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The Saint/Mary (Surp Asdvadzadzin) Monastery in Kiğı (Bingöl, Türkiye): New Evidence from an Archaeological Survey

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Article

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The Saint/Mary (Surp Asdvadzadzin) Monastery in Kiğı (Bingöl, Türkiye): New Evidence from an Archaeological Survey

Abstract

The mountainous region of Eastern Anatolia preserves numerous medieval ecclesiastical sites that remain poorly documented within their archaeological and landscape contexts. Among these monuments is the Surp Asdvadzadzin (Virgin Mary) Monastery, located on the western slopes of Köşmür Mountain between Kiğı and Adaklı in Bingöl Province, Türkiye. Despite its historical significance, the site has received only limited scholarly attention and has never been systematically investigated through archaeological fieldwork. This study presents the results of a detailed archaeological survey conducted at the monastery and its surrounding cultural landscape. The research integrates architectural recording, topographical observation, spatial analysis, and comparative evaluation to document the surviving remains and assess their archaeological context. The field survey identified the principal church building together with associated structural remains preserved at foundation level or as partially standing walls. These remains provide important evidence regarding the spatial organization, construction practices, and functional components of a rural monastic complex situated within a mountainous environment. The findings contribute new archaeological data concerning medieval Christian settlement patterns and religious landscapes in Eastern Anatolia, a region that remains comparatively understudied despite its strategic position between Anatolia and the South Caucasus. The study further proposes a reconstruction of the monastery's general layout, evaluates its possible chronology, and reassesses previous interpretations in the scholarly literature. By documenting previously unpublished archaeological evidence, this research enhances our understanding of rural monastic traditions and cultural landscapes in eastern Türkiye and provides a foundation for future archaeological investigations and heritage management initiatives.

Keywords: Medieval Archaeology; Monastic Landscapes; Archaeological Survey; Eastern Anatolia; Bingöl; Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery.

Introduction

Although there is no definitive judgment about the origin of monasteries, which are defined as the collective living unit of religious identity, it is accepted that they first emerged in Egypt and its surroundings (Erdoğan, 2012, 434; Baş, 2003, 189). Monasteries are structures or groups of structures where Christian religious communities worship, work, and study together (Kingsley, 2003, 350). Derived from the Greek word for living alone, it has been suggested that monasteries first appeared in the 4th century as a living space behind a closed complex (Doğan, 2003, 74). Monasteries, which house many structures together and were built for the continuation of an ascetic lifestyle, were designed as complexes where all the needs of the monks and nuns who spent their lives there could be met throughout the Middle Ages (Doğan, 2003, 77-78). Some sources suggest that the construction and use of monasteries continued until the 16th century, after which they lost their function (Baş, 2003, 186). However, this religious way of life continued in Eastern Christianity even after the 16th century. While it is known that some monasteries in Bingöl province were repaired or renovated in the 18th century, the Deyri Zafaran and Mor Malke Monasteries in Mardin are still standing and continue to function as monasteries today (Akyüz, 2010, 7).

Anatolia is a region where churches and monasteries have been built since the early Christian period. In this context, it is known that the Greek and Armenian populations of Eastern Anatolia have been settled since the early Christian period. There are many Christian centers in the region. Bingöl province is also one of the provinces that houses many churches, civil architecture, monasteries, and important structures belonging to Christians. While the structures from different periods in Bingöl province, which has been a settlement since the Neolithic period (Sevin, 2010, 47-63), have been destroyed due to possible major natural disasters, recent research has revealed that there are remnants of many civilizations after Urartu in Bingöl province (Butasım, 2021, 14). Works from the Byzantine, Akkoyunlu, and Ottoman states after the Roman period are also seen (Johnston, 1989, 203; Butasım, 2021, 45; Tokat, 2015, 39, 135). Following the decisive defeat of the Trapezuntine Empire, the Ottoman Empire established its dominance in the region, with a population composed of both Muslim and Christian inhabitants. Therefore, particularly in the Kiğı region, structures belonging to both religions can be seen side-by-side. Sources mention numerous churches and monasteries in the area (Şemsettin Sami, 1996, 39-39; Tokat, 2015, 39-63). Recent research has confirmed the existence of some monasteries in Bingöl province, as documented in the literature. Several church ruins remain at foundation level in the center of Kiğı. Churches in the villages of Açıkgüney, Güneyağıl, and Çanakçı, within the Kiğı district, are still standing (Butasım, 2021, 45, 46). Unlike monasteries in neighboring provinces, the existence of monasteries in Bingöl province had not been scientifically established until recent years. The presence of numerous churches in the Kiğı region, despite their mention in the literature, raised questions about why monasteries could not be physically located. The lack of research, as well as the complete destruction of many monasteries, are among the main reasons why these structures are unknown. Another reason stems from the fact that the Christian population in the region has consisted of Armenians in recent centuries, and the names of Armenian artifacts were used by the local people in their language. Armenians called monasteries "Vank." Naturally, this term was also used by the Muslim population of the region. In our field research, there was a widespread misconception that the word "vank" meant church. In recent research, the existence of monasteries and the finding that the word "Vank" actually means monastery in Armenian (Tarbassian, 1975, 44; Babür, 2019, 330; Gül, 2009, 176) have revealed that some of the ruins are actually remnants of monasteries. At the same time, in field research, older people familiar with the region were asked to describe the structures called "vank," and as a result of these descriptions, it was understood that all the structures called "vank" referred to monasteries. Ongoing research along this axis has resulted in the identification of monasteries in the province. Literature suggests that there are four monasteries in Kiğı (Bardizaktsi et al., 2015, 51). In addition to these four monasteries, it is stated that there are 12 hankavanks. The term hankavank is known as a completely ruined monastery, meaning "deceased" (Bardizaktsi et al., 2015, 31). In Bingöl province, despite the presence of monastery names in historical sources, the only monastery that has

survived to the present day is the Surp Asdvadzadzin/Virgin Mary Monastery, located on Köşmür Mountain, east of Eskikavak/Arek Village in Kiğı District.

The exact date of the initial construction of the Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery is unknown. It is claimed that the construction dates of monasteries in Bingöl province, as well as in surrounding provinces, go back to the 3rd century (Akyüz, 2010, 3,6). Some sources providing information about the Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery suggest that the structure was built in 1433 (Tokat, 2015, 39). Due to its similarity to the St. David Monastery in Tercan district of Erzincan province, and the fact that both monasteries were affiliated with the monastery in Muş province at the same time (Tokat, 2015, 39), it is thought that the monastery was built around the same time. It is suggested that the Tavit/David Monastery in Tercan Abrenk was originally built as a martyrium in the 4th century and later converted into a monastery (https://www.collectif2015.org/tr/100Monuments/Le-Monastere-de-Saint-David-d-Abrank-/, 2025). Recent research indicates that, according to an inscription on the Abrank Church in Tercan, it was built in 1873 (Yılmaz, 2020, 477). However, this date appears to be the date of the church's reconstruction.

Some monastic complexes in Eastern Anatolia are thought to have originated as martyrial shrines before developing into monasteries. Although a similar developmental trajectory may be considered for Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery, the absence of excavation data, inscriptions, or securely dated architectural evidence prevents any firm conclusion regarding such an early phase. In the current state of knowledge, the date of 1433 reported in historical sources may correspond to a major construction or rebuilding phase of the monastery. However, the absence of securely dated inscriptions or archaeological evidence means that the chronology of the complex remains open to further investigation. The Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery is located in a valley on a high mountain slope to the east-northeast of the villages of Arek/Eskivakavak and Yeldeğirmeni, known as Mount Köşmür. Built on a sloping terrain, the monastery overlooks the Oror River, also known as the Peri River, to the west, hence its name in Armenian, "Monastery of the Holy Mary Overlooking the River." The structure is indeed situated in a high valley on the western side of Mount Köşmür. The monastery can be reached either via a stabilized road from Yeldeğirmeni/Zermak Village, which is only usable at the end of summer, or via footpaths eastward from Arek/Eskikavak Village. Its location on a high ridge within a valley, and the way the stones used in the terrain conform to the typical structure, give the monastery an air of being a hidden religious building.

Method and Limitations of the Study

This study employed the architectural field survey method, frequently used in the fields of Archaeology and Art History. After obtaining the necessary permissions, a architectural field survey was conducted in the area where the structure is located. The research was not limited to the area where the monastery is located, but also included its surroundings. Thus, the geographical location of the monastery and the quarry in its vicinity were also included in the study. The structure was measured and photographed from different angles. The measurements and photographs were compared with previously taken photographs. Following the architectural field survey, a literature review was conducted, and information was collected about monasteries in the region and its surroundings. After compiling information about the history of the monastery, the study was completed within the disciplines of archaeology and art history, with introduction, catalog, and conclusion sections. This study is based on architectural documentation and field survey observations. No excavation, stratigraphic investigation, archaeometric analysis, or epigraphic evidence was available during the research. Therefore, the proposed interpretations regarding the chronology, construction phases, and functional organization of the monastery should be regarded as preliminary. Further archaeological excavation, material analysis, and comparative regional studies are required to clarify the historical development of the complex.

Architectural and Decorative Features

The monastery, known as Surp Asdvadzadzin, meaning "Virgin Mary" in Turkish, is a rectangular building complex measuring 33x23.5 m externally. The monastery, meaning "Virgin Mary" in Turkish, is a rectangular building complex measuring 33x23.5 m externally. The monastery is defined externally by the body walls of its contiguous units rather than by an independent enclosure wall. No separate perimeter wall was identified; the location and typology of the complex suggest that an additional enclosure wall was not required. All units are built in a contiguous manner. There are passages providing access from one unit to another. The northern perimeter wall of the monastery continues linearly in the east-west direction without interruption or break. This wall forms the northern perimeter wall of the church, narthex, and units. However, the southern perimeter wall continues for 10.5 m from west to east, then curves 3 m to the south, and then continues again eastward in the east-west direction. This southern wall forms the eastern outer wall of the units to the west, the southern perimeter wall of the sacristan, and continues throughout the units, also enclosing the narthex. The eastern wall forms the eastern body wall of the church and its sacristy, while the western wall forms the body wall of the western units.

The structure rests against Mount Köşmür, with a slope rising from west to east. Due to this slope, the body walls on the western side were kept higher to bring the building's elevation level to the same level. There is an elevation of approximately 7 meters in this section. The monastery consists of a church with a narthex, a sacristy, and a western section containing various units (Figures 1-2-3). Furthermore, the quarry containing the stones used in the construction of this monastery has been identified to the south of the structure.

Church

The church is a three-nave basilica with a barrel vault, measuring 17.4 x 15.4 m, with a nave supported by four columns. The central nave is wider than the side naves. The narthex is located to the west of the church, and the sacristy to the south. Entrance to the church is through a rectangular portal projecting outwards, located precisely in the middle axis of the west wall (Figure 4). The stones above the rectangular portal are shaped into a rounded arch, creating a sense of dynamism. The door protrudes approximately 25 cm outwards and is bordered on its outermost edge by a convex/fluted molding. After a 30 cm flat surface, a stepped molding, first fluted and then grooved, each curving inwards by 4 cm, frames the door on three sides. Immediately following these moldings, another border is formed with triangular prisms designed in an inverted/upright manner. The base and length measurements of the triangular prisms used in these borders are 4 cm. A flat surface continues after this border. This facade is largely destroyed. A cross motif is located in the upper right corner of this facade. The cross motif was made using the carving technique. The heads of the cross arms are enlivened with circles and zigzags. The circles and straight lines in the background of the cross motif indicate that it was designed according to guide lines before the cross was made. The presence of guide lines may indicate that the decorative program was unfinished or modified during a later phase; however, further architectural analysis is required to confirm this interpretation. While the right side of the door providing access to the church is intact, the entire protruding part on the left side has been removed. A cornice protruding 20 cm is located above the door frame. The cornice has a three-tiered arrangement. At the bottom is an oval/concave/cavetto molding, followed by a convex/ovolo molding. At the top is a series of muqarnas decorations. This muqarnas section consists of a triangular prism followed by stepped circular, flat, fluted muqarnas. The door opening has a rounded arch. The section containing the cross on the right side of the door extends slightly, obscuring the door opening. This suggests that the door may have originally had a different arrangement. However, since the other parts are heavily damaged, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion at this time. (Figures 5-6-7).

On the west wall of the church's entrance, facing the narthex, there are windows and niches on either side of the door. Symmetrically arranged on the right and left of the door are first two small niches, followed by a second row of larger, square-plan niches with rounded arches. Following these niches, there are pilasters adjacent to the wall. These pilasters, which appear to be the lower units of the arches supporting the roof, have cavetto moldings on their surfaces. The bases of the pilasters have a two-tiered

arrangement and are enlivened with horizontal moldings. The capitals of the pilasters are also at the level of the window openings. The pilaster capitals are also in the shape of two-tiered rectangular prisms. These capitals are also enlivened with tiered moldings. The stones above the capitals, which appear to be the arch stirrup stones from the remaining parts, are missing from both pilasters. Following the pilasters, there are square window openings on each side. The rounded arch above the window on the south side is quite regular. However, the round arch above the window on the north side is both flattened and reconstructed as a second series of blind arches on top of this blind arch. This irregularity may indicate that the northern window arch was altered or reconstructed during a later phase. There are three square windows at the top of the entrance facade. The central window opening is aligned with the door opening. The window openings are kept small and enlivened by a series of blind arches at the top. These window openings open into the narthex. While they are square on the narthex side, they are loophole windows on the nave side (Figures 8-9).

The church nave is covered with barrel vaults supported by arches resting on four main columns and pilasters at the corners. With its roof resting on four main columns and apses in the eastern section, the nave exhibits a typical example of a basilical plan. The floor surface of the nave is completely destroyed. The entire surface of the soil has been dug up and scattered haphazardly. Therefore, it is not possible to understand how the bases of the columns were originally located on the church's floor. The column shafts are constructed in a regular circular style with stone blocks of varying lengths. The column capitals are finished with two moldings. The lower molding is concave, and the upper one is convex. Following these two circular moldings, the column capital is in the Doric style. The column capitals are prism-shaped. The prism capital is enlivened with sharp (S) carvings on four sides. Since the sharp-cornered (S) arrangement is made at the intersecting corners of the capital, an almond-shaped muqarnas appearance is created in the center. On the upper parts of the column capitals, small rectangular recesses are carved in four directions on the arch stirrup stones. Some of these recesses are currently secured with wooden struts. It appears that in their original form they were connected to each other with metal clamps. The pilasters adjacent to the wall are connected to the four columns in the central area with round arches. These buttresses are also connected along the body walls by round blind arches designed to protrude 10 cm outwards. The bases and capitals of the pilasters are designed in the shape of hexagonal prisms. There are no window openings on the north facade of the nave. In this section, there are two square-plan niches in the northwest wall. One of the niches is relatively larger. On the east facade, there are three semicircular apses. The central main apse is wider than the rest of the building due to its central plan. The upper parts of the apses are designed in the shape of a quarter sphere. There are no openings in any of the three apses. Small hollow cubes are located in the quarter-dome section of the apses. There is a small niche in the southeast wall of each of the three apses. Another niche has been built in the northeast wall of the central apse. The south body wall of the nave contains a loophole window within each arch. While the loophole windows are square on the exterior, their upper parts are rounded arches on the interior. Below the last loophole window in the southwest, there is a rounded arched opening. This opening serves as a doorway from the nave to the sacristy. The doorway is designed as a square window on the inside. In the sacristy, it is also rounded arched, and a second arch form is created above the arch opening in this section. At the level of the capitals of the pilasters embedded in the nave wall, there are rectangular recesses measuring 10x20 cm in three directions, intended for wooden beams. These recesses appear to have been made for the second floor in the nave. These recesses, prepared for the load-bearing elements of the second floor, encircle the structure in a U shape in three directions: west, north, and south. The recesses continue along the naves in two directions from the entrance of the nave and end in front of the apse. These beams were probably supported by wooden supporting columns. The distances between the recesses for the wooden beams are not standard. There is no literature available regarding the existence of an upper floor (Figures 10-11-12-13-14).

Narthex

The narthex is rectangular in plan, measuring 5x15.4 meters. There is a door opening from the sacristy to the narthex on the south side. We have no information about whether or what the nature of the portal opening to the outside was in the sacristy section. The outer perimeter wall in this section, the sacristy, is completely destroyed. Therefore, it is unclear whether there was a doorway. However, a monumental entrance was made from the sacristy to the narthex. The stepped entrance is recessed 3 meters on the outermost side, to the south. The round arch surrounding the entrance rises from a pilaster, enlivened by two horizontal moldings at the arch's starting level. The main entrance opening is 1 meter wide. It then provides further inward movement with a step of 1.5 meters. The door opening is in the form of a round arch. A niche with a round arch is located in the north wall directly opposite the door. This niche, 45 cm deep, 2 m wide and 2x25 cm high, cannot be precisely measured due to the soil accumulated at the base. The type of material covering the narthex floor is unclear due to accumulated soil. Based on the pilaster remnants on the nave entrance wall, it is thought that the narthex roof was originally a barrel vault supported by arches, similar to the nave. However, considering the pilasters and capitals adjacent to the wall, as well as the church's western wall and elevations, it appears that the narthex roof was lower than the church's. The opening through which access was provided to the units to the west of the narthex is not determined due to the complete collapse of this wall. The narthex floor is filled with numerous decorative stone fragments (Figures 15-16-17-18).

Sacristy/Preparation Room for Clergy

The sacristy is a room for church relics where sacred and everyday objects are kept, and a unit where the clergy prepares themselves. This unit is also called skeuphylakion (Doğan, 2003, 79). It is known that the sacristy section was a resting and working area reserved for the clergy, and that there was always a table in this area (O'Donnell, 1884, 31, 92). Located on the south side of the monastery, this unit is largely destroyed, but some of its outer walls remain standing. There is a door providing access from this unit to the Naos. The loopholes in the upper part of the wall of the Naos adjacent to this unit suggest that the height of the sacristy section was lower in this part, although on the east side, the body wall adjacent to the church, although partly destroyed, appears to be equal to the church wall. Therefore, it is difficult to make a definitive judgment about the height measurements of the sacristy section's walls or the extent and type of its roof covering. The sacristy unit measures 7x19 m. However, the section of the body wall 10 m from east to west is completely destroyed, leaving no trace. The sacristy section consists of two parts on the east side. Each rectangular area measures 3x6 m. A transition to the units on the west side is made via a difference in elevation. However, the units in this section are completely destroyed. It is assumed that there was a portal in the south wall of the sacristy. It is unlikely that there was an entrance gate in the other sections. An entrance opening is possible in this section, but no evidence of a gate could be found due to the ruins.

Units in the Western Section

The units adjacent to the west in the narthex are surrounded by an outer wall, and due to the slope of the ground, they are enclosed by a high wall. The units in this section consist of rooms of various sizes. The last room in the northwest section has interior dimensions of 2.5x3 m, the one next to it is 1.8x3 m, another is 2x3 m, and the room furthest to the right, in the southwest, has interior dimensions of 5.5x3 m. This largely destroyed unit has a two-story arrangement due to the lower elevation level. No information has been determined regarding the internal structure or the plans of the lower floors of this two-story arrangement. The interiors are completely filled with earth. The stones in the western wall have a fairly regular workmanship. This western wall, which surrounds the units, is made of basalt stone. It is understood that this rather hard stone was used in this section due to the slope, and that a smoother and harder stone was preferred to prevent the damage that this slope would cause. The three rows of stones on the western side of the wall, starting from the foundation, appear to be of different sizes and their workmanship is not very neat, suggesting an older wall structure. The rows of stones continuing above these three rows are quite regular and give the appearance of being constructed at a later period. Another feature of the wall in this section is the softening of the wall at both corners. The stones at the

corners have been cut and softened, and decorations have been created at a certain level. Considering the stones used in the church, narthex, and sacristy, and their current condition, it is understood that this section, i.e., the walls surrounding the western units, was added later during restoration/repair. At the same time, the appearance of the stones and the softened corners raise doubts about whether this section was part of the monastery's initial construction.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Bingöl Province contains numerous examples of Christian religious architecture, particularly churches, while monasteries are known primarily through historical sources and recent field surveys. Available evidence suggests that twelve monasteries survive only as ruined or completely vanished sites, whereas four monasteries can still be identified by name and location. Among these are the Surp Garabed Monastery in the Peri Suyu Valley, the Surp Giragos/Saint George Monastery in Güngörsün Village, reportedly restored in the nineteenth century (Tokat, 2015, 113), and the İsa Mesih/Surp Pırgiç Monastery in Açıkgüney Village, believed to date to 1383 (Tokat, 2015, 99). However, apart from limited architectural remains and foundation-level traces, these monasteries no longer preserve sufficient evidence for reconstructing their original plans, functions, or architectural organization.

Based on currently available evidence, the Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery is the best-preserved monastic complex in the province and the only example whose architectural layout can be reconstructed with reasonable confidence. The monastery's church exhibits a characteristic plan in the region with its three naves rising on four columns and its vaulted roof. It is most similar to the Surp Kevork Church in Yeldeğirmeni Village and the St. George/Surp Giragos Church in Çanakçı Village (Butasım, 2010, 45-49). In both churches, the roof rises on four independent columns in the center. It is possible to see churches continuing this plan in almost every region of Anatolia. The Hagios Stephanos Church in Niğde Center, with its three naves supported by four columns, is similar to the church plan of the Surp Asdvadzadzin monastery (Gültekin, 2024). The Surp Minas Church in the Aziziye district of Erzurum resembles the church in the Surp Asdvadzadzin monastery due to its barrel vault roof supported by four columns (Torun & Torun, 2021, 539-540). The similarities in plan, construction techniques, and material use may suggest that the church in Kiğı belongs to a comparable architectural tradition and possibly a similar period of construction or renovation. The Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in Sancaktepe Village, Bayburt, dating from 1818, is similar to the church in the monastery on Köşmür Mountain in Kiğı with its three naves supported by four columns and its barrel vault roof (Çiğdem et al., 2020, 315). The Akyaka Church in the Demirözü district of Bayburt generally exhibits the same typology with its three-nave basilical plan supported by four central columns (Çiğdem et al., 2020, 334). The Bitlis Yumurtatepe (Papşin) Church, with its roof rising on four columns in the central area, the central nave ending in an apse, and its rectangular plan (Öztürker, 2022, 1013-1015), is similar to the Kiğı Surp Asdvadzin Church. However, it differs from Surp Asdvadzin in that it has pastophorium cells on both sides of the apse.

The Surp Georges Church in Van, which stands on four pillars and has an entrance adjacent to the Surp Astuacacin Church, is described as a jamatum by Yalçın Karaca. However, M. J. Thierry, who studied this monastery in 1989, describes this section as the Saint George narthex (Karaca & Kızgın, 2021, 142, 143; Öztürk 2021, 16). Although the jamatum in the Seven Churches shows similarities with the plan of the Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in Kiğı in terms of four central columns and corner piers, it differs in that the side aisles have a semicircular plan. Thierry's description of it as a narthex is because it provides access to another church with a cruciform plan via a doorway. However, in the Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in Kiğı and similar churches, the narthex section and the transition from there to the nave of the church are very distinct.

The building's roof, columns and pilasters, and the stone arrangements used in the doorways are characteristic of the region. The barrel-vaulted roof, hexagonal pilaster capitals, and the rounded arched upper parts of the square window openings are repeated in the church in Yedisu Güzgülü/Gözoğlu

Village (Tokat, 2015, 33). Similar applications are also found in the Saint George Church in Çanakçı Village and the Saint Kevork Church in Yeldeğirmeni Village.

The narthex section of the monastery, as evidenced by the pilaster and the arched stirrup stone continuing from it, appears to be lower than the church. The fact that the nave of the church is higher than the narthex is not unique to this structure. The narthex of the Amena Surp Pırgiç Monastery in Bahçesaray district of Van has a lower roof than the nave of the church (https://www.collectif2015.org/tr/100Monuments/Le-Monastere-du-Saint-Sauveur-de-Mogs-ou-de-Dzebad/, 2026). Similarly, the marytrium of the Abrank Monastery in Erzincan, located nearby, has a lower wall and roof than the church. The rooms in the western part, although not exactly the same, are located west of the narthex in the Hokyats Monastery in Çatak district of Van. These units have no windows and are illuminated by a window opening at the top (https://www.collectif2015.org/tr/100Monuments/Le-Couvent-des-Esprits, 10.03.2026). These units are similar to those in the Monastery of the Virgin Mary. However, since the body walls of these units in the Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery have completely collapsed, it is not possible to obtain information about whether or what the window openings were like.

The decorations in the structure have been identified as being located above the entrance to the nave, on the northwestern part of the body walls, on the columns in the nave, and in the niches in the narthex and the interior of the nave. The extensive damage to the structure makes it difficult to determine whether there were other decorations. Especially around the entrance door, there are Armenian inscriptions on stones, some of which have been removed from the walls. However, the simplicity of the carvings may suggest that these inscriptions belong to a later phase of modification. The decorations on the corner of the northwestern body wall, like the body wall itself, appear to have been added later, as evidenced by the nature of the decoration and its unfinished appearance. This section consists of a softened area. There is an area bordered by circular decorations at the top and bottom. Below this, there are two triangular geometric arrangements. Within these geometric arrangements, triangular shapes have been created using the carving technique. A prismatic triangle is located between the two triangles. The upper part of this wall also contains a section formed by curved lines, and at the bottom, mostly damaged, are arrangements that appear to be muqarnas. A lintel stone with horizontal moldings is noticeable below these shapes. The decorations in this section, especially those at the top, appear to have been added later, lacking a sense of unity (Figure 19). The arched niches in the narthex and nave feature crosses on the keystone and, in some cases, in the center of the niche. The cross figures used on the columns and arches in the nave are simple and designed in a form that widens from the inside out. The cross motifs, ovolos, cavettos, and plain moldings found on the doors are characteristic features of Byzantine-era doors (Özügül, 2024, 662).

As understood from field studies, the stone material used in the structure was extracted from a quarry located approximately 500 meters south of the building. A large amount of stone material was extracted from the quarry and separated for processing. Many of the stones show traces of stone tools. The fresh appearance of the quarry faces and the limited weathering observed on the extracted blocks may indicate relatively recent quarrying activity, although this interpretation requires further geological and archaeological investigation. The stones from the quarry are basalt, and basalt stone was also used in the structure (Figure 20). In almost all Armenian churches and monasteries in Eastern Anatolia, stone material was used due to the abundance of stone and the presence of stonemasons. The abundance and ease of processing of volcanic tuff stone, in particular, made this material widely used (Özkaynak, 2023, 544).

The present study is based on architectural documentation and surface survey data. As no archaeological excavation has yet been conducted at the monastery, the original functions of several associated units, the chronology of construction phases, and the relationship between the church and the surrounding structures remain only partially understood. Furthermore, no dated inscription or stratified archaeological material directly associated with the surviving architectural remains was identified

during the survey. Consequently, the chronological and typological assessments proposed here should be regarded as preliminary and subject to revision through future excavation, conservation, and archaeometric studies.

The results of this study indicate that the Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery represents the best-preserved monastic complex currently documented in Bingöl Province and constitutes an important example of rural Armenian monastic architecture in Eastern Anatolia. The surviving church, narthex, and associated architectural remains provide valuable evidence for understanding regional ecclesiastical architecture and monastic organization. Comparative analysis suggests that the monastery shares significant architectural characteristics with churches and monastic structures in Erzurum, Erzincan, Bayburt, and Van. Nevertheless, the absence of excavation, securely dated inscriptions, and stratified archaeological deposits limits the chronological interpretation of the complex. Future archaeological excavation, conservation work, and material analyses will be essential for clarifying the monastery's construction phases, functional organization, and regional significance.

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Ethical Approval

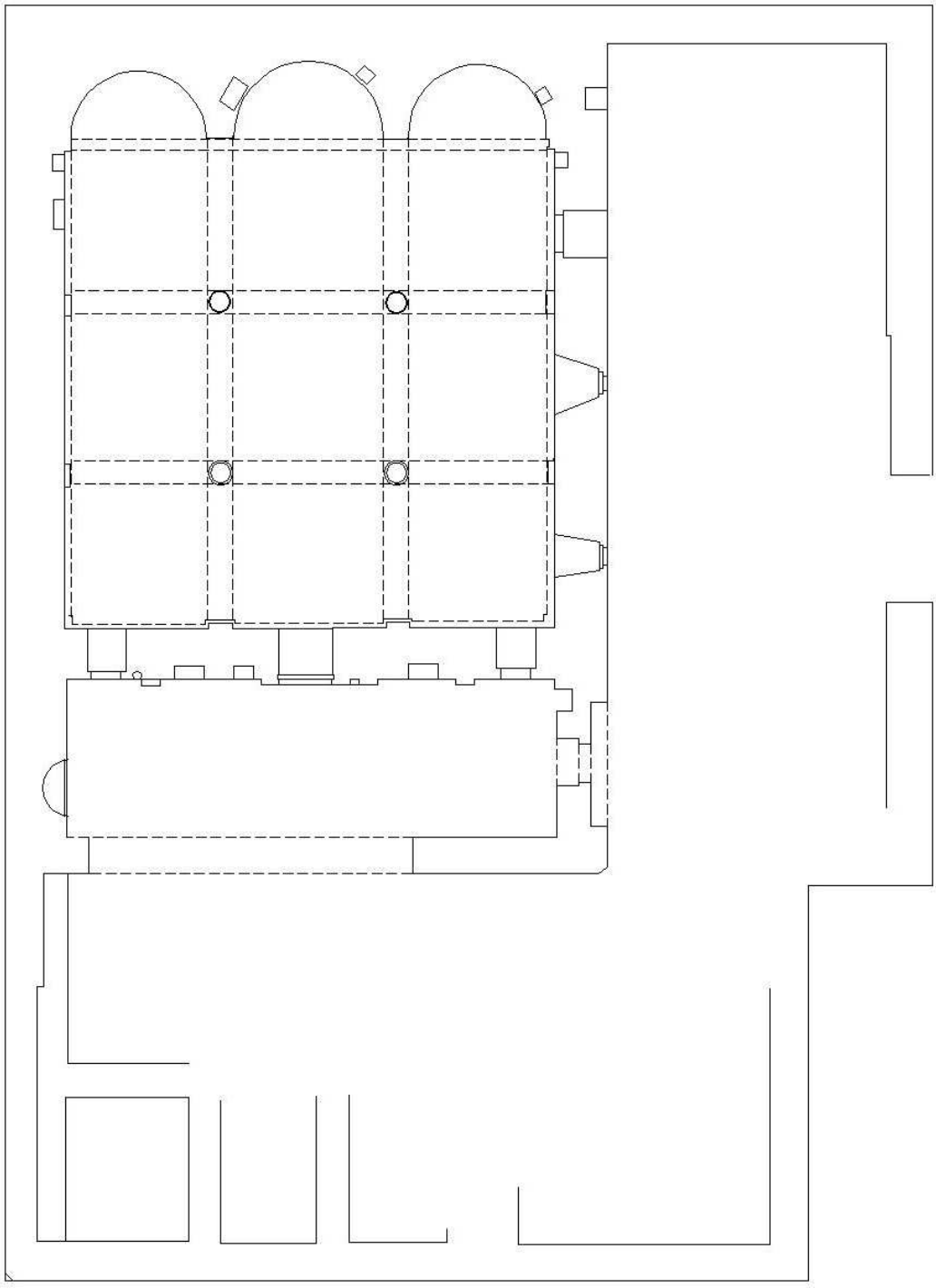
Ethical Approval: This study is based on archaeological field survey research conducted under permission granted by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums. No human participants or animals were involved in this research. Therefore, approval from an institutional ethics committee was not required.

Research Guidelines

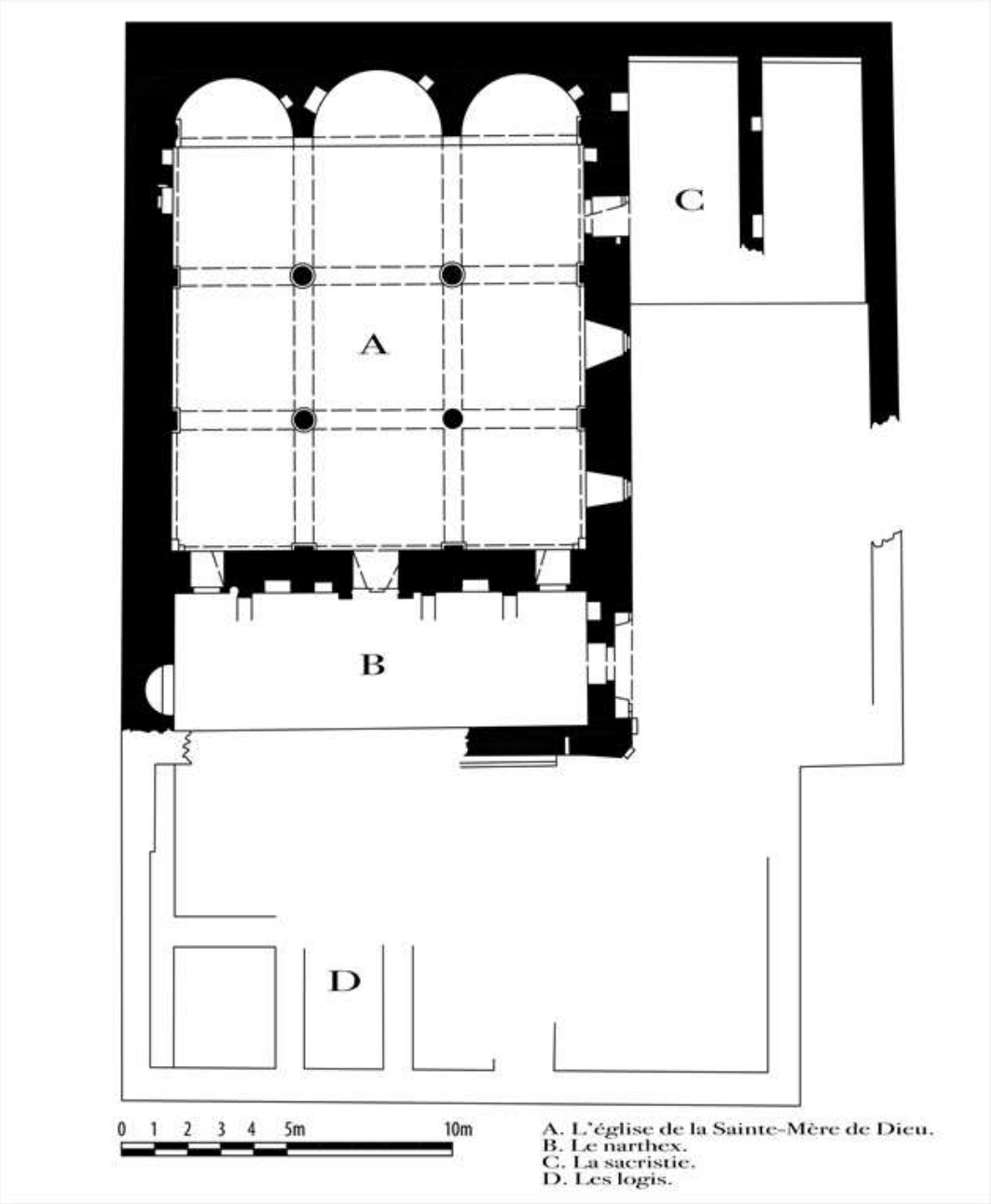
All research activities were carried out in accordance with the regulations and permissions issued by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism and relevant national legislation governing archaeological field research.

Informed Consent

Informed Consent: Not applicable. This study did not involve human participants or personal data.



Plan 1: Plan of Kiğı Saint Mary/Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery



Plan 2: Kedahayats Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery
(https://www.collectif2015.org/tr/100Monuments/Le-Monastere-de-la-Sainte-Mere-de-Dieu-Penche-sur-la-Riviere/, Accessed: 1.01.2024)



Figure1: General view of Saint Mary / Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery and its surroundings.



Figure 2: View of Surp Asdvadzadzin/Saint Mary Monastery from the south.



Figure 3: View of Saint Mary/Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery from the southwest.



Figure 4: Entrance facade of Saint Mary/ Surp Asdvadzadzin Monastery church.



Figure 5: The entrance door of the church.



Figure 6: Detail of the church entrance door.



Figure 7: The stone on the left side of the church door.



Figure 8: Buttress, window, and niche on the west wall of the church, to the right of the entrance.



Figure 9: Window, buttress, and niche to the left of the entrance on the west wall of the church.



Figure10: View of the church's west entrance from the apse.



Figure11: The church's roof and columns.



Figure 12: View from the entrance towards the apse



Figure 13: Apse roof

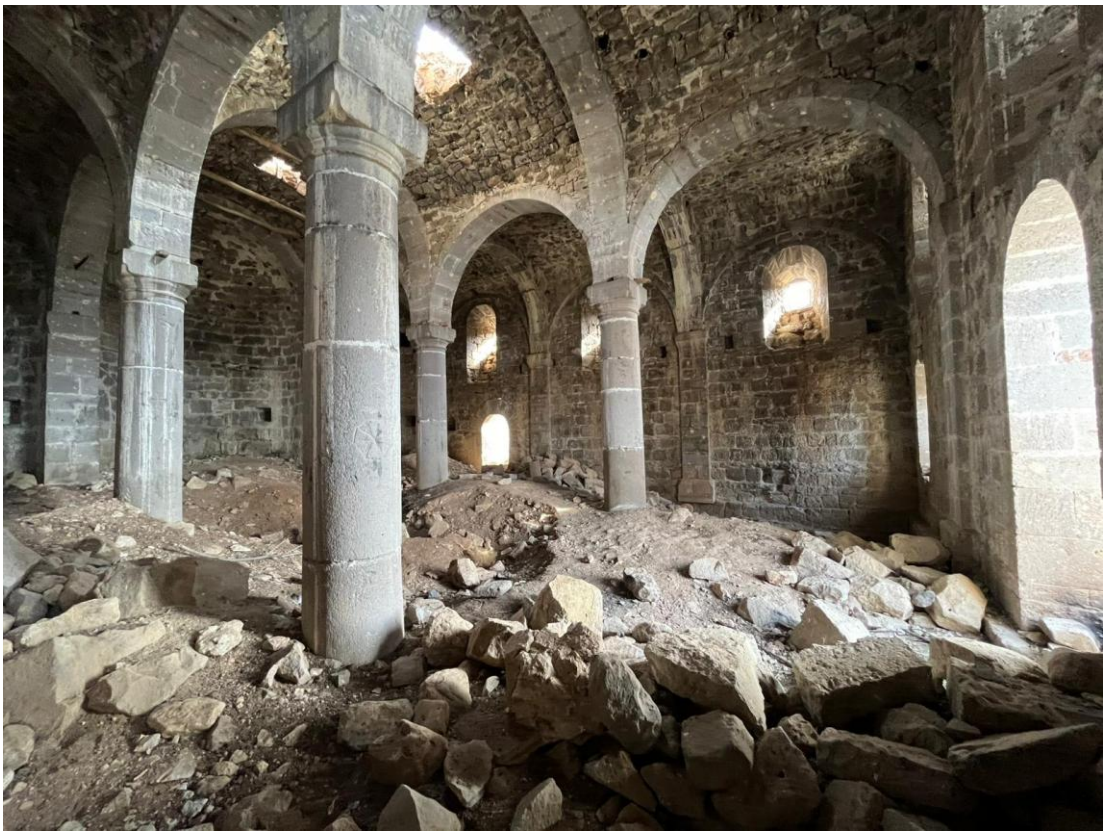


Figure14: View of the nave from the northwest corner.



Figure15: Narthex entrance gate



Figure 16: View from the West: sacristy, narthex and church entrance gate.



Figure17: View from the round arched niche opposite the entrance inside the narthex.

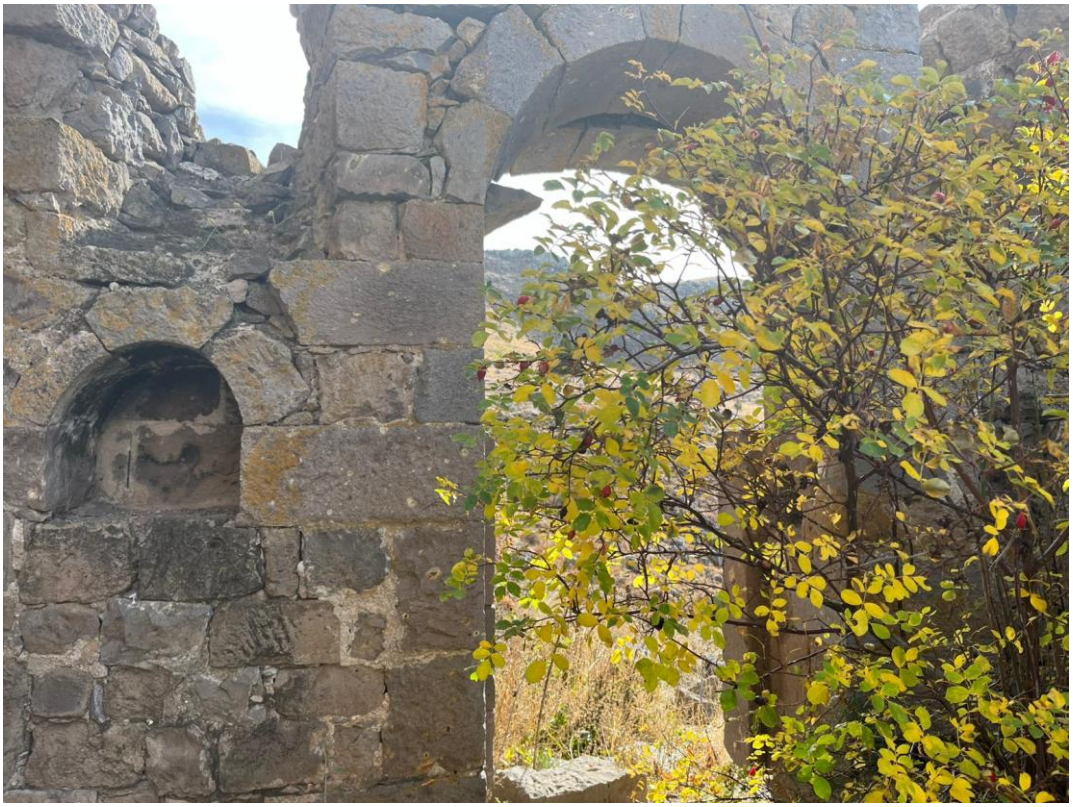


Figure 18: View from the narthex towards the doorway.

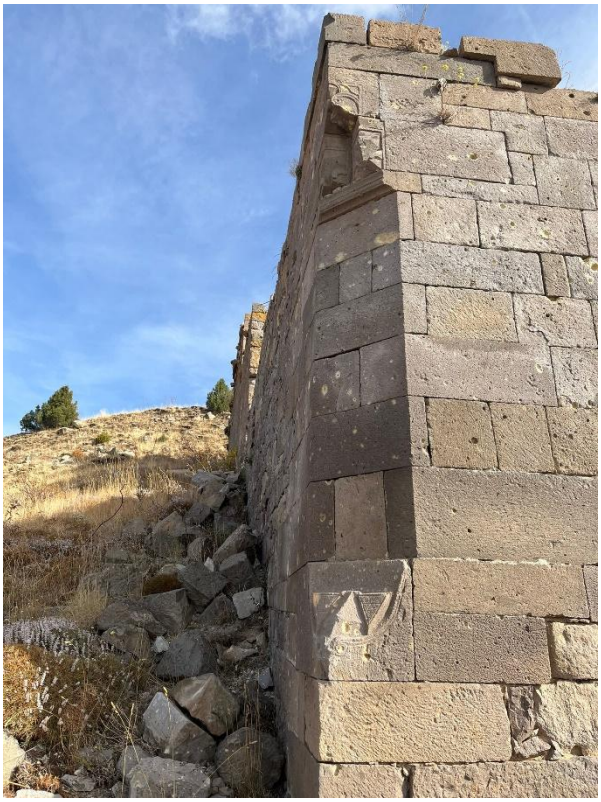


Figure 19: Decorations on the northwest body wall.



Figure 20: The quarry near the monastery.