

The Anaphora of Addai and Mari and the Architecture of the Chaldean Church

General Introduction

The liturgy reflects the faith, tradition, and teaching of the Church, and helps to consolidate its identity and character. The Chaldean term “**Taksa**” (ܬܟܣܐ) is used in our Church, which means *order*, and the term “**Teshmeshta**” (ܬܝܫܡܝܫܬܐ), to indicate the *service*, in reference to this journey that deepens the life of the Christian believer in prayer, so that prayer becomes a source of life within him, and his entire life becomes a continuous liturgy.

The Chaldean liturgy is among most ancient liturgies of the Church. It is simple and clear liturgy, that is formed to be the liturgy of people. It has been strongly influenced by the Jewish liturgy of Jerusalem. More precisely, it is a Judeo-Christian liturgy and preserves one of the oldest Anaphora (Eucharistic prayers), namely the **Anaphora of Addai and Mari (3rd century)**. The structure and architecture of the Chaldean Church also resemble the Temple of Jerusalem: The *Bema*, the veil, and the spirit of reverence for the sacraments.

To deepen the spirit of prayer and its significant in the lives of the faithful, and to make the liturgy a source of hope and joy, the Chaldean liturgical year is divided into stages that reflect the life of Jesus and the life of the Church: **Annunciation (Advent), Nativity (Christmas), Epiphany, Lent, Resurrection (Easter), Pentecost, and the Season of the Church (Apostolic Mission)**.

While the seasons of **Summer, Elijah, the Cross, and Moses** are seasons of repentance, the year concludes with the **Sanctification of the Church**. Each season includes seven Sundays, interspersed with commemorations of saints.

The purpose of this arrangement is to help the faithful orient themselves toward the eternity. Chaldeans believe that if they follow Christ and the saints, they may hope to reach the same destiny attained by Jesus. The Chaldean Church has three Eucharistic prayers (**Anaphora**): **First**: Addai and Mari; **the second** (attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia †428); **and the third** (attributed to Nestorius †450).

In this course we will study the **Anaphora of Addai and Mari** and its connection with the original architecture of the Chaldean Church.

Part One: What is the Anaphora?

The word *Anaphora* (ἀναφορά) literally means: **lifting – offering – ascent**. It refers to the specific part of the Mass in which the bread and wine are consecrated into the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. It is the essential part of the Divine Sacrifice. This term is used by the Byzantines as well as all Eastern Antiochian traditions (today called Syriac). In our tradition, the word “**Qudasha**” (ܩܘܕܝܫܐ) is also applied to this part, so that the name extends to the whole Eucharistic celebration that is called *Qudasha* (the Mass).

There is some difference in the understanding of the Anaphora between Western and Eastern theology.

In the West, the weight is often on the moment of consecration and the words of forming, with the key question being: *When exactly did the transformation happen?*

In Eastern theology, especially in the theology of our Church, the Anaphora is **not a single moment but a whole journey**.

It is not limited to the question: *When do the bread and wine transform?* but the deeper question is: *How does the whole Church enter into the mystery of salvation?*

The Eastern rite does not separate thanksgiving, creation, redemption, the Holy Spirit, and the Church, because they all move together within the Anaphora. In the East, the focus is on the **Holy Spirit, the Father, and the journey**. Therefore, our Eastern theology stresses that: “The Church participated in the work of the Spirit, the Father accepted the offering, and the Son is present in the sacrament.”

Thus, the Anaphora is not merely a stage within Mass, but the Core **heart of the Mass**, the moment in which the Church entirely enters the act of salvation.

The structure and arrangement of the Anaphora vary from one tradition to another and one Church to another, according to the theological vision and spiritual emphasises in which each Church or tradition seeks to express.

The Anaphora therefore forms the essence of the Mass, however there are other parts that together constitute what we now call the Mass. We will first examine the Chaldean Mass in its structure, order, and theology, and then focus on the Anaphora of Addai and Mari to understand the original architecture of the Chaldean Church.

Part Two: The Structure of the Chaldean Mass

When discussing the Chaldean Mass, we must consider its entirety, rather than from a single perspective. It is necessary to seek understanding for how this Mass was formed and developed, as well the foundational principals underlying it, then we will be able to attain a full and accurate understanding to our Mass.

We will start by briefly outlining the general meaning of the Mass, the Eucharistic Theology, then turn to the theological significant of our Mass, and conclude by examining its structure so we may have deeper and experiential comprehension.

A. The Eucharist as a “Sacrament- mystery”

The implication of “sacrament” in the Divine Mass is both intrinsic and fundamental. It denotes the sacred truth. One that expresses and fulfils the sacred truth, to become a concrete reality unfolding in time and history.

The Eucharist is one of the seven sacraments of the Church. It is the memorial of the Last Supper that the Lord Jesus celebrated with His disciples, in which He gave the believers His Body and Blood under the forms of bread and wine. When the faithful celebrate the Eucharist, they re-live that Last Supper, and Christ becomes present among them under the forms of bread and wine.

The Eucharist is thus a true sacrament because Christ is fully present within it. It is not simply a *recollection*, but a ‘*memory*’ in the fullest sense of, enacted fulfillment. Using the word (memory) is often used to indicate some events that we know and been saved in our mind, the one we may recall whenever needed, yet in this context, memory does not refer merely to mentally recalling past events, but to a past event made alive now, lived in the present full of power.

The memory in this perspective signifies a truth that becomes alive within the person, allowing him to embody it and bring it into his present reality. In turn, the person participates and is enlivened by the truth; Therefore, this is a twofold process: the truth that is actualized in the person, and the person who lives through with the truth.

Accordingly, within the sacrament of the Eucharist, the faithful receive this Body and Blood of Christ, they bring Him to live within themselves and bear witness that the salvific work of Christ remains active. Through this participation, they become one community, forming one body, the Body of Jesus Christ who began the work of salvation, and His current living Body (the Church) who continues that redemptive mission in the world (Rom 12:1–9).

Christ, the Holy Son of God, offers His Body in the Eucharist; therefore, all who receive Him are consecrated, for Christ Himself is the source of their holiness. Thus, the Eucharist is a true sacrament as it consecrates those who participate in it by filling them with Christ, making them a *dwelling place* (Mishkna) of Christ, through whom He continues His work in the world today.

B. The Chaldean Mass

There are several foundations that form the Chaldean Mass:

1. **The theological foundation:** the heart of the Mass, the consecration (*Qudasha* or Anaphora), begins after the Creed “*We believe*”, specifically from “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ... “until “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ... ”* before (Let us approach with fear...)
2. **The structural order:** the beginning, the journey, and the conclusion (to be discussed under Church architecture).

The theology:

There are two fundamental theological dimensions within the Chaldean Mass: **The theological foundation** and **The theological plan**.

1. The Theological Foundation

The theological foundation of our Mass is deeply rooted in the **Pauline theology**, remarkably the teaching of St. Paul, when he proclaims that all believers are on a journey toward meeting with the Lord, and that our present life serves as the **pledge** (ܐܪܒܘܢܐ *arrabon*) of the life to come (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14).

Accordingly, the East “*the source of light*” symbolizes the source of life, which is Christ. And the rising of the light reveals the truth of the Lord. For this reason, during the Mass, the community faces East, toward the Light from which life” **Christ**” comes.

2. The Theological Plan

Building on the theological foundation oriented toward the East, grounded in the Pauline theology of the *Pledge (arrabon)*, the structure of the Mass follows the pattern of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24**):

The Procession – The Word of God – The Breaking of the Bread – The Mission.

- **The entrance procession** (Unveiling the curtain with the words: (“**كجی قڈز**” “*To You, O Lord of all*”) which signifies the union of the two worlds, heavenly and earthly, through Christ) “He began to walk with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him” (Luke 24:15). So, how would they recognize Him? First, through the explanation of the words, then the interpretation the Word of God
- **Liturgy of the Word:** “Then He begun with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).
- **Consecration:** “He went in to stay with them. When He was at the table with them, He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them; then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him” (Luke 24:29–31).
- **Communion and Sending Forth:** “At that moment they got up and returned to Jerusalem... and told what had happened on the road, and how He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:33–35).

Here, we can observe the connection between the concept of sending forth and the season of announcement as the beginning of the Chaldean liturgical year. The season of Annunciation marks the beginning of the era of salvation, through the announcement of the birth of John, and the announcement of the birth of the Lord Jesus, as well as the birth of the Lord Jesus, together with the start of the proclamation of the believer in the world, after received the Lord in Communion.

Proclamation is central to Christian faith in general, and to our Church in particular. Christianity cannot exist without it: to *proclaim* is to receive the Good News, and to *evangelize* is to announce it to others.

This principle is fully embodied in the Chaldean Mass. Understanding this theological foundation is therefore essential for grasping all other dimensions of the liturgy.

Part Three: The Anaphora of Addai and Mari

A. The Anaphora in Chaldean Eastern Understanding

In the Chaldean rite, the Anaphora constitutes the Core **heart of the Mass**, the moment in which the Church entirely enters the act of salvation. The understanding of the Chaldean Church, rooted in the Eastern tradition, it is not merely a set of “words of consecration,” but the ascent of the Church to the Father with Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

In the Chaldean liturgical spirit and language, the Anaphora is first an act of offering before being an act of receiving. Before the Body and Blood are given, creation, history, suffering, hope, and the Church herself are offered.

Therefore, the Chaldean rite places the Anaphora after:

- Proclamation of the Word
- Profession of faith
- Reconciliation and peace

As if the Church says: we cannot raise the offering unless we are reconciled.

B. Its Antiquity and Importance

The Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari is the **most ancient Eucharistic prayer still in continuous use** in the East Syriac tradition. This Anaphora preserves a distinctly Semitic language echoing the prayer forms of the Old Testament is characterized by the centrality of the **epiclesis** (invocation of the Holy Spirit). Although its earliest form lacks an explicit narrative of the words of the Last Supper as formulated in later liturgical traditions, the Catholic Church officially recognized its validity in 2001, affirming that the words of Christ are present in a Eucharistic ecological manner throughout the prayers of Thanksgiving, glory and commemorations.

First: The Historical Background of the Anaphora

The Anaphora of the Apostles **Addai and Mari** belongs to the most ancient liturgical strata of the Church. Scholars widely concur that its original milieu was **Mesopotamia**, within a Semitic Christian context rooted in the Chaldean language and early Judeo-Christian culture. It most likely arose in the region of **Edessa** or nearby Christian centres, where apostolic traditions blended with the Semitic spirit of prayer.

Its earliest composition is usually dated to the **third century**, possibly even slightly earlier, making it one of the oldest Anaphora used continuously throughout history.

- **Earliest Manuscript Witnesses**

The earliest extant complete text is preserved in the **Manuscript of Mar Isaiah** housed in Mosul, dating from (**10th–11th century**). Analysis of this manuscript reveals the absence of a continuous “institution narrative” specifically, the words attributed the Last Supper (“This is my Body... This is the cup of my Blood...”) are not presented as a unified quotation. Nevertheless, the fundamental liturgical structure is fully retained: encompassing the praise of God the Father, commemoration of salvation history, and invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the offerings and the community. This evidence indicates that the core structure remained complete and effective despite differences in literary form.

Second: The Structure of the Anaphora as Reflected in the Sources

The Chaldean texts reveal that the Anaphora of Addai and Mari is not merely a sequence of prayers, but a **spiritual journey** that lifts the community from daily life into the presence of God, then sends them back to carry His grace into the world. This ascending movement has clear stages:

1. The Lifting of Hearts

The Anaphora begins with the deacon’s and priest’s call: “**Lift up your hearts.**”

(ܒܫܘܚܐ ܫܘܚܘܢܝܢ... ܫܘܚܘܢܝܢ ܫܘܚܘܢܝܢ ܫܘܚܘܢܝܢ ܫܘܚܘܢܝܢ)

This simple expression opens the way into a new horizon, where the community leaves earthly concerns and turns upward. It proclaims that the liturgy is not mere words, but a communal ascent into the presence of the Father.

2. Thanksgiving and Praise

Following the lifting of hearts, the prayer unfolds into comprehensive act of thanksgiving to God, the **Creator** who gave existence and the **Redeemer** who saved humanity. This is the literal meaning of *Eucharist* (thanksgiving). The Church deepens not on a single event, but the entire history of creation and salvation fulfilled in Christ.

3. The Sanctus: “Holy, Holy, Holy”

With the Sanctus, marks the liturgical entry to the communion with the angels. The faithful do not pray alone; rather, they are united with the choirs of heaven, who unceasingly acclaim before the throne. The earthly celebration becomes a foretaste of heavenly worship, where time meets eternity and earth meets heaven.

4. Commemorations

Subsequently, the liturgy proceeds to the commemoration of the Fathers, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Martyrs, and all who have faithfully lived the life of faith. In this act, the Church consciously recognizes itself as a continuation of the salvific history, understanding that it is not an isolated assembly but part of a long procession of believers who have gone before. The commemorations thus function to connect the present with opening it toward the future.

5. The Epiclesis (Invocation of the Holy Spirit)

The prayer reaches its summit in the invocation of the Holy Spirit: “**May Your Holy Spirit come and dwell upon this offering, bless and sanctify it.**” In this stage, the Church understands that the transformation of the gifts is not affected by human words alone, but by the action of the Spirit, who makes the bread and wine the Body and Blood of Christ and simultaneously transforms the assembly into the living Body of Christ. Here, the profound meaning of the Eucharist is articulated: the sacrament of the Spirit working both within the material elements and within the gathered community.

Throughout these stages, however, it has consistently preserved its core: **thanksgiving, remembrance, and invocation** the foundation that supports its identity as a genuinely apostolic and living prayer in the Church to this day.

Rabban Gabriel ben Levi of Qatar, who composed a commentary on the Mass of the Church of the East (written between the years 615–625), states that the foundation of the substantial transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ lies in the words spoken by Jesus at His Last Supper. He says: “He blessed the bread and broke it, then blessed the wine and gave it to them, saying: This is My Body, this is My Blood. Take, eat, and drink from it, all of you. Do this in remembrance of Me...”¹196a¹

Gabriel of Qatar continues: “Thus the Church, in obedience to the command of the Lord, sets apart a priest to bless and give thanks in the manner of Christ our Lord; and through his recitation he indicates the words of our Lord: *This is My Body, which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins.*” 199b

It is incumbent upon the priest to complete this solemn service, knowing that he stands in the place of Christ at that hour, when he blesses and gives thanks” (200a). “The blessing with which our Lord blessed the bread and the wine and called them His Body and His Blood behold, it continues throughout all ages; it will never cease.”

Therefore, Gabriel of Qatar states that the substantial transformation in the Mass takes place through the Words of Consecration pronounced by the priest and through the signs of the Cross that he traces over the offerings; and the substantial transformation is completed through the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the offerings. (*When the priest recites and blesses the bread and the wine, by the grace of the Holy Spirit who descends, they become from that moment onward the Body and Blood of Christ...*) (199b).

This interpretation of the Mass of the Church of the East was composed by Gabriel of Qatar before the liturgical reform carried out by Patriarch **Isho‘yahb III** (649–659). He explicitly mentions the existence of the “Words of Consecration” and that the celebrating priest pronounces them, whereby the bread and wine are blessed and, through the descent of the Holy Spirit, become the Body and Blood of the Lord. Therefore, we conclude that the narrative words were indeed present.

Bishop Jacob Ishaq, *Explanation of the Divine Liturgy of the Chaldean–Assyrian Church of the East*, critical edition and ¹ Arabic translation, Baghdad, 2012.

However, scholars rely on its absence in the oldest manuscript of the Mass that has reached us, the Manuscript of **Mar Isaiah** to argue that the original Anaphora did not contain the narrative words.

We believe that the words were present, and it is possible that the liturgical reform carried out by Patriarch Isho‘yahb III either removed them or caused them not to be written in manuscripts because of their sacredness, or for other unknown reasons. Their absence in the mentioned manuscript is therefore not conclusive proof that they did not originally exist.

Fourth: Its Distinctive Characteristics

The Anaphora of Addai and Mari possess several features that make it unique:

1. Absence of a Continuous Institution Narrative

Unlike most Eastern and Western Anaphora, Addai and Mari does not contain a continuous narrative of the Last Supper in its earliest form. This is not seen as a deficiency, but as evidence of primitive authenticity, emphasizing Eucharist as a living act of thanksgiving and invocation rather than a single verbal formula. This endows the Anaphora with special historical and theological significance, highlighting that the essence of the Eucharist resides in the communal action of the assembly, empowered by the Spirit, rather than in a single isolated formula.

2. Orientation to the Father.

The Chaldean texts are addressed primarily to **God the Father**, all supplications orient to Him the source of all gifts and salvation, while the Son is remembered as **Redeemer** and the Holy Spirit **invoked as Sanctifier** of the assembly and the offers. This fatherly orientation, with the presence of the Son and the Holy Spirit placed the Anaphora within a balanced **Trinitarian structure**. The Trinitarian structure reveals the divine will in its full unity.

The texts indicate that the primary addressee of the Anaphora is God the Father: it is to Him that the offerings are presented, and from Him the invocation of the Holy Spirit is requested to sanctify both the gifts and the assembly. However, the Son is consistently present within the text, acknowledged as the one sent by the Father for the redemption of the world and as the Word who taught and proclaimed salvation.

The Holy Spirit, in turn, is referred to effect transformation and sanctification. In this way, the Anaphora reveals a Trinitarian structure while maintaining a fundamentally paternal orientation, in continuity with the pattern observed in most Eastern Anaphora.

3. Centrality of Epiclesis

The invocation of the Holy Spirit is the living heart of the Anaphora. That Church affirms its acknowledgement to the Eucharistic transformation as an act of the Spirit, rather than a mere work of human words. This stage is where the faithful communion meets with divine sacrament: the Holy Spirit sanctifies the offerings and transforms the community into the Body of the Christ. This vision makes (Addai and Mari) a living theological school about the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.

4. Semitic Language

The Anaphora uses a deeply rooted Semitic Chaldean language, reflects the historical link between the Old and New Testaments. The invocation, *“To You, O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,”* directly recalls the blessings of the Fathers and the Jewish *Berakhot* prayers. In this way, the Eucharist is situated within the continuum of salvation history, demonstrating that Christ did not come to sever the past but to fulfill the covenant and incorporate the Church into the depth of a unified salvific narrative.

Part Four: Structure of the Anaphora

The Anaphora follows the pattern of Jesus acts on the Last Supper:

Took bread → Offering

Blessed (said the blessing prayer) → Sanctification

Broke → Signing and breaking

Gave to His Disciples → Communion

(cf. Matt 26:17–29; Mark 14:12–26; 1 Cor 11:23–27)

Thus, the Anaphora in the Chaldean Mass has four principal parts, Each contains several elements.

- **The Offering**

This stage includes the washing of the hands of the one presenting the sacrifice in preparation for carrying the gifts. Then the offerings are transferred, accompanied by the **Hymn of the Mysteries**. This hymn varies according to the liturgical seasons and in every Mass presents the sacrament of the Holy Offering in its various aspects, inviting the faithful to reflection and preparation to receive it with purity of conscience.

After the transfer of the offerings, there is the greeting and prostration before the priest as a sign of his sacred role. Previously there was also a procession from the *Bema* to the Holy of Holies, followed by the Creed and the intercessions (“Let us pray, peace be with us...”), after which the transition took place from the Holy of Holies to the altar.

- **The Sanctification**

The Rite of Sanctification begins with the Pauline greeting: “**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...**” (2 Cor 13:13).

This is followed by a liturgical dialogue between the celebrant and the faithful, succeeded by supplications and the Prayer of the Second Inclination, recited by the priest after he kisses the altar, bows, and extends his hands. The liturgy then proceeds with the chanting of the *Sanctus* (“Holy, Holy, Holy...”), followed, in contemporary practice, by the narrative of the Last Supper, additional prayers of supplication, and the Prayer of the bowing, culminating in the invocation of the Holy Spirit for the sanctification of the gifts.

- **The Fraction Rite (Fractio Panis)- Signing and Breaking.**

Following the Sanctification of the offerings, the faithful prepare to receive Communion; however, this is preceded by the Fraction Rite. In these rites, the priest approaches the offerings with profound reverence, elevates them while reciting silent prayers, and then breaks the Holy Bread, symbolizing the Passion and Death of Christ.

The Signing that follows involves the priest dipping one half of the Host three times into the chalice and marking the other half with the Blood of the Lord, thereby signifying the bodily, spiritual, and divine unity of Christ.

- **The Rite of Communion**

Following the Fraction Rite, the celebrant priest blesses the faithful using the Pauline greeting salutation that initially opened the Anaphora. This serves as an indication of the beginning of a new liturgical stage: by repeating the opening salutation, the Anaphora signals the conclusion of the preceding rites while simultaneously embracing what has occurred and what is about to follow, creating a sense of liturgical continuity and cohesion.

Mar Narsai connects this blessing with the Resurrection of Christ and its graces. The priest traces the sign of the Cross not only upon himself but above his head and shoulders so the faithful may see and share this blessing and the grace of the Resurrection.

Then the deacon proclaims: **“Let us approach with fear and reverence,”** urging the faithful to prepare themselves worthily to approach the Holy Table.

Then follow prayers before and after the **Our Father**, followed by the proclamation **“Holy things are suitable for the holy ones”** to which the people respond, **“One Holy Father...”**. The celebrant then communicates, followed by the clergy and faithful.

At the end of Communion there is the hymn **“Maran Isho...”**, followed by two prayers before the final blessing, which sends the faithful forth to proclaim and live what they have received.

Theological Conclusion

The call **“Lift up your thoughts to the heights”** in the Chaldean Spirituality that comes at the beginning of the Anaphora is not merely a formal shift or call for silence, but an **existential transformation**.

Lifting the mind means leaving earthly attachments, divisions, and inner deliberations. One who does not lift his mind cannot enter the Anaphora, even if he hears its words.

The Anaphora of Addai and Mari, represents a unique ecclesial example, and is considered as the oldest in the Church: it does not focus on one moment or a specific formula, but on a continuous and connected act of thanksgiving and invocation.

Its focus is not on a single moment, nor on a specific formula of institution; rather, it emphasizes a prolonged and continuous act of thanksgiving and invocation.

In the Chaldean Liturgy, the Holy Spirit is not an addition but the Mighty Actor. The Anaphora is a prayer to inhabit the Holy Spirit only on the offerings, but also on the church, the Holy Mass does not sanctify the bread and wine only but also the Church.

Accordingly, the Anaphora is not the action of the priest alone but the action of the entire Church. Within the Chaldean spiritual tradition, the priest does not “make the sacrament” but presides over the Church’s prayer. The faithful respond, pray, and stand with reverence, while the deacons coordinate the rhythm of the liturgy, call attention to key moments, and uphold the sacred worship of the celebration.

The Anaphora is the action of the entire Body, not of an individual. It teaches the Chaldean faithful that the Eucharist is not a mere “thing” to be received but a life in which they are elevated with Christ. The assembly approaches the altar not merely as recipients but as active participants in the Son’s offering to the Father.

In summary, in the Chaldean rite the Anaphora is:

- The ascent of the Church to the Father
- An act of thanksgiving before sanctification
- The Holy Spirit as the Mighty Actor
- The Church is Sanctified with the offerings
- Eucharist is Communion, not a technical moment

In one phrase: **the Anaphora in the Chaldean liturgy is the place where the Church becomes Church.**

The distinctiveness of the “Addai and Mari Anaphora” lies in its noble, authentic style and its simple language, evocative of biblical blessings. The invocation of the Holy Spirit is its vital core, while the prayers are addressed to God the Father, the source of every gift, with acknowledgment of the Son and His salvific work, and the Spirit’s descent as the completer of sanctification. The absence of an obvious account of institution does not lessen its significance; rather, it highlights an original primitivity, reminding us that the Eucharist is not confined to a single moment or fixed formula, but constitutes a complete liturgical journey of thanksgiving, praise, remembrance, and invocation.

Part Five: The Architecture of the Chaldean Church

Every element in the church; its architecture, structure, movements, and liturgical actions serves the theological formation of the Mass in its fullest. From entrance procession to

gestures, prayers, inclinations, and the order of rites, all are directed toward this purpose and intention.

1. Church Architecture

The original architecture of our churches, which regrettably we have lost, was shaped according to the liturgical structure of the Mass. The architectural design of the Church in our tradition was developed in close correspondence with the development of liturgical rites. A proper understanding to the structural design of the early Chaldean church is essential for fully comprehending the Eucharistic celebration.

Our churches were originally constructed with an eastward orientation, so that the entire structure of the Church is oriented towards the East. During the Eucharistic celebration, the assembly, together with the celebrant, also faces the East, so that the direction of both priest and people is aligned towards the East, the source of the light, why?

Because it reflects the dynamic of the faithful's journey toward life in Christ, who Himself moves toward us, as noted earlier in the discussion of the theological foundation. In this framework, Christ is not merely present among us as emphasized in Western theology but there is a reciprocal movement: we approach Him, and He comes forth towards us.

But differently, a dual dynamic is at work: Christ is present among us, yet He is also oriented toward us. He is complete in Himself yet continually imparting His fullness into the life of the assembly.

The original design of our Church in fact reflects both the theological concept of the Mass and Eastern Christian understanding of God and the Church's role in the world. It was influenced by the Temple of Jerusalem (Holy of Holies, veil, and the concept of sacrament), reflects the hidden aspect of faith, or the sacred nature of God.

At the same time, the influence of Eastern tradition more specifically, the cultural heritage of Mesopotamia is evident in this architectural design. The dome above the altar evokes the form of the ziggurats, functioning as a symbolic of approaching the divine.

It is noteworthy that the earliest small churches were constructed beneath a single large dome. The theological significance of this design is that the entire church is in direct contact with the grace of God; in other words, God approaches His people with His blessing wherever the faithful are gathered in His name.

As architectural concepts developed and the need for larger churches arose, the design of the church developed accordingly. The dome was then placed solely above the altar, signifying that the grace of God descends upon the altar, sanctifying it, and through it is distributed to the church represented by the nave and ultimately to the world. This theological vision is reflected in the traditional giving of the sign of peace, which originates at the altar and is extended to all the faithful.

The entrance to the church building is typically through a small external door, featuring a high threshold and a low ceiling, requiring the entrant to bow. This architectural feature serves as a reminder of the humility expected of all who enter the house of God and emphasizes that all are equal upon entering this sacred space

The Courtyard and Auxiliary Spaces

A. House of Prayer- Oratory:

On the eastern side of the church courtyard is a structure known as the (House of Prayer or Oratory) used for the morning and evening prayers. Liturgically, it also serves for the first part of the Mass, the liturgy of the Word, particularly during the summer season. Liturgically, from the eve of the Feast of the Ascension until the eve of the first Sunday of the Church's consecration.

B. The Vigilantes Quarters:

On the opposite side of the (Oratory) is a room known as the *Bēt al-Suhād* (Vigilantes Quarters- the house of vigil). This space was occupied by the vigilantes, the devout who practiced nocturnal prayer, maintaining a night-long vigil in devotion to God.

C. Baptistry:

Is a small room adjacent to the altar on the southern side and attached to the (Oratory). This room contained a small altar or table upon which the cross and the Gospel were placed during baptisms. In the right-hand corner of the room is the baptismal font, underscoring its liturgical function within the sacramental life of the church.

D. The Temple:

The general temple of the church is rectangular, representing the nave as a symbol of the earthly world. Within this structure, designated spaces were assigned for men surrounding the Bema on both sides up to the front of the Altar and for women, with separate entrances for each.

On the left wall of the temple², the relics of the saints and martyrs were preserved. During the morning and evening prayers, a procession would be conducted to these relics by the clergy and deacons, accompanied by the chanting of the martyr hymns in the morning and evening prayers.

The (Bēma)

The **Bema**, raised in the centre, this area is slightly elevated above the level of the nave floor. represents the Church the **earthly Jerusalem**, since the people back then believed that Jerusalem is the centre of the world,³ linking heaven and earth (what the Alter symbolises). In this Bema the Mass starts until the **(Creed)** where the celebrant stands with some deacons with procession to the Alter to continue the Mass. The clergy also seat in it during the morning and evening prayers (Sabra and Ramsha).

Within the *bēma* several liturgical furnishings were present. **There were two lecterns**: the **right** lectern was designated for readings from the Old Testament, and the **left** lectern for readings from the New Testament.

A small wooden platform in the centre, known as the (Calvary- Golgotha), held the cross and the Gospel, placed upon it, facing the people, so that they might bow before them and kiss them upon entering the bema.

At the western centre opposite the altar and facing the cross stood the bishop's throne. To his left sat the archdeacon (the chief of the church ministers) while the priests were seated around them in a semicircular arrangement.

The celebrant of the Eucharist initially sat among the clergy in the *bēma*. Following the petitions (*Karozutha*) after the Gospel reading and sermon, the archdeacon would designate a priest to perform the consecration. At this point, the celebrant stood and made

The directions discussed in this research are understood from the perspective of a person standing in the church, looking ²
toward the altar
Ezekiel 5:5 ³

three profound bows toward the bishop and the priests on both sides before proceeding with the procession alongside the deacons to the altar.

The **Shqaqona**:

The *bēma* is connected to the sanctuary (*Holy of Holies*) by a narrow passage known as the *Shqaqūnā* (the “little alley”). This passage is used by the clergy to move between the sanctuary and the *bēma* at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word and when carrying the Gospel. It is also used to return from the *bēma* to the sanctuary for the recitation of the Creed and the commencement of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The *Shqaqūnā* symbolizes the narrow path leading to heaven- the sanctuary- and signifies that heaven is connected to the earthly world through the Church, represented by the *bēm*.

The Holy of Holies (The sanctuary)

The Holy of Holies is the place that contains the altar in addition to several other elements:

a. **Qestruma**:

A wide step on which the readers of the Old Testament and the assisting deacons (the Epistle deacons) stand. The Qestruma symbolizes Paradise, which is connected to heaven because it is linked to the Holy of Holies; yet it remains part of the earthly world because it is connected to the nave of the church.

b. **The Door and the Veil of the Holy of Holies**:

The Holy of Holies is closed by a large double door and is also concealed by a large veil. This veil is opened during the Mass at the hymn *Lakho Mara*. The opening of the door and the veil at this moment symbolizes the union of heaven the Holy of Holies with the earth (the nave of the church) during the celebration of the Mass.⁴

c. **Qanki**:

The large door leads to the *Qanki*, which is the space before the altar and symbolizes heaven. In the past it was illuminated by a lamp hanging from the centre of the dome of

The only church that still retains this door is the Holy Chaldean Church in Mosul ⁴

the Holy of Holies. This lamp marked the boundary beyond which the Epistle deacons were not permitted to pass when entering the Holy of Holies. The Gospel deacons, however, were allowed to reach the steps of the altar.

d. The Altar:

The altar was attached to the eastern wall of the church, and only the priest was permitted to ascend it. Upon it were placed the Cross and the Gospel.

e. The Treasury:

A small cabinet on the southern side of the Holy of Holies where the sacred vessels were kept, namely the chalice and the paten.

Beth Diacon (Sacristy)

On the northern side (or wall) of the altar there is a door leading to a small room called “**Beth Diacon**” (Sacristy). In it the offerings the bread and wine for the Mass were prepared. For this reason, it contained an oven for baking the Eucharistic bread, which was prepared on the same day the Divine Sacrifice was celebrated.

The Chape of Martyrs

In the nave of the church, around opposite the *Bema* on the northern side, there was a door leading to a room called “**The Chape of Martyrs**” or “**The Chape of the Saints.**”

This room preserved the relics of the martyrs and the saints, and within it the prayers of the martyrs were recited on the days of the celebration of their feast.

2. Liturgical Movements

Everything movement preformed within the Mass has a specific purpose, they are not merely for devotional expression. Therefore, every movement must be performed with the spirit of the Mass. Moving during the Mass without embodying and serving the purpose of the Mass is, in fact, a distraction for the people and a disturbance to the spirit of the Mass.

We will clarify some basic movements that are still present, which accompany the structure of the Anaphora or the Mass, as well as the church architecture.

- The Entrance

During “**Lakho Mara**” there used to be a procession from the Holy of Holies to the Bema, led by priests, deacons, the cross-bearer, the two candle-bearers, and the thurifer -Perma. During the procession they chanted the hymn of the Holy of Holies, and then “**Lakho Mara.**” The priests used to stand in the Holy of Holies, while the deacons stood on the Qestruma. When the Archdeacon gave the signal to open the veil, the procession would begin and move toward the Bema. Upon arrival, the bishop would ascend the Bema and sit on his throne, and the priests would take their seats around him. The deacons would stand on the Shqaqona, and the epistle deacons- subdeacons would return to the Qestruma.

This procession carrying the Gospel and the Cross to the Bema at the time of chanting “**Lakho Mara**” indicates: first the beginning of the Mass, and that heaven has been united with earth through the Church, which the Bema represents.

Today we still perform this procession, but without the veil, and we do it from outside the church rather than from the Holy of Holies toward the Bema, because the Bema no longer exists.

- The Beginning of the Anaphora

Currently, after the celebrant says, “**We believe**” he makes three inclinations while on the way to the altar. Previously we used to make three inclinations toward each side while facing the people, before turning and going to the altar. The people faced inclinations were in fact originally done in the Bema. After the Archdeacon appointed the priest celebrant, that priest would bow to the bishop in the centre and to the priests on both sides, then begin the procession toward the altar to begin the Anaphora.

The anonymous author⁵ notes the practice of mutual embraces among the priests within the *bēma*, accompanied by gestures of reverence. Since the act of sanctification is considered a solemn and weighty action, the priests embrace the celebrant before he

⁵ It is a precious commentary entitled ‘*Presentation of the Church Rites*’, authored by an unknown writer and dating back to the ninth century. The book provides an important liturgical overview for the entire liturgical year and other rites, with particular attention to the festive Divine Liturgy. It was translated into Arabic by Father Elbert Abouna and published in Ankawa in 2017 as part of the publications of the Chaldean Diocese of Erbil.

proceeds to the sanctuary. As he moves toward the sanctuary, the deacons bow before him and kiss his hand, as do the faithful.

Along the way, the celebrant makes three profound inclinations while reciting a silent prayer, expressing both amazement and joy at entering the sanctuary and approaching the altar. Upon reaching the altar, he kisses it three times, further expressing reverence, joy, respect, and humility.

- Bows and inclinations (*Gehantā*) connected to the prayers.

At the beginning of each prayer of *Gehantā*, the celebrant must bow, kiss the altar, and recite the prayer with hands extended upon or toward the altar. These gestures are foundational in the Anaphora, both establishing and revealing the sacramental mystery.

The blessing of the hands and face with incense follows the sanctification, preparing the priest for the following Rite of Breaking and blessing. This ritual purification prepares him for his first contact with the sacred gifts during the liturgical actions of the Eucharist.

- Incensing the Hands and Face

After the conclusion of the sanctification comes the Rite of Communion, preceded by the Rite of the Breaking and Blessing. Here the priest incenses his hands and face so that he may be ready for the Rite of the Breaking and Blessing, because he is about to touch the Holy Things for the first time.

- The Final Blessing

After reciting the two prayers before the blessing, the priest proceeds to the door of the sanctuary and stands on the right-hand side to pronounce the concluding blessing. In this blessing, he enumerates the spiritual fruits that the faithful have received from the Mass, particularly the reception of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the forgiveness of sins, and the grace to please God through their words, thoughts, and deeds. It also invokes the strength for steadfast pursuit of holiness and expresses firm hope in the glory of the Resurrection.

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