

The Macomber Articles - A Brief Comment

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The study of the eastern liturgies is one of the more demanding of the various disciplines collected under the general heading Christian Oriental studies, for it requires a considerable knowledge of the ancient Christian languages, literatures and history. Of the individual language communities of the Christian Near East, the Syriac-speaking churches present the greatest challenge and the greatest interest. Syriac Christian literature is spread out in time, spanning more than 1700 years; and it is dispersed geographically through the Near East, China and India and, today, of course around the world.

Dr. William F. Macomber has made distinguished contributions to the study of the early Syriac liturgies. It is welcome news that the *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* has now reprinted two of his articles of special interest to its readers: "A History of the Chaldean Mass," *Worship*, Vol.51, No.2 (1977) 107-120, reprinted in JAAS vol. XI, No.2 (1997) 70-81, and "The Sources for a Study of the Chaldean Mass," *Worship*, Vol.51, No.6 (1977) 523-536, reprinted in this issue. Together, these articles provide a clear and concise historical overview of one of the earliest Syriac eucharistic liturgies associated with the Syriac-speaking Christians in the Persian empire, and surviving in part today in the liturgies of the Church of the East or the Nestorian Church, and in the liturgies of the Catholic Chaldeans of the Middle East and the Malabar Christians of Kerala, India.

The first article is a survey of the historical development of the Chaldean mass. The second article, reprinted in this current issue of the Journal, focuses on the literary and textual sources for the study of the Chaldean mass. Dr. Macomber introduces readers to the many ancient commentators on the Chaldean mass. Other source materials include the liturgical books used by the participants in this mass: The *Taksa*, *Hudra* and *Gazza*, psalter, and lectionaries.¹

Although some twenty years have passed since their original publication, Dr. William Macomber's articles remain the best English language introduction to the Chaldean mass. It is good to see them in print again.

¹ More than a few of the manuscripts for the documentary sources listed by Macomber can be consulted here in United States. See, e.g., M.H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library: A Catalogue* (Harvard Semitic Studies, 23; Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, c1979); and S.H. Griffith & M.J. Blanchard, "Henri Hyvernat (1958-1941) and the Beginning of Syriac Studies at The Catholic University of America," *ARAM* 5 (1993) 181-196