

Choose **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the text for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 9-12 on your answer sheet.

- 1 Christians and Muslims were visiting al-Qaryatain to appreciate what saint
- 2 What local population regards Mar Elian as a Sufi leader?
- 3 Who found the tumbledown ruins of the original complex?
- 4 What did the community have to explain why Sunni Muslims and Christians lived together in harmony?

Museum of Lost Objects: Mar Elian Monastery

For centuries, Christians and Muslims have visited the small Syrian town of al-Qaryatain to venerate a saint known as Mar Elian. But in August 2015, the shrine was bulldozed by the group that calls itself Islamic State and the multifaith community was torn apart. About 1,500 years ago, an elderly and pious man called Julian, from the far east of Mesopotamia, went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his disciples. As he travelled home, Julian had an inkling that he was going to die before he made it. "If such a fate befalls me," he told his companions, "put my body on an ox cart and set it loose. Where the oxen stop is where I should be buried."

Julian did indeed die, his body was loaded on to the cart, and the oxen plodded on until they came to a stop near a small town. Julian's disciples built a tomb for him and in time a monastery grew up around the shrine. That at least is the legend of St Julian the Old Man, or, as he is known in Arabic, Mar Elian. What's certainly true is that Mar Elian's shrine has existed since at least the 6th Century, near the remote town of al-Qaryatain, located in the desert between Damascus and Palmyra. Mar Elian is not only venerated as a saint by Christians, however. The local Sunni population regard him as a Sufi leader and call him Sheikh Ahmed Ghouri ("ghouri" means "priest"). Until its destruction last year, Mar Elian's sarcophagus was draped in green satin, a traditional mark of homage to a Sufi holy man.

When the British archaeologist, Emma Loosley, travelled to al-Qaryatain 15 years ago to excavate and redevelop the monastery she found the tumbledown ruins of the original complex, a run-down church from the 1930s and a friendly priest - Father Jacques Murad - who immediately decamped to a house in a nearby village. "We couldn't cause any scandal by sleeping in the same place," she says. "That meant I was the only permanent resident of the monastery at that point, and I had to live in this half-ruined mud-brick tower in the corner of the cloister. "Our shower was tainted because the well had sulphur, so I used to smell like rotten eggs every time I washed." But the Qurwani, the people of al-Qaryatain, made up for the grotty living conditions. Loosley found the remote desert community to be remarkably open-hearted and tolerant. They even had a myth to explain why Sunni Muslims and Christians - who accounted for about a fifth of the population in 2001 - lived together so harmoniously. "Their belief is that there were two tribes living in this place," says Loosley. "With the coming of Islam, the tribes got together and they decided that one tribe would stay Christian and that the other one would try the new religion. "Then they had a pact that whichever religion became dominant, they would look after their brothers who stayed in the minority religion."