

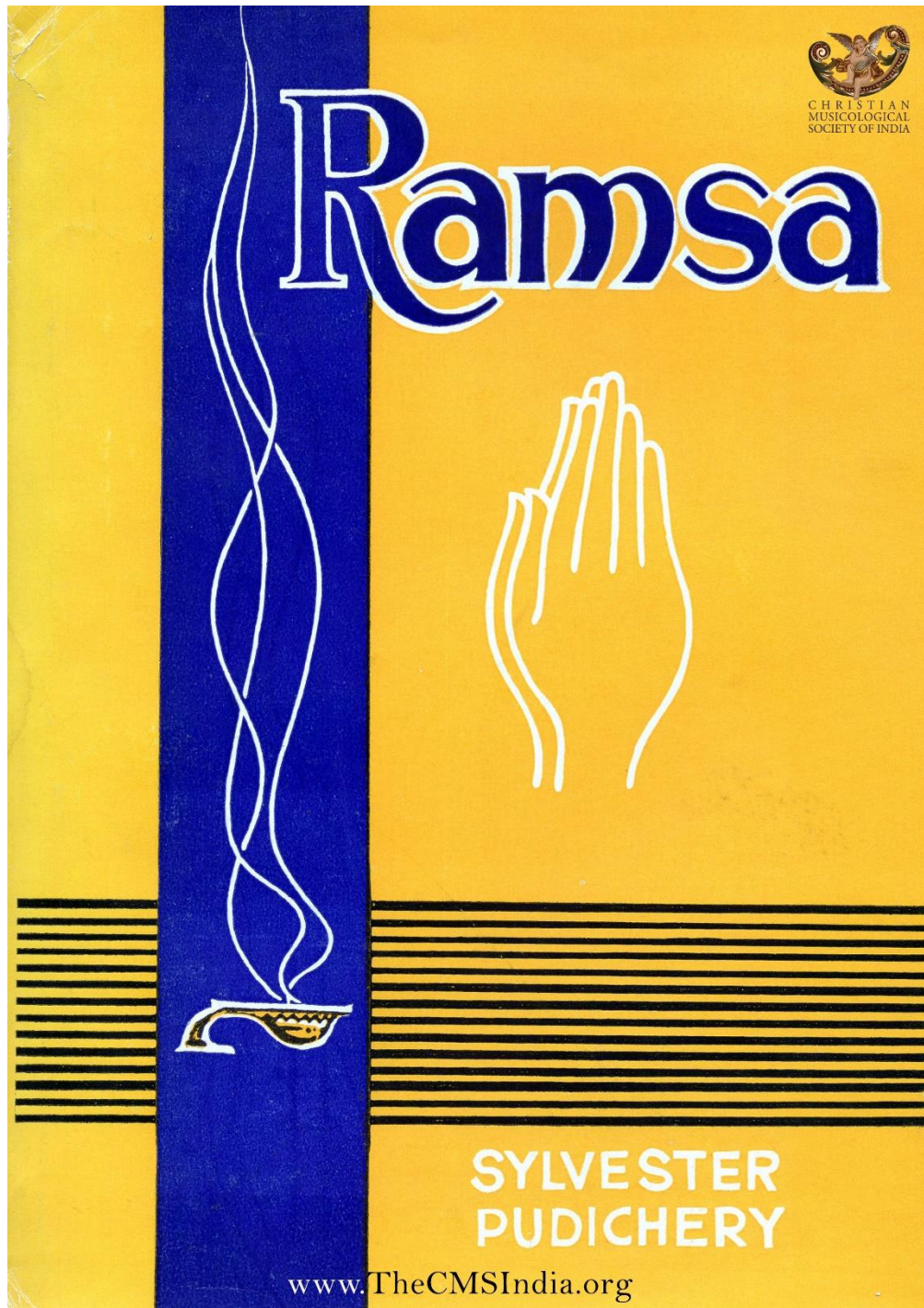


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RAMSA

AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF
THE CHALDEAN VESPERS

Fr. Sylvester Pudichery, C. M. I.

Dharmaram College
8th September
1972

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Dharmaram College Studies No. 9

Printed at
De Paul Press,
Pachalam

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CONTENTS

Preface	i
Introduction ...	ii

PART I

CHAPTER I

RAMSA--AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE CHALDEAN VESPERS

1. The Chaldean Breviary	1
2. The Historical background of the Chaldean Divine Office	1
3. A short description of the Chaldean Breviary	5
I. The present Arrangement	7
II. The First Volume	8
III. The Second Volume	9
IV. The Third Volume	10
V. The Qale	12
VI. The Psalter	12
VII. The Book da-qdam and d-bater	13
VIII. Warda	14
IX. Abu Halim	15
X. Division of the liturgical Cycle	15

CHAPTER II

THE ORDINARY STRUCTURE OF THE CHALDEAN RAMSA	17
--Festival Evening Service	17
--Ramsa = Evening prayers	18
The Schema of the festival Ramsa	46

CHAPTER III

THE EVENING SERVICE --FERIAL	47
--Schema of the Ferial Ramsa	60

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iv

PART II

RAMSA DURING THE LITURGICAL YEAR

CHAPTER I

PERIOD OF ANNUNCIATION	63
1. Subbara (Advent)	64
2. The Ramsa of Christmas	68
3. The Schema of the Ramsa of Christmas	72

CHAPTER II

THE FAST OF EPIPHANY AND ITS PERIOD	75
I. The Ramsa of Epiphany	75
II. The Sundays after Epiphany	79
III. The Rogation of the Ninivites and the end of the Epiphany period	80

CHAPTER III

THE PERIOD OF LENT	
I. The Sundays of Lent	89
II. The Ramsa of the ferial days of "Raze"	93
III. The Ramsa of the simple ferial days of Lent	99

CHAPTER IV

PALM SUNDAY AND HOLY WEEK	103
I. Palm Sunday	103
II. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the Holy Week	105
III. Thursday of the Holy Week	107
IV. Passion Friday	108
V. Holy Saturday	110

CHAPTER V

EASTER AND PASCHAL TIME	114
I. The ferial days of the Easter Week	119
II. The Sundays after Easter	120
III. The Feast of Ascension	121

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CHAPTER VI

THE PERIODS OF APOSTLES AND SUMMER	123
I. The Sunday of the Pentecost	124
II. The Fridays and Sundays of the period of the Apostles	124
III. The Sunday of Nusardel and the period of Summer	128
IV. The 2nd—7th Sundays of Summer	130

CHAPTER VII

THE PERIOD OF ELIA AND MOSES	133
I. The period of Elia	133
II. The Feast of the Cross	139
III. The period of Moses	141

CHAPTER VIII

THE PERIOD OF THE DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH	144
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PART III

SOME PROBLEMS CONCERNING RAMSA

CHAPTER I

Incense, its oration and Hymn	152
2. Place of the prayers:	157
I. The beginning psalmody—9th Hour	157
II. Titles of Prayers	159
a) Concluding oration of the psalmody	159
b) Oration of Laku Mara	159
c) Concluding prayer of the vesperal psalms	159
d) The concluding prayer of ramsa	160
e) Oration of the onita d-basalige	160
f) Prayers after the 3rd Surraya	161
III. Surraye and Onyata	161

PREFACE

All are of opinion that the Chaldean Divine Office is quite ancient and beautiful. Three are the main services observed by the Chaldeans as canonical hours, namely Ramsa (evening service), Lelya (night service), and Sapra (Morning service).

The object of this study is the Chaldean vespers or evening service, called Ramsa. The Ramsa office is recited just before Sun-set and it is intended to offer thanks to God for our preservation during the day, and also for the coming night ordained for our repose. In it we like-wise implore the mercy of God for those errors, short-comings and follies, of which we have been guilty during the day.

This Book is divided into four parts. In the first part the general structure of ramsa is explained and in the second, the ramsa office of the whole liturgical year is analysed. In the third part we have tried to solve some problems concerning ramsa, and the fourth part is set apart to demonstrate the different schemes of ramsa. I have not entered into canonical or historical questions about ramsa, since it is not the scope of this study; yet some historical facts or events are given in brief where they seemed to be necessary. While explaining the different elements, some general terms like marmita, onita, suraya, tesbohta etc. are given as they are named in the syriac text itself. But where ever these terms are used for the first time, there I have given also the literal meaning or the explanations necessary. A good number of syriac passages of the ramsa office are given translated. This helps us to realize the richness and beauty of the syriac poetry, to understand their pastoral value and to perceive the suitability of the prayers for the different liturgical periods of the year.

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viii

Now it is with sincere gratitude that I remember the conversations I had with His Beatitude Paul II. Cheikho, the present Patriarch of the Chaldeans and with His Grace Mar Raphael Rabban, the Archbishop of Kerkuk, who encouraged me in this attempt. I express my sincere thanks to Rev. J Mateos, S J., the Professor of Liturgy in the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, who being competent in this field of work, directed this study, giving all possible helps needed. I am also very grateful to Very Rr. Fr Raes S. J., the former Rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute and the Prefect of the Pontifical "Bibliotheca Vaticana", for his valuable suggestions and encouragements given to undertake and complete this book. Likewise my thanks go to Very Rev Fr Placid, C M. I., for his good will and kindness to help me, mainly for the translation of the syriac passages.

I do not demand this work to be perfect in all its details. Some propositions may be changed, in the light of further evidences. All suggestions and proposals for ameliorations are always welcomed. Once again I thank and pray for all those who helped me for this study of the Chaldean Vespers.

Fr A. Sylvester Pudichery, C. M. I.,
Bangalore, 8th Sept. 1972

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- a -

Introduction

THE DIVINE OFFICE

The Divine Office of the Church is the most complete anthology, or library, of Christian thought in existence. It is the wheel, with the Mass as the hub. The psalms, hymns, canticles, readings from Scripture and also other prayers, provide a spiritual nourishment for all moods and for all climes of the Christian year. It is a deposite of ancient tradition with modern application.

In her wisdom the Church has provided her children with a shining example of how they should imbue with a spirit of prayer and at the same time has given a mighty means towards achieving this goal. By means of Divine Office each hour of the day receives its own special sanctification and consecration, so that the devout Christian, following the lead of the Mother Church, can orientate all his apostolic endeavours as well as his pains, pleasures, and peaceful repose towards the greater glory of God, he can insert his entire earthly existence, hour by hour, into the unending chorus of angels and saints who stand about the throne of the Almighty, exclaiming: 'holy, holy, holy'.

THE OFFICE AND THE MASS

The Office and the Mass form a unit: the liturgical day, "officium diei". The sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, and its grace-effects are begun, continued, and channelled off by means of the "sacrifice of praise". In a comprehensive view of this unit, the Mass begins at first, vespers of the preceding evening continues through leyla, sapra and other small hours while its graces are applied to the rest of the day as the remaining hours echo and hark back to the theme of praise and thanksgiving of the Eucharistic prayer. Thus the Office is the handmaid of the Queen the Mass, serving the core of Christian worship, its hours are like the surrounding stars and planets reflecting the glory, light and warmth of the sacrificial sun.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE OFFICE

If you ask what is the theology of the office we can say it is the voice of the spouse of Christ (Vox Ecclesiae), the voice of the

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- b -

Church By his very incarnation, our Lord, the Divine Word, says Pius XII: (1) "introduced into this earthly exile a hymn which is sung in heaven for all eternity He unites to Himself the whole human race and sings with it this hymn to the praise of God". Since we know not, how to pray of ourselves as we ought, "the spirit himself pleads for us with unutterable groanings". (2)

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

The Church is the sacrament of Christ. He is present in the world through the mystery of the Church, which reenacts His salvific deeds especially by the celebration of His Paschal mystery. The divine office is a particular aspect of this celebration. The liturgical Constitution (art. 83) of the Second Vatican Council, while speaking of the Divine Office says: "He (Christ) joins the entire community of mankind to himself, associating it with his own singing of this canticle of divine praise.

The mystical body is the continuation of Christ; to it Christ has bequeathed His mission and power of praising and adoring God. As Christ in His members, the Church must continue this canticle of praise which He began on earth. Christ pledged to His Church, as it were by a mystical marriage, all His riches, His merits, satisfactions, His precious Blood, His very divine personality. Thus the Church becomes His bride by this mystical marriage of priestly power and grace given her by Christ. In the voice of this mystical Brief we hear the voice of Christ. When the Church prays, the Father is infinitely pleased for He really hears the voice of His well beloved Son Jesus Christ. And so the Office is the official voice of the Spouse of Christ. By her faith, and most especially by her priestly union with Christ, the Church spans the abyss between God and creatures and sings His praises like the very Logos in the bosom of the Divinity. It is under God's gaze that, united to Christ, she sings that eternal canticle, and because of her union with Christ, on which is based her title of Bride, she merits always to be heard. Hence, when we recite the Divine Office we do not go before God as individuals with solely private interests and purely human praise. But we

(1) Mediator Dei N. 144

(2) Rom. 8, 26

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