

## **TAFSIR**

An Arabic term (pl., *tafsir*) for explanation or interpretation. This is a metrical Coptic composition inspired by a THEOTOKION; though called an “explanation” or “paraphrase” of an original text, it is in fact a more or less free composition on the themes contained in the original.

A *tafsir* [paraphrase](#) is divided into a number of sections equal to that of the theotokion. Each section of a *tafsir* is intended to be used liturgically immediately after the section of the theotokion that it interprets, although some are private compositions that perhaps never attained the dignity of recitation in church. Thus, the paraphrases form a body of popular hymnody that is approved, but not officially authorized, by the church. Their use is optional; those who use them are at liberty to select whichever they please.

Abu al-Barakat IBN KABAR (fourteenth century), in his *Misbah al-Zulmah* (The Luminary of [Church](#) Services), expressed the opinion that the best of these paraphrases are the older and shorter ones. The shorter paraphrases that occur in combination with the text were thought at one time to be confined to the Sunday and Saturday theotokia, but the discoveries at [DAYR ANBA MAQAR](#) suggest that at some period there was a full [liturgical](#) series of all the seven theotokias, each with its own *tafsir*.

Some of these paraphrases (especially those of Saturday and Sunday) are now [sung](#) only as part of the SAB’AH WA-ARBA’AH in the month of Kiyahk. But the [manuscript](#) of [Tartib](#) *al-Bi’ah* (The Order of the Church) says that they are to be [sung](#) not only on the eve of Sundays (Saturday evening) of the month of Kiyahk but also optionally on the eve of Sundays of Lent and the whole year.

Some of the *tafsir* found in the manuscripts collected by De Lacy O’Leary in *The Coptic Theotokia* (1923) appear in the *Kitab al-Absalmudiyyat al-Muqaddasat al-Kihyahkiyyah*, for the month of Kiyahk

1911, under the title LOBSH (e.g., pp. 289-329).

In the Saturday theotokia are nine sections called SHARAT, followed by a LOBSH. Each of these nine sections has three *tafsir* called respectively *rumi*, or Greek; MU'AQQAB (i.e., repeated); and Bohairic. These are found in the relatively older manuscripts published by De Lacy O'Leary. The *Kitab al-Absalmudiyat* adds some (probably later) *tafsir* that are Bohairic, *Misri* (i.e., Cairene), or Sahidic (Upper Egyptian), as well as a series of six Arabic *tafsir*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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