

The restoration of the monastery of Mar Awgen in 1271

By Andrew Palmer

The following is a translation, with some words added between square brackets, of a notice which appeared on the website of the Artuqid University of Mardin in mid-May 2011: 'At the Artuqid University of Mardin, on Wednesday 4th May, at ten o'clock of the forenoon, in the Kocaklar Conference Hall, a lecture entitled "M'arre (Marine, Eskihisar): The Village of Caves, Nusaybin" was delivered by Dr. Andrew Palmer of the University of Muenster. Dr. Palmer stated that the village of Eskihisar (in the vicinity of the town of Nusaybin, Mardin) was once named M'arre, meaning "caves"; that it was known as "Marine" during the Ottoman period and was renamed "Eskihisar", meaning "the old castle", in the second half of the twentieth century; and that [Kurdish-speaking] Muslims now inhabit the village, in which Muslims and Christians lived together for centuries. [The last Aramaic-speaking Christian inhabitants left the village about 1951 to reside on the land of their relatives in the nearby Christian villages, such as Kharabe Mishka.] Dr. Palmer stated that among the monuments that remain until today were [two cave-]mosques, [one modern mosque built in a former Christian church dedicated to Mort Shmuni], the Syrian Orthodox church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, [the former church of Mor Malke, now a private house], the church of St Mary [the Virgin] and baths [or, possibly, a small mausoleum]. He stated that Arabic and Syriac were used together in inscriptions which were put up to commemorate the building of several buildings.

At the end of his talk, Dr. Palmer emphasized that when the sources are examined it can be stated that Muslims and Christians lived together in harmony in the village of Eskihisar at times. [For example, the whole village, including the head of the village, Husayn, the son of Hus, participated in the restoration of the monastery of Mor Awgin in 1271.] Our Dean, Prof. Dr. Serdar Bedii Omay, and our faculty attended the lecture, which ended with Dr. Palmer answering questions, [amongst others, the question of Prof. Dr. Mark Soileau about the former importance of M'arre in the distribution of the products of the grape-vine from the mountainous hinterland].'

Christians & Muslims in M'arre

A The village I shall speak about has two names, an old name and a new name. The old name is Aramaic: M'arre, which means 'caves'. The scree below these caves contains the refuse of centuries. If this refuse were excavated, carbon-14 tests could show how long ago they were first inhabited. A variant of this name, favoured by the Arabs and the Ottomans, is M'arrin. To the Kurdish villagers this sounds like a woman's name (several of their own girls have similar names, such as Narin, Rosbin, Rozalin.

The idea that Marin/Marine is a girl's name explains the legend that the village is named for a princess who lived in the castle which dominated the medieval walled town. Its ruins still stand on the rock above the hamlet which is all that is left of M'arre today. In the second half of the twentieth century the village was given a Turkish name: Eskihisar, meaning 'ancient castle'. The village of the castle, the village of the caves: whichever it be, Christians and Muslims lived there together in the past. That combination is sometimes problematic. How did it work out in M'arre? That will be my theme today. How can we know? The sources include inscriptions, books, archaeology and oral history. The University of Mardin ought to be committed to bringing all these into the general domain.

B The present inhabitants are Kurmanji-speaking Muslims. According to Malke 'Anter, now resident in Germany, who was one of the last Aramaic-speaking Christian inhabitants of M'arre, these Kurds came from Tur 'Abdin, on the other side of Mount Izala. According to this oral tradition, Khasho, the great-great-grandfather of the present mukhtar, murdered the Christian mukhtar, 'Innis, and so gained the right for his people to live in M'arre. 'Innis and his descendants, Tuma, Malke, Brahim and the others, belong to the Syrian Orthodox church and speak Turoyo, the Aramaic dialect of Tur 'Abdin. The peace-treaty between Rome and Iran in A.D. 363 after the death, in what is now Iraq, of the Roman emperor, established the international frontier along the ridge above M'arre. This meant that M'arre and the monasteries – at least three of them – which sprung up around it fell within the Iranian Empire, where the dominant Christian group was that of the so-called 'Nestorians'.

At some time after A.D. 613, when Iran pushed the frontier back further into Roman territory, a conquest renewed by the Arab Muslims in A.D. 640, Aramaic-speaking Syrian Orthodox Christians settled beside the Aramaic-speaking 'Nestorian' Christians. They may have left the Roman Empire because Syrian Orthodoxy had become illegal there. It seems likely that the big church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste on the south side of the castle rock was built by these refugees. The Forty Martyrs were likewise victims of the Roman state's zero-tolerance of religious diversity. Besides, the plan of the church resembles that of a parish-church in Tur 'Abdin, the Syrian Orthodox heartland on the other side of the mountains.

The lay people congregated in the nave, with the women at the back. Here, in the north wall, there is a niche in which grapes may have been crushed in preparation for the Christian ritual of Communion with God by the consumption of bread and wine, which have first been set apart from ordinary food by being raised above the altar by a priest and renamed as 'the Body and Blood of Christ'. Through a wooden grill and

over the heads of the men, who were not distracted from their prayers by the sight of the fair sex, the women watched from afar, as the rituals of their ancient Faith were enacted by an all-male clergy, dressed in white and ranked from senior to junior, like the angels, standing on a platform built around the altar to represent Heaven.

Another church which must have belonged to the Syrian Orthodox community of M'arre is the little graveyard church of the Mother of God, situated outside M'arre, near the edge of the plain, on the road to the monastery of Mor Awgin. The 'Nestorians' did indeed follow Nestorius, as the popular name suggests, in denying to Mary, the Mother of Christ, the title of God-bearer, which, understood as 'Mother of God', might suggest that there was a time before the Creator of the Universe was born! The Syrian Orthodox object to this, saying that to deny Mary the title of 'God-bearer' is tantamount to denying that Jesus Christ is God. The 'Nestorians' were established in M'arre before the Syrian Orthodox, as we have seen, so it is likely that their church or churches were in the centre of the town. The present village-headman of M'arre showed me, at the north-eastern extremity of the village, a house built by his father, Jamal, out of what remained of the church of Mar Malke – whose cult seems to have started in the 'Nestorian' church. As for the fourth and last church of M'arre, that of Mort Shmuni, the present mosque was built on it about ten years after the last Christian family to live in M'arre, the House of 'Anter, left the village for Kharabe Mishka in 1951. This knowledge, which I have from Malke 'Anter, was also confirmed by the headman of the village. There is an inscription in the mukhtar's house which dates it to 1218 and identifies it as a shop, owing tithes to the monastery of the Sons of Shmuni. It is possible that the church under the mosque belonged to a convent for nuns, built inside the wall of the town for protection. Perhaps the so-called prison, which is not far away from the church of Mort Shmuni and which contains a room which may have been a library, should be identified with this monastery. Only archaeology and the comparative study of oecistics, that is the uses of different types of room, can turn speculation into knowledge here.

C M'arre was Aramaic-speaking and Christian – more specifically, 'Nestorian' – at the time of the Arab Conquest. After that and probably before the end of the first millennium, first Aramaic-speaking Syrian Orthodox Christians, and secondly, Arabic-speaking Muslims settled there. At the beginning of the second millennium the village was shared between these three groups, with the original inhabitants at the centre, near the gate of the town, the Christian immigrants around the Church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste on the south side of the castle rock and the Muslims to the west of the Syrian Orthodox, where there is a rock-cut mosque, the tomb of a tenth-century holy man called Shughurdin and a considerable number of Arabic inscriptions. One of these, in a

round building which may have been a bath-house, contains the grand-sounding name of Abul Qasim al-Haqqaq. There was a Muslim presence outside the Muslim quarter, as one might expect in a town under Muslim rule.

[Thomas Munt, of the University of Oxford, tells me that the Arab geographer Yaqut says that the people of M'arre made *bust*, a kind of carpet, in his time.]

Six Arabic inscriptions dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are found to the north and north-west of the centre and in what was evidently a Muslim shop built by Christian builders next to the Christian shop. The date of this building was on the upper vault, which has partly collapsed. It must have been about the same date as the shop next door (A.D. 1218), since the master-builder was 'Aziz, the son of Tuma, who is also named in an inscription dated A.D. 1201.

D In 1271 the 'Nestorian' monastery of Mar Awgin was restored with the help of seventy men from M'arre. One might assume that these men were Christians. The record, however, a note inserted at the end of a book, names the head man of M'arre that year as Huseyn, the son of Hus – a Muslim name – and implies that this Shi'ite took part in the restoration of the abode of Christian holy men. The same name is found, together with that of Hasan, in the Syriac inscriptions on the thirteenth-century Muslim shop in M'arre. The impression we gain from these records, meagre as they are, is one of peaceful symbiosis, not of separate communities, living in mutual distrust. The evidence for this symbiosis is the mixture of Arabic and Syriac in the inscriptions commemorating the completion of a single building, whether Christian (I found two such buildings), or Muslim, like the shop, on which we read Salman in Arabic, after a reverent mention of the name of Allah, and, in Syriac, the names of thirteenth-century Shi'ites called Hasan and Huseyn, giving praise to 'the Lord'. One might think that the Islamic Allah and the Lord of the Christians were one and the same God! Perhaps the fact that Arabic and Syriac are related in the Semitic family of languages made this harmony easier to achieve. When Kurds from Tur 'Abdin came to M'arre, murder was committed; and yet, even after 1915, the oral tradition of both the Muslims and the Christians confirms that Christians returned to the village and lived there, side by side with their former enemies, for many years. It has to be said, though, that they did not leave the village of their own accord in 1951.

E Looking into the past is like gazing down into a well: you strain your eyes to see something down there in the darkness, catch a movement, and recognize, with a little shock, your own face. We have made an effort to reconstruct the past and perhaps we have projected onto it, not the reflection of our less than entirely peaceful time, but

rather the fulfilment of our youthful wish for peace. M'arre has the potential, in any case, to provoke discussion of many questions, one of which is certainly relevant to our own time: the possibility of Muslims and Christians living together in harmony.

F M'arre should be made into an open-air museum, its buildings and its history – with the directed aid of regional universities – thoroughly charted, traditional crafts and skills of food-preparation demonstrated and taught in its responsibly restored medieval buildings, which should be the pride of the district of Nusaybin. Christians should be stimulated to come and live there again, bringing the church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste back into the service of their religion, a living symbol of the resurrection both Christians and Muslims profess to believe in. Perhaps a monk or two might be found, ready to inhabit the erstwhile Nestorian monastery of Mar Yareth/Mor Yoreth, above the village, and to explain to visitors how much, in spite of their separate development and formal enmity, the eastern and western branches of Syriac Christianity have in common. If not, there is the monastery of Mar Awgen/Mor Awgin, half an hour's walk away, which will be reopened in June under the management of Dayroyo Yuyaqim Unval.

Literature

The only publications on M'arre so far, to my knowledge, are parts of a chapter of a book on Nusaybin, an article on Mount Izala and a section of a study of Christian liturgical buildings in Tur 'Abdin:

Jean-Maurice Fiey, *Nisibe: métropole syrienne orientale et ses suffragants* (Louvain 1977), chapter 2.

Sebastian Paul Brock, 'Notes on some monasteries on Mount Izla', *Abr-Nahrain* 19 (1980-1981), 1-19; repr. *idem*, *Syriac perspectives on late antiquity* (London 1984), XV.

Gernot Wiessner, *Christliche Kultbauten im Tur 'Abdin, Teil II: Kultbauten mit longitudinale Schiff*, two volumes: 1 text, 2 photographs (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 95-102, with Fig. 11 on p. 97 (a plan of the parish church [of the Forty Martyrs]), coloured photograph XII (a general view of the village with its castle) and black and white photograph 55 (interior view of the nave, looking east towards the sanctuary).

The *Lives of Mar Yohannan the Beduin, of Mar Yareth and of Abba Sallara* have yet to be published. The Syriac inscriptions of M'arre and of its monasteries are shortly to be published by me, the Arabic by Robert Hoyland.

[The village is referred to in Ibn al-Azraq's twelfth-century *Ta'rikh Mayyāfāriqīn* and in the *Mushtarak* of Yaqut (1179-1229), as I am informed by Dr Thomas Munt of Oxford.]

Turkish archival material and tax-registers concerning M'arre have only just begun to be studied. See: M. S. Erpolat, 'XVI. yüzyıl arşiv kaynaklarından tahrir defterlerine göre Nusaybin', in: İbrahim Özcoşar, ed., *Makalelerle Mardin*, 1 (İstanbul 2007), 349-414. See also pp. 666 and 718 in the same collection of papers.

The restoration of [the monastery of Mar Awgen in] 1271

{Quoted from S. P. Brock, 'Notes on some monasteries on Mount Izla', *Abr-Nahrain* 19 (1980-81), 1-19 (repr. in *id.*, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984), at p. 3f.)}

Seert ms 59 (of 1567) and Mingana [ms] syr.166 (of 1739) contain a historical note concerning the restoration of the monastery [of Mar Awgen] carried out in 1271. {Note 13: [J.-M.] Fiey [*Nisibe*], p. 137 with note 1.} Mingana only gave an English summary in his *Catalogue* (col. 373). Since the piece is of some interest, I give a translation of the entire notice: "In the name of our Lord I now write out a notice of how the church (*haykla*) of the holy Mar Awgen was restored. In the year 1582 of the Greeks the holy church of Mar Awgen was restored in the days of the watchful and zealous shepherd, Mar [']Abdisho', son of Mashk, from the village of GSLWN' {Palmer: Gaslona/Gasluno}. He took [the] utmost care to send everywhere to collect what was necessary for the cost. He died only a month after the reconstruction (was finished): may the Lord give rest to his spirit, along with those of th[os]e upright [men], his fellow companions, seeing that he did more than his utmost. Now at that time there were in the monasteries of Mar Awgen and Mar Iohannan the Arab many monks. During the two months which they took over the rebuilding none of them entered his cell and no one even made any bread in his cell, but from the moment dawn arrived and the sematron {note by Palmer: Syriac: *naqosha/naqusho*, a plank of wood struck with a hammer to wake up the monks of a monastery, or else a metal gong for the same purpose} sounded until it grew dark they were toiling in ceaseless love. They had with them every day seventy men from the village of M'arre – may our Lord keep it inhabited, amen[!] – and they all worked without pay. In the final week the whole of M'arre came, and during it one woman died: there was no one who did not pray or carry (the bier), and so they came down from the monastery in her funeral procession. The head man of M'arre that year was the eminent Husain bar Hus, and they brought from M'arre a great number of loads of flour, wheat, grapes and figs. The architect was the priest Rahmon, who, when it was completed, took no pay apart from a robe [which] the metropolitan gave him – may our Lord give rest to his soul along with the upright and just, together with Mar Awgen and his disciples, amen[!] Rabban Abraham saw this notice in a history of Mar Awgen at the end of the manuscript, and I too, a sinner, copied it: pray for me in love, and supplicate the Lord with all (your) heart that he may deliver him (*sic*) from torment."

Further extracts from the same article by Brock:

p. 4f: The village of M'arre appears frequently in connection with the monasteries of Mar Awgen and Mar Iohannan. {Note 19: Cp Fiey pp.

259-60.) It is situated below and somewhat to the west of Mar Awgen at the foot of [Mount] Izla, and many remains of medieval buildings, sometimes quite well preserved, are still to be seen. A feature of the place is the presence of a large number of Syriac (or, in one case which I saw, Arabic) inscriptions on the plaster walls and vaulting of private and other buildings. These deserve a proper study, for many of them are dated to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. {Brock proceeds to transcribe and translate some of these inscriptions; his inscription 3i reads as follows, in his translation} 'There built and completed this shop Barhadbeshabba son of Isho' / of (the village) Bothra in the month Ab of the year one thousand 529 / of the blessed Greeks; and there is on this shop each year 2 ratls of / seed (*or* oil from seeds) to (?) the dinar (due to the church of) the Bnay Shmuni: may their prayer be upon the community, amen [!]' {My own translation of the original inscription, which I read slightly differently, is as follows: This shop was built and vaulted by Harhadbshabba the son of Isho' of Botra in the month of August of the year 1529 of the blessed Greeks = A.D. 1218; and this shop owes two pounds of linseed every year to the monastery of the Sons of Shmuni; and may their prayers be for the community, amen!}'

p. 9: {Extract from Brock's summary of the *Life* of Iohannan Tayyaya} At the feast of the Nativity the monastery [of Mar Awgen] ran out of wine, so the steward told Iohannan to go and buy some in M'arre, giving him two *zuze* {pieces of money}. Iohannan makes an obeisance (*metanoia*) and sets off. On entering the town he sees a poor man asking for alms, whereupon he [gives] him the two *zuze*. He then [fills] his jars with water from a cistern in front of the town, and set[s] off back home. On his return Andreas summons him and asks him why he has brought water, not wine. (The rest of the episode becomes confused and illogical.)

p. 10: Another case of Iohannan's healing concerned a girl from M'arre who was possessed [by an evil spirit]. p. 11f.: Other miracles include the healing of a blind man from Nisibis, and the staying [= stopping] of a plague at M'arre. [...] [The monastery of Mar Iohannan Tayyaya was built after the saint's death by a rich and childless man from Nisibis called Synnados in AG 702 (= AD 390-1).] Iohannan died aged 95, having spent 20 years as a layman, 33 as a hermit, and 42 as superior. So much for the life of Mar Iohannan. The same manuscript of 1963 at the monastery of Mar Gabriel also includes the life of Abba Sallara, one of the 70 disciples of Mar Awgen, which Fiey only knew from a summary by Armalet.

p. 12f: [Extract from Brock's summary of the *Life* of Abba Sallara.] The practice of magic at M'arre had brought about an epidemic of shaking and trembling, and Sallara refers the case to his mother [Elishba', who resided in a cell in the monastery]; the fifteen witches {Note 43: For

witches at M'arre, see the life of Yareth, summarized by F. Nau in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 19 (1914), p. 436.) of the town try to kill her, but by divine grace she gets the better of them and nullifies their spells by forcing them to recite them, whereupon she wr[i]te[s] them in the dust on the ground and then rub[s] them out. She then has the witches (whose leader [is] called Thekla) renounce Satan and confess Christ three times. Three months after this episode God reveals to Elishba' her imminent death; when she departed this life her son saw her soul being escorted away by angels, just as Antony had seen in the case of the soul of Amon. Her body was laid to rest in the monastery of Mar Iohannan.

p. 14: The two monasteries [of Mar Awgen and Mar Iohannan] had the same way of life and, up to Sallara's death, a single superior; after this, each monastery had its own. The superiors are listed as follows: Awgen, 36 years; Andreas, 82 years; Iohannan of Hira, 41 years [not 42, as claimed in the *Life* of Iohannan, on which see above]; Daniel, 20 years; Iohannan 'Arabaya, 35 years; Estephanos the Persian, 50 years; Isho' the Palestinian, 2 years; Abraham the Egyptian, 20 (margin, 21) years; Abraham of Jerusalem, 30 years; and Sallara, 21 years. Sallara's successors are Yazdin of Kashkar for Mar Awgen, and Sharmudaya for Mar Iohannan. [...] The date of Sallara's death is given as the last Friday of Teshri I [October], and his age [as] 83 (made up of 62 years as a monk and 21 as superior!). This far the *Life* of Abba Sallara. The figures given would indicate that he was thought to have died 301 years after the death of Awgen (reputedly [in] 363 {Note 48: ... the date given in Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* III, p. 477.}), i.e. [in] 664.

p. 16: The monastery of Mar Yareth (Fiey, p. 157) is situated above M'arre, according to my local informants. [...] The commemoration of Mar Khudahwi, 'whose monastery is above M'arre', is to be found in Berlin [ms] syr. 63 (Sachau 188) of 1882, as well as Cambridge Add. 1982, both East Syrian.

Extract from *The Hidden Pearl* (2001), vol. 2 (English), p. 136:

A series of surviving manuscripts written at Mar Augen monastery indicate continued activity in the monastery. As many as eight colophons from the sixteenth century are known, and one of these is a manuscript begun at another famous monastery, that of Rabban Hormizd (near Alqosh, north of Mosul) but finished at Mar Augen in 1558. Further connections with Alqosh are to be found in the following centuries: in 1739 the deaconess Maryam of Mar Augen monastery commissioned a priest Shem'on of Alqosh to copy out the Life of Mar Augen, and an inscription of 1838 mentions as abbot of the monastery "Joseph the Antonian". The Antonians were a Chaldaean order founded in 1808 by Gabriel Danbo in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. [...] It is unknown how much earlier than 1838 Mar Augen monastery had become Chaldean. As it happens, it was shortly to change hands again, for a few years later it was in the possession of the Syrian Orthodox: testimony to this is to be found in a couple of Syrian Orthodox manuscripts, a Psalter (now in Hasseke) written in the monastery in 1842, and a copy of Shem'un of Tur 'Abdin's Syriac-Arabic Lexicon, written there in 1842-43 by the Syrian Orthodox bishop Malke, from Anhel. Visitors at the beginning of the twentieth century (who included the British archaeologist Gertrude Bell) found a number of monks in residence. [...] Mar Augen's changeover in ownership from East Syriac to Syrian Orthodox follows the pattern of a number of monasteries on the southern slopes of Mount Izla, such as those of Mor Abraham of Kashkar, or Mor Iuhanon the Arab. These had started out as foundations of the Church of the East in the monastic revival in this Church in the sixth and seventh centuries, and at some time during the Middle Ages or later changed hands.

at the foot of Mount Izlo]. His diet was always the same: he ate one plain loaf of bread every Sunday. Once the people of the place and the inhabitants of M'arre heard the reputation of the holy man, those among them who were sick and distressed flocked to him; and they were healed. One day some peaceable women from M'arre came and told him about a woman called Saydo, who (they said) used magic and was leading many astray. 'Every Wednesday she climbs up to the top of the mountain and stands with one foot on the east side of the village and the other on the west. She stays there, bestriding the gully which passes the village, so that her fellow women will see her and become her disciples. We are all upset because of her.' Now when the blessed man heard this, he said to them with a twinkle in his eye, 'On the night of the fourth day of the week I shall make sure you see that madwoman broken.' When Wednesday evening came, the blessed man arose and went secretly to a place above the village and hid beneath a stone. The witch Saydo arose and gathered her fellow-witches at the fourth hour of the night; the witches took up their station in the middle of the village, while she climbed the mountain on the east side and set her [left] foot down on the mountain on the west side and stayed there with her face to the north, while her fellow-witches cackled and gossiped noisily. At this very moment, the holy Mor Yoreth stood up and froze the unclean woman to the spot, saying, 'Saydo, I bind you by the fierce command of Christ: you are not allowed to come down from there until tomorrow, nor are your fellow-witches allowed to stray from their place beneath you until your tricks are laid bare to the whole world! And the devils whose cult you all maintain shall have power over you and torment your limbs until the morning.' And the wretch stayed there, crippled and hanging between heaven and earth; and the devils whose cult they maintained whipped them cruelly with leather straps from that hour until day dawned. The whole village was shaken by the screams of those madwomen, saying: 'Have mercy on us, servant of Christ, and release us from the cruel menaces which you pronounced against us!' Every man, woman and child woke up and saw the madwomen made the laughing-stock of the village and Saydo stretched out between heaven and earth, while her fellow-witches looked up at her with their hands tied behind their backs. When day dawned, the people of all the villages around assembled to see the misguided women. The holy man uttered the following oath: 'By Christ, I will not release them from their bonds until they confess in front of everybody to their magic spells and their tricks.' Then, one by one, they began to confess their cunning designs and their magic spells, while he wrote them with his right thumb on the ground. When he had written down all their tricks, he rubbed them out and scattered the dust over all the land about; and immediately, all their tricks were erased from their memories. After that he released them and they went to their houses in deep shame and misery; and our spiritual master returned to his cell.

uproar among their witches, to the following effect: 'Come on, let us go and kill Salloro's mother before daybreak, so that she cannot undo us all in the morning and drive us all out of the village of M'arre!' All the witches who were in the village of M'arre – and there were fifteen of them – got together to kill her, accompanied by many demons, who helped them in their undertaking. For they rode on saddles [*okpe*: this word is not in the dictionaries and has been translated from the sense of the following passage] and came flying through the air, and the devils with them. But as soon as they got near the cave in which the holy woman dwelt, they were prevented by divine grace from going any further and they were trussed up, together with the devils which had brought them there. They stayed like that until day dawned. Now when the time came for the inhabitants of M'arre to get underway – for the inhabitants of this village have the peculiar habit of travelling in the night-time – they reached out for their saddles [*okpe*] to put them on their beasts of burden and could not find them. At this they raised their voices, calling to one another in their search for their saddles [*okpeh*]; and there was a disturbance in the village until morning. Now a certain beggar who had gone up from the village to the monastery [of Mor Yuhannon] and seen there the miracle which Mother Elishba had performed with the witches, came back down and told the villagers all about it: 'With these mine eyes I saw your saddles [*okpaykun*] and all the witches of M'arre riding on them. I tell you, they are in the monastery of Mor Yuhannon, where they have been trussed up by the holy Elishba.' When they heard this, everyone in the village surged out to go and see this miracle. When they got near the monastery, they saw the witches sitting on the saddles, trussed up by divine grace and unable to move from there. The men of the village stood there in amazement at what their wives had done; each of them spat at his own and accused her. After that, they approached the holy woman and asked her to release the wretched women from their shameful bonds. The holy woman gave ear to the petitions of those men and went up to the witches, bringing some dust, which she put down in front of her, calling upon each of the wretched women in turn: 'Come and show me how you work your magic!' The witch who was right in front of the holy woman told her how her magic was done and the blessed woman wrote the entire secret of her magic doings in the dust on the ground. When it was finished, the holy woman wiped it out by passing her hands over the dust. Then she asked the witch again, saying, 'Tell me again what it is that you know!' But the witch now answered, 'It as though I had never known anything at all about magic.' The holy woman then said, 'In that case, deny your devils and confess our Lord Christ three times in front of all those who are here!' The witch did all that the holy woman told her to do. Then the holy woman told her to get down off the saddle [*okpo*] on which she was riding and to carry it and leave the company of her fellow-witches. Hardly had the holy woman spoken, when her bonds were untied and she was able to get off her mount and go and sit on one side, freed from the demons. Gradually the blessed woman did the same to all her companions and freed them from their demons and their magic spells and brought them back to God, their true Father. One of them refused to reveal her magic art, because Satan had hardened her heart and had promised to rescue her from the hands of the holy woman. This was because she had been engaged in magic for a long time. Everyone who wanted to learn to do magic used to learn it from her. As for the rest, they desisted from the practice of magic and did penance in front of the whole village, as the holy woman commanded: carrying their saddles, they entered their village, followed by a

great crowd, praising God and thanking Him for converting the witches from the deeds of darkness to the knowledge of the truth, and for lifting by the agency of those two bright pillars, Father Salloro and Elishba, the affliction which he had allowed to descend upon their children; for by the prayers of these two their village had been freed from the wickedness of magic practices. But Thekla, the head of the witches, began to be knocked about by the devils and she screamed: 'Holy Elishba, I will reveal to you the secrets of my magic art.' So the holy man ordered the devils to put her down; and no harm had been done to her. Then and there they put her down and Elishba went up to her and said, 'Do you confess, like your fellow-witches, that you may be released from these bonds in which you stand?' She answered, 'Yes, I confess the same as my fellow-witches confessed before me.' And she confessed and was freed from her wickedness; for she had been sacrificing to the devils for a long time. She picked up her saddle [*okpoh*] and entered the village of M'arre, like her fellow-witches; and the owner of the saddle followed her until both had entered M'arre.

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