

# A pagan temple, then a monastery, and later a mosque

## The true events, documented in old history books

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A lot had been said and written, since the explosion that resulted in the destruction of prophet *Younis*' mosque (Younan in Aramaic and Jonah in English) by ISIS in Mosul 2014, that made people really believe, Jonah had been buried there. I am not going to discuss this mythological matter. Resources confirm that Jonah was buried in *Gath- Hopher, Al Murshid* village nowadays, near Lake Tiberius, Palestine. I am writing about Jonah's monastery (the Younan monastery), as it was known for more than a thousand of years.

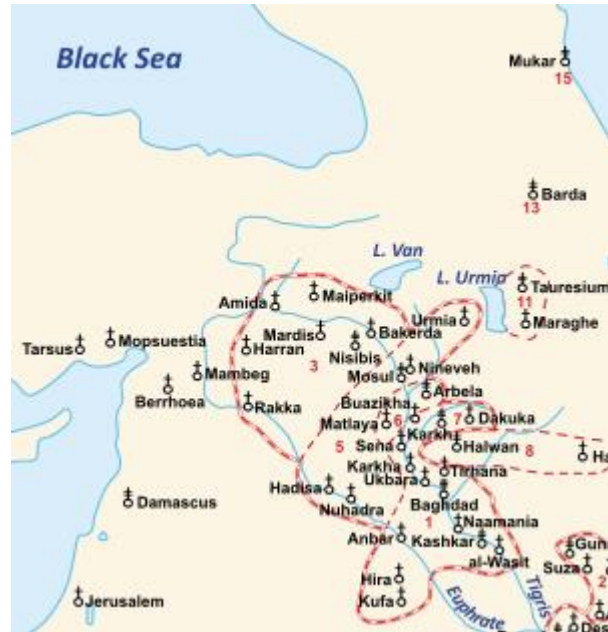


This monastery was built in the seventh century, on top of the ruins of an Assyrian temple. It housed the patriarch of the Eastern Church. When Muslims came, they changed it to a mosque, named the Prophet *Younis* Mosque. People used to go there to pray and repent. Thus, they called it the Repentance Hill.



Well known Arab historian and scholars, like *Yaqut Al Hamawi* ( 1179-1229) in his book (*Mu'Jam Al Buldan*) referred to it as, the monastery for repentance (Al Tawba ). Also, *Alkamil*, by *Ibn Al Atheer*, the travels by *Ibn Jubayr*, and *Rehlat Ibn Battuta*.

This monastery was built next to the ruins of Nineveh, as a reminder of Jonah's story (Younis in Arabic). We read in the Book of Jonah that God asked Jonah to go to the people of Nineveh, to warn them of His punishment if they did not listen to Him and repent. They did, and God forgave them because He loves His people. Jonah, as a Hebrew prophet, was annoyed and surprised! How can God love and care for non-Jewish people? After all, they are the chosen ones. These ruins were also the result of a war, where the king's castle was burned, in 612 BC.



### **The sixth and seventh centuries**

The Byzantines ruled over Nineveh, the big village, at the beginning of the seventh century. They were all Christians. The bishop of the Eastern Church was based near the wall of Nineveh, since 554 AD, till 640 when they surrendered to the Muslims.

Patriarch *HnaNishou*' the 1st, elected in 686 AD, had to reside at the Younan monastery, and carry out all his duties and responsibilities from there. Not by choice! The church was going through a very difficult phase. There was division, and power struggle, according to *Mary Sulieman's* book *Al Majdal*. He suffered a great deal at the hands of his envious opponents. *Eashou'yab* bishop of Basra *Youhanna Al Abrass* bishop of Nusaybin in Mardeen backed by the Calipha, *Abdul Malik Bin Marwan*, while *Youhanna Al Abrass*, wanted the Ecumenical Patriarchate to himself

With the help of the Muslim Wali (governor in Arabic ) *Bishr bin Abdul Malik*, they managed to bring him by force, to a place called *Al Mada'en* (Salman Pak nowadays 27km south east of Baghdad) There, the Patriarch, was stripped off his sacred symbols and medals, and was sent to exile with his two students. They were imprisoned in a cave, in Samighan, and were left there, to die. They were rescued by a young shepherd, who took them back to the Younan monastery.

Yet, *Youhanna Al Abrass* and his doctor friend Sarjon did not stop conspiring against him. They bombarded the Caliph *Abdul Malik bin Marwan*, with false accusations and lies about the patriarch. The caliph transferred him to Nusaybin.

That was not enough. They tried again. This time, they put poison in his Eucharist, but he survived. The patriarch, did not leave the north, ever since. He carried out his duties in Nusaybin, Mosul and Beth Jermaya. He ordained many Bishops, to serve the Church of the East. He died later of plague. Was buried at the monastery in 699 AD.

He managed to overcome one of the most difficult situations, resulted by the uprooting of 40000 Christians, from their homeland, Najran, in the south west Arab peninsula, by the order of caliph Omar, who said no Jews, no Christians should be living in this land. This happened at the end of the caliph's rule, *Al Rashideen*, and the beginning of the Umayyad era. Displaced Christian refugees lived in Al-Hira, (near the city of Al-Koufa today). Patriarch *HnaNishou'yab*, stood fast, firmly, and served his people faithfully, for 14 years. Despite the bad relationship with caliph *Abdul Malik Bin Marwan*, and *Al Hajaj*, later on,

combined with the greed of some clergymen who kept trying to deprive him of serving his church and people, fully.

Patriarch HnaNishou', wrote and translated many prayers. The book of *Al Taazi* and *Al Mayamir*, Four letters explaining the Bible. 20 rules to be followed organising daily duties at church, and a Book of philosophy, He worked so hard for 47 years. His manuscripts are kept at the library of Cambridge University in the UK. The rest were burned in *Siirt*, south of Turkey. The monastery was well known for its best school of Aramaic language, at the time of the *Abbasid* flourishing civilisation, in the 9th century.

Christians suffered a great deal in the seventh century. The constant wars between the rival Muslims, to control Mosul, left behind tens of thousands of slaughtered civilians. At the end, the *Abbasid* won the war against the *Umayyad*. They called the village of Nineveh, Al Mosul. It covered the old and new areas around the river Tigris.

### **The 8th to 10th century**

During the above centuries, the patriarchate of the Eastern Church was in Baghdad. And with the patriarch *Timuthawis* the 1st 779-823, during this period, the monastery flourished with priests and monks.

Patriarch Sarkis the 1st, 860-872, managed to refurbish the church and the monastery, following the death of caliph *Al Mutawakil*. Christians were suppressed during his rule.

Caliph *Al Mu'atathid billah* 892-901 AD, built a mosque next to the monastery. This will lead to the annexing of the monastery to the mosque, by princess *Jameela*, daughter of *Nasir Al Dawla Al Hamdani*, later on, at the end of the 10th century. It was called now *Masjid Al Tawba* (repentance ), not the Younan Monastery. According to *Al Masoudi*, in his book (*merouge Al Thahab* ) Meadows of Gold 957ad He mentioned that monks and worshipers used to live and pray in that mosque.

Nevertheless, there were some amusing stories during that time, that shows the support of the Muslim ruler Ibn Hamadan to the Christians. He arrested a number of Jews and punished them, for desecration of the monastery, in 932ad Nothing is left now.

### **The 11th to the 14th century**

The writer Bishop *Sulaiman Al Saegh* (20<sup>th</sup> c.), thinks, there were still priests and monks at the monastery until the end of the 12th century. That shows there was some kind of positive dialogue between the government and the church. The *Seljuks* ruled there at the end of the 11th century, 1096 AD where Mosul was an abandoned city.

Despite the war between *Salah Al Deen Al Ayoubi*, and the Zings, monks managed to stay at the monastery, till the 13th century According to *Yaqut Al Hamawi*.

In 1244, Mosul surrendered to Hulagu Khan, then Baghdad in 1258. The great civilisation of the Abbasid empire collapsed. It was destroyed and crashed completely. Al Mosul was looted again by the Mongols, in 1261 AD. In the year 1244ad, the country was weak, destroyed and unstable. Some representatives from the Eastern Church, came down from the mountains, North of Mosul, to open the coffin of the late Patriarch *HnaNishou'*, who died 650 years ago. They'd been told that some men had opened it already.

They were surprised to see him exactly as he was, when he died. He looked like as if he was asleep. Thus, they considered him a saint, and people started visiting his shrine, to pray and to be blessed.

In the year 1364 ad, Mosul was invaded again by *Al Jala'eryouns*, another Mongolian tribe. Then came the Terco- Mongol warrior, Tamerlane (1336-1405), in year 1364, he destroyed everything, on his way to Mosul. But when he arrived there, he did not do any harm. On the contrary, he gave presents to the Younan monastery monks. The Christians of Mosul, asked him to protect the shrine of saint HnaNishou. He did, and asked his men to pay their respect too.



According to Al Majdal book, it says that the repeated invasions of the mongols, destroyed Mosul and turned it into a village. They wiped the Christians and pushed them out of Mesopotamia: from the Gulf, Basra, and Baghdad, up to Mosul. At the beginning of the 14th century, hundreds of churches and monasteries were destroyed where in Qatar and the Gulf, there were three Eastern bishops.

But Christianity endured bravely in Mosul, until the 10th of June 2014 when ISIS attacked the city; there were 17 churches and 140 mosques, in Mosul, since the beginning of the 20th century according to Bishop *Sulieman Al Saegh*.

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