

# The 'last' king of Makuria (Dotawo)



**Abstract:** Representations of Makurian Kings and Queens (Mothers of the King), dated from the end of the 8th through the 13th centuries, have been preserved inside several churches of Makuria, but mostly inside the cathedrals of Pachoras. The representation of the king inside the monastery church NB.2.2 in Dongola is the latest one and the most fully preserved with the regalia and late dress.

**Keywords:** Makuria (Dotawo), Dongola, monastery, church NB.2.2, king, crown

A representation of the King of Makuria (Dotawo), discovered in 2018 in the Monastery Church NB.2.2 in Dongola, is in all likelihood the latest among the known depiction of royals. It is also the most fully preserved image of a king and his protectors in the entire body of surviving Makurian painting recognized to date (Godlewski forthcoming a).

The building [Fig. 1] is dated to the turn of the 13th century, if not the first half of the 14th century at the latest. The image of the king was introduced, along with a number of other murals, after the rebuilding of the church. The location chosen for it was the northwestern apse inside the church, aligned with the sanctuary and thus in keeping with a Makurian tradition drawing upon Byzantine models, recognized in Pachoras in the

**Włodzimierz Godlewski**

University of Warsaw  
*Emeritus*

Cathedral of Paulos and Petros and the Late Cathedral (Godlewski 2008), and in Dongola, in the Throne Hall (Zielińska 2015a: 32–33). The rule, however, was not a strict one with portraits of kings being painted also in the *diakonikon*, the sanctuary and even the apse of the Cathedral.

The royal representation from the monastery church in Dongola is the central figure of a composition of four standing figures: above and behind the king a monumental figure of Christ—the bust with a slightly damaged head survives—and two saintly figures embracing the king depicted on either side of the ruler [Fig. 2]. The triple form of protection represented here is unique in the painting of Makuria, the only parallel being a depiction of a priest in the prothesis of the Church of the Archangel Raphael in the Citadel of Dongola [Fig. 3]. The priest is shown standing, in the protection of Christ and two archangels, Michael and Raphael (Zielińska 2015b). It is dated earlier than the representation of the king from the monastery church. The

common principle in the 13th and 14th centuries was to show the ruler in the protection of the “Makurian Holy Trinity” depicted in the form of three busts of Christ above the ruler’s head. Compositions of this kind are exemplified by a painting from the rebuilt Northwestern Building (B.NW. 8) located in the Monastery of Dongola (Godlewski 2018: 61–65). It represents the Queen Mother in the protection of the Makurian Holy Trinity (the figure of the Queen Mother survives on the wall of the building in Dongola, whereas the three heads of Christ, re-composed from fragments, are in the collection of the National Museum in Khartoum; Godlewski 2008; see Martens-Czarnecka 2011: 229–233, identifying the representation as a royal portrait) [Fig. 4]. A similar but much later composition, from the turn of the 13th century, representing the King of Dotawo, was recorded in the Rivergate Church w Pachoras (Griffith 1926: 77–78; Martens-Czarnecka 1992: 363–369) [Fig. 5]. The latter painting was not preserved.

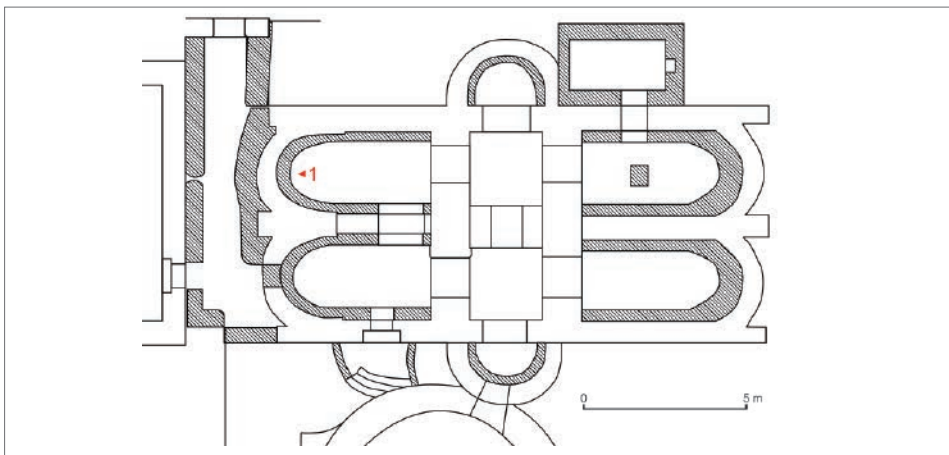


Fig. 1. The church NB.2.2 in the Monastery in Dongola. Plan (PCMA UW–QSAP Dongola Project | drawing W. Godlewski)



Fig. 2. The King in composition with other figures, painting from the northwestern apse of the Church NB.2.2 in Dongola (PCMA UW-QSAP Dongola Project | photo W. Godlewski)

## THE KING

The ruler from NB.2.2.7, painted without a legend, was depicted in frontal view. He is wearing a Nubianizing crown and holding in his left hand a cross with a *velium* (ribbon) tied around it; in his right hand he bears a small Byzantinizing crown surmounted with a cross. The tunic he wears has long sleeves

and is covered with an outer garment that looks like a pleated skirt, and two shawls, one underneath, which is discernible on the left shoulder (perhaps the bottom part of the outer garment), and one on top, dropping from the right shoulder and gathered up across the left forearm of the king.

## THE ROYAL CROWNS

Several objects depicted in this portrait are symbolic of the king's position in the



Fig. 3. The presbyter in composition with other figures, Church of the Archangel Raphael (SWN.B.V) in Dongola (PCMA UW-QSAP Dongola Project | drawing D. Zielińska)

political structure of Makuria (Dotawo) and Arwa as kingdoms in a union, but preserving their own traditions (including the regalia). The Nubianizing crown on the king's head is a high vaulted helmet surmounted with a cross and a pair of horns curving upward [Fig. 6 top]. Four pendants are suspended from the horn tips on either side and there are two small birds depicted sitting on the tips, near the cross. A similar crown with birds sitting on the horns is held by a ruler de-



Fig. 4. The Queen Mother under the protection of the Makurian Holy Trinity, painting from the Northwest Building of the Monastery in Dongola (PCMA UW Dongola Project | photo W. Godlewski)

picted in Chapel 3 of the Upper Church in Banganarti (Żurawski 2014: 143–150). The Byzantinizing crown held by the king in his right hand is covered with a fish-scale motif and surmounted with a cross that has been partly obliterated [Fig. 6 bottom]. It is somehow connected with long sashes joined together at the back of the crown.

Nubianizing crowns with horns on the helmet and a crescent or cross at the top appear on the heads of Kings and Queen Mothers from the second half

of the 11th century; in a few representations, the ruler holds a crown, either Nubianizing or Byzantinizing, in his hand (Godlewski 2008) [see Fig. 4]. The paintings from Pachoras may represent the crowns of Arwa and Makuria (Dotawo), differentiated by the addition of a bucranium [Figs 7, 8] (Godlewski forthcoming a). In the latter instances, the state of preservation of the painting does not substantiate the statement that the portrayed royalty are actually wearing a crown



Fig. 5. A king under the protection of the Makurian Holy Trinity, painting from the Rivergate Church in Pachoras (After Griffith 1926)

Fig. 6. Close-up of the two crowns in the representation of a king from the church N.B.2.2.7 in Dongola: top, Nubianizing crown on the ruler's head, and bottom, Byzantinizing crown in the ruler's hand (PCMA UW-QSAP Dongola Project | photo W. Godlewski)



on their heads; surviving fragments of “something” on their heads alone justify the suggestion. This is, however, not the case of the discussed well preserved image from the monastery church in Dongola.



Fig. 7. King wearing a Nubianizing crown, painting from the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras (PCMA UW Documentation Center)



Fig. 8. King with a bow and a crown in his hand, painting from the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras (PCMA UW Documentation Center | photo T. Żółtowska-Huszczka)

The rules behind how the regalia are arranged in the painted composition are not known. One thing is for sure: they are not a matter of artistic convention. They may have been conditioned by the dynastic traditions of the two dominions of Arwa and Makuria. Members of the royal family depicted wearing crowns in the churches and official buildings of Makuria (there is no evidence available from the territory of Arwa) are identified unequivocally as the currently ruling king and the dead king; the paintings come from commemorative buildings, such as the Monastery and the Church of Georgios in Dongola, and the Upper Church in Banganarti. The Queen Mother



Fig. 9. Portrait of a Queen Mother, painting from the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras (PCMA UW Documentation Center | photo E. Parandowska)

was also shown wearing crowns and in the same sacral spaces as the kings. No attempt has been made so far to reconstruct these rules. It was long believed that the eparch of Nobadia had the right to wear a crown and discerning between portraits of kings and their mothers, the queen mothers, is still a touchy issue. The differences were not noted because of the similarity between the robes and regalia of the portrayed, who were not identified by inscriptions. Jewelry—necklaces, finger rings, earrings in particular—remains a decisive iconographic distinction when differentiating between the Queen Mother and the King. There may be more distinctive elements, especially in the robes, but the fragmentary state of preservation of many of the paintings imposes severe limitations on research.

The Queen Mother as the second person after the King appears in the courtly *taktika* (*notitiae*, official lists of titles and offices) for the first time in a foundation inscription dated to AD 930 from the Church of the Eparch Iesu in Pachoras. The Coptic text records a King Zacharias and directly after him, his mother Mariam as the Queen Mother (Jakobielski 1972: 110–114; van der Vliet 2003: 15–21). In the mid-11th century, the personal union of King Zacharias V with the ruling family of Arwa complicated the situation. According to this concordat, the king's sister (or the daughter of his sister) was wedded to a member of the royal family in Arwa (brother of the king or the son of the king's sister). Among the royal portraits in the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras there are depictions of, most probably, King Solomon (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 435–437) and his mother (God-

lewski forthcoming b), both portraits without legends. Moreover, the image of the Queen Mother keeps being interpreted as King Mouse, even though it appears in the part of the church intended exclusively for women; the earrings and necklace with a cross pendant leaves rather little doubt that the figure portrayed here is a female wearing a Byzantinizing crown on her head and hence a Queen Mother (Godlewski 2008; Jakobielski et al. 2017: 431–434; Godlewski forthcoming b) [Fig. 8]. The royal figure in the apse wears a Nubianizing crown, because he is from the Arwan royal family, whereas the nameless Queen Mother wears a Byzantinizing crown, because she comes from the Makurian dynasty [Fig. 9].

The inscription to the right of the head of the above described Queen Mother mentions King Mouse and Georgios VI, rulers, respectively, of Dotawo and of Arwa in the second half of the 12th century (Łajtar 2009: 89–97). The two kings are both mentioned in the address of a letter, dated AD 1186, sent to the Patriarch of the Coptic Church in Alexandria, Apa Mark (Plumley 1978: 236–238; Adams 1996: 228–229). In studies to date, Mouse and Georgios are identified as two names of the same person. To my mind, however, this does not seem probable as cases of double names are not recorded in the earlier Makurian tradition. In the Greek text of the letter to Apa Mark and the Greek address of a letter from Qasr Ibrim (PO.IV.113, Ruffini 2014: 301–304), the kings mentioned there are Mouses and Georgios, respectively rulers of Arwa and Makuria, which probably means the senior king Mouses, King of Arwa, and King Georgios, co-ruler of Makuria.

It is very likely that members of the royal family in Dongola adopted traditionally Greek dynastic names (that is, Georgios, Zacharias, Ioannes etc.), while the family in Soba were given Old Testament names (Solomon, Mouse etc.). Heirs to the throne are named by their mothers depending on which royal family she comes from; the mothers are assured the title of Queen Mother with the crowning of their offspring, becoming the second ranking person listed in the *taktika* of official documents. There is no key to understanding the choice of names for the Queen Mothers, except that in documents they are always Nubian. Two Queen Mothers are known by name from Pachoras. One of them is Mariam from the foundation inscription of the Eparch Iesu in Pachoras and the other is Martha, named in the Greek legend accompanying her portrait (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 248–253). Other known names of Queen Mothers come from the *taktika* of documents written in Old Nubian. A Coptic document from Qasr Ibrim, dated to AD 925, lists Mariam as the Queen Mother (Plumley mss.).

This tradition, reconstructed hypothetically, presumably decided on the choice of regalia depicted in portraits of Kings and Queen Mothers, and whether one or two crowns were represented in the official wall paintings in Makurian buildings. The Nubianizing crown is rather obligatory in depictions of the king after the middle of the 11th century. However, his dynastic connections may

be signaled by additional elements of the crown, that is, the cross, crescent or bucranium that surmounts the horned helmet (Godlewski forthcoming b). As for the Queen Mothers from the Dongolan family, they could have been represented in painting wearing Byzantinizing crowns or holding such crowns in their hand [see Fig. 4]. In the latter case, when a Queen Mother is shown holding a Byzantinizing crown, the state of preservation of the mural precludes any determination of what had originally been painted on her head.

Studies of regalia are handicapped by missing inscriptions identifying the portrayed individuals and the absence of original texts from Makuria (Dotawo), but it is without question that the crowns depicted in portraits of royalty were intended to manifest an important tradition that was well understood by local communities, identifying the family of the mother of the ruling king.

In this context, one should consider the possibility of there being ceremonial crowns. The case against such crowns seems closed, considering that the known representations come from church spaces (Pachoras, Sonqi Tino and Abd el-Gadir). The representations of rulers from the Throne Hall in Dongola are fragmentarily preserved, whereas the portraits of kings and queen mothers from the Upper Church in Banganarti are of an eschatological nature, at least those painted in the apses.

## SYMBOLS OF THE RULER

In his hands, his arms bent at the elbows, the king holds against his chest a cross

with a long vertical lower arm, tied with a ribbon (*velium*), this in his right hand,



and an apparently Byzantinizing crown in the other hand, surmounted by a cross on top of the domed part and with rolled ribbons pressed against the chest [see *Fig. 6*]. The cross in the right hand is a traditional symbol of authority, known already from earlier portraits of rulers from the Cathedral of Paulos and Petros in Pachoras. At the turn of the 10th century, the bow appeared in the right hand of the king in two paintings (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 419–422; Godlewski forthcom-

ing a]. In a depiction from Chapel 3 in the Upper Church at Banganarti, the Queen Mother holds a cross with the figure of Christ inscribed into its central part (Żurawski 2014: 143–149). The form of the cross held by a king changes over time, distinctly enough to be considered as a chronological marker. The cross tied with a ribbon appears only in the hand of the ruler portrayed in the Monastery Church (NB.2.2) in Dongola [see *Fig. 6* top].

### THE ROBES: KING VS. QUEEN MOTHER

The first general impression of the robes of depicted personages, wherever they have been preserved sufficiently

complete and recognizable, is that there are no noticeable differences between what the king wears and what the



Fig. 10. Royal dress: figure of a king(?) under the protection of Christ, painting from the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras (PCMA UW Documentation Center | photo T. Żółtowska-Huszczka)

queen mother is shown in. Neither are all of the relevant paintings precisely dated, while it is entirely admissible that some changes would have occurred in the dress of the rulers between the mid-11th century, when the first kings of Dotawo were portrayed, and the 14th century, when we have the last dated portraits.

Paintings that are fairly complete and readable are a good point to start with. The best preserved is a 14th century depiction of a nameless king from the Monastery Church NB.2.2 in

Dongola [see Fig. 2]. Comparable attire can be observed on another representation of a ruler, undoubtedly of earlier date, from the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras [Fig. 10]. Finally, there is the lower part of a royal figure dated to the 14th century [Fig. 11], so the closest chronologically to the discussed Dongola painting from the Monastery Church NB.2.2 (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 403–406, 419–422, 449–451). The following is a tabular comparison of the different elements of the royal dress seen in the wall paintings.

Table 1. Comparison of different elements of royal attire appearing in the discussed wall paintings

Nameless king, painting from Dongola (NB.2.2), 13th/14th century [see Fig. 2]	Ruler, earlier date, Cathedral of Petros, Pachoras [Fig. 11]	King, 14th century, from Cathedral of Petros, Pachoras [Fig. 11 right]
Tunic with long sleeves and cuffs, striped decoration on the forearms—this form of tunic emphasizing the decorated sleeves and cuffs is observed in a number of other paintings of different date	Tunic with long sleeves and cuffs, striped decoration on the forearms, white trimming at the bottom (used to be interpreted as pants)	Long tunic
Outer garment, referred to either as a "skirt" or apron, pleated, possibly with one shoulder strap (seen as a stripe on the king's left shoulder, assuming of course that this is not part of the shawl or pants)	Outer garment ("skirt"), pleated, wide border at the bottom	Outer garment, pleated, with a wide border
Shawl (?), on the left shoulder of the figure (see above)	Shawl, thrown over the left shoulder, passing under the right armpit, the other end over the back	Shawl, fragment visible on the left forearm and on both sides of the figure
Shawl, another one on the right shoulder of the king, wrapped around his left arm. Shawls are known from much earlier representations of court dignitaries depicted in the church SWN.B.V (Godlewski 2019)		
No evidence of shoe wear (lower parts of the representation, especially the feet, damaged)		



Fig. 11. Royal dress: figure of a king, painting from the sanctuary of the Late Cathedral in Pachoras (PCMA UW Documentation Center | photo T. Żółtowska-Huszczka)

A very interesting study has been made of the garments of figures painted in the apses of the Upper Church in Baganarti (Woźniak 2016). The paintings are dated from the mid-11th through the 14th century. The army of the Sultan Baybars destroyed the church in Baganarti as a symbol of royal authority rather than as a church. The cathedral in Dongola was left untouched. The Church of the Archangel Raphael (SWN.B.I) survived the destruction of the nearby palace. The ruins of the church in Baganarti continued to function as a place of pilgrimage frequented by the Makurians who left there numerous graffiti (Łajtar 2014). The last portraits of rulers were painted probably in the 13th century. Woźniak's suggested changes in the attire of kings and queen mothers concern two aspects. The king wore three garments: the inner tunic as an undergarment, the outer garment which was like a skirt held up by a strap across the right shoulder, and a shawl across the left forearm and right shoulder. The decorative nature of the outer garment resembles robes produced in the caliph's textile workshops. In a few cases even fragments of inscriptions in the Arabic script can be discerned.

### THE KING'S PROTECTORS

The two saintly figures—possible figures from the Old Testament—are both dressed in similar fashion with a long pleated tunic tied with a wide buckled belt and an outer robe, a kind of cloak, fastened with a clasp in front. Both are long-haired and bearded, the hair fair in the figure on the right and dark in the one on the left, shoulder-length. The fig-

ure on the right places his right hand on the king's shoulder, while holding in his left a small casket with domed top. The figure on the left embraces the king with his left hand, while touching the king's hip with the other one. Both figures are standing slightly to the back, both have high foreheads, wrinkles and heavily accentuated eyes and an ovoid halo around their heads [see *Fig. 2*].

The two figures find parallels in the central parts of the two eastern apses (Godlewski forthcoming a). Together with the central figure they form a distinctive part of the apse composition, in which the "colorless" apostles are merely outlined figures. However, the state of preservation of the murals in the apses does not allow the central figures to be identified. There are no parallels for such apse compositions in other churches of Dotawo.

The figure towering behind the king is only partly preserved. The face is damaged. The surviving parts show that it had a short beard and that there was a halo round the head. In his left hand the figure held a large codex and in his right what was presumably a "royal" scepter; one can see the domed top surmounted by a small cross. The figure is dressed in a traditional tunic with a *pallium* thrown around the shoulders [see *Fig. 2*]. The central figure is undoubtedly meant to be Christ, but the identification of the two protectors—without inscriptions naming them and in view of the simplified and mannerist

painting style—is not an easy task. Certain formal similarities with the painting in the southern apse, identified as John the Baptist by an inscription on the roll held by the figure, flaked on the left side by an Old Testament figure (Zacharias?) and an archangel on the right (Godlewski forthcoming a), could suggest that in the case of the Dongola painting the king's figure was flanked by John the Baptist and Zacharias as a "symbol" of Makuria's conversion to Christianity. The figures from the southern apse of the Dongolan church may support this suggestion. Thus, the figures represent the Old and New Testaments and are a foretoken of the birth of Christ. Their presence next to the ruler could symbolize the baptism of the kingdom and a strong attachment to Biblical tradition. Christ would then embody the king's status as ruler of the world out of God's grace. No parallels for such a representations are known from Makuria.

The two saintly figures on either side of the king may also be interpreted hypothetically as symbolic representations of the founders of Christianity in Makuria—the apostle of Makuria and the first abbot of the monastery.

These preliminary suggestions are not well grounded in iconographical studies. We may say, however, that the wall paintings from the church NB.2.2 present many iconographic innovations that require more detailed research.

**Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski**  
University of Warsaw *emeritus*  
w.godlewski@uw.edu.pl

**How to cite this article:** Godlewski, W. (2019). The 'last' king of Makuria (Dotawo). *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, 28/2, 479–492  
<https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0013.6901>

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