



Article

## **Restoration Process of an Assyrian Monastery – Deyrulzafaran in Mardin** **Relic of ancient times Deyrulzafaran Monastery**

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### **Abstract**

Deyrulzafaran, Monastery whose first construction dates back to BC , took its final shape in the 18th century with a detailed restoration. It was restored to the original features of its magnificent architecture . This restoration work is based on original materials and technique set, a special example with the importance given to its use.

Ancient description of Deyrulzafaran Monastery is inadequate and every stone is a proof of historical document, has gone back years with all its glory.

It is located 5 kilometers east of Mardin (a city in southwest Turkiye). The magnificent architecture of the Deyrulzafaran Monastery is dazzling after the completed restoration.

It is estimated that Deyrulzafaran Monastery was built as a temple of the Sun-worshipping Shamsis in B.C. Sun-worshipping temple is located at the downstairs of the monastery The section with a small window oriented towards the sun rise is considered the first core of the building from this period. After the Romans withdrew from the region, a monastery was built on the complex, which was later used as a castle by the Romans. The monastery, which grew with annexes as the needs increased over time and took its current form, served as the Patriarchate Center of the Assyrians for 640 years. This study is about the restoration of Deyrulzafaran Monastery, which is one of the world cultural heritage values , at the tentative list.

### **Keywords:**

Monastery, Deyrulzafaran, Assyrians, Mardin, Patriarchate Center of Assyrians

### **Introduction**

The monastery, which is known as Deyrulzafaran (Saffron Monastery) in Mardin, Türkiye (Fig.1) , after the saffron plant growing around the building since 15th century, consists of three churches built in different periods, the House of Saints (Beth Kadise), a “divanhane” and a large courtyard surrounded by priests’ rooms.

The main sections that make up the monastery are as follows: Mor Hananyo Church and Bell Tower, Virgin Mary Church, House of Saints, Mor Peter Church, Temple of Shamsis (sun-worshippers) , Patriarc’s office,

Divanhane, priests’ rooms and visitors’ rooms, inner courtyard, service units, kitchen, laundry and dining hall, monastery front and side garden (Firdeyso), iwan (eyvan) with pool and corrals (Fig.2,3). Its domes, arched columns, wooden hand engravings, interior and exterior stone of the Monastery attracts attention with its embroidery (stone ornaments ) (Fig4,5). It continues to function as a Metropolitan Center covering the Provinces of Elazig (a city in Eastern Anatolia).



Fig.1.



Fig.2.



Fig.3.



Fig.4.



Fig.5.



Fig.6.



Fig.7.

### 1-The Restoration Process Initiated by the Assyrians

The monastery, which is on the world heritage tentative list, lived wrong interventions, timeout, indifference and uncontrolled use of cement resulting serious erosion and was in a damaged condition. To protect, repair and restoration should be done to stop that wrong work coming through the building which is the cultural heritage of the world. It was necessary to rest the tired and exhausted body of the building and bring it back to its true identity. For this reason, work started in 2003 to restore the Deyrulzafaran Monastery. Being aware of this situation and living in Istanbul, a group from the Assyrian community decided to establish the "Deyrulzafaran Monastery Maintenance, Repair and Sustainability Association", especially considering the Deyrulzafaran Monastery and its surroundings as their field of activity. The whitewash layer and plaster on the domes of the Mor Hananyo Church blasted in a way that did not cause damage (Fig.8). It was previously called the Domed Church. It was understood that the top cover of the named work was actually a vault made of cut stone.

The Association determined the current state of the Monastery and made a survey, preparing restoration projects and getting them approved by the Restoration Board, to produce and adopt protection-priority policies (Fig7).

Opportunities of the members of the association for financial sources was insufficient to do what is necessary. Donations from the Syriac community and funding the restoration of historical buildings to provide possible resources by reaching institutions and to continue stopping the destruction that caused, then improve the living conditions inside. It is necessary for those who visit the monastery for tourism, worship and living harmony with the natural and architectural structure of the environment. It is also necessary to ensure the transportation facilities and on-site parking, toilets, cafeteria, souvenirs' shop. Realizing purposes such as creating and operating or having business offices a collective work has been started working with a series of missions such as "Deyrulzafaran Monastery Maintenance, Repair and Survival Association", "Cultural Heritage Development of the European Union in the GAP Region Development Program". In this case, the second

pillar of the execution plan of restoration work based on scientific data gained priority. This step-existing projects and Restoration Board decisions, restoration work was almost perfect to implement.

### 2-Main Parts of the Monastery

- 1- Mor Hananyo Church and Bell Tower
- 2- Church of the Virgin Mary
- 3- House of Saints
- 4- Purple Peter Church
- 5- Temple of sun-worshippers.
- 6- Patriarch, Metropolitan and Divanhane, priest rooms and visitor rooms
- 7- Inner Court
- 8- Service Units, Kitchen, Laundry and Dining Hall
- 9- Monastery Front and Side Garden (Ferdeyso), iwan with pool and animal shelters

### 3-Restoration Approach and Working Techniques

The purpose of the "Deyrulzafaran Monastery Maintenance, Repair and Survival Association":

- Determination of the current situation of the Monastery,
  - Have the historical building's survey, restitution and restoration projects prepared and approved by the Restoration Board,
  - To produce and adopt conservation priority policies by acting as a bridge between monastic life and historical structure,
  - To provide possible resources for financial means to fulfill the mission it has undertaken, through the means of the members of the association, the donations of the Assyrian society and the institutions that provide funds for the restoration of historical structures,
  - To stop the ongoing destruction, then to prepare the infrastructure to improve the living conditions inside,
  - To apply to the relevant official institutions for the restoration, maintenance and repair of the monastery and its outbuildings or to have them done.
  - To establish and operate or have the monastery operated, in order to meet the needs of those who visit the monastery for tourism, worship and similar purposes, accommodation facilities compatible with the natural and architectural structure of the environment and parking lot, toilets, cafeteria, souvenir shops within its structure.
- The first target in the restoration phase is to make roofs and terraces from concrete layers. And to save and



Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10

to restore the original cover, to improve the isolation conditions of the terraces and converting from cement pavements to stone. Interior restoration of Hananyo Church and House of Saints' (with Bell Tower) and Saints' graves (Fig.9). As a requirement of this, special attention was given to the use of original materials and cement use was kept to a minimum. Mor Hananyo Church and in the restoration of the House of Saints. The local authorities helped to complete the missing parts with the stone taken from the quarries. Hydraulic lime and cream lime (to make the Khorasan mortar) was used in joint plaster as a binder. There are two striking features in the main apse of the Mor Hananyo Church.

One of the rostrums, estimated to be 350 years old, was built by the Patriarchs. The walnut lectern was used. The other lectern with ivory is thought to be 500 years old. During the restoration phase, roofs and terraces which were made of concrete layers rescued and restored to its original veil. Insulation conditions were improved,

and cement pavements converted to original stone. The bones of some Saints and the Patriarch who served in the Monastery and the section where the metropolitans were buried also restored. In the completion of the missing parts in restoration, local quarried rock was used. "Khorasan" to be used in plaster hydraulic lime and cream lime to make the mortar. One of the most striking features of the Deyrulzafaran Monastery are stone motifs found on the entrance door and indoors. Thus, Deyrulzafaran Monastery occupies a special place in the history of art and architecture in the region among other mosques, churches and monasteries (Fig.10).

This is a very important work feature in terms of cultural, aesthetic, technical and symbolic restoration project. And its implementation carried of great importance. In this context, the maximum use of the original materials and techniques took place. Cement screeds damaging the structure of terrace, were carefully taken over the roofs without damaging the original layers underneath. (Fig11).



Fig.11  
DEYRULZAFARAN  
Manastırı Bakım  
Onarım Yaşatma  
Derneği, İstanbul,  
2004

After the dismantling work is done, in accordance with the waterproofing details, LIC was created. Meanwhile, the missing gargoyles were found in local stone-was manufactured and replaced. Deletions that have lost their properties with chipped stone were completed. The chimneys in the strata were repaired and handled visually and functionally. The covers were made of local stone.

In Mor Hananyo Church, layers of whitewash and plaster were made, especially on the dome. Preliminary preparation for reinforcement works by installing suspension scaffolding for pocketing. It was scraped off without damaging the tissue. The top cover of the work, called as scientists who have a say in restoration in Turkey with technical intervention said it was also observed that there were static problems as a result of the separations. The restoration of this section was carried out by taking the opinion of the Restoration Board. On the lower

elevations, the original plasters are preserved. At the transition from the vault to the body wall, the stone border removed from the plaster . Decorated stone cornices were unearthed, leaving the stone texture exposed, in its side spaces, where necessary, paint-whitewashing was done, all Houses of Saints: When the plaster in the House of Saints' were scraped meticulously, the original surfaces were unearthed, but in time some deteriorations were completed by using appropriate grout , cut stones it has lost a lot of its character. For this purpose, a joint was embedded between them and the locations. Other works for restoration, technical representatives of the EU Delegation, GAP (Project for Southeastern Anatolia) , specialists and Deyrulzafaran Monastery members of Maintenance-Repair and Sustainability Association Project. Restoration was carried out by Kartalkaya Company, the application contractor.

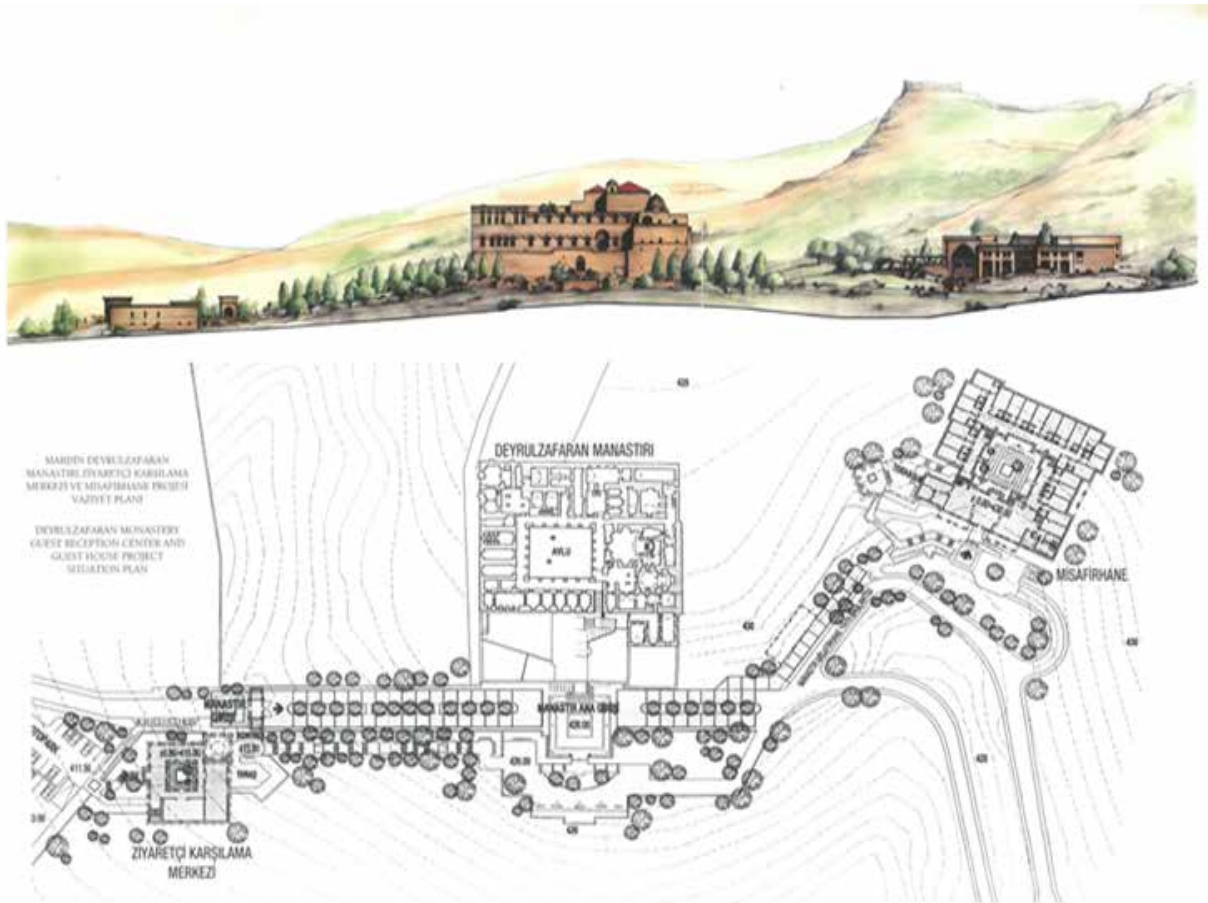


Fig.12 - DEYRULZAFARAN Manastırı Bakım Onarım Yaşatma Derneği, İstanbul, 2004



**4-Visitor Section**

According restoration of such a comprehensive and important work in every way, parallel to the needs of the visitors” Objector Welcoming Place” was also built near Deyrulzafaran Monastery, (Fig12), one of the most important sacred places of the Assyrians,

At the end of this very comprehensive and meticulous restoration work, it regained the original features of its magnificent architecture.”European Union Grant Program” and Deyrulzafaran in cooperation with the GAP Regional Development Administration, financed by Cultural Heritage Development Program in the GAP Region. European Commission managed by the on-board technical support team. The aim of the program was , commissioned by a consortium led by the Çekül Foundation to contribute to the improvement of economic and social conditions.of the region through support of cultural heritage development initiatives. Presented by the relevant institutions and organizations in Şırnak; Adıyaman, Gaziantep, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Batman, Siirt and the result of the evaluation of the project proposal: to be one of the selected projects in Europe .

One of the 30 projects supported within the framework of Deyrulzafaran in Mardin . A support of 12 million EURO was provided by the Commission. In this context, Deyrulzafaran in Mardin with the help of “Monastery Maintenance, Repair and Survival Association”. The project was completed in November 2007. Restoration Application of Deyrulzafaran Monastery project is different from other cultural heritage projects (Fig13,14). There were three remaining important issues. As stated in the application,variety of Monastery in Deyrulzafaran’s first stage restoration: Destruction caused by time lapse and uncontrolled use of cement trying to resolve, in other words: “careless” intervention made over time restorations were subject to a “re-restoration”. Secondly, in the monastery where this activity leads a lively life,to be done by trying not to interfere as much as possible. In this respect, it is one of the other restorations within the scope of this project differentiating, almost a street rehabilitation project. Interventions were made within the scope of the “Cultural Heritage Development Program”.



Fig.13



Fig. 14.

### 5-Conclusions

Since it is a very important work in terms of culture, aesthetics, technique and symbolism, which has a special place in the history of art and architecture, the restoration project and its application of Deyrulzafaran Monastery requires high importance. In this context, care has been taken to use the original materials and techniques at the maximum level.

The cement screeds that damaged the structure of the Deyrulzafaran Monastery were carefully removed from the terraces and roofs without damaging the original layers underneath. After the dismantling work was done, the base was created in accordance with the water insulation details. In the meantime, the missing gargoyles were made of local stone in accordance with their samples and put in their place. The erasures that lost their characteristics were completed with a directional stone. The parapet walls, which are incomplete and damaged, have been restored to their former level in accordance with the material and weave texture. In addition to these, the chimneys on the terraces were repaired and handled visually and functionally, and the chimney caps were made of local stone.

In order to secure the intervention to the interior of the Mor Hananyo Church on the dome, preliminary preparations were made for the strengthening works by installing a suspension scaffold. Then, especially the whitewash layers and plaster on the dome were scraped so as not to damage the underlying tissue. It was understood that the upper cover of the work, which was previously called the domed Church, was actually a vault made of cut stone. However, it was seen that the stonework of the church's vault had static problems as a result of serious weathering. With the technical interventions made on-site, the restoration was carried out by taking the opinions of the civil engineers. Later, the plaster of the undecorated sections was re-plastered with the original plaster technique. In addition, the stone border, which was removed from under the plaster in the transition from the vault to the body wall, was restored and the work was strengthened. The original plasters were preserved on the lower levels, and decorated stone cornices were exposed by careful paint-whitewash blasting in the side spaces, where necessary, leaving the stone texture exposed. The original cut stone surfaces were exposed when the original plaster existing in the House of saints was carefully scraped, but some deteriorations that were caused in time were completed by using appropriate joint mortar (Fig 16). Since the cut stones have lost their feature a lot, joints were made between them as buried and the emptied places were strengthened.



Fig.15

The application was carried out by Kartalkaya Project Construction Industry and Trade Company.Parallel to the restoration of such a comprehensive and all-important work, the “Visitor Reception Place” was built as an additional building with simple architectural characteristics, in a position not to compete with the historical building, to meet the needs of the visitors and to allow them to live and tour the environment comfortably.

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