The Department of Medieval Studies of Central European University cordially invites you to the public lecture of the Faculty Research Seminar

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An Indian Syriac Humanist Poet from the 17th Century Rediscovered:
Alexander of the Port (Alexandros Lmenaya: Kadavil Chandy Kattanar)

17:30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 29, 2014
CEU–Faculty Tower #409
Budapest, V. Nádor u. 9.
Reception to follow!

During the digitizing and cataloguing of the Syriac manuscript collection of St Joseph's CMI Monastery in Mannanam, Kerala, we came across a modest-looking manuscript, Mannanam Syr 63 according to our checklist. The manuscript contains anonymous Syriac poetry (memre) of a very learned man, residing in India, a disciple of Francisco Roz, the first European Metropolitan of Angamaly/Cranganore in Kerala (1601-1624). One can establish that the author of this poetry is Alexandros Lmenaya (Alexander of the Port) or, in Malayalam, Kadavil Chandy Kattanar (1588-1673?), an important actor of the turbulent 17th-century interaction between local Christians and European missionaries and a poet who was writing in Syriac and sent one of his poems to Pope Alexander VIII. Chandy's work is a synthesis of traditional East Syriac poetry (‘onyata) and of humanist learning received at the Jesuit seminary of Vaipikotta, interspersed with elements characteristic of Indian (Sanskrit and Malayalam) poetry, a unique synthesis that could not have been created anywhere else in the world but in India. The lecture will tell the story of the rediscovery of this poetic oeuvre, treat its authorship, present the personality of Kadavil Chandy, and analyze the subjects, the style and the sources of his poems.

István Perczel is specializing in Late Antique and Byzantine Intellectual History and Eastern Christian Studies, especially in the History of Indian Christianity. In 2000 he initiated a still ongoing project for surveying, digitizing and cataloguing the manuscript libraries of the Syrian Christians of India. Perczel is Professor at the Department of Medieval Studies and member of the Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at CEU. He is the editor of The Nomocanon of Metropolitan Abdisho of Nisibis: A Facsimile Edition of MS 64 from the Collection of the Church of the East in Thrissur,(Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005, 2009) and author of a number of studies on Byzantine intellectual history and the history of the Syrian Christians of Kerala.