

Cultural Heritage without Borders
and
Friends of S:t Lazarus Monastery

Seminar Draft 2010-08-02

S:t Lazarus monastery (Mor Loozor) and south eastern Turkey

Background

Tur Abdin

In south eastern Turkey around the cities Mardin and Midyat, the area is known as Tur Abdin. The area's rich multicultural nature is characterised by the multitude of ethnic groups, languages and history. The area has a Christian minority group, but also another minority group of Yezidis (formerly Zarahostra) and a majority of Sunni Muslims. Even if Tur Abdin is a small area on the world map it has experienced many different cultural impulses and a number of great empires have left marks here. Few areas in the world have like Tur Abdin been influenced by so many different societies - Assyrian, Persian, Roman, Mongolian, Hittitic, Arabic, Ottoman and today's Turkish.

Various ethnic groups live in Tur Abdin, among them Assyrians (also known as Syrians), Kurds and Turks. There are as well many different languages spoken, apart from Turkish especially Syrian, Kurdish and Arabic. This is also of important relevance for Sweden today. At present about 3.800 Assyrians/Syrians live in the area of Tur Abdin compared with 40.000 in the sixties. In Sweden there are around 70.000 Assyrians/Syrians. Many Assyrians/Syrians have begun to return back to the area, either as tourists or in groups as students, to rebuild houses, monasteries and churches which have been neglected for years.

This newborn interest for Tur Abdin is important for changes and development of many places in the area. Various organisations, religious and ethnic groups as well as individuals can together contribute to this aspiration. Youth in Sweden experience that the area's diversity as regards to ethnicity, religion and languages pose an important and enriching source for dialogue and problem solving.

Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) and the Friends of St Lazarus Monastery (SLKV), together with NGOs and institutions in the area, have initiated collaboration around the preservation of this cultural heritage in eastern Tur Abdin with St Lazarus monastery as a starting point.

Why the St Lazarus monastery?

St Lazarus monastery was established in the 5th century and located 500 meters from the village of Hapisnas where its inhabitants are “mhalmi”, a group of Muslims with Christian roots. In Hapisnas the “Mhalmi dialog centre” (represented by Mr. Mehmet Ali Aslan) is already working with dialog between different minorities and religious groups. This initiative could be strengthened and developed through a future project with the St Lazarus monastery as focal point. A few years ago the church in the village was restored by initiatives from Assyrians/Syrians in Sweden.

The monastery is surrounded by wine yards and fruit-trees on a property of 10.000 square meters. The monastery needs to be repaired and the ongoing plundering needs to be deterred. If the standard of the monastery was in a better condition it could accommodate approximately fifty people. Groups of students and others could visit the monastery for seminars and field studies in the area. With the monastery as a starting point, youth and other visitors would be able to take initiative to dialog on relevant and urgent issues and develop various restoration projects. The monastery could also function as the meeting point for regular dialogue meetings between the leaders of the ethnic and religious groups of the area.

The early Christian architectural heritage in Tur Abdin in eastern Turkey needs to be acknowledged and developed. The local population still has a living tradition of artisanship working with stone that can be considered as an unbroken link from the early antique architecture.

It should be an interest both from Turkey as well as the international/European community to protect this historical link.

The Seminar

The seminar will take place in Mardin/Midyat and in the monastery with theoretical and practical lectures, study visits in the neighbouring area, discussions about possible activities after the seminar. Lectures will be held accomodating historical, theoretical and a practical perspectives where local and Swedish professionals will exchange knowledge and experiences with the local community.

Objectives of the seminar:

The concrete objective of the seminar is to prepare a project of developing S:t Lazarus Monastery (Mor Loozor) into a meeting place and well known place for dialog. The restoration of the monastery, as well as the preparation work, are important parts in the dialog process. In this process the question of women’s participation in the society is of importance. The seminar aims to formulate preliminary activities and a draft program for the dialog centre.

The seminar will give good possibilities to create networks of professionals and a basis for the coming restoration, dialogue centre and the financing. A scientific and social base is

determining for future steps. A report from the seminar with its conclusions and recommendations will be compiled.

In order to firmly prepare the coming project locally outreach activities outreach activities will be carried out in connection to the seminar, such as local information through public meetings, invitation to politicians and the public to certain seminar activities and contacts with media.

A survey was already been carried out in October/November 2009 as one input for the coming project and to plan for further research. CHwB engaged the Istanbul based consultants MP Design and Construction which carried out an inventory of the monastery with modern methods and equipment and produced a report on how the monastery stands today. This report will be presented at the seminar and serves the purpose of making consideration and planning as concrete as possible.

Expected results:

- Preparation for the coming project aiming to increased regional understanding of the various cultures and their long and common history in eastern Turkey.
- To collect, structure and provide existing knowledge about the monastery from a professional view,
- Start to mobilise the local community around an active preservation of St Lazarus Monastery and the multicultural heritage,
- Increase the knowledge about Tur Abdin, its history, heritage and current situation among Swedish professionals and students in the field of cultural heritage,
- Initiate networks and contacts between academics and craftsmen in Tur Abdin and internationally,
- Start to facilitate dialog between people in Tur Abdin and link this process to ongoing dialogue work in Sweden,
- To collect experience from other dialog processes,
- Develop ideas and formulate goals for the processes of S:t Lazarus dialogue centre,
- To formulate a draft plan for a coming restoration of the monastery,
- Develop strategies for financing of the coming project,

Seminar organisation:

For the organisation of the seminar a steering group has been set up. A Swedish based part of the steering group comprise Father Abraham Garis SLKV, Mr Ingvar Oljelund SLKV, Mrs Verde Shamoun SLKV, Mr Johan Mårtelius architect Prof. at KTH / CHwB, Mr Jan Aleby SLKV / CHwB architect and project coordinator

A Tur Abdin based part of the steering group comprise Mr Isa Dogdu at S:t Gabriel monastery (Mor Gabriel), Mrs Neslihan Dalkilic Dr at Diyarbakir university, Mr Murat Caglayan achitect at Mardin Artuklu University, Mr Nihat Erdogan at Mardin Museum, Mr Mehmet Ali at Mhalmi Dialog Center.

Representatives of the Swedish steering group will travel to Tur Abdin approximately one week before the seminar in order to settle the practical preparations on place. The Steering

Group will arrange for premises for the seminar, local housing for all participants, food, and transportations in co-operation with the local community.

The Seminar Part 1 is planned for 17-19 October 2010. Travelling days are 16 and 20 of October with possibility for those who can to stay in the area to participate in the additional programs of Part 2, 20-22 October.

The Swedish and Turkish steering group is responsible for the seminar content. Seminar management is carried out from the project coordinator Mr Jan Aleby CHwB/SLKV together with Mr Simon Shamoun from SLKV.

Representatives from the Tur Abdin organisations will host their parts of the seminar. Father Abraham Garis SLKV is superior host for the seminar. Mr Jan Aleby and Mr Simon Shamoun from the steering group are responsible for the overall organisation of the initial seminar with kind contribution from the Tur Abdin hosts. A secretary and interpreters will make the seminar efficient. Photo documentation will be carried out by Mr Ingvar Oljelund.

The results of the seminar will be compiled into a publication where the lecturers contribute with written text and illustrations supplemented with notes taken by the secretary during the seminar. The publication will be distributed to actors and target groups in Swedish, Turkish and English.

Seminar Participants

- Lecturers from Turkish and Swedish universities and institutions of education. Through CHwB there are existing close contacts with the technical universities in Turkey and Sweden, in order to cover competence in architecture and art history, stone preservation, ethnology and landscaping.
- Turkish and Swedish restoration architects, who can work out a program for the possible proposed restoration works.
- Turkish and Swedish stone craftsmen.
- Students from relevant institutions for conservators, art historians and ethnologists from Turkey and Sweden.
- Representatives from Turkish cultural heritage authorities and the local cultural department in Diyarbakir.
- Representatives from local NGOs who will guarantee the long term work in the project.

Recipients of the results over and above the participants:

- Owners of historically important settlements.
- Other Turkish universities and institutions of education interested in the results.
- Swedish universities and institutions of education interested in the results.