1 Introduction: Christian Nubia and her Inhabitants

The term “Nubia” designates the middle part of the Nile Valley to the south of the First Cataract. It has an ethno-linguistic character, as it originates from the name of an ethnic group which inhabited the land in question since the beginning of the Christian era. Members of this group, who still inhabit some parts of the Middle Nile Valley, call themselves Nubians and speak Nubian languages from the Nilo-Saharan language family.¹ The Nubians seem to have arrived in the Nile Valley around the beginning of Roman rule in Egypt, but we hear about them in the written sources only in late antiquity, when, taking advantage of the fall of the Meroitic kingdom in the mid-fourth century, they formed their own kingdoms: Nobadia in the north, between the First and the Third Nile Cataracts, with Faras or Qasr Ibrim as the capital; Alwa (sometimes referred to as Alodia) in the south, beyond the Fifth Cataract, with the capital in Soba; and Makuria in between, with Dongola as the capital.² At a certain moment, probably in the first half of the seventh century, the northern kingdom, Nobadia, was incorporated into its southern neighbour, Makuria, and ceased to exist as an independent entity. Before this happened, all three kingdoms accepted Chris-
tianity as the new state religion.³ The process of Christianisation of Nubia is poorly known to us. John of Ephesus, who is our main source of information, speaks of three evangelisation missions, which were carried out mainly with Egyptian forces and means, though at least partly with the emperor’s awareness and consent. The first and second missions, which took place in the years 542–545 and 569–575 respectively, reached Nobadia, while the third one, launched in the 580s, was headed for Alwa. Makuria was most probably Christianised in a separate missionary undertaking approximately at the same time as the second mission to Nobadia. The Christianisation of the Nubian kingdoms strongly impacted the Middle Nile Valley as the whole region incorporated Eastern Christianity’s culture, including its patterns of literary and visual culture, organisation of the state, ideology of power, and social behaviour. The Nubian Christian kingdoms survived in the Middle Nile Valley for almost a millennium. Makuria was divided in the fourteenth century into several petty kingdoms, which could have retained their Christian character for a certain period. One of them, situated in the Second Cataract region, survived as a Christian state until at least the end of the fifteenth century, or even as long as the Ottoman conquest of northern Nubia in the 1570s. Alwa ceased to exist in the first half of the sixteenth century under pressure from the Muslim Funj people, who were moving down the Blue Nile. Its capital, Soba, was captured by the Funj warriors in 1504.

2 The Sources

We learn about the history and culture of the Christian Nubian kingdoms from two kinds of sources: internal and external. The internal sources, the amount of which is constantly increasing thanks to archaeological research, include material remains of human settlements and graves, sacred buildings with their decoration, objects of everyday use, as well as several thousand texts, both literary and documentary, in Greek, Sahidic Coptic, Old Nubian, and Arabic.⁴ External sources are almost exclusively texts, mainly literary, composed for the most part in Arabic, and to a lesser degree in Coptic, Greek, Syriac, and Ga‘az.⁵ While the latter group are all of Christian provenience, the former originate from both Muslim and Christian milieus. The inter-

⁴ For the written heritage of Christian Nubia with respect to the form and contents of texts, see G. Ochała, “Multilingualism in Christian Nubia: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches”, *Dotawo* 1 (2016), 1–50.
⁵ Those sources were collected and translated into English by G. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, Heidelberg – Warsaw 1975; the collection has recently been digitised and published online at <http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/Giovanni_Vantini%27s_Oriental_Sources_Concerning_Nubia>.
nal sources are of considerably greater importance than the external ones. They are not only more numerous and more variable, but also more credible as genuine products of Christian Nubian culture. The external sources have in turn serious weaknesses in that they only transmit the perception of a distant land in the Middle Nile Valley by members of other cultures and hence they are not infrequently tendentious.

The sources at our disposal are, unfortunately, not very eloquent as far as Nubian kingship is concerned. Among the internal sources there is not even a single example of a historiographic work about the Nubians’ own history and the role of kings in it; the Nubians most probably did not know this literary genre. Likewise, we find no texts in which the ruler’s duties, prerogatives, modi operandi, etc. are clearly defined and described. What we have are official documents, scarce though they are, which were produced by the royal chancery and reveal kings in action in particular matters. Definitely more numerous are pieces of information about individual rulers, namely their names and titles preserved in dating formulae of different types of texts ranging from legal deeds to building and commemorative inscriptions. Moreover, we know a dozen or so full-scale royal portraits painted on walls of cult places. In several cases, the portraits are supplied with legends identifying the depicted persons. Some examples of informal depictions of rulers also exist, such as graffiti on walls of buildings and decoration of pottery vessels. In Dongola, the capital of Makuria, the Polish archaeological mission has discovered a massive storied building of residential character, probably a royal palace. Another construction in the same site, whose essential part is a hypostyle hall located on the first floor, is traditionally interpreted as a throne hall of the Makurian kings. The external sources provide much more detailed information about the Nubian rulers, the character of their authority, modi operandi, their actions, individual personality features, etc. However, serious limitations of these sources (see below) must be always kept in mind when approaching Christian Nubian history through them. It should be emphasised here that the majority of accessible sources is relatively late. Dated between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, they are formally outside of the scope of this volume. Nevertheless we have decided to use them extensively, because in many a case these late narrations are clearly based on much earlier sources; also, it may be assumed that the phenomena described in the late period most probably originated in the

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8 Godlewski (cf. fn. 7) 42–47.

first millennium. The lion’s share of the external sources refers to Makuria from the
time after its unification with Nobadia; only single mentions pertain to the still inde-
pendent Kingdom of Nobadia and the Kingdom of Alwa.

3 Nubian Royal Houses

Nubian royal history is poorly known. We are aware of names of some thirty kings
along with their approximate dating,¹⁰ but only in a few instances are we able to es-
establish, even roughly, the duration of the reigns of particular sovereigns and hence
accord them a proper place on the timeline. It is well known that Christian Nubian
rulers formed dynasties, which changed over time. We hear of at least two such
changes, in c. 725 and in the second half of the eleventh century. The dynasty ruling
between the eighth and eleventh centuries was characterised by a patrilineal system
of succession, whereby the crown was inherited by the firstborn (?) son of the current
king, which is clearly visible in onomastics: for most of their rule, the members of
this dynasty bear the names Georgios and Zacharias alternatively.¹¹ During the
reign of the other dynasty, from the end of the eleventh century, the matrilineal suc-
cession principle was in force: the crown was handed over to the eldest (?) son of the
current king’s sister. Some members of the matrilineal dynasty attempted to break
the tradition by nominating their own sons or succeeding their fathers. Such at-
ttempts inevitably lead to internal conflicts, which not infrequently ended in military
interventions from Egypt. This, as a result, contributed significantly to the fall of Ma-
kuria. When there was no legal heir, a king could appoint another candidate of his
choice. Such a situation is attested for Zacharias, son of King Merkourios (first
half of the eighth century), who, according to the History of the Patriarchs of the Copt-
ic Church of Alexandria, desiring a peaceful religious life as a monk (?), abdicated
the throne in favour of his kinsman Simon; after Simon’s death Merkourios adopted
a certain Abraham, coming apparently from outside the royal family, and designated
him as a new king.¹² Belonging to the royal family seems to have been an important
factor governing the choice of a successor, not only by birth but also by marrying a
king’s daughter. The latter case could have eventually led to a change of dynasty, as
indeed happened for the Zacharias-Georgios dynasty (first half of the eighth centu-
ry): Ioannes, the founder of the dynasty and father of Zacharias I, did not belong

¹⁰ On Nubian kings, see S. Munro-Hay, “Kings and Kingdoms of Ancient Nubia”, Rassegna di Studi
Etiopici 29 (1982–1983), 87–137; G. Ochala, “‘When King Georgios Was the King of Dotawo’: An An-
notated List of Christian Nubian Rulers” (in preparation).
¹¹ For Makuria under the rule of the “Zacharian” dynasty, see W. Godlewski, “Introduction to the
¹² Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 40–41.
to the royal family but was the husband of one of the royal women.\textsuperscript{13} We come across analogous situations in the terminal period of Makurian history: chieftains of Muslim Bedouin tribes married daughters of Makurian kings and thus obtained rights to the throne of Dongola. Women held generally quite an important position in Christian Nubian hierarchy, and not only in the matrilineal system. From the first half of the tenth century, thus from the time of the patrilineal dynasty, comes the first attestation of the title “queen mother”\textsuperscript{14} (Gr. μήτηρ βασιλέως, Nub. ευνη [read /ŋonnen/]), which recurs in sources until the very end of independent Christian Nubian statehood.\textsuperscript{15} Judging by the protocols of Nubian legal texts, this was an important office\textsuperscript{16} in the kingdom, always being listed in the second or third position after the king. It was held, so it seems, by either the current king’s mother or his sister, the mother of the future king.

### 4 Terminology

Three generic terms for “king” are used in Christian Nubian texts. Greek sources unanimously use the Greek noun βασιλεύς (most often as an abbreviation ΒΔΣ resembling a nomen sacrum).\textsuperscript{17} The same word may also appear as a Greek loanword in the Coptic linguistic context. Coptic texts, of course, also feature the native Egyptian noun ρῶ. In Old Nubian sources, in turn, king is exclusively called by the native Nubian word αγγογο, which derives from the noun αγγ, “head,” and is probably cognate with the Meroitic qore, “king.”\textsuperscript{18} In addition, we come across a number of non-generic terms. Two ninth-century kings, Zacharias (father) and Georgios (son), are designated αὐγουστος (Augustus) and καίσαρ (Caesar), respectively. The former is called “Augustus” in the filiation given in the epitaph of his son Ioannes († 883),\textsuperscript{19} and the latter is called “Caesar” in the epitaph of his official Mariankouda (†

\textsuperscript{13} Maqrizi gives the name of Zacharias’ father (Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 644) and Michael the Syrian claims that “he was not of royal descent” (Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 317).

\textsuperscript{14} This is Queen Mother Mariam who accompanied King Zacharias. She occurs in three texts: a Coptic legal document from Qasr Ibrim, 925 (unpublished [DBMNT 615]), a Coptic foundation inscription from Faras, 930 (\textit{I. Khartoum Copt. 2} [DBMNT 33]), and the beginning of a Coptic documentary text from Qasr Ibrim, 940/1 (unpublished [DBMNT 701]).

\textsuperscript{15} For the title of “queen mother,” see B. Rostowska, “The Title and Office of the King’s Mother in Christian Nubia”, \textit{Africana Bulletin} 31 (1982), 75–78.

\textsuperscript{16} We indeed seem to be dealing with an office here, not merely an honorific title.

\textsuperscript{17} For basileus as a royal and imperial title, see G. Rösch, \textit{ONOMA BAZILEIΛΩΣ. Studien zum offiziellen Gebrauch der Kaisertitel in spätantiker und frühbyzantinischer Zeit [= BV 10]}, Vienna 1978, 37–39. The title basileus along with basiliskos was used already by pre-Christian rulers of the Nobades; see T. Hägg, “Titles and Honorific Epithets in Nubian Greek Texts”, \textit{SO 45} (1990), 148–158.


\textsuperscript{19} \textit{I. Khartoum Greek} 21 (DBMNT 15).
both kings are apparently dead at the time of the epitaphs’ composition. Obviously, the dynasty, which ruled Dongola at that time, made use of an antiquated Roman imperial titulature going back to the second century CE. This use, however, does not conform with the original Roman model, in which Caesar became Augustus after the death of the latter. In our case, Georgios, who succeeded Zacharias, retained his title of a lower rank until his death. Because the titles Augustus and Caesar went out of use almost completely in the seventh century in the Eastern Roman Empire, the Nubians must have adopted them before that date, most probably at the time of Christianisation of the Nubian kingdoms in the mid-sixth century. The title Caesar is also attested in a fourteenth-century Greek inscription left in Deir Anba Hadra (St. Simeon Monastery) near Aswan by Joseph, archbishop of Dongola. Therein he describes his career at the royal court in Dongola, which stretched over the rule of several kings. Joseph refers to them with the help of different terms: βασίλευς, καίσαρ, σκήπτωρ, ρήξ, κοίρανος, ἄναξ. It is hard to believe that these terms were actually used to address the king in fourteenth-century Nubia; they are rather employed here as a display of Joseph’s erudition and his classical literary education.

King Moüses Georgios ruling Makuria and Alwa in the second half of the twelfth century bears the title αὐτοκράτωρ τοῦ λαοῦ, “absolute ruler of the people,” in the Greek subscript to his letter to Patriarch Mark III (1180 – 1209) dated to 1186. As with the use of καίσαρ and αὔγουστος, we are dealing here with the adoption of the traditional Roman imperial terminology. Interestingly, the title is not attested before the second half of the twelfth century in Nubia, although we may suppose that it came there already in the mid-sixth century. The addition of τοῦ λαοῦ, absent from Roman titulature, is equally interesting. It is uncertain what λαος means here exactly. Some suggestions are offered by the context. The title immediately follows a list of nations over which the king claims supremacy preceded by the epithet φοβερότατος πάντων τῶν βαρβάρων, “the most fearful towards all barbarians.” The nations are those that appear in the titulature of the miaphysite Patriarch of Alexandria as his subordinates, as given in the address of the same letter: Alwans, Makurians, Nobadians, Dalmatai (perhaps inhabitants of Cyrenaica), and Axumites. Thus, we may surmise that λαος designates all Christians within the confines of the Alexandrian Patriarchate as

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20 I. Khartoum Greek 18 (DBMNT 12).
21 For the titles augustus and caesar, see Rösch (cf. fn. 17) 34 – 35 and 36 – 37.
24 For the title αὐτοκράτωρ, see Rösch (cf. fn. 17) 35 – 36.
opposed to non-Christians. In this way, the Nubian king puts himself in the position of the protector of the Christian populace of north-eastern Africa, a ruler comparable to the Byzantine emperor who is considered the protector of the Christian oikoumene. Finally, we need to mention the title δεσπότης, found only once in the titulature of Tokiltoetōn, a ruler of Nobadia in the mid-sixth century. This title, a constant element of imperial presentation in Greek, especially from the tetrarchic period onwards, points to the ruler’s absolute power.

Nubian kings were also given various epithets. They seem to occur only in Greek and Coptic texts of official character (legal deeds and foundation inscriptions). The most common among them was φιλοχριστος, “Christ-loving,” attested also in the Coptic version ἡαυχριστος. Coptic texts also feature the rarer variant ἡαινογες, the translation of the Greek φιλόθεος, “God-loving,” itself not attested in Nubia. The title φιλοχριστος/φιλόθεος emphasises the king’s religious attitude and his attachment to the true faith. A similar notion is transmitted by the title ὀρθοδοξος, “orthodox.” To the epithets describing a religious attitude one needs to add also εὐσεβεστατος, “the most pious,” indicating the ruler’s piety perceived as a virtue. The epithet θεόστεπτος, “crowned by God,” known also in its Coptic translation (ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲥⲧⲉⲫⲁⲩ ⲙⲙⲟ ϥ), points to another aspect of royal authority, namely

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27 The epithet is attested for the following kings: Tokiltoetōn (DBMNT 458; cf. fn. 25 above), Merkurios (Coptic foundation inscription of Bishop Paulos, Faras, 707; I. Khartoum Copt. 1; DBMNT 32), Chael (two legal deeds of land sale, northern Nubia, c. 784–812; unpublished, fragmentary transcript and translation in J. Krall, “Ein neuer nubischer König”, WZKM 14 [1900], 236–240; DBMNT 634–635), Ioannes (two deeds of land sale, northern Nubia, 9th cent.; P. Lond. Copt. 449–450; DBMNT 630–631), Moūses Georgios (DBMNT 610; cf. fn. 23 above and 368–369 below).

28 It can be found as describing the following rulers: Kyriakos (deed of land sale, northern Nubia, 8th cent.; CPR IV 28; DBMNT 636), Ioannes (DBMNT 630–631; cf. fn. 27 above), Georgios V (fragment of legal document, Qasr Ibrim, 1071/2; J. M. Plumley, “A Coptic Precursor of a Medieval Nubian Protocol”, Sudan Texts Bulletin 3 [1981], 5–8; DBMNT 609; the counting of kings is given after Ochala [cf. fn. 10]).

29 Rösch (cf. fn. 17) 65.

30 Found only once in internal sources, referring to Georgios I (DBMNT 12; cf. 365 above), and once in external literary sources, in the History of the Patriarchs, in connection with King Kyriakos (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 44).

31 Only kings Tokiltoetōn (DBMNT 458; cf. fn. 25 above) and Moūses Georgios (DBMNT 610; cf. fn. 23 above and 368–369 below) are given this epithet. For the title εὐσεβεστατος, see Rösch (cf. fn. 17) 42–43, esp. fn. 53. The title, especially widespread in late-antique imperial titulature, goes back to the title εὐσεβης, which was given to Roman emperors from the second century CE.
that this power comes from God himself. The title, which is very popular in the Eastern Roman empire, especially in the seventh–eighth centuries, is believed to be linked to the coronation of the emperor by the patriarch of Constantinople. One may wonder whether the Nubian use of this term is linked with the same custom, namely the coronation of the king of Makuria by the bishop of Dongola, the head of the Makurian Church.

The titulatures of two Nubian rulers deserve special attention, namely that of kings Tokiltoeton of Nobadia in the mid-sixth century and Moüses Georgios of Makuria in the second half of the twelfth century. The former is known thanks to an inscription commemorating the erection of the city walls of Ikhmindi (c. 100 km to the south of the First Cataract). He is called there ἐπιφανεστάτος καὶ εὐσεβεστάτος ἀγάθος δεσπότης καὶ φιλόχριστος βασιλεύς, “the most distinguished and most pious good lord and Christ-loving king.” In this titulature we have obviously two elements joined together, ἐπιφανεστάτος καὶ εὐσεβεστάτος δεσπότης and φιλόχριστος βασιλεύς. The former, which goes back as far as the tetrarchic imperial titulature, belongs to the sphere of civil authority, while the latter, modelled on the titulature of Eastern Roman emperors, points at the religious aspect of power. The element ἀγάθος is, in our opinion, somewhat artificially added and finds no parallel in the Roman world. It is, however, present in the titulature of King Moüses Georgios. This titulature is found in a draft of the letter of the king to Patriarch Mark III requesting ordination of a certain Iesou as bishop of a Nubian see, found in Qasr Ibrim. In it, the king is described by a whole set of epithets including: εὐσεβεστάτος, φιλόχριστος, φιλεκκλήσιος, φιλόπτωχος, φιλάνθρωπος, ἀγάθος, πράος, εὐσπλαγχνος, μεταδότης, ἀνδράγαθος, τροφεύς, φοβερότατος πάντων τῶν βαρβάρων, “the most pious, Christ-loving, Church-loving, loving the poor, lover of men, lover of strangers, good, mild, kind, generous, one who behaves uprightly, foster-father, the most fear-

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32 The title is attested in Nubia only for king Merkurios (Coptic and Greek foundation inscriptions of Bishop Paulos, Faras, 707; Coptic: DBMNT 32; cf. fn. 27 above; Greek: I. Varsovie 101; DBMNT 67). Generally for the title θεόστέπτος, see Rösch (cf. fn. 17) 66–67, and H. Hunger, Prooimion. Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengend er Urkunden [= Wiener byzantinische Studien 1], Vienna 1964, 56.
33 See fn. 25 above.
34 Note the use of the title ἐπιφανεστάτος in the titulature of Phonen, king of the Blemmyes, as preserved in his own letter to Aburni, king of the Nobades (J. Rea, “The Letter of Phonen to Aburni”, ZPE [1979], 147–162; T. Eide et alii [eds.], Fontes historiae Nubiorum, III: From the First to the Sixth Century AD, Bergen 1998, 1158–1165 [no. 319]). This text, predating the stela of Tokiltoeton by roughly a century and originating from a pagan milieu, shows that the process of adopting imperial titulature started well before the official Christianisation of the Middle Nile Valley.
35 The epithet ἀγάθος is, however, found in the titulature of Chosroes as presented in his letter to Emperor Justinian (Men., ex. gent. 1.176, 13ff. [de Boor]).
36 See above, 366 and fn. 23.
ful towards all barbarians.” The sequence and meaning of these epithets is definitely not accidental. At the beginning, there is a series of five compound adjectives with the element φιλό-, which are followed by adjectives and nouns of another morphology, mostly simple ones. The whole set is preceded by the adjective in superlative, εὐσεβέστατος, obviously not an original element of the list. From the point of view of semantics, the list starts with epithets describing the king’s attitude towards God and His Church (εὐσεβέστατος, φιλόχριστος, φιλεκλήσιος). Then follows a series of epithets that characterise his attitude towards men. Among them we find terms referring to general moral qualities (ἀγαθός, πράος, εὐσπλαγχνος) as well as those reflecting the king’s humanitarianism (φιλόπτωχος, φιλάνθρωπος, φιλόξενος, μετα- δότης, τροφεύς). These groups are similar in their meaning, but while the former describes qualities the latter describes actions. In addition, there are two epithets referring to the king’s manly virtues (ἀνδράγαθος, φοβερότατος πάντων τῶν βαρβάρων). The complete list presents the ideal of a Makurian king. He is simultaneously a pious Christian, a merciful ruler taking care of all his subjects, especially the marginalised ones (the poor, the strangers, etc.), and a fearful warrior protecting his realm. Of course, this is an ideal, but we can suppose that Nubian rulers aspired to it and realised it to a greater or lesser degree.

5 The Character of Nubian Kingship and Ways of Executing Power

There exists sufficient evidence of textual and iconographic character to suppose that Christian rulers of Makuria were perceived as chosen by God and His actors on earth. The very birth of the heir to the throne took place under the divine auspices.  

37 From among those, only φιλανθρωπος is attested as an imperial epithet. The word is found to describe rulers already in Ptolemaic Egypt and continues to be used until the end of the Byzantine period. Its use, stemming from the classical Greek employment to designate gods’ love towards men, served to underline the king’s/emperor’s god-like (and God-like) character (see Hunger [cf. fn. 32] 143–153). Interestingly, in late Byzantine period, φιλανθρωπία came to be used in the sense of ‘Welt- offenheit, Gastfreundlichkeit gegenüber allen Nationen’ (ibid. 148), which indicates that the occurrence of φιλόξενος immediately after φιλανθρωπος in the titulature of Moüses Georgios is most probably not accidental.  

38 This must be a literary creation, the exact sources of which are unknown, but surely should be sought in the panegyrical literature of late antiquity. A parallel is provided by the eulogy of Bishop Georgios of Dongola († 1113) preserved in his epitaph in Greek, immured above his tomb in a monastery on the outskirts of the capital of Makuria. Cf. A. Łajtar, “Georgios, Archbishop of Dongola († 1113) and His Epitaph” [in:] T. Derda, J. Urbanik, M. Węcowski (eds.), EYPETEIAΣ ΧΑΡΙΝ. Studies Presented to Benedetto Bravo and Ewa Wipszycka by Their Disciples [= JJP Supplement 1], Warsaw 2002, 167–174, and A. Łajtar and J. van der Vliet, Empowering the Dead in Christian Nubia. The Texts from a Medieval Funerary Complex in Dongola [= JJP Supplement 32], Warsaw 2017, 18–22 (no. 1). We can assume the existence of a common source for both the eulogy and titulature of the king.
An exceptional painting preserved on a wall of a room in the so-called South-West Annex to the monastery located on the outskirts of Dongola shows the scene of a ritual dance in front of an icon of the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus. The participants of the dance, clad in animal skins and masks, cry out phrases in Old Nubian, written down next to their heads, which makes the whole representation resemble a modern comic book.\footnote{M. Martens-Czarnecka, The Wall Paintings from the Monastery on Kom H in Dongola [\textit{= Nubia III, Dongola 3; PAM Monograph Series 3}] Warsaw 2011, cat. no. 109 and 233–238.} With these exclamations, they ask Mary, the mother of Jesus, to help the queen mother (Old Nubian $\text{ⲧⲟⲛⲛⲉⲛ}$) to deliver a prince (Old Nubian $\text{ⲧⲟⲣ}$).\footnote{V. van Gerven Oei, “A Dance for a Princess: The Legends on a Painting in Room 5 of the Southwest Annex of the Monastery on Kom H in Dongola”, \textit{JJP} 47 (2017), 117–135.} The parallel Mary – Jesus / queen mother – heir is self-evident here. The heir, just like Jesus, is anticipated as God’s anointed, the saviour of his people. In the previous paragraph, we have seen that the kings of Makuria bore the title $\text{θεότοτπος/ πεντακάινου} \text{ⲧⲥⲫⲁⲱ} \text{ⲧⲡⲓⲟ}$, “crowned by God,” which can pertain to the act of coronation by the supreme authority of the Makurian Church, but can also characterise, quite generally, the royal power as coming from God. Visible proof of such a perception of the royal authority in Christian Nubia comes from painted representations of rulers in cult places. They are attested for the first time in the tenth century and were produced until the end of the tradition of decorating church walls in the fourteenth century. They show a king standing en face in a ceremonial dress holding regalia, whose set and form can change from period to period. Jesus, Mary, or an archangel stand behind the king holding their hand(s) on the ruler’s shoulder(s). These representations are traditionally interpreted as scenes of protection, although they may also be perceived as scenes of presentation of the ruler to his subjects.\footnote{B. Mierzejewska, “Murals in the Bishops Chapel, Faras. The Visual Expression of the Ruler’s Ideology in Nubia” [in:] S. Emmel et alii (eds.) \textit{Ägypten und Nubien in späantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster 20.–26. Juli 1996}, Bd. 1: \textit{Materielle Kultur, Kunst und religiöses Leben [\textit{= Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients 6/1]}}, Wiesbaden 1999, 285–296.} Importantly, these protection/presentation scenes are sometimes placed in church apses, that is in the central point of the liturgical space, in the lower register of decoration, among the apostles and below Christ bestowing His blessing.\footnote{Known examples include church BV on the citadel in Dongola: king under protection of Archangel Raphael among the apostles (unpublished; personal communication of D. Zielińska); Upper Church at Banganarti: king or kings under protection of Archangel Raphael among the apostles preserved in the decoration of seven chapels (B. Żurawski [in:] B. Żurawski et alii, \textit{Kings and Pilgrims. St Raphael Church II at Banganarti, Mid-eleventh to Mid-eighteenth Century [\textit{= Nubia V, Banganarti 2]}, Warsaw 2014, 125–168); room 29 of the North-West Annex to the monastery on Kom H at Dongola: King protected by Archangel Michael among the apostles (Martens-Czarnecka [cf. fn. 39] cat. no. 46); the cathedral at Faras: king under protection of Mary among the apostles (the portrait of the king is a secondary addition here, the scene originally presenting Mary among the apostles; S. Jakobielski et alii, \textit{Pachoras/Faras. The Wall Paintings from the Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros [\textit{= PAM Monograph Series 4}]}, Warsaw 2017, 107–111 [cat. no 1]). Generally, on apsidal portraits of Nu-}
jects taking part in the liturgy perceived their sovereign as the one who was blessed by Christ, protected by Mary or Archangels, and was equal to the apostles. According to an isolated narrative in al-Nuwayri’s *Nihayat al-arab fi funun al-adab*, the subjects of the Makurian king prostrate themselves before him as if he were a god; although here such a behaviour may have been connected with an exceptional situation: the legitimisation of the king’s rule against an usurpation enforced from outside.⁴³ Some Arabic sources even claim that the Makurian ruler was a god for his subjects. In his *Athar al-bilad*, the Arab geographer and historian al-Qazwini (died 1274) claims that “they fancy that he never eats, but they bring him food secretly, and if anyone of his subjects chanced to notice it, they kill him at once. ... (They) believe that he has the power of giving death and life, health or illness.”⁴⁴ This narration, attractive as it may appear from the point of view of the present study, is definitely improbable. Al-Qazwini obviously copied the passage from *Mujam al-buldan* by Yaqut al-Rumi, traveller and geographer of Greek Christian origin (died 1229), who, however, was describing the king of Zaghawa, a nomad tribe from western Darfur.⁴⁵ Abu al-Makarim (died 1208), Coptic author of a description of churches and monasteries (*Tarikh al-Ka-na’is wa-al-Adyirah*), claims in turn that Nubian kings were at the same time priests and were allowed to “celebrate the liturgy within the sanctuary, as long as they reign without killing a man with their own hands.”⁴⁶ Here also the information seems suspicious, all the more so since in another place Abu al-Makarim repeats it in reference to the king of Ethiopia.⁴⁷

Al-Qazwini, quoted above, characterises the Makurian king as an absolute ruler. According to him, “his orders are promptly obeyed by his subjects, he has absolute power so that he can reduce to slavery anyone he wants and can freely dispose of their property.”⁴⁸ A similar piece of information is transmitted by al-Aswani (quoted by Maqrizi) in his *Al-mawa’iz wa-l-i’tibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa-l-athar* (henceforth quoted as *Al-khitat*) in reference to the king of Alwa: “Their king can reduce to slavery any of his subjects he wants whether he be guilty of a crime or not, and they do not oppose him, rather they prostrate themselves before him. They do not revolt against his order, however unjust it may be; [on the contrary] they call out loudly

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⁴³ See below, 374.
⁴⁵ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 344.
⁴⁶ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 333.
⁴⁷ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 339.
⁴⁸ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 383 – 384.
‘May the king live! And let his order be executed!’

The information that Nubian kings could turn their subjects to slaves is certainly imprecise, even though it may contain a grain of truth. A number of internal sources attest to the existence of slavery in Christian Nubia, and a form of slave trade between Nubia and Egypt is reported by external sources. Although there is no firm evidence, it can be assumed that the slaves came mostly from raids into neighbouring lands, but at least some of them could have been native Nubians deprived of their freedom for various reasons; it is implausible, however, to think that anyone could have been turned into a slave with no reason at all.

A frequently quoted opinion in modern Nubian scholarship is that the king of Makuria was the owner of all arable land in the country. This belief is rooted in a superficial reading of some Arabic sources and is definitely false. Numerous deeds of land sale known from Qasr Ibrim and elsewhere show that private persons were legal landowners who could do whatever they pleased with their possession. The Makurian Church could also own land. Of course, the king had his own private estates; he also must have had his own private trading affairs too, extending beyond the confines of his realm.

Being neither the absolute lord of life and death of his subjects nor the sole owner of the land and everything in it, the king of Makuria, however, had all the instruments of power in his hand. His was first and foremost the legislative power. We hear of one crucial change of law enacted by the king, mentioned by al-Nuwayri in his Nihayat al-arab fi funun al-adab: “Abdalla Barshanbū, when he became king (1317 – A.L. & G.O.), altered the laws of the kingdom and showed proud behaviour without precedent among the Nubian kings his predecessors. He treated the natives rudely and even cruelly, so that all hated his rule.”

While this information is undoubtedly an element of creating a negative picture of the king, it does not alter the fact that such a change was possible. We come across mentions in the sources

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49 Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 614.
50 Neither textual sources nor archaeology confirm the common opinion that Nubia became a major source of slaves for the Caliphate; see D. Edwards, “Slavery and Slaving in the Medieval and Post-Medieval Kingdoms of the Middle Nile”, Proceedings of the British Academy 168 (2011), 87–94.
51 Maqrizi in Al-khitat puts the matter in the same light: “Under the peace treaty we have undertaken not to carry out raids into their territory, but not to prevent enemies from attacking them. Whomsoever their king reduces to slavery, or the slaves which they make when they raid each other, can be legally bought; but those whom the Muslims reduce to slavery through abduction or by stealing, are illegal business; some Muslims used to have Nubian slave girls as concubines” (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 643).
53 Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 485.
about royal decrees pertaining to various issues connected with administering the kingdom, such as the movement of people and goods within the country, circulation of Egyptian money, etc.⁵⁴ These ordinances can be of a very detailed character. An Old Nubian proclamation issued by King Moüses Georgios releases a church of Saint Epimachos from the duty of annual contributions for the bishop of Qasr Ibrim, which seems almost too trivial for the king to be involved personally.⁵⁵

Second, the king had executive power, which he delegated to his officials; we know them and their hierarchy thanks to highly elaborate protocols of Nubian legal deeds, in particular Old Nubian land-sale contracts discovered at Qasr Ibrim.⁵⁶ Third, although we have no information about the Nubian kings’ judicial power, we can assume that it also belonged to their competence.⁵⁷ Last but not least, the king was the commander-in-chief of the Makurian army. Arabic sources narrating military encounters between Muslim Egypt and Christian Makuria always show the Makurian army as headed by the king himself, as, for instance, during the armed intervention of King Kyriakos in Egypt in the 740s or the attack of King David on Aydhab in the 1270s.

It is also the king who signs peace treaties and truces with commanders of foreign (Muslim) armies, as in 652, after 'Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh’s raid on Dongola, or at the turn of the thirteenth century, during the wars for the Makurian throne. He is, moreover, responsible for respecting those deals, including the famous baqt, a non-aggression and commercial treaty regulating Muslim-Nubian relations since the mid-seventh century.⁵⁸ In this capacity he is addressed in a letter sent in 758 by the governor of Egypt, Musa ibn Ka’ab, who complains about the Makurian’s negligence in fulfilling the baqt’s provisions.⁵⁹ The king, on behalf of his people, swears an oath of allegiance to the Mamluks, when powerless Makuria becomes politically dependent on Egypt and rights to the throne are obtained thanks to a military inter-

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⁵⁵ P. QI III 31 (Qasr Ibrim, 1155 [DBMNT 589]). For royal decrees in general, see Ruffini (cf. fn. 52) §§ 7–9.
⁵⁷ As a matter of fact, we have no information whatsoever on the Christian Nubian judicial system; none of the attested titles of officials seems to indicate judiciary functions.
vention sent from Cairo.\textsuperscript{60} Finally, he represents Makuria in external contacts with both the Muslim and Christian worlds, the latter being most importantly the Alexandrian Patriarchate. The *History of the Patriarchs* relates several cases of the Makurian king asking the patriarch to ordain someone as a bishop,\textsuperscript{61} the letter of King Moüses Georgios to Patriarch Mark III mentioned above being unique non-literary evidence of this practice.\textsuperscript{62} The king received letters and delegations from the patriarch as well.\textsuperscript{63} We hear also of Makurian rulers acting as an intermediary between Alexandrian patriarchs and Ethiopian kings.\textsuperscript{64}

The king of Makuria relied on the stratum of hereditary nobility, who in Arabic sources are frequently referred to as “princes.” From among these “princes” the highest officials of the kingdom were recruited: courtiers,\textsuperscript{65} military commanders, and most probably bishops of the Makurian Church. The political significance of this elite stratum is clearly visible in the story of King Semamun (called Georgios Simon in the internal sources) from the years 1289–1291. The Mamluk military intervention launched at that time to place a puppet king on the Makurian throne forced Semamun to flee Dongola. He hid on an island located fifteen days’ journey from Dongola, having at his side his closest family members, including the queen mother, as well as the “princes” and the bishop of Dongola with his clergy. The “princes,” however, and the clergymen switched sides at some point and abandoned the king, taking the regalia with them. After the Mamluks had crowned the usurper and the Nubians swore loyalty to him, the army marched off to Egypt. Soon after “Semâmûn came back by night, called at the door of every prince personally and asked him to come out. Every prince who came out and saw him, kissed the ground before him and swore allegiance. Before sunrise, all the Nubian army had joined him. He went with them to the palace of the king, arrested the king (the one established by the Mamluks – A.L. & G.O.), sent for Ruknaddin Baybars (the commander

\textsuperscript{60} For the oath and its legal and political aspects, see P. M. Holt, “The Coronation Oaths of the Nubian Kings”, *Sudanic Africa* 1 (1990), 5–9.

\textsuperscript{61} King Abraham demanded from Patriarch Michael I the deposition of the bishop of Dongola Kyriakos, with whom he was in conflict, and the consecration in his place of the royal candidate Ioannes (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 40–41); King Basil requested Patriarch Cyril (1077–1093) to make a son of the previous king, who died, a bishop (Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 217).

\textsuperscript{62} See above, 366 and 368–369 and fn. 23.

\textsuperscript{63} Thus, e.g., in the *History of the Patriarchs* a story is told about a certain bishop Merkourios whom Patriarch Christodoulos (1046–1077) sent as his envoy to the king of Makuria (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 214). Abu al-Makarim claims that “the fathers and patriarchs used to write letters to the kings of Abyssinia and Nubia, twice in the year” (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 340).

\textsuperscript{64} As, e.g., in the case of King Georgios IV, who, according to the *History of the Patriarchs*, was supposed to intervene on behalf of an anonymous Ethiopian ruler asking Patriarch Philotheos (979–1003) for a new *abun* for Ethiopia (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 205–207). Cf. A. Łajtar and G. Ochala, “An Unexpected Guest in the Church of Sonqi Tino (Notes on Medieval Nubian Toponymy 3)”, *Dotawo* 4 (2017), 264.

\textsuperscript{65} It cannot be excluded that both groups – the highest officials and courtiers – are identical with one another; there is, however, too little data to assert this.
of the Egyptian garrison in Dongola – A.L. & G.O.) and asked him to go back to his Master to avoid clashes.” The story ends with the description of an extremely cruel death inflicted by Semamun on the usurper.⁶⁶ The “princes” thus, disloyal as they appear from the story, seem to have held a real power to change the fate of the country and its rulers. Their opinion was important, and the king had to take it into account. In Al-taʾrikh al-kabīr al-muqaffa (cited as Al-muqaffa further on) Maqrizi cites al-Aswani’s account of his own embassy to Georgios, king of Makuria. He was sent by the governor of Egypt with a letter inviting the king to embrace Islam and soliciting the payment of the baqt. When al-Aswani arrived at Dongola, the king “summoned the [chief] men and the bishops of his kingdom as well as ʿAbdalla (al-Aswani – A.L. & G.O.) to have a discussion with ʿAbdalla.”⁶⁷ As another fragment of al-Aswani’s account shows, the “princes” could disagree with the king and they could express it openly. Al-Aswani mentions that, during his stay at Dongola, the Sacrifice Feast took place, the most important event in the Islamic liturgical year. The royal entourage “pressed the king to forbid all publicity for that ceremony, but the king would not pay heed to their request and answered: ‘This man has left his home and family [to go] on a useful mission. Today is the greatest feast of their own religion: he wants to celebrate it with all possible pomp: you shall not prevent him from enjoying this opportunity.’”⁶⁸ Such a disagreement between the king and his retinue could have far-reaching consequences, as is attested by the account of the events of 1286 transmitted by Ibn ʿAbd al-Zahir in his Tashrif al-ayyam (biography of sultan Qalawun): the envoys of the sultan were on their way back to Cairo from King Adur of Abwab, a land located somewhere in the Fifth Cataract region, when they were captured by a king of Dongola, who intended to kill them. He did not do this, however, because “the nobles and his entourage rushed to warn him: ‘Do you intend to ruin our country and our homes?’” They subsequently rebelled against him and “made another king in place of him.”⁶⁹

The accounts of Arab authors quoted above, especially reminiscences of al-Aswani from his sojourn at Dongola, seem to point to the existence of a collective body (a council?) assisting the king in investigating various issues and taking decisions. The internal sources contain mentions of “elders” of the king, perhaps chiefs of clans or houses, which appears to fit such a picture. At an early stage of his career, Joseph, the fourteenth-century bishop of Dongola who left his commemorative inscription in Aswan,⁷⁰ was the head of the “elders” of King Moüses Georgios concerning the church of Saint Epimachos⁷¹ alludes to the modus operandi

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⁶⁷ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 721.
⁶⁸ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 722.
⁶⁹ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 425–426.
⁷⁰ See above, fn. 22.
⁷¹ See above, 373 with fn. 55.
of this council: in the prolegomena of the document the king writes that he was approached by the “elders” in this case just after he succeeded his uncle David on the throne.

The queen mother must have had a particular responsibility in advising the king and influencing his decisions. A telling example here is a story that happened in the 1290s and is related by Ibn ʿAbd al-Zahir in his Al-altaf (the biography of sultan Al-Ashraf Khalil). The sultan sent a letter to an unnamed king of Makuria in which he claimed that the Makurian hostages held in Cairo, including the queen mother and her court, are treated very well and even receive regular pension. In response, the king dispatched his envoys who were supposed to tell the sultan “that (in the court of) the kings of Nubia, it was only the women who direct the kings; therefore he asked that his mother be sent back to direct him – not only his mother but also those who were with her.”\(^{72}\) We have already seen King Semamun escaping Dongola before the Mamluk army and taking with him, among others, the queen mother. Queen mothers are the only persons except kings and local bishops to be portrayed in Nubian churches. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the queen mother was the second most important personage in the Kingdom of Kokka, which came to existence in the region to the north of the Third Cataract after the fall of Makuria and most probably copied the latter’s organisational structure and model of functioning. According to oral accounts concerning the end of its existence in the second half of the nineteenth century, the king had daily meetings with the queen mother, seeking her advice in current matters.\(^{73}\)

The attitude of the Nubian king and his modus operandi was to a large degree shaped by his Christian viewpoint and moderated by the Church acting through her bishops. The kingship of Makuria is consistently presented in Arabic sources of Islamic background as an unbroken line of Christian rulers. When the governor of Egypt, Jawhar, proposed to King Georgios through his envoy al-Aswani that he change his faith, the king replied that Jawhar himself should become Christian instead.\(^{74}\) An anonymous Makurian king (taking the date into account, it should be Kyriakos), “a tall, fine-looking man,” when accepting the Marwanids escaping Egypt in 750, refused to sit on carpets spread on the ground claiming that “every king must humble himself before the majesty of God who raised him to power.”\(^{75}\)

\(^{72}\) Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 431.
\(^{74}\) As related in Maqrizi’s Al-muqaffa (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 721).
\(^{75}\) The story first appears in Ibn Quotayba al-Dinawari at the end of the ninth century (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 66) and is subsequently repeated by many authors, including Ibn Wasif, Ibn Iyas, and Al-Qazwini. According to the last one, the king was supposed to say “God Almighty bestowed on me the royal power; therefore, it is my duty to correspond with humility” (transl. Vantini [cf. fn. 5] 384).
He then accused them of transgressing the divine law by indulging in luxuries and asked them to leave the kingdom after the habitual period of hospitality (three days). Although the king’s words transmitted by the Arab authors are most probably fake, the story clearly shows the Christian moral attitude of Nubian kings, or rather the perception thereof outside Nubia. When in 836 Prince Georgios was on his way to Baghdad to discuss with the chaliph, the supreme authority of the Muslim world, irregularities in fulfilling the provisions of the baqt, he was zealous in exhibiting his Christian faith wherever he came, which was highly appreciated by members of other Oriental Churches encountered during the journey.⁷⁶ Georgios was accompanied by as many as three bishops, of whom only one came back to Makuria, the two other having died of hardships along the way. Let us remember here that a bishop (probably that of Dongola) was among others in King Semamun’s retinue when he was fleeing the capital before the Mamluk intervention, and bishops (note the plural), together with the chief men of the kingdom, were summoned by King Georgios to hear al-Aswani’s message. Bishops could criticise the king, when provoked by his behaviour. According to the biography of Patriarch Michael I (744–768) in the History of the Patriarchs, the bishop of Dongola Kyriakos, kept warning and instructing King Abraham, who was a “proud and wicked” ruler. This lead to an open conflict, as a result of which Kyriakos was deposed by the patriarch, who had been threatened by Abraham that Makuria would abandon Christianity if Michael supported the bishop.⁷⁷ Kyriakos removed himself to a monastery, where he lived until a very old age, but as long as he lived (so the History of the Patriarchs), no rain fell upon the royal city of Dongola – a clear sign that God had turned away from Abraham. A king’s favourable attitude was, of course, praised by the Church. The History of the Patriarchs thus praises two Makurian kings: Merkurios and Kyriakos, both in the biography of Michael I mentioned above. The former is called there a “New Constantine” because “he became by his beautiful conduct like one of the Disciples.”⁷⁸ The meaning of this phrase is obscure. The most common interpretation found in Nubian scholarship is that Merkurios made the Makurian Church subordinate to the miaphysite Alexandrian Patriarchate, which made him resemble the achievements of Constantine for the Church. No source, either internal or external, supports this interpretation, however. The latter king is characterised as an “honest and virtuous man”⁷⁹ and described as “the orthodox Ethiopian king of Makuria,” “the Great King, upon whom the crown

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⁷⁶ Our main source here is Michael the Syrian, who is quoting the lost chronicle of the Jacobite patriarch Dionysios of Tell Mahre, the eyewitness of the events. For Georgios’ journey to Baghdad, see especially Seignobos (cf. fn. 58) chapter 4: “Un prince nubien à la cour des Abbassides: la mission diplomatique de Georgios (836)”. From the earlier scholarship one can cite G. Vantini, “Le roi Kirki à Baghdad”, [in:] E. Dinkler (ed.), Kunst und Geschichte Nubiens in Christlicher Zeit, Recklinghausen 1970, 41–48.
⁷⁷ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 41–42.
⁷⁸ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 40.
⁷⁹ Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 43.
descended from Heaven,” the one who “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, but their kings attend him when he passes through their territory.” This pompous description is a manifestation of gratitude for Kyriakos’ military intervention in Egypt in defense of the patriarch, expressed by the latter’s secretary. It is at the same time an illustration of the atmosphere prevailing in eighth-century Christian communities in the Near East and North-East Africa, most clearly visible in Coptic and Syriac apocalyptic literature of that date: the Christian Nubian king Kyriakos, victorious in clashes with Islam, is the fourth and the last world king foretold by the prophets, the saviour of the Christians, whose reign precedes the end of the world. 81

6 Royal Onomastics

Names of Nubian rulers are a source of interesting observations concerning the subject of this paper. They can be divided into two groups: Christian names and native Nubian names, whereby the former group is much larger than the latter. Among Christian names one can distinguish two subcategories: Biblical names and names of Christian saints. In the former subcategory, there are names of personages from both Old and New Testament. The repertoire of Old Testament names includes the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaak), the rulers of the United Kingdom of Israel and Judah (Solomon, David), and prophets (Mōises, Ioel). While the names of Abraham, Isaak, David are quite common in Nubian onomastics in general, Solomon is rare and its choice for a member of the royal family (a possible future king) might have been ideologically inspired. The choice of names of New Testament origin (Zacharias, Symeon, Ioannes, Markos, Stephanos) is rather unusual. The two priests, Zacharias (provided the inspiration was indeed the father of John the Baptist) and Symeon, as a source of inspiration may be especially surprising. This may perhaps be connected with the putative priestly role of the Nubian king (see above).

Among the names of saints, we can distinguish the names of Archangels (Chael [most probably an abbreviated version of Michael] and Raphael) and the names of humans (Merkurios, Kyriakos, Georgios, Basil). The occurrence of the name Raphael in royal onomastics is surprising. A study of Nubian naming practices reveals that the Nubians avoided the use of the names of Archangels, unless modified (e.g., Chael, Michaelinkouda, Raphaelanya, etc.). Perhaps, thus, the royal family was exempt from this rule. As for other holy figures, one observes the presence of two war-

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80 Transl. Vantini (cf. fn. 5) 44–45.
rior saints, Merkurios and Georgios, which may be linked with military aspects of the kingship. Coincidentally, the name Basil, even though it has a saint as its source of inspiration, derives from the root designating royalty, and as such is perfect for a king.

Royal names of Nubian origin (Eirpanome, Tokiltoeton, Qalidurut, Mashkouda, Kudanbes, Siti, Paper) are difficult to interpret, because the study of Nubian native names is in its beginnings. Apart from the name Mashkouda (lit. ‘servant of the sun’), the etymology of these names is unknown. It is worth observing that epichoric names occur only at the beginning of Christian Nubian statehood (mid-sixth to mid-seventh century) and its end (second half of the thirteenth–fifteenth century). Royal onomastics seems thus to reflect a general tendency observable in medieval Nubian culture, where local, perhaps still pagan, elements are visible in the first century of Christianity and then come to fore again in its last centuries.⁸

In general, Nubian royal onomastics is completely different than Eastern Roman imperial naming practices; there are no typical imperial names in Nubia, such as Constantine, Theodosius, Justinian, Justin, Anastasius, Tiberius, Leo, Zeno, or even Michael. The only two common elements are Ioannes and Basil, but they are otherwise present in Nubian naming practices as such.

Conclusion

The Christian Nubian king, as presented in accessible sources, is a type of absolute monarch. His power is connected with the office rather than the person. It has divine legitimacy and covers all areas of the kingdom’s functioning: legislation, administration, judicial, military, and foreign affairs. At the same time, this power, however extensive, has its limitations. The king must respect the opinion of those who support his rule: the nobles and family members. He is also seriously restricted by local tradition reaching back to pre-Christian, African roots. On the other hand, the ruler’s behaviour and attitude are shaped by his Christian faith, the keeper of which is the Church, represented by her bishops.

⁸ On the margin of our discussion, it needs to be observed that Arabic names start to appear in royal onomastics in the latest period, which is connected to the progressing Arabisation and Islamisation of the Middle Nile Valley population.