

ABU SHAKIR [IBN AL-RAHIB](#)

Abu al-Karam Butrus ibn al-Muhadhdhab was the son of al-Shaykh al-Mu'taman al-Saniy Anba Butrus al-Rahib, one of the leading Coptic personalities and [eminent scribes](#) of Egypt, who lived in the thirteenth century. After being widowed, he retired from public service, and on becoming a monk—which explains the use in his name of the epithet “al-Rahib” (the monk), which appears in his son’s name as well—he was appointed presbyter of the ancient Church of Abu Sarjah in Old Cairo (*see* BABYLON).

Abu Shakir the younger was a deacon in the famous Church of Our Lady known as al-Mu'allaqah in Old Cairo, and proved himself to be a writer of great distinction and one of the most eminent theologians of the Middle Ages. His precise date of birth is unknown, but he was probably born sometime before the [investiture](#) of Pope CYRIL III ibn Laqlaq, the seventy-fifth patriarch, who acceded to the throne of [Saint Mark](#) in A.D. 1235. Abu Shakir is known to have been a [contemporary](#) of Pope Cyril III, ATHANASIUS III, GABRIEL III, JOHN VII, and probably THEODOSIUS II, that is, the seventy-fifth to the seventy-ninth patriarchs, whose reigns extended from 1235 to 1300. He was made a deacon by Pope Athanasius III in 1260, although he had previously opposed the election of that same pope.

Abu Shakir distinguished himself as a theologian, a historian, and a linguist in perfect command of both Coptic and Arabic. His work on the dates of the patriarchs shows that he could have been equally proficient in mathematics and astronomy. Perhaps his most famous work was his theological study on the divinity and humanity of Jesus, entitled *Kitab al-Shifa fi Kashf ma-Istatara min Lahut al-Masih wa-ikhtafa* (The Book of healing of what was hidden of the divinity of Christ), of which an autographed copy dated A.M. 984/A.D. 1268 is preserved in the National Library in Paris; another copy dated A.M. 1398/A.D. 1611 is available in the Patriarchal Library in Cairo. This is mainly an exegetical work full of

[biblical commentaries](#) with references drawn from the works of the fathers of the church.

Among his famous works is *Kitab al-Burhan fi al-Qawanin* (The Book of evidence in laws), a legal compendium in fifty-two chapters comprising a statement of Christian doctrines and traditions. A [contemporary](#) copy dated A.M. 987/A.D. 1270 exists in the Patriarchal Library. Other, later copies are available in the British Museum, the Vatican, and elsewhere.

As a historian, Abu Shakir composed a universal history under the title *Kitab al-Tawarikh* (The Book of histories) consisting of fifty-one chapters beginning with a section on [astronomy](#) and chronology followed by a chronicle of world events and the history of the patriarchs of Alexandria. His compilation of the dates of the Coptic popes is a significant contribution to Coptic chronology and historiography, in which he displayed his unusual skill in the use of astronomical and mathematical data. His treatise on the ecumenical councils (*al-Majami' al-maskuniyyah*) comprises the whole movement without excluding the later councils that were recognized by his own Coptic church.



Kitab al-Tawarikh (The Book of histories)

In the field of Coptic linguistics, he stands as a towering figure in his philological works. These consisted of his *Sullam* (*scala*), a lexical compendium in which he assembled Coptic terms with their Arabic equivalents; it [preceded](#) his second major work, *Muqaddimah* (literally, preface), a superior grammatical treatise of the Coptic language.

Abu Shakir, like Ibn Kabar, was an encyclopedist of great stature in the golden age of Coptic literature in the Middle Ages. He probably died at an advanced age during the reign of the seventy-ninth Pope Theodosius II (1294-1300), toward the close of the thirteenth century.

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