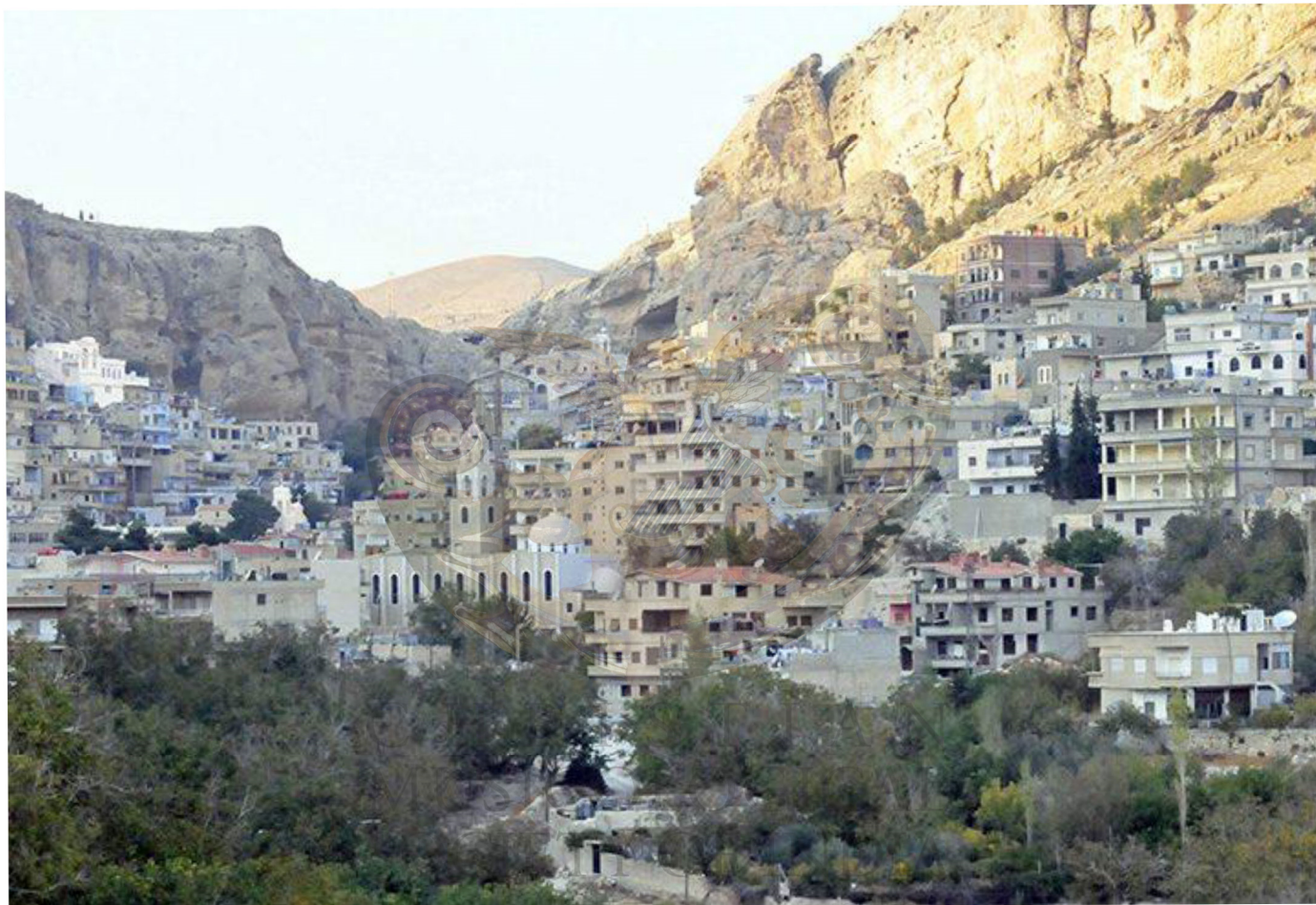




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Column: The language of Jesus in Ma'loula

by [Don Knebel](#) · August 16, 2016



Ma'loula, Syria, in November 2010 (Photo by Don Knebel)

Until a few years ago, visitors to an ancient mountainside village in southwestern Syria could hear the words of Jesus in his own language. Today, those words have been temporarily silenced.

Ma'loula (or Maaloula) was founded in about 90 A.D. in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, 40 miles northeast of Damascus. Christianity came early to Ma'loula, which has maintained a Christian majority for at least 1,600 years. With a population never exceeding a few thousand, Ma'loula has been home to 40 churches.

The Mar Sarkis Church, one of the oldest in the world, features a unique altar reminiscent of pagan altars, with raised edges for catching sacrificial blood. The adjoining Mar Sarkis monastery honors St. Sergius, a Roman soldier executed for following Jesus. Mar Thecla, another ancient monastery, claims the remains of St. Thecla, said to have been a follower of the apostle Paul.

Because of its geographic isolation, Ma'loula's residents still speak Western Aramaic, the ancient language Jesus spoke. For centuries, priests of the Mar Sarkis Church have recited the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic for visitors from around the world.



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