



CD Review

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Qambel Maran: Syriac Chants from South India. 2002. PAN Records, Netherlands, PAN 2085 (Paradox@dataweb.nl). Recorded and annotated by Joseph J. Palackal. One compact disc. 16 pages of notes in English, 7 photos, 1 map, and bibliography. 29 tracks (66.00).

Qambel Maran, meaning, "accept O Lord," is a highly laudable audio collection of East Syriac liturgical hymns from the ancient tradition of the Chaldean rite of the Syro-Malabar Church among the St. Thomas Christians in India. Joseph J. Palackal, who is renowned for a number of pioneering attempts in the field of Christian devotional hymns, has done a valuable contribution with this CD by preserving the ancient melodies in their original language and by drawing attention to the rich and varied repertoire of the Syro-Malabar liturgical hymns. Until now, these melodies existed primarily in oral tradition. The hymns bear a testimony to the interaction at multiple levels between the Syro-Malabar Church, the Chaldean Church and the Roman Catholic Church at various stages in the complex history of the St. Thomas Christians.

The CD contains 29 hymns from the liturgy of the Hours, the solemn form of Mass (*Raaza*), services for the dead, paraliturgical services and other special occasions such as wedding. These hymns "cover a span of several centuries in the history of Christianity" (p. 4). The collection includes works by St. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) and Syriac translation of the Latin chant *Pange Lingua* that St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) wrote for the feast of Corpus Christi. Of special interest is the acrostic hymn of St. Ephrem (track 3) on the name *Iso M'siha* (Jesus the Messiah), which is sung today in a few dioceses in Kerala in Malayalam translation.

The booklet provides useful historical, linguistic and musical information on the chants. It is also a model for future researchers to study lesser-known musical genres in India. Palackal grew up in the liturgical and musical tradition represented in this CD; his intimacy with the tradition and his training for doctoral degree in Ethnomusicology at the City University of New York have helped him in writing the booklet. Palackal rightly observes: "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" (p. 4). The hymn texts are not included, but the booklet gives a summary of the themes of each hymn. Among the photographs is the "Persian Cross" at Valiyapally, Kottayam (circa 7th century) with inscriptions in Sassanian Pahlavi or Old Persian and in Syriac.

A good number of the tracks in this CD were recorded at the chapel of the St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, on 27 August 1999. And most of the performers are from the congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). The Syriac linguistic and liturgical traditions in India are closely associated with Mannanam and the CMI congregation. The printing press that Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871) established here with facilities to print Syriac texts in 1844 played a crucial role in the preservation of the Syriac language and liturgy.

Evidently, the hymns in this CD are deeply devotional, mostly scriptural, primarily liturgical, predominantly vocal, highly theological and profoundly ecclesiastical in style and substance. It sounds like an unending hymn of praise, worship, honor and thanksgiving rendered to God. Palackal has brought this invaluable treasure of the Syro-Malabar Church to the attention of a wider audience, connecting the Apostolic Eastern Christian tradition and the contemporary Christian experience in India. These hymns are rooted in the Asian ethos and at the same time open to the ethos of international devotional chanting.

The CD can be useful in comparative studies of East Syriac liturgical texts and their respective melodies as they exist in India and the Chaldean churches in the Middle East. Further, it is possible that the style of singing psalms in track 2, *Hallel, hallel*, ("Praise, praise"), is rooted in the Jewish tradition. This track consists of a *marmiza* (psalm 93, 94 and 95) from the midnight mass for Christmas.

This CD can be a welcome addition to the linguistic, liturgical and musical departments of libraries. Palackal has shown that the study of a Christian music genre in India can contribute toward the understanding of the epiphany of the Mystery of Christ and the history of Salvation.

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