versions of the names of historical figures and literary works are used, except for the lesser-known names of places and holy men from Ṭur ʿAbdin, which are provided in Syriac transliteration. Except for quotations, all the transliterations of Syriac words follow the West Syrian pronunciation. Unless mentioned otherwise, all the dates are given according to the Gregorian calendar. In terms of chronology, this research is restricted to the time period from Late Antiquity to the end of the thirteenth century, when the Mamluks defeated the Crusaders, and "Christianity seemed to have been defeated in the whole Middle East," bringing the Syrian cultural production seemingly to a halt.[24]

[24] 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): 3.

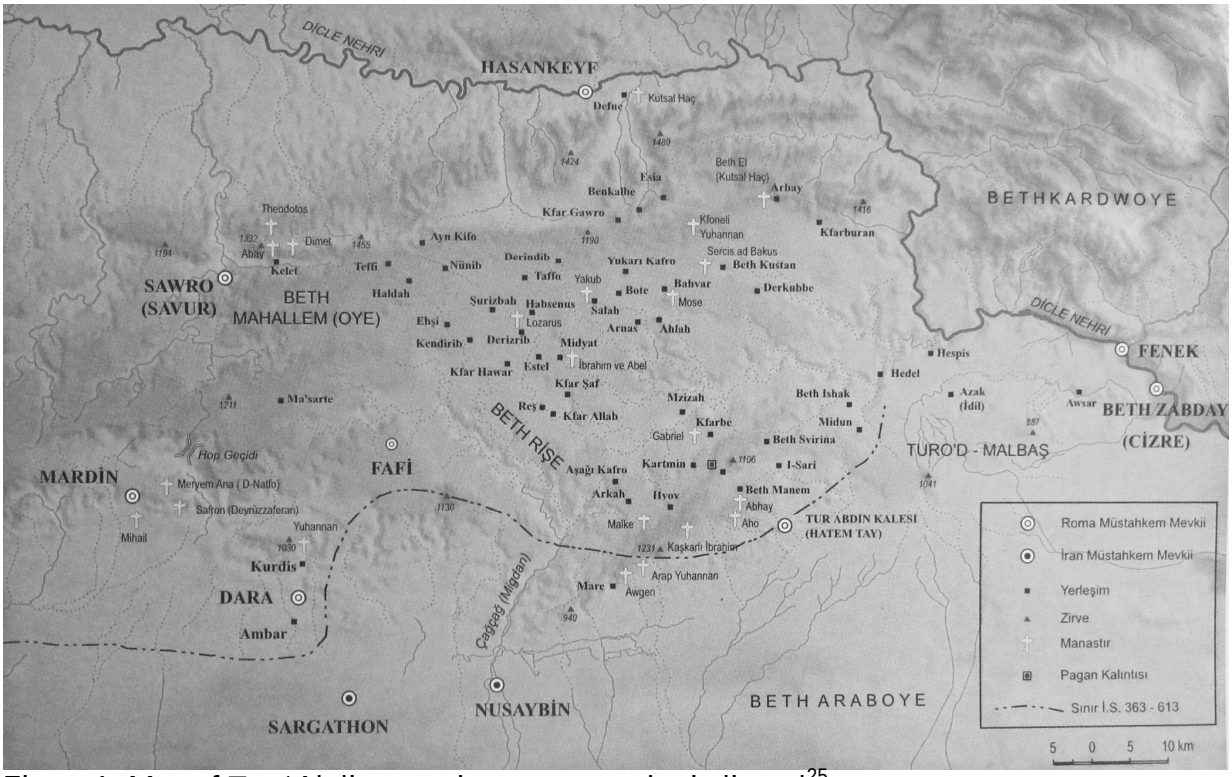

Figure 1. Map of Ṭur ʻAbdin, prominent monasteries indicated[25]

The Making of Ṭur ʻAbdin as a Christian Landscape in Late Antiquity

Certain dynamics of Late Antiquity played a crucial role in the formation of Ṭur ʻAbdin. One can distinguish three prominent aspects in the period: the routes taken by merchants, the plateau's location on the Roman-Persian frontier and the Christological controversies which led to the split of the Eastern (Orthodox) Churches. Consequently, Ṭur ʻAbdin emerged as a specific Christian landscape, where villages and monasteries, clergy and laymen, holy men and the simple people coexisted for centuries.

Examining the network of roads and paths in Ṭur ʻAbdin, one sees that monasteries are located along those roads over which pedestrian, horseback and perhaps, although unlikely, wheeled traffic moved. The plateau is crossed by a number of these intersecting roads and paths; and almost without exception, monasteries are located along these routes, thus becoming active participants in the trade and pilgrimage

of the region.[26] Antony Comfort reconstructs possible Roman roads passing through Ṭur ʿAbdin in the fifth and sixth centuries.[27] In his reconstruction of the road network of the frontier it can be seen that the monastery of Mor Gabriel is on one of the two possible trade routes passing through the region, and the monastery of Mor Abay at Qeleth, near Ṣawro, is on the other.

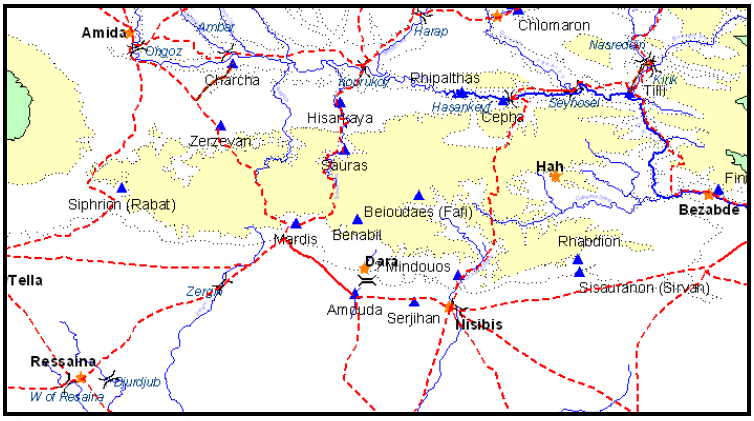

Figure 2. Trade routes passing through the plateau of Ṭur ʿAbdin in Late Antiquity[28]

The *Trilogy* relates a story about a trader who, during the time of Mor Gabriel (d. 667) trusted his sacks of gold to the monastery while passing over the plateau.[29] John of Ephesus (d. ca. 588) says that in his lifetime the monasteries around Amida engaged in agricultural activity and had economic relations with laymen.[30] Also, Procopius writes about the agricultural lands around the castle of Rhabdion (Qal'at Haytam Ṭay), which he refers to as the "Field of the Romans."[31]Although neither of the authors mentions any monastery in Ṭur ʿAbdin *per se*, monasteries on the plateau must have engaged in economic activity in a similar way as those around Amida did.

[25] Adapted from Suavi Aydin, Kudret Emiroglu, Oktay Ozel and Suha Unsal, *Mardin: Asiret - Cemaat – Devlet* (Turkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfi: Istanbul, 2000), 477.
[26] See the end of chapter 3 in Palmer, *Monk and Mason*.
[27] Antony Comfort, "Roads on the Frontier between Rome and Persia: Euphratesia, Osrhoene, Mesopotamia from 363 to 602" (PhD dissertation, University of Exeter, 2008), 289.
[28] Ibid, 218, fig. 19.
[29] *Qartmin Trilogy*, 118.
[30] John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, Patrologia Orientalis, vol. 17, fasc. 1, No. 82 (Brepols: Pontificia Instituto Orientale Roma, 2003), 614ff.

Certain architectural features of monasteries and churches suggest that the region may have had to cope with a large number of pilgrims. An example is the so-called "Dome of Theodora" in the abbey of Qartmin, which is identified as an adult baptistery and dated to the early sixth century by Palmer.[32] It is not only the main monasteries of the plateau that have features which indicate large numbers of pilgrims, also a number of churches in villages seem to have been built in a way to be able to accommodate visiting masses. For instance, the so-called 'cathedral', the Church of Mor Sovo at Ḥaḥ; Mor Stephanos at Kafarbé; and Mor Ḥadbshabo at 'Aynwardo are among the relatively large churches of Ṭur 'Abdin (all are dated from the sixth to the eighth centuries),[33] which must have functioned as landmarks in the landscape and as prayer spaces for the passers-by.

A significant architectural phenomenon, the *beth ṣlutho*, should be mentioned here. A *beth ṣlutho* is a free-standing exedra consisting of an apse, located to the south of village churches in Ṭur 'Abdin (Fig. 3). There have been several arguments with regard to the development of the *beth ṣlutho* and its function.[34] Marlia Mundell-Mango, elaborating on the analysis of Gertrude Bell, describes *beth ṣlutho* as an outside oratory that can be used as a prayer space when the weather allows.[35] Palmer argues that this feature allowed villagers to partake in prayers without taking their footgear off; he also suggests that the *beth ṣlutho* possibly had funerary functions, basing his argument on funerary inscriptions found on some of the *beth ṣlawotho* in Ṭur 'Abdin. [36] Keser-Kayaalp, agreeing with Palmer, points out the possible funerary

[31] Procopius, *Buildings*, ed. E.H. Warmington, trans. H.B. Dewing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 125.
[32] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 145-7.
[33] Bell and Mango, *Churches and Monasteries*, 163; Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 194; Keser-Kayaalp, *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, 98.
[34] 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. N. Garsoian, T. Matthews and R.W. Thomson (Washington, DC, 1982), 125.
[35] Bell and Mango, *Churches and Monasteries*, x, 14.
[36] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 136.

function of the *beth ṣlutho*.[37] She also argues that the late antique pilgrimage practices in Sinai might give an idea about the function of the *beth ṣlawotho* in Ṭur ʻAbdin.[38] Keser-Kayaalp points out that the building of sanctuaries on pilgrimage and travel routes is an ancient practice dating back to Roman and Early Christian times. This practice might have constituted the original idea behind the emergence of the *beth ṣlutho*. These structures establish the visibility of Christian landmarks from afar, for they are in the form of apse and are generally decorated with relief crosses. They probably provided additional prayer space for overflowing congregations, which were occasionally pilgrims and travelers.

Figure 3 The beth ṣlutho of the Church of Mor Sovo in Ḥaḥ (sixth century)(left) and that of the Church of Mor ʻAzizael in Kafarze (eighth century) (Photos by the author, Feb. 2010)

The frontier is the second factor which played a significant role in the formative period of the plateau. Ṭur ʻAbdin was a part of the Roman-Persian frontier, on Roman territory.[39] Arguably for this reason the region received close attention and generous benefactions from the Roman emperors up to the Arab conquests of the seventh century. According to a prominent saint's *life* from the region, the Fortress of Ṭur

[37] *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, 104; Palmer, *Monk and Mason,* 211-2.
[38] *Ecclesiastical Architecture*, 104f.
[39] Bell and Mango, *Churches and Monasteries*, iii; Palmer, *Monk and Mason,* 1-8.

'Abdin, Qal'at Haytam Ṭay, was built under Constantius II (r. 337-361) in the year 350/1 by the commander Demetrius.[40] The emperor also fortified prominent settlements close to the frontier, such as Amida in 348/9, and built fortresses along the river Tigris.[41] Anastasius (r. 491-518) founded the city of Dara (Anastasiopolis) south-west of Ṭur 'Abdin in 507 to compensate for the loss of Nisibis, which had been ceded to the Sasanids by Jovian in 363. There were a number of forts on the frontier, which Justinian (r. 527-565) rebuilt and reinforced in the sixth century.[42] The list of reinforced forts provided by Procopius possibly includes some of the monuments in or around Ṭur 'Abdin.[43] In 585, the Roman commander Philippicus advanced from Amida, moved into Ṭur 'Abdin, and established a camp on Mount Izlo.[44] In the sixth century three monasteries were founded either by Mor Aḥo or on his relics at strategic locations along the frontier.[45] Emperors Arcadius (r. 395-408), Theodosius II (r. 408-450) and Anastasius provided Qartmin Abbey with generous benefactions.[46] The fine mosaics granted to the monastery under Anastasius have partially survived until the present day.[47] All these facts seem to indicate that Ṭur 'Abdin was a significant part of the frontier which received military and monetary support. Emperors, in order to reinforce

[40] Demetrius is not mentioned in the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. In the *Life* of Symeon of the Olives he is placed in the fourth century, a Roman commander during the reign of Constantius II, commissioned to build the castle of Ṭur 'Abdin, later (in the tenth century) called Qal'at Haytam Ṭay, in the year 350/1, *Life of Shem'un d-Zayte [Simeon of the Olives], Mardin MS,* trans. Jack Tannous, unpublished, a copy of which is kindly provided by him, fol. 157a-158b. A historical source(s) to validate this information has not yet been identified, Sebastian Brock, "The Fenqitho of the Monastery of Mar Gabriel in Tur 'Abdin," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 28 (1979): 181 n. 39; The *Life* of Aḥo indicates that the castle was southeast of the monastery of Mor Aḥo, *The Life of Aḥo*, Vatican Syriac 37, fol. 184a.
[41] *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ*, quoted by Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 6, referring to the Damascus Ms (12/17) fol. 122a.2; Julian, "Panegyric in Honour of the Emperor Constantius," 55-57, in *Works of the Emperor Julian*, in three volumes, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, LOEB Classical Library, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
[42] Procopius, *Buildings*, 129. The argument that these were possibly Anastasian foundations and repairs will not be elaborated here.
[43] Ibid.; Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 22.
[44] John Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2008), 54.
[45] Fiey, *Saints*, 30-31.
[46] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 14, 49ff (the records of the former benefaction under Arcadius are suspicious); *Qartmin Trilogy* 27, 30.
[47] Ernest J. W. Hawkins, Marlia Mundell and Cyril Mango, "The Mosaics of the Monastery of Mar Samuel, Mar Simeon and Mar Gabriel near Kartmin with a note on the Greek Inscription," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 27 (1973): 283.

their presence and power on the frontier, utilized monasteries as strongholds and the monastic communities as loyal supporters.

Monks played an active role in the protection of the frontiers. As Procopius states for the sixth century, with reference to a certain Jacob, monks were considered effective supporters of troops for the defense of the frontiers.[48] Likewise, Theophanes Confessor writes in his chronicle, in the eighth century, about monks guarding towers during the Persian siege of Amida in 503.[49] The role of holy men as an active part of the defense of the frontiers in Late Antiquity, on which William Frend and Peter Brown extensively elaborated,[50] had a direct impact on the location of churches and monasteries in Ṭur ʻAbdin, for holy men provided spiritual protection, which was an indispensable part of the notion of the need for protection and safety. [51]

Both the natural gateways to the plateau and the immediate surroundings of the villages are "protected" by churches and monasteries that harbor relics of martyrs or the True Cross. A striking example is that one of the monasteries founded by Mor Aḥo was dedicated to the Cross, for Aḥo, according to his *Life*, possessed a piece of the Holy Cross. Another prominent example is the village of Beth Svirina, which is surrounded by "25 saints", i.e. churches and chapels, some of which date to the late antique period. It should also be noted that Ya'qub the Recluse (d. 421) was said to have prayed with his last breath that God might encircle the nearby village of Ṣalaḥ with "a high and mighty wall against all enemies, visible and invisible."[52] The need for protection was

[48] Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. B. Fewing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990-2), 51-53.
[49] Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor, Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 283-823*, trans. and intro. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 54.
[50] Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 87ff. (80-101); *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), 145; William Frend, "The Monks and the Survival of the East Roman Empire in the Fifth Century," *Past & Present* 54 (1972): 3-24.
[51] Note that Syrian asceticism in general flourished in a milieu characterized by the land's situation as an insecure frontier between the Roman and the Persian worlds. Susan Ashbrook-Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (London: Berkeley, 1990), 58.
[52] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 111, n. 200, referring to the *Life of Ya'qub*, fol. 180b.3, and comparing fol. 179a.2-3: "That region … and especially the village near which he lived was blessed by his holy steps.

reflected in the strategically-positioned monasteries; simultaneously the holy relics located in churches and monasteries constituted an invisible, sacred wall around the settlements.

The Christological controversies and, thus, the separation of the non-Cyrillian (the Persian Church of the East, East Syrian)[53] and Cyrillian (the Chalcedonian and the anti-Chalcedonian), as well as that of the Imperial (Melkite) and the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite, West Syrian), Churches add yet another dimension to the formation process of Ṭur ʻAbdin.[54] The plateau emerged as a heartland of the West Syrian Church, that is the anti-Chalcedonian Church that was organized under the leadership of Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578), in the sixth century.[55] The East Syrian Church, on the other hand, was formed earlier, taking its distinguished form in the fifth century by refusing the decisions of the Council of Ephesus (431) and based on the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia.[56] The East Syrian Church for the most part was settled in Persian territory, the western flank of which was demarcated by the river Tigris and the south of Ṭur ʻAbdin (the crest of Mt. Izlo) until the Arab conquest of the region in 640.

Although initially East Syrians must have lived on the plateau, Ṭur ʻAbdin was inhabited by West Syrians and was characterized by their presence.[57] The territorial

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Those who were ill or had a misfortune or a sorrow ran to the blessed man and took refuge in him." In n. 204, on the same page, Palmer compares the *Life of Theodotos* in the second volume of the same Ms (12/18), fol. 66b.1: "Stay with us, father, for your body alone may be for us like an unbreachable wall."

[53] For the terminology used to refer to the Church of the East see Sebastian Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no.3, (1996): 23-35.

[54] The terminological problems and considerations with regards to the various Eastern Orthodox Churches are beyond the scope of this research. For the purpose of convenience I shall use the names "East Syrian," "West Syrian," and "Chalcedonian" Churches.

[55] Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent, "Apostolic Memories: Religious Differentiation and the Construction of Orthodoxy in Syriac Missionary Literature" (PhD dissertation, Brown University, 2009), 29; Frederick W. Norris, "Greek Christianities," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris, vol. 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 98; Lucas van Rompay, "East (3): Syria and Mesopotamia," in *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook-Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 376-377.

[56] Van Rompay, *Syria and Mesopotamia*, 377.

[57] Sebastian Brock, "Ṭur ʻAbdin: A Homeland of Ancient Syro-Aramaean Culture," in *Living Cultural Heritage- Turabdin: Where Jesus' Language is Spoken,* ed. Hans Hollerweger (Linz: Freunde des Tur Abdin, 1999), 22; also note that the *Life of Aḥo*, whose cult seems to have flourished in the sixth century

proximity between the East and the West Syrian communities brought about not only hostility, but also struggles between the two Christian groups over the ownership of sacred spaces. While the East Syrians warned their fellow believers against the "heretics that looked, dressed and spoke like Christians," possibly referring to the West Syrians, the latter group continued to take over and build more churches.[58] In the *Life of Shem'un d-Zayte* (Bishop of Harran, from Ṭur 'Abdin, d. 734) the author extensively writes about how church building in Nisibis by the West Syrians was many times interrupted by "Nestorians,"[59] which were either the East Syrians or the Chalcedonians. Moreover, in the same *Life*, we read about ruined churches in Nisibis being built over and renamed in the eighth century. The ruined churches belonged probably to the East Syrians. West Syrians, while taking over the sacred monuments, seemingly wanted to give a new identity to these spaces and therefore dedicated them to their own saints or to the Mother of God. Thus, Ṭur 'Abdin became a stronghold of the West Syrian Church among the East Syrians and Chalcedonians. The monasteries dominating the landscape were not only strongholds securing the frontier, but also embodiments of the true faith. Thus, while the monastic communities on Mt. Izlo adopted a discourse by which the mountain was likened to Mt. Sinai, the communities of Ṭur 'Abdin chose a similar discourse, that of the Holy Land, in their hagiographical writings.

As a result of these dynamics Ṭur 'Abdin emerged as a Christian landscape, in which villages and monastic communities have perennially co-existed,[60] a phenomenon that will further be analyzed below. As the physical landscape was formed and altered through time, the literary monuments produced on the plateau formed a spiritual

in Ṭur 'Abdin, starts with the "heresy of Marcian" (the Byzantine Emperor under whose reign the Council of Chalcedon took place), *Aḥo*, fol. 176a.

[58] Andrew Palmer, "La Montagne aux LXX Monastéres: La Géographie Monastique du Ṭur 'Abdin," in *L*e monachisme *syriaque*, ed. Florence Jullien, Etudes Syriaques 7 (Paris: Geuthner, 2010), 176-179.

[59] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, fol. 171a.

[60] Note that Susan Ashbrook-Harvey states that this co-existence was observed in the Syrian asceticism from the beginning. *Asceticism*, 53.

landscape in which monks and lay people found not only directions for perfection and piety, but also perspectives for approaching their physical surroundings, that is their churches and monasteries.

CHAPTER I. HAGIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE IN ṬUR ʻABDIN: DOCTRINAL DISCOURSE AND PROMINENT THEMES

In the Middle Ages intense writing activity took place in the monasteries of Ṭur ʻAbdin. Many saints' lives were written or rewritten in this time period, especially following the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750). The literary monuments of this era, unlike earlier works, represent Ṭur ʻAbdin, and particularly its prominent monastery, Qartmin Abbey, as holy places directly associated with much-venerated holy men of the past. From these representations one might draw conclusions at two levels. Firstly, the authors' intention was to emphasize the place of the Ṭur ʻAbdin monasticism in the genealogy of the anti-Chalcedonian Church and monasticism. On the second level these hagiographical documents mirror a shift in the communities' relationship to sacred spaces in Ṭur ʻAbdin in the Middle Ages, as a reverberation of this enhanced role of the Ṭur ʻAbdin area. In this chapter I deal with the first level, analyzing the prominent hagiographical monuments of Ṭur ʻAbdin with regard to their doctrinal content, as well as their other thematic constituencies.

I.1 Doctrinal Controversies as a Part of Hagiographical Discourse

> … Some of them [Amidene monks] from the stress of the persecution even withdrew as far as the southern desert also, and ʻArab and Izlo and the other districts and dwelt there. And, when they had set up many places, and built many monasteries, they found little opportunity and were drawn by love of the coffins of their spiritual fathers, and they came back again and arrived, and again entered the same convents after a space of twenty-three years that they completed, and for the second time also. And when they had yet again found them quite completely knocked to pieces and demolished and destroyed, and when they had again been involved in much labour and no small expense in setting them up, and had built them and set them up, then again a storm of persecution rose up against them, and they were again expelled from them a third time, when they had not been allowed to complete even two more years in them, and thereafter return to the southern region of the desert and of ʻArab and of Izla, and all of the country round the city of

> Dara and go down and be scattered over the places and the monasteries for the purpose of habitation[61]

Thus writes John of Ephesus, a prominent anti-Chalcedonian bishop, who played a crucial role in recording the establishment of the anti-Chalcedonian, later to be called the Syrian Orthodox, ecclesiastical hierarchy.[62] In his voluminous work, *The Lives of the Eastern Saints*, John refers to Izlo and the area around the city of Dara as a place inhabited by monks, yet, his way of referring to these places is far from being *panegyrical* in nature. In fact, Amidene monks are portrayed as exiles in the monasteries of the area that was later called Ṭur ʻAbdin. The only connection that John establishes with the monastic communities in Ṭur ʻAbdin is when he refers to a certain John, ordained as the Bishop of Dara by Jacob Baradaeus, as being a former monk from the monastery of Qartmin.[63]Although the fact that Jacob chose a Qartminite monk as an anti-Chalcedonian bishop for Dara shows that in the sixth century the community at Qartmin Abbey was an anti-Chalcedonian community, one cannot draw such a conclusion from the rest of John of Ephesus's narratives. He praises neither a holy man nor a monastery from the region of Ṭur ʻAbdin, despite the latter's geographical proximity to Amida, John's homeland. This observation is a significant retrospective *comparandum* for the writings of the Qartminite monks in the Middle Ages, who showed special reverence to John of Ephesus in the *Qartmin Trilogy* (*terminus post quem* 819).

The *Trilogy,* which is the foundation story of Ṭur ʻAbdin's most prominent monastery, Qartmin Abbey, consists of three saints' lives, sequentially that of Samuel of Eshtin, Simeon of Qartmin, and Gabriel of Beth Qustan. It was written by multiple authors over a long period of time, and it possibly took its final shape in the ninth

[61] *Lives*, 419-420.

century.[64] It begins with a reference to John of Ephesus' *Ecclesiastical History*, relating the story of Qartmin Abbey being pillaged and burnt by the Persians in 576.[65] John, in the third part of his *Ecclesiastical History*, gives an account of the Persian sack of the region.[66] The author of the *Trilogy* uses this narrative to explain the alleged sack of the monastery in the sixth century, and explicitly refers to John of Asia, that is John of Ephesus, as the source of this information. The intention of the *Trilogy*'s author is to connect the monastery's history to this much-venerated sixth-century church father stems from the latter's well-established reputation among anti-Chalcedonians. The Qartminites thus attempted to place themselves and their monastery within the most ancient tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church after the separation.

A striking manifestation of this ideology is a quotation in the *Trilogy* from a now-lost letter of Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523), who is known to have ardently urged monks and communities in Syria and Mesopotamia to stand firm by their anti-Chalcedonian principles, for which he is considered as one of the founding fathers of the Syrian Orthodox Church, and has been venerated throughout the Middle Ages until the present day.[67] A sermon (*mimro*) was composed for him in the thirteenth century, to be delivered during his commemoration day at the Qartmin Abbey by a monk, Elijah, from the monastery.[68] Four commemoration dates, together with his name, are listed in a nineteenth-century copy of a liturgical book, *Fenqitho*, in Ṭur 'Abdin.[69] The author of

[62]Volker Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 109.
[63]*Lives*, 588.
[64] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 13-18.
[65]*Qartmin Trilogy*, 1.
[66]John of Ephesus, *Historia Ecclesiasticae,* Pars Tertia, trans. E. W. Brooks. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalis 106 (Louvain: Imperie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1952), 218ff.
[67] David A. Michelson, "Philoxenos of Mabbug," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas van Rompay (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 332-3; Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde, *Three Letters of Philoxenus Bishop of Mabbogh (485-519)* (Rome: Tipografia Della R. Accademia Dei Lincei, 1902), 6-20.
[68] John Watt, "Syriac Panegyric in Theory and Practice: Antony of Tagrit and Eli of Qartmin," *Le Muséon* 102 (1989): 86.
[69] Brock, *Fenqitho*, 173.

the *Trilogy* extracts a centuries-old letter of Philoxenus and inserts into his narrative that "to go there [Qartmin Abbey] seven times in faith is like going to Jerusalem."[70] The letter of Philoxenus, as quoted in the *Trilogy*, also states that the monastery was constructed in the likeness and after the pattern of Jerusalem, and that it is laid out according to the same design.

Philoxenus, according to his *Life*, arrived at Qartmin Abbey after having joined a group of monks who were on their way from the Mountain of Qardu to visit the monastery.[71] He spent a long time there learning languages, and he even became the head of the monastic school. He then moved to "the great monastery" of Tell 'Adda, where he also spent a considerable number of years.[72] He was in close contact with monasteries and monastic communities through occasional visits, but mostly through his letters. Applause was not the primary purpose of his communication, and therefore the praises of the monasteries are mostly short in his letters. To illustrate, in his *Letter to the Monks* he refers to the monastery, which the letter was addressed to, as "the holy, pure and faithful convent."[73] The only praise he has for the monastery in his *Letter to the Monks of Beth Gawgal* is a rhetorical question: "Where has not the fame of your holy monastery spread?"[74]

Compared to these examples, Philoxenus' praise of Qartmin Abbey appears as an extraordinarily bold eulogy. This observation notwithstanding, Philoxenus praised other monasteries that played significant roles in his religious life, just as he was praising Qartmin Abbey. For instance, about "the great monastery" of Tell 'Adda, where he went when he had left Qartmin Abbey, he wrote that it was "richer in

[70] *Qartmin Trilogy*, 18.
[71] Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 3 vols (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1958), III, 437.
[72] Ibid, 438.
[73] Vaschalde, *Philoxenus*, 93.
[74] Ibid. 106.

professors, students and exegetes than all other monasteries of the east and the west."[75] The author of the *Trilogy,* decontextualizing Philoxenus's general approach to monasteries, inserted extracts of his letter, if authentic, into his narrative in order to portray the monastery as almost comparable in sacredness to Jerusalem.

John of Ephesus and Philoxenus of Mabbug are not the only church fathers to whom the *Trilogy* refers. In the *Life of Simeon* (middle part of the *Trilogy*) it is written that Rabbula of Edessa visited Simeon at Qartmin and stayed there for six months in the year 723 AG (411/2).[76] According to the *Chronicle of Edessa* this is the year in which Rabbula, an ardent follower of Cyril of Alexandria, became the bishop of Edessa and built the church of Mor Stephanos.[77] Thus, although he was known to have had close relations with various monastic communities,[78] it is unlikely that he stayed at Qartmin for six months in the same year. Nevertheless, this fact appears to have not prevented the author of the *Trilogy* from inserting a story with Rabbula into the history of Qartmin Abbey. Another church father to whom a significant role is given in Simeon's *Life* is Dioscorus of Alexandria. In the *Trilogy* the patriarch of Alexandria is described as having "expelled from the holy church the wicked Flavian of Constantinople and Domnus of Antioch, the evildoer, also Irenaeus of Tyre, the rebel, and the cunning Ibas of Edessa, besides the proud and loathsome Theodoret of Cyrus."[79] He is also depicted as coming to Qartmin Abbey and helping the Qartminite monks fight with the inhabitants of a nearby village for Simeon's relics.[80] Again, the author gives an anachronistic story, for Simeon died in 744 AG (432/3), more than a decade before Dioscorus was made patriarch in 756 AG (444/5).[81] However, the author intended to

[75]Vööbus, *Asceticism*, III, 438.
[76]*Qartmin Trilogy*, 43.
[77]"The Chronicle of Edessa," *The Journal of Sacred Literature*, NS (series 4), 5 (1864): 34 [entry 51].
[78]Vööbus, *Asceticism*, III, 69.
[79] *Qartmin Trilogy*, 52.
[80] Ibid, 52-3.
[81]*Chronicle of Edessa*, 35 [entry 62].

connect the history of Qartmin Abbey with the Alexandrian tradition, regardless of the chronology of the events.

The *Life of Mor Shem'un d-Zayte*[82] is another prominent example of this hagiographical tradition in which one finds a strong doctrinally-charged discourse. Shem'un (d.734) was a Qartminite monk, who was ordained bishop of Harran.[83] He was reputed for his building projects in the region of Ṭur 'Abdin and his grand endowments to Qartmin Abbey.[84] His appellation 'of the Olives' is due to the olive groves he planted in the region of Ṭur 'Abdin. His *Life* was written by his nephew allegedly in the late-eighth century.[85] Like the *Qartmin Trilogy*, the *Life* of Shem'un has a distinctive anti-East Syrian (or anti-Chalcedonian, depending on the intention of the author) discourse. The so-called "Nestorians" are placed among the other non-Christian groups, Arabs and Jews. Allegedly, Shem'un had theological debates with members of the three groups.[86] Moreover, "Nestorians" are depicted as a hostile community that interfered with church-building projects of the Syrian Orthodox community in Nisibis.[87] The author notes:

> And what shall we say? For how many trials did he endure from the cursed Nestorians in the building of this church which we have spoken of? So that, from the intensity of their wickedness, their priests made a prohibition, that no one from their subdeacons should go with Mar Simeon, that is, the workmen who were laboring in the building of the church, either for pay or without pay.[88]

While the doctrinal discourse is explicit in the *Trilogy* and *Life of Shem'un* , in the *Life of Barṣawmo of the Northern Mountain* (d.458),[89] probably written between

[82] *Life of Shem'un d-Zayte*, Mardin MS, trans. Jack Tannous, unpublished, fol.152a-210a.
[83] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, 178a-179b; Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 160.
[84] Ibid.
[85] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, 209b-210a; Brock, *Fenqitho*, 174.
[86] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, 167a-168b.
[87] Ibid, 171a, 172a, 173a.
[88] Ibid, 173a.
[89] *Life of Barṣawmo of the Northern Mountain*, trans. Andrew Palmer, unpublished, prepared for J. Hahn, V. Menze, *Die syrische Vita Barsauma: Edition, Übersetzung und Analyse* (forthcoming); summary by F.

550 and 650,[90] the diction is subtler, though no less powerful. The *Life* is a long account of Barṣawmo's miracles and ascetic practices. He, according to his *Life*, went to Jerusalem twice, destroyed many synagogues during his travels, and also visited St. Simeon the Stylite, an account that is not found in any one of the three *Lives* of Simeon.[91] Barṣawmo is depicted as a zealous fighter for Christianity against Jews, Samaritans, pagans and Chalcedonians in the geographical context of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The author of this source gives detailed, yet not always historical, accounts of Barṣawmo's confrontations with the Chalcedonians. The first mention of Chalcedonians is the Emperor Marcian (r. 450-7) sending a great army to Alexandria and Palestine against the non-Chalcedonian groups. Thousands of people, according to the story, were slaughtered, sent into exile or imprisoned. Marcian suppressed the rebellion initiated by the non-Chalcedonian monk Theodosius against Juvenal, the bishop of Jerusalem, and banished unruly bishops after 453.[92] Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor gives an account of these events, but he does not give the number of murdered people.[93] Later in the *Life* there is an episode in which it is written that the Magistrate summons Barṣawmo to Constantinople, and accuses him of being a "wizard and false guide, the emperor's enemy and the murderer of bishops."[94] In fact, he was accused of murdering Flavian,

Nau in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 18 (1913): 272-6, 379-89; *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 19 (1914): 113-34, 278-89.

[90] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 17.

[91] *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, trans. Robert Doran, foreword Susan Ashbrook-Harvey (City: Cistercian Publications, 1992). The motif of a monk of the Upper Tigris visiting Simeon Stylites is used in the *Legend of Aaron*, as well. *La Légende d'Aaron de Saroug,* trans. Francois Nau, *Patrologia Orientalis* 5 (1910): 732.

[92] Menze, *Syrian Orthodox Church*, 15. The *Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, trans. Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, Translated Texts for Historians 45 (Liverpool: University Press, 2005), 52; Ernest Honigmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5, (1950): 253ff.

[93] *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor. Church and War in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey Greatrex, trans. Robert R. Phenix and Cornelia Horn, with contributions by Sebastian Brock and Witold Witakowski, Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool: University Press, 2011), III, 119ff.

[94] *Barṣawmo*, 75.

the bishop of Constantinople in 449.[95] Barṣawmo's answer was: "I have never killed a bishop; but the Lord will kill a priest who denies the truth."[96] Thus, the fatal hostility between the two Christian churches found its way into hagiography in the form of a dialogue, in which a murder is justified. Finally, the author of the *Life* narrates a plot of the "infidels" (Chalcedonians) to murder Barṣawmo in a church. His disciple, who does not let Barṣawmo go to the church, says to the Chalcedonian group, which accuses him of interfering with peace negotiations, "your love is enmity to God; and your mendacious peace will rebound upon you like a conflagration of wrath."[97]

What were the underlying dynamics behind the employment of a strong doctrinally-charged discourse in hagiographical compositions? The answer to this question has been explored more with regard to historiography than for hagiography. Although there is not a clear distinction between the two genres, they both encompass distinct literary forms.[98] With regard to the literature of Ṭur 'Abdin, chronographic works have been studied more than saints' lives, passions, miracle accounts, etc.

Michael Morony and Jan van Ginkel laboriously demonstrate that the church leaders and monks in the Near East, especially after the Arab conquests of the mid-seventh century, attached much importance to maintaining communal solidarity and doctrinal identity.[99] Therefore, they conclude, historiography was used as a tool to ensure the attachment of the Christian communities to their Christian identity under the Islamic rulers, and to defend the doctrinal grounds against "heretical" neighbors. The

[95] *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, 156.
[96] *Barṣawmo*, 75.
[97] Ibid, 87.
[98] Catherine Cubitt, "Introduction: Writing True Stories – A View from the West," in *Writing 'True Stories' : Historians and hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 11; Susan Ashbrook-Harvey, "Hagiography," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas van Rompay (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 185-186.
[99] Michael Morony, "History and Identity in the Syrian Churches," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, ed. J. J. van Ginkel, H. L. Murre-van den Berg, T. M. van Lint, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 134 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers & Department of

Chronicle of AD 819 and the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* (Michael the Great, d. 1199), for instance, emphasize the struggles among East Syrian, West Syrian and Melkite groups, particularly after the Arab conquests.[100] As Morony summarizes, "pan-Christian solidarity was not emphasized in Syriac historiography. Instead the solidarity of the confessional community against its rivals was emphasized."[101]

The hagiographical literature also developed parallel to this literary tradition.[102] In Jan-Eric Steppa's words, the Chalcedonian controversy in the sixth century became a struggle for history, and hagiography was used as a forceful weapon, for it could reconstruct and rewrite history.[103] It was used as a "method of reconstructing history" with which "each faction [both Chalcedonians and Anti-Chalcedonians] established its own 'facts,' in order to identify the unbroken line between the ancient fathers of the past and the champions of orthodoxy in the present."[104] As Vööbus states, Syrian monasticism "became the main force in all of the doctrinal battles. To involve particularly respected and influential monks in theological controversies for the purpose of using their authority to tip the scales in a desired direction was a well-tested tactic."[105] Those well-known monks of the earlier centuries, long after their deaths, were referred to in the same way in the medieval hagiographical literature to defend

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Oriental Studies, 2005), 15; Jan van Ginkel, "History and Community. Jacob of Edessa and the West Syrian Identity," in Ibid, 74; ter Haar Romeny, *West Syrian Identity*, 3.

[100] Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in West Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool 1993), 79; *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioch (1166-1199)* ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot (Paris, 1899, 1901), 491-4; Morony, *History and Identity*, 1-2.

[101] Morony, *History and Identity*, 4. For possible later changes in or questioning of this attitude see Herman Teule, "It Is Not Right To Call Ourselves Orthodox and the Others Heretics. Ecumenical Attitudes in the Jacobite Church in the Time of the Crusaders", in *East and West in the Crusader States: Context, Contacts, Confrontations*, ed. Krijnie Ciggaar and Herman Teule, (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2003), 13-27. Also note the twelfth and thirteenth-century writings in Arabic, in which the Syrian Orthodox identity was defined and defended for not only Christian but also Muslim communities. Herman Teule, "Reflections on Identity. The Suryoye of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Bar Salibi, Bar Shakko, and Bar Hebraeus," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89 (2009): 179-189.

[102] Brock, *Saints in Syriac*, 187. For propagandistic writings of the anti-Chalcedonians see Witold Witakowski, "Syrian Monophysite Propaganda in the Fifth to Seventh Centuries," in *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium,* ed. L. Rydén, J. O. Rosenqvist, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions, Vol. 4 (Stockholm, 1993): 57-66.

[103] Steppa, *Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, xxvii.

[104] Ibid.

doctrinal grounds. The final version of the *Qartmin Trilogy* and the *Life of Shem'un d-Zayte* were characteristic products of this tradition.

Yet, references to doctrinal controversies and other Christian groups were not always as prominent in Ṭur 'Abdin's medieval hagiography. The *Life of Aḥo of Rish'ayno*[106] demonstrates that sometimes authors clarified their doctrinal sides with only a brief, yet bold, statement at the beginning of their texts. The opening of the *Life of Aḥo* consists of a reference to the "heresy of Marcian, who divided God the Word into two natures."[107] No other reference to the Council of Chalcedon, however, appears throughout the *Life*. Aḥo is depicted as a defender of universal Christianity against pagans in the midst of a series of calamities at the Roman-Persian frontier. The author of the *Life* followed a hagiographical tradition that is known from another group of saints' lives, which will be elaborated in the remaining section of this chapter.

I.2. Reconstructing the Past, Rediscovering the Ancient Fathers

Beginning roughly from the ninth century onwards the monasteries of the Upper Tigris region produced an immense corpus of hagiographical literature to (re)construct a glorious ancient past.[108] The dynamics underlying these projects will not be elaborated here, but the literary products of this long time period, from the ninth century up until the thirteenth, constitute a distinct hagiographical tradition which will now be analyzed. Arguably the best-known example of this tradition is the *Life of Awgen*.[109]

[105]Vööbus, *Asceticism*, III, 197.
[106]Vatican Syriac Ms. 37, fol.176a-191b (I used a transcription of the MS by Andrew Palmer in this thesis); summary in Fiey, *Saints*, 30-31.
[107]*Aḥo*, 176a.
[108]Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 182ff, especially 183-184. For the Byzantine case see Claudia Rapp, "Byzantine Hagiographers as Antiquarians, Seventh to Tenth Centuries," in *Bosphorus. Essays in Honour of Cyril Mango*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis, Claudia Rapp and Dimitris Tsougarakis (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1995), 31-44.
[109] *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, ed. Paul Bedjan, III (Paris: Harrossowitz, 1892): 376-480.

Leading a massive exodus from Egypt with seventy (or seventy two) disciples, Awgen allegedly introduced Pachomian monasticism to northern Mesopotamia, founding his first monastic community on Mt. Izlo, the southern crescent of Ṭur ʻAbdin, in the fourth century.[110] It has been argued that his *Life* is not earlier than the ninth century, and that it has no historical value.[111] The continuing debate over the dating of this *Life* notwithstanding, the content of the text has not been subject to extensive research. Although the current study cannot close this scholarly gap, some aspects of the discourse and content of the *Life of Awgen* will be brought forth, for they are significantly similar to the saints' lives in Ṭur ʻAbdin.

One of the lives, the author of which was probably inspired by the *Life of Awgen* is the *Life of Aḥo.* Accounts of Persian raids, personal encounters of holy men with Persian kings, and alleged monastic foundations in Armenia are among the prominent common themes used in both *Lives*. Like Awgen and his disciples, Aḥo observed the custom of providing water for travelers.[112] There are also close resemblances in the diction of the two texts. The author of the *Life of Awgen* wishes the following: "May God give me wings like an eagle so I may fly and land in the spirit of this holy musician's godly deeds".[113] Similarly, one of Aḥo's brothers, when he witnesses Aḥo's grief for being separated from his family, before he realizes that this is their brother, says to the third brother "I wish I was made an eagle and could fly and see if our brother is as sad as him."[114]

[110]E.A. Wallis Budge, *Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas, Bishop of Marga A.D. 840*, Vol I (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1893), cxxxff.
[111]Vööbus, *Asceticism*, II, 218.
[112]*Aḥo*, fol.182b.
[113]*Awgen*, 376.
[114]*Aḥo*, fol.181b.

Another saint's life from the *Awgen Cycle* is that of Mor Pinḥas.[115] A pupil of Mor Awgen, Pinḥas also migrated to northern Mesopotamia from Egypt.[116] He was found by Persians in a cave and brought to the prefect, who ordered Pinḥas to worship the "seventy-two gods" of the Persians.[117] Pinḥas refused, and consequently was severely tortured and martyred. His body was placed in a church, but the parts of the body were "carried to seven different monasteries by the angels."[118] Miracles occurred through his relics and monastic communities gathered around the churches built over them. The *Life of Pinḥas* is undated, but the saint "has a place among the late, very long list of Mor Awgen's disciples."[119] The *Awgen Cycle* probably had deep impacts on the later saints' lives written in the Upper Tigris.[120] This is evident in many cases, one of which was the Life of Aḥo, which was briefly mentioned above. Two more examples will now be brought forth. One of them is the *Life of Malke*,[121] a holy man of Ṭur 'Abdin, who was considered a disciple of Awgen. The other instance is that the *Life of Pinḥas* closely resembles another prominent local saint's life from Ṭur 'Abdin, the *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ* (d. 421).[122]

Malke (d. 415) is listed as one of Awgen's disciples in the latter's *Life;* according to Malke's *Life* he also was Awgen's nephew.[123] Unlike Awgen's other disciples, however, Malke is associated with one of Ṭur 'Abdin's ancient monasteries, Mor Malke in Arkaḥ, in the southeastern part of the plateau.[124] According to his *Life*, he

[115] Adam McCollum, *The Story of Mar Pinḥas. Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Gorgias Press, 2012, forthcoming).
[116] Ibid, 22.
[117] Ibid, 27.
[118] Ibid, 35.
[119] Ibid, 6.
[120] Palmer, *Monk and Mason,* 178.
[121] *Legend of Malke*, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, ed. Paul Bedjan, V (Paris: Harrossowitz, 1892-5), 421-69; summary in Johnson, *Monks*; extracts in Palmer, *Monk and Mason*.
[122] *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ*, MS Damascus 12/17, fol.173a-181a; extracts in Palmer, *Monk and Mason*; summary in *Revue de l'Orien Chrétien*, 20 (1915-17):1-12; translation of an unspecified version of the *Life* in Johnson, *Monks*, 156-174.
[123] Budge, *Book of Governors*, cxxx; Johnson, *Monks*, 71.
[124] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 64, 178; Johnson, *Monks*, 69ff.

was, like Awgen, born in Clysma in Egypt.[125] He also abandoned his family and came to Mt. Izlo.[126] After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Egypt, Malke came back to northern Mesopotamia, settled near the village of Arkaḥ in Ṭur ʻAbdin and built a monastery there.[127] He went to Constantinople and healed the daughter of Emperor Constantius,[128] a *topos* found in the *Life of Aaron of Serug*, as will be analyzed below. Malke was a holy man of Ṭur ʻAbdin, whose story was written according to the *Life of Awgen*. Even though this scriptural process might have taken place when the monastery was taken over by the East Syrians after the Arab conquests, the saint's story and his close association with Awgen crystallized in the West Syrian tradition in both liturgical and hagiographical terms.[129]

The story of Yaʻqub of Ṣalaḥ also indicates a close relation between the hagiographical traditions of Mt. Izlo and Ṭur ʻAbdin. The monastery that is associated with him, namely the Monastery of Mor Yaʻqub in Ṣalaḥ, has been dated to the late fifth or early sixth century based on its architectural typology and sculpture.[130] There is also a possibility that he is the holy man Jacob, whom Procopius mentions as having played a significant role in defending the Roman frontier in a region close to Amida.[131] Thus, one can conclude that Yaʻqub of Ṣalaḥ's cult flourished in the sixth century in Ṭur ʻAbdin.[132] His *Life,* albeit as an oral tradition, emerged around this time, although the final version of this hitherto unedited *Life* might be much later.

According to his *Life*, Yaʻqub was born in Egypt.[133] After being a monk in a monastery near Alexandria he came to northern Mesopotamia with four of his brethren.

[125] Ibid, 70.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid, 71.
[128] Ibid, 72.
[129] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 178, n. 257; Brock, *Fenqitho*, 173.
[130] Bell and Mango, *Churches and Monasteries*, 10.
[131] Procopius, *Wars,* 51-53.
[132] Provided that the monastic church was named after him when it was built.
[133] *Yaʻqub*, fol.173a.

He settled near the village of Ṣalaḥ and started his solitary life as a recluse. Soon a cenobitic community gathered around him. His disciple, Daniel, was credited with founding the monastery after his death. Throughout this *Life*, one reads about the holy man's miracles, his encounters with pagans, Persian raids, martyrdom of the Christians, and his personal connections with Roman military officers and clergymen in the region.

In addition to the introductory story of the saint coming to northern Mesopotamia from Egypt, Ya'qub, like Pinḥas, was despised by the Persians for his long hair and foul appearance. In both lives Christians are forced to worship Persian gods and they are martyred for rejecting this order. Martyrdom at the hands of Persians is among the prominent themes in both texts. In fact, in the *Life of Ya'qub* the martyrdom story is prominent, as in the better-known Syriac hagiographies, such as the *Acts of Qardagh* and the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs*.[134] Churches were built in memory of martyrs, and monastic communities gathered around these churches in the narratives of both *Lives*. The close resemblances in these two *Lives* do not seem to be a coincidence, since, as Fiey notes, once there was a church dedicated to Pinḥas at the Monastery of Mor Ya'qub in Ṣalaḥ.[135]

The *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ*, while carrying similarities to the *Life of Pinḥas*, is closer thematically to the *Life of Aḥo of Rish'ayno*, which demonstrates that the hagiographical traditions of Ṭur 'Abdin, despite carrying similarities with the lives in the *Awgen Cycle*, ultimately formed a distinguished group. The cult of Aḥo must have flourished by the eighth century at the latest, for one of the prominent monasteries associated with him, the Monastery of the Cross in Bno Il in Ṭur 'Abdin, bears strong material and epigraphic evidence from that time period.[136] Aḥo's *Life*, however, might have been written or re-written later. There are no clear indications in the *Life* to

[134] Brock, *Saints in Syriac*, 185-186. Note that the *Life of Aḥo* uses this theme in a more subtle way.
[135] Fiey, *Saints,* 153.

securely date the text. Andrew Palmer argues that the initial author of the *Life* appears to have personally participated in the burial ceremony of Ḥeworo, Aḥo's disciple, for his account of this event is long and quite realistic.[137] This theory would indicate a sixth-century authorship of the *Life*, yet it is difficult to prove. The story about Aḥo attaining a piece of the True Cross in Constantinople indicates that the *Life* must have been written after Emperor Heraclius' (r. 610-641) reinstallation of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in 630.[138] A geographic term used in the *Life*, "the mound of the Turks," ܬܠܐ ܕܬܘܪܟܐ,might appear to point to a relatively later time period. In fact, it might indicate a *terminus post quem* due to the expansion of the Seljuk Empire into Asia Minor in the eleventh century. However, the name could have been used any time after the sixth century, for there were Turkish allies fighting in the Persian army against the Arab tribes from 565 onwards,[139] and it is possible that consequently some Turkic groups settled in northern Mesopotamia. Furthermore, the term "Turk" could be used to refer to various Turkic communities.[140]

Arguably more important than a precise dating of the *Life* is the literary tradition it belongs to, with regard to its content and discourse. Although the author makes a bold reference in the introduction to the ill-reputed Council of Chalcedon, the rest of the *Life* is different in content from the doctrinally charged hagiographical tradition. Aḥo, although claimed to have lived until the beginning of the sixth century, is totally isolated from doctrinal debates. He even visits Constantinople, works for four years in the "Great Church," ܥܕܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ, which probably refers to the Hagia Sophia. The author does not seem to have had any interest in placing him within the ardent

[136]Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 94, 96ff.
[137]Personal communication, January 2012.
[138] Walter E. Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 206, 326.
[139]Mark Dickens, "Medieval Syriac Historians' Perceptions of the Turks" (MPhil, University of Cambridge, 2004), 19.
[140] Ibid.

doctrinal debates of the time period. The similarities between this *Life* and that of Awgen were mentioned above. The parallels between the *Life of Aḥo* and the *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ* should also be pointed out.

The author of the *Life of Aḥo*, like that of Ya'qub, mentions the reign of Julian the Apostate at the very beginning of his narrative. Aḥo, like Ya'qub, saw a man in his dream who announces him that God had prepared a place for him to dwell. Both leave their brethren for pilgrimage and both pilgrimages include a sea voyage on the Mediterranean. They both heal lame children, "who were born like that from their mothers' womb," and the children become their disciples. Both *Lives* give accounts of Persian raids, together with names of the Persian commanders, and pagan religious practices. The theme of aspersion against holy men and disclosing the truth through a miracle is also commonly used.[141] Both *Lives* tell of stylites, and both give information about the Fortress of Ṭur 'Abdin and the relation of holy men to the commanders of the castle.[142]

The *Life of Aḥo* and the *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ* are strikingly similar to the *Life of Aaron*,[143] another local holy man of the Upper Tigris. According to his *Life*, which was allegedly written by his disciple Paul, Aaron lived in the third and fourth century (d. 337), having lived for a hundred and eighteen years,[144]a considerably long life like that of Aḥo. The theme of healing of a child that was born paralyzed is repeated.[145] Like Aḥo, Aaron also goes to Jerusalem and Armenia.[146] Connection with Constantinople is also among the tropes emphasized in both *Lives*. Aḥo makes a pilgrimage to

[141]*Aḥo*, fol.185a-186a; *Jacob*, fol.179b-180a; this theme was used in the *Life* of Simeon of Qartmin as well, *Trilogy*, 35.
[142]*Aḥo*, fol.184a; *Jacob*, fol.177a.
[143]*La Légende d'Aaron de Saroug,* trans. Francois Nau, *Patrologia Orientalis* 5 (1910): 701-49.
[144]Ibid, 702.
[145]Ibid, 708.
[146]Ibid, 707ff.

Constantinople, works for Hagia Sophia and attains a piece of the True Cross.[147] Aaron's connection with the royal city was more intense. The Emperor Constantine, according to the *Life*, demands that Aaron come to Constantinople.[148] Aaron arrives in the city, expels a demon from the Emperor's son and receives a generous benefaction for his monastery from Constantine,[149] just like the aforementioned Malke, who went to Constantinople for the same purpose during the reign of Constantius.

The last life to be compared with that of Aḥo is the *Life of Theodotus of Amida*.[150] Theodotus (d.698) was a monk who became the bishop of Amida. The twelfth-century manuscript in Damascus constitutes a *terminus ante quem* for the *Life*, even though the narrator of the *Life*, Josephus, claims to have witnessed some of the events that took place during Theodotus' lifetime.[151] Both thematically and formally the two lives are significantly similar to each other, and clearly belong to the same hagiographical tradition. The authors of both lives use a rural hagiographical geography, depicting the holy men in towns and villages rather than in cities (with a small number of exceptions). Even some of the place names they use are the same; like Aḥo, Theodotos also passes the river Arsenos.[152] Both holy men visit Jerusalem, followed by a voyage along the Mediterranean littoral; even the theme of a ship in danger of sinking is repeated.[153] Moving emotional scenes are frequently used in both lives. The conversation between Theodotos and Josephus that took place when Theodotos was dying at the monastery of Mor Abay near Qeleth in Ṭur 'Abdin is notably similar to the conversation between Aḥo and villagers when the holy man was

[147] *Aḥo*, fol.186a-b.
[148] *Aaron*, 729-30.
[149] Ibid, 735ff.
[150] I was able to read this *Life* only in an unpublished translation of Andrew Palmer, entitled "The Story or Heroic Deeds of the Holy One, My Lord Theodute, Bishop of the city of Amida." The *Life* survives in a twelfth-century manuscript in Damascus, MS Dam. 12/18 fol. 58a-69b. Palmer, *Saints' Lives*, 203-204.
[151] Ibid, 208.
[152] Ibid, 208.
[153] Ibid, 207.

dying.[154] Moreover, Palmer's observations about the grammatical formation of the *Life of Theodotos* are perfectly valid for the *Life of Aḥo*.[155] The latter *Life*'s author, as well, begins almost every sentence with an "and", and uses simple structures with direct speech.

The holy man was depicted as the friend of the oppressed, a miracle worker, leader of monastic communities, an inspiration for the youth, an embodiment of the faith in Christ, an ardent fighter for Christianity on the Roman-Persian frontier, a constant pilgrim and a stranger, and most importantly, a de facto maker of the Christian presence in a long-gone antiquity in northern Mesopotamia. This picture is the thematic core of the medieval hagiographical compositions presented in this section. The authors of these texts did not hesitate to forge history. Their intention was not to deceive, however, but to prove the ancient roots of the existence of specific monuments and spaces.[156]

The *Life of Awgen* was written to narrate the origins of northern Mesopotamian monasticism, especially the monastic communities on Mount Izlo. The *Life of Aḥo* presents the foundation of the Monastery of the Cross in Bno Il in Ṭur ʻAbdin. The *Life of Yaʻqub of Ṣalaḥ* narrates the foundation story of the Monastery of Mor Yaʻqub in Ṣalaḥ. The historical context and the credibility of the accounts in these texts were secondary, so were divisions within the Church, even if historically the issue should have mattered during the lifetime of the respective holy men. Although beginning earlier, in the region of Ṭur ʻAbdin this tradition flourished from the ninth century onwards, as seen in the formation of the *Awgen Cycle*.[157]

[154] Ibid, 209.
[155] Ibid, 206.
[156] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 184; Brock, *Syriac Hagiography*, 265.
[157] Vööbus, *Asceticism,* II, 219.

Originally the *Qartmin Trilogy* also belonged to this tradition. There are three prominent allusions to ancient church fathers in the former *Life of Simeon* in the *Trilogy*: the quotation from a now-lost letter of Philoxenus of Mabbug, and the alleged visits of Rabbula of Edessa and Dioscorus of Alexandria. The anachronisms with regard to the latter two were discussed above. The story of Dioscorus and the fight over Samuel's body was possibly added by a later author to connect the *Life of Samuel* to that of Gabriel.[158] If the later hand decided to add the person of Dioscorus to this intermediary story, he might be given credit for inserting stories from Philoxenus and Rabbula into Samuel's *Life*, too. If this hypothesis is correct, the original *Life* consisted only of accounts of miracles and the legendary foundation of Qartmin Abbey initiated by an angel. The main purpose of the *Life* was to narrate this legendary foundation story, and all the rest of the account was a background consisting of miracles.

Susan Ashbrook-Harvey's remark on the earliest versions of the *Lives* of St. Symeon Stylites helps contextualize this tradition within a wider chronological and geographical context. Ashbrook-Harvey states that "the very different authors of these lives [St. Simeon Stylites'] do not attempt to enlist him in party polemics, as later writers did, but show forth Simeon as friend of God and protector of the oppressed."[159] Likewise, a group of hagiographers of the Upper Tigris, some of whom probably had St. Simeon Stylites' *Lives* among their primary sources, seem to have followed the literary tradition of representing saints mainly as defenders of universal Christianity against pagans, Jews and other groups. Furthermore, the products of this tradition were

[158] Ibid, 14.
[159] "Introduction," in Doran, *Simeon,* 65-66. For an introduction to Ashbrook-Harvey's scholarship on St. Simeon Stylites see "The Memory and Meaning of a Saint: Two Homilies on Simeon Stylites," *Aram* 5 (1993): 219-41; The Stylite's Liturgy. Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 523-39.

construed as written proofs of the perennial existence of particular monuments in the region.

The *Lives* of Simeon of Qartmin, Awgen, Pinḥas, Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ, Theodotus, Malke and Aḥo are embodiments of this tradition. This group of texts helps one visualize that, especially after the ninth century, each monastic community needed the stories of its own ancient founding father(s). This indicates intense rivalry among monastic communities and struggles for survival, numerous examples of which were given by Michael the Great.[160]

The Middle Ages saw the establishment of two distinct hagiographical traditions. One, to which the *Awgen Cycle*, *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ, Life of Theodotos of Amida, Life of Malke* and the *Life of Aḥo* belong, endeavors to reconstruct a glorious divine past that appears as archaic as possible. The other, which produced the *Qartmin Trilogy*, *Life of Shem'un d-Zayte* and *Life of Barṣawmo*, however, was concerned with community identity and doctrinal distinctions in addition to a deeply-rooted tradition of holiness.

The latter tradition in particular was a reverberation of perceptions of spaces and of territorial claims in the region where East and the West Syrians, together with other Christian and non-Christian groups, lived in close proximity. John, the Bishop of Mardin (d. 1165)[161] notes the following in the preface of the canons of the Monastery of Mor Ḥanonyo: "Had I not given the monks the commandment to build monasteries in these places, then, those of other confessions from other Christian nations would have come and taken our places and our monasteries in this land."[162] Conflicts among various Christian groups over ownership of territories and monuments had been a major

[160] *Chronique,* 456, 525, 528ff; for a close analysis of the monastic rivalries see Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 174ff.
[161] Fiey, *Saints*, 111-112.
[162]The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition, II, trans. Arthur Vööbus, *CSCO*, 376 (Louvain: Secreteriat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalis, 1976), 225. (Translation slightly corrected.)

issue in the region since the sixth century, and this had a direct impact on a group of hagiographical compositions. The hagiographies that did not emphasize the doctrinal debates also shaped approaches to sacred spaces, albeit with seemingly different purposes. The next chapter will analyze approaches and perceptions of Ṭur ʻAbdin and its prominent sacred spaces within written sources.

CHAPTER II. HIEROTOPY THROUGH TEXTS: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF ṬUR ʻABDIN AND ITS SACRED SPACES

> I am convinced and assured […] that you will render the hill called in the tongue of the country Marde no meaner than the hill of Horeb, but even more glorious than that. For by drawing to you companies of holy monks, and of men who are living the coenobitic life while cleaving to orthodoxy, and by recalling and healing like shepherds and fathers at the same time those who have transgressed or otherwise become remiss and been swept away to follow the violence of the time you have also appropriated to your hill the glory of another higher and holier hill that is situated in Jerusalem, I mean on the cornerstone of Zion …

Severus, Patriarch of Antioch (512-518), thus praises the hill of Marde.[163] Which monastic community there did he have correspondences with? He asked this monastic community, in his letter: "I beg you to extend your diligent watchfulness which becomes shepherds to the God-loving archimandrites and devout solitaries, those that are near you and those that are geographically far from you."[164] Did he have monks and monasteries of Ṭur ʻAbdin in mind? Also, did John of Ephesus refer to Ṭur ʻAbdin as the "Desert of Hermits to the boundary of Persia" in his *Ecclesiastical History*?[165] One can comfortably assume that Ṭur ʻAbdin was, at least partially, a part of Severus' "holy hill" and John's "desert." As mentioned in the previous chapter, even though Ṭur ʻAbdin was acknowledged by John for its monastic communities, it does not seem to have had a specific appellation by the sixth century; "desert of hermits" at best. Did this change in the Middle Ages? The current chapter analyzes medieval literary reconstructions with regard to Ṭur ʻAbdin and its churches and monasteries as immensely holy places.

[163] *The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch,* trans. E. W. Brooks, vol. II, part II (Londo: Williams and Norgate, 1904), 346-7.
[164] Ibid, 349.

II.1. Qartmin Abbey: The Kernel of the Sacred

A specific group of hagiographical compositions evolved around the most prominent monastery of Ṭur ʻAbdin, Qartmin Abbey. The *Qartmin Trilogy* and *the Life of Shemʻun d-Zayte* are the cornerstones of this literary corpus. Both of them narrate the foundation and the early history of Qartmin Abbey, attempting to build a community identity by integrating the history of the monastery to other monasteries and churches in the region.[166] Two levels of analysis should be introduced here, first, the way the narration describes how sacred spaces are determined and founded, and, at the second level, the sacred spaces' relation to other spaces, to the region and to the Christian communities in the region.

According to the *Qartmin Trilogy*, the locations of sacred spaces in Ṭur ʻAbdin were determined by God and his angels, holy relics, the use of liturgical time or by replacing former pagan sites. Samuel builds his first monastery on top of the relics of the martyr-bishop Karpos,[167] who was the bishop of Sawro (the northwest edge of Ṭur ʻAbdin) in the fourth century according to the *Trilogy*, yet he probably lived in the sixth century.[168] When Samuel and Simeon walk away from their former village to found a monastery they occasionally utilize liturgical time to identify or declare sacred spaces. With each tenth part of the psalm they build a small House of Prayer.[169] At the end of their journey an angel speaks to Simeon and says: "Come! Let us go on ahead and lay the foundations of an abbey! First of all, as is fitting and right, we shall build a beth

[165] *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum Vulgo Dictum*, ed. I.-B. Chabot, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalis 104 (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae 1933), 21.
[166] Note that John of Mardin revitalized the Syriac language in the twelfth century while restoring churches and monasteries, Vööbus, *Synodicon*, II, 202. Also, see how the author refers to the presence of the 'Kurds' and the lack of Syrian monks, Ibid. 210, 212.
[167] *Qartmin Trilogy*, 9; Fiey, *Saints,* 59.
[168] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 23-24.
[169] *Qartmin Trilogy*, 9.

slutho."[170] The angel shows him where to build a monastery and even places the first foundation stone of Qartmin Abbey.

Qartmin Abbey not only has a venerable foundation story, but also becomes comparable to Jerusalem in sacredness, in the *Trilogy*. The author, as mentioned above, quotes from a now-lost letter of Philoxenus of Mabbug, who allegedly wrote that "to go there [Qartmin Abbey] seven times in faith is like going to Jerusalem." This hierotopical reference must have generated deep feelings of attachment and veneration among the audience of the *Trilogy*, that is, the monks and lay communities associated with the monastery.

The author of the *Trilogy* promotes Qartmin Abbey by emphasizing its reputation as comparable to Jerusalem in sacredness. Promoting and enhancing the statuses of monasteries through metaphorically likening them to Jerusalem is an ancient concept. According to the Arabic *Life* of Shenoute of Atripe (385-465), Shenoute told Jesus that he preferred his brethren to visit the holy sites at Jerusalem, to which Jesus answered as the following: "You shall glorify Jerusalem in your monastery, which you have dedicated to my name together with those who will hear and obey you, as equals of angels. … You must know that my Cross is everywhere for whoever desires to repent."[171] As Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony states, "preference for local pilgrimage … became a prevalent motif in the hagiographical literature and infiltrated the milieu of the Middle Ages."[172] Comparing Qartmin Abbey to Jerusalem in the *Trilogy* is a perfect example to this, and the focus on local sacred spaces was not confined to Qartmin Abbey in Ṭur ʿAbdin.

While the *Qartmin Trilogy* focuses primarily on the history of the monastery, and the holy men associated with the former, in the *Life of Shemʿun d-Zayte* one sees a

[170] Ibid, 18.

more expanded territorial approach to Ṭur ʻAbdin. The author of the *Life* connects the story of Shemʻun to Qartmin Abbey, stating that "it was in the holy Monastery of Mar Samuel and Mar Simeon and Mar Gabriel that Mar Simeon of the Olives received instruction in his youth."[173] The *Life* shows that it was a well-established tradition that young boys of the region were sent to Qartmin Abbey.[174] This powerful connection with Qartmin Abbey notwithstanding, the *Life* puts specific emphasis on the regional importance of Ṭur ʻAbdin for the Syrian Orthodox community.

One of the rudimentary indications of this ideology is that the author refers to the region as "all (the region of) Ṭur ʻAbdin" on multiple occasions. He not only indicates the existence of a definite territory with a particular appellation, that is Ṭur ʻAbdin, but also emphasizes the unity of the community in this region under the Syrian Orthodox church leaders. Some of the clear manifestations of this are observable in the following examples:

> […]according to the rule which was of old in all the region of Ṭur ʻAbdin each male child is given to the monastery for instruction. […] [Shemʻun 's] report went out into all of Ṭur ʻAbdin and God was working many wonders through him. […] from them [the olive groves Shemʻun planted], light was provided for all of the monastery and the churches of the entire region of Ṭur ʻAbdin. […] God willed and Mar John, the bishop of the monastery and of all of Ṭur ʻAbdin passed away. […] all the inhabitants of Ṭur ʻAbdin rejoiced in him [Shemʻun][175]

These and similar expressions, frequently used in the *Life*, can be construed as attempts to literally present the region as a united Syrian Orthodox territory inhabited by the Syrian Orthodox communities with established religious traditions. The communal aspect of the aforementioned representations is also clear in the way the author of the *Life of Shemʻun d-Zayte* emphasizes the church building activity undertaken by

[171] Quoted in Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: the Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 202-3.
[172] Ibid.
[173] *Shemʻun d-Zayte*, fol.152a-152b.
[174] Ibid. fol.152b-153a.
[175] Ibid. fol.152b, 155a, 158a, 162a, 172b, 191a, 201a, 203b, 204a.

Shem'un and how it was frequently interfered by "Nestorians," that is, probably the Chalcedonians.[176]

Qartmin Abbey is the kernel of the sacred in Ṭur 'Abdin. It is the most prominent sacred space in the region that embodies the holy past. The author of the final redaction of the *Trilogy*, while fine-tuning the details of the *Lives*, connects the history of the Abbey to a well-known clergy member from Ṭur 'Abdin, Shem'un d-Zayte.[177] Allegedly Shem'un was present at Gabriel's funeral, which is most probably not historically correct. Nevertheless, connection to Shem'un d-Zayte was a much desired historicity, for the latter man, the Bishop of Harran, undertook major investments in Ṭur 'Abdin. The olive groves Shem'un planted were a territorial extension of Qartmin Abbey, while the churches and monasteries built by him were the spiritual extension of the former. The relation of Shem'un to Qartmin was reinforced by the *Life* of Shem'un , as well. Shem'un, according to the *Life*, was instructed in Qartmin, endowed abundant property to the monastery, and was finally buried there.

By roughly the ninth century, the hagiographical tradition pertaining to Qartmin Abbey was established, communicating, to the monks and possibly to the lay people, the antiquity, sacredness and unity of Ṭur 'Abdin. What hierotopical message did the hagiographies of other monasteries in the region communicate to their audiences?

II.2. Independent Hagiographical Compositions of Other Monasteries

In the other group of hagiographical compositions of Ṭur 'Abdin we see that the authors were not interested in claiming the sacred unity of the plateau. Their primary goal seems to have been promoting specific monasteries in the region. The *Lives of Aḥo*

[176] Ibid. fol.171a-173a.
[177] The act of rewriting a *Life*, also known as *metaphraseis* is elaborated in Rapp, *Byzantine Hagiographers*, 34ff.

of Rish'ayno and *Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ* are among the prominent examples of these compositions.

The author of the *Life of Aḥo of Rish'ayno*, although indicating that the region was known as Ṭur 'Abdin, does not mention either any other monastic community in the region (Qartmin Abbey, for instance) or the Syrian Orthodox identity, which must have begun to flourish by the time Aḥo allegedly lived (the fifth-sixth century). The author rather allocates his entire narrative to arguing for the riches of Aḥo's monasteries along with the latter's ancient history.

The two monasteries, the monastery at the "mound of the Turks"[178] and the White Monastery at Bno II,[179] must have been known in Ṭur 'Abdin by the time the *Life* took its final form. It is difficult to identify the former, since no place in Ṭur 'Abdin has been identified as the "mound of the Turks."[180] The monastery at Bno II, on the other hand, is identified as the monastery at Dayro d-Fum, to the north-west of Qal'at Haytam Ṭay.[181] The author of the *Life of Aḥo* claims a great expansion of territory, between two monasteries, to have belonged to the monastic community, drawing a magnificent holy past through the persona of Aḥo.

The *Life* of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ also follows this tradition. This *Life* narrates not only a glorious martyrdom story, but also the foundation of the monastery at Ṣalaḥ. According to the story, the monastery was built shortly after the death of Ya'qub in 421, on the church that had been built atop the Temple of Heracles.[182] Although the highlight of the entire story is the foundation of the monastery of Mor Ya'qub in Ṣalaḥ by his disciples after his death, which is narrated only at the end of the *Life*, the author connects numerous sacred spaces in the region of Upper Tigris to this holy man.

[178] Aḥo fol.180a.
[179] Ibid. fol.183a-184a.
[180] It might even be a corrupted version of a different place name.
[181] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 7.
[182] Johnson, *Monks*, 166.

According to the story, Ya'qub initially inhabited a tower in Syria.[183] From there he first went to Tarsus, thence to Amida. His first encounter with Ṭur 'Abdin monasticism is through his meeting with Bar Shabo and his stay at the latter's monastery. Ya'qub traveled in the region together with Bar Shabo, visiting villages, other monasteries and performing miracles. After the alleged martyrdom of Bar Shabo and his disciples at the hands of the Persians, Ya'qub started dwelling at their monastery, the point in the story at which Ya'qub settled in Ṭur 'Abdin. The author notes "to this day it is called the House of Martyrs of Bar Shabo the Abbot and Eleven of his Disciples."[184] He then mentions that Ya'qub's disciples Halo and Daniel served both this church and Ya'qub himself, who was then a recluse. The author also writes that the "region was blessed by his footsteps."[185] This is the first part in the *Life* in which a sacred space in Ṭur 'Abdin is attested for Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ.

The author, after bringing forth a number of miracles, connects his story to another monastery in Ṭur 'Abdin, the Monastery of Mor Ḥalo. Allegedly, this was built by Ya'qub's disciple Ḥalo, who left his master Ya'qub and built his own monastery. The topos of a disciple of a holy man associated with a monastery is familiar from Aḥo, whose second monastery was named after his disciple Ḥeworo according to his *Life*.[186]

The final part of the *Life of Ya'qub* consists of the Holy Man's prayer for the brethren and the inhabitants of the region. After his death his disciples Daniel and Theophilus, who are also purported to have been the first two abbots of the monastery, gradually expanded the Monastery of Mor Ya'qub. Initially the saint was buried in the Church which had existed there since the martyrdom of Bar Shabo and his disciples. Then "probably at the end of the fifth century" the author says, Daniel initiated a grand construction to build a larger church. Finally, under the Abbot Theophilus, at the

[183] Ibid, 158-9.
[184] Ibid, 168.

beginning of the sixth century, the Church was reconstructed on a larger scale. This renovation was possibly the one that was recorded in a group of inscriptions in the Church. One of the inscriptions gives the date of 753 for the renovation of the Church and mentions Abbot Theophilus.[187] Palmer states that the so-called restoration of the Church was almost nothing less than a complete rebuilding.[188] The author of the *Life of Ya'qub*, at the very end of the text, emphasizes that the building project mentioned in an inscription from 737 is a renovation of the Church. Describing building projects as renovations, on the one hand, enabled Christians to avoid conflicts with Muslim rulers, who condemned building new churches.[189] On the other hand, the statements ensured the local populace that their churches were originally constructed long before recorded history, the one found in inscriptions.

The author of the *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ* reconstructs a holy past that is built above the life story of a fifth-century holy man for the monastery of Mor Ya'qub in Ṣalaḥ, which dates back architecturally to the sixth, and epigraphically to the eighth century. Similarly, the author of the *Life of Aḥo* had the agenda of promoting the monasteries associated with the holy man Aḥo. What were the motivations and driving forces steering the composition of these literary monuments?

II.3. Hierotopical Perceptions in Ṭur 'Abdin in the Middle Ages

> [w]e could never find out when, how and by whom it [the Monastery of Mor Ḥanonyo] was built nor the name of the saint by whose name it was (first) known and proclaimed before Bishop Ḥanonyo- as this has happened to many monasteries whose stories of the saints on whose names they were built (have been lost). As (for example) that of the holy Mor Behnam, who now in in our days is doing miracles and mighty works (just) as in the time of the apostles, to all those who come to him in faith. There is no story at all about him except only that which is told

[185] Ibid.
[186] *Aḥo*, fol. 184a.
[187] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 206-7.
[188] Ibid, 187, 207.
[189] Ibid.

> in oral tradition- and one as it pleases him can tell it in an elaborate or in a concise (way). So this is the reason why we remembered these monasteries [the ones restored by John of Mardin in the twelfth century], the origin of their building and the names of the saints who built on the resting places of the saints, (although), indeed, it would be proper that there ought to be a special story for each monastery.[190]

Michael the Great, as quoted above, expresses the unreliability of oral tradition, and emphasizes the need for possessing the written form of foundation stories for each church and monastery John of Mardin restored. John, while bishop of Mardin in the twelfth century, undertook a massive project of constructing and restoring numerous churches and monasteries in the region of Mardin and Ṭur ʻAbdin.[191] He was recorded as having mentioned that his aim was to encourage that many of these sacred spaces become inhabited by monks.[192] Thus, he created a taskscape, as Peter Jordan uses the term.[193] That is, he created a landscape in which the visitors – lay people and monks – were expected to undertake certain tasks - take care, venerate and inhabit the sacred spaces that were restored.

Rebuilding ruined sacred monuments, however, was not enough; one needed to know when and by which holy man it had been founded. This is a fundamental insight into the close relation between the hagiographical compositions and sacred spaces in Ṭur ʻAbdin. In the absence of the former the latter's sacredness was not complete. Hagiographical compositions not only secured the information pertaining to the history of particular churches and monasteries, but also established and reinforced the traditions pertaining to the perception of those sacred spaces. These traditions appear to have evolved around two main concepts; the relics of the founding father(s) and further expansion of monastic landscapes, generally through the former's disciples.

[190] Michael the Great, "About Mor Yuhannon of Marde," in Vööbus, *Synodicon*, II, 207.
[191] Ibid, 205-7.
[192] Ibid, 206.
[193] Peter Jordan, *Material Culture and Sacred Landscape. The Anthropology of the Siberian Khanty* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 17-18.

One of the dramatic scenes in the *Qartmin Trilogy* is when brethren at the monastery, about a century after Mor Gabriel's death (667), exhume his body. Amazed how well-preserved the body is, they bring the body into the church, place it on the north side, and pray "with" the holy man, in order to cure an epidemic.[194] There was no holy man alive, as implied in the story, to call on for help. As Palmer, argues, relics in the Middle Ages were given an immense amount of value, more than in Late Antiquity.[195] Starting from the late-seventh century, and particularly after the mid-eighth century, relics were a significant source of power and thus determinants of sacred spaces. The monks at Qartmin wanted to know how many holy fathers were buried at the House of Saints. The author of the *Life of Shem'un d-Zayte* emphasized the burial of Shem'un at Qartmin Abbey, near Mor Samuel and Mor Shem'un of Qartmin.

The author of the *Life* of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ gave a detailed account of Bar Shabo and his disciples' martyrdom, and the church built over their relics. The author of the *Life of Aḥo of Rish'ayno* brought forth the most venerable of all relics, the True Cross, into his narrative; Aḥo allegedly acquired a piece of the True Cross in Constantinople and took it back to his monastery. The importance of relics in sacred spaces can be seen, besides the literary topoi in hagiographical compositions, in the *West Syrian Synodicon*, in which John of Mardin's restorations are narrated. The author says that the saints buried in the restored monasteries still make supplications "from their resting places."[196]

In the *Trilogy* it is not only Gabriel's relics that receive special attention. It happens that the holy men who are buried in the vicinity of the holy abbey live, act and speak like living people. All of the saints are literally present there, which is why the

[194] *Trilogy*, 89-91.
[195] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 182ff.

monastery was perceived as an immensely holy place. A monk in Qartmin Abbey takes an oath that he "shall never leave this holy abbey nor the vicinity of your resting place, in which the dead converse and speak with the living on equal terms whenever they will."[197] One of these holy fathers seems to have been Shem'un d-Zayte, who, after his impending death was revealed to him by God, chose to come and spend the last years of his life at Qartmin, where he was finally buried in a niche.[198] The author writes that his relics still perform miracles. Note that in the *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ* the martyred Abbot Bar Shabo and his disciples' voices "were heard in the night singing Hallelujahs like the angels in heaven" after a church was built where they were martyred, the place that was later to become the monastery Mor Ya'qub.[199]

This notion of the continuous presence of the holy is observed in numerous hermits' caves throughout Ṭur 'Abdin, which are taken over and successively inhabited by generations of monks and hermits. Throughout the generations the holy fathers of Ṭur 'Abdin have continued to live in these places, like a *genius loci* or even the *numen* of the place. Although these terms are used particularly in the Roman-religious context, the notion of a living, protective spirit inhabiting a specific space is comfortably applicable to the practice in Ṭur 'Abdin. A prominent example of this notion is the series of caves north of the Monastery of Mor Ya'qub in Ṣalaḥ, which were inhabited by monks until recently. Another modern example is the village of Beth Svirina, which is believed to be protected by the twenty five saints, i.e. churches and chapels, surrounding it. Each holy man, whose relics are believed to be buried in these sacred spaces, is believed to be protecting the village.[200]

[196] Vööbus, *Synodicon,* II, 207.
[197] *Qartmin Trilogy*, 71.
[198] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, fol. 203b-206b.
[199] Johnson, *Monks*, 168.
[200] Hollerweger, *Turabdin*, 253.

Figure 4. Hermits' caves north of the Monastery of Mor Ya'qub, Ṣalaḥ (fifteenth century?) (Photo by the author, Feb. 2010)

The second notion pertaining to sacred spaces that arises from hagiographical compositions is the territorial expansions of monastic settings. The *Qartmin Trilogy* portrays the sense of a flexible monastic setting. The monks there are depicted as not strictly secluded within the enclosure wall; "some would go down into the great broad wadi and even further away from it and there they would stand and chant, some alone, some in pairs."[201] Qartmin Abbey also had numerous monasteries associated with it. The monastery of Mor Abrohom and Abel in Midyat is described as an "offshoot" (ܢܚܬܐ) or daughter-house of Qartmin Abbey;[202] so was the monastery near Serwan, which was inhabited by the seventh-century stylite Shem'un.[203] The spiritual extension of the monastery was solidified and materialized under Shem'un d-Zayte, who endowed gardens, fields, villages, churches and monasteries on Qartmin Abbey.[204]

In Shem'un's *Life* one also encounters a particular monastic disposition, the foundation of a lower and an upper monastery:

> After these things, he [Shem'un] went and enclosed himself in a pillar which was high, and fair and excellent, which was in the lower monastery which had been built by the first monks who were in the plain which is next to the ancient city of Sīrwān which had been built by Shapur the King of the Persians and then the Romans destroyed it in

[201] *Trilogy,* 61.
[202] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 114 n. 3.
[203] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, fol. 154b-155b.
[204] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, fol.160b-163a, 178a.

> battle. Mar Simeon dwelt in the pillar of this monastery, as we have said, with many monks and husbandmen (who were from their monastery of Qartmin) who were living in this lower monastery and who were sowing many plots of land with the plow for the table which was in the monastery.[205]

Here, one sees a physical connection between multiple monasteries, one of which is called "the lower monastery," and another one is Qartmin Abbey. The notion of physically connected monastic settings, a glimpse of which is given in the *Life of Shem'un d-Zayte*, is thoroughly described in the *Life of Aḥo of Rish'ayno*.

> And they were leaving the lower monastery for the upper monastery while singing, celebrating and praising [God] and their estates had no interruption from one gate to the other. And all the inhabitants of that locality were going and coming more during the night than during daytime.[206]

The author of the *Life of Aḥo of Rish'ayno* narrates the spiritual and physical connection of the two monasteries believed to have been founded under the divine guidance of Aḥo. He notes that, while the brethren of the two monasteries walked frequently between the lower and the upper monastery singing psalms and hallelujahs, nothing physically interfered from door to door between the properties of these two monasteries.

The first monastery, according to the *Life*, was built by the lay man Theodor. He also endowed the monastery with many fields and vineyards, which previously had belonged to the nearby village. When Aḥo's mother found his monastery, she saw the harvest near the monastery, which indicates both the territorial expansion and the riches of the monastery. Aḥo's second monastery, the White Monastery (the Upper Monastery) at Bno Il, was built by Theodor. Later in the *Life* one reads about the wealth of this monastery, leaving which Aḥo began his second pilgrimage, and the monastery's close relations with both the Lower Monastery and the Qal'at Haytam Ṭay.

[205] Ibid. fol.154b-155a.

Interdependence did not always occur between monasteries built close to one another. John of Mardin tells about the interrelation between the Monastery of Mor Ḥanonyo and that of Mor Abai in Sawro, and how the two acted together. He orders that

> anything that is left over of the crop and other things and of produce and of harvest and fruits, shall be used to fill the need of the place [the Monastery of Mor Abai] and of its brethren –that the remainder shall be brought to this said monastery. And (also) when the Monastery of Mor Abai is in need, then they from Mor Ḥanonyo shall bring to fill its need.[207]

Although the Monastery of Mor Ḥanonyo was the seat of the patriarch in the twelfth century, and thus it was natural that it took care of other Syrian Orthodox monasteries in the region, it is significant that this was put into writing. In this way, the spiritual and physical connection between the two monasteries was reinforced and part of the territory of Syrian Orthodox monasticism was defined.

The landmarks of the spiritual territory in Ṭur ʻAbdin were not only the monasteries; hagiographical writings highlight the spiritual, economic, and social relations between the monasteries and villages of the plateau. Despite the divine experience that demarcates sacred space, sacred and profane spaces in Ṭur ʻAbdin have always been integral parts of each other. When Samuel and Simeon in the *Qartmin Trilogy* start out on their spiritual journey, they first settle "one bow-shot's distance from the village [of Qartmin]."[208] This physical proximity between the village and the monastic setting underlined by the *Trilogy* is clearly visible in Ṭur ʻAbdin, and is probably the result of the protective role of holy men, coupled with their dependence on villages and the topographical features of the plateau.

[206] *Aḥo,* fol.184b.
[207] John of Mardin, "Other Canons about the Monasteries of Mor Abai and of Mor Ḥanonyo," in Vööbus, *Synodicon*, II, 230.
[208] *Qartmin Trilogy,* 15.

Each monastic community on the plateau had a territory consisting of not only various interconnected monasteries, but also villages.[209] The *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ* mentions that Daniel, Ya'qub's successor, "acquired many villages" for the monastery when the community flourished.[210] Likewise, Shem'un d-Zayte purchased villages, among other assets, for Qartmin Abbey in the seventh century.[211]

The visual and physical relation between the villages, the monasteries and with smaller hermits' caves and smaller monasteries constitute a multi-layered sacred order, in which the main monastery of a district is a focal sacred point between the village and the associated smaller monasteries. The monastery of Mor Ya'qub in Ṣalaḥ has a visually connected disposition to the village on its south-east. In contrast, the monastery has a spiritual extension to the north, through numerous hermits' caves, not all of which are visible from the village.[212] The monastery of Mor Abay in Qeleth is connected to the village and to the smaller monasteries of Mor Dimeṭ, Mor Shabay, Mor Theodotos and the hermits' cave dedicated to Mor Barṣawmo on the opposite side of the valley.[213] The same visual relation exists between the monastery of Mor Abrohom and Hobel and the village of Midyat to the west.

[209] Palmer, LXX *Monastéries*, 194-5; *Monk and Mason*, 28, 110-11. Note the term "satellite arrangement" he uses.
[210] extract in Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 110, n.198.
[211] *Shem'un d-Zayte*, fol. 178a.
[212] Author's observations, especially during the field work in February 2010.
[213] Hollerweger. *Turabdin*, 149.

Figure 5. The Monastery of Mor Barṣawmo seen from the village of Beth Svirina (Photograph by the author, Feb. 2010)

Figure 6. The village of Qeleth seen from the Monastery of Mor Abay (Photograph by the author, Apr. 2010)

A hierotopical map of Ṭur ‘Abdin can be generated as a network of main and subsidiary monasteries, with extensions in the form of hermits’ caves into the uninhabited areas of the plateau and in the form of visual exposure and churches reaching into the inhabited areas. The interrelation between these sacred and profane spaces is well depicted by Gregory bar Hebraeus (d. 1286, Bishop of Aleppo, Maphrian

of the East and a prominent Syrian Orthodox author) writing about the rules of perfection for monks:

> At any village or town he [a traveling monk] reaches, he has first to present himself at the church. He shall not remain longer than three days in the same village or town. And when he has reached the cell of the Father [he wishes to visit], he shall not knock at his door, but sit down till he will perceive and call him.[214]

He also states that in some cases recluses engaged much in earthly matters, in their caves, to the extent that their cells became meeting-places for people from towns and villages, and that in those instances hermits should leave their caves.[215] Intense physical and social interrelation between the villages and monastic settings in Ṭur ʻAbdin, the seeds of which were sown in Late Antiquity, continued well into the Middle Ages. While Bar Hebraeus' accounts show some of the dynamics underlying these relations and the way canonical rules tried to keep them under control, within the hagiographical traditions another hierotopical notion is expressed: pious laymen and their role in building and protecting sacred spaces.

The author of the *Qartmin Trilogy* does not highlight this notion. The story of the monastery is kept to a great extent within the spiritual realm, although economic and social relations with the villages and lay people in the vicinity are mentioned. Simeon and Samuel, the two founding fathers of the monastery, begin their spiritual journey by detaching themselves from the nearby village. In the rest of the story there is hardly any hierotopic connection between the monastery and the surrounding lay setting. This pattern changed significantly in the *Life* of Shemʻun d-Zayte.

In the latter *Life*, Shemʻun is not merely depicted as a holy man. As Palmer states, the purpose of his *Life* seems to be giving account of his economic activities and

[214] *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove, Together with some Chapters from his Ethicon*, trans. A. J. Wensinck (Leyden: Brill, 1919), 31.
[215] Ibid, 20-22, 30.

building projects.[216] He is a local from Ṭur ʻAbdin and he expands the (spiritual) extension of Qartmin Abbey to villages, mills, olive groves, etc. He is an exemplary landlord, an outstandingly pious man, who supports the economic well-being and social reputation of the monastery (and other sacred monuments of Ṭur ʻAbdin) to the full. He endows all his monetary holdings on Qartmin Abbey and represents the monastery and Christians of the region in the highest courts of the ruling powers. The author of this *Life* does not hesitate to create a miraculously long life span for him, from the early eighth century to the reign of al-Maʻmun (r. 813-833),[217] in order to serve all these purposes. The Fortress of Ṭur ʻAbdin, called "fortress of Demetrius (allegedly its original founder)" and "Haythum," is also mentioned in the *Life*.[218] It is narrated that Shemʻun ordered leaders of the region, Abraham and Lazarus, to rebuild the fortresses, one of which was this castle. His spiritual duty was not only to support the monasteries, but also to reinforce the security of the region.

The role of pious laymen in determining the hierotopic qualifications of Ṭur ʻAbdin finds one of its most prominent examples in the *Life of Aḥo*. Both of Aḥo's monasteries in Ṭur ʻAbdin were allegedly built under the patronage of Theodor, a Christian landlord from the region. He did not only built splendid monasteries for Aḥo and his disciples, but also endowed great stretches of land to the community. His piety, zeal, generosity and eagerness are occasionally noted in the *Life*. He became so holy that, although being a lay person, he was buried in the House of Saints (burial chamber) of the monastery.

Another patron of Aḥo's monastery was the commander of the Fortress of Ṭur ʻAbdin, Demetrius the Roman. The author, having mentioned the physical proximity of the monastery to the Fortress of Ṭur ʻAbdin, elaborates on how Demetrius was a pious

[216] *Monk and Mason*, 183.
[217] *Shemʻun d-Zayte*, fol.166a-167a.

soldier who frequently visited the monastery and built a burial chamber out of hewn stone for the abbey.[219] He was, like Theodor, buried in this chamber as a reward for his piety. The monasteries associated with Aḥo were depicted in the *Life* of Aḥo as generously supported places, the security of which was assured by the high military officials of the region. This pattern is repeated in the *Life of Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ*, in which Rufus, the governor of Hesno d-Kifo, frequently visits Ya'qub's monastery, is blessed by the holy man, and supports the community on various occasions.[220]

The dynamics underlying the literary emphasis on the close relations between sacred spaces and pious patrons are evident in the socio-economic changes in the Middle Ages in Ṭur 'Abdin. Although the situation regarding building and the security of churches and monasteries under the initial Muslim rulers was in flux, from the late eighth century onwards monasteries were no longer exempt from taxes (*jizya*)[221] and, during Mutawakkil's reign (821-861), there was an official ban on church building.[222] Over the course of the ninth and tenth century the Eastern Mediterranean was gradually transformed into an Islamic landscape.[223] A significant aspect of this Islamic world, however, must have been the patches of Christian strongholds, one of which was the region of Ṭur 'Abdin. This gradual exacerbation and isolation made the monasteries dependent on the local landlords as patrons and protectors.[224] The landlords, emerging either from among wealthy lay persons or clergymen, managed the assets and income of monasteries, which were now subject to taxes. They were also patrons of building activity, as observed in the commemorative inscription that notes the contributions of

[218] Ibid. fol.157a-158b.
[219] *Aḥo*, fol.184a-185b.
[220] For other villages that possibly were founded by *limitanei* see Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 54-5.
[221] Ibid, 187.
[222] A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects* (Humphrey: Oxford University Press, 1930), 50ff.
[223] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: University Press, 2008), 14.

local patrons to the rebuilding of the conventual church in Ṣalaḥ in 753.[225] According to this inscription, numerous lay persons contributed varying amounts of money to the rebuilding of the church.

This powerful position of landlords and other wealthy individuals afforded them enough privilege to contribute to the religious affairs of the region as well as to exploit the local populace, especially in economic terms.[226] For instance, Gregory bar Hebraeus, while still young, was sent to Ṭur ʻAbdin to collect funds from villages and monasteries in order to support Dionysius of Melitene in the patriarchal rivalry.[227] Since a significant portion of the local population were the monastic communities, in the hagiographical compositions one finds various descriptions of exemplary lay people, pious, wealthy and dedicated. In some cases their religious identity was as prominent as their secular patronage, like that of Shemʻun d-Zayte. In other cases, like that of Theodor in the *Life of Aḥo of Rishʻayno*, the landlord is presented as a lay person, wholly dedicated to the monastic community. In either case the message of the writings was clear: holy men of the past were not alone. Churches and monasteries benefited greatly from the generosity and protection of pious lay people, and, as a result, they embraced the latter with their sacredness. With this ideology the medieval audience of the saints' *lives*, consisting of lay people as well as monastics, was called to be whole-heartedly dedicated to the sacred spaces.

[224] R. Stephen Humphreys, "Christian Communities in Early Islamic Syria and Northern Jazira: the Dynamics of Adaptation," in *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates*, ed. John Haldon (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 45.
[225] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 206ff.
[226] Ibid. 55, 187.
[227] Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History,* trans. John Sutherland Black (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 240-1.

CONCLUSION

During my visit to the village of Beth Svirina in Ṭur ʻAbdin, Velit, my friend and driver, asked our young guide in the village: "How do you remember all of the names of these churches?" Our guide, who must have been no more than ten years old, answered: "The names of these churches are like our own names. Do you ever forget your name? Likewise, we never forget these names." Our guide knew the stories of more than twenty churches surrounding the village, which he, like all the other children, learned at the village church from their teacher, *malfono*. He led us on a small pilgrimage in and around the village, and introduced us to every sacred space on our way: Which church was used for healing purposes; which holy man was buried at which church; which part of the church a woman can or cannot step into; which church's ashlars were so big that how it was built is a mystery, and so forth. With his words he created a sacred zone, together with its history, rules, and various other aspects. Could this modern picture be a glimpse of medieval Ṭur ʻAbdin? Were stories of holy men and churches associated with them as part of their identity, "like their names"? What one can see from the writings produced in that time period is that at least there was a voluminous corpus of literature, in the form of saints' lives, which aimed at generating such an image.

Qartmin Trilogy and the *Life of Shemʻun d-Zayte* are prominent literary monuments of the Middle Ages in Ṭur ʻAbdin that were loaded with intense doctrinal discourse. Referring to the well-known anti-Chalcedonian church fathers, and warning their readers against other Christian groups, the authors of these texts appear to have aimed at reinforcing the Syrian Orthodox identity in the region. In the *Trilogy* this attempt is mainly restricted to the Qartmin Abbey in terms of spatial connotations. That

is, the text strictly focuses on the anti-Chalcedonian origins, heritage, connections and continuous dedication of the monastery and its monastic community. The *Life of Shem'un* , on the other hand, includes a wider territory, the entire region of Ṭur 'Abdin, and a larger number of monuments, such as the churches in Nisibis, as part of the spatial scope of this identity and presence.

Doctrinal controversies and identity building were not always the main motivation behind the composition of saints' lives in Ṭur 'Abdin. The *Lives* of Aḥo of Rish'ayno, Ya'qub of Ṣalaḥ, Malke, and Aaron of Serug, among others, are literary monuments that probably took their final shape in the Middle Ages; their function appears to be promoting the cults of certain saints and veneration of specific monasteries. Moreover, the prominent themes repeated in these compositions indicate that they were interrelated texts forming a distinct hagiographical tradition that was built upon specific themes, diction and even grammar.

A comprehensive close reading, comparison and literary analysis of the texts have not been the subject of any scholarly enquiry yet. My research, taking a small step forward, has discussed the hierotopical approaches to Ṭur 'Abdin and its sacred monuments through these hagiographical compositions. While certain authors of hagiographies connected Qartmin Abbey with the most venerable fathers of the past, associating other monasteries and holy men to the abbey itself like a perpetual, unbroken chain, other authors prioritized narrating the history and holy men of their own monasteries, aiming at promoting individual monastic settings.

Regardless of which group a hagiographical composition belonged to, these texts carried common hierotopical messages. A monastery was not confined to its enclosure wall; its spiritual extension reached out to other monasteries (the ones founded by disciples), churches and caves. The holy fathers of the past were still alive in the sacred spaces. Furthermore, building, venerating and protecting these places were

not tasks of only the monastic communities; this was also the spiritual duty of pious lay people, who would be blessed by the holy steps of both ancient and contemporary holy men.

Sacred lives, written in Ṭur ‘Abdin in the Middle Ages, narrated to their audience a world of sacred presence of holy men, and pointed out the still-standing churches, monasteries, and hermits’ caves for them to seek-out that holiness. The holy past was incomparable in sanctity, yet it was extended and made physical in the surrounding sacred places.

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