



# Monastery heritage as a tool for reconciliation pre-post earthquake: The case of Saint Simeon Monastery

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## Abstract

Preserving heritage ensures it is passed to future generations, cultural heritage is crucial in shaping community's identity through this journey. Religious heritage has huge importance in continuation and give sense of belonging within religious communities. Monastery heritage has a crucial role in safeguarding the rich past and traditions of monastic communities, with a focus on their religious and societal significance. Antioch is a city, a home of coexistence. Beside the city's rich culture, the city is known as central point promoting reconciliation through three main monotheistic religions. The city has faced several earthquakes in history, it was completely destroyed and later rebuilt again. Unfortunately, recently an earthquake occurred and destroyed not only the historical religious buildings but the greatness of coexistence. Reconciliation is the key of healing after the disaster by fostering unity, comprehension and collaboration. Saint Simeon Monastery in Antioch is a significant example of resilience, rebirth, and reconciliation, as evidenced by the references to its response to challenges in its history. Preservation of the monastery should include physical and psychological strategies so that the place can welcome everyone, heal, and coexist with its values and characteristics post-challenge. The research aims to create a framework to increase cultural awareness within the community about the importance of Saint Simeon Monastery as religious heritage site. This will promote to build the bridge of reconciliation post-earthquake. Method of the study includes both quantitative and qualitative research to examine the significance of Saint Simeon Monastery's religious history brings communities together in Antioch after the earthquake.

**Keywords:** coexistence, cultural heritage, earthquake, historical religious buildings, reconciliation

## 1. Introduction

Like Heritage refers to items, buildings, objects, rituals, or culture that have historical or cultural significance and are handed down from one generation to another. Rather of being destroyed, these structures should be preserved since they provide as tangible record of the lifestyle and culture of the people who lived in or near them (Mısırlısoy & Günçe, 2016). Cultural heritage has a crucial role in shaping the identity of a community, promoting a strong feeling of pride and belonging among its inhabitants (Nijkamp, 2012). Religious heritage encompasses holy writings, rituals, architecture, and art, serving as a means to safeguard beliefs, values, and traditions, assuring their transmission to future generations (Olsen, 2006). The heritage of monasteries is very valued as it helps to preserve the history and traditions of monastic communities (Gilchrist, 2020). It provides a deeper understanding of their religious and social functions, as well as their cultural and intellectual contributions to society.

Antioch, also known as Antakya, is a city that has a significant cultural heritage and plays a pivotal role in fostering harmony among the three major monotheistic faiths. Antioch a significant city which serves as a central location and preservation of cultural inheritance. The city's coexistence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism enhances its cultural fabric and promoting mutual understanding between the religions to promote interfaith. Earthquake of 7.7 magnitude that occurred in 2023



was a historic moment that highlighted the necessity of research to examine the steps to rebuild the bridge of reconciliation.

Earthquakes as natural disaster has a big impact on cultural heritage not only physical structures but it also has impact on communities. Earthquakes cause people to lose their houses, so people have to shift somewhere else to maintain their daily basic needs. Beside of these needs, they could not fulfill the needs of cultural and social demands. In this case monasteries with their power can act to build or serve as reconciliation. It can bring people together to share values and appreciate their cultural significance.

Reconciliation is the process of repairing relationships, solving conflicts and restoring divisions within society. It promotes understanding, forgiving in reconstructing relationships between individuals, communities, organizations or nations. It includes political, social and emotional factors in facing any conflict of type of a disaster. Restoring cultural heritage places can ensure the revival of communities (Mısırlısoy & Günçe, 2023). Cultural heritage in that region is one of the most important structures of reconciliation, as it is the common heritage of the common past.

Research aims to create a comprehensive framework of comporment to sensitize cultural significance in the region among communities. Saint Simeon Monastery is recognized by its authority to gather people together even it is abandoned. As a part of religious heritage in Antioch and tool for reconciliation, Saint Simeon Monastery can act as a hub of coexistence post-earthquake. Earthquakes occurs suddenly and brings people together, Saint Simeon Monastery can serve as healing sanctuary. The primary objective is to promote communities to be back to city strategically by superior of monastery.

The research reviews the role of monastery in means of reconciliation after earthquake. Comparing monasteries in Antioch region and investigating cultural, religious and monastic heritage. The limitation of the study is theoretical and obstacles related to post earthquake reconciliation among specific religions and cultural context.

## 2. Literature Review

Heritage consists of items that can be passed down from one generation to another, items that can be safeguarded and inherited, items that hold historical or cultural importance to the community (Feilden & Jo Kilehto, 2003). According to UNESCO heritage is categorized in three sections which are cultural, natural and mixed heritage (UNESCO, 2021). It is an inheritance that belongs to all of humanity and gives each region its own unique qualities. Additionally, cultural heritage serves as a repository of human existence (Jokilehto, 2006). Assets of cultural heritage are tangible and intangible that a group or society inherits from earlier periods (Figure 1). Tangible assets include ancient ruins, monuments, buildings with significant values. Intangible cultural heritage includes music, art, languages and more (UNESCO, 2021).



Figure 1 Types of Cultural Heritage (Adapted from UNESCO, 2021)

UNESCO defines 'tangible cultural heritage' as physical objects, such as creative creations and historical buildings, that are preserved and transmitted over generations. This preservation is

crucial for understanding and appreciating humanity's history, and divided into movable and immovable cultural assets (UNESCO, 2003). Intangible Cultural Heritage refers to cultural practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills passed down through generations, considered part of a community's identity. The 2003 UNESCO Convention defines it as practices, representations, and artifacts. In built heritage, it includes hidden values, such as associations with historical figures, personal memories, or ethical principles, deeply intertwined with the heritage's significance (Petronela, 2016). Cultural heritage is significant due to various causes and values, including historical, architectural, aesthetic, unique, and archaeological aspects. Intangible qualities include emotional, symbolic, and spiritual significance (Jokilehto, 2006).

Religious heritage consists of customs, beliefs, rituals, texts, artefacts, and historical buildings shared by religious groups for future generations. It includes symbols by religious buildings such as monasteries, synagogues, churches, mosques, and temples as material and for immaterial religious heritage includes spiritual rites, ceremonies, and practices that connects beliefs to the historical roots (Mekonnen et al., 2022). Traditions hold great significance as symbols and clothes links faith and continuation. Religious heritage impacts culture and society on literature, unity in diversity, art and ethical frameworks (UNESCO, 2003). Shapes everyday life preserves historical sites and items promotes interfaith in communities. Religious heritage is complex and interconnected aspect of human civilization that impacts cultural identity, social connections and spiritual practices. It supports the preservation of cultural identity in the context of globalization (Mekonnen et al., 2022). It is important in rebuilding relationships between the communities and fosters sense of belonging.

Religious buildings including churches, monasteries, cathedrals are not only significant by cultural and as religious landmarks, are also centers for knowledge preservation and dissemination (UNESCO, 2003). They provide important role in promoting societal and cultural advancement. Monasteries as religious heritage buildings are the places of spiritual retreat and religious practice.

### *2.1. Philosophy of Monastery Heriatge*

The monastery heritage refers to the historical and cultural importance of monasteries, which are holy buildings where monks or nuns reside, worship, and participate in religious ceremonies. The monasteries have had a significant impact on cultural identities, practices, and beliefs throughout the course of history (Harvey, 2012). These cultural artefacts include profound spiritual doctrines, innovative accomplishments, impressive architectural wonders, and enduring traditions, establishing them as a worldwide phenomenon that beyond both national boundaries and religious associations (Baker & Chitty, 2013).

Monasteries have a profound cultural past that encompasses many generations of spiritual activities, ceremonies, and rituals. They function as temples of worship, hubs of education, and reservoirs of learning and enlightenment. In addition, monasteries contain significant artworks and relics that provide insights into the religious tales, symbolism, and aesthetic sensitivities of different civilizations (Williams, 2008). In addition, they participate in social services and charitable endeavors, such as operating educational institutions, medical facilities, and orphanages (Brewer et al., 2015).

Preserving monastic heritage requires cooperation among several entities, each fulfilling a crucial role in upholding the cultural, historical, and spiritual importance of these locations. Monasteries have shown to be resilient by successfully adjusting and attracting people who are seeking solace, contemplation, and spiritual enlightenment, even if their initial educational purposes have changed throughout time (Smith, 2016).

Monasteries have played a crucial role in important historical events, displaying their significance beyond religious activities in social and political changes. Their unusual architecture, which displays a range of styles from several locales and historical eras, is well recognized and celebrated (Jenkins & Forsyth, 2009).

Architecturally, monasteries harmoniously integrate functional spaces with spiritual and communal aspects, placing emphasis on communal living, prayer, and deep reflection inside a confined environment. These artefacts may be found throughout many civilizations and religious traditions, and they include a wide array of designs tailored to meet the special requirements of their respective societies. Typical characteristics of these structures include enclosed sections, central courtyards, places of worship such as churches or primary prayer halls, covered walkways, living quarters, dining halls, libraries, rooms for studying, tall structures housing bells, and accommodations for visitors (Crawford, 2009).

Monasteries embody the seamless fusion of architecture and the surrounding with natural environment, resulting in sacred locations that evoke deep respect and tranquilly. Their architectural prowess is often augmented by their flawless integration into the surroundings, promoting contemplation and admiration of the beauty of nature. Monastic gardens, characterized by their luxuriant foliage and vivid hues, provide a serene and calm ambiance that harmonizes with the spiritual principles upheld in these hallowed sites. The monastery grounds provide expansive places that are conducive to contemplation, reflection, and social meetings. These settings give breathtaking views of the close environment (McNeill, 2017). Monasteries exemplify cultural and religious profundity via their architectural structures, with some ones using sustainable design methodologies to attain a state of ecological balance. Contemporary monasteries are progressively embracing eco-friendly architectural styles that seamlessly integrate with the surrounding environment (Jackson, 2020).

UNESCO identifies World Heritage Sites based on their global worth, cultural importance, human ingenuity, and cultural heritage. Monasteries, being tangible cultural treasures, are acknowledged as World Heritage Sites in order to guarantee their conservation for future generations. In order to be eligible, a monastery must satisfy certain requirements, such as being an exceptional example of human artistic brilliance, offering distinctive evidence of a cultural heritage or civilization, representing a noteworthy period in human history, or having direct connections to significant events or traditions (UNESCO, 2019). Monasteries are regarded as exemplary works of architectural and creative ingenuity, demonstrating the talents and inventiveness of the people and communities responsible for their construction. Additionally, they provide as evidence of religious, spiritual, and community customs, showcasing distinct architectural designs, artistic customs, and cultural rituals (ICOMOS, 2018).

The monastery's cultural heritage is endangered by acts of vandalism, the encroachment of urban development, lack of care and maintenance, the impact of tourism, extremist ideologies, and the potential risks posed by natural catastrophes. Efforts to save this cultural heritage include the collaboration of several entities, including local law enforcement, historical preservation groups, monastic communities, government cultural agencies, heritage foundations, international religious freedom organizations, and disaster management agencies (Brelsford et al., 2014).

**Table 1** Threats to Monastery Heritage and Safeguarding Measures

Threat Name	Impact Explanation	Safeguarding Organization
<b>Vandalism and Desecration</b>	Vandalism refers to the deliberate act of damaging or altering monastic buildings, religious symbols, or artefacts, resulting in the loss of their spiritual and cultural significance.	UNESCO, ICOMOS, WMF, EAA, CHwB, Local heritage preservation agencies
<b>Urbanization and Development</b>	The process of urban growth poses a significant danger to monastic sites as it might lead to their destruction, change, or invasion, so disturbing their historical and spiritual significance.	UNESCO, ICOMOS, WMF, GHF, NTHP, Local heritage preservation agencies
<b>Neglect and Lack of Funding</b>	Inadequate funding may lead to the decay of monastery structures and artefacts, hence reducing their historical and cultural importance.	UNESCO, ICOMOS, WMF, GHF, NTHP, Local heritage preservation agencies, Europa Nostra, The Getty Foundation

<b>Tourism Pressure</b>	The presence of a large number of visitors may exert physical strain on the infrastructure of monasteries, resulting in deterioration and disruption of the serene atmosphere.	UNESCO, ICOMOS, WMF, EAA, GSTC, Local and National Heritage Agencies
<b>Ideological Extremism</b>	Radical ideologies might potentially cause deliberate devastation or compelled cessation of monasteries, leading to the extinction of cultural variety and spiritual customs.	UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, Blue Shield International, GHF, ICC
<b>Natural Disasters</b>	Monastic buildings and artefacts are at substantial danger of damage and destruction from natural calamities such as earthquakes, floods, or wildfires.	UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, WMF, GCI, Blue Shield International, GHF

Disasters occurs quick and tragic beyond to handle and react. These events can be natural occurrences like earthquakes, floods, and tropical storms, or it can be human generated disasters such as industrial misfortunes and technical accidents. By this cultural heritage sites are under danger, these can be threat as tangible or intangible that can damage physical and non-physical impacts. UNESCO is an international organization that safeguards cultural heritage sites during crises. Cultural heritage should be protected from these events by all-encompassing approach that includes disaster preparedness assessment of possible disaster and coordinated emergency actions.

Earthquake causes movements on tectonic plate, this makes buildings to move, relocate, collapse. It has potential to damage historical buildings, monuments, and archaeological sites. Similar to physical aspects, intangible cultural heritage has impacts caused by earthquakes to such as destroying cultural unity and memory. This highlights the difficulty and courage of communities bonding together and protecting their identity. Reconciliation appears here to bring people together, strengthening, restoring relationships and healing as a whole. It brings mutual understanding and collaboration, promotes peace, positive development, instead of spreading hostility.

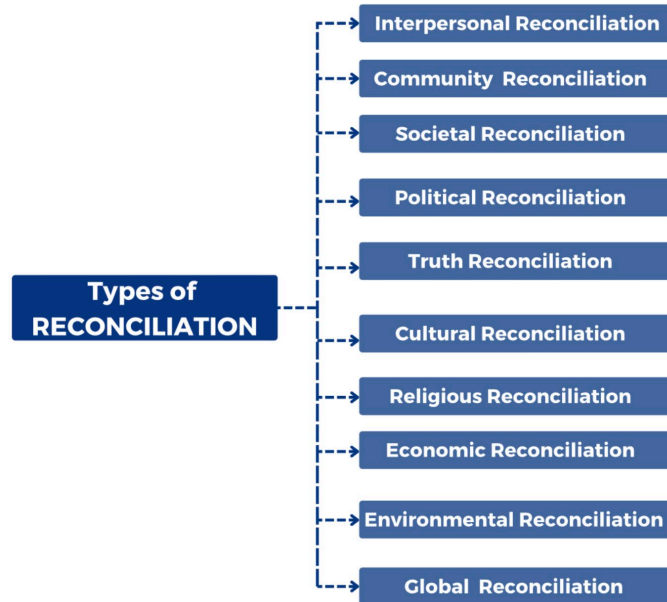


Figure 2 Reconciliation types (Developed according to Radzik & Murphy, 2015)

Reconciliation is complex, can be grouped within its types according to situations. In each specific environment, reconciliation becomes evident by embracing the unique characteristics inherent (Gale & Potter, 2002). Reconciliation is the process of examining the tolerance to certain aspects of forming human connection and societal frameworks (Meierhenrich, 2008). Reconciliation in post disaster recovery can be seen in various types (Figure 2).

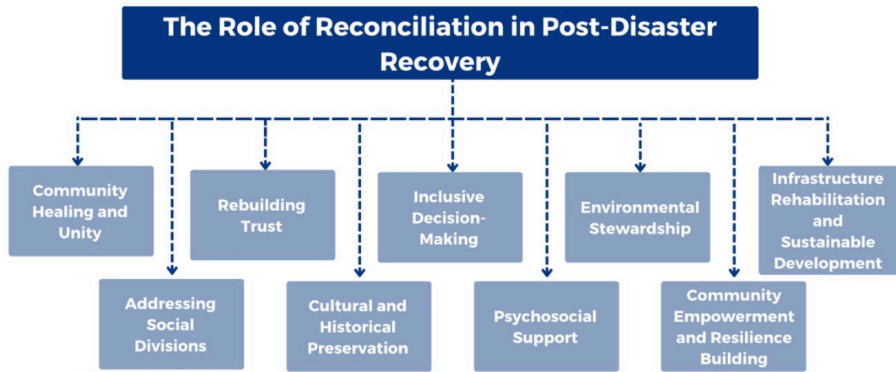


Figure 3 The role of reconciliation in post-disaster recovery

Reconciliation has crucial role in rebuilding emotional, social and cultural facets of community healing in post disaster recovery (Figure 3). It includes a systematic framework for community healing that allows remaining communities to openly discuss their situations and find comfort on a shared path to healing. Reconciliation efforts aim to restore trust, preserve cultural heritage, and support embracing resolution (Mısırlısoy & Günçe, 2023). Cultural heritage sites are significant in facilitating the process of reconciliation (Viejo-Rose, 2016). Attaining harmony between our pasts is an additional objective, but it requires sincere trust from every community involved (Scham & Yahya, 2003). Facilitating the empowerment of communities and fostering their ability to withstand and recover from challenges are essential elements of the reconciliation process, since they empower people to actively participate in their own healing and restoration.

2.2. Monastery Heritage and Reconciliation Relationship

Promoting reconciliation by integrating cultural, spiritual and social facets is the tradition of monasteries. This is not only architectural importance but to foster understanding and recovery. In this case preserving monastery heritage post-disaster can be separated by two strategies, physical and psychological (Figure 4). By this way it can be possible to categorize to follow which strategies to apply in different situations.

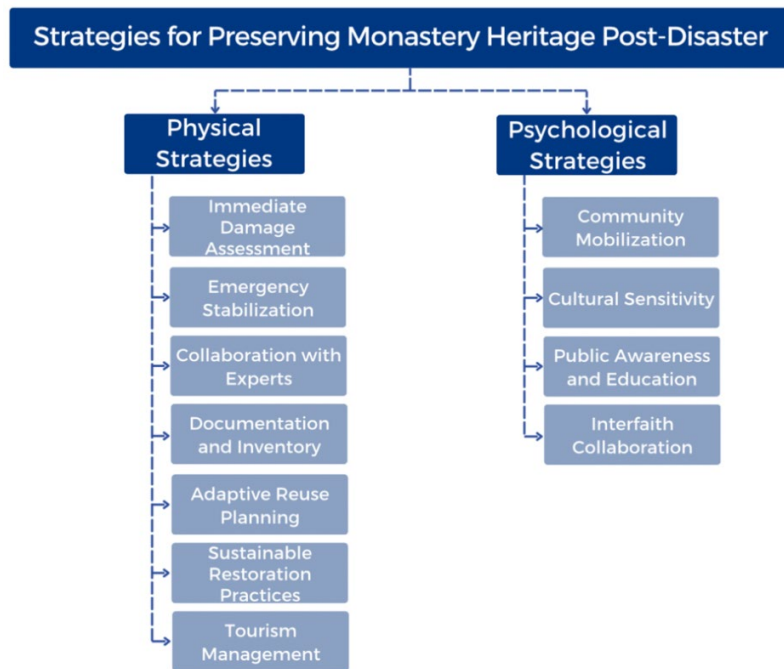


Figure 4 Grouping of preservation strategies in post-disaster

Post-earthquake monasteries foster and strength peace, promotes healing and preserving cultural heritage. It is promoting well-being and advocating the healing and bonding communities

(Radzik & Murphy, 2015). By promoting awareness, monasteries offer resilient peace, sustain cultural history, aiding sense of identity and belonging.



Figure 5 The role of monastery heritage in reconciliation

As means of fostering healing and unity between societies specifically in cases of social divisions, conflicts and disasters monasteries had played crucial role in history. Communities which are affected by earthquake survives with continuation of their identity, they ensure this continuation by safeguarding cultural heritage. Monasteries provide their continued existence over time by protecting their identity with religious artifacts, literature and artistic treasures (Figure 5). Providing peaceful environments, rituals, and cultural significance, monasteries are the icons of tranquility. Through the practice of mindfulness, prayer, mediation, and ceremonies passed over the years, monasteries promote inner healing, cutting chaos from the outside and protecting peace. Monasteries commitment in overall wellbeing shown by involving in humanitarian efforts, healthcare and educational initiatives. They adapt current situation to function as during crises and environmental disasters.



Figure 6 Monasteries as symbols of healing

In times of crisis monasteries are providing peaceful, calm and psychological support environments (Figure 6). They create good relationships with their communities and efficiently

strategize humanitarian efforts. Heritage of monastery should be protected by organized approach that merges both psychological and physical plan. Should respond with quick damage evaluation and collaboration with professionals. Economy is being achieved by the active role of participating. Protecting cultural environments provide sustainable tourism.

### **3. Methods and Materials**

Resources and materials widely shaped the approach of this research and gave result of objective and sub-aims. Materials that form this study are literature review sources, survey and on-site observation by photography. An extensive observation was made in Antioch which is now known as Antakya as mentioned above. On site observation has made it possible to see the situation of the city is beyond imagination. Pictures have been taken as a live proof of barely no one is left in the city and reconciliation is no longer there. Online databases and libraries are sources of literature review. To gain wide range of understanding, research contains multi choice questionnaire survey answered by local people, religious communities and academicians. Questions were organized according to the findings of literature review and answers shaped the result of the research.

Methodology of the research is mixed method that involves two components of quantitative research and qualitative research. Method includes compairation between two monasteries in the region. Literature review as first component of qualitative research, purposes to provide a theoretical foundation on why and how preservation post-earthquake is important. As second component case study, comparative analysis occurs according to cultural and architectural values and UNESCO World heritage list criteria's (UNESCO, 2005). Provided theoretical perceptions are proven physically by the support of photographs. Quantitative research consists of selection of case study, survey design, data collection and analysis. The research observes post-earthquake condition of the city by the result of survey responders. Views possible strategies as monasteries being bridge of reconciliation post-earthquake.

### **4. Review of the Case**

The city of Antioch is an exceptionally refined and prestigious location. This city is encompassed by two fortifications, the larger of which is exceptionally tall and remarkably wide, constructed with immense stones, and adorned with four hundred and fifty towers. The entirety of this city is aesthetically pleasing. To the east, the area is enclosed by four mountains, while to the west, a river named Farfar (Orontes) flows alongside the city walls. The city below was remarkable and meticulously designed, embellished with a variety of magnificent structures, including numerous churches and three hundred and sixty monasteries (Todt, 2004). The organization's head was a metropolitan who oversaw a total of one hundred and fifty-three bishops. Antioch, the city in question, holds significant influence as it was founded by a total of seventy-five monarchs, with King Antiochus being the most prominent among them, hence the name Antioch (Todt, 2004).

Antioch, ancient city of Turkey is significant by its unique cultural religious and architectural history, shaped by ears of Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine. Fabric of the city is a testament shows city has accepted variety of cultures. Context of the city and symbol of coexistence between different religions that can be observed by seeing Habibi Neccar Mosque located near by Church of St. Peter (Figure 7), everyday routines are defined by spiritual institutions.





**Figure 7** Identity of religious coexistence in Antioch (Diker & Erkan, 2017)

Shared values of historical heritage of the city promotes tolerance and mutual respect. The mentioned number of monasteries in Antioch were refunded and reconstructed in the history. This number shows the city's significance in the early Christian World. These monasteries were not the places of worship only, they were the centers of education and community services. Important example, Saint Simeon monastery is a living representation of religious and cultural heritage displays city's ability and preserve historical monuments. Antioch with its integrative nature is evident in pieces of architectural structures and archaeological landmarks. Monasteries of Saint Simeon and Saint Barlaam are spiritual atmosphere of Antioch was impacted by Christian monasticism. Additionally, to these aspects, vanished monasteries enhance religious traditions and historical identity of the city. Reading the past of the city is possible through cultural mosaics by multi faith history.

One of the significant historical monuments of Antioch is the Monastery of Saint Barlaam. During the 3rd century BCE, a Doric temple stood at this location. In the 4th century, St. Barlaam arrived at this location, dismantled the statue of Zeus, and formed a community of monks. In the 6th century, a church was constructed in the southeastern corner of the monastery (Figure 8). Saint Barlaam monastery has faced many difficulties, like natural disasters and political disruptions. An earthquake in 526 demolished the monastery (Hatay Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2021). The monastery is refounded and reconstructed by Georgian monks between 950 and 1050, remained operational until 1268 before being deserted (Todt, 2004). Its architectural style is Byzantine style and includes church, chapel and monastic cells. Monastery is left with remaining's of architectural features, murals, mosaics and structural features displays artistry of the era. Considering these economical limitations, being left to its destiny resulted the abandonment of the monastery. Unfortunately, the absence of documentation for Saint Barlaam monastery results in a dearth of information.



**Figure 8** Saint Barlaam Monastery, Antioch (Hatay Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2021)

Saint Simeon Stylite the Younger, who influenced a religious movement, laid the foundation for the Monastery of Saint Simeon. He followed Saint Simeon Stylite the Elder way of living. He became a significant spiritual figure in Antioch during the Byzantine Empire. He entered monastic life at an early age. To be closer to God and focus on prayer, he isolated himself from the city and started to live on a 15-meter pillar for this spiritual dedication on a mountain in Antioch (Torrey & Simeon 1899). He spent 65 years of his life on this 132x160-metre pillar. His dedication has earned him respect and fame over the years. People would visit him and bring food. His popularity grew worldwide, and his lifestyle shaped the lives of many. He was accepted as a holy man. Pilgrims used to travel and visit him for blessings, they also believed he could cure the sick and heal them (Figure 9). Between 476 and 490 AD, the pillar served as the focal point for the construction of the monastery, enabling monks to live together and learn from him. Emperor Zeno, who ruled the Empire, supported the construction, and architects, builders, and monks collaborated to create a suitable living space. Monastery has become religious center for Orthodox Christianity. The central pillar, a cross-form with four wings, shaped its unique architectural style. In the 6th century, the monastery suffered considerable damage from several earthquakes in 526, 529, and 588 AD. In the 7th century, Arab conquests resulted in the dissolution of monasteries, leaving them without the support and maintenance they needed. In addition to this issue, seismic events occurred continuously. In the 10th century, during the Byzantine Reconquest, monasteries were undergoing reconstruction efforts by Emperor Basil II. Emperor Basil II transformed the monastery into a fortress with strong walls and towers, preparing it for further attacks. Seismic events that occurred in the 11th century damaged the monastery even more, making it abandoned during this century. Up until the 16th century, some parts of the monastery remained in use. Excavations uncovered the historical and architectural significance of the monastery in modern times.

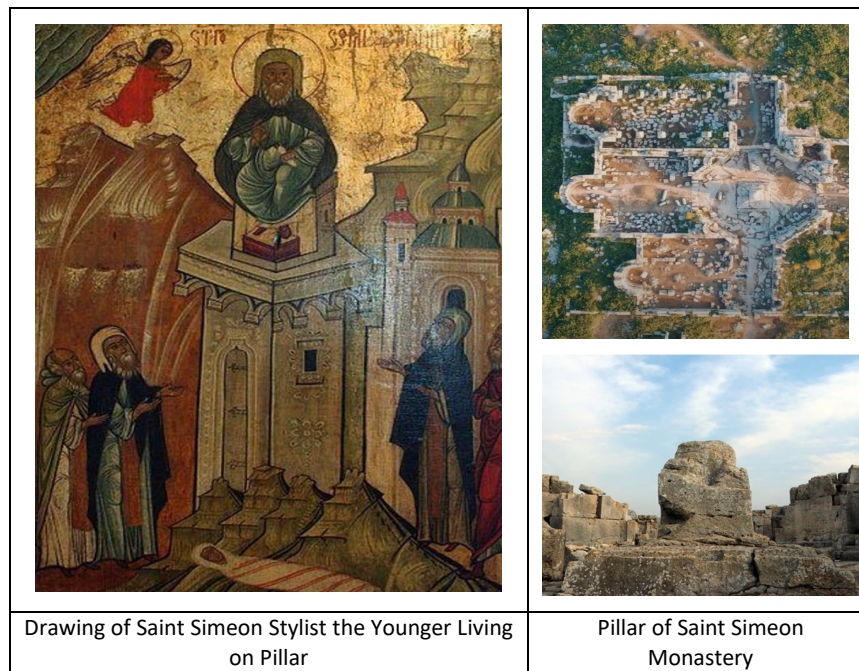


Figure 9 Saint Simeon Monastery, Antioch (Lendering, 2024; Contributors to Wikimedia projects, 2016)

The octagonal courtyard and surrounding area creates a focal point for the monastery. This courtyard was also designed to create space for pilgrims and monks to come together and pray. Three wings of the cross shaped main church of the monastery is approximately 25 meters and eastern wing is longer with three apses in the end of the wing (Figure 10). These wings are built to serve as basilica and create environment for worship. Chapels and baptisteries are additional structures within the monastery. Chapels serve as worship spaces, while baptisteries serve as separate buildings for baptisms. The monks and nuns stayed in dormitories, and guesthouses were constructed for visitors.

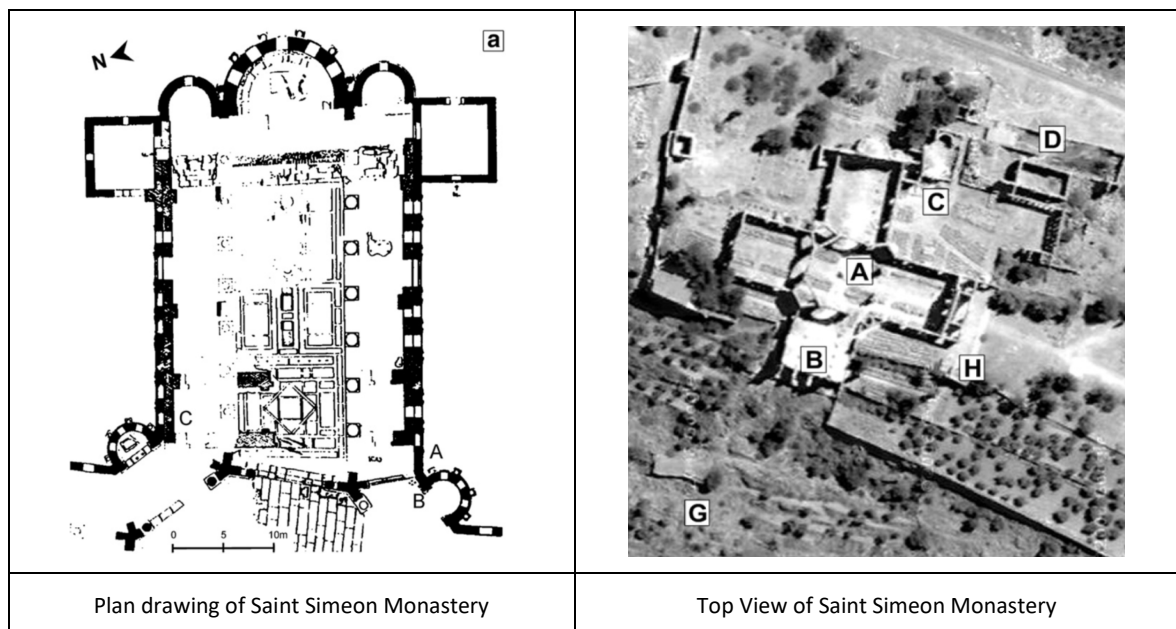
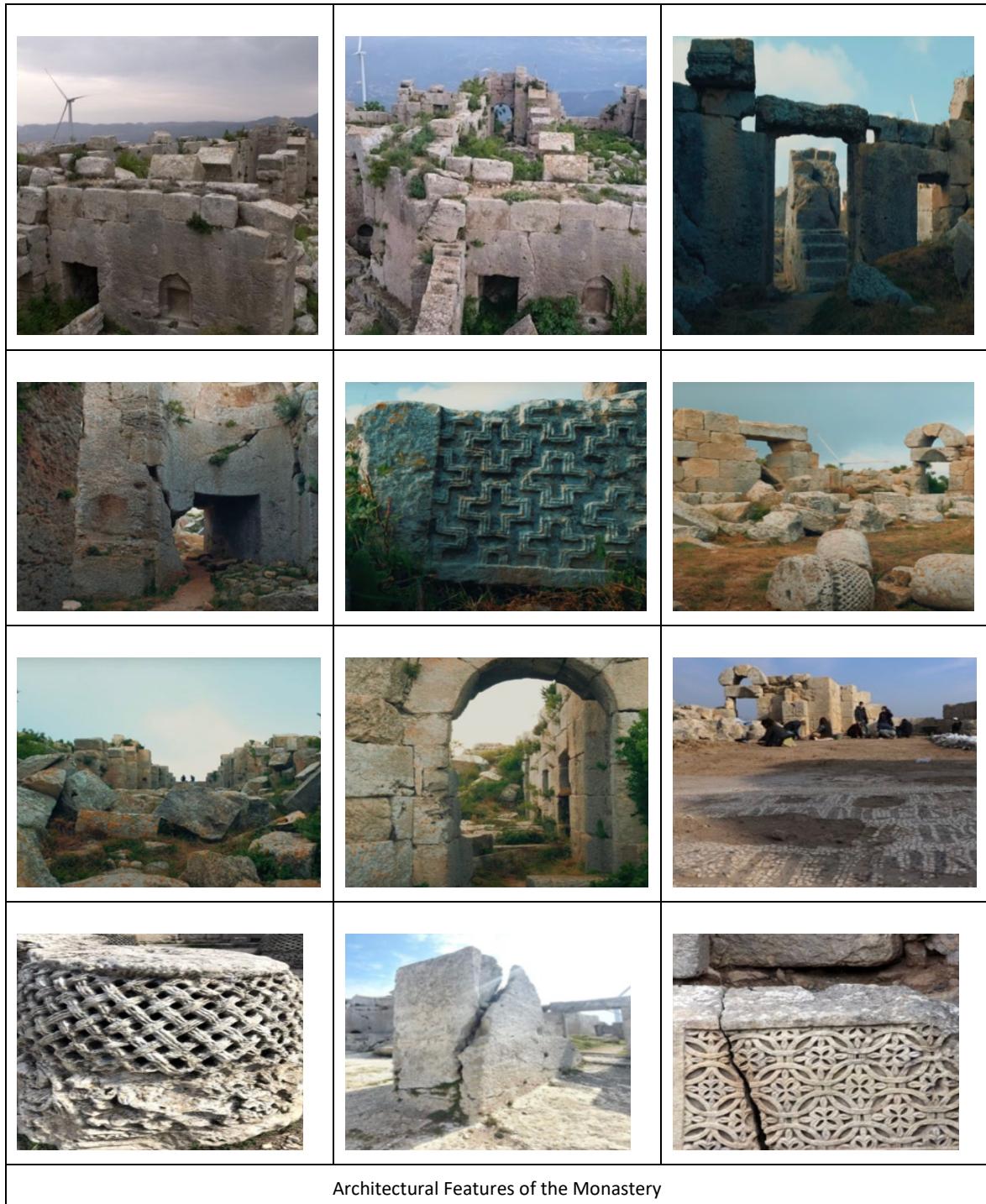


Figure 10 Architectural layout of the Monastery of Saint Simeon (Karakhanian et al., 2008)

The main church is represented by A, the western wing with a loggia is represented by B, the main church chapel is represented by C, the Convent is represented by D, the Baptistry is represented by E, the Baptistry chapel is represented by F, a bastion or water reservoir is represented by G, and the entrance to the lower terrace is represented by H.

Architectural features of Byzantine style on structures, columns, openings and mosaics on the floor represents the cultural background and importance of monastery heritage (Figure 11). Historical events led to changes to additional modifications and fortifications. These features of the monastery are also crucial in representing both practical and symbolic aspects of Byzantine architecture. Mosaics are aesthetically adding color to interiors, they frequently illustrate religious scenes and creating visual environments. Arches are representing the typical Byzantine architecture, beside supporting heavy load by distributing weight equally, they create sense of openness and height in the space. The structural design of the monastery supports the daily routines of monastic life with wide open spaces which provides spiritual atmosphere. Overall, the features are reflecting architectural sophistication and the significance as cultural, religious and historical site.



Architectural Features of the Monastery

Figure 11 Architectural features of the Saint Simeon Monastery (Hatay. com, 2021)

Additionally, to its fascinating architectural features, monastery located on top of the mountain has magnificent view of nature. This location gives lots of opportunities in promoting peace and healing. Being isolated is ideal for mediation, pray and contemplation as it provides quiet environment. Connecting with nature facilitates healing, fosters a deeper connection, and fosters the experience of a spiritual bond. The height makes it possible to observe surrounding areas. The location of being on top of the mountain symbolizes being closer to God and heaven, this makes it significant as religious tradition.

Saint Simeon monastery has faced several earthquakes in the past; it has been rebuilt many times, as mentioned previously. The most recent earthquake, which occurred on February 6, 2023, did not cause any damage to the monastery. However, prior to this, political issues led to its abandonment, and subsequent repairs were not carried out. Local people are publishing news, creating awareness of significant features of cultural heritage. They are striving to gain the government's attention. Even though it remains abandoned, local people, religious communities, and tourists are visiting the monastery constantly. Primary schools are organizing trips to sites to teach heritage to new generations (Figure 12).



Figure 12 Attraction on Saint Simeon Monastery (Motley Turkey, 2016; Turkish Archaeological News,2016)

Both of the monasteries hold architectural and cultural significance but Saint Simeon Monastery clearly has more historically significance. Saint Simeon Monastery sustains its importance by its visitors from different groups. This is a live representation of reconciliation by its neglectance is not decreasing its value. Saint Simeon Monastery is not in the list of World Heritage but when considering UNESCO criteria, it is tangible and immovable cultural heritage, representing unique evidence of cultural tradition and stands as illustrating example of significant point in human history.

## 5. Evaluations and Findings of the Case

Numerous evaluations and observations have filled the research gap with findings from the study on valuable cultural heritage. This research has produced highly valuable findings that revealed important perceptions and awareness. The study has never been executed before, so it fills a significant gap.

As means of historical resilience, fostering the shared identities and cultural bridge religious heritage becomes an important tool in both before and after earthquake. After the earthquake it becomes tangible as for healing, unity, interfaith cooperation, preserves cultural traditions and it serves as an educational resource. Religious heritage builds the coexistence by guiding communities

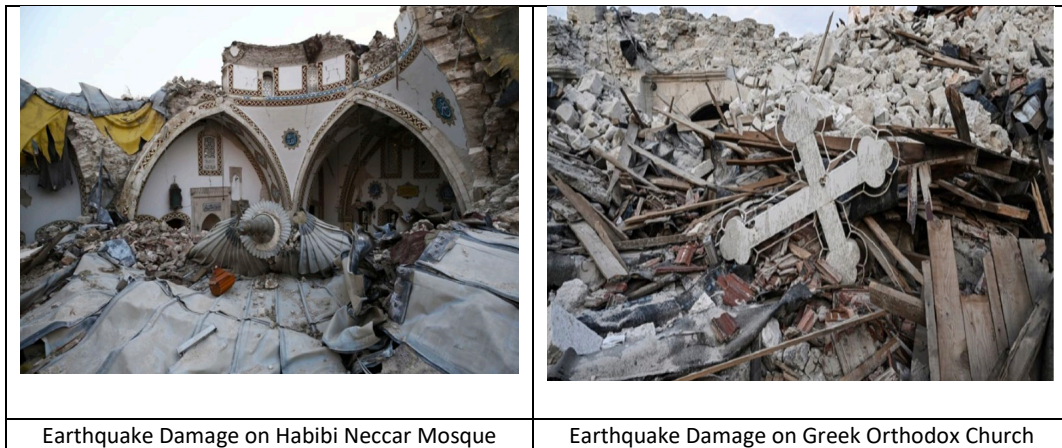
to reconciliation in post disaster recovery. Its multifaceted aspects makes it a powerful tool in leading communities towards reconciliation.

**Table 2** Role of Religious Heritage as a Reconciliation Tool Pre and Post Earthquake

Aspect	Pre-Earthquake	Post-Earthquake
<b>Sense Cultural Bridge and Shared Identity</b>	Serves as a cultural bridge, fostering shared identity.	Shared identity becomes a tool for unity and collaboration in rebuilding.
<b>Historical Continuity and Resilience</b>	Embodies historical continuity, symbolizing resilience.	Historical continuity inspires resilience, aiding in the recovery process.
<b>Symbol of Hope and Healing</b>	Acts as a beacon of hope and inspiration.	Becomes a tangible symbol of hope and healing for communities.
<b>Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation</b>	Promotes interfaith understanding and cooperation.	Facilitates collaboration among diverse religious groups for recovery.
<b>Cultural Preservation and Reconstruction</b>	Preserves cultural traditions and architectural treasures.	Preservation and reconstruction contribute to cultural revitalization.
<b>Educational Resource for Understanding</b>	Serves as an educational resource for cultural and spiritual values.	Becomes a tool for understanding, dispelling misconceptions, and unity.

Religious heritage is not only connecting communities to their past but also leads them forward by offering solace, hope and heal to rebuild. Religious heritage represents the soul of resilience and reconciliation facing challenges. Saint Simeon Monastery can serve as a powerful tool for reconciliation by its cultural, religious and historical significance. To understand this, it is important to delve into both its tangible, immovable heritage and their connection of intangible, living cultural aspects.

To observe the situation of the site and to cover people’s awareness through rebuilding the bridge of reconciliation under the role of monastic heritage, it has been reflected with survey questions that answered by local people, religious communities and academicians. With a %54 percentage of respond they were aware of religious and cultural heritage in Antioch. Study revealed with greater amount people visited Saint Simeon Monastery before earthquake. Half of the participants reviewed religious heritage is important in promoting peace, smaller amount of group was not aware and others answered as it is not important. Half of the people thinks monasteries are important in cultural heritage of Antioch. The question of earthquakes impact on sense of identity and bonding of community through damage on monasteries, greater amount of responders were agreed only an amount of 17% were not sure. People are highly aware of coexistence of different religious communities in Antioch. After this relationship demolished by earthquake question were asked on re-functioning monasteries can be part of three monotheistic religions to come together and heal together, more than half of the responders agreed. Recent earthquake occurred on 6th February, 2023 with magnitude of 7.7 had a big impact on religious heritage as means of physical structures and more than that the communities are damaged (Figure 13).



**Figure 13** Damage on religious heritage (Arkeofili, 2023; Gazete Oksijen, 2023)

By the result of highly agreement of responders on question of conserving religious heritage sites can benefit as to repair relationships, recover and heal. At the same time these places are where they have tourist attraction constantly and this will feed economic growth. City got greatly damaged by the earthquake. On the site observation it has been dedicated that, residential buildings, commercial buildings, schools got collapsed. Single-storey buildings were not having damage and this is where the only people left in the city are living. There are only few people living in the city because they had to shift out of the city where they could provide their daily needs. People who could not find a place to live are living in the tents which the government provided but their health is highly affected from the asbestos dust that comes out from demolishing process of the buildings (Figure 14).



**Figure 14** Post-earthquake situation of Antioch (Pictures taken by Kalkan, 2024)

With the perception of local people that stayed in the city, academicians and religious communities' answers on survey questions shaped the findings of the research. 29% of the respondents, who are part of the local population group, did not recognize the heritage. When asked about the impact of religious heritage conservation on community healing, 63% of respondents cited fostering pride and identity, promoting tourism and economic opportunities, and organizing cultural events and gatherings.

Survey question on conserving and re-functioning damaged monasteries can significantly contribute bonding relationships of communities and healing together which is an act of reconciliation. 57% of people agreed with this solution. As a final result greater amounts of responder's thoughts are on monasteries are promoting peace and they can continue to sustain their culture by coming together. With a great amount of 70% of the responders answered on the active involvement in efforts to rebuild reconciliation and protect cultural heritage in Antioch.

As general review of survey results, responders are aware of earthquake did not only destroy physically but also demolished the relationship of communities. Heritage sites are important by means of cultural and religious heritage. Monastery of Saint Simeon can be transformed into a place where everyone can come as a whole, appreciate their significance.

Research findings gave the result of people are already doing the act of reconciliation already without notice. There was an event of Easter celebration in front of collapsed Antioch Greek Orthodox Church and different communities had attended (Figure 15). Also, a collaborative effort had shown in Christmas celebration in Antioch. Even though they are people with different beliefs they want to come together under the umbrella of common shared values of heritage and cover their wounds.



Figure 15 Christmas and easter celebrations in Antioch (BBC NEWS TÜRKÇE, 2023)

All the religious representatives of three Abrahamic religions came together and visited city's religious and historical sites on the date of 19 April 2023 (Açık et al., 2023). The aim of this visit was to give hope to people during this challenging time. In the speeches each of them gave they were mentioning that collaboration is important, this unity can heal the pain caused by the earthquake. They were giving information of historical significance, cultural richness and coexistence of Antioch to make local people aware. They were sharing prayers even if they were having different faiths, this represents the collective hope, resilience and reconciliation. While these were happening in religious communities, organizations started to publish platforms with names of Yeniden Antakya Platformu Derneği Kültürü Korumak ve İyileştirmek (Rebuild Antakya Platform for Preserving and Improving Culture), Korumaradyoda (Cultural Heritage and Preservation), Hatay Ortak Meselemiz



(Hatay, Our Common Issue), and Hatay Yeniden Ayakta Platformu (Hatay Rebuilds Platform) these are the actions of reconciliation (Figure 16).



Figure 16 Platform building awareness of Antioch

While the types of reconciliation mentioned in Figure 2 may be more than one suitable for this case but ‘community reconciliation’ is the most accurate type. It is the type of forgiveness that matters the most, it is all about bringing the communities together and fostering unity, healing and rebuilding the relationship within. This is the aim of utilizing religious heritage such as Saint Simeon Monastery as a tool for reconciliation among the communities affected by the earthquake in Antioch. By focusing on community reconciliation, looking into how religious heritage can help to bring people together, it can be possible to understand each other and make the relationship stronger.

Survey resulted the answer on further steps on to sustain permanent existence and usefulness of restored monasteries as; with 74% of responds on it is by creating partnerships with local companies, developing educational programs for youth and community members, establishing ongoing dialogue platforms for interfaith cooperation. In the post-earthquake rehabilitation Saint Simeon Monastery can play an important role by implementing to practice with plan that incorporates activities for community and social growth and it will significantly develop economy by this cultural heritage can sustain. This can be the call to people who forced to shift elsewhere because of the bad living conditions. This will be the approach to build the bridge of reconciliation. Saint Simeon Monastery is a living testament as tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Also, the result of the survey question on involvement in the efforts to build peace and protect cultural assets is that 70% of highly rated respondents said they would definitely participate, seven people with the amount of 20% were interested but depending on the condition (Figure 17). These responses demonstrate a great willingness to participate in the reconciliation process.

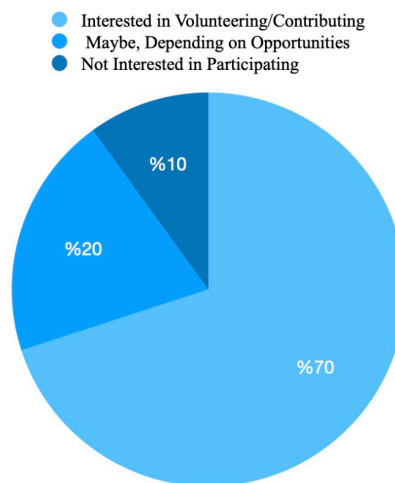


Figure 17 Reveal diverse levels of willingness among participants to actively engage in efforts aimed at building reconciliation and safeguarding cultural assets in Antioch

## Result of Survey Questions

The analysis of the survey results makes it clear that earthquakes are not only damaging the buildings themselves, but also disrupting the relationship between the buildings and communities. It shatters the reconciliation bridge between Saint Simeon Monastery and its sacred assets. The general result of the responses has shown there is a need for this place; such a holy place should be restored to be in use. The awareness of the importance of cultural and religious heritage is significantly higher than that of those who are not familiar with it. Communities aspire to transform the Monastery of Saint Simeon into a place where everyone can come together as one. The results show a shared desire to protect and repair religious and cultural heritage linked to the monastery, demonstrating how important it is as a communal resource.

- **Local people:** More than half of the local residents were aware of the heritage, while less than half were not, indicating a persistent lack of knowledge. Saint Simeon Monastery, with educational efforts and community involvement, can effectively address and reduce the knowledge gap.
- **Religious communities:** Calling religious groups emotional participants can reflect how they perceive their answers to the survey. This brings out how deeply they feel connected to religious historical sites. It is important to recognise and understand this emotion in order to create programs that can connect with beliefs and feelings. Including this emotion and cultural aspects together in the preservation can get more people involved in the community.
- **Academicians:** This is a well-informed group where opinions come from experts who know a lot about Saint Simeon Monastery's cultural, religious, and unique heritage. Scholarly perspectives contribute to their perceptions, enhancing academic knowledge. Engagement with scholars plays a crucial role in approaches to conserving cultural assets.

These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of participants' viewpoints and emotions at Saint Simeon Monastery, as well as the wider context of Antioch's cultural and religious heritage. In order to create a strong link between the past and present, it is essential to implement an integrated heritage approach for the Saint Simeon Monastery. This approach involves finding both the concrete aspects, such as the physical characteristics, and the intangible aspects that make the monastery distinct. Both the tangible and intangible aspects of the Saint Simeon Monastery should be considered to create a significant framework, and the findings can enable to understand their deep connections.

## Tangible Heritage

- **UNESCO Criteria:** Architectural and artistic values represents the details of different eras, its healing location with the view of on top of everything, woven with spiritual value, collective soul of the community that exceed extents tangible architectural magnificence. Saint Simeon Monastery is not in the list of UNESCO's World Heritage List, it should meet at least one of the criteria which consists of (i) to (x) criteria (UNESCO, 2004). Saint Simeon Monastery aligns with Criterion (i), Criterion (iii), Criterion (iv) and Criterion (vi). Criterion (i), represent a masterpiece of human creative genius. Criterion (iii), bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization. Criterion (iv), be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape that illustrates a significant stage in human history. Criterion (vi), be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.
- **Architectural and Artistic Value:** The architectural elements of Byzantine style found on structures, columns, entrances, and floor mosaics symbolize the cultural significance and historical legacy of the monastery (Figure 11). Historical events resulted in subsequent alterations and reinforcements. The practical and symbolic components of Byzantine

architecture are effectively represented by these features of the monastery. Mosaics serve to enhance the aesthetic appeal of rooms by adding vibrant colors. They often depict religious motifs and contribute to the creation of visually captivating spaces. Arches in Byzantine architecture serve the dual purpose of evenly distributing weight and creating a sense of openness and height in the space. The monastery's structural design facilitates the daily operations of monastic life by incorporating expansive areas that provide a conducive spiritual ambiance. Overall, the features exhibit architectural refinement and hold cultural, religious, and historical importance.

- **Historical Significance:** The beauty of Saint Simeon Monastery is more than its architecture, it is a living testament to the historical significance of Antioch. The narratives give the site a sense of shared spiritual background. Its prayers and visitors are drawn for not only its architectural featured but also the connection with the sacred history carved in its Stones. The history still shapes the culture of the area, it connects the past to the present and welcomes everyone to be a part of the lasting memory.

Saint Simeon Monastery is s significant monument with architectural, artistic and historical values. It serves as a place where Saint Simeon's ultimate burial occurs. The monastery's Byzantine architecture, as shown by the Pillar of Saint Simeon, draws researchers and enthusiasts from across the globe. The spiritual importance of this place is well established in the region's history, interweaving a collective spiritual narrative within its stones. Although the monastery is not included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, it has inherent qualities that meet UNESCO's standards for acknowledgment, demonstrating global significance, cultural significance, and historical genuineness. The eventual acknowledgment would enhance the monastery's significance in the worldwide account of human history and spirituality.

### Intangible Heritage

- **Spiritual Values:** The spiritual meanings of the Saint Simeon Monastery is deeply interwoven into the invisible work of art that goes beyond its physical beauty. The traditions, spiritual practices and beliefs connected with the monastery are not only monastery rituals, it shows what community symbolizes as a whole. It is a powerful force that brings people together, shapes the community's identity and have been passed down from generations. The echos of prayers, sacred chants and quiet reflection creates monastery's intangible aura. It is a source of spiritual richness that brings the community together in a shared journey.
- **Community Behaviors and Beliefs:** Beyond its physical presence, the monastery is where everyone in the community shares beliefs and acts in the same way. It is a lively hub where people do spiritual activities together and this gives sense of unity and purpose. Shared faith shapes the behavior in a way that is more than walls of the monastery and into the daily lives. It is influences on guiding the daily actions, community unity, ethical decisions, cultural traditions and social support. How people in the community acts and believe is connected. Shared beliefs and behaviors are keeping Saint Simeon Monastery alive. The heritage of the monastery is not only tangible.

### Integration of Tangible and Intangible Heritage

- **Model of Behavior - Integrated Heritage Approach:** To build a powerful connection between the past and present, there should be an integrated heritage method for Saint Simeon Monastery. This method entails both identifying the physical (tangible) and the traditions and beliefs (intangible) that define the monastery's uniqueness. Guided tours and educational programs in the monastery help visitors not only understand the architecture, but also the cultural and spiritual values that keep the monastery alive. Combining and considering these elements allows for a full appreciation of the monastery

heritage's richness. This method promotes not only preserving the heritage but also dynamically engaging with the present legacy.

- **Cultural Events and Celebrations:** There are many cultural events and celebrations that Saint Simeon Monastery hosts to bring communities together. These events are not only displaying the physical richness of the monastery but also its rich history, art, and spiritual practices. Organizing activities, art shows, music performances, and traditional rituals can strengthen the bonds between community members and honor the shared heritage. The monastery gains vibrant cultural life from each activity and event, reflecting its meanings and keeping its significance alive. Additionally, this approach helps people feel proud and united, so they can keep monastery heritage alive by making it a part of their lives.
- **Interfaith Dialogues:** Saint Simeon Monastery acts as a place where people with different faiths, including the three Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in Antioch, can come together and participate in interfaith dialogues. This post-earthquake conservation of religions is more than just religious differences; it helps to rebuild common understanding, perception, and collaboration within religious groups. By inspiring these interactions, different belief systems make the monastery serve as a bridge. This approach enriches the cultural diversity and promotes coexistence in Antioch. Collaboration can avoid social divisions, and shared values can foster respect and unite people. This is done through the interfaith dialogues at the monastery.

### Healing Place and Gathering Hub

Saint Simeon Monastery, aside from being renowned for its healing properties, offers health and wellness activities. It blends ancient calm with modern wellness practices, and this creates a sanctuary for physical and spiritual restoration. Community engagement approaches encourage community members to contribute to the monastery's preservation, which fosters a sense of honor and ownership. These activities, including workshops and educational sessions, help locals view the monastery as a living part of their community, ensuring its relevance.

## 6. Conclusion

The recent earthquake in Antioch had a significant impact on religious heritage, causing physical structures and communities to be damaged. The survey results reveal that earthquakes not only damage the buildings but also disrupt reconciliation between the buildings and communities, shattering the relationship between the monastery and its sacred assets. However, conserving religious heritage sites can help repair relationships, recover, and heal. Religious heritage plays a crucial role in historical resilience and cultural bridges, both before and after earthquakes. It serves as a powerful tool for healing, unity, interfaith cooperation, preservation of cultural traditions, and educational resources. Saint Simeon Monastery can serve as a powerful tool for reconciliation due to its cultural, religious, and historical significance. Tourist attractions and economic growth are also contributing to the recovery process.

The visit by religious representatives from three Abrahamic religions to city's religious and historical sites give hope and promoted unity. In the visit representatives shared prayers and gave information about historical significance, cultural richness, and coexistence of Antioch. Representatives were mentioning that the only way to recover from this disaster is to come together. Celebrating holy religious days in demolished religious buildings with rituals, ceremonies and traditions (Figure 15), platforms that are working on rebuilding relationships (Figure 16) and visits by religious representatives is a proof of possible reconciliation post-earthquake. By focusing on community reconciliation, religious heritage can help bring people together and strengthen relationships.

Religious representatives played an important role in encouraging local people to see the richness of Antioch's culture, they spread unity and thought it would give them the power to get through this challenge. They showed exemplary behavior and broadened the opinions of the locals,

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so the answers to the survey questions were more conscious. The survey results indicate that the Saint Simeon Monastery, a living testament to both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, can be significantly improved by implementing post-earthquake rehabilitation plans that incorporate community and social growth activities. The survey also revealed that 70% of highly rated respondents would participate in the reconciliation process, demonstrating a willingness to participate in the process.

An integrated heritage approach identifies the tangible and intangible aspects of the monastery's uniqueness, promoting a full appreciation of its heritage as these aspects are reinforcing each other. Building itself serves as physical manifestation of intangible heritage that includes traditions, knowledge and rituals. Saint Simeon Monastery as building is enhanced by these practices, that makes it gain its significance from the intangible cultural heritage. History, art, and spiritual practices of the monastery embodies cultural expressions, historical narratives and social values. Activities, art shows, music performances, and traditional rituals provides the symbolic meaning and context that makes Saint Simeon Monastery valuable. These intangible aspects are crucial for the transmission of cultural values and knowledge from past to future. Without Saint Simeon Monastery, these practices cannot be performed, without these traditions the monastery is losing its cultural significance. It is crucial to understand this connection for a possible heritage conservation. Safeguarding the practices should be involved in preservation of the monastery. This study can be a base for further researches and it is open to research in different dimensions. It can form the basis for studies in different disciplines.

These mentioned cultural events and celebrations at the monastery brings communities together, showcasing the monastery's physical richness and rich history, art, and spiritual practices. Interfaith dialogues at the monastery help rebuild common understanding and collaboration within religious groups, fostering respect and unity. By repairing these relationships, communities will recover and heal, making it possible to rebuild the bridge of reconciliation.

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## Resume

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