

East Syriac Liturgical Poetry of the St Thomas Christians

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The uniqueness of early Syriac literature is its poetry. It is in the liturgical tradition that Syriac poetry has found its finest expression. Since the St Thomas Christians of Malabar followed the East Syriac liturgy from time immemorial, the early history of their liturgical poetry and music goes hand in hand with the liturgical heritage of the Church of the East. The article develops this argument in two parts: the first part expounds the development of liturgical poetry in the East Syriac tradition from a historical perspective and the second part analyses the chanting system from a liturgical and musical perspective. The state of affairs of the liturgical music after the 17th century following the Latin contact and the development of Christian folk art forms are not part of our discussion. The basic liturgical text of reference is the *Ḥudrā*, with its Catholic (HB) and non-Catholic editions (HD).¹ The present Syro-Malabar ‘breviary’ (an abbreviated form of *Ḥudrā* for the daily Liturgy of Hours) is also used as a primary source.²

Part One: History of East Syriac Liturgical Poetry

1.1 Early Liturgical Poetry

Syriac poetic form is based on syllable count, and not length. We have no trace of evidence that the early Syriac poetry in *Odes of Solomon* and in *Acts of Thomas* were used in liturgy. The *Odes of Solomon* is not syllabic, but is described as a *zmirtā*, ‘song’. The interpolation of ‘*h(alleluia)*’ at the middle as well as the end of each *Ode* in the later manuscripts indicates that they were adapted, in the manner of Psalms, to the liturgical chant. The two poems in the *Acts of Thomas* are in six-syllable metre which is rarely used later on. Another appended hymn, though not part of original *Acts* is the “Song of Praise of Thomas the Apostle”. It contains some phraseologies that have close parallels with the most ancient sections of the earliest surviving Anaphora, attributed to Addai and Mari.³

Among the early liturgical composers of the East Syriac tradition, three names need special mention: first and foremost comes Mar Ephrem, the poet par excellence of Syriac Orient and then two bishops, Mar Simeon and Mar Marutha.

¹ Catholic edition of *Ḥudrā* prepared by Paul Bedjan (HB = *Breviarium juxta Ritum Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum*, I-III, Rome 1886-87) and the non-Catholic edition by Mar Thomas Darmo (HD = *Ktābā da-Qdām wad-Bātar wad-Ḥudrā wad-Kaškol wad-Gazā w-Qālā d-‘Udrānē ‘am Ktābā d-Mazmorē*, I-III, Trichur 1960-62).

² The official text now in use (*Syro-Malabar Sabhayude Yamaparthanakal*) was published in 27-12- 1986 with the permission of Syro-Malabar Bishops Conference and with the provisional approval of the Holy See.

³ The phrases like ‘you put on our humanity’ (ܠܒܫܬܝܢܐ ܕܢܚܝܢܐ) and ‘you resurrected our dead state’ (ܬܚܝܬܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܬܝܢܐ) are found in Post-Sanctus of Addai Mari. S. Brock, “Some Early Witnesses to the East Syriac Liturgical Tradition”, JAAS 18:1 (2004) 9-45, 9 note 3.

1.1.2 Catholicos Mar Simeon bar Sabbae

According to the *Book of Tower*, the first ‘Summa’ of East Syriac theology, written by the Arabic historian Mari ibn Sulayman (mid-twelfth century), it was Catholicos Mar Simeon bar Sabbae, Metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (329-344),⁴ who introduced two choirs with alternate chanting of psalms, *hullālē* and anthems (*ʿoniyātā*) in the Persian Church.⁵ The *Book of Tower* cites two anthems that Simeon used before his martyrdom that occurred on the Good Friday of 344. They are the anthem of the Mysteries (*Rāzē*) sung on the Passover Thursday (HB II:356) and on the New Sunday, first Sunday after Easter (HB II:450).⁶ These anthems are currently sung in the Syro-Malabar liturgy on the very same days. The anthem of *lākumārā*, the primitive fixed introit of *Ramšā* and *Rāzē*, is also attributed to Mar Simeon. This anthem is one of the earliest Christological hymns ever used in liturgy, and is composed in the form of *madrāšā*, a teaching song. It is a quatrain with a simple syllabic pattern (4+4+4+4) and it reads as follows.

<i>La-ku ma-ra dkoḷ maw-di-nan</i>	To you, O Lord of all, we acknowledge/confess,
<i>olak l-šo msi-ha mšab-hi-nan</i>	To you, O Jesus Christ, we praise;
<i>da-tu mnah-ma-na dpa-gra-in</i>	you are the Quickener (ܩܝܝܡܐ) of our bodies,
<i>wa-tu pa-ro-qa dnap-ša-tan</i>	and you are the Saviour (ܡܨܝܐ) of our souls.

Though nothing of Mar Simeon’s renovations or compositions are historically verifiable, the ecclesiastical tradition consider him progenitor of East Syriac liturgical poetry.

1.1.2 Mar Marutha of Maipherqat

The second liturgical compositor is Mar Marutha, bishop of Maipherqat/Martyropolis (end of 4th to the beginning of 5th century), to whom *Ḥudrā* ascribes most of the “martyrs’ anthems” (HD II:420*).

“Anthems of martyrs: written by Marutha of Maipherqat: this Bishop was member in the ecumenical Synod of Nicea. When he was traveling in the countries of East and West, he saw the massacres of the holy martyrs of the Church of God in both places, (thus) he composed these voices of the martyrs to be sung in the churches at the morning and evening (services). Afterwards, other skilful teachers of the church added a few other anthems, which are appropriate to the whole community for the memorial of the holy martyrs, for the consolation of the faithful, for the instruction of the disciples, and for the glory of the Name

⁴ One of the earliest dated Christian literary manuscript in any language (Add. Ms 12,150 in the British Library), completed at Edessa in November 411, witnesses the martyrdom of Catholicos Mar Simeon, Metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (329-344). S. Brock, “Syriac Culture 337-425”, *The Cambridge Ancient History XIII: The Late Empire AD 337-425*, I. E. S. Edwards (ed.), Cambridge 1998², 718 note 22.

⁵ *Maris, Amri et Slibae de patriarchis nestorianorum commentaria I*, H. Gismondi (ed.), Rome 1897, 15-16.

⁶ Two other hymns are also attributed to him in certain Mss: *ʿonitā d-subāʿā* of I Tue of Fast (HB II:77-78) and *tešboḥtā* of Ferial Weeks of Fast, found in the *Book of After and Before*. According to J. Mateos the use of this *tešboḥtā* in the Weeks of Ferials of Lent itself indicates its antiquity, though not its authorship. Cf. J. MATEOS, *Lelya-Sapra: Les offices chaldéennes de la nuit et du matin*, OCA 156 (1972), 189-91.

of the Mighty Lord of Hosts, whom they praise and bless forever and ever, Amen.” (HD II:420*)

Bishop Marutha's service as the Roman ambassador for the peace negotiations between the two empires won him to obtain relief for the persecuted Church in Persia. He is known to have gathered quantities of martyrs' relics, which he transferred to his city his bishopric, consequently named as Martyropolis. In addition, he is said to have written accounts of the martyrs' passions. All these were enough reasons to accredit to him various Martyrs' anthems of the East Syriac liturgy. These anthems were often sung after the evening and morning (*Ramšā* and *Ṣaprā*) daily services like an additional stationary liturgy appended to the Cathedral service. For instance, the final hymn of the present Syro-Malabar (=SM) Morning service, called *b-madnāhay Ṣaprā* ("As morning dawns") is originally a series of popular anthems sung during the procession towards the martyrion in honour of martyrs.

1.2 Liturgical Poetry of Ephrem⁷

The poet *par excellence* in the Syriac world is Ephrem, the 'harp of the Holy Spirit'. His poetical writings can be divided into two categories: *memrē* (isosyllabic couplets for narrative and didactic verse) and *madrāšē* (stanziac verse). The former can employ small number of different metres: the most usual being 7+7 syllables is designated as the metre of Ephrem. Many of the liturgical pieces in this metre are falsely attributed to Ephrem. Amongst those which are likely to be genuine is the long narrative *memrā* concerning Jonah and the repentance of the Ninevites (*Sermons* II:1) used in both East (HB I:438-66) and West Syriac liturgical tradition for the Fast of Nineveh.

Madrāšē, 'teaching songs', by contrast, can employ a very large number of different syllabic patterns, though any single poem will employ the same pattern throughout all its stanzas. Within a single stanza there will be metrical breaks (caesuras) between the various segments, usually corresponding to slight breaks in the sense. These segments are built up of smaller units consisting of two to five syllables.

Whereas *memrē* were evidently recited, *madrāšē* were sung, either by a soloist, with the refrain (*ʿonitā*) sung by a choir, or by two choirs in alternating verses with the refrain sung by both; they were to be chanted to the accompaniment of the lyre (*kennarā*), on the model of David the Psalmist. According to Jacob of Serug, Ephrem employed women's choirs. Since the melody title (*qālā*) employs the opening words of a well-known *madrāšā*, it also serves as an indicator of the particular syllabic metre that is being used. For these, just under 100 different *qālē* or melody titles, are recorded in the manuscript tradition. *Qālā* in a liturgical context can often refer to a whole stanzaic poem, and later on it can also mean musical

⁷ S. Brock, "Poetry and Hymnography (3): Syriac", *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (eds.), Oxford 2008, 657-71; Id., "Ephrem and the Syriac Tradition" 362-72, 513-515; Id., "Some Early Witnesses to the East Syriac Liturgical Tradition", *JAAS* 18:1 (2004), 9-45; S. Brock, "Ephrem and the Syriac Tradition", *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, F. Young, L. Ayres, A. Louth (eds.), Cambridge 2004, 362-72, 513-515.

tone. The 400 or so *madrāšē* by Ephrem that survive employ some 45 different syllabic meters. The use of rhyme was not a regular feature in early Syriac poetry. The use of rhyme as a regular feature is found from about the ninth century onwards, this was evidently introduced under the influence of Arabic poetry.

The context of Ephrem's *memrē* and *madrāšē* was often the divine liturgy. Specifically, as St. Jerome says of these compositions, "in some churches his writings were publicly recited after the reading of the Scriptures".⁸ The *Vita Siriaca* states that *madrāšē* were sung at dusk and dawn in the Church, before the liturgy.⁹ This means that the proximate occasion of these compositions was the reading of a set of passages from the Scripture chosen for the relevance to the liturgical celebration of the day or the season. The titles of the collections of *madrāšē* reflect their liturgical character. Complete texts of Ephrem's *madrāšē* are preserved almost exclusively only in the 6-7th century manuscripts. Later, for liturgical purpose many of Ephrem's *madrāšē* were excerpted, broken up, added to, and even completely reconstituted in (liturgical) manuscripts. Moreover, since the texts were sung alternatively by two choirs, manuscripts were sometimes written in pairs, each one giving only the verses sung by one of the two choirs. A good example of this is provided by a beautiful Epiphany poem, probably of the sixth century, whose full form of 26 stanzas is only to be found in a single 12th cent. Ms, whereas all that is left of the poem in the printed edition is the five stanzas (HB III:411; HD III:586).¹⁰

The printed editions provide only a small proportion of what is to be found in the liturgical manuscripts. For example, the West Syrian *Fenqitho* incorporates a large number of *madrāšē*, mostly attributed to Ephrem, whereas the *Ḥudrā* has a much more limited selection, and these are always just restricted to three stanzas. The Liturgical pieces found commonly in West Syriac and Maronite traditions can normally confirm the antiquity of the texts.¹¹ The shared texts would normally imply that they are likely to antedate the ecclesiastical divisions. Here is a list of excerpts from Ephrem's *madrāšē* in the *Ḥudrā* so far identified as genuine.¹²

II Sun Annunciation	HB I:69; HD I:130	= Nativity, 5:1-3.
IV Sun Annunciation	HB I:88; HD I:152	= Nativity, 23:1-3.
VI Sun Epiphany	HB I:242; HD I:476	= Epiphany, 6:1-3.
Comm. of Mary	HB I:365; HD I:596	= Nativity, 11:1-3.
II Sun Fast	HB II:116; HD II:189	~ Fast, 1:6, 4:1.
VI Sun Fast	HB II:277; HD II:381	= Church, 6:1-5,7. ¹³

⁸ *Saint Jerome: On Illustrious Men*, Thomas P. Halton (tr.), Washington DC 1999, 149.

⁹ DE FRANCESCO, *Inni sul Paradiso*, 196 note 15.

¹⁰ S. BROCK, "An Anonymous Hymn for Epiphany", *PdO* 15 (1988-89), 170.

¹¹ For details: BROCK, "Early Witnesses", 9-45.

¹² BROCK, "Early Witnesses" 44. References are to E. Beck's editions in CSCO.

¹³ The inclusion of the *madrāšē* on the Church, 6:5 is fortunate, since this is badly damaged in Beck's manuscript B, and so thanks to *Ḥudrā*, we are able now to read it in its complete form. S. BROCK, "The Transmission of Ephrem's *madrāshe* in the Syriac Liturgical Tradition", *SP* 33 (1997), 501, Appendix 5.

VII Mon Fast	HB II:334; HD II:456	= Virginity, 8:1-3.
VII Tue Fast	HB II:339; HD II:463	= Unleavened Bread, 3:1-4, 6-7.
VII Wed Fast	HB II:345; HD II:469	= Unleavened Bread, 5:1-6.
Passover	not in HB; HD II:477	= Crucifixion, 2:1-3.

S. Brock notes that a *madrāšā* found in East Syriac *Ḥudrā* (Passover: HB II:351; HD II:476-7) gives the impression of preserving genuine Ephremic material, but had been lost or is absent in available manuscripts.¹⁴ Among the many liturgical poetry attributed to Ephrem, some *tešbāḥtā* common with the Maronite tradition may be dated very old. For example, *Receive, O our Lord, the supplication of us all* in *Lelyā* of Thursdays (HB I-III:44; HD I-III:54).¹⁵

The ferial morning hymn recited in SM Week-day *Ṣapṛā* ("To you be glory, our God"), according to ms tradition is attributed to Ephrem (HD I:63). Though this hymn has no uniform syllabic pattern, in general follows the classical meter of Ephrem (7+7). In the same way, the Sunday morning "hymn of light" recited in SM Sunday *Ṣapṛā* ("Jesus our Lord the Messiah") is an acrostic poem attributed to Ephrem. Each stanza of this hymn is composed in 7+7 7+7 meter. The acrostic spells the name of Jesus Christ, consisting of ten Syriac alphabets (ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ), where the sequence *yod + alaph* points to the antiquity of the East Syriac convention of placing a supralinear *alaph* over the initial *yod* where this serves as a vowel.¹⁶ The post-communion hymn of "Sundays and Memorials" sung in SM Eucharistic liturgy, is attributed to Ephrem. This hymn is written in 4+4 4+4 syllables. We quote the first four lines of this ancient hymn.

<i>Ma-ran Ish-o mal-ka sgi-da</i>	Our Lord Jesus King that is worshipped
<i>da-zka bha-she lmau-ta thru-na</i>	who conquered by his Passion death the tyrant.
<i>Bra da-la-ha desh-taw-di lan</i>	O Son of God, who has promised to us
<i>Ha-ye had-the bmal-kut raw-ma</i>	New Life in the Kingdom on high

S. Brock further gives a short list of common *madrāšē* that are generally attributed to Ephrem, as found in East Syriac *Ḥudrā*, but these will certainly date from slightly later.¹⁷ This would normally imply that they are likely to antedate the ecclesiastical divisions of the fifth and sixth centuries, thus confirming the antiquity of such texts.

I Sun Annunciation	HB I:58; HD I:118
Passover	HB II:351 stanzas 2-3; HD II:476
Passion Fri	HB II:368; HD II:501
Passion Sat	HB II:384; HD II:522
Easter	HB III:411; HD III:586
II Tue Resurrect.	HB III:421 stanza 1; HD III:597
II Fri Resurrect.	HB III:433 stanza 3; HD III:612-3

¹⁴ BROCK, "Transmission of Ephrem's *madrashē*", 502.

¹⁵ BROCK, "Early Witnesses", 22-38.

¹⁶ An additional superlinear *alaph* (Ⲁ) is added after the first alphabet. This is the practice of later East Syriac mss. The latest reprint of *Ḥudrā* (2002) edited by P. Yousif has added this provision.

¹⁷ BROCK, "Early Witnesses", 44-45.

The present SM Liturgy of Hours contains very many selections from Ephrem, even though not found in *Ḥudrā*. We give a short list of Ephrem's genuine works quoted in the first season of the liturgical year, the period of Annunciation.

Wed <i>Ramšā</i>	Anthem "of Before"	Nativity 5:21
Wed <i>Ramšā</i>	Royal Anthem	Nativity 12:1.14; 25:16
Wed <i>Lelyā</i>	Night Anthem	Nativity 8:14-16; 11:6-8
Wed <i>Ṣaprā</i>	Morning Anthem	Nativity 1:15; 5:20; 6:4
Thu <i>Ramšā</i>	Royal Anthem	Faith 46:11
Thu <i>Lelyā</i>	Night Anthem	Nativity 23:4
Thu <i>Lelyā</i>	Night Hymn	Faith 10:1-3
Fri <i>Ramšā</i>	Anthem "of Before"	Faith 11:2
Fri <i>Ramšā</i>	Anthem "of After"	Faith 10:9; Virginité 39:11
Sat <i>Ramšā</i>	Anthem "of Before"	Faith 16:2; Nativity 3:21
Sat <i>Ramšā</i>	Anthem "of After"	Nativity 3:20; 3:3
Sat <i>Ramšā</i>	Royal Anthem	Nativity 3:2.4.12
Sat <i>Lelyā</i>	Night Anthem	Nativity 24:21; 3:4.12; 23:8
Sat <i>Ṣaprā</i>	Morning Anthem	Nativity 3:11.15

Again, it was Ephrem who introduced, the genre *sogitā*, a kind of *madrāšē* into Syriac. The *sogitā* consists of short stanzas of four lines with a simple metre, usually 7+7 7+7 syllables. *Sogiyātā* quite often have an alphabetic acrostic, and a distinctive sub-category of them are in the form of dialogues between two persons speaking in alternate stanzas. There are two *sogiyātā* found in the HD, but not in HB: an acrostic dispute between Body and Soul (Tuesday of Rogation of Ninevites: HD I,367-9) and a dialogue between Helena and Jew Judas (Feast of the Finding of the Cross: HD III:723-6). It is time to conclude this section, but what has been said so far is enough to judge Ephrem's impact on the Syriac liturgical poetry.

1.3 School of Nisibis and Mar Narsai

Three ecclesiastical institutions have greatly influenced the development of liturgical poetry and music in the East Syriac tradition: they are the theological Schools, the Monasteries and the Catholicate.

Artful chanting of liturgical texts in choir was an essential part of the School curriculum, especially in the Persian School (first in Edessa and later on in Nisibis) that emerged in the early decades of the fifth century. Narsai (died circa 500), the founder of the Persian School in Nisibis, used metrical homilies (*memrē*) in the service of catechesis. The tradition claims that Narsai had written as many *memrē* as the year has days.¹⁸ Their composition in twelve-syllable meter would suggest that they were intended for liturgical use as well. Indeed, the survived *memrē* were arranged within the framework of the liturgical year.¹⁹ They all begin

¹⁸ *La seconde partie de l'histoire de Barhadbesabba 'Arabia*, F. Nau (ed.), PO 9 (1913), 613.

¹⁹ Mingana has arranged the available *memrē* (81) and *sogiyātā* (10) of Narsai, 60 according to the main days of the liturgical year, and remaining 21 as various. A. MINGANA, *Narsay doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, I-II, Mosul 1905.

with a refrain (*ʿonāyā*). Narsai himself would have chanted these *memrē* before the congregation of students, and thus these homilies entered into the School curriculum and liturgical chanting. For example, the 16th *memrā* “Nobility and Humility”, is still recited in *māwtbā* of the Fast of Ninevites (HB I:468*-479*). Other remnants of Narsai’s *memrē* in liturgy can be still seen in the metrical distichs, called *hpakatā*, which *per se* should be excerpted from the *memrē* of Narsai. Portions of Narsai’s *memrē* are also found in the longish passages, called *pasogē*, chanted in the burial service.²⁰

Among the various kinds of liturgical hymns composed under the patronage of the School of Nisibis and the Great Monastery, the genre of *tešbāhtā* is the most popular. First, we give a list of *tešbāhtā* recited in the common rite of Services, that are attributed to the teachers of the Persian School. But some of them are attributed also to solitaires of the Great Monastery at Mount Izla (denoted by #).

<i>Šaprā</i> Sundays 1 (HB I:35)	Ephrem/Theodore
<i>Šaprā</i> Sundays 2 (HB I:35-36)	Narsai ²¹
<i>Šaprā</i> Sundays 3 (HB I:37)	Theodore
<i>Šaprā</i> Ferials (HB I:50)	Ephrem / Abba
<i>Lelyā</i> Sundays (HB I:27)	Narsai ²²
<i>Lelyā</i> Mondays (HB I:42)	Abraham Rabban ²³
<i>Lelyā</i> Tuesdays (HB I:43)	Barsauma/Abba/Thomas of Edessa
<i>Lelyā</i> Wednesdays (HB I:43)	Abimelek/Abba/Thomas of Edessa
<i>Lelyā</i> Thursdays (HB I:44)	Ephrem
<i>Lelyā</i> Fridays (HB I:28)	# Abraham of Nathpar / John ²⁴
<i>Lelyā</i> Saturdays (HB I:45)	Ephrem/Abba
After Communion Easter (Sundays)	Yazdin
After Communion Passover (Feasts)	Ephrem

The last two *tešbāhtā* of the list, recited on Easter and Passover, were later used throughout the year for all Sundays and Feasts respectively, and is still used in the SM Eucharistic liturgy. The same way, the *tešbāhtā* of *Lelyā* had an early use in the baptism Service celebrated during the Holy Week and in *qālā d-šahrā* of ‘Weeks of Mysteries’ of the Great Fast.²⁵ Many *tešbāhtā* recited in the period of Great Fast are of ancient origin, and some of them are repeated in other occasions, such as the ‘Rogation of Ninevites’.

²⁰ W. F. MACOMBER, “The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai”, OCP 39 (1973), 278. A. Mingana even attributes all *qalyātā* to Narsai. MINGANA, *Narsai* 23.

²¹ This hymn is referred to in the Synod of 596. See *Synodicon Orientale* (SO), 199/459-460.

²² This hymn is also referred to in the Synod of 596. See SO, 199/459-460.

²³ Abraham of beth Rabban was the third successor of Narsai in the school of Nisibis (510-569).

²⁴ Abraham of Nathpar of the sixth century, gives no trace of his eventual connection with the Great monastery, but is considered a follower of Abraham the Great. John of Beth Rabban was the fourth head of the School (mid-sixth century).

²⁵ The *tešbāhtā* used in Sun-Thur *Lelyā* were used in the baptism service after *Šaprā* in Mon-Fri of the Holy Week. The same way, the *tešbāhtā* used in *Lelyā* are also used in *qālā d-šahrā* of ‘Weeks of Mysteries’ of the Great Fast, except that of Thursday: this means that *tešbāhtā* of *Lelyā* have their origin from the baptism service of the Holy Week.

<i>Qālā d-šahrā</i> (former Fridays; Mon Rogation)	Barsauma
<i>Qālā d-šahrā</i> (latter Fridays; Tue Rogation)	Hnana
<i>Qālā d-šahrā</i> (Wed Rogation)	no attribution
<i>Māwtbā</i> (Fast Sundays)	#Babai the Great
<i>Māwtbā</i> (Weeks of Mysteries, Fridays)	#Abraham of Izla
<i>Māwtbā /subbā'ā</i> (Weeks of Ferial)	Simeon bar Sabbae/Ephrem
<i>'Edānā</i> (of Fast)	Ephrem/Abba

Still other *tešbāhtā* recited in other periods of the liturgical year, since they are used also by Maronites, should belong to an early period. Since majority of the authors to whom these *tešbāhtā* are attributed belong to 6-7th century, this will provide a *terminus post quem* for their subsequent borrowing by the Maronite tradition.

<i>Māwtbā</i> (season of Annunciation)	#Babai the Great
<i>Māwtbā</i> (season of Epiphany)	#Babai of Nisibis
<i>Qālā d-šahrā</i> (former Weeks of Summer)	No attribution
<i>Qālā d-šahrā</i> (latter Weeks of Summer)	No attribution
<i>Māwtbā</i> (season of Dedication)	#Bishop Giwargis of Nisibis

1.4 Catholicos Ishoyahb III, the Great

Catholicos Ishoyahb of Adiabene (650-659) is the most important liturgical reformer of the Church of the East.²⁶ According to the *Book of Governors*,²⁷ at the time of Ishoyahb, the Church Services were performed in a confused manner, and therefore, Ishoyahb with the help of his companion Henanisho, who was distinguished for his academic and musical excellence, ordered the chants and canons of "*Penqitā of Ḥudrā*".²⁸ The *Ḥudrā* that Ishoyahb arranged is the collection of '*oniyātā* to be sung in *Ramšā*, *Lelyā*, *Ṣaprā* and the Mysteries, for the whole year.

The Byzantine choral service may have influenced Ishoyahb and Henanisho in such an ordering. According to Budge, during the days of Ishoyahb "no systematic arrangement of hymns and anthems seems to have existed; it is possible that he obtained new ideas on these subjects when he visited the churches at Antioch and Apamea, and that on his return to his diocese he endeavored to introduce a system of choral service resembling that which

²⁶ After leaving the School of Nisibis, Ishoyahb entered the monastery of Beth Abe, and later became bishop of Nineveh, Adiabene and finally the Catholicos. J.-M. Fiey has given the best biography of Ishoyahb III. According to him, it was the liturgical reforms introduced by Metropolitan Ishoyahb in Adiabene, that was later generalized all over the Catholicate. As soon as he was elected Catholicos, due to political reasons he moved the Catholicate See to his own monastery of Beth Abe, from where the definitive liturgical codification took place. Cf. J. M. FIEY, "Išō'yaw le Grand Vie du catholicos nestorien Išō'yaw III d'Adiabène (580-659)", OCP 36 (1969-70) 10.

²⁷ The *Book of Governors* (=BG), a historical work, written by Thomas of Marga around 840, narrates the story of the monastery of Beth Abe near Mosul from its beginning till the author's day. *Book of Governors, The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga AD 840*, I-II, E. A. W. Budge (ed.), London 1893

²⁸ BG suggests us that Ishoyahb's "*Penqitā of Ḥudrā*", included not only the variable anthems but also certain rules and canons regarding the celebration of Services, probably in a separate volume. Cf. BG 177, 189 and 293.

was in use in the Byzantine Churches”.²⁹ Ishoyahb wanted to found a School near the convent of Beth Abe, in order to teach these anthems and chants, but due to the resistance of solitaries who protested against chanting for it disturbed their solitary life, he established it in Adiabene (cf. BG 148-49). One can easily note that anthems were becoming more popular in the Services, and it was actually taught and was practised by novices in cenobitic-Schools, though the solitaries resisted.

1.5 Liturgical Reforms in the Early-Arabic Period (7-9th centuries)

According to the *Book of Governors*, Babai of Gebilta (early 8th c.) unified and re-founded Ishoyahb’s *Ḥudrā*. The chant system established by him came to be known as the “musical system of Rabban Babai”.³⁰ Since at this time, all the various Church hymns, melodies and songs had been confused, Babai brought the many traditions together and imposed an order on them.

According to the witness of the *Nomocanon* of Gabriel of Basra, during the period of Patriarch Sabrisho (831-835) many village clerics detested learning, and did not even know the *’onitā* of the day. Therefore, Sabrisho organized the *Ḥudrā* of anthems for Sundays throughout the year, and commanded that all of the clerics should abide by his system.³¹

1.6 Liturgical Music in Malabar during the Pre-Diamper Period³²

The St Thomas Christians in India from time immemorial followed the East Syriac liturgy. Students from Malabar were sent for theological formation to the Persian Schools, and they returned to Malabar bringing with them the latest ecclesiastical innovations and writings. But unfortunately, the history of Indian Christianity is not documented, and hence we are devoid of any direct information regarding their early Church Music. Besides, the Synod of Diamper in 1599 had ordered to burn all Syriac manuscripts in Malabar. But all the liturgical manuscripts that survived, beginning with Vat. Syr. 22, a lectionary written at Kodungalloor in 1301, attests to the East Syriac lineage.

²⁹ BG lvi.

³⁰ BG 293, 296-97. Babai wrote many liturgical compositions too. He would have a lasting influence because he founded numerous schools and became a teacher to many disciples, including Abraham bar Dasandad the Lame. Babai’s disciple Abraham in turn taught two great future Catholicoi: Timothy I and Isho bar Nun.

³¹ It is not clear whether it is a new arrangement, or merely a simplified form for the usage of village clerics. “While I (Sabrisho) was passing through the region of Beth Aramaye, I saw that all churches were void of knowledgeable clerics (...). The novices not even knew the *’onitā* of the day. (...) And I organized the *Ḥudrā* of *’oniyātā* for Sundays of the year, that which I left at the residence of the Fathers (Patriarchate); and I cautioned the teachers to give its contents to the rural priests of the villages, and to those who minister in the houses of the faithful” (translation is ours). *Die Rechtssammlung des Gabriel von Basra und ihr Verhältnis zu den juristischen Sammelwerken der Nestorianer*, H. Kaufhold (ed.), Berlin 1976, 302-304.

³² B. PUTHUR (ed.), *The Life and Nature of the St. Thomas Christian Church in the Pre-Diamper Period*, Kochi 2000; S. H. MOFFETT, “Indian Christianity and its Relation to Persia”, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. I, New York 1998². A. MINGANA, “The Early Spread of Christianity in India”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 10/2 (July 1926), 435-514.

Almost all of the 16th century travel accounts attest to daily parish choral Services in the Syriac language with the participation of people. For instance, in a letter Fr. M. Nunea Barreto SJ (1564) writes: "All the days before sunset, they assemble in the church to recite the psalms and the lessons in the Chaldean language, and in the morning they do the same. (...) the *Cattanars* reciting their matins at the altar and the people answering their Halleluias and other words with such impetus of spirit that although I do not understand, they provided in me devotion."³³ During the season of Great Fast, in addition to the daily morning and evening service there was an additional noon service.³⁴

An incident that occurred on the Palm Sunday in 1599 sheds light on the contrasting attitudes of the Portuguese missionaries and the Malabar Christians toward the local chant tradition. A few days before the Synod of Diamper, Archbishop Menezes decided to visit Kaduthuruthy, an important church of the Malabar Christians, to celebrate the Holy Week ceremonies with them and thus to win them over to his side. In order to impress the local Christians, the Archbishop decided to conduct the Palm Sunday services with a solemn sung Mass in the Latin rite, with a special choir from Kochi. Antonio Gouvea, the secretary of the Archbishop, describes the event thus:

The Arch-bishop not knowing but that the Portuguese Music might charm the common people, and reconcile them to the Latin service, to which they seemed to have aversion, sent for a full choir from Cochin, and on Palm Sunday had a high Mass performed with the same ceremony and majesty that he could have had it done at Goa: but the *cattanars* and people were so far from being satisfied with the music and pompous ceremony of the service, that if they liked it ill before, they liked it a great deal worse after that, as in truth none but they that place all religion in external performances can do otherwise, there being no Passion which that service will not excite in its spectators (which is all the people were) sooner than devotion.³⁵

The decrees of the Synod of Diamper shed light on the musical practice among the St Thomas Christians in the sixteenth century. The missionaries could not understand the permeable religious boundaries in Malabar, and therefore the Synod condemned the local

³³ Cited in P. NEELANKAVIL, *Feasts and Celebrations in the Syro Malabar Church*, Kottayam 2008, 152. In a letter of Alvaro Penteado (1528) states: "this is the custom to come to the church: they take a bath and clean or wash their clothes (...) going to the centre of the church they say together and loudly the prayers with the priest or the minister and when the prayer is over they bend their head to the floor, praying silently for a short time and getting up they go to kiss the hands of the priest or touch the hands of the ministers. This they used to do only on Saturdays in the evening and on Sundays in the morning, and during the week they do not enter the church, but only at the entrance, the priests also pray in the same manner." *Ibid.* 149.

³⁴ In the history of J. F. Raulin (*Historia Ecclesiae Malabaricae*), he gives the testimony of Maffeus (1559), which states that, "they assist at the daily psalmodies and sacrifices. (...) They go three times a day to the church during the whole Lenten period: early morning, evening and night; for the first two no one absents himself. The same discipline is observed for Advent. (...) whenever they enter the church during the time of office in Lent, they receive with their hands a sign of peace and obedience, which they call 'Casturi', for the priests who raise their hands to let the faithful touch them. Cited in NEELANKAVIL, *Feasts in Syro Malabar Church*, 150-51.

³⁵ M. GEDDES, *The History of the Church of Malabar*, London 1694, 80-81.

custom of inviting Hindu musicians to perform inside the church during the festive celebrations.

Whereas up on several festivals of the church there are musicians called to the celebration thereof, according to the custom of the country, who are all heathens, small care being taken in what part of the Church they are placed, or to hinder them from playing during the time of the Holy Sacrifice, at which no excommunicate person or infidel ought to be present, therefore the Synod does command, that great care be taken not to suffer them to remain in the church after the Creed is said, or the sermon, if there be one, is ended, that so they may not behold the Holy Sacrament; the Vicar shall also be careful to drive all heathens who may come upon such occasion, from the doors and windows of the church.³⁶

It is probable that they were playing instrumental ensembles such as *panchavadyam* or *chentamelam* that are essential to temple festivals of Hindus. Musical practices of a society often reflect the social structure of the time. The Christians' invitation to Hindu musicians to perform in church festivals, and their willingness to accept the request speaks volumes about the harmonious social interaction that existed between Christians and their Hindu neighbours in Kerala. This shows that the Malabar Christians were not simply imitating the Syriac music as it was practised among the Persians, rather they made adaptations ("inculturation") in the pronunciation of Syriac words and in the liturgical chanting. For example, the Arabic influence of the East Syriac music during post-seventh century period did not affect the Malabar manner of singing, and therefore, the St Thomas Christians' chanting tradition seems more archaic and original than their Chaldean counterpart.

Part Two: Liturgical Chanting in the East Syriac Tradition

2.1 Choral Recitation

The various liturgical prayers can be classified into two categories: of choral recitation and of individual recitation. The former brings out, in a more expressive way, the ecclesial dimension of liturgy and the latter, the priestly dimension. The first category includes the psalms and hymns, recited commonly by the whole congregation or by the choir. The second category includes prayers in which the liturgical body fulfils their specific priestly office, either ministerial or common priesthood: presbyters through collects and blessing, deacons through litanies and acclamations, and the faithful through their responses.

The prayers that are by their nature and genre chorally sung can be divided into two groups. The first group includes the psalms of Old Testament (old psalmody), and the second group consists of ecclesiastical poetry (new psalmody). Psalms are not prose prayers, but poems of praise. In Syriac they are usually called "psalmody" (ܩܠܝܠܐ), and at times "praises" (ܩܠܝܠܐ) as well. Psalmody is by nature musical and choral. The East Syriac chanting of psalms has three characteristics: 1) psalms are always recited in two choirs, alternate

³⁶ GEDDES, *Church of Malabar*, 256.

psalmody; 2) psalms are accompanied with ‘halleluiah’ or *qanonā* (antiphon or refrain); psalms are chanted either as responsorial psalmody or as antiphonal psalmody.³⁷

2.1.1 Alternate Psalmody

The psalmody is always alternated between two choirs. The two choirs are called ‘First and Second’ or ‘Before and After’ or ‘Former or Latter’. Regarding alternate recitation of collects and psalms, the rubric for *Ramšā* states thus.

If the first (‘Before’) choir begins the first collect of the day, the second (‘After’) choir the next. If Sunday is of the first choir, also Monday, Wednesday and Friday are of them. Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday will be the second choir. Thus also on Feasts and Memorials that fall in them. *Viceversa*, on the next Sunday. (HB I:2)

The weeks are divided into ‘Before’ and ‘After’, according as whether the first choir on the north side, or the second choir on the south, begins the Service. If the first choir begins one anthem, the second choir begins the next, and so on alternately. For example, the first psalm (Ps 100) of *Šaprā* is recited alternatively in the following manner.

I Choir : Praise the Lord all earth (v. 1),
O Lord, giver of light, we lift up glory to you (*qanonā*),
Praise the Lord all earth (v. 1).
II Choir : Serve the Lord with joy (v. 2),
O Lord, giver of light, we lift up glory to you (*qanonā*),
enter before Him with praise (v. 3).

A special feature in psalmody is the binary psalmody, the choral recitation of psalm verses in two clauses at a time. In Sunday *Šaprā*, Ps 91 is originally recited in this mode.

2.1.2 Antiphonal Psalmody

Antiphonal psalmody represents a later form of singing of psalms, developed from responsorial psalmody. In antiphonal chanting, the soloist intones the psalm verses, and people who are divided into two choirs, respond alternatively with the antiphon. But this original form is no more in use, instead the antiphon is repeated at the beginning and end of each psalm. It seems that it was the desire to abridge that led to this suppression.³⁸ Besides, the melody of the psalm has also disappeared. One mode of reciting the alternate psalmody with antiphon today, for example of Ps 100 in *Šaprā*, is as follows.³⁹ It is to be noted that Ps 100 is said in ten verses (ܐܠܗܝܡ ܠܥܠܡ ܕܥܠܡ).

³⁷ The term *qanonā* is translated in this article in two ways: whenever it refers to an ecclesiastical writing (joined with a psalm) we call it ‘antiphon’, while whenever it refers to a psalm verse (joined with an ecclesiastical anthem or hymn) we call it ‘refrain’.

³⁸ MATEOS, *Lelya-Sapra* 371.

³⁹ MATEOS, *Lelya-Sapra* 369.

Soloist : Praise the Lord all earth (verse). O Lord, giver of light, we lift up glory to you (Q).⁴⁰
 II Choir : [1] Praise the Lord all earth (verse). [2] Serve the Lord with joy, + Q
 I Choir : [3] enter before Him with praise.
 II Choir : [4] Know that he is the Lord our God,
 I Choir : [5] He is our creator, and we are not,
 II Choir : [6] we are his people, sheep of his flock.
 I Choir : [7] Enter his doors with thanksgiving, and his courts with glory.
 II Choir : [8] Give thanks to Him and bless his name.
 I Choir : [9] For the Lord is good, and eternal is his goodness,
 II Choir : [10] and his faithfulness is forever and ever.
 All : *Gloria Patri* + Q

Such antiphonal psalmody has many characteristics common with the Byzantine usage (*troparion*)⁴¹: 1) the term *qanonā* refers to the non-biblical ecclesiastical composition and not to entire psalmody; 2) the people divided into two choirs respond alternatively, alternate psalmody; 3) the antiphon, at times, is chanted only at the beginning and end of the psalm, and not after each psalm-verse; 4) antiphonal psalmody, unlike the responsorial, always concludes with *Gloria Patri*.

The Lord's Prayer is chanted antiphonally in the East Syriac tradition. Patriarch Timothy I, (around the year 780), introduced the antiphonal psalmody of the Lord's Prayer with his own *qanonā*, inspired by Peshitta Is 6:3: "Holy, holy, holy are you. Our Father who is in heaven, heaven and earth are full of the greatness of your glory. The watchful ones (angels) and men cry to you: holy, holy, holy are you". We reconstruct this ancient cathedral singing still conserved in the liturgical Text. Choir is normally referring to clerics inside (priests and deacons) and outside (sub-deacons and monks) the Sanctuary.

Choir I (inside Sanctuary)	first three verses of the Lord's Prayer
Choir II (outside)	<i>qanonā</i>
people	Lord's Prayer
Choir I	<i>Gloria Patri</i>
Choir II	<i>Sicut erat</i>
Choir II	first three verses of the Lord's Prayer
Choir I	<i>qanonā</i>

If the witness of Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) is true, Patriarch Abdisho I (963-986) changed the then practice of choral recitation of the Lord's Prayer, between those inside the sanctuary and outside, and ordered it to be said by all together.⁴²

2.1.3 Responsorial Psalmody

⁴⁰ The psalmody opened with the soloist proclaiming the antiphon and first verse of the psalm (and not the choir), thus clearly instructing the people, who of course did not have books, what they were to sing.

⁴¹ TAFT, "Psalmody" 19-23.

⁴² "Until the time of this Catholicos, those who were offered the offering inside the sanctuary were saying (one) part of 'we believe' and those outside the other part. Thus also he determined the prayer 'Our Father' to be said by all together." *Ecclesiastical History of Bar Hebraeus* III, 252-254.

Responsorial psalmody is more archaic form of chanting, and the 'response' is always a psalm verse (or alleluia). The chanting of Ps 51 (*Miserere*) in *Ṣapṛā* is a unique example of responsorial psalmody. The response for weekly *Ṣapṛā* is "Have mercy upon me, O Lord" (Ps 51:3), the first verse of the psalm. But today it is no more repeated after each verse, but only at the opening and end. We reconstruct the original mode of responsorial psalmody of *Miserere*, where the psalmody ends not with *Gloria Patri* but with the psalm verse.⁴³

Soloist : response = "Have mercy upon me O Lord"

People : response

Soloist : two clauses each of the psalm till the end

People : response

Soloist : first two clauses

2.2 Poetic Genres

All ecclesiastical poetic compositions can be distinguished into two genres: first, originated in relation to psalmody, and second, independent of psalmody.⁴⁴ The first genre is further divided into two groups: either the psalmic element is predominant or the poetic element is principal. *Qanonā* or 'antiphon' of psalms belongs to the first group because in them the poetic element is subordinated to the psalmody.

2.2.1 Antiphon Genre (*qanonā*)

'Antiphon' is often an ecclesiastical composition and the psalmody always concludes with *Gloria Patri*. It was Catholicos Abba I, the Great (540-552) who arranged of the East Syriac psalter, and composed the *qanonā* of each psalm, the prayers between the psalms and the *giyorē*. Nevertheless, the antiphons of the common part of the daily Services, unlike those *qanonē* ascribed to Mar Abba, are simple and in general not metrical, and therefore, they belong to a period anterior to Mar Aba. This means that the antiphons of a single verse belong to the earlier stratum.⁴⁵ Antiphons of all morning psalms, except Ps 100 (6+6) and 91 (5+5), are of a single verse. Simple *qanonā* was further developed into complex antiphons as, for example, *b-rāšit* in Sunday *Ṣapṛā*, where the poetic element was expanded.

2.2.2 Anthem Genre ('*onitā*)

In a further evolution, the non-biblical antiphons gradually took the predominance and the psalm was reduced to a few verses. The poetic compositions or anthems gradually gained independence from their original context. The first stage of this development is the Sunday '*onitā d-Ṣapṛā*'. The two fixed psalm verses used here Ps 100:1-2a are independent of the

⁴³ Responsorial psalmody ends with a psalm verse, and not with *Gloria Patri*.

⁴⁴ We basically follow in this section: *Lelya-Sapra* 374-382.

⁴⁵ MATEOS, *Lelya-Sapra* 351.

sense of the morning anthem.⁴⁶ In the original form, *'onitā d-Ṣaprā* was like the antiphon to Ps 100. But soon the poetic element became more predominant than the psalm refrain. Among the four ancient *'oniyātā* or anthems (*d-Ramšā*, *d-Lelyā*, *d-Ṣaprā* and *d-Rāzē*) arranged by Ishoyahb III, *'onitā d-Ṣaprā* is more primitive, because other three anthems have no fixed psalm refrain but varies according to the content of the anthem. Therefore, *'onitā d-Ṣaprā* is a stage of transition between antiphon and anthem.

The Syriac term *'onitā* literally means 'response' (derive from the root ܐܢܬܐ 'to answer', 'to respond') and is thus a responsory which is accompanying or joined to the psalmody. We translate it simply 'anthem'. Anthem is a kind of ecclesiastical poetic composition of variable length, and is always preceded by a psalm refrain or *Gloria Patri*.

The function of anthems is to solemnise a procession or a particular rite. For example martyrs anthems were used during the procession towards martyrion or the Sunday morning anthem was meant to accompany the opening of the sanctuary veil and the processional rite of light and incense. The archaic *lākumārā* was already used in this sense. But as a form of *madrāšā*, *lākumārā* seems to belong to the second genre of ecclesiastical composition, those originated independent of psalmody. But when *lākumārā* and Ps 100:1-2a were joined together in week-days, it is clear that the poetic element (*lākumārā*) was not inspired of the psalm-refrain. Since Sunday morning anthem is a further development of its weekly counterpart (*lākumārā*), *'onitā d-Ṣaprā* is a stage in which one can clearly see the dependence as well as the independence between anthem and antiphon.

Just as ecclesiastical antiphons were added to psalms for antiphonal singing, so also psalm refrains were joined to ecclesiastical anthems. All anthems, including *lākumārā* and Trisagion were sung antiphonally preceded by psalm refrains and *Gloria Patri*. Thus by the end of the eight century, *lākumārā* was no more called *qanonā* but an anthem (*'onitā*), sung several times during the processional rite of incense, with fixed refrains for daily *Ramšā* (Ps 122:1) and *Ṣaprā* (Ps 5:3). Most of the morning anthems still conserve the original one stanza format, and the anthems having more stanzas are mostly of later period. Many archaic stanzas were reused in this long series of anthems.

2.2.3 Hymn Genre (*tešbohtā*)

Among the various genres of liturgical poetry *tešbohtā* is a distinctive kind. The term means 'glorification', 'praise' and is parallel to Gk δόξα. The hymns are generally sung in the final part of the celebration. As already noted in detail, most hymns in the present East Syriac liturgy had their origin in the Persian School.

2.3 Melody Titles

⁴⁶ The only day in the year in which the psalm verses are different are on Easter Sunday and First Sunday of Dedication. According to Mateos, this exception is recent, and it was just to adapt the psalm to the sense of the anthem. *Lelya-Sapra* 71 note 2; 375 note 2.

Each anthem/hymn in the East Syriac tradition is associated with *reš qālā*, what one might call a ‘title music’ or more accurately a ‘head song’ that indicates the melody with which the text is to be chanted. The term connotes both a particular chant text written in a specific meter as well as the melody associated with that chant. Thus, there can be several chants composed in the same poetic meter for different occasions in liturgy that are sung to a single model melody. Under each melody, in the ancient tradition, melodies of eight different modes are given, analogous to the eight-mode Gregorian chant system. To add to the richness of this system, some modes have variants of their own called *šuhlāpā*. The melodies are not documented using musical notation, rather by texts that the choir associates with melodies learned by tradition; whereas *šuhlāpā* is transmitted orally from *malpan* to disciples. The present SM liturgy still uses the system of *reš qālā* but not that of *šuhlāpā*. The Malayalam breviary indicates the Syriac model melody at the top of each chant.

The most significant and scientific documentation of the East Syriac music is done by Heinrich Husmann.⁴⁷ Whereas M. P. George has done excellent works on West Syriac music.⁴⁸ The recent study of Joseph Palackal CMI is both a historical and musicological research on the Syriac Chants in South India.⁴⁹ He has also prepared a list of “melody titles” (together with their musical notation) currently in vogue in the present SM Liturgy of Hours.

Syriac Title

1. *Tuyay*
2. *Brīk hannānā*
3. *Sahdē brīkē*
4. *Etpan al slōtā*
5. *Yādā husāwē*
6. *Sahdē waitōn*
7. *Isyā daw remse*
8. *Laikā ēzal*
9. *Eramrammāk*
10. *Pus baslāmmā*
11. *B’endān saprā / Al madbahqudsā*
12. *Sahdē qandīsē*
13. *M’shīhā pārōqe*
14. *Estappānōs*
15. *K’tāwā rambā*
16. *Mānāy hādē*
17. *Māryā kolhōn hāwbay / Prōkkumariyā*
18. *Sāmā w’lāmāhmē*
19. *Māran āsē*

⁴⁷ H. HUSMANN, *Die Melodien des Chaldäischen Breviers Commune nach den Traditionen Vorderasiens und der Malabarküste*, OCA 178, Rome 1967. The transcriptions are in Western staff notation and are based on the renditions by Fr. Amos Mechery CMI (1904-1988).

⁴⁸ M. P. GEORGE, *Suriyani Sangeetham* (Mal.), Kottayam 2010².

⁴⁹ J. PALACKAL, *Syriac Chant Tradition in South India*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, New York 2005.

Palackal has rightly noted that when the Syriac texts were translated into Malayalam, classical Dravidian meters were mostly used, as they were less rigid than the classical Sanskrit meters. It seems that the main goal was the singability of the translated text while maintaining the original Syriac melody. The Dravidian meters allowed enough freedom to achieve this goal, because the translators could increase or decrease the number of syllables in a verse, and the singers could adjust the poetic meter to the melodic meter. Shown below is an example of the heptasyllabic meter of the Syriac melody *Tuyay* and the quantitative meter of its Malayalam counterpart. This hymn is called “the hymn of light”, attributed to Mar Narsai and is sung in the Sunday *Ṣapṛā*.

<i>Tu-yay bad-mut he-so-ka</i>	Error, like darkness	Irulala polayabathangal
<i>Pri-sa was al ber-ya-ta</i>	had spread over creation;	Avaniye mudimarachidave
<i>Wad-nah nuh-reh dam-si-ha</i>	the light of Christ has dawned,	Thirunadan than deepthimuda
<i>Waq-na al-ma bu-ya-na</i>	and world has got meaning.	Manniludichu kulireki

Both the Syriac and the Malayalam texts have four lines in the strophes. However, there are differences in other aspects. The Syriac text has a uniform syllabic structure. Each verse has seven syllables distributed exactly the same way in all the verses. Such clear pattern is lacking in the Malayalam version, instead each verse has varying number of syllables and *matra*-s. The study of Palackal gives further details on the rhythmic and melodic aspects of Syriac chanting in Malayalam.

Conclusion

Music is an essential element of Christian liturgy because it is one of the best expressions of the ecclesial communion of the worshipping community. The choral chanting by the whole assembly in one harmonious voice underlines the ‘present’ dimension of communion, whereas the use of ancient and sacred liturgical texts (anthems and hymns) together with the traditional music brings to light the ‘past-future’ dimension of ecclesial communion. The St Thomas Christians considered the East Syriac liturgical poetry and music as a *locus* of their ecclesial communion and as an apostolic heritage handed down from their fore-fathers. The Syriac musical heritage of the Malabar Christians was not a mere imitation of the Middle East tradition, but was original and indigenous in many ways. They preserved this patrimony even in the midst of great trials. In short, the East Syriac poetry and liturgical chanting is always considered by the St Thomas Christians as an integral part of their apostolic Tradition, called the “Marthoma margam”.