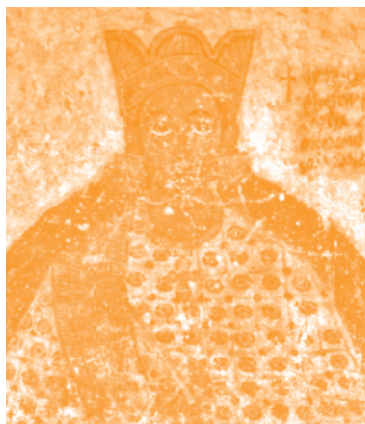


# Makuria in the middle of the 12th century



**Abstract:** In the middle of the 12th century, the King of Dotawo (Makuria) and Arwa, referred to as Mouse Georgios in many Old Nubian documents and in studies on the subject, was the eparch of Palaga, a province of the Kingdom of Arwa, and in all likelihood the official heir of King Paulos of Arwa. He was crowned King of Makuria (Dotawo) in 1155, following mediation by the Fatimid caliph between the two kings, Georgios V of Makuria and Paulos of Arwa. The crisis was triggered by David, a presumed member of the Arwa royal family, usurping the throne of Makuria. The paper marshals the evidence for a hypothetical reconstruction of the political situation in the region in 1155 and considers the reasons for King Mouse being called Mouse Georgios in Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim.

**Keywords:** Makuria, Dotawo, Georgios V/Paulos/David/Mouse/Georgios VI, Queen Mother Mari, murals, Petros Cathedral in Pachoras, crown of Arwa Kingdom

Major changes in Makuria coincided with serious economic problems caused by repeated anomalous Nile floods in the mid-11th century that affected the harvests and animal breeding, and presumably also the health of the Makurians. A similar situation, better documented, was noted in Egypt. The sole reprieve lay in closer economic ties between the kingdoms of Makuria and Arwa, and this may have been achieved through a personal un-

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ion between the ruling families in the two lands. Makuria was the weaker side in this new configuration. This evaluation of the situation finds confirmation in Arabic reports. Al Maqrizi (Vantini 1975: 613) and Ibn Hawqal (Vantini 1975: 162) both emphasized that Arwa was larger and richer compared to Makuria. Not all necessarily approved of the union advanced by Zacharias V. The first ruler from the Arwa ruling family, Solomon, surrendered the throne after ten years of his reign owing to the difficulties he had to face. The situation was even more complex in the final years of the reign of Georgios V, who was deposed by David in the middle of the 12th century. The same can be said of the reign of King Mouse in the second half of the 12th century; he was crowned first as king of Makuria and then as king of Arwa.

Three documents shed light on the political situation in the united kingdoms in the middle of the 12th century:

1. Funerary stela of the King of Makuria (Dotawo) Georgios V (Van Gerven Oei 2011);
2. Letter in Arabic from Abdullah to the eparch of Nobadia, document from the Qasr Ibrim archive (Adams 2010: 248–249);
3. Royal proclamation in Old Nubian, text from the Qasr Ibrim archive (Browne 1991: QI.III).

Rules of royal inheritance must have been introduced when the ruling families of Dongola and Soba concluded the union of their kingdoms in the 1060s. The hypothetical reconstruction of this new system, based on an analysis of the available documentary evidence, called for the sister of the king from one family to marry the brother of the king from the other family; the heir to the throne was always the son of the king's sister and his mother bore the title of Queen Mother.

## THE POLITICS OF YEAR 1155 IN MAKURIA

In 1154, the political situation in Makuria and Alwa was most probably as follows. King Georgios V, the ruler of Dongola for 25 years (since 1130), was the senior king in the united kingdom. In accordance with the rules of inheritance in force for close to a hundred years, his successor was Mouse, son of Mari, the consort of Paulos King of Arwa. Paulos had ruled Soba for some years, but apparently not as long as Georgios. His successor, again according to the new rules, was David, the son of the king's sister and a courtier at Dongola. In keeping with the rules, Mari was designated to bear the title of the Queen Mother

(*niounnien*) once Mouse ascended to the throne. In 1154, Mouse held the office of eparch, governing the province of Palaga in the kingdom of Arwa.

As the senior king, Georgios V was the lord of the “two dominions”, as stated on his funerary stela. The familial relations between Mouse and David are signaled in Mouse's royal proclamation and are mentioned in other documents, confirming the nature of the reconstructed rules of royal inheritance in force in the united kingdom.

The situation appears to have been stable and predictable. What happened to cause it to change so dramatically? There

is no explicit indication of any transformative events in the surviving sources and we are left to conjecture. To start, there is the information on King Georgios V, derived primarily from the text of his funerary stela. Assuming that he had indeed left Dongola for Cairo at the turn of 1154, one is entitled to wonder about the rationale of this trip. Were the reasons political, issuing from the mutual relations between (the united) Makuria and the Fatimids of Egypt? Or were they strictly personal? In view of the consequences of this move in Dongola, as well as the Caliph's subsequent role in the events, one is persuaded to consider the reasons for the visit to be personal. A serious illness may have prompted Georgios to seek treatment at the Caliph's court. His death within two years of his departure from Dongola, at the relatively young age of 52, may argue in favor of his poor health. The lack of trustworthy information on the progress of his treatment in Cairo may have been at the root of the confusion in Nubia.

Reconstructing the circumstances more or less along these lines gives a better idea of the role of particular individuals involved in the situation. On one hand, David, the heir apparent to the Soban throne, but living in Dongola, observing an opportunity to take power with the support, and on the other, the Caliph's court acting in liaison with Paulos of Arwa to protect the inheritance of Georgios V according to the principles in force in the united lands of Makuria and Arwa. The fact that Georgios did not return home before his death substantiates the theory about his terminal illness.

David took power in Dongola in an apparent coup d'état, driven either by personal ambition or to quell growing unrest triggered by the king's illness and prolonged absence. There is no indication of whether he had the support of the kingdom's urban elite. After all, he was deposing not just the King of Makuria, but the senior king of the entire Nubian Union, Arwa included. The "constitutional" nature of the senior king's role and his

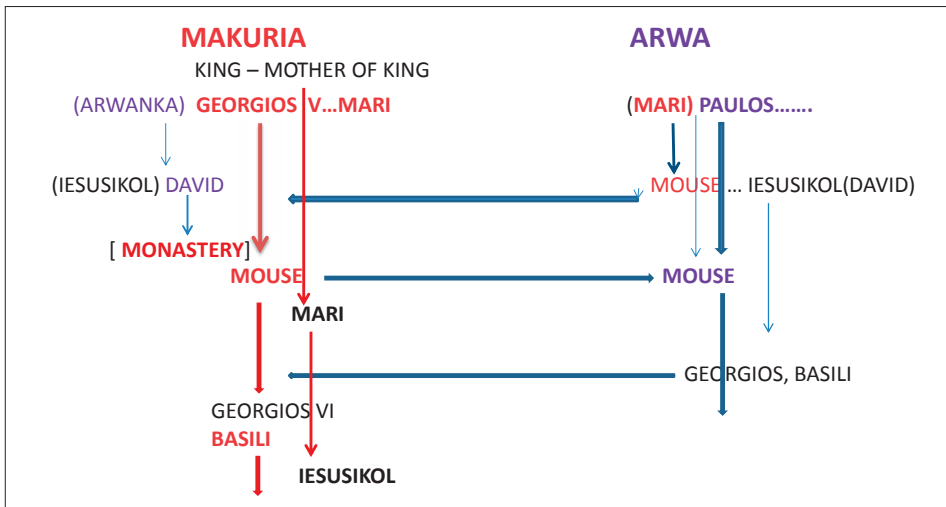


Fig. 1. The lineage of the ruling families of Makuria and Arwa in the 12th century

relations with the Fatimid court are not even intimated in the known sources. We can assume, on the grounds of the condemnation that David's action drew from the Fatimids and ultimately also from Paulos of Arwa, that David acted prematurely and his ascendancy to power failed to be recognized in the Union. There is no proof that David was ever crowned as King of Dotawo.

In these circumstances, the proclamation of King Mouse, drawn up by a royal scribe, also on behalf of the absent King Georgios V, may reflect his effort to bring in the Church of Makuria as an ally. In 1155, Mouse was already discharging his royal duties as heir apparent to the Makurian throne. As the future king he was set to become the protector of the Church (which seems to have functioned independently of the Arwan Church).

Fatimid interest in the situation and the attempts of the court in Cairo to intervene in the matter suggest that Georgios was still there and indeed could not return to Dongola (perhaps because of ill health, as conjectured above). The Caliph's first emissary sought to meet with Paulos in Soba to prod the king into action to resolve the situation in the two lands (Adams 2010: 252). The second emissary found the Arwan king already in Dongola, facing strong resistance from the Makurian elite unwilling to accept David as the new king of Makuria. According to the rules, each kingdom in the Union retained the right to independent royal succession, constrained only by the personal ties between the ruling families.

Estimating the duration of the crisis in Dongola is not easy. Two successive

emissaries being sent from the Caliph indicates that it must have been a drawn out process, requiring credible information on the health of Georgios V. We do not know when Mouse was crowned as King of Makuria. The presence of his mother, Mari, the future Queen Mother at the heart of the events may have paved the way to his being accepted by the power elite in Dongola. In the reconstructed lineage of the two ruling families, she was part of the Dongolan royal family, most probably a sister of Georgios V.

There is no more information in the sources on David. He was removed from power, divested of his right to the Arwan(?) throne and banished to a monastery (Church of the Virgin Mary in Ami). However, his children—three young boys—most likely retained their right to the throne of Dongola, because their mother was Iesusikol, a sister of Mouse. Her sons Georgios and Basil ruled Makuria jointly in the second half of the 12th century. In 1155, they must have still been children.

Negotiations between Paulos and the power elite in Makuria, in the presence of the caliph's emissary presumably representing Georgios V, brought a decision that was surprising in the circumstances, but rational at its core. Mouse, eparch of the Arwan province of Palaga and the legitimate heir of Georgios V, was crowned King of Makuria. For Arwa, the move was advantageous as Mouse would become the senior king after the death of Paulos. Georgios V kept his position, perhaps under the tacit assumption that he was in no condition to return home. It may have been the

position of the Caliph's emissary in the talks that took place, having full support from Georgios and understandable in view of the fact that the King would have been aware that his sister automatically became mother of the new king regnant of Makuria.

Georgios V died in Egypt in 1157. The text on his funerary stela, formulated in Greek and Old Nubian, gives the place and date. It is the only royal stela from Makuria. The prayer for the deceased, written in two languages, has only one parallel from Makuria, which is the funerary stela of Joseph, Bishop of Syene, who died and was buried in Dongola, although much earlier in time (Jakobielski and van der Vliet 2011). In the latter case, the beginning of the prayer is in Greek and the second part of the text in Coptic, in the bishop's native language. Hence the assumption that the King actually died in Egypt and

was buried most probably in the el-Suriani monastery in Wadi Natrun. His funerary stela is kept at the monastery.

Mouse remained on the throne in Dongola, supported by his mother Mari, who was raised automatically to the status of Queen Mother. Later events demonstrated that he was more interested in the Arwan throne after the death of Paulos. He was most probably the only crowned king of Makuria to be crowned a second time, as the king of Arwa, after Paulos passing. This suggestion is based on the appearance of the crown in which he was depicted on a mural in the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras, assuming of course that the identification of the figure in the wall painting is not questioned. The painting is fragmentarily preserved and continues to be referred to as a representation of an eparch (most recently Jakobielski et al. 2017: 425–427).

## **QUEEN MOTHER MARI AND KING MOUSE FROM THE CATHEDRAL OF PETROS IN PACHORAS**

The inscription found under the Nativity scene on the east wall of the northern aisle of the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras takes on special meaning in this context. It has been improperly interpreted as a legend to a representation of the Queen Mother, whereas the painting itself has been identified groundlessly as a depiction of King Mouse (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 431–434). The representation is undoubtedly that of a Queen Mother, previously suggested by the author to be the mother of King Solomon (Godlewski 2008) [Fig. 2]. A much more probable identification of this figure is the mother of King Mouse,

Mari, represented as the Queen Mother in a Byzantinizing crown, which she was entitled to wear as a person of royal Dongolan lineage and a sister of Georgios V. The painting would also justify the inscription found near it. She is shown surprisingly without divine protection, which was the rule in Makurian painting of the time. Perhaps the painter intended the Virgin from the Nativity scene above to be the protectress for the queen portrayed below, but it would have been a highly exceptional understanding of this particular composition. Another possibility is that the painting reflects an Arwan tradition



Fig. 2. The Queen Mother (Mari?) (figure identified earlier as King Mouse Georgios), wall painting from the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras (PCMA UW Documentation Center | photo E. Parandowska)

of composing scenes of this kind with representations of rulers shown without divine protection, a tradition practiced also in Makuria with respect to depictions of bishops (Godlewski 2008). Assuming this figure of a Queen Mother is indeed Mari, she appears in the *taktika* (*notitiae*, official lists of titles and offices) of documents from Makuria (Dotawo) (Browne 1991; Ruffini 2014). There is no parallel for representations of Queen Mother from the territory of Arwa, because no wall paintings are known to have survived from that kingdom.

The next Queen Mother in Makuria, the mother of Georgios VI, would have been Mouse's sister Iesusikol, but in the *taktika* of surviving Makurian texts she is linked only to Basil II, most probably a brother of Georgios VI (Browne 1991: QI.38, QI.40). The *taktika* of documents from Qasr Ibrim mentioning Georgios VI as king of Dotawo still gave Mari as the Queen Mother (Browne 1991: QI.32, QI.34)

The inscription from the Pachoras Cathedral should be considered in the context of the address of a letter sent in 1186 to the Coptic patriarch Mark. Two rulers are mentioned there as kings of Makuria and Arwa: Mouse and Georgios VI. The introduction to the letter contains an exposition of how the Church of Makuria understood the Holy Trinity as three embodiments of Christ, whereas the return address presented the kings of Arwa and Makuria as defenders of people inhabiting territory in the jurisdiction of the Coptic Patriarch. The two texts may be from the same period more or less, but the inscription from the cathedral in Pachoras is not dated.

The text is probably a rendering of the political lineage of King Mouse (see Łajtar 2009: 91). It reads: "Mouse Great King of King Georgios, is the son of Koudapis [brother of Paulos, King of Arwa?], is the king of Arwa and Makuria, heir to Georgios [V] similarly as Zacharias [V] and King David [usurper] set(?) in a monastery, the Church of Mary at Ami...". The Georgios mentioned in this text could have been a son of Iesusikol and the deposed David. In keeping with the new rules of inheritance, he would have been most probably King of Makuria, co-regent of King Mouse.

From the start of the publication of these texts, the two names of Mouse and Georgios were interpreted as two appellations of the same person, that is, Mouse. To my mind, this interpretation is defective, resulting from an impaired knowledge of the Old Nubian language. In Greek texts, specifically a letter to the Coptic patriarch (Plumley 1978) and the address of another partly preserved letter (Ruffini 2014: QI 113), the names clearly refer to two different individuals, Mouse and Georgios.

The dating of the inscription from the Cathedral in Pachoras is also an issue. In all probability, the surviving texts mention two different persons called Georgios in association with Mouse. If the Georgios from the inscription in the cathedral is Georgios V, the king then already in Egypt, then the inscription and perhaps also the painting, assuming the identification with the Queen Mother Mari is correct, should be dated to about 1155–1156. However, if it is Georgios VI, who is



Fig. 3. Representation of a king of Arwa(?) holding a bow and a bucranium, wall painting on the west face of the southwestern pillar in the naos of the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras; inset, crown of the rulers of Arwa(?), drawing based on a wall painting from the central southeastern pillar [see Fig. 4] (PCMA UW Documentation Center | photo T. Żółtowska-Huszczka; drawing W. Godlewski and M. Puzkarski)



also listed in the address of a letter to the Patriarch Mark, then the inscription should be placed in the 1170s. The lineage [of Mouse] recorded in the inscription would argue in favor of an

earlier dating, assuming that the text in question, the reading of which is not entirely unambiguous, has been understood properly (Łajtar 2009: 89–97; Jakobielski at al. 2017: 432).



Fig. 4. Representation of Mouse, King of Arwa and Makuria(?), fragment of a composition from the west face of the central southeastern pillar in the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras, the wall painting after conservation; bottom left, the painting *in situ*; bottom right, plan of the cathedral with the location of the three incremented murals (PCMA UW Documentation Center | photo after conservation E. Parandowska; plan by W. Godlewski)



Fig. 5. Representation of a King of Makuria with Christ between two saints, wall painting from the Monastery Church NB.2.2 on Kom H in Dongola (PCMA UW-QSAP Dongola Project | photo W. Godlewski)

## KING MOUSE FROM THE CATHEDRAL IN PACHORAS

The dating of the painting to the second half of the 12th century is determined by a correlation with the date of documents mentioning Mouse in the *taktika* (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 431–434). Assuming the identification is justified, it seems valid to move the dating of the mural to the beginning of the second half of the 12th century, right after 1155. In keeping with the reconstructed custom, the bishop of the cathedral in Pachoras, *abba* Iesu in this case, should have commissioned a portrait of the King and the Queen Mother inside the church shortly after the coronation (Godlewski 2008). There is no suggestion as to where a painting representing Mouse could have been located inside the cathedral. A possible representation of King Mouse is fragmentarily preserved on the western face of the central southeastern pillar (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 425–427) [Fig. 4]. Virtually the only part of this depiction that has survived is the king's crown, a double-horned helmet topped by a crescent with a bucranium on the front, and the head of Christ by the king's left side. A fragmentary legend accompanying this painted portrait was read from the beginning as identifying an eparch (of Nobadia by surmise), because the abbreviation of the title is evident, even if incomplete. Nonetheless, eparchs were never depict-

ed in crowns, they were not represented as the King's deputies and are not present among the figures from the Cathedral of Paulos and Petros at Pachoras, which has the fullest preserved program of official painting comprising portraits of Kings and Queen Mothers (Godlewski 2008). Nor has an eparch ever been represented in any of the preserved churches from the province of Nobadia. The interpretation as an eparch of the painting from Abd el Gadir was faulty, because the accompanying inscription was not a legend identifying the figure as an eparch, but a prayer of an eparch, most probably the founder of the painting (Godlewski 2008: 274). The painting in question, on a pillar from the Cathedral of Petros, may be the missing representation of King Mouse, titled in the *taktika* of the royal proclamation from 1155 as "King of Dotawo and eparch of Palaga [province of Arwa]" (Browne 1991: QL.30). The fragmentary inscription accompanying the depiction on the pillar may comprise this royal titlature. Importantly, this suggestion, if accepted, would end the dubious discussion concerning portraits of eparchs wearing crowns in Makurian painting (see Jakobielski et al. 2017: 426). The identification of this particular king is naturally a hypothesis.

## THE CROWN OF ARWA

The crown from this image is itself an interesting contribution to the discussion as it finds no parallels in Makurian painting apart from the figure painted on the

west face of the southwestern pillar in the naos of the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras (Jakobielski et al. 2017: 419–422). There, a king was depicted holding in his left

hand a bucranium identical with that on the helmet crown of the figure shown on the southeastern central pillar [see Fig. 3].

It is valid to ask whether the crown in question is a Nubianizing crown of the Kingdom of Makuria (Dotawo) or a rendering of a traditional Arwan crown that had served as its prototype. Should the painting on the southeastern pillar be identified as Mouse, the crown could be hypothesized as the crown of the Kingdom of Arwa. There is no proof from the territory of Arwa to support this suggestion, the legitimacy of which draws from the fact that the so-called Nubianizing crown starts being depicted in Makuria only after the union of the two dominions (Godlewski 2008). Moreover, the rul-

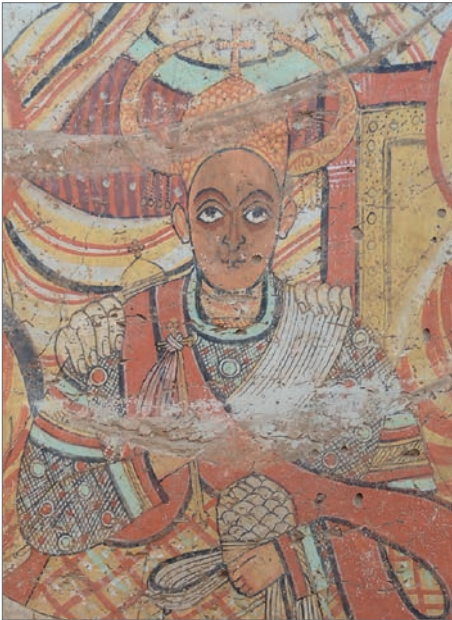


Fig. 6. Portrait head of a king in the crown of the kings of Dotawo, a Byzantinizing crown held in his hand, detail of a wall painting from the Monastery Church NB.2.2 in Dongola (PCMA UW-QSAP Project | photo W. Godlewski)

er depicted on the southeastern pillar bears a bow in his right hand; this is not a Makurite attribute, the king of Makuria being shown usually with a cross in his right hand. A king of Makuria depicted on the walls of the Monastery Church NB.2.2, the painting dated to the first half of the 14th century, wears a typical Nubianizing crown and holds in his hands two key symbols of the kings of Makuria: a miniature of a Byzantinizing crown and a cross [Fig. 5].

The crown on the head of a nameless King of Makuria from the Monastery Church in Dongola is undoubtedly a Makurian version with a cross topping the horned helmet [Fig. 6]. An analogous crown is observed in the hands of a figure (most probably a Queen Mother) painted in Chapel 3 at Banganarti (Żurawski 2014: 143–151).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one should emphasize again that Mouse is the only name preserved in the documents of this particular king of Makuria and Arwa. The accompanying name of Georgios refers to two different kings of Dotawo, Georgios V and Georgios VI, successive co-regents of King Mouse, the former a senior king, ruler of two dominions (Makuria and Arwa?), and the latter king of Makuria (Dotawo).

A second important point made here is a tentative identification of the crown of the Kings of Arwa as a double-horned helmet with a crescent topping it and a four-horned bucranium attached on the front. The crown has been identified in two paintings from the cathedral of Petros in Pachoras. In the representation on the

southwestern pillar in the church naos, the figure also holds another important attribute of Arwan kings, that is, a bow in the left hand (on the formal ‘evolution’ of Makurian crowns, see Jakobielski 2013).

The third important comment concerns the identification of the Queen Mother below the Nativity scene painted in the northern aisle of the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras. She is suggested to be Mari, mother of King Mouse, a sister of King Georgios V. The proposed identification would close the 50-year discussion regarding the figure painted in the north aisle of the church intended for the female part of the congregation. It would also free researchers from the crippling inability to distinguish between male (king) and female (Queen Mother) representations.

Jewelry around the neck of the Queen Mother Mari(?) is an element easiest to observe when distinguishing between male and female representations (Godlewski 2008). Whenever unambiguous inscriptions are lacking and legends do not accompany the pictures, a proper interpretation of details of dress, regalia and jewelry can be considered as grounds for identifying the depicted figures.

The location of representations of the King is another important element of the identification (sanctuary, southern aisle and partly the central one and the *diakonikon*). The same should be said of depictions of the Queen Mother (the northern aisle solely) in the naos of the Cathedral of Paulos and Petros in Pachoras.

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