



The Old Mosque of Savur/Mardin: An Analysis of Architecture, Inscriptions, and Patronage

Mardin/Savur'daki Eski Camii: Mimari, Kitabe ve Bani Analizi

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Öz

Bu çalışma, Mardin'in Savur ilçe merkezinde yer alan Eski Camii ve kitabelerinden oluşmaktadır. Yapı; cami, medrese, avlu, abdesthane ve minareten oluşan bir külliye özelliğine sahiptir. Yapı içerisinde yedi adet Arapça kitabe ve bir adet Süryanice kitabe bulunmaktadır. Kitabeler üzerinde yapılan inceleme ve değerlendirmeler, hem daha önce okunmuş hem de önceki çalışmalarda detaylı olarak ele alınmamış kitabeleri kapsamaktadır. İbadet mekanının kible duvarında, mihrabın doğu tarafında yapıya dair inşa kitabesi yer almaktadır. Sekiz satırlık Arapça kitabeye göre cami 827H/1423 yılında inşa edilmiştir. Bu inşa kitabesinde bani ismi yer almamaktadır. Ancak, kitabenin inşaa tarihine göre, İran coğrafyasından bölgeye gelen Karakoyunlu devletinin hükümdarı Kara Yusuf'un (r. 1389-1420) oğlu İskender Mirza'nın (r. 1420-1434) saltanatlık yılında yapıldığı tahmin edilmektedir. Karakoyunlular, Mardin, Savur ve çevresini 1409-1432 yılları arasında kısa bir dönem yönetebilmişlerdir. Karakoyunluların Savur'da imar çalışmaları hakkında pek bilgi mevcut olmadığı gibi Mardin merkezde de çok az mimari eserleri günümüze kadar gelmiştir. Dolayısıyla, Savur Camii'nin üzerindeki kitabe, Kara Koyunlu emiri İskender Mirza döneminde bu bölgede yapılan bir inşaa çalışmasını belgelemesi açısından önemlidir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son dönemlerinde Savur'un yerel yöneticileri tarafından camiye önemli eklemeler yapılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, makalede caminin banileri hakkında bilgi verilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mardin, Savur Eski Camii, Karakoyunlular, Savur Beyleri, Baniler, Kitabeler.

ABSTRACT

This article studies the Old Mosque located in the centre of the Savur district of Mardin. The structure functions as a complex, consisting of a mosque, madrasa, courtyard, ablution area, and minaret. The building has seven Arabic inscriptions and one Syriac inscription. The study and evaluation of these inscriptions includes both those that have been previously read and those that have not been thoroughly analysed in previous studies. An Arabic inscription on the qibla wall of the mosque, on the east side of the mihrāb, commemorates the construction of the mosque, with its eighth line providing the year 827H (1423AD). The name of the patron is not mentioned. However, the inscribed date indicates that the mosque was built during the rule of Iskandar Mirza (r. 1420-1434), the son of Qara Yūsuf (r. 1389-1420). The latter was the ruler of the Qara Qoyunlu— who arrived in the region from Iran—and ruled Mardin, Savur, and the surrounding areas for a short period, i.e., between 1409 and 1432. Little is known about the construction policy implemented by this dynasty in Savur, notably in the center of Mardin where very little architectural work has survived. Therefore, the inscription on the Savur mosque is precious as it testifies to constructions in this area during the reign of the Qara Qoyunlu emir of the region, Iskandar Mirza. During the last periods of the Ottoman Empire, important additions were made to the mosque by the local rulers of Savur. In this context, the article provides information about the patronages of the mosque.

Keywords: Mardin, Old Mosque of Savur, Qara Qoyunlu, Savur Begs, Patronages, Inscriptions.

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INTRODUCTION

The district of Savur is located 47 km north-east of the city centre of Mardin, capital of its eponymous province. Like Mardin, Savur was founded around the foot of a castle built on a high hill (Fig 1). For this reason, the topography of Savur is often compared to the Old City of Mardin.



Fig. 1: An overview of Savur (Rahşan Doğru, 2019)

The name Savur is thought to derive from the Syriac word *šawrā* (ܫܘܪܐ) –pronounced *šawrō* in the Western dialect–, meaning “neck”, and might have a more ancient Semitic etymology (Smith, 1903: 476; Akyüz, 1998: 134). It was transcribed in Arabic as *Šawr*, in both literature (Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, 1906: 399) and epigraphy (see below). Savur, which has been an important region since ancient times, had ties with Mardin in the Middle Ages that appear in the archaeological record. Notably, inscriptions from Savur’s Old Mosque testify to the development of the city during the Islamic period, specifically under the Artuqid, Ayyūbid, Qara Qoyunlu, and Ottoman periods.

During the rule of al-Malik al-Šāliḥ Nağm al-Dīn Ayyūb (r. 630-637H/1232-1239) this area was divided into two principalities: Ḥiṣn Kāyfā, in the north, was for a time in the hands of the Artuqids of Mardin, while the Ayyūbids ruled the castle of Savur. The Artuqids lived under the protection of the Ayyūbids until 1260 (Baluken, 2016: 53; Kaya, 2023: 73, 101). Then, the first half of the 15th century witnessed the struggles between the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu for the control of Mardin. Mardin was ruled by the Qara Qoyunlu between 1409 and 1432. When there was no ruler from the Qara Qoyunlu dynasty in Mardin, the administration of the city was overseen by a governor named Nökeri Tanrıvermiş (Tan, 2011: 78). Additionally, an inscription from the period of the Qara Qoyunlu governor Tanrıvermiş is preserved in the Grand Mosque of Mardin (Fig 2), providing epigraphic evidence of his administration.



Fig 2: The inscription of the Qara Qoyunlu governor, Tanrıvermiş (Kaya, 2023)

In the spring of 812H/1409, when the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Qara Yūsuf visited the Muş region in the company of several emirs, men of the Artuqid ruler of Mardin, al-Malik al-Şāliḥ, arrived and informed them that Qara Yülük Osman, the Aq Qoyunlu lord, was marching towards Mardin. They said that if the Qara Qoyunlu do not intervene, Mardin Castle will be lost (Sümer, 1984: 80; Schmidt-Dumon, 1970: 98). Consequently, Qara Yūsuf gathered Şams al-Dīn (the ruler of Bitlis), emir Sehend, and other emirs of Kurdistan at the head of a large army near Amid. They marched to Mardin and defeated Qara Yülük Osman, who fled the Aleppo. After this incident, Qara Yūsuf came to Mardin and married one of his daughters to the Artuqid ruler al-Malik al-Şāliḥ, giving him the city of Mosul in return. Qara Yūsuf then appointed Ali as the governor of Mardin. However, the Artuqid ruler al-Malik al-Şāliḥ died in Mosul a shortly thereafter, with one theory suggesting he was poisoned by Qara Yūsuf's men (Sümer, 1984: 80; Schmidt-Dumon, 1970: 98). In and around Mardin, this marked the end of the Artuqid era and the beginning of the Qara Qoyunlu era. The Qara Qoyunlu continued to expand their borders by capturing the cities of Mardin, Mosul, and Erbil. Subsequently, Qara Yūsuf appointed an emir named al-Nāşir to govern Mardin (Schmidt-Dumon, 1970: 98). Qara Yūsuf died in 823H/1420 (Bitlisi, 2013: 412; Schmidt-Dumon, 1970: 103) and his son Iskander Mirza became the head of the Qara Qoyunlu state. In 824H/1421, the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Qara Yülük Osman organised an expedition to Mardin to take advantage of the situation. Facing this invasion, Iskandar Mirza, emir Şams al-Dīn, the ruler of Cizre, and three thousand Kurdish soldiers called for help. Tanrıverdi, who had been appointed as governor of Mardin by Qara Yūsuf, ordered the closure of the city gates. Subsequently, Mardin became a battleground between the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu, with the latter's attempt to seize the city ultimately ending in failure (Sümer, 1984: 119). However, in 1432 the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Qara Yülük conquered Mardin from al-Nāşir, the governor of Qara Qoyunlu. This marked the end of the Qara Qoyunlu rule in Mardin and the beginning of the Aq Qoyunlu period (Demirkent, 2005: 94, 95). During the Qara Qoyunlu period, major construction projects took place in the regions of Tabriz, Yerevan, Van, Bitlis, and Iğdır (Konyar, 2004: 230). During this time, the Qara Qoyunlu were subject to the Timurid state in Mardin—indeed, most of the coins minted in Mardin had Qara Qoyunlu names on one side and the names of the Timurid rulers on the other (Album, 1976: 143). The Aq Qoyunlu period in Mardin lasted from 835H/1432 to 908H/1502. During this period, Qara Yülük, Hamza b. Qara Yülük Osman (1435-44), Cihangir b. Ali b. Qara Yülük Osman (1444-69) and Kasım b. Cihangir (1503) ruled from Mardin. Many architectural buildings from all

three periods have survived in Mardin and its surroundings to the present day (Göyünç, 1969: 13). Later, in 1508, the Safavid ruler *Şah* Ismail came to Mardin and took control of the city of Savur, along with Mardin, for a short period. In 1516, Sultan Selim I (Yavuz Sultan Selim) took the region from the Safavids, incorporating Mardin and Savur into the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, Savur was governed by its local begs (Bekin, 2009: 11).

The architectural structure under study, the Old Mosque of Savur, is located today in the Gazi neighbourhood, in the centre of the Savur district in the province of Mardin. According to the land register of 924H/1518, Savur was classified as a sub-district within the Mardin Sanjak, and the judge of the district at that time was Mevlana Yūsuf. For the same period, Katip Çelebi (1609-1657) mentioned a mosque in Savur (Göyünç, 1969: 59), which likely refers to the Old Mosque. The earliest Arabic inscription inside the mosque is dated to 827H/1423, from the Qara Qoyunlu period. Another mosque in Savur, referred to as the Central Mosque, bears an earliest inscription of Seyid emir Hacı Abd Allah Beg from 1297H/1880 (Yıldız, 2003: 18), indicating that a restoration of the building was carried out in 1330H/1912 by the son of Hacı Abd Allah Beg. Since these two inscriptions from the Central Mosque are from a much later period than Katip Çelebi's reference, the Old Mosque of Savur was most likely the mosque mentioned. According to the *Diyarbakır Salname* of 1286-1323H (1869-1905), a mosque existed in Savur at that time: the *Cami-i Şerif* (Tellioglu, 1999: 308). This probably refers to the Old Mosque of Savur. The building in question is therefore one of the oldest religious structures in Savur.

The article begins by discussing the date of the mosque's construction, followed by a detailed examination of the prayer hall, the *madrasa*, and other monuments within the complex. The inscriptions found in the building are then analysed, leading to conclusions based on their content. An assessment is also made of the Christian symbols and a Syriac inscription present in the building, which some scholars consider to be evidence that the Old Mosque of Savur was originally a church.

1. Construction Date of the Mosque and Its Patronages

The Old Mosque of Savur was protected and registered by the Diyarbakır Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Regional Directorate in 1979. Repair and restoration works have been carried out on the mosque in different periods, including in recent times. In December 2003, a report for a simple repair of the mosque was prepared by the Diyarbakır Regional Foundation Directorate. The mosque was subsequently repaired in 2007. It is possible that additional repairs to the mosque after this date resulted in the inscriptions being added. In December 2022, the Diyarbakır Regional Directorate of Foundations started working again on repairing the mosque. Non-original plaster and wood-like materials were removed from the surface in order to achieve the original wall and vault texture inside the mosque, the restoration of which was completed in April 2024. The blackening of the stones on the exterior of the minaret and the building were cleaned.

Inside the mosque, various inscriptions provide insights into the construction history of multiple mosques. An eight-line inscription, written in *nashī* script on the *qibla* wall of the prayer hall and dated to 827H/1423 (Inscription n° 1), indicates the initial construction during the Qara Qoyunlu period. Although the patron's name is not mentioned, historical context suggests the administration of Mardin, Savur, and the surrounding area was under Iskandar Mirza's rule during this time, indicating Qara Qoyunlu influence. Furthermore, there is a construction inscription on the *mihrāb* of the mosque, dated to 957H/1550 (Inscription n° 6), corresponding to the Ottoman period. However, the *mihrāb* itself may not be as old, raising the possibility of the date being added later. Additionally,

two other inscriptions within the mosque, dated to 1195H/1780 (Inscription n° 4) and 1258H/1842 (Inscription n° 5), attribute the building's foundation to Hasan Beg and Abd Allah Beg, respectively. These inscriptions provide further historical context regarding the mosque's construction and founding figures.

Hacı Abd Allah Beg, also known as Hacı Beg, was an influential figure who lived between 1818 and 1873 and played an important role in Savur. He belonged to one of the oldest families in the region. His loyalty to the Ottoman Empire during the rebellion of Botan Miri Bedirxan Beg in 1842 greatly enhanced his status. After Bedirxan Beg surrendered in 1847, the Ottoman administration gave Hacı Beg the village of Anittepe (Kalaç) as a gift. Due to his growing reputation, he was appointed district governor of Midyat and civil governor of Mardin between 1869 and 1870. His tomb, located in the Centre cemetery of Savur, dates from the late Ottoman period and is remarkably well preserved. The gravestone, inscribed in Arabic, reads "Hacı Abd Allah Beg b. İbrahim Beg"² and indicates that he died in 1290H/1873 (Fig 3). In addition, the tombstone mentions that he had high palaces and mansions built, and the Sufi poetic expressions on the same tombstone reflect the aesthetic approach to tombstone design of the period. Based on this information, it can be concluded that Emir Seyid Hacı Abd Allah Beg died before 1873.

Hacı Abd Allah Beg's family is referred to as "Seyid" in the region, and in some Ottoman archival documents their name appears as "Hacı Şeyh Ağa" (Kankal, 2007: 472; Tan, 2011: 271). In the family tree of the Savur Principality, as reported by Altan Tan, there is a mention of a person named Hasan, who was the brother of Hacı Abd Allah Beg's great-grandfather. It is also known that Emir Seyid Hacı Abd Allah Beg had 11 sons, and one of them, Abdulfettah, is listed second in order (Tan, 2011: 272). Another gravestone in the central cemetery of Savur states that Abdulfettah, the son of Hacı Abd Allah Beg, died in 1298H/1881 (Pullu, 2010: 26, 28). This confirms the information in Altan Tan's family tree.

In the centre of Savur, near the Old Mosque, an inscription in the house of Abdullatif Özbek indicates that the building was constructed by Emir Abd Allah Beg in 1257H/1841 (Yıldız, 2003: 90). Furthermore, another three-line inscription on the minaret of the Savur Central Mosque confirms that the mosque and its minaret were built by Seyid Emir Hacı Abd Allah Beg.

These inscriptions and historical records show that Hacı Abd Allah Beg played a key role not only in the administrative development but also in the architectural and social progress of Savur.

² Fig 3: The inscription reads: لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله هذا القبر الرحوم أمير حاج عبدالله بك. ابن إبراهيم بك

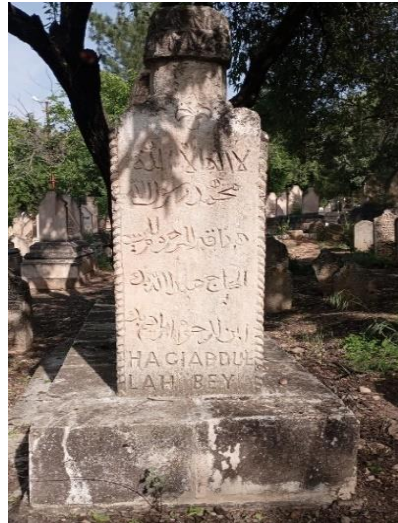


Fig 3: Tombstone of Hacı Abd Allah Beg (Kaya, 2024)

Based on the available dates, it has been concluded that the existing structure of the Old Mosque in Savur dates back to the 15th and 18th centuries, with several additions made over time to give it its present form.

1.1. Plan and Architecture of the building

The Old Mosque of Savur is located in the Gazi neighborhood, in the centre of the Savur district, in the province of Mardin. It was built on the bedrock corresponding to the level of the outer wall to the south (Fig 5a) and west (Fig 5b), facing the street to the south of the existing building and at the foot of Savur Castle. The mosque is bounded by streets on the south, east and west sides, while houses are built adjacent to the mosque on the north side. The mosque complex includes a prayer hall, a *madrasa*, a minaret, a courtyard, a cistern and an ablution room (Fig 4). The prayer hall is to the south of the building, the *madrasa* to the north, the ablution and *madrasa* rooms to the west, the courtyard in the centre of the buildings, the cistern in the centre of the courtyard and the minaret to the north-east. The entire building complex measures 24 x 23.32 square meters³. Below is information on each of the architectural sections of the building.

³ Plan dimensions taken from Google Earth. 25/05/2024.

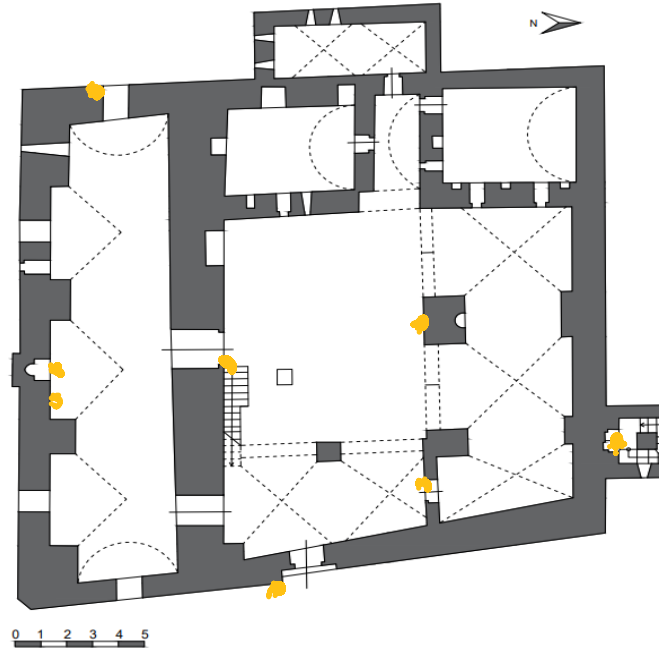


Fig 4: Plan of the Old Mosque of Savur (Yücel Dönmez, 2024, based on İrfan Yıldız's research from 2003)⁴

1.2. Mosque

The mosque's prayer hall is located in the south of the building and follows a rectangular east-west plan (Figs 5c-5d). It has a single nave and a barrel vault roof. The mosque is similar in plan to the Eminateddin Social Complex *masjid* from Mardin, which dates from the Artuqid period (11th-12th centuries) (see Açıkyıldız, 2017: 20, 21). A *mihrāb* is located in the centre of the *qibla* wall, between two pillars. The interior of the mosque is accessed through two different doors. The first door opens onto the north-eastern portico. The other overlooks the open courtyard to the north-west (Fig 5e). The second door of the mosque has the shape of a small *iwān* from the inside, with a small window. There are rectangular windows with ogival arches on the east and west sides of the prayer area. Just above this window is another small window. In the southwest, there is a window with a deep pointed arch. Inside the mosque, the north-east and north-west walls show differences in the arrangement of their facades. Small niches are arranged in a single row along the northwest walls of the mosque, a masonry pattern that is absent from the west façade. Differences in wall thickness are noticeable between the north walls of the mosque and those in other directions. The north wall appears to be thicker than the other sides. Some researchers believe that the mosque was once a church (Akyüz, 1998: 138) and that it was even converted into a mosque during the Artuqid period (Halifeoğlu and Dalkılıç, 2005: 297; Tan, 2011: 271). The portico, located on the eastern side of the existing building, is the passageway connecting the mosque and the *madrassa*. It faces the western direction of the courtyard in the form of an open *iwān* with two pointed arches. The upper part of the portico is covered with a cross vault. On the right is a staircase leading to the upper floor. These steps and a wooden staircase led to the upper floor of the portico. The portico was mainly built with smooth limestone, with very little rubble.

The prayer hall of the mosque contains a *mihrāb* (Fig 5f) with an inscription dated to 957H/1550 (inscription n° 6, below) on the upper part of its pointed arch. The *mihrāb*, made entirely of cut

⁴ The areas marked in yellow on the mosque plan indicate the distribution of the inscriptions identified on the structure.

limestone and decorated with floral motifs, is rectangular in shape and is bordered by two different layers. The outermost border, decorated with an endless composition of interlaced *rumi*, has a pointed arch, while the inner border, approximately 50 cm inwards, has a round arch decorated with the same *rumi* pattern. The muqarnas frame of the *mihrāb* is decorated with a shell design, while its interior remains undecorated. At the corners of the *mihrāb* are two columns with floral capitals and grooved bases. The tripartite arch at the top of the columns is decorated with *rumi* motifs. The mosque's *mihrāb* is similar in form to that of the Central Mosque in Savur, but the stonework is more elaborate. It also bears similarities to the main entrance gates of the Abdullah Latif Mosque, Sultan İsa Mosque, Kasım Sultan *Madrassa* and Kasım Tuğmener Mosque in Mardin. Its form also evokes comparisons with the *mihrāb* of the Şehidiye *Madrassa* in Mardin and the Great Mosque in Kızıltepe, south of Mardin. In addition to the *mihrāb*, İrfan Yıldız mentions the presence of a non-original metal *minbar* within the mosque, located to the right of the *mihrāb* (Yıldız, 2003: 16). It is noteworthy, however, that the *minbar* is currently absent from the mosque and does not appear to be among the historically significant *minbar*-s from an art historical perspective.



Fig 5: A) View of the mosque from the south-east (Kaya, 2024); B) Western facade of the mosque (Kaya, 2020); C) Interior of the prayer hall (Kaya, 2024); D) Interior of the prayer hall from the west (Kaya, 2020); E) Northern entrance of the prayer hall (Kaya, 2024), F) *Mihrāb* of the prayer hall (Kaya, 2024)

1.3.Madrasa

The *madrasa* of the building is located on the north side of the portico. It was built by its founders, Hasan Beg and Hacı Abd Allah Beg, between 1195H/1780 and 1258H/1842, according to the building inscription on the entrance gate (Inscription n° 4-5, below) and the southern exterior of the *madrasa*. The *madrasa* has a single nave with cross vaults and is laid out longitudinally in an east-west direction. The entrance to the *madrasa* is on the south-east side of the building (Fig 6a). The entrance has a rectangular plan and a low arch. However, on the plan drawn by İ. Yıldız, this entrance is not visible. It was built only in form, with rubble stone on the inside and cut stone on the outside. From this entrance, it is also possible to enter the part where the portico is located. The *madrasa* has a rectangular east-west plan. Its upper roof is cross-vaulted, as are the porticoes. The *madrasa*'s *mihrāb* is located in the square pillar on the south side of the interior. It is very simple and small compared to the mosque *mihrāb*. It has a single niche *mihrāb* (Fig 6b). The *mihrāb* is made of cut stone, the other facades of rubble, and the floors of wooden materials. In addition, the lower parts of the walls of the northern facades of the interior were covered with wooden panelling. On the west side there are two rectangular windows. To the south of the pillars there are two pointed arches. Today, these arches have the appearance of large windows closed with wood and glass. The windows resemble the arches of the colonnades between the mosque and the *madrasa*. The arrangement of the arches in the *madrasa* and the portico mirrors the external layout of the *madrasa* rooms in the Sultan İsa Madrasa in Mardin, the southern façade of the Abdullah Latif Mosque and the *madrasa* rooms of the Latifiye Mosque.

In the middle of the mosque and *madrasa* is a traditional square open courtyard surrounded by buildings on all four sides. To the south is the mosque, to the north is the *madrasa*, to the east are the portico (Fig 6c) and to the west are small ablution rooms, toilets and other rooms. In the centre of the courtyard is a cistern, and the courtyard floor is made of cut stone (Fig 6d). To the west of the mosque and *madrasa* are an ablution room, a toilet and two small rooms. These rooms are accessed through an entrance resembling an *iwān* to the north-east. The *iwān*-like hall has a rectangular east-west plan and is covered by a barrel vault. To the north and south of the *iwān* are small rooms with barrel vaults. The southern room has a rectangular window and two smaller windows above it, with a low arched entrance facing north. These windows overlook the eastern side of the courtyard. The entrance to the ablution room and toilet is also to the north, facing the *iwān* section, and there is a small courtyard in this area. The ablution room and toilet are rectangular, projecting outwards, with irregular cross vaulted ceilings. Small windows on the south and west walls provide light.





Fig 6: A) The interior of the *madrasa* (Kaya, 2020); B) *Mihrāb* of the *madrasa* (Kaya, 2020); C) Courtyard and the portico (Kaya, 2024); D) View of the courtyard and the buildings to the west (Kaya, 2024)

1.4.Minaret

The minaret was constructed on the north-east side of the building, next to the *madrasa*. It is built on a square base with three floors. The last floor of the minaret continues as a cylindrical base and is covered with a cone with a pointed tip (Fig 7a). It has a single balcony at the top. The entrance to the minaret is through the rectangular, flat-arched southern entrance (Fig 7b). To light the minaret from the inside, the cylindrical section has rectangular windows facing east, west, and south. There are no window openings on any floor, except for the cylindrical section to the north. The minaret is cut limestone, and only the decoration under the balcony cone is visible. According to Gabriyel Akyüz, there is a Syriac word written on the minaret of the Old Mosque of Savur, an ancient church whose name and date of construction are unknown (Akyüz, 1998: 138). (Inscription n° 8, below). On the south side of the minaret, on the first floor, west of the entrance gate, the Syriac script in question is written in the Estrangelo style. Examples of the construction of bell towers from earlier periods (4th and 14th centuries) are rarely found in Mardin and its surrounding areas. In fact, they were predominantly built in churches and monasteries during the Tanzimat period and before the establishment of the Republic. Notable examples include the bell tower of Mor Mihayel/Burç Church (1885) (Akyüz, 1998: 39), the bell tower of Mort Şmuni Church in Mardin (1910) (Akyüz, 1998: 74), and the bell tower of Mort Şmuni Church in Midyat (1889). Furthermore, the balcony and conical elements of the minaret of the Central Mosque of Savur are very similar to those of the Old Mosque of Savur. Square minarets are common in Upper Mesopotamia and Syria, with many examples found in mosques from the Umayyad, Artuqid, and Ayyūbid periods in the southeastern region. These include the minaret of the Great Mosque of Ḥarrān, the minaret of the Great Mosque of Āmid (12th century) –modern Diyarbakır–, the minaret of the Seyit Bedrettin (Yasin) in Lice (13th century), the Atak Mosque minaret in Hani (13th century), Great Mosque minaret(13th century) in Dūnaysīr/Kızıltepe, the minaret of the Ḥalīl al-Raḥmān in al-Ruhā (608H/1211) –Şanlıurfa–, and the Kırık minaret in Mayyāfāriqīn (596-607H/1199-1210 and 617-644H/1220-1247) –Silvan–. There are also several examples in Ayyūbid Syria, including the al-Ğarrāḥ Mosque (578H/1182), the Šāmiyya *Madrasa* (582H/1186), the Mušallā Mosque (606H/1209), the Māridānīyya *Madrasa* (610H/1213), and the Šālīḥīya Hanbali Mosque (610H/1213) in Damascus. Additionally, examples in Bosra include the ‘Umar Mosque (618H/1222), and the Abū al-Fidā *Madrasa* (622H/1225), as well as further examples in Damascus, such as the Atābakīyya *Madrasa* (640H/1242) and the Muršidiyya *Madrasa* (650H/1253). Moreover, the ‘Umarī Mosque in Dar‘ā (651H/1254?) has similar architectural features. (Kaya, 2023: 564, 565). Thus, the examples of square minarets mentioned here challenge the

misconception that every tower-shaped structure with a square plan should be classified as a bell tower, as this view is often based on a stereotype.



Fig 7a-b: Views of the minaret before restoration, from the north and during the restoration of the minaret in 2024, from the south. (Kaya, 2020)

1.5. Material and technique

The Old Mosque of Savur was built on a rocky site, as can be seen from its foundations (Fig 8a). A combination of rough-hewn stone, rubble and cut stone were used as materials for the exterior and interior facades of the building. On the southern facade, the rubble material used was a column capital composed of interwoven stones on cut stone (Figs 8b-c). Similarly, a tombstone was later added to the right of the window on the west wall. A cross motif (Fig 8d) decorates the cut limestone block to the left of the second doorway on the north side. In addition, a three-line Arabic inscription on the east façade, to the left of the main entrance door, appears to have been added at a later date. The building features decorative elements that incorporate both Islamic and Christian influences. While large carved stone materials sometimes adorn the mosque walls, a variety of sizes are also used. Although flat arches are technically preferred for the doors, pointed arch patterns dominate the portico and windows. Both barrel and cross vaults are used in the upper roof plan. A rubble buttress on the south side provides additional support for the monument (Fig 8a).





Fig 8: A) The southern exterior facade of the mosque's prayer hall (Kaya, 2020); B) Column piece on the southern exterior façade (Kaya, 2020); C) Column piece on the exterior façade of the mosque (Kaya, 2020); D) Cross motif on the entrance door of the prayer hall (Kaya, 2020)

1.6. Inscriptions

A total of seven Arabic inscriptions and one Syriac inscription consisting of a few words were identified in the mosque during the field survey carried out between 2020 and 2024. İrfan Yıldız had previously evaluated the Old Mosque and its inscriptions in the catalogue of his master's thesis and later in his book (Yıldız, 2003: 10, 17; Yıldız, 2011: 16, 25). However, both studies only examined four Arabic inscriptions, while the Syriac inscription was not analysed. Furthermore, a study evaluating the architectural features and renovations of the Old Mosque of Savur included references to the inscriptions, but left their interpretations and contextual analyses incomplete (Kuzu, 2021: 239, 241). Moreover, discrepancies and errors in the transcription and interpretation of the inscriptions in both Kuzu's and Yıldız's works have been identified. In this study, all the inscriptions in the mosque, especially the Syriac inscription, which had not been addressed previously, have been re-examined and comprehensively analysed.



Inscription n° 1 – Inscription of the mosque dated to 827H/1423(Kaya, 2024)

This inscription is located on the *qibla* (southern) wall of the place of worship, on the left-hand side of the *mihrāb*. The stone block is rectangular, measures 58 x 87 cm. The middle of the inscription, which is well preserved and easily readable, is divided into two parts. The text is written in Arabic in eight using the *nashī* script, employing the relief technique on carved limestone. During restoration work in 2007, the plaster on the interior and exterior of the building was removed, which led to the discovery of the inscription (Kuzu, 2021: 237).

Arabic text

١. لما كان بتاريخ سنة سبعة وعشرين
٢. و (ثمانمئة) شرع بعمارة هذا المسجد
٣. المبارك الفقير إلى الله تعالى أمري
٤. الملك أعز الله نصره حاكم يو
- ٥ -مئذ بالصور وقد رسم أن جميع
٦. الوقف الذي عليه يكون إطلاقا لا يؤ
٧. خذ منه حاصل ولا يقدر من بعده
٨. الذي يخون عليه اللعنة إلى يوم القيامة

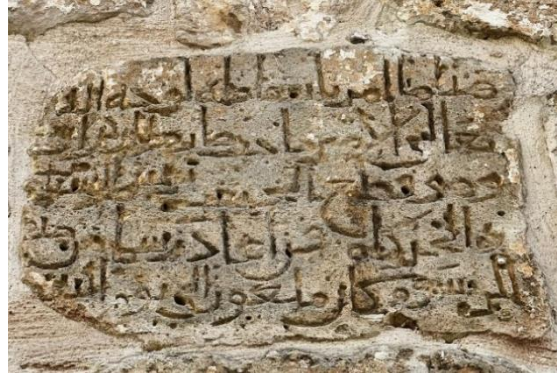
Translation

- 1- When happened in the compute the year twenty-seven
- 2- [and eight hundred,] was undertook the foundation of this mosque
- 3- blessed, the needy of God the exalted, my command
- 4- al-Malik, may God make his victory great, the governor on that
- 5- day in *al-Şawr*, he decrees that the totality of
- 6- this *waqf* will be absolute, and that no revenue
- 7- shall be taken from it and that no estimate shall be taken from afar.
- 8- Whoever betrays, the curse shall be on him until the day of Resurrection.

Comment

According to the inscription, the mosque was built in 827H/1423, making it a foundation inscription. The building inscription does not mention the name of the patron. However, based on the inscription's date of construction, it is estimated that the mosque was built during the reign of Iskandar Mirza (r. 1420-1434), the son of Qara Yūsuf (r. 1389-1420), the ruler of the Qara Qoyunlu dynasty, who had migrated to the region from Iran. The Qara Qoyunlu ruled Mardin, Savur and the surrounding area for a short period between 1409 and 1432. The mosque is also significant because it has the oldest inscribed date of any structure in Savur, particularly the Old Mosque. The Arabic name of the settlement, *al-Şawr*, appears in the fifth line of the Arabic inscription, marking its first mention in epigraphy. In addition to the inscription in Savur, there is another inscription from the Qara Qoyunlu period on the north-eastern facade of the prayer hall in the Great Mosque of Mardin. This inscription, dated 821H/1418, bears the name of Tanrıvermiş, the Qara Qoyunlu governor of Mardin (Gabriel, 1940: 295; Ilisch, 1984: 156; Beyazıt, 2009: 117, 118)⁵. Thus, at least two inscriptions from the Qara Qoyunlu period have been documented.

⁵ The Grand Mosque of Mardin's inscription is readen as follow: برز المرم الثريف امر الامير الكبير تفري ور مش بالذل الر اتب عن جماعة



Inscription n° 2 – *Khānqāh* inscription (Kaya, 2024)

This inscription is located on the pediment of the north-west entrance gate to the mosque. It is written in Arabic in five lines using the engraving technique on a rectangular piece of limestone. The inscription measures 40 x 47 cm.

Arabic Text

١- هذا ما أمر بإسقاطه لوجه الله

٢- تعالى الأمير صاحب بأرض مardin [...] ...

٣- [...] قطع الخشب [...]

٤- والخنكاه من أعاد رسما من هذه

٥- الرسوم كان ملعون إلى يوم الدين

Translation

- 1- This is what has ordained to abolish, for the sake of God,
- 2- ...the Most High, the *emir* the lord of Mārdīn [...]
- 3- [...] the cutting of wood [...]
- 4- the *Khānqāh*. Whoever reinstates any of these practices
- 5- this decree shall be cursed until the day of Resurrection.

Comment

There are noticeable abrasions, particularly on the left side of the inscription, suggesting that the text may have originally been longer. The style of writing in this inscription differs from others that have been examined. In particular, the name of the builder and the date of construction are missing. It also appears to be a foundation/*waqf* inscription. The inclusion of the term *Khānqāh* (الخنكاه) in the fourth line of the text is noteworthy. The term *Khānqāh* or *kānaqāh*, in Persian, literally a 'dwelling', 'place of residence', refers to an Islamic institution and physical facility reserved primarily for *Ṣūfī* dervishes to meet, reside, study, and gather and pray together as a group in the presence of a *Ṣūfī* master (Arabic, *ṣayḥ*; Persian, *pir*), who is the teacher, educator, and leader of the group. The term *khānqāh* is often used interchangeably in Islamic sources with the Arabic terms *ribāṭ* ('caravansary') and *zāwiya* and the Turkish term *tekke* or *takiyya* 'place of rest and support' (Böwering and Melvin-

القصابين و ملعون بن ملعون من بدل ذلك بتاريخ
أحد؟

Koushki, 2010: 456; Ephrat and Pinto, 2020: 105, 106). *Khānqāh*, who is also compared to a *zāwiya*, is described as having the characteristics of a *zāwiya* in terms of religious practice. The word *zāwiya* is found in the inscriptions of the Sittī Legliye mausoleum in the centre of Savur and the *Şayḥ Dāwud* mosque in the village of Sancar, Mardin. Both inscriptions date from the Artuqid period, between the 13th and 14th centuries⁶. The text of the inscription refers to a *khānqāh* rather than a mosque. The text of the inscription suggests that this was not originally part of the monument and was probably added later as Islamic spolia. Like the word *al-Şawr*, the word *khānqāh* appears for the first time in an inscription from this region, which makes it significant. In fact, it can be said that this is the first example of this word carved into an inscription. The style and material of the inscription suggest that it dates from the Artuqid and Aq Qoyunlu periods, from the 12th to the 15th century, and was probably commissioned by one of the emirs of Mardin. Although the term had been used in written texts before, there are almost no examples in inscriptions. Historically, such structures were used by states such as the Ayyūbids, Seljuks, and Mamluk. Saladin al-Ayyūbi founded his *khānqāh* - a hospice known as Sa'īd al-Su'adā' or al-Şalāḥiyya in 569H/1173 to house newly arrived Sufis in Cairo. He built it in the heart of the city and funded it with an endowment (*waqf*) to ensure that it would continue to provide a home for Şūfīs long after his death. In 724H/1325, however, the Mamluk sultan al-Nāşir Muhammad moved the centre of state-sponsored Şūfīs to his new *khānqāh*, located north of Cairo at Siryāqūs (Hofer, 2015: 35). Known examples of *khānqāh*-s from the Ayyūbid and from the Mamluk periods are the following: *Khānqāh* al-Salahiyya (585H/1189) in Jerusalem, *Khānqāh* al-Farāfirat(635H/1238) in Aleppo, the complex of the sultan al-Zāhir Barquq_(1384 and 1386) in Cairo and the *khānqāh* al-Nāşir Farağ Ibn Barquq (1398 and 1411) in Cairo (Behrens-Abouseif, 1985: 73, 93; Hammad, 2004: 17, 20; Hawari, 2007: 35,44). In 579H/1183, Saladin took Amīd/Diyarbakır from the emir of the Nīsānids (Turkish *Nisanoğulları* or *İnaloğulları*) and gave it to the Artuqids on the condition that it remain under their protection. As a result, Mardin and its environs were ruled by the Artuqids within the borders of the Ayyūbids for a long period until the Mongol invasions of 1260. While inscriptions found on architectural structures mention only the names of Artuqid rulers, coins minted in Mardin bear the names of both Artuqid and Ayyūbid sultans or emirs (Kaya, 2023: 59, 78). Thus, the Artuqids showed their political and economic allegiance to the Ayyūbids in a strict manner. It is believed that the *khānqāh* building developed during the Ayyūbid period was also constructed in Savur during the Artuqid period, inspired by Ayyūbid religious structures.



Inscription n° 3 – tombstone of Naşr Allāh(Kaya, 2024)

⁶ Kaya, Neslihan (2026), *The Culture of Zāwiya during the Artuqid Period in Mardin: Construction and Historical Analysis of the Sittī Legliye and Şayḥ Dāwud Mausoleums*, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny/Yearbook of Oriental Studies*, (forthcoming).

This inscription is located on the western outer wall of the mosque's prayer hall. It is written in Arabic *nashī* calligraphy; the text is engraved in relief in four lines. The rectangular limestone block measures 55 x 30 cm.

Arabic text

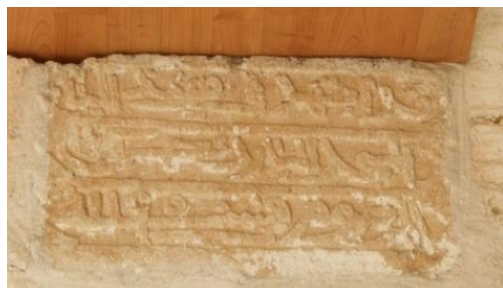
١. هذا قبر المرحوم
٢. المتوفي نصر الله
٣. ابن شاه حسين أر
٤. زنجاني في سنة ٩٤٤

Translation

- 1- This is the grave of the deceased
- 2- who departed, Naṣr Allāh
- 3- Ibn Ṣāh Ḥusayn Ar-
- 4- zingānī, in the year 944 [H/1537AD].

Comment

The inscription belongs to the tombstone of Naṣr Allāh, the son of Ṣāh Ḥusayn of Arzingānī (modern Erzincan), who died in 944 H, i.e. in 1537 AD. The tombstone of Naṣr Allāh was used as material for the western facade of the mosque. It is believed that the dimensions of the building materials vary according to the pattern of the masonry on the wall. It is believed that Naṣr Allāh, who lived during the Ottoman period, was not originally from the town of Savur, as indicated by the "Erzincan" at the end of his name. However, there is not enough information about his identity in the historical sources. In the tahrir/register of Erzincan of 1516, a person named Ṣāh Ḥusayn is mentioned (Telci, 2019: 16). The name of Naṣr Allāh's father matches the name of the inscription, suggesting a possible connection. However, no further details are available in the historical record at this time. It is possible that future in-depth research will provide more clarity regarding Naṣr Allāh's identity and his historical connections with Savur.



Inscription n° 4 – Inscription of Hasan Beg (Kaya, 2020)

The inscription, which is fully legible, is located above the entrance door to the *madrasa*. Carved in relief on cut stone, it is rectangular in shape and spans three lines. The inscription measures 50 x 30 cm.

Arabic text

١. قد اجتهد في هذا البناء

٢. المسجد المبارك حسن بك

٣. المرحوم سنة ١١٩٥

Translation

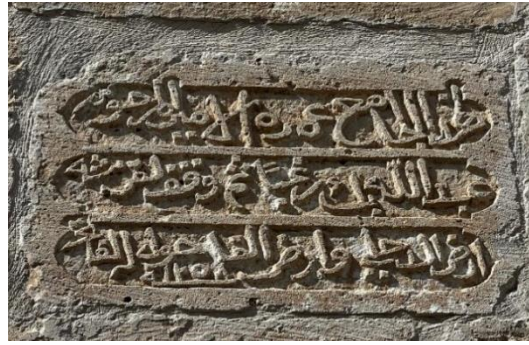
1- Has arranged for the construction of

2- the blessed mosque, Hasan Beg,

3- the deceased, in the year 1195.

Comment

According to the text, the mosque was built by Hasan Beg in 1195H/1780. There is no information about the identity of this man. However, Altan Tan's study mentions that İbrahim, the father of Hacı Abdullah Beg, and Hasan, one of the brothers of İbrahim's father, are recorded in this family tree (Tan, 2011: 272). Hasan Beg's name was not found on any other religious or civil architecture in Savur, suggesting that this mosque may be the only building associated with him in the area.



Inscription n° 5 – Inscription of Abd Allah Beg (Kaya, 2024)

The inscription is located on the outside wall of the *madrasa*, on the south side. It is rectangular in shape, written in Arabic in three lines, and carved in relief on cut stone. It is remarkably well preserved and measures 60 x 41 cm.

Arabic text

١. هذا الجامع عمره الأمير مرحوم

٢. عبد الله بك رغبا ثم وقف لفرشه

٣. أرض الاحلي وأرض الفاحول له الفاتحة سنة ١٢٥٨

Translation

1-This mosque was built by the emir, the deceased

2- Abd Allah Beg, willingly, and then he put in *waqf*, to furnish it,

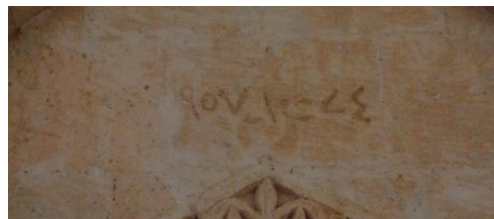
3- The land of *al-Ahlī* and the land of *al-Fāḥūl*. (Reading the *surah* of) *al-Fātiḥa* in favor of one's soul. In the year 1258.

Comment

According to inscription N° 5 mentioned above, the mosque was built in 1258H/1842 at the request of Abd Allah Beg, and the lands of *al-Ahlī* and *al-Fāḥūl* were also donated to the mosque. However, an important detail in the inscription is the use of the term “merhum” (deceased) before the name of Abd Allah Beg, the patron of the mosque. This suggests that the person named in the inscription is deceased, and it is likely that his name was added to the inscription later by another individual. On the other hand, the tombstone of Hacı Abd Allah Beg (1818-1873) in the central cemetery of Savur indicates that he died in 1290H/1873. If the patron of the mosque is indeed the same person as Hacı Abd Allah Beg mentioned on the tombstone, the use of the term “merhum” in the mosque inscription creates a chronological inconsistency. This raises the possibility that either the date of the inscription was incorrectly recorded, or that the name “Abd Allah Beg” refers to another individual.

At this point, it would be useful to compare and contrast other inscriptions attributed to Hacı Abd Allah Beg. For example, the inscription on the house of Abdullatif Özbek in Savur, dated 1257H/1841, is one year earlier than the inscription on the Old Mosque. Similarly, another inscription found on the house of Hacı Beg, dated 1266H/1849, does not contain the term “merhum”. In addition, the inscription on the Başkavak (Ahmedi) Bridge states that the bridge was repaired by Emir Hacı Abd Allah Beg in 1278 H/1861, but again the term “merhum” is not used. The inscription on the Central/Great Mosque in Savur also mentions that the mosque and its minaret were built by Hacı Abd Allah Beg, but this implies that he was still alive at the time. The inscription on his tombstone in Savur Centre cemetery is also a reference to his construction of high palaces and mansions.

There are also buildings in Savur attributed to Hacı Abd Allah Beg that have no inscriptions but are known locally as his works, such as the Hisarlı Bridge, the Hacı Abd Allah Beg Laundry and the Meydan Laundry (Yıldız, 2003: 82; Doğru and Coşkun, 2023: 19-20). In the light of all this information, it is clear that Hacı Abd Allah Beg made a significant contribution to the architectural landscape of Savur and played an active role in the construction of many public buildings. However, the use of the term “merhum” in the mosque inscription raises the possibility that the inscription was added later, or that the name “Abd Allah Beg” refers to another individual due to name similarities. This suggests that the inscriptions in the region should be re-evaluated in their historical context.



Inscription n° 6 – The inscription on the *miḥrāb* of the pray hall (Kaya, 2020)

The inscription is situated on the *qibla* wall, inside the *miḥrāb* of the mosque. It consists of the Arabic date and the month of the year, written on a single line by engraving.

Arabic Text

٢٤ [جماد ١] ٩٥٧

Translation

24 [ḡumāda] | 957 [H = 10 June 1550AD]

Comment

The mosque was supposedly built in 957H/1550 during the Ottoman period, according to the date inscribed on the *miḥrāb*. However, an oral history study has suggested that the *miḥrāb* may not be as

old as claimed. On closer inspection, the inscriptions on the *miḥrāb* appear to be new. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the oral tradition is probably correct in this respect.



Inscription n° 7 – The inscription on the entrance door of the building (Kaya, 2024)

The inscription, measuring 52 x 47 cm, is positioned as a facing stone to the left of the main entrance door of the building. It consists of a three-line Arabic inscription engraved on a cut stone.

Arabic text

... -١
 ... -٢ هـ الملك [...] ...
 ... -٣ أطل الله [...] ...

Translation

- 1- ...
- 2- [...] al-Malik [...]
- 3- [...] May God extend [...]

Comment

The inscription is written in a style reminiscent of the Middle Ages, but its condition is so bad that it cannot be read. İrfan Y. suggests that the inscription dates from the Ayyūbid period (Yıldız, 2011: 16). The Ayyūbids commonly used the *nashī* script in their inscriptions (Kaya, 2023: 670). Despite attempts to decipher a few words of the inscription, the lack of clarity makes any understanding difficult. Moreover, the inscription's upside-down position on the mosque wall suggests that it may have been reused as *spolia* material in a later Islamic period, adding to the uncertainty about its original association with the mosque.



Inscription n° 8 – Syriac inscription of the minaret (Kaya, 2024)

Three stone blocks on the first level of the south side of the minaret, to the west of the entrance gate, have distinct engravings that appear to resemble Syriac letters. It was first mentioned by Gabriyel Akyüz that there was a Syriac inscription on the minaret. However, the inscription has not been deciphered, and its analysis is included in this study for the first time. The script used is *Estrangelo*, the monumental variant of Syriac. Only the inscription on the upper block makes sense, as the four letters can be interpreted as abbreviations of two Syriac words.

Syriac text

[ܕܐܝܬܐ] ܗܘܠܐ

Translation

Da[y(s)?] ho[ly] / Ho[ly] da[y(s)?]

Comment

Starting from the right side, the letter Yud appears to be quite certain, followed by a Waw which is clearly larger than the previous letter. The subsequent letters are also identifiable: the squared one connecting to the following letter is a Qaf, and the following letter is a Dolat, distinguished by the dot below. However, the sequence YWQD does not form a coherent word. Therefore, it is reasonable to interpret them as two separate words, likely abbreviations of longer terms. The first word could be the noun “day” in either the absolute (ܕܐܬܐ), emphatic singular (ܕܐܬܐܐ), or plural (ܕܐܬܐܐܐ) forms. The second word could be the adjective or noun “holy, saint” (ܗܘܠܐ), either in the singular or plural (ܗܘܠܐܐ) forms. Hence, they could be understood either as two separate words, “day” and “holy”, or as one phrase, “holy day(s)”.

CONCLUSION

The Old Mosque of Savur has undergone various developments and modifications over time, as evidenced by the numerous inscriptions found inside the mosque. A total of seven Arabic and one Syriac inscriptions have been identified inside the mosque. According to the inscriptions, the construction of the prayer hall and the minaret preceded other elements of the mosque, while later, during the period of the Lords (begs) of Savur, the *madrasa*, its portico and the rooms associated with the *madrasa* were added. The oldest inscription, dated 827H/1423 during the Qara Qoyunlu period, probably refers to the original construction of the mosque. The oldest dated inscription on the Savur Mosque is significant as it documents a building activity in the region during the reign of Qara Qoyunlu Emir Iskandar Mirza. Historical sources identify the Old Mosque of Savur as the oldest mosque in the city, further emphasising its historical and architectural significance. In addition, an

inscription (n° 2) on the northern entrance gate of the mosque contains the term '*khānqāh*', suggests a connection with a *Şūfī* institution. The presence of this term, with is the only known example in the region, adds to its significance. Furthermore, the tombstone inscription (n° 3), located on the western exterior of the mosque, presents an appears incongruity with both architectural features of the mosque and the content of the inscription itself. In Islamic architecture, the integration of tombstones into building facades is extremely rare practice. Therefore, it is plausible that this inscription originated from another building and was later applied to the facade of the mosque. The inscriptions (n° 1, n° 2) are significant in the they mention the cities of Mardin and Savur, among other prominent regional locations, suggesting that they date from the Islamic period. While some sources claim that the building was converted from a church to a mosque, the current architectural configuration does not conclusively support this claim. However, the presence of a cross motif, typically associated with Christianity, on the northern exterior of the mosque suggests the possible Christian influence. The exact origin of this motif remains uncertain, especially as it is found on a distinct block of stone, different from the rubble typically used for the façade. In addition, the Syriac script (n° 8) on the south side of the minaret further suggests possible Christian connections. However, the Syriac inscriptions on the minaret do not exhibit the precision associated with professional craftsmanship and appear to have been added at a later date, suggesting that the mosque may not date from the same period as the surrounding square. Furthermore, the architectural style of the mosque bears similarities to religious buildings from the Artuqid and Aq Qoyunlu periods in Mardin, particularly in terms of the materials and construction techniques used. It is therefore reasonable to consider the Qara Qoyunlu period as a continuation of the architectural traditions established during the Artuqid period. The arrangement of the minarets is also reminiscent of the square minarets designs common in Upper Mesopotamia and Syria during the Ayyūbid period.

Compliance with the Ethical Standard

Conflict of Interests: The author(s) declare that they do not have a conflict of interest with themselves and/or other third parties and institutions, or if so, how this conflict of interest arose and will be resolved, and author contribution declaration forms are added to the article process files with wet signatures.

Ethical Approval: Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. The wet signed consent form is attached to the article process file.

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