

Consecration of Holy Myron: Frequently Asked Questions

1.) How many times has Holy Myron been consecrated in Malankara?

The most recent (3 April, 2009, at Devalokam Aramana Chapel) consecration was the ninth instance. Syriac Patriarchs consecrated Holy Myron in 1876 and 1911, respectively by Patriarch Ignatius Peter IV (27 August, 1876) and Patriarch Ignatius Abdullah II Satuff (19 August, 1911). Mulanthuruthy Marthoman Church was the venue on both occasions. After the Catholicate was relocated in 1912, Catholicos Baselius Geevarghese II consecrated Holy Myron twice at the Old Seminary Chapel (22 April, 1932, and 20 April, 1951). Catholicos Baselius Augen I consecrated the Holy Myron once on 21 December, 1967, again at the Old Seminary Chapel. Catholicos Baselius Marthoma Mathews I consecrated the Holy Myron twice (1 April, 1977, and 25 March, 1988), the first instance at the Old Seminary Chapel and on the second occasion at the Devalokam Aramana Chapel. Catholicos Baselius Marthoma Mathews II consecrated the Holy Myron once on 26 March, 1999, at the Devalokam Aramana Chapel.

2.) Are there any other instances of Holy Myron consecration in Malankara?

Yes. Patriarch Zakka I Iwas of the Syriac Church has consecrated the Holy Myron for the breakaway Jacobite faction twice at Manarcaud St Mary's Church (27 February, 1982) and Marthomen Cheriyaipalli, Kothamangalam (25 September, 2004).

3.) Who can consecrate the Holy Myron?

The convention of consecration of Holy Myron has evolved over the centuries. In most churches, the right is reserved for the Head of the Church. In the Roman Catholic Church, bishops are authorized to do the consecration. Under extraordinary circumstances, the Pope can also authorize a priest to consecrate the Holy Myron. In the Malankara Orthodox Church, by convention, the authority to consecrate the Holy Myron is vested with the Catholicos, although the Hudoyo Canon bestows the right to bishops as well.

4.) Where does the Hudoyo Canon mention about the rights of bishops to

consecrate the Holy Myron?

In Chapter 3, section 1. The historical precedence for this is derived from a description given by Syriac father Jacob of Edessa (Malayalam: Urahaayile Yakob) who speaks about a bishop "in our days" who proceeded to ordain a deacon in an outlying location without a church or altar or Holy Myron to anoint an altar. Accordingly he sanctifies the Holy Myron, anoints an altar, and immediately celebrates the Holy Mysteries, and made (abdeh) the deacon a priest, whom he put in charge of the place, all in one night.

5.) In which of the works of Jacob of Edessa is this reference found?

In his commentary on the Holy Myron, Syriac father Dionysius Bar-Salibi references it to the epistle to John. Those interested may please look it up in A. Voobus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition, I*, p.234 (CSCO 367, 1975). Many thanks to Syriac historian Sebastian Brock for providing the reference and clarifying the point.

6.) How does the breakaway Jacobite faction manage to deny the authority to consecrate the Holy Myron to bishops?

They do it by the very clever stratagem of presenting a forged version of the Hudoyo (the Udayagiri Hudoyo) where in Chapter 3:1, the description by Jacob of Edessa about the consecration of Holy Myron by a bishop has been edited out.

7.) On which day is the Holy Myron consecrated?

The Hudoyo Canon recommends that the consecration ceremony be conducted on Maundy Thursday and cites the reasons for the same. It can, however, be conducted on any day during the Great Lent when Holy Qurbana can be celebrated. The long drawn out preparation and prayers for the consecration has made the Great Lent a natural fit for the ceremony. It can also be timed to be held during any other lent period.

Ingredients and Measure

8.) What are the ingredients of the Holy Myron?

The main ingredients are olive oil (mentioned throughout the Bible) and balsam (see the references to the balm of Gilead in Genesis 37:25 and Jeremiah 8:22). Other ingredients are spikenard (Malayalam: *jatamansi*), a perennial herb prized for its

spicy, fragrant flowers (Mark 14:3, John 12:3 and Song of Solomon (1:12, 4:13 and 14);dried ginger (Malayalam: *chukku*); cinnamon (Malayalam: *karuva patta*); pepper; nutmeg (Malayalam: *jaathikka*); saffron crocus (Malayalam: *kunkumam*), a bulbous perennial of the iris family treasured for its golden coloured, pungent stigmas, which are dried and used to flavour and colour foods and as a dye (see Song of Solomon 4:14); and storax (Malayalam: *pachcha njarias*),a resin obtained from the eponymous tree (see Sirach 24:15 in the apocrypha).

9.) What's the measure used for preparation of the Holy Myron?

The measure given in the Malayalam Hudoyo is *zuzo*. This is understood as a subunit of the shekel, which in Biblical times was at once a currency and a unit of measurement. *Zuzo*, or more accurately *zuza*, is a quarter of a silver *shekel*, mentioned in 1 Samuel 9:8. As a unit of measurement, St Epiphanius of Salamis, in his *Treatise on Weights and Measures*, defines a *zuza* as equivalent to 1/8th of an ounce (grateful acknowledgement to Gabriel Mar Gregorios thirumeni for having taken the time to consult and clarify this point). For the Holy Myron, the Hudayo prescribes 400 *zuza* of olive oil and 200 *zuza* of balsam, 60 *zuza* each of spikenard and storax, 50 *zuza* of cinnamon, and 20 *zuza* each of dried ginger, pepper, nutmeg and saffron crocus.

Preparation

10.) What are the steps involved in the preparation of the Holy Myron?

Holy Myron is prepared in two stages. In the first stage balsam is not used. Instead, oil is prepared with the olive oil base by experienced priests in a specially segregated area. Work on this preparation begins a few days before the actual consecration. Essentially at this stage, olive oil is poured into glass bottles and mixed with all other powdered ingredients, except storax, in equal measure. The glass bottles are wound tightly with coir to avoid breakage during the process of double boiling. To prevent spillover, only three quarters of a bottle are filled with the mixture. A giant vessel filled with water is used for the double boiling, into which the glass bottles are lowered on strings, after ensuring that the bottles do not hit the floor of the big vessel.

Another vessel with boiled water is always kept next to the giant vessel to ensure continuous supply of boiled water. Once the powdered ingredients are dissolved into the olive oil, the resinuous storax is funneled into the bottles. After one more hour of boiling, the fire is extinguished and the bottles are removed from the vessel after

thoroughly ensuring that they are cooled. Entry is restricted to the segregated area where this oil is prepared, and only the faithful are allowed in. The sediments of the ingredients are carefully buried in a clean location. The prepared oil is kept in the Holy of Holies, along with the bottles containing balsam.

11.) What are the physical requirements for the Holy Myron consecration?

A *bema* or raised platform, symbolizing the seat of judgement, is erected in the middle of the nave. Some churches in Malankara (eg. Arthattu St Mary's Church and Puthenkavu St Mary's Church) have *bemas* incorporated into their structure. But a *bema* can be erected temporarily for the purpose of the Holy Myron consecration. Apart from a *bema*, 12 censers (Malayalam: *dhoopakkutty*), 12 flapping fans (Malayalam/Syriac: *marhawsa*), 12 candles and a canopy (known as the *kabussa*) to cover the chief celebrant (HH the Catholicos) are required for the Holy Myron consecration.

12.) What are the participatory requirements for the Holy Myron consecration?

Apart from the Catholicos, all the bishops of the church are required to be present for the consecration. Twelve priests are required to hold the censers, 12 full deacons (*shamoshos*) to hold the flapping fans and twelve subdeacons (*apodyaqnos*) to hold the candles. In addition, four more priests are required to hold the four corners of the canopy during the procession of the chief celebrant. All participants are required to wear their ceremonial robes.

13.) Can you give a brief overview of the Holy Myron service?

The service of the Holy Myron consecration is a two-part affair, which includes two processions, and is fairly long. The most recent consecration service in MOSC (3 April, 2009) was scheduled to take place from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. The participants are arranged in three choirs.

First Procession

After prayers, a bishop conducts the first procession in the anticlockwise direction starting from the location in the altar where the prepared oil and balsam are kept. He will hold the crosier of the Catholicos in his left hand and the censer in his right. During the procession, two priests, two full deacons and two subdeacons accompany

him with flapping fans and candles. The procession ends with prayers of the incense in front of the oil and balsam kept in the altar. The procession will be accompanied by a hymn about the sinner woman who brought an alabaster box of ointment and anointed Our Lord's feet (see Luke 7). After more prayers, the Old Testament is read with the following lectionary.

Genesis 28: 10-22

Numbers 6:22; 7:11

1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Psalms 45: 1-17

1 Kings 1: 32-40

Song of Songs 1: 2-11; 3:6; 4:10-15

2 Kings 9: 16

Ezekiel 20:5

Isaiah 61:16

At the end of Old Testament readings, the chief celebrant approaches the prepared oil and mixes it with balsam. He should be accompanied by one or more bishops. The ceremony is accompanied by the choir chanting hymns praising the mystery of the incarnation and the archdeacon recites a litany.

Second Procession

The second procession by the chief celebrant follows, to the accompaniment of 12 priests, 12 deacons and 12 subdeacons. Four priests hold the corners of the canopy in which the chief celebrant stands holding the Holy Myron bottle. An archdeacon carries the crosier of the Catholicos and another priest carries the Bible and the cross. The procession begins when the archdeacon, in a loud voice, asks the non-faithful to leave and asks the participants to stand in awe. The Catholicos now enters the canopy and the procession slowly winds its way in an anticlockwise direction with stops at the northern, western and southern entrances. The choir will be chanting a hymn based on Psalms 7.

The chief celebrant then steps out of the canopy and enters the Holy of Holies, places the Holy Myron bottle on the *tablita* (portable altar) and begins part two of the service. After prayers, Psalms 132 and 131 are sung in the seventh and eighth modes respectively; after *proemion-sedro*, Nicene Creed, and New Testament readings (John 2: 20; 3:1 and Corinthians 2: 12-17), the Gospel is read from Matthew and John. After

a litany recital by the archdeacon, the chief celebrant ascends the step before the altar (*darga*) and begins the main part of the elaborate service during which the bottle containing the Holy Myron is consecrated.

During the final part of the service, the chief celebrant wears ceremonial white robes and sets out in a procession towards the bema. After celebration of the Holy Myron to the four corners with the accompaniment of a hymn and three chants of *kurielaison*, Holy Myron is again celebrated to the east with the chant of *Hawo Dmalakhe*.

At the conclusion, the celebrant is seated on a throne placed in the *bema* facing the west (towards the congregation), and receives grateful acknowledgement from the archdeacon, who stands facing him, for conducting the service. The chief celebrant then prays for the faithful and blesses them.

The Holy Qurbana is then conducted commencing from the third-hour prayers. All depart after kissing the bottle containing the Holy Myron.

14.) Can you give us an overview of the theological moorings and significance of the Holy Myron consecration?

The commentary by the 12th century Syriac father Dionysius Bar-Salibi on the Holy Myron consecration covers much ground on the subject.

Sources:

Encyclopaedia Britannica

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Hudoyo Canon by Gregorios Bar Hebraeus.

Sabha Encyclopaedia