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# The Memories of Byzantium as Preserved in Nubia's Political Ideology after the 7th Century CE

Effrosyni Zacharopoulou

This study mainly focuses on the formation of the dominant ideology that Nubian rulers conveyed to the Nubian people and aims to show how the ideological influences from Byzantium integrated with the indigenous background into Nubia's political system and created a unique Afro-Byzantine state.

By the term Nubia this paper mainly refers to the united Kingdom of Nubia with its capital at Old Dongola, which was constituted by the states of Nobadia and Makuria, the two of the three states that emerged as heirs to the Meroitic kingdom. In all probability, the merging of these two kingdoms occurred in the 7th century, as a consequence of the Arab conquest of Egypt and the Nubians' attempt to stave off the Arab threat coming from the north.<sup>1</sup>

This choice is not without reason, as excavations have been carried out more extensively in this part of the Middle Nile Valley due to the construction of dams on the Nile.<sup>2</sup> In the third medieval Nubian kingdom – Alodia – archaeological excavations are still limited and less fruitful. Moreover, after the 10th century Alodia appears to be in a close political association with Old Dongola.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 About the union of the kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria and the various aspects of this fact see ADAMS, *Nubia*, pp. 453–454; EDWARDS, *The Nubian Past*, pp. 236–237; GODLEWSKI, “The Rise of Makuria,” pp. 58–61; JAKOBIELSKI, *Faras III*, pp. 35–36; ŁAJTAR, “On the Name of the Capital of the Nubian Kingdom of Makuria,” p. 129; MUNRO-HAY, “Kings and Kingdoms of Ancient Nubia,” pp. 96–99; WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 83–84; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Νουβία και Βυζάντιο*, pp. 137–140.
- 2 EDWARDS, “The Archaeology of Sudan and Nubia,” pp. 212–213.
- 3 See Ibn Hawqal and Mas’udi in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 162–163, 166, and 130 respectively. See also GODLEWSKI, “Archbishop Georgius of Dongola,” p. 269; JAKOBIELSKI, *Faras III*, p. 73; Id., “North and South in Christian Nubian Culture,” p. 234; MUNRO-HAY, “Kings and Kingdoms of Ancient Nubia,” pp. 103, 108–109; OCHALA, “Multilingualism in Christian Nubia,” pp. 19–20; PLUMLEY, “The Christian Period at Qasr Ibrim,” p. 106; VANTINI, *Christianity in the Sudan*, pp. 117–118, 132; WELSBY & DANIELS, *Soba*, p. 7; WELSBY, *The Medieval*

The cultural and ideological influences from Byzantium that penetrated into Nubia are already traceable at the very early stages of the formation of the Nubian kingdoms<sup>4</sup> and became more safely established with their Christianization in the 6th century, after two missions were sent from Constantinople by Justinian and Theodora.<sup>5</sup> From that moment onwards, Nubia became an integral part of the Christian world for about a thousand years, even though, from the mid-7th century onwards, the expansion of Islam kept Nubia apart from the Byzantine Empire and the Christian Mediterranean World.

Archaeological findings in pre-Christian tombs indicate that Christianity had found its way into Nubia before its official Christianisation.<sup>6</sup> However, it was established as an official and widespread religion only after the king and aristocracy were converted to it by the Byzantine missionaries.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we can say that in Nubia Christianity developed in the opposite direction of the way it did in the Mediterranean world, where Christianity first spread amongst the people before becoming appropriated by the elite.<sup>8</sup> In Nubia, on the contrary, it was transplanted first throughout the upper echelons of society from Byzantium. Nevertheless, Christianity exerted a huge amount of influence over every aspect of life in Medieval Nubia.<sup>9</sup>

Nubia's Christianisation was politically motivated. The archaeological findings from post-Meroitic royal tombs of Ballana and Qustul point out to a probable Byzantine involvement in the emergence of the state of Nobadia.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Constantinople ensured both its em-

*Kingdoms of Nubia*, p. 89; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Νουβία και Βυζάντιο*, pp. 181–186; ŻURAWSKI, “The Southern Dongola Reach Survey Project, 2002,” pp. 241–244.

- 4 WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 14–30; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Νουβία και Βυζάντιο*, pp. 40–113.
- 5 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 6–26. See also KIRWAN, “A Contemporary Account of the Conversion of the Sudan to Christianity”; Id., “The Birth of Christian Nubia,” pp. 127–132; ZACHAROPOULOU, “Justinian and Theodora.”
- 6 ADAMS, *Meinarti I*, pp. 86–89, 102; EDWARDS, *The Nubian Past*, pp. 216–219; JAKOBIELSKI, *Faras III*, pp. 17–24; KIRWAN, “The Birth of Christian Nubia,” pp. 121–127; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “The Christian Nubia and the Arabs,” p. 249; OBLEUSKI, *The Rise of Nobadia*, pp. 173–174, 176–177; WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 31–67; ZACHAROPOULOU, “Η χριστιανική διείσδυση στη Νοβατία πριν τον επίσημο εκχριστιανισμό της τον 6ο αιώνα,” pp. 316–332.
- 7 ADAMS, *Nubia*, p. 444; Id., “Medieval Nubia,” p. 29; KEA, “The Mediterranean and Africa,” p. 436.
- 8 ŻURAWSKI, “Nubian Mortuary Complex of the Christian Period,” pp. 171–172.
- 9 FREND, “Nubia as an Outpost of Byzantine Cultural Influence”; GODLEWSKI, “Nubia, Egypt, and Byzantium,” pp. 168–170; HÄGG, “Some Remarks on the Use of Greek in Nubia,” pp. 104–105; ŁAJTAR, “Old Nubian Texts from Gebel Adda,” p. 198; MARTENS-CZARNECKA “Iconography of Jesus Christ in Nubian Painting,” pp. 242–248; Id., “The Christian Nubia and the Arabs,” pp. 252–253; TÖRÖK, “Money, Economy and Administration in Christian Nubia,” pp. 302–309; WOŹNIAK, “L'influence byzantine dans l'art nubien”; Id., “Rayonnement de Byzance,” pp. 15–16.
- 10 ADAMS, *Nubia*, p. 422; HENDRICKX, *Official Documents*, pp. 67–68; KIRWAN, “Prelude to Nubian Christianity,” pp. 123–124; LETSIOS, *Βυζάντιο και Ερυθρά Θάλασσα*, pp. 191–200, 217–227, 328; WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 15, 18–19; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Νουβία*

pire's safety on its southern borders in Egypt and its economic interests in the trade with the Red Sea and African inland.<sup>11</sup> Concurrently, by adopting Christianity the new rulers of the Middle Nile Valley gained considerable benefits.<sup>12</sup> First of all, they assured their ascendancy over other tribal leaders in a struggle for dominance in the political vacuum left by Meroe's collapse.<sup>13</sup> It was obvious that this religion was a warranty for their bonds with the mighty Byzantine Empire. At the same time, through its Christianisation Nubia rose to the forefront of that period as a force to be acknowledged in the eyes of the Christian world.<sup>14</sup>

After their evangelisation, Nubian states developed their political ideology and organised their administration by adopting the Byzantine model, creating an Afro-Byzantine model. According to what Medieval Arab historians wrote, Nubians followed the customs of the Rum, that is, of the Byzantines.<sup>15</sup> Researching on the institutions of the Christian kingdoms of Nubia, we observe that the focal point

- και Βυζάντιο, pp. 40–46; Id., “The Emergence of the State of Nobadia and the Byzantine Policy,” pp. 237–243; Id., “Ο Νοβάρτης «βασιλίσκος» Σιλκώ και οι σχέσεις του με το Βυζάντιο.”
- 11 PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars*, 1. XIX. 33. See also CHRISTIDES, “Hagiography in the Service of History,” pp. 136–138; KARAYANNOPOULOS, *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού*, p. 399; LETSIOS, *Βυζάντιο και Ερυθρά Θάλασσα*, pp. 335–346; TÖRÖK, comments in *FHN III*, p. 1190; TRIGGER, *History and Settlement in Lower Nubia*, p. 144; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Πρώμη Βυζαντινή Αυτοκρατορία και Βασίλειο του Αξούμ*, pp. 13–22, 46–63, 85–90, 98–107; Id., *Νουβία και Βυζάντιο*, pp. 66–69. Id., “The Emergence of the State of Nobadia and the Byzantine Policy,” pp. 233–237.
  - 12 ADAMS, *Nubia*, pp. 443–445; DRZEWIECKI, *Mighty Kingdoms and Their Forts*, pp. 62, 75–78; OBŁUSKI, “The Formation of the Nobadian State,” pp. 607–617; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Νουβία και Βυζάντιο*, pp. 69–70.
  - 13 As Artur Obłuski has shown regarding the formation of the Nobadian state, in a chiefdom society – as the post-Meroitic was – one way of legitimizing a leader was his possession of valuable objects – in Nubia's case coming from the Byzantine Empire – and his ability to use them in order to buy off the loyalty of other tribal leaders (OBŁUSKI, “The Formation of the Nobadian State,” pp. 607–609). See also DIJKSTRA, “Religious Encounters on the Southern Egyptian Frontier,” p. 55; FULLER, “Pharaonic or Sudanic?” pp. 169–184; EDWARDS, “Power and the State in the Middle Nile”; Id., “Meroe and the Sudanic Kingdoms,” pp. 190–193; Id., “Meroe in the Savannah,” pp. 317–318; For theories about the consolidation of ruling elites in general, see KRISTIANSEN, “Chiefdoms,” pp. 16–43; WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, p. 21.
  - 14 In respect of this, let's see what John of Deacon (VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 44–45) wrote in the middle of the 8th century about Cyriacus, the king of Makuria: “(Cyriacus) was the orthodox Ethiopian king of Al-Mukurrah; and he was entitled the Great King upon whom the crown descended from Heaven and he governed as far as the southern extremities of the Earth for he is the Greek king, fourth of the Earth; and none of the other kingdoms stands up against him.” See also GODLEWSKI, “Nubia, Egypt, and Byzantium,” pp. 168–169; EDWARDS, “The Archaeology of Sudan and Nubia,” p. 221; KEA, “The Mediterranean and Africa,” pp. 436–439; TSAKOS, “On Place Names Used by Nubians,” pp. 237–238; ŻURAWSKI, “Banganarti and Selib,” pp. 384–387.
  - 15 Thus, e.g., al-Istakhri (VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, p. 111) says: “Only a few branches of the Blacks who dwell along the borders of the aforesaid empires [i.e., the Byzantine and the Moslem empires] possess some religious beliefs, moral and political institutions similar to [those of] the above mentioned empires. Such are the Nubians (*an-Nūba*) and the Ethiopians (*Ḥabasha*) because they are Christians and follow the customs of the Rūm. Before Islam, those peoples had some links with the empire of the Rūm because they were neighbours.” Al-Umari (VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, p. 516) also says: “Misr is enclosed within four frontiers, i.e., the southern frontier beginning from the Red Sea at Aydhab, passes through the country of the Badariba and the Rum of Nubia.” In this Giovanni Ruffini can see a pattern in which Muslims saw Nubia and thought of Byzantium (RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*, p. 72). See also

of their organisation was royal power, which was concentrated on the king's image, persona, and role. In this respect, official royal iconography, as depicted in wall paintings of Nubian churches, gives us a good insight into Nubia's political ideology.<sup>16</sup>

First of all, in order to manifest how powerful their authority was, Nubian kings, through their representations in Byzantine attire, highlighted the connection between themselves and their Byzantine counterparts. Kings are depicted wearing Byzantine-style crowns like the *kamelaukion*, topped with a cross and with the characteristic *prependulia*, finely decorated robes of honour in the type of *chlamys* decorated with *tablion*, and golden pendants and red shoes.<sup>17</sup> In their hands, kings hold a sceptre and other insignia of royal power. Probably, they had a clear knowledge of the magnificence of Byzantine Emperor and his court either by the Nubian delegations that visited Constantinople<sup>18</sup> or by effigies of Byzantine kings sent as royal gifts to Old Dongola, and by their portraits on coins and miniatures in Byzantine codices used in churches.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, they organised their court on the very elaborate Byzantine pattern. Research on documents from Nubia reveals a plethora of Greek titles and offices such as *eparchos*, *nauarchos*, *exarchos*, *chartularios*, *domestikos*, *triklinarios*, *notarios*, *meizon*, *meizoteros*, *protomeizoteros*, *illustrius*, and so on.<sup>20</sup> This nomenclature reflects a well-organised administration based on a well-developed bureaucracy controlled by the king and enhancing his authority.<sup>21</sup>

GODLEWSKI, *Dongola*, pp. 47, 64–67; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “The Christian Nubia and the Arabs,” p. 250.

- 16 With regard to this, see INNEMÉE, “Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration”; JAKOBIELSKI, *Faras III*; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels”; WOŹNIAK, “The Chronology of the Eastern Chapels in the Upper Church at Baganarti,” pp. 629–646; ZIELIŃSKA, “The Iconography of Power,” pp. 943–949; ŻURAWSKI, “The Southern Dongola Reach Survey Project,” p. 245.
- 17 GODLEWSKI, “Nubia, Egypt, and Byzantium,” pp. 169–170; INNEMÉE, “Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration,” pp. 283–285; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels,” pp. 94–98; WOŹNIAK, “L’influence Byzantine dans l’art Nubien,” pp. 86–87; Id., “Rayonnement de Byzance,” pp. 4–18; Id., “Royal Iconography,” pp. 929–941; Id., “The Chronology of the Eastern Chapels in the Upper Church at Baganarti,” pp. 632–635; ZIELIŃSKA, “Painted Decoration of the Central Hall,” pp. 32–33, figs. 2–13; ŻURAWSKI, “Medieval Nubian Regalia,” p. 226; Id., “Miracles of Baganarti,” p. 22.
- 18 Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 4.7 in EIDE, HÄGG, PIERCE & TÖRÖK, *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, p. 1079–1081; John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, p. 14, 27–28; VANTINI, *Christianity in the Sudan*, pp. 40–41, 165–168; HENDRICKX, “Un roi africain à Constantinople en 1203”; ROSTKOWSKA, “The Visit of a Nubian King to Constantinople.”
- 19 GODLEWSKI, “Nubia, Egypt, and Byzantium,” p. 177; Id., “Christian Nubia, Studies 1996–2000,” p. 1047; ŻURAWSKI, “Nubian Mortuary Complex of the Christian Period,” p. 173n5; “The Anastasis Scene,” pp. 168–169, 176–179.
- 20 HÄGG, “Titles and Honorific Epithets in Nubian Greek Texts”; HENDRICKX, “The Nubian and Blemmyan Rulers and Their States”; Id., “Byzantine Profane Titles, Epithets and Symbols”; DEPTUŁA “Inscriptions from Saint Menas’ Church in Selib,” pp. 127–131; ŁAJTAR, “The Mystery of Timikleos Solved!”; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels,” p. 93; WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 95–96.
- 21 On this subject, see RUFFINI, “Documentary Evidence and the Production of Power.”

During the first phases of the Nubian states' organisation, the adoption of these titles was probably a necessity derived from the lack of a proper terminology, on one hand, and from the advantage in using the Greek language for communication with Mediterranean Christianity, on the other. But the ongoing use of Greek titles even after Old Nubian literacy was fully developed<sup>22</sup> may convey a symbolic significance in the Nubian context. Given that Greek was the language of the Bible and of Nubia's official evangelisation, thus the primary vehicle of God's word, it may have been considered in Nubia as a sacred language<sup>23</sup> that attributed a kind of sanctity to an office, to a title bearer or to its user. Therefore, the use of Greek could work both as a constant reminder of Nubia's bonds with the Byzantine Empire and at the same time used as a spiritual devotional tool. Moreover, the Greek alphabet seems to resonate with symbolic significance. In this respect, it is widely accepted among scholars who study African cultures that specific patterns were known to have had spiritual significance in African art. Abstract designs that were considered as bearing mystic powers often reappeared in many forms including ceremonial scarring and tattooing.<sup>24</sup> This is probably the case of a mummified Christian woman found in Nubia. She lived during the 7th–8th century and the monogram of Archangel Michael was tattooed on her thigh.<sup>25</sup> Written words can be considered as a kind of pattern and their apotropaic use is well attested on texts and graffiti in Nubia.<sup>26</sup>

The most essential political idea that the Nubians shared with the Byzantines is the concept of theocracy, in which *sacerdotium* and *regnum* are closely tied to one another.<sup>27</sup> The Byzantines regarded

22 New titles such as *διάκονος μέγας* and *πρεσβύτερος μέγας*, were coined on original Byzantine terms under the influence of Old Nubian, as late as in the 11th century at least (see BROWNE, *Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim III*, no. 58, ii, l. 1; ŁAJTAR & OCHAŁA, "Ase," pp. 241–243). In addition, in inscriptions from Nubia, texts in Greek are very often written side by side with the ones in Old Nubian, or they are a mixture of both languages. See BROWNE, "Old Nubian Philology"; JAKOBIELSKI, "Old Dongola Kom H"; ŁAJTAR & VAN DER VLIET, "A View from a Hill," p. 160; ŁAJTAR, "Dongola 2010" p. 286; Id., "Archangel Raphael in Inscriptions," p. 261; Id., "The Greek of Late Christian inscriptions from Nubia." For the status of Greek in Nubia, see HÄGG, "Uses of Greek in the Nubian Kingdoms"; OCHAŁA, "Multilingualism in Christian Nubia," pp. 26–34; SHINNIE, "Multilingualism," pp. 45–46; TSAKOS, "The Use and Role of the Greek Language in Christian Nubia"; Id., "Religious Literacy in Greek from the Christian Monastery at Qasr el Wizz."

23 OCHAŁA, "Multilingualism in Christian Nubia," p. 43; TSAKOS, "On Place Names Used by Nubians," pp. 234–236.

24 DAVIDSON, *African Kingdoms*, p. 154.

25 See VANDENBEUSCH & ANTOINE, "Under Saint Michael's Protection."

26 ŁAJTAR & VAN DER VLIET, "An Inscribed Tomb Chamber in Ukma-West"; Id., *Empowering the Dead in Christian Nubia*, passim; TSAKOS, "The Liber Institutionis Michaelis in Medieval Nubia," p. 59; Id., "Miscellanea Epigraphica Nubica V," pp. 261–263 and fn. 17; VANDENBEUSCH, "Under Saint Michael's Protection."

27 For a definition of theocracy, see ZAKAI, "Theocracy," pp. 342–343; WASKEY, "The Political Theory of the Theocracy," pp. 116–129. For "theocracy" in Nubia see Al-Qazwini in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, p. 383–384; Al-Bakuwi in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, p. 565; ŻURAWSKI, "Miracles of Baganarti," p. 22; Id., "Filling in the Gaps," p. 94. For theocracy in Byzantium,

their empire as an earthly reflection of the heavenly kingdom.<sup>28</sup> And according to the theory put forward by Eusebius, the authority of the emperor was bestowed upon him by God.<sup>29</sup> This theocratic political ideology of Byzantium seems to have easily fitted to the concept of divine/sacred kingship that was so widely spread throughout Africa.<sup>30</sup>

According to this tradition, a king is conceived as the most sacred person and, after his inauguration, a God on earth. He rules as an embodiment of divine forces and he is the source of the law in society, the one who connects the world of the living with the one of the spirits and ancestors, hence he secures harmony between the terrestrial and spiritual worlds as well as order in society. In a mystical and supernatural way, a king, through his presence, ensures society's power and prosperity. Moreover, a king's robustness and strength is connected with the power of the state. Thus, in many instances in the African tradition, when a king was getting physically weak, measures like a regicide and his ensuing replacement had to be taken in order to prevent the weakening of the state.<sup>31</sup>

In Nubia, the notion of the king as a providential ruler and a God living on earth easily transformed into a king who ruled by the providence of God, who also superintended the observance of Christian law and had undertaken as his main duty the Christians' protection in his realm.

see GEANAKOPOLOS, "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire," pp. 381-403; GLYKATZI-AHRWEILER, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin*, pp. 148-168; Id., *Γιατί το Βυζάντιο*, pp. 145-149; RUNCIMAN, *The Byzantine Theocracy*.

28 GLYKATZI-AHRWEILER, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin*, p. 159.

29 BAYNES, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, pp. 53-59, 168-171; GLYKATZI-AHRWEILER, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin*, pp. 24, 145, 164, 166; Id., *Γιατί το Βυζάντιο*, p. 147; HENDRICKX, "Byzantium and Its Meaning for Africa," pp. 209-211.

30 On the debate over the terms "divine" or "sacred" kingship in Africa, see GILBERT, "The Sacralized Body of the Akwapim King," pp. 171-174; GRAEBER, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk," pp. 2-13; DE HEUSCH, "Forms of Sacralized Power in Africa," pp. 25-37; RIAD, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk and Its Origin" pp. 156-164; RICHARDS "Keeping the King Divine," pp. 23-35; VAUGHAN, "Divine Kings," pp. 383-401 (with reference to the Bemba). On the divine/sacred kingship in Africa, see also ARENS, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk"; CLAESSEN, "Sacred Kingship," pp. 3-48 (with reference to the cases of West African Dahomey, East African Buganda, the north Kongo kingdom of Tio, the central Kongo kingdom of Kuba, West African Benin, the Jukun in the west Sahel, the Nilotic kingdom of the Shilluk, and Interlacustrine Bunyoro); ENKAMIT, *Divine Kingship of Asante*, pp. 28-30, 80-111; EVANS-PRITCHARD, "The Divine kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan"; LIENHARDT, "The Shilluk of the Upper Nile"; LLOYD, "Sacred Kingship and Government among the Yoruba," pp. 221-237; MEYEROWITZ, *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt*.

31 CLAESSEN, "Sacred Kingship," pp. 4, 23-24, 31-33; EVANS-PRITCHARD, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan," pp. 413-419; GILBERT, "The Sacralized Body of the Akwapim King," pp. 171-174, 183-186; GRAEBER, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk," p. 3; RIAD, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk and its Origin," pp. 156-164; SCHNEPEL, "Continuity despite and through Death," pp. 42-50; SIMONSE, "Tragedy, Ritual and Power in Nilotic Regicide," pp. 67-100; YOUNG, "The Divine Kingship of the Jukun," pp. 135-152.

One of the remarkable features of art in African cultures is its attempt “to give form to an abstraction”<sup>32</sup> and thus to visualise complex ideas through simplified imagery. An example of this is the depiction of the Holy Trinity as the figure of Christ in a threefold identical image, which is a figurative rendering of this abstract Christian dogma.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the theocratic concept of a ruler by divine right is pictured by the Nubian kings’ representations, almost in every instance, under the protection of the Holy Trinity, Christ, the Virgin, and archangels.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, protection scenes aimed to illustrate that the king’s authority was given by God.<sup>35</sup> Through the king, his subjects were also blessed and protected. The representations of a king under protection is known from Byzantium,<sup>36</sup> and in Nubia it became a standard iconographic depiction within churches, which is something unique in the Christian world.<sup>37</sup> In protection scenes, traditional African beliefs interwoven with the Christian dogma can be traced. That is, for example, the archangels’ high status as protectors in the Nubian Church, which seems to be associated with traditional beliefs in spirits and ancestors.<sup>38</sup>

The king’s inclusion in church iconography probably has to do with the role of churches as the gathering places of local congregations.<sup>39</sup> People gathered in churches to worship God and pray for

- 32 DAVIDSON, *African Kingdoms*, pp. 145–146. See also FINNESTAD, “Images as Messengers of Coptic Identity,” pp. 91, 98–100, 104–107; MAKOWSKI, “The Holy Trinity in Nubian Art,” p. 308; ŻURAWSKI, “The Anastasis Scene,” p. 175.
- 33 MAKOWSKI, “The Holy Trinity in Nubian Art”; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “Nubian Wall Painting,” p. 266; Id., “Iconography of Jesus Christ in Nubian Painting,” pp. 243, 251–252, figs. 12, 15, 16; WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 229–230; WOŹNIAK, “L’influence byzantine dans l’art nubien,” p. 89; ZIELIŃSKA, “Painted Decoration of the Central Hall,” figs. 2–7, p. 28; figs. 2–12, p. 31.
- 34 For protection-scenes in Nubian churches’ iconographical program, see JAKOBIELSKI, “Nubian Scenes of Protection from Faras,” pp. 44–50; INNEMÉE, “Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration,” pp. 282–283; ŁAPTAŚ, “Banganarti 2003,” pp. 244–252; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “Nubian Wall Painting,” pp. 266–267; Id., “Late Christian Painting in Nubia,” p. 308; Id., “Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels,” pp. 92–107; WOŹNIAK, “L’influence byzantine dans l’art nubien,” pp. 85–89; Id., “Rayonnement de Byzance,” pp. 7–10, figs. 1–3; ZIELIŃSKA, “The Iconography of Power,” pp. 943–949; ŻURAWSKI, “Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and ez-Zuma,” pp. 76–78; ŻURAWSKI et al., “Banganarti and Selib,” p. 325.
- 35 GLYKATZI-AHRWEILER, *L’idéologie politique de l’empire byzantin*, p. 159; INNEMÉE, “Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration,” pp. 282–283; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels,” p. 93; TALBOT-RICE, *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, pp. 35–36; WOŹNIAK, “L’influence byzantine dans l’art nubien,” p. 89; ŻURAWSKI, “Medieval Nubian Regalia,” p. 224.
- 36 PAPAMASTORAKIS, “Orb of the Earth,” pp. 97, fig. 8; pp. 104–105, figs. 23, 24; WOŹNIAK, “L’influence byzantine dans l’art nubien,” pp. 88–89.
- 37 JAKOBIELSKI, “Nubian Scenes of Protection from Faras,” p. 44.
- 38 GODLEWSKI, “Christian Nubia – after the Nubian Campaign,” p. 272; INNEMÉE, “Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration,” pp. 280–281; ŁAPTAŚ, “Archangels as Protectors and Guardians in Nubian Paintings”; Id., “The Archangel Raphael as Protector, Demon Tamer, Guide and Healer”; VAN GERVEN OEI et al. (eds.), *The Old Nubian Texts from Attiri*, pp. 15–20.
- 39 KAPLAN, *Pourquoi Byzance?*, p. 144; cf. MARTENS-CZARNECKA, “Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels,” p. 93.



welfare in this life and salvation in the afterlife. In addition, churches have been excavated throughout Nubia, in almost every settlement.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, they were very convenient public spaces for a king to be visible to all his subjects even in the regions of his realm where his physical appearance was practically not feasible. Moreover, through his symbolic presence, the king could not only confirm the power of his authority but also accomplish his traditional role as a sacred king whose presence was connected with fertility of the land and prosperity of the population in his realm.<sup>41</sup> The traditional practice of regicide was transformed under Christian influence as well. As Włodzimierz Godlewski has suggested, in the 11th century, due to a wave of hunger caused by a low Nile, King Solomon was sent to a monastery after a short rule.<sup>42</sup>

From the 9th to the 10th century onwards the effigies of a king under protection begin to be represented in the apse of the sanctuary, the holiest place within an Eastern Christian church.<sup>43</sup> It seems to be a kind of symbolic illustration of the title of archpriest attributed to the Byzantine emperor<sup>44</sup> and probably acquired by his Nubian counterpart.<sup>45</sup> This new feature in Nubian royal iconography

- 40 EDWARDS (*The Nubian Past*, p. 241) mentions that 150 churches have been located only in the area between the first and third Nile cataract. For a full list of the churches of Nobadia, see ADAMS, "Architectural Evolution of the Nubian Church," pp. 126–38. Portraits of kings, of course, are not found in every Nubian church.
- 41 For kings' association with fertility in African traditions, see CLAESSEN, "Sacred Kingship," pp. 4, 14–15, 19, 31–38; EVANS-PRITCHARD, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan," p. 414; GORDON, "(Dis)embodying Sovereignty," pp. 50; GRAEBER, "The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk," p. 3; VAUGHAN, "Divine Kings," p. 397. For Christian Nubians' attachment to their old African tradition, see ADAMS, *Nubia*, p. 480; EDWARDS, *The Nubian Past*, p. 127; LAJTAR, "A Greek Hymn to the Virgin," pp. 406–407; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, "A Scene of a Ritual Dance"; OBUŁSKI, "Nubia and the Late Antique Greek-Roman World" SCANLON, "Excavations at Qasr el-Wizz," p. 48.
- 42 GODLEWSKI, "Archbishop Georgius of Dongola," pp. 669–671. For Solomon, see in accounts written by Severus (VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, p. 215), Abu Makarrem (*ibid.*, pp. 331–332), and al-Furat (*ibid.*, pp. 393–394).
- 43 GODLEWSKI, "Bishops and Kings," pp. 267–271; *Id.*, "Archbishop Georgius of Dongola," pp. 666–667; JAKOBIELSKI, "Tentative d'identification de certaines peintures de Faras," pp. 65–71; INNEMÉE, "Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration," p. 282; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, "Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels," pp. 94–107; WOŹNIAK, "L'influence byzantine dans l'art nubien," pp. 86–88; *Id.*, "Rayonnement de Byzance," pp. 6–13; ZIELIŃSKA, "The Iconography of Power," pp. 943–946; ŻURAWSKI, "Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and ez-Zuma," pp. 76–78; *Id.*, "The Southern Dongola Reach Survey Project, 2002," pp. 245–246.
- 44 DAGRON, *Emperor and Priest*, pp. 31–32, 127–181, 248–318; GEANAKOPOLOS, "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire," pp. 391–392; ΔΡΑΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Μεσαίωνας Ελληνικός και Δυτικός*, p. 52; ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, "Το νέο κράτος της μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου," pp. 171–174.
- 45 Such an appropriation by Nubian kings might be traced in the chronicle of ΟΤΤΟ, BISHOP OF FREISING (*Otonis Episcopi Frisingensis Chronica sive Historia de Duabus Civitatibus* [vii, 33]), which mentions a Christian leader who was both a priest and a king at the same time. From his remote kingdom, situated beyond the Islamic countries, he would attack them from the rear. In the 13th century in *Historia Damiatana* Oliver of Paderborn has recorded a prophecy about the Nubians. According to this prophecy, a Nubian king would seize Islam's holy lands in Hejaz (OLIVER SCHOLASTICUS, *Opera*, I. *Historia Damiatana*; II, *Epistolae*). In such hearsay and prophecies the origins of the legendary figure of Prester John can be found. For Prester John, see in DORESSE, *L'empire du prêtre Jean*; JONES & MONROE, *A History of Ethiopia*, pp. 59–63; KAPLAN, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, pp. 43–62; KURT, "The Search

could be a kind of encroachment on clerical privileges as well as a proclamation of the king's dominance over the religious domain. It was the period when the kingdom of Makuria enjoyed its economic, political, and cultural heyday. We know that Georgios I, during his visit to Baghdad, won the attention as well as admiration of the Christian population.<sup>46</sup> And it was the very same Georgios whose representation was firstly illustrated in the Faras cathedral. His successor is probably the ruler who is first depicted in the apse composition under the Virgin's protection.<sup>47</sup> This king's representation may visualise Justinian's principle of one state, one Church, one law, all concentrated on the king's person.<sup>48</sup>

In Nubia, just as in the Byzantine Empire, the Church and the State seem to be the two main institutions upon which the spiritual and political life of the Christian kingdoms were based, over the centuries of their history. For instance, we find settlements from that period developing around a church, which probably functioned not only as a religious but as an administrative centre as well.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in texts found in Qasr Ibrim, we see references to the participation of the Church in economic issues of the state, since priests served either as scribes and warrantors or as receivers of assets.<sup>50</sup> Besides, Nubian bishops hold a prominent place among the depicted faces in wall paintings and, furthermore, the wealth of the churches is a clear indication of their high standing in Nubian society.<sup>51</sup> But,

for Prester John," pp. 297–320; SALVADORE, "The Ethiopian Age of Exploration," pp. 593–627; SEIGNOBOS, "L'autre Éthiopie: La Nubie et la croisade (XII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)," pp. 49–69; ZACHAROPOULOU, "The Black Saint Maurice of Magdeburg and the African Christian Kingdoms in Nubia and Ethiopia in the 13th century," pp. 90–93.

- 46 Michael the Syrian wrote in his Chronicle regarding the visit of the Nubian Prince Georqi(us) to Baghdad in 835 CE: "When the prince arrived at Callinice (Syria) the emir of Jezirah came to meet him. The Tayaye and the Christians accompanied him to see the unprecedented marvel which had happened in their country [...]. Georqi(us) advanced towards the king (Al-Mutasim) who took him by the hand and made him sit before him. [...] He received Georqi(us) very well and gave him rich presents of gold and silver." In VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 316–319. See also al-Aswani's account by Maqrizi in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 644–647.
- 47 GODLEWSKI, "Bishops and Kings," pp. 265–269; JAKOBIELSKI, "Tentative d'identification de certaines peintures de Faras," pp. 65–66; INNEMÉE, "Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration," p. 282; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, "Some Remarks on Iconography of Rulers and Archangels," p. 94; ZIELIŃSKA, "The Painted Decoration of the Church at Sonqi Tino," pp. 943–944.
- 48 EVANS, *The Age of Justinian*, pp. 60–61; MOSS, "The History of the Byzantine Empire," p. 7; RUNCIMAN, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, pp. 45–46.
- 49 ADAMS, "Medieval Nubia, Another Golden Age," p. 33; DEPTUEA "Inscriptions from Saint Menas' Church in Selib," pp. 131–134; EDWARDS, *The Nubian Past*, p. 241; JAKOBIELSKI, *Faras III*, pp. 15–16, 85; MARTENS-CZARNECKA, "Wall Paintings Discovered in Dongola," pp. 281–282; RUFFINI, "Documentary Evidence and the Production of Power," p. 15; TÖRÖK, "Money, Economy and Administration in Christian Nubia," pp. 298–300; TRIGGER, *History and Settlement in Lower Nubia*, p. 149; TSAKOS, "On Place Names Used by Nubians," p. 234.
- 50 ŁAJTAR, "Dongola 2010"; OCHALEA, "Multilingualism in Christian Nubia," p. 32; TSAKOS, "On Place Names Used by Nubians," p. 234.
- 51 GODLEWSKI, "Bishops and Kings," pp. 265–79; Id., "Archbishop Georgius of Dongola"; Id., *Dongola*, pp. 52, 57; INNEMÉE, "Monks and Bishops in Old Dongola"; ZIELIŃSKA, "The Painted Decoration of the Church at Sonqi Tino," pp. 595–596.

ultimately, the Church was under the royal authority, and, as Nubian texts indicate, the kings of Nubia, just as the Byzantine kings, had control over ecclesiastical affairs. Moreover, kings nominated the bishops who were subsequently approved by the patriarch of Alexandria.<sup>52</sup>

However, Nubian kings never proceeded to claim autonomy over their Church and release it from its dependency on the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Why did they preserve, throughout their history, the tradition that required the appointment of their metropolitan to depend on Egypt and why did not they declare the autonomy of the Nubian Church? Only tentative answers can be provided to this question. The reason might be that, through these contacts, Nubians remained connected with the rest of the Christian world wherein they could seek inspiration and the powers of their renaissance. On the other hand, the Christians outside Nubia, especially these of Egypt, Syria, and Ethiopia, saw in the face of a Nubian king the leader who was able to offer his protection to Christian people. Nubian kings willingly undertook this responsibility whenever they intervened in Egypt, in defence of the persecuted local Church or when they mediated with the patriarch in order to restore his contacts with Ethiopia.<sup>53</sup>

To conclude with the relations between Church and state in Nubia, the fact remains that the Nubian Church not only developed under the royal auspices, but existed by virtue of the royal protection. Without this protection Christianity fell into decline and eventually disappeared completely. This development accelerated after a Muslim leader's ascension to the throne of Dongola.<sup>54</sup> This is very different from what happened in the rest of the Eastern Christian world, where the Church outlived the state.

As we have already noticed, royal authority was placed in the centre of Nubia's theocratic system. Nubian documents evidence that the authorities of officials and dignitaries derived from and were sanctified by their connection with kings.<sup>55</sup> The representation of a Nubian king among apostles, as we can see from Faras, Dongola,

52 PLUMLEY, "Qasr Ibrim 1974," p. 7. For example, we do find a reference in John the Deacon, describing how Michael, a patriarch of Copts in Alexandria, was forced to finally accept the substitution of a Nubian archbishop, although he did not agree with it, after the archbishop's conflict with the Nubian king. See VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 40–43; In addition, we know several cases where a nominee was the son of a dead king, who was denied access to the throne due to matrilineal system of succession that is attested in Makuria a number of times after the 11th century. See the account by Severus in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, p. 217.

53 See accounts by John the Deacon in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 43–44; Severus in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 201–204, 205–207; Abu Makarrem in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 329–330; al-Makin in VANTINI, *Oriental Sources*, pp. 374–375.

54 ADAMS, *Nubia*, pp. 508, 522–31; WELSBY, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 242–255; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Νουβία και Βυζάντιο*, pp. 222–232.

55 As RUFFINI has very convincingly suggested in "Documentary Evidence and the Production of Power in Medieval Nubia."

or Banganarti,<sup>56</sup> might be a pictorial communication of this idea. This is very similar to the picture of Byzantine court that Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus described in his *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*.<sup>57</sup> There the Byzantine emperor is presented among his dignitaries as Christ among the apostles.

In Nubia's theocratic system the divine origin of the royal authority is also underlined by the role preserved for the queen mother. She occupied the most important place among the Nubian dignitaries. The office of the mother of the king was presented in close connection with the Mother of Christ. In Nubian wall paintings, representations of the queen mother under the protection of God's Mother are depicted in the northern nave, that is in the part of a church which was kept for women.<sup>58</sup> The queen mother was also depicted being clad in Byzantine-style and Byzantinised crowns resembling the ones worn by Theotokos. As regards the queen mother role we can testify not only influences from Byzantium, but also elements of the traditional concept of African kingship,<sup>59</sup> in which her role is paramount, as she is the person who supports a king in his rule.<sup>60</sup> The tradition of ruling queens is well attested in Nubia during the Meroitic kingdom.<sup>61</sup> In Christian Nubia the matrilineal succession gave the queen- other even greater political relevance.

In conclusion, it is not only memories from Byzantium that can be traced in Nubian political ideology throughout medieval Christian Nubian history. Overall, the Nubian states were formed as long as the new leaders who emerged from the ruins of the Meroitic state were determined to establish their authority by becoming Christian converts in interaction with the Byzantines. Therefore, they created a strong Christian kingdom modelled on the Byzantine Empire, which became a part of Eastern Christendom. In the political ideology that they promulgated among their subjects, elements from African and Byzantine culture were interwoven. This creative inter-

56 GODLEWSKI, "Archbishop Georgius of Dongola," pp. 671-672; ZIELIŃSKA, "The Iconography of Power," pp. 943-946; ŻURAWSKI, "Miracles of Banganarti," pp. 20-22; Id., "Nubian Mortuary Complex of the Christian Period," p. 181; ŻURAWSKI et al., "Banganarti and Selib," p. 325.

57 REISKE, *Constantini Porphyrogeniti Imperatoris, De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, p. 638. See also GLYKATZI-AHRWEILER, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin*, p. 63.

58 GODLEWSKI, *Pachoras*, p. 71; Id., "Bishops and Kings," p. 266; INNEMÉE, "Observations on the System of Nubian Church Decoration," p. 285; WOŹNIAK, "L'influence byzantine dans l'art nubien," pp. 85-86; ZIELIŃSKA, "The Painted Decoration of the Church at Sonqi Tino," pp. 596-597; Id., "The Iconography of Power," p. 943 and fn. 4.

59 VAN GERVEN OEI, "A Dance for a Princess," pp. 117-135.

60 CLAESSEN, "Sacred Kingship," pp. 6-7, 21, 25, 28; ENKAMIT, *Divine Kingship of Asante*, passim, and see especially a conclusion on p. 290; FARRAR, "The Queenmother, Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority"; GRAEBER, "The Divine kingship of the Shilluk," pp. 16-18; KAPLAN, "Iyoba," pp. 73-102; LIENHARDT, "Nilotic Kings and Their Mothers' Kin," pp. 29-42; MEYEROWITZ, *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt*, pp. 23-26.

61 KAHN, "The Queen Mother in the Kingdom of Kush," pp. 61-68; LOHWASSER "Queenship in Kush," pp. 61-76; MORKOT, "Kingship and Kinship in the Empire of Kush," pp. 211-213; TÖRÖK, "Kinship and Decorum," pp. 60-84.

action is evident in everyday life, in art and in the use of the Greek language by the indigenous population. Therefore, the ideological influences from Byzantium integrated into Nubia's indigenous background, forming thus a unique Afro-Byzantine society. This society was strong enough to safeguard its status as the sovereign state in the Middle Nile Valley. Studying its history we can acquire a comprehensive and insightful understanding of Eastern Christianity during Medieval times.

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