

## **Platform of Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform / Those who are backing our cultural heritage Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage/ Part 8**

Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and Syriac Cultural Heritage projects with Çağla Parlak and Başak Emir

**TOPICS:** Presentation of Syriac Cultural Heritage projects and outputs.

**Nükhet Everi- We will talk about cultural heritage in general and Assyrian Syriac cultural heritage in particular with Çağla Parlak and Başak Emir in our "Those Who BackVanguards Our Cultural Heritage" interviews prepared for ADİP. Çağla Parlak is the founder and projects manager of the Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (KMKD), which I founded, and Başak Emir serves as a cultural heritage communication specialist. Çağla and Başak, can you tell us about yourself and your work?**

Çağla Parlak- I started working as a project coordinator at the Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in 2015. I had previously worked at Dolmabahçe Palace, where I contributed to the development of the educational activities of the national palaces. I graduated from Istanbul University International Relations, and then I did my master's degree in museology.

Başak Emir- Since 2018, I have been working as a project coordinator in AssyrianSyriac projects at the Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (KMKD). I am a cultural heritage communication specialist. I graduated from Boğaziçi University, Department of History. I then did my master's degree in archaeology at Uludağ and Bilgi universities. While doing my master's degree, I started working with the Greece-based Heritage Management Organisation. I have been working at the History Foundation since 2020.

**Nükhet Everi- Let's find out briefly what kind of projects are carried out at the Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and why and how we started working on Syriac Cultural Heritage.**

Çağla Parlak- The Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage was founded in 2014. Cultural heritage is a multi-stakeholder field. Therefore, we were established to contribute to the development of the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise in this sense, to ensure that the necessary measures are taken for the protection of cultural heritage, to carry out protection projects, to ensure the participation of society in protection. We were also established to carry out studies on the interpretation of cultural heritage and the management of historical sites. The work of KMKD can be categorised under four different headings. First of all, we have carried out a number of training activities to increase the existing capacity of different groups for the protection of cultural heritage. We have organised youth camps for university students. We have conducted trainings for professionals working directly in the field of cultural heritage. We have conducted trainings for tourist guides. We gave trainings on how to better interpret cultural heritage. We gave cultural heritage trainings to stonemasons, carpenters, people working in municipalities for work related to cultural heritage. On the other hand, we also gave training to people who will spread the idea of protecting cultural heritage and this awareness. For example, we have organised trainings such as cultural heritage journalism training for journalists, developing cultural heritage awareness with teachers and children. We also provide maintenance trainings for those living in historical places. On the other hand, we have carried out studies on the protection of architectural heritage. The founding idea of KMKD was in this direction for these objectives. In other words, it startedbegan with the protection of architectural heritage. We started in 2015 with a project on the documentation and risk analyses of the architectural heritage built by different societiescommunities in Anatolia. We carry out activities

to take urgent measures for the protection of buildings under risk. Restoration can be a very costly activity.

In October 2019, we carried out Turkey's Türkiye's first energy-efficient restoration. We carried out the restoration of a building in Mardin under the name of called Tamir Evi. The upper floor was opened as an artist guesthouse and the lower floor as a conservation exhibition. Of course, we have to deal with intangible cultural heritage as a whole. Architectural heritage and intangible cultural heritage cannot be separated from each other. Başak will talk better about the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. We worked on the documentation, digitisation, and conservation of the printed and manuscript works of the Syriac Catholic Church.

Within the scope of the project to preserve the architectural heritage of Anatolia, which we carried out between 2015 and 2016, we analysed surveyed derelict buildings in seven different provinces. One of the places we were going to examine the Syriac heritage was Mardin, Midyat, and its surroundings. We had identified all the buildings we will we were going to examine. Everything was ready and we were ready to go commence. I think 4 or 5 days before we left, a state of emergency was declared in Mardin. We were incredibly saddened. The buildings we identified as most at risk were located in areas where there was a curfew. With the energy of turning our route to other places, we wrote a completely different project for Syriac heritage. We wrote a project not only for architectural heritage, but also for the protection and documentation of intangible cultural heritage from a holistic perspective. It was accepted.

**Nükhet Everi- What was done while working on the intangible Syriac cultural heritage? What was the process like?**

Başak Emir- We did two AssyrianSyriac projects at KMKD. One of them is the project for the documentation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage in Mardin, which was carried out with the United States Embassies Fund. The other is the "Syriac manuscripts project" with the Prince Claus Fund. Firstly, stakeholders in the region were analysed. We met with local administrations and individuals belonging to the Syriac community. We made three field visits by acting together with the community and talking to them. We had two separate workshops and two international organisations. Members of the AssyrianSyriac community and AssyrianSyriac academics from abroad and in TurkeyTürkiye came to these organisations. At the same time, community leaders also took part in this workshop. This enabled us to analyse together from an insider's point of view what the problems are being experienced, what are the causes of the problemstheir causes, and what can be done to solve them. We have three booklets on intangible cultural heritage. We prepared a booklet on how "Community Participation in Cultural Heritage" can be carried out in the case of Mardin, which was prepared in cooperation with the Heritage Management Organisation (STK) and edited by them. This is a booklet that we think can help all NGOs, institutions, organisations, or people who want to work there.

**Nükhet Everi- These three booklets are really very important. They contain many things in terms of tourism and cultural heritage. It seems to me that these booklets will appeal not only to those who want to learn something, but also to those who want to get to know their own culture.**

Başak Emir- Our workshop on intangible cultural heritage was hosted by Anamed. Eight experts participated, we listed the problems faced by cultural heritage, especially the effects of the migration called Seyfo on cultural heritage. And wWe tried to find solutions to these problems with a problem tree. We made a stakeholder analysis. If there are communication deficiencies, we worked on what could happen. The elements to be included in the booklets were determined. Our first booklet, the maps are also available for download on our website. There is also a colourablecolour-in version of

this map on the back of our children's booklet. In our second booklet, we worked with Esra Balcı and anthropologist Marc Soleil, who have conducted oral history studies in this region. They prepared ten cultural heritage items that are seen as endangered with based on the interviews they conducted in the region. Thirdly, we wanted to have a booklet for all segments of society. Since we wanted to be able to offer something towards a solution, we talked directly about how community participation could be ensured through the example of Mardin. Mardin is a multicultural, and multi-religious city. It is a place with many stakeholders. There may be different problems or conflicts that this may bring. As a result, different problems or conflicts may arise. We have included some practical information on how these conflicts can be resolved.

**Nükhet Everi- Language is also very important. What have you done in this regard?**

Başak Emir- Syriac language is very important. It was especially addressed in our workshop. Our children's book was published both in Turkish and Syriac. Children doing oral history work, Assyrian Syriac children, children living in Mardin and children from the diaspora also participated in the work of KMKD's work. In our Syriac manuscripts project, we aimed to increase the preservation status of manuscripts and printed books in the library of the Mardin Syriac Catholic Church. We organised trainings sessions with the participation of students of Syriac Language and Literature at Mardin University. We showed them preventive preservation methods. Many diaries and baptismal records scanned during this work are also presented as very beautiful historical documents. We hope that the information that emerged as a result of these studies can be a source for many researches on about this culture.

**Nükhet Everi- Başak, when you came, you also brought some technologies to the Cultural Heritage Protection Association. Can you tell us about them?**

Başak Emir- We shotfilmed 360- degree videos. These are available on our website and we shotfilmed them as they are. What I mean by filming as it is, for example, a monastery in a very remote place, which is under a lot of risk. But there are graffiti on the walls. Because it is not protected, it is open, or rubbish has been thrown there, something has been burnt in it, and so on. We did not move anything while taking these records, so that we could help the local authorities and the Ministry of Culture to work on this issue, and we also tried to provide access to these heritages, even for people in the Diaspora who are actually in Mardin but cannot go there. We made 3D modelling in partnership with the Heritage Management Organization. It added a new dimension to our project. We prepared three-dimensional models of the buildings in the places we could visit, together with aerial photographs.

The digitisation of cultural heritage and the use of these tools are very important. We can see appreciate these structures in the comfort of our homes.