



Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises

Coptic Melodies



How beautiful are the hymns sung in Coptic churches today. They date back to as far as the days of the Pharaohs, who are our ancestors.

ĒLahnī is an Arabic translation of the Coptic word *ēekhōs*, and basically refers to either a certain melody or melody type that is readily recognized by people, and known by a specific, often descriptive, name, such as, for example, *ēfaraihiī* (joyous) or *ēhazainīī* (sorrowful).

Writing in the fourteenth century, *Ibn Kabar* named some twenty-six types of *lahn* (melody), most of which are still known today. The following are some of those melodies which are said throughout the year, depending upon the feast and/or season:

ĒFaraihiī (joyous) melodies are sung on all of the Lord's feasts, during the fifty days after the Resurrection, on the 29th day of each Coptic month, except for Toubah and Amshir, from the first to the sixteenth day of Tut, from 29 Kiahk to 6 Toubah (.....), and from Epiphany til the Feast of the Wedding at Cana, from 11-13 Toubah.

ĒKiahkiī (particular to the Coptic month of Kiahk) melodies are those sung for Advent, in preparation for the birth of our Lord.

ĒSha-aniniī melodies are designated to Palm Sunday and the two Feasts of the Cross (10 Baramhat and 17-19 Tut)

ĒSanawīī (annual) melodies are sung throughout the whole year, and not reserved, like others, for certain occasions.

ĒSiamīī (to do with fasts) melodies are sung during the Holy Great Fast and the three days of the Fast of Nineveh (or Jonah). The melody for Saturdays, Sundays, the first Monday of Lent, and the Friday proceeding Passion Week, is different to that which is used on any other days.

Furthermore, the same melody may have three forms, which are: short (*qassir*), abridged (*mukhtassar*), and long (*tawil*).

Some of the melodies of the which are changed according to the occasion are:

1. The introductory hymn to the ĒCommemoration of the Saintsī which is said during the *Midnight Praise* service (*ētenowih enthoki*), and the Commemoration Hymn itself.
2. The *ēlobshī* (interpretation), which immediately follows a *Theotokia*, and sung in the *watus* tune.
3. The *Watus doxologies*, which are the melodies of praise, said during the *Midnight Praise* and the *Raising of Incense* in honour of the season, the Virgin Saint Mary, the angels, the apostles, and the saint(s) of the particular church.
4. The response of the Holy Bible reading during *Vespers*, *Matins* and the *Divine Liturgy*.
5. The melodies which are sung during Holy Communion.

The two melody types most frequently named are *ēAdami* and *ēBatosī* (or *ēWatusī*). *Adam* hymns are sung from Sunday through to Tuesday, as well as on certain other specified days, while *Batos* hymns are reserved for Wednesday through to Saturday, for evening service, and for Pascha Week. The two names are derived from the *Theotokia* of *Kiahk*, in which *ēAdami* is the first word of the Monday *Theotokia*, *ēAdam etiefoi: enem kahnhet...ī* (ēWhen Adam became of contrite spirit...ī) and *ēBatosī*, on the other hand, is the first word of the Thursday *Theotokia*, *ēPibatos eta moisis: nav erof...ī* (ēThe bush which Moses saw...ī).

Although these two melodies are distinct from each other in verse structure, length, and mood, their music differs little in contemporary practice, and both may be heard in the same service. ✠