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E T H N I C S E R I E S

# Qambel Māran

Syriac chants from South India





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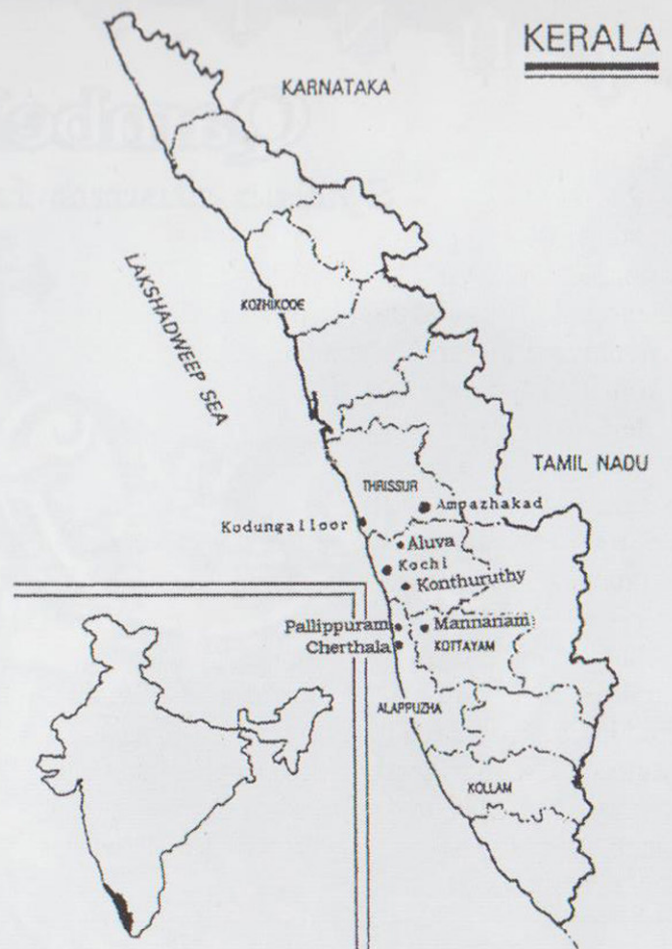
Syriac chants from South India

Joseph J. Palackal

## Syriac (Aramaic)

Syriac is a form of Aramaic, which belongs to the Semitic family of languages. As a language of commerce, Aramaic was known in India at the time of Emperor Ashoka (273-232 BC); it was one of the languages in which the Emperor promulgated his edicts. Aramaic gradually replaced Hebrew as the colloquial language of Jews after the Babylonian exile in the 6th century BC. Jesus and his disciples conversed and preached in Aramaic. Syriac developed as an independent Aramaic dialect in Edessa in the first century AD, and soon became the literary language of the Aramaic-speaking Christians. Initially, it used a script called Estrangela. By the fifth century, two different scripts along with their respective vowel systems and methods of pronunciation began to develop within the Syriac-speaking areas. These came to be known as East Syriac and West Syriac.

What may interest linguists and Syriac scholars in particular is the sound of East Syriac in this recording. The influence of Malayalam, the native language of the performers, is evident in the inflection of the voice; the pronunciation of certain



words, for example, awūn d'waśmayyā (#1), instead of the common pronunciation, abūn d'baśmayyā (our Father in heaven), is peculiar to the local tradition.

## Syriac liturgies in South India

The history of Christian liturgical traditions in India is embedded in a complex process of religio-cultural communications between distant peoples and diverse cultures for several centuries. The ancient Christians in South India are often referred to as 'St. Thomas Christians' or 'Syrian Christians' (from



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suriyāni, i.e., Syriac). According to tradition, St. Thomas the Apostle landed in Kodungalloor in Kerala, on the southwest coast of India, in 52 AD and established Christian communities there and in the neighboring region of Tamil Nadu. Tradition also holds that Persian Christians started migrating to South India in the middle of the fourth century. It is probable that these Christians brought with them a developed form of liturgy in Syriac. Historians affirm that the Indian Church had a hierarchical relationship with the Church of Persia from the middle of the fifth century. Continuous contact from that time onwards kept the Syriac liturgical tradition rejuvenated in South India.

Vasco de Gama first landed in Kerala in 1498. The Portuguese missionaries who joined him on his second trip introduced the Roman rite in Latin soon after they arrived in Kerala in 1502. The first of several divisions among the St. Thomas Christians started in 1653, as a reaction to the Portuguese hegemony. The dissident group eventually professed allegiance to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and thus came to be known as Jacobites or Syrian Orthodox. They continued, however, the Chaldean liturgy in East Syriac for almost a century before adopting the Antiochean liturgy in West Syriac, in 1751. Other divisions followed in the subsequent centuries because of conflicting allegiances to the pope, the king of Portugal, the patriarchs of the churches in the Middle East, and the Church Missionary Society of England. As a result, there are now seven independent churches in South India that follow Syriac liturgical traditions: the Syro-Malabar Church, the Church of the East, the Syrian Jacobite Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Independent Jacobite Church of Thozhiyoor, the Syro-Malankara Church, and the Marthoma Syrian Church. Among these, the first

two churches follow the Chaldean liturgy, and the other churches follow the Antiochean liturgy.

### **Context**

This CD contains 29 melodies from the vast musical repertoire of the East Syriac tradition as it has been preserved in the Syro-Malabar Church. There are about 3.5 million Catholics in this church, including expatriate communities in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Kerala, the cradle of Christianity in India, is home for most of the Syro-Malabar Catholics. In earlier records the region was referred to by different names such as 'Malabar' ('place of hills', probably given by Arab traders) and 'Malankara' ('land of hills'). The present-day boundary of Kerala was set after Indian independence in 1947, based on the areas where Malayalam is the spoken language. According to the 2001 census, the population of Kerala is 31.8 million, consisting of approximately 58% Hindus, 23% Muslims, 19% Christians, and a small number of Jews and Jains.

Among the performers, the St. John's Church choir is from Konthuruthy, in the city of Kochi (Cochin), and the St. Mary's Forane Church choir comes from the village of Pallippuram, near Cherthala, in Alappuzha district. The latter consists mostly of members from the Vathappallil family, which has rendered musical service to the local parish for over a century. Female voice is conspicuous by its absence in this recording, except in #25. In the Syro-Malabar Church, until the vernacularization of the liturgy in the 1960s, most choirs consisted only of men.

### **Text**

The authorship of most of the chant texts remains to be explored. Based on available information it is



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safe to say that these chants cover a span of several centuries in the history of Christianity. For example, the chants of the celebrated poet, St. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) in #3 and #16 predate the great Christological controversies of the 5th century that led to the further distancing of the Eastern and Western churches. For the same reason, and in view of the antiquity of the Aramaic liturgy, these chants may be a bridge to the realm of 'Early Music'. The Syriac translations of Latin chants in section IV are a sound testimony to the ongoing dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches and, therefore, have a special place in the history of Christian liturgies.

The texts were transmitted orally and through manuscripts until the middle of the 19th century, when printed books in Syriac became easily available in Kerala. The St. Joseph's Press at Mannanam that Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) established in 1844 became the center of Syriac printing in Kerala.

Those who are familiar with Syriac language will find the treatment of text by singers in a few tracks not up to the mark. In the last century and a half, church choirs relied on printed books of Syriac chants transliterated in Malayalam script, because most of the singers could no longer read Syriac. Even among the clergy, daily reading of Syriac texts gradually came to an end in the 1970s, following the vernacularization of the liturgy. Nonetheless, capturing the sounds of these melodies at this juncture is an imperative because, more than music, they are an integral part of the history of a people, linguistic soundscape of a region, and musical map of a country. Moreover, the performers are crucial witnesses to a transnational tradition that is in rapid transition.

Most of the chants in this recording fall into one of

the following general categories based on the poetic form, thematic content, or performance practice. A prayer or supplication is called *slōṭā*. The concluding prayers at the end of a service are known as *huthāmma*. A psalm is called *mazmōra*, and a set of two or more psalms is usually referred to as *marmīzā*. These three categories of chants may be recited or sung, depending on the solemnity of the occasion. Chants of praise are called *tešbohtā*. The didactic nature of the text is the characteristic mark of a *madrāšā*; it is sung usually in a solo-refrain format. Any song that may be sung even outside the strictly liturgical context is called *sogīṭa*. A chant that serves as an interpretation of a biblical text is called *turgāmma*. The musically most popular category of chant, *ōnīṭa*, is an antiphonal hymn. It is sung in two groups that alternate the strophes. In most cases, the strophe begins with an incipit (*šūrāyā*). The incipit is often a verse from one of the psalms that introduces the theme of the strophe and often falls outside the syllabic structure of the strophes. The designated leader of each group intones the incipit that serves also as a cue for the melody of the strophe.

The texts were taken from the following books. *Taksā d'qūrāw rāze* (The Rites of Rāza, St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, 1948) #1 (p.3), #10 (p. 13), #11 (pp. 14-15), #12 (p. 31); *Kṭāwā d'ṭešmeštā qānōnāita d'yāwmmāsā d'ēdē* (The Book of Canonical Service for the Feast Days, Mannanam, 1930) #2 (p.394), #9 (pp. 321-22); *K'ṭāwā d'slōṭā qānōnāita* (The Book of Canonical Prayers, Mannanam, 1931) #3 (pp. 397-98), #4 (pp. 599-600), #5 (490-92), #6 (pp. 508-9), #7 (369-70), #8 (pp. 489-90), #23 (Supplement pp. 1-2); *Taksā kaldāyā d'Malabār* (The Order of the Chaldean Rite of Malabar, Mannanam, 1928) #13 (pp. 51-52); *K'ṭāwā d'ṭešmeštā dahlāp annīdē* (The Book of



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Services for the Dead, Mannanam, 1921) #14 (p.131), #15 (pp. 244-45), #16 (pp. 12-15), #17 (p. 36), #18 (p. 221); Dēvālaya gītāngal (Chants for the Church, 8th edn., Fr. Bassilios TOCD, ed., St. Joseph's I.S. Press, Elthuruth, 1961) #19 (pp.

12-14), #20 (p. 179), #21 (p. 73), #22 (pp.74-75), #26 (p. 25), #27 (p. 90), #28 (pp. 26-27), #29 (p. 19); Geliyōnā d'taksā (The Book of Instructions, Mannanam, 1944) #24 (p. 110); Purāthana pāṭṭukal (Ancient Songs, 5th edn., Lukas U. Puthenpurackal ed., Kottayam, 1980) #25 (pp. 242-43). These books are available at the libraries at St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, and at Acharya Palackal Jeevass Kendram, Aluva.



*'Persian Cross' at Valiapalli, Kottayam (circa 7th century). Inscription on the sides in Sassanian-Phalvi or Old Persian and the inscription on the bottom (Gal. 6:14) in Syriac.*

### Music

Until further evidence appears, the sources of the melodies (except for the melodies in section IV and a few in section V) may be presumed to be the same as those of the text, i.e., the Syriac churches in the Middle East. It is a matter of historical and musicological interest that these melodies have not only survived over such a long period of time, but also have retained their unique identity in the completely different cultural milieu of South India. As yet, the authorship of melodies cannot be attributed to anyone with certainty. This is true even of the melodies in section IV that originated in Kerala. Until now the melodies were handed down from generation to generation mostly through oral tradition. Although there were attempts to publish transcriptions of a few melodies in Western staff notation in Kerala from 1937, singing from notation books did not become very popular. Individual and regional variations in the melodies are accepted facts; hence the popular saying among singers in Kerala: "no two Syriac singers sing the same chant alike!"

All the melodies are strophic, i.e., all the stanzas of a chant are sung to the same melody. In most cases, therefore, only the first few stanzas of the chant are recorded. Most of the melodies have a limited range of four to six notes.



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### **Musical instruments**

The four instruments used for accompaniment are violin, harmonium, drum, and triangle. It is not clear at what point these instruments came into use in the churches of Kerala. In common parlance among Christian performers even today, the violin is referred to either as fiddle or as rebec, and this may indicate an earlier (probably, pre-sixteenth century) practice of playing either or both these instruments in the Syrian churches of Kerala. The instrument depicted on the reredos of a few churches in Kerala has, like some of the fiddles of the Middle Ages, five strings instead of four. In a document written in 1505, there is a reference to the use of the organ in the church that the Portuguese built in Cochin (Mundadan 1989: 370). Prior to the use of hand-pumped harmonium from early twentieth century, wealthy churches in Kerala used to have a pedal harmonium or even an organ. Although there is no evidence for the use of music notation in churches, the act of playing violin and harmonium is referred to as 'reading' (vāyikkuka). Performers of these instruments are often self-taught. The drum is known by its Portuguese name, tambor, and the triangle is called tiriyaṅkōl, a Malayalam adaptation of the Portuguese, 'triângulo'. The act of playing these instruments is referred to as 'striking' (koṭṭuka). Generally, in melodies that are set to specific meters, percussion instruments provide the accented beats, and in rhythmically free melodies the drum and triangle players strike their instruments in a fast tremolo-like pattern, as in #1 and #21.

### **The repertoire**

The 29 tracks are grouped into five sections, based on the liturgical contexts in which the texts are sung.

The melodies often cross over the contexts, i.e., the same melody may be sung to different texts in various liturgical celebrations.

### **I CHANTS FROM THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS**

The most common Hours are ramśā (evening prayer), leliyā (night prayer), and saprā (morning prayer). Each has two forms for the celebration: the ordinary form (short) and the solemn form (long). In the solemn form for feast days the chants may be sung with instrumental accompaniment, as in #1. The melodies recorded here represent the monastic tradition of Syriac chants preserved by the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (established in 1831) in Kerala. The diocesan priests sing the same texts with slight variations in the melody. The following priests of the congregation participated in the recording: James Aerthayil, John Kachiramattom, Alexander Koolipurackal, Aiden Kulathinal, Joseph Muttath, Joseph Mathew Nedumparambil, Liberius Ozhukathanam, Henry Suso Padiyara, Probus Perumalil, Abel Periyappuram, Sylvester Puthussery, and Augustus Thekkanath

**1] Awūn d'waśmayyā** (Our Father in heaven) Probus Perumalil (celebrant), Lonappan Arackal (vocal, triangle), Joseph M. Olikkal (harmonium). The Lord's Prayer in this chant contains probably some of the exact words that Jesus taught his disciples. The chant begins with the greeting of the angels to the shepherds at Christmas night: "And on earth peace and good hope to all people" (Lk 1:14). Following the East Syriac tradition, the prayer is further interpolated four times with text based on the hymn of angels mentioned in Isaiah 6:3 and



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Revelation 4:8 - “holy, holy, holy are you” (qandiś, qandiś, qandiśat). The chant belongs to the category of slōṭā (prayer or supplication) and is part of the solemn vespers, known in Malayalam as pāṭṭuramśā (literally, ‘sung-ramśā’). The celebrant and the choir alternate the verses, and the deacon concludes the chant with a wish for peace (n’salle ślāmmā amman).

**2] Hallel hallel** (Praise, praise)

Leaders: Probus Perumalil and Sylvester Puthussery.

The midnight mass for Christmas is preceded by a rather lengthy celebration of leliyā. The singing of psalms, which in ordinary celebrations would be recited in a monotone, adds solemnity to the occasion. This chant is from the third marmīzā that consists of psalm 93, 94, and 95. A special feature of this marmīzā is the addition of tropes, respectively to psalms 93, 94, and 95 – “we glorify you with songs”, “the angels sang, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, at the birth of Christ the King”, and “the being who is from eternity”. In this recording, however, the singers have sung the last two tropes to the verses of psalm 95. The leader sings the verse and the community sings the trope as a refrain at the end of each verse in a call-and-response format.

**3] Iśo māran m’śihā** (Lord Jesus Christ)

Incipit: Alexander Koolipurackal.

This is an acrostic hymn by St. Ephrem. The printed text carries the following title: teśbohtā d’awidā l’mār aprēm al āṭwāṭā d’iśo m’śihā (hymn of praise composed by St. Ephrem with the letters of ‘Jesus Christ’). It is sung during saprā on Sunday. There are ten strophes in the chant, one for each letter in Syriac in the name, iśo m’śihā (Jesus, the Messiah). It is probable that St. Ephrem composed the melody,

too. The melody, so far as I have come to know, is one of the very few that are common to all the Syriac traditions in South India. The melody of the incipit is quite similar to the melody in #2.

**4] Mārya kolhōn hāwbai** (Lord, all my faults)

Incipit: Probus Perumalil and Alexander Koolipurackal.

This is an ōnīṭa from leliyā on Thursday. The text echoes the cry of a repentant sinner who seeks refuge in God’s mercy. The strophe consists of lines with varying number of syllables. The melody has a loosely woven metric structure in which steady rhythmic pulses are interrupted by rhythmically free cadences at the end of lines.

**5] B’endān saprā** (In the morning)

Incipit: Probus Perumalil and Alexander Koolipurackal.

This ōnīṭa from the morning prayer on Monday describes the scene at the second coming of Christ. The text is an example of heptasyllabic verses in Syriac poetry, popularized by St. Ephrem: b’en-dān-sap-rā-d’meṭ-ṭaṭ-hīn. In this chant, each strophe consists of six lines with seven syllables each.

**6] Esthappānōs** (Stephen)

Incipit: James Aerthayil and Sylvester Puthussery.

This is an ōnīṭa from ramśā on Tuesday. It describes the death of St. Stephen, the first martyr who, like Jesus, prayed for his persecutors before death. Each strophe consists of four heptasyllabic lines: es-tha-ppā-nōs-ur-hā-draś. The singers extend the seventh syllable so that there are eight beats in each melodic phrase.

**7] Brīk hannānā** (Blessed is the merciful one)

Leaders: Probus Perumalil and Alexander



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*Close-up of angel on the wooden reredos of the main altar in St. Mary's Forane Church, Pallipuram, Cherthala.*

Koolipurackal.

The leliyā on Sunday includes this tešbohtā in praise of the mystery of the Incarnation. The text is in the form of couplets; each line consists of two tetrasyllabic phrases: brīk-han-nā-nā/daw-thai-bū-ṭeh//par-nes-ha-yyan/ban-wi-ū-ṭā. The singers seem to follow a 4-beat metric structure in the rendition of the melody.

#### **8] Eṭpan al slōṭā** (Turn to the prayer)

Leaders: Probus Perumalil and Alexander Koolipurackal.

This is a tešbohtā from leliyā on Monday. The strophes are in the form of couplets. Each line consists of two phrases with five (2 + 3) syllables in each phrase. The singers seem to place this pentasyllabic structure over an 8-beat pattern in the rendition of the melody.

#### **9] Tāw n'yaqar** (Come let us honor)

Probus Perumalil.

This ōnīṭa is from the leliyā for the feast of virgins. The printed text prescribes the model melody known as 'b'mambu hayye' (fountain of life) for this chant. The exact nature of the melody is unknown. The singers often treat it not as a fixed melody, but as a way of generating a melody. It is made of a group of short phrases that the singers can apply to any text, especially to those that are not set to strict poetic meters.

## II. CHANTS FROM RĀZA

The Eucharistic celebration (Qurbāna, literally 'offering') of the East Syriac rite has three forms: the most solemn form, the solemn form, and the ordinary form. The degree of solemnity depends,





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*St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam. The archive at the monastery contains an extensive collection of Syriac manuscripts that includes works by indigenous authors.*

besides rubrics, on the number of celebrants (i.e., priests), the number of readings and chants, the use of musical instruments, and the use of incense. In common parlance in Kerala, these three forms are referred to as *rāza*, *pāṭṭuqurbāna* (sung mass), and *ottaqurbāna* (single mass) respectively. *Rāza* may be celebrated on the most solemn feasts such as Easter, Christmas, Epiphany, Pentecost, Transfiguration, Exaltation of the Cross, Dedication of the Church, the feast of St. Thomas, and for the commemoration

of the dead. The most solemn and the solemn forms are sung with instrumental accompaniment. However, *rāza* for the commemoration of the dead precludes the use of musical instruments. The celebration of *rāza* (as well as the solemn form) may take about ninety minutes. Only four chants from *rāza* are included here.

**10] *Slīwā dahwā lan*** (The Cross that became for us)



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John Kachiramattom and the Syriac choir of St. John's Church, Konthuruthy, Ernakulam: Lonappan Arackal (vocal, triangle), Joseph M. Olikkal (harmonium), and Laiju Chacko Kalathiveetil (drum).

The public veneration of the cross is part of the introductory ceremonies of *rāza*. The celebrant offers the cross to the people who show their respect by kissing it. At this time, the choir sings this 'Anthem of the Sanctuary' (d'qanke). The chant extols the glory of the cross. The text is an example of pentasyllabic meter in Syriac poetry: *slī-wā-dah-wā-lan/e-laṭ-tā-wā-tā*.

**11] O dezdamman īnja** (O you who are invited)  
Leaders: Abel Periyappuram and Lonappan Arackal. This chant belongs to the category called *turgāmma* (interpretative). Its purpose here is to prepare the people to listen to the reading from one of the epistles. A special feature of this particular chant is the addition of the vocable, 'īnja', at the end of each line of the sung version of the text, in order to fill in the melodic and metric structure. The printed text does not include the vocable. Such a practice, which is common in secular folk songs in Kerala, seems to be peculiar to the liturgical tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church.

**12] K'ṭāwā rambā** (The great book)  
Incipit: Probus Perumalil and Sylvester Puthussery. One of the solemn ceremonies in *rāza* is the gospel procession before the proclamation. This chant is part of the ceremony. The same text and melody is usually sung four times, each time with a different textual incipit.

**13] Ślām lēk maryam** (Hail Mary)  
Probus Perumalil.

This is the *huthāmma* (concluding prayer) from the liturgy for the feast of the Blessed Virgin. The celebrant sings the verses and the congregation responds by singing 'Amen.' The text is an example of dodecasyllabic meter popularized by St. Jacob of Srog (d. 521). Each line has three phrases with four syllables in each phrase: *ślām-lēk-mar-yam/dah-wayt-e-mmā/baw-tū-lū-tēk*. The descending melodic motion is a special feature of this chant; the starting note is also the highest pitch in the melody.

### III. CHANTS FROM THE SERVICES FOR THE DEAD

This section contains five items from a vast repertory of chants from the Office for the Dead and funeral services for priests and lay people. The Office for the Dead has short and long forms. The melodies of chants in #14 and #18 share a few unique features, the most important of which is the syllabic setting of the text with melismatic ornamentation of the final syllable at the end of each melodic phrase. The singers often take freedom in the extent and the duration of the ornamentation. The melodies in this section probably belong to the older repertory of Syriac chants.

**14] Qambel māran** (Receive O our Lord)

Celebrant: Abel Periyappuram.

This *madrāsā* (didactic chant) from the short form of the Office for the Dead is sung in a solo-group format in which the celebrant sings the verses and the congregation repeats the first stanza as a refrain. Technically, the group is singing in 'unison', however, individual differences in the manner, extent, and place of subtle ornamentations are evident. Such differences are acceptable and even appreciated. Fr. Abel Periyappuram CMI (1920-



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2001), the lead singer, played a significant role in the transition of the Syriac liturgy to Malayalam in the 1960s. His translations, especially of the chant texts of the liturgy of the Hours and funeral services, set to their original Syriac melodies, facilitated the continuity of this music tradition in South India.

**15] Lā tekre lāk** (Don't be sorry)

Leaders: Probus Perumalil, Alexander Koolipurackal.

This chant is from the funeral services for lay people. It is sung during funeral procession from home to the church. The text is an exhortation to the weary human mind to take refuge in the Lord's promise of hope and resurrection. The descending melodic motion is a distinctive feature of this melody.

**16] Laikā ēzal min ruhāk**

(Where shall I go from your Spirit?)

Incipit: James Aerthayil, Alexander Koolipurackal.

This *ōnīṭa* is from the long form of the Office for the Dead. The authorship of this chant is attributed to St. Ephrem. It is based on psalm 139, which is a hymn to God's omnipresence and omniscience. The text is an example of Syriac prosody in which a strophe consists of lines with varying number of syllables, in this case, lines of eight (4+4), nine (4+5), ten (5+5), and seven (4+3) syllables, as in: lai-kā-mā-ran/ne-rōq-me-nnāk// W'ai-nā-aṭ-rā/net-thše-min-qud-maik// ....

En-hu-mār-d'har-ṭe/d'āl-mā-ma-thyaṭ-lā// B'rah-mē-neh-wē/šū-lā-mmā//.

**17] B'had min yawmīn** (On one of the days)

Celebrant: Probus Perumalil.

This is a *madrāšā* from the funeral services for laywomen. The text describes the sorrow of Martha

and Mary at the loss of their brother, Lazarus. Following the performance practice of *madrāšā*, the celebrant sings the stanzas and the congregation sings the first strophe as a refrain.

**18] Ēttā pūs lēk** (Farewell, O church)

Probus Perumalil.

The funeral service for priests consists of elaborate ceremonies that last for several hours. The rubrics given in *K'ṭawā d'ṭešmešta dahlāp annidē* (Mannanam, 1921, p. 220) prescribes this *madrāšā* as part of the farewell ceremony in which the pallbearers carry the casket in procession, first to the main altar and then to the entrances of the church. Although the chant is rendered solo here, in the actual service the congregation sings it in two groups by alternating the stanzas.

IV. SYRIAC TRANSLATION OF LATIN CHANTS FOR  
PARALITURGICAL SERVICES

The chants in this section belong to a particular phase in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church. After the Synod of Diamper in 1599, the Portuguese missionaries wanted to replace the Syriac liturgy with Latin liturgy and chants. The local Christians vehemently opposed the move. In course of time, however, the missionaries succeeded in introducing paraliturgical services such as the Benediction, Novena, Solemn Vespers, Holy Week services, and *Ladainha* (Portuguese, 'litany'). They organized translations of the Latin texts for these services in Syriac. This gave rise to a new set of Syriac chants that were composed in Kerala either by the missionaries or by indigenous Christians. The names of the translators and composers are as yet unknown.



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The missionaries also introduced Western musical instruments that can be heard in this recording.

**19] Quryēlaisōn** (Lord have mercy)

The Syriac choir of St. Mary's Forane Church, Pallippuram, Cherthala: Paily Vathappallil (harmonium, lead singer), Joseph Pathiamoola (vocal), Ouseph Vathappallil (violin), Jose Paul Vathappallil (drum), Joy Paul Vathappallil (triangle).

This litany in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary is part of a paraliturgical service known as *ladīnj* (a Malayalam adaptation of the Portuguese word, *ladainha*). A *ladīnj* consists of a litany, hymns, and prayers that vary according to the feast. There are over thirty melodies for this litany, some of which are known only to local choirs. Until the 1960s, the practice was, especially in the formation houses of religious congregations, to sing a different melody for each day in May, the month of special devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Only the musically relevant parts of this long litany are included here. Worthy of special mention is the transition in the metric structure from 4/4 to 6/4 in the concluding part (*emrēh d'alāhā*, 'Lamb of God'). This metric cycle with accents on the first and the third beats is known in South Indian classical music theory as *Rūpakam*.

**20] Hā qes slīwā** (Behold the wood of the cross)

Celebrant: Augustus Thekkanath. Deacon: Lonappan Arackal.

This is the translation of the Latin chant, *Ecce lignum crucis* (Behold the Wood of the Cross), for the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday. As in the Latin tradition, the chant is sung three times, each time in a higher pitch register. However, the roles are differently distributed. In the Latin rite the

celebrant sings the first two of the three phrases, and the congregation sings the third ('come, let us worship'). In the Syriac rite the celebrant, the congregation, and the deacon sing each phrase consecutively. The Syriac chant has the same melody for all three phrases, unlike its Latin counterpart.

**21] Šanbah lešān** (Praise my tongue)

The Syriac choir of St. John's Church, Konthuruthy. This is a free translation of the first stanza of the famous Latin hymn, *Pange Lingua* ('Sing My Tongue') that St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) wrote for the feast of Corpus Christi. As in the Latin rite, the Syriac text was prescribed for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for Benediction. There are several melodies for this chant, some that are rhythmically free and others that are set to specific meters. Transcriptions of eight melodies in Western staff notation, including the one recorded here, can be found in A. Saldanha (1937:125-129). A distinctive feature of the melody performed here is its range of a complete octave. This is in contrast to the limited range of the Syriac melodies in general. The melody gradually ascends and descends like a bell-shaped curve. The upper tonic is the climactic point in the melody. The use of the raised fourth in an otherwise major scale and the leap of a perfect fourth in both ascending and descending manner are other special features that are seldom found in Syriac melodies, especially those from the pre-Portuguese period. Any direct affinity of this music to a Western chant melody remains to be explored.

**22] Kollan dašnē** (Let us all offer)

The Syriac choir of St. John's Church. Celebrant: Probus Perumalil.



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The last two stanzas of Pange Lingua came to be treated as a separate hymn known as Tantum Ergo (the first two words of the penultimate stanza) and became the second chant for Benediction. The Syriac translation here incorporates a line, probably borrowed from one of the Syriac writers, as a trope on the word fides in the first of the two stanzas: “By it [faith] we sail as in a ship, in this sea which is turbulent”. (In retrospect, the time of the translation of this text was indeed a turbulent period in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church!). The Syriac text has several melodies. The melody included here is set to the 7-beat (3 + 4) Miśra cāpu tālam. Transcriptions of five other melodies can be found in Saldanha (1937:131-136).

**23] Tā lāk ruhā** (Come, O Spirit)

Leaders: James Aerthayil, Alexander Koolipurackal. This is the translation of the Latin chant Veni Creator Spiritus (Come Spirit, Creator) for the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Ordination rites. In the Syriac tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church it was used also as an invocation hymn at religious gatherings. The congregation sings in two halves, alternating the stanzas.

**24] Ślām lēk** (Hail to you)

Alexander Koolipurackal, Augustus Thekkanath and the Syriac choir of St. John’s Church. The Latin chant, Salve Regina (hail queen), is part of the Office of Compline for the ordinary time in the Latin rite. The Syro-Malabar Christians sang the Syriac translation of this chant on various occasions. The melody recorded here is from the celebration of ladīnj. Until the early 1970s, the monastic communities of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate used to sing this text with a different melody

without instrumental accompaniment on every Saturday evening and on the eve of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin.

V. CHANTS FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

These chants were composed for special celebrations outside the strictly liturgical contexts. Like the chants in the previous section, these chants were printed in Malayalam script for the convenience of those who did not read Syriac. The melodies in tracks 26-29 were probably composed in Kerala during the Portuguese period.

**25] Bar maryam** (Son of Mary)

Dr. Jacob Velliyan, Sr. Dennis Velliyan, Denny Vattamthotty and the Syriac choir of St. John’s Church.

The wedding ceremonies of the Knānāya Christians, an endogamous community within the Syro-Malabar Church, conclude with this chant. The text, however, has no reference to wedding. There are 49 couplets in the chant. The celebrant sings the verses and the congregation repeats the first verse as a refrain at the end of each couplet. This is one of the very few Syriac chants that are sung with their original text in wedding celebrations in the Knānāya community even today. Dr. Jacob Velliyan and the female singers, Sr. Dennis Velliyan and Miss Denny Vattamthotty, are members of this community. The melody is known to singers outside the Knānāya community. My filed recordings include a rendition of this melody with a different text, sung by the St. Mary’s Church choir at Pallippuram.



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**26] Lāk mār yāwsep** (You, St. Joseph)

The Syriac choir of St. Mary's Church, Pallippuram. This chant of praise in honor of St. Joseph is prescribed for the novena days before the feast on March 19th. Joseph Beschi (1680-1747), an Italian Jesuit who joined the Madurai Mission in Tamil Nadu, popularized the special devotion to St. Joseph in South India (Beschi died at Amapzhakad, in Kerala). Any similarity in thematic content of this chant (20 lines) to parts of Beschi's epic poem composed in Tamil, Tempavāni ('sweet voice', 3,615 lines), on the life of St. Joseph, is yet to be verified.



*Joseph J. Palackal (left) with Abel Periyappuram.  
New York, July 22, 1998.*

**27] Šanbah l'māryā** (Praise the Lord)

The Syriac choir of St. Mary's Church. Psalm 117 is sung here with a refrain (hallelujah) added to each verse. It is part of the flag-hoisting ceremony on the first day of the celebration of the feast of the parish's patron saint. A special feature of this melody is its 7-beat metric cycle, Mīśra cāpu.

**28] Hadmin īrē** (One from the Angels)

The Syriac choir of St. Mary's Church. This chant speaks about the mission of Angel Gabriel, chosen from among many, to announce the divine message of the incarnation to Mary. It is sung during the feast of Annunciation on March 25.

**29] B'ēda d'yāwmān** (On this festival day)

Joseph J. Palackal and the Syriac choir of St. John's Church.

This tešbohtā in honor of the Blessed Virgin is from the solemn Vespers for Marian feasts. It has at least two melodies. I learned this melody from Chacko Pallipparambil, the sacristan (kapyār) of my home parish. The chant used to be part of a ceremony, probably the remnant of a Portuguese tradition, to honor the members of the Marian confraternity of the Parish. The all-male confraternity, known in Malayalam as Darśana samūham (literally, 'community of visionaries') supervised the week-long celebration of the feast of the Assumption on August 15. The ceremony took place in the church on the evenings of August 13 and 14 during ladīnj. The choir boys in pairs walked down the isle singing the verses of the chant. While walking back to the altar, they sprinkled first, holy water, and then flower petals on the members of the confraternity on each side. The ceremony is no more in vogue, but the Syriac choir at St. Mary's Church continues to



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sing the chant during solemn mass in Syriac, on August 14.

### Pronunciation

d='th' as in though; g = 'g' as in gain; ś = palatal-fricative, between 's' in Sam and 'sh' in shut; t = t, but dental; ṭ = 's' as in Sam.

### Research

I grew up in the music tradition represented in this CD. At the age of nine I made my debut in my parish church at Pallippuram, Cherthala by singing the chant in #29. Much later, during fieldwork for my master's degree in Ethnomusicology at Hunter College, New York, I began to approach this music from an academic perspective. The research continued for the present project intermittently for six years from 1995 to 2000. Prior to the recording I organized two conferences on Syriac music, with the help of the Research Institute of Studies in History (RISHI), Mannanam. The first one was held at St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam (August 25-26, 1999) and the second at the Prior General's House of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, Ernakulam (August 22, 2000). I gratefully acknowledge the valuable guidance given by Dr. Anthony Vallavanthara, the director of RISHI, and Fr. Emmanuel Thelly CMI, the author of Syriac-English-Malayalam Lexicon (Kottayam, 1999).

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**Joseph J. Palackal**

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*Probus Perumallil*



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*The Syriac choir of St. Mary's Forane Church, Pallippuram, Cherthala. From left to right: Jose Paul Vathappallil (drum), Joy Paul Vathappallil (triangle), Paily Vathappallil (harmonium, lead singer), Joseph Pathiamoola (vocal), Ouseph Vathappallil (violin).*

- The following priests of the congregation participated in the recording: James Aerthayil (vocal: 6, 16, 23), John Kachiramattom (vocal: 10), Alexander Koolipurackal (vocal: 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 15, 16, 23, 24), Aiden Kulathinal, Joseph Muttath, Joseph Mathew Nedumparambil, Liberius Ozhukathanam, Henry Suso Padiyara, Probus Perumalil (vocal: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22), Abel Periyappuram (vocal: 11, 14), Sylvester Puthussery (vocal: 2, 6, 12), and Augustus Thekkanath (vocal: 20, 24). Other participants: The Syriac choir of St. John's Church (10, 22, 24, 25, 29), Lonappan Arackal (vocal, triangle: 1, 10, 11, 20), Joseph M. Olikkal (harmonium: 1, 10), The Syriac choir of St. Mary's Forane Church (19, 26, 27, 28), Laiju Chacko Kalathiveetil (drum: 10), Paily Vathappallil (harmonium, vocal: 19), Joseph Pathiamoola (vocal: 19), Ouseph Vathappallil (violin: 19), Jose Paul Vathappallil (drum: 19), Joy Paul Vathappallil (triangle: 19), Dr. Jacob Velliyan, Sr. Dennis Velliyan, Denny Vattamthotty (vocal: 25), Joseph J. Palackal (vocal: 29).

**Cover photograph** — Angels playing musical instruments. The wooden reredos of the main altar in St. Mary's Forane Church, Pallippuram, Cherthala.

All photographs by Joseph J. Palackal, India, Kerala, October 2, 2000.

Readers who want to obtain the complete transcription with translations into English, should contact PAN Records via [info@panrecords.nl](mailto:info@panrecords.nl)

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