article/ Words on Warfare from Christian Nubia

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abstract/ *This article is an attempt to assemble the vocabulary related to war found in Nubian written sources (primarily manuscripts) and discuss the insights it offers about warfare in Christian Nubia. All four languages used in medieval Nubia are examined, but the focus is on Old Nubian. Saint Epimachos, Saint Mercurios, Saint George, and the Archangel Michael are the personae around which pivot the narratives that offer insights into weapons, offices, and practices in the otherwise very scarcely documented military of Christian Nubia.*

keywords/ Christian Nubia, Makuria, Old Nubian, Greek, Coptic, Weapons", Military Offices, Military Saints, Eparch, General, Admiral, Esquire

The purpose of this paper is to present textual evidence from Christian Nubia relating to issues of warfare, weaponry, and military functions. This evidence will be gleaned mainly from manuscripts, and secondarily from monumental epigraphy. From the four languages used in Christian Nubia, the present study will focus primarily on Old Nubian and partly on Greek, while occasionally evidence from sources in Arabic and Coptic will also be used. Although the material is not particularly rich, it may add to and/or nuance the picture of warfare in Nubia during the medieval era (ca. 5th to 15th centuries), which otherwise lacks a systematic study.

Moreover, evidence of warfare in the archaeological record from Nubia is scarce.[1] One of the major reasons is the abandonment of the ancient custom of accompanying the dead with tomb furnishings already from the very beginnings of the Christian era in Nubia,[2] whereas it was precisely tombs that provided the richest material evidence for warfare in terms of weaponry, as can be seen in A-Group,[3] Kerma,[4] Napatan,[5] Meroitic,[6] and post-Meroitic burials.[7] Wars were, however, far from absent from Christian Nubia.

Warfare in Nubia is marked on the landscape by the numerous castles and forts of the Middle Nile region,[8] although their function was also as sites of power, sights of might, centers of authority[9]; it was witnessed by the historians who recorded the frequent wars between Christian Nubia and the Caliphate[10]; it is related with slavery and slaving expeditions that have impregnated the image of the past in Sudan from prehistory until modernity[11]; it was recorded implicitly on the walls of the Nubian churches, where military saints, most often on horseback, parade as martyrs of the Christian faith and as guarantors of the security, longevity and prosperity of the Makuritan realm.

These military saints will set off the presentation of the textual evidence on warfare in Old Nubian,[12] because there has also been preserved textual evidence of their cult, in the form of both shorter texts (dedications, prayers) and longer hagiographic works,[13] as well as legal documents. From the sanctified humans that populated the celestial army, we will then move to the *archistratēgos* of the heavens, the archangel Michael, whose cult in Nubia has produced texts that offer important insights into the military organization of the Makuritan state. Finally, a question about the possibility of discerning evidence of Makuritan naval forces in our epigraphic material will conclude this modest contribution on warfare in Christian Nubia.

1. The Protector of the Four Corners of the Nubian Nation

One of the most impressive documents of legal practice from Christian Nubia is a Royal Proclamation found at Qasr Ibrim (P.QI 3 30) and dated to the 23rd of August 1155.[14] Through this legal act, king Moses George proclaims the rights and privileges of the church of Saint Epimachos at Ibrim West.[15] The king

threatens anyone who "speaks against and denies my statement" (P.QI 3 30, l. 30) that Epimachos will "stab him with his spear" (ll. 30-1). The action is described by the verb ϣⲁⲣ and the weapon by the noun ϣⲓⲣ̄, but whether the latter refers to the "spear" indeed and not to any other weapon is uncertain. Without parallel texts in other languages, it is difficult to confirm the definitions in OND, which seem to try to conform with the fact that the spear was the diagnostic iconographic attribute of Epimachos in Nubian iconography (see below). There is moreover another word in the OND for "spear" or "lance," i.e. ϣⲁ, which possibly has a related root, but again it does not necessarily mean "spear." Finally, it should be noted that an Old Nubian term for "ruler" is ϣⲓⲕⲉⲣⲓ, and although in the OND this is etymologically linked with a variant ϣⲏⲕⲕ of the term ϣⲁⲗ for "administrative unit," a verb ϣⲓⲕ, meaning "to rule" has recently been identified in P.QI 4 93.4 and P.QI 4 108.7. It is tempting to associate this verb with the noun ϣⲓⲣ̄ and thus suggest that ϣⲓⲕⲉⲣⲓ was a military ruler, but for the time being this hypothesis remains speculative.

In any case, the king's threat to invoke Saint Epimachos is presented in the royal proclamation from Qasr Ibrim as even more powerful than the King's curse; a heart attack; the sharing of Judas Iscariot's faith; and the rejection of the trespasser by the society. Again, after all these threats/curses, it is Epimachos who is called upon "on the day of judgment" to "come great in battle against him" (ll. 34-5). Here, the Old Nubian word for battle is used, i.e. ⲡⲙ̄ⲅ. There is also attested a verb form ⲡⲙ̄ⲕ, i.e. "to fight," as well as a synonym ⲇⲓⲥⲉ (or ⲇⲓⲥⲁⲣ).[16] One instance of the use of the latter term in the Old Nubian corpus translates the Greek participle πολεμουμένων, which derives from the term πόλεμος, i.e. "war." In Nobiin, the verb ⲇⲓⲥ also translates as "Krieg führen," [17] and it is not inconceivable that a derivative of the root ⲇⲓⲥ was also used to define "war" or "warfare." A military victory can also be discerned behind the meaning of the term ⲇⲓⲥⲁⲣⲧ, attested once in the OND translating the Greek word νῖκος.[18] In the same semantic field as ⲇⲓⲥⲉ (or ⲇⲓⲥⲁⲣ), there is the verb ⲉⲥⲕ meaning "to conquer," which seems rather related with the ability to win rather with the fight necessary to mark a military victory. However, in one instance, the term is directly linked with the quality of a weapon, namely a shield (about the Old Nubian terms for this weapon, see below): P.QI 1 11.ii.2 ⲥⲟⲩⲇⲁⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲗⲇⲏⲕⲧⲓⲛⲁ ⲅⲟⲩⲉⲓⲟⲩ ⲉⲥⲕⲓⲟⲣⲉⲛⲓⲛⲗ̄, that can be translated as "the staff which is the victorious *shield* of readiness."

Conversely, the Greek term for "war," i.e. πόλεμος, was surely known in Christian Nubia, since it appears several times in the Septuagint and the New Testament. It is important to note that the Greek term is also used in the Sahidic New Testament, suggesting that it is not impossible that it had remained untranslated in the Old Nubian version of the Bible too (for further evidence, see the section on Saint George).

Moreover, the adjective πολέμιος for "enemy," deriving from the noun "πόλεμος" is attested in a prayer to Raphael from Banganarti, composed in "extremely corrupted" Greek. In the same text, a participle "πολεμόντων" (sic) also appears.[19] From the rich textual corpus recorded at the same site one can also glean a couple of instances of the use of the Greek noun ἐχθρὸς, meaning «enemy».[20] These instances seem to rather refer, however, to the devil and other demonic forces as the *par excellence* enemies of the Christians.

The term πολέμιος – denoting real, earthly enemies – is read in the text on the back of a small wooden plaque found at the late Christian settlement of Attiri, where Saint Epimachos is called upon "to protect the roads from the enemies." [21] At the same time, there is also an Old Nubian term for "enemy," i.e. ⲟⲩⲕⲕⲁⲧⲧ stemming apparently from the verb ⲟⲩⲣ meaning "to oppress."

The reference to "the roads" in the text of the Attiri plaque seems to invest Epimachos with the role of the protector of the territory that the ruler and/or the inhabitants of Attiri controlled. This role is confirmed and expanded to the entire Makuritan realm in the text of P.QI 3 30.26-7, where the king makes an invocation "in order that Epimachos might arise, come and place the four corners of the nation for care under my feet."

Although there are several saints with the name Epimachos, it is generally thought that the Nubian Epimachos is the same with Epimachus of Pelusium, who was not initially a warrior-saint, but a weaver from Pelusium who martyred for the Christian faith under Diocletian.[22] Perhaps through his association with other martyrs under Diocletian, like Saint George, Epimachos became a warrior saint in the belief system of the Christian Nubians; perhaps this was due to his name, including the Greek word for battle, i.e. μάχη; or perhaps thanks to some local miracle that was not preserved to us due to the loss of the relevant written source. In any case, the cult of Epimachos was widespread at least in Lower Nubia and in the later centuries of Christianity there (first half of the second

millennium CE), as can also be seen from a fragment of a stela in Coptic,[23] two fragmentarily preserved texts witnessing an Old Nubian version of his Martyrdom,[24] as well as from two painted representations at Aballah-n Irqi and Abu Oda, where the saint is spearing a fallen figure, like in the plaque from Attiri.[25]

There were, however, other military saints who were at least equally venerated in Christian Nubia as Saint Epimachos, and it seems that the idea of Epimachos spearing the enemies is inherently linked with the function of such saints who speared the adversary, in the form of a dragon, a pagan or an apostate, symbolizing in general terms the evil itself.

2. The Saint *Stratēlates* Mercurios and George

The spearing of an adversary of the Christian faith is exemplified in the Acta of Saint Mercurios.[26] Mercurios was a Roman soldier who martyred under Decius. The locality of his martyrdom was near Caesarea in Cappadocia. Thence, he was linked in one legend with Saint Basil of Caesarea. Basil was a contemporary of Julian the Apostate and, according to a version of his Life, during Julian's Persian campaign, Basil was informed in a dream that Mercurios was chosen by the Theotokos to kill the emperor. Basil rose and went to the martyrion of Mercurios, but neither his body nor his weapons were there. Later on, the news of Julian's death reached him.

An exegesis for this miracle may be linked with the report by Ammianus Marcellinus that Julian was killed by a lance "no one knows whence" (Res Gestae XXV.3.6: incertum inde).[27] Obviously, this vagueness gave room to speculation for divine intervention, while the reason that Mercurios was chosen may allegedly be linked with the role of Basil and the geographical proximity of the martyrion with Julian's Persian campaign.

In any case, when the narrative about the assassination of Julian reached Egypt, it was still linked with both the dream of Basil and the spear of Mercurios, but rather seen as part of the History of the patriarchate of Athanasios, apparently in order to invest the miracle with local references. An even further alienation from the narrative in Basil's Life is to be found in a Greek version of the Acta of Saint Mercurios discovered at Qasr Ibrim. There, Basil has disappeared from the miracle story, and the person who sees the dream is Pachomios. When this dream

comes, the father of coenobitic monasticism is together with Athanasios, during the exile of the latter in the second half of Julian's reign, i.e. 362-3 CE. The Theotokos has also disappeared from the narrative and it is now an angel of God who reveals things to Pachomios. Whether this new narrative is a local, i.e. Nubian, invention or an Egyptian contextualization of the legend around the assassination of the Emperor Julian cannot be investigated in this context.

It can be mentioned, however, that while Mercurios is represented in Egyptian iconography both as a holder of a spear,[28] and as Abu Sayfayn, i.e. the Father with the two swords,[29] in Nubia he appears as the slayer of Julian with his spear in all known mural representations, i.e. from Faras, Abdel Qadir and the Central Church of Abdallah-n Irqi.[30] The mural from Faras is of special importance, because it has been suggested that the story of Abu Sayfayn was already part of the complete iconographical concept in that section of the cathedral (see below). Thus, the iconography of Mercurios spearing Julian unites a type of weapon with the miracle story of the saint and underlines the identification of Mercurios with the act of eliminating pagans and the threat of the old religion.

This identification is relevant for the purpose of this paper, when one considers that Mercurios was the name of a very important royal figure in the history of medieval Nubia: King Mercurios ruled during the turn from the 7th to the 8th century and the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* calls him the New Constantine, who "became by his beautiful conduct like one of the Disciples".[31] Although this characterization has been linked with the annexation of Nobadia by Makuria and the integration of the united kingdom in the hierarchy of the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria, I have suggested that the name Mercurios might have been given to him as indeed a New Constantine who turned away from heathen practices the Nubian people remaining to be Christianized, stamping out paganism like his name-sake saint speared the last pagan emperor.[32] In sum, for Christians of the Nile Valley, the name Mercurios must have sounded extremely heroic, belligerent and war-like.

Finally, there are three words that are attested in the Greek version of the Acta S. Mercurii from Qasr Ibrim, which are of direct relevance for the present investigation, namely:

- the noun πόλεμον for "war" commemorating the Persian campaign of Julian and confirming the knowledge that the Nubians must have had of this term.

- the noun λόγχαριν for "spear" identifying the miraculous weapon of the martyr in Greek. About the Old Nubian term, see discussion in previous section.

- the adjective στρατηλάτης for "general" referring to Mercurios and linking him with the other famous "general" of the Christian faith, saint George.

Saint George is perhaps the most renowned military saint. He belongs to the circle of Roman soldiers who martyred for the Christian faith under Diocletian, but his fame far surpassed that of others, for reasons that also surpass the scope of this article. His cult reached of course Christian Nubia too, as is witnessed by fragments of both a Greek and an Old Nubian version of his Acta that have been unearthed at Qasr Ibrim and Kulubnarti respectively.[33]

The Old Nubian fragments of the Martyrdom of Saint George have been reconstructed on the basis of the Greek *editio princeps*, but find also parallels in witnesses in several other languages.[34] As to the Greek version, it exhibits a text written in a Greek language characteristic of late Christian Nubia,[35] while its content seems to be a combination of Greek and Coptic versions. This observation led the editor of the Qasr Ibrim fragments to the hypothesis that the text is either the result of a free choice from both sources or a Nubian edition of an original narrative of the martyrdom antedating the Greek *editio princeps*.[36]

In terms of vocabulary, the Martyrdom of Saint George offers interesting attestations in both versions:

In the Greek one, the term κομητοῦρα,[37] a Latin loan-word also attested in the *editio princeps*, is worthwhile to comment upon, because it confirms the acquaintance of Nubians with Latin military jargon, most probably as a result of an influx of Latin terms in medieval Greek. Moreover, it is interesting that Roman military correspondence has been unearthed at Qasr Ibrim,[38] the site of provenance of the Greek version of the Nubian martyrdom of Saint George. The influence of Roman military practices in the Middle Nile region has also been marked on the ground through the apparent similarities between Roman forts and those built in the Middle Nile region during Late Antiquity.[39]

As far as the Old Nubian version of the Acta S. Georgii is concerned, the most interesting term is ⲡⲁⲗⲁⲫⲟⲁⲣⲓ[ⲗⲟⲩⲗ], which stands for the Greek term σπαθάριος, or etymologically "those (soldiers) who carry sword," combining the

terms ⲡⲁⲗⲁⲯ for “sword” and ϭⲁⲣ from ⲕⲁⲣⲣ for “to grasp, hold”.[40] The shift from *kappa* to *jima* can be explained as progressive assimilation under influence of the palatal nasal *nia*, while the phenomenon of the incorporation of a noun into a verbal root complex is attested in Old Nubian.[41]

This etymological analysis may be compromised by the existence of the Old Nubian word ⲕⲁⲣ meaning “shield,” which could translate the term as “the holder (sic) of the sword and the shield,” but without any morpheme explicating the coining of the two terms, unless it can be found in the reconstructed part of the manuscript. Moreover, the existence of a Greek Vorlage for the Acta S. Georgii gives good ground for accepting the original etymological analysis, while the term ⲕⲁⲣ is only attested in a passage of the Stauros-text, that the Coptic parallel text does not preserve.[42]

Finally, the analysis of ⲡⲁⲗⲁⲯϭⲁⲣⲓ[ⲗⲅⲟⲩⲗ] as “those (soldiers) who carry sword” opens the path for a new interpretation of another office from the titulature used in Christian Nubia, namely ⲅⲟⲩⲕⲁⲣⲕⲟⲗ.

This term is attested in P.QI 3 30.37 & 41 and seems to derive its etymology from the word ⲅⲟⲩⲉⲓ for “shield” or “armor” more generally. The last element ⲕⲟⲗ defines “the one who has,” forming a sort of a participle. And the remaining three letters could again be interpreted either as ⲕⲁⲣ meaning “shield” or as ⲕⲁⲣⲣ meaning “to grasp/hold”. In my opinion, it makes better sense to use the latter etymology and to see ⲅⲟⲩⲕⲁⲣⲕⲟⲗ as a term defining the officer who is wielding the shield.[43] For this etymology to work, one must account for the dropping of the final glide, a phenomenon which is not unattested.

The relation of this office with the “shield” brings to mind the Greek title ὑπασπιστής, which means “the one who is under the shield” and derives from the Macedonian military organization, where the hypaspistēs were a sort of esquires.[44] The office continued into the Byzantine period and, according to Maspero the hypaspistēs were the guard of the duces in Egypt,[45] often composed of mercenaries, also including “Ethiopians”, a term used for the peoples leaving south of Egypt, but which remains vague whether it denoted in the medieval era the Nubians or the inhabitants of modern-day Ethiopia or both.[46] The meaning “guard” for hypaspistēs appears also in Byzantine sources of the 11th century,[47] while in later times the hypaspistēs were important individuals close to the ruler, sort of retainers of the king. Interestingly, the most renowned chronicle of the

Fall of Constantinople in 1453 was written by Georgios Frantzis who was – among other things – the hypaspistēs of the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine Paleologos.[48]

This interest lies with the fact that both instances of the term ⲣⲟⲩⲕⲁⲣⲕⲟⲗ in the Old Nubian corpus derive from the royal proclamation from Qasr Ibrim, examined in the section about Epimachos. Now, the first instance is only preserved partially as ⲣⲟⲩⲕ̀ⲕ́ and has been deciphered based on the second one, although they apparently refer to different persons, first to someone called Papasa and then to someone called Ounta. The first one accumulates several titles, mainly monastic, palatial, and bureaucratic; the second one is a scribe. It is not improbable that such individuals in Christian Nubia may also have exercised military functions, as the etymology based on ⲣⲟⲩⲉⲓ for "shield, armor" may indicate and the history of the term hypaspistēs in Byzantine Egypt underlines, but it is equally probable that the office meant in Makuria the same as in the later centuries in Byzantium, namely an esquire. At least this seems, in my opinion, more fitting with Papasa and Ounta in the service of king Moses George.

In any case, a military aura of the Makuritan royal court is very plausible, given, among other things, the certainly important role that the king played in warfare, as is attested in the Arabic sources referring to Christian Nubia, where the king always appears as the leader of the Nubian armies. We could look for example at this same king Moses George who stamped with hot iron a cross on the hand of the emissary of none less than Saladin, when he was asked to subdue and convert to Islam[49]; or much earlier in the 8th century, when king Kyriakos invaded Egypt and caused chaos there attempting to liberate the imprisoned patriarch Michael[50]; or even in the heroic defense of Dongola in the 7th century by king Qalidurut who signed the much-discussed *baqt* with Abdalla ibn Sa'd.[51] During the siege, the world came to know the might of the Nubian archers who were praised by the Arabic chroniclers and poets for centuries to come. The Old Nubian word for bow is attested once in a passage translated from Greek Patristic literature: ⲇⲁⲛⲁⲣ. Interestingly, in the OND, this term is linked etymologically with the Dongolawi/Andaandi *tungur*, which has a striking phonetic similarity with the Old Nubian toponym for the Makuritan capital, namely ⲧⲟⲩⲣⲣⲟⲩⲗ. Although the term tungur for "bow" seems unrelated to the accepted etymologies of ⲧⲟⲩⲣⲣⲟⲩⲗ,[52] it cannot be excluded that the inhabitants of Dongola associated their city with the war technique that their ancestors became famous

for, and they themselves surely still practiced. This is a line of thought that might be worth investigating further in a future study.

3. The ϲⲟⲗⲟϭ of Heavens and the Archistratēgos of the Makuritan King

Mercurios and George were sanctified and as stratēlates were posthumously surely manning the celestial hosts in their perennial and eternal fight against evil, along with Epimachos and the other military saints of Nubia. In this superhuman afterlife, the martyrs would thus be expected to join forces with the archistratēgos of heavens, the leader of the angelic hosts, the archangel Michael.

Characteristically, the swords that Mercurios holds in his representations in Coptic art as Abu Sayfayn are given to him by Michael as narrated in the *Encomium of Acacius, Bishop of Caesarea, on Mercurius the Martyr*.[53] It seems that the Nubians were aware of that story and while preserving the spear as weapon of the mounted Saint Mercurios in the cathedral of Faras, they represented on the adjoining wall Michael offering the sword to the saint.[54]

The archangel Michael is the most venerated celestial being in the Christian pantheon of medieval Nubia with innumerable sources dedicated to his cult.[55] One of the most popular aspects of the archangel's cult is an apocryphal work called "The Book of the Investiture of the Archangel Michael," which describes – among other things – the fall of Mastema (i.e. the devil) from Heaven due to his objection to venerate Adam as an image of God and his replacement by Michael who thence becomes protector of the humans and leader/archistratēgos of the angelic hosts.[56]

A lot has been written about the importance of this work in Nubia.[57] One important element in the discussion is the coincidence that the focal passage of the entire work – the scene of the Investiture of Michael – is the only thing narrated in the two versions fragmentarily preserved in two Nubian manuscripts: one in Greek from Serra East and one in Old Nubian from Qasr Ibrim.[58] Among other insights that this coincidence offers, there is one that obtains a special importance in the context of the present paper, namely that the word that translates the Greek term ἀρχιστράτηγος in Old Nubian is ϲⲟⲗⲟϭ, which is most probably the term used to define an Eparch of the Makuritan kingdom,[59]

more often than not (but not exclusively) linked with the Late Antique kingdom of Nobadia controlling between the 4th-5th and the 6th-7th centuries Lower Nubia.

There are, however, more Eparchs attested in the Nubian sources than just the Eparch of Nobadia. Whether all Eparchs were Songoj or whether all Eparchs had (also) a military function, it is impossible to ascertain. The Eparch of Nobadia though (the Migin Songoj of the Nubian texts) seems to be the same term as the "Lord of the Mountain," which is attested in Arabic sources and although apparently linked with economic activities (an idea based on the nature of the documents in which the title appears) he was also understood as a military officer and also called "Lord of the Horses."[60] Suffice to be reminded here that military saints in Nubia were mostly depicted on horseback.[61]

One more detail from the field of Nubian iconography: a mural from Faras housed at the National Museum of Warsaw represents an unnamed Eparch who holds a bow,[62] perhaps the weapon par excellence of Nubians, as we mentioned in the reference to the successful defense of Dongola against the invading Islamic army in the 7th century. Admittedly, this is not the only representation of an Eparch from Christian Nubia, but the sole iconographic witness of the links between the Eparch and warfare.

So, although the title of the Eparch may have been used for a variety of functions in the Makuritan state, the military one should not be doubted based on the translation of ἀρχιστράτηγος as ⲥⲟⲗⲟϭ in the Book of the Investiture of the Archangel Michael. All this is of course the result of the identification of the titles Eparch and ⲥⲟⲗⲟϭ. This identification is quite certain for some contexts, but during the centuries (at least six) that it was in use the terms may have shifted semantic fields. So, it is plausible that the term ⲥⲟⲗⲟϭ translating the Greek ἀρχιστράτηγος was a military office that supplemented the civil functions of the Eparch, an office for which the Old Nubian term is unknown – if it ever existed. On the same token, one may be reminded of the existence of the offices of *peseto* and *pelmos* in Meroitic Lower Nubia, the former having civil functions and the latter military ones.[63]

Leaving aside this necessary and eventually inevitable nuancing for a different venue, it may be concluded in the context of the present paper that the

Songoj/Eparch was (also) the archistratēgos of the Makuritan king, a sort of a *præfectus prætorio* or ἔπαρχος στρατευμάτων.[64]

Hence, a complementary working hypothesis can be advanced. In the Greek version of the Book of the Investiture of the Archangel Michael, we get a detailed description of the celestial ceremony of investiture, where Michael is receiving the garments of his new function, the uniform of the archistratēgos. In the first instance that the military character of the archangel's dress is mentioned, the garments are called στρατοπεδαρχίας ἀμφιάσματα, "the clothes of the chief of the military encampment." The Old Nubian text prefers again to state that Michael was dressed in the garment of the office of the ϲⲟⲩⲟϭ. So, it seems that for the Makuritans the Songoj was an army general presiding over an encampment. Was this encampment permanent? Or did the role apply to the leadership of a special type of unit stationed at a given locality? And to what degree such στρατοπεδαρχίαι reflect the local authority that eventually the various Eparchs attested in our sources had? These questions should remain open until new discoveries and a more thorough study of the material takes place.

4. War on the Nile

There is a last aspect that is worthwhile a comment in the framework of the present paper. The dimensions of warfare discussed hereby all seem to refer to land forces. However, the most characteristic element of the Nubian civilization is its relation with the River Nile. Therefore, its navigation cannot have left unaffected the military exploits of Christian Nubians. Actually, it has already been suggested that the placement of the fortresses of Makuria along the banks of the Nile necessitated the existence of a fleet which could transport the army and vital provisions in case of a land attack from intruders, be they desert marauders or the Egyptian army.[65] Unfortunately, there is very little in our sources that gives information about the naval forces of the Makuritans. Moreover, what is known about navigation on the Nile in terms of Old Nubian vocabulary has already been presented and this material includes nothing that points with certainty to warfare.[66]

There exists, however, one title in Greek, namely ναυάρχης, for ναύαρχος, meaning "admiral," who has been already seen as the leader of the fleet transporting goods and military units to the Makuritan fortresses.[67]

Furthermore, there should be no doubt that an "admiral" was always in existence in Nubia, since we know of a "strategos of the water" from Meroitic times.[68] Now, it has been shown in an early study of the titles and honorific epithets from Nubia that ναυάρχης, albeit of apparently Byzantine inspiration, was not the preferred *terminus technicus* for a Byzantine "admiral," but it was mainly to be found in literary works.[69] Thus, it is worthwhile enquiring whether the Makuritans did not make some bookish research in order to find the term that they would use for their admiral, as it seems that they have done in other occasions, like in the accumulation of terms for "king" in the renowned Kudanbes inscription, which – rather unsurprisingly under this light – is one of the places where the term ναυάρχης is being attested.[70]

5. Concluding Remarks

It would be difficult to pronounce a set of conclusions from this study that aimed primarily at assembling lexicographical data about warfare in Christian Nubia. Previous research has already traced the outlines of the influence of Greek terminology upon the way Nubians created their own titles and honorific epithets and there has not been found any new military terms or words of weaponry that can be added to OND. However, new apprehension of a couple of words on war was proposed here, while the revisiting of both literary and documentary sources has offered a reappraisal of some others and the nuancing of their contextualization against the background of the Makuritan Christian kingdom, undoubtedly involved in wars along its history and across the classes of its social stratification. Finally, it is perhaps the main contribution of this paper to show the potential of teasing out information about neglected aspects of the Nubian past from a careful and educated but also bold and imaginative reading of the available material.

6. References

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Endnotes

1. For a general presentation, see Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, pp. 78-82. ↩

2. Edwards, "The Christianisation of Nubia: Some Archaeological Pointers," p. 89 ↩

3. Hafsaas-Tsakos, *War on the Southern Frontier of the Emerging State of Ancient Egypt*. ↩

4. Hafsaas-Tsakos, "Edges of Bronze and Expressions of Masculinity: The Emergence of a Warrior Class at Kerma in Sudan." ↩

5. Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush*, pp. 39-50. ↩

6. Francigny, *Les coutumes funéraires dans le royaume de Méroé*. ↩

7. Lenoble, *El-Hobagi*. ↩

8. Crawford, *Castles and Churches in the Middle Nile Region*. ↩

9. Drzewiecki, *Mighty Kingdoms and their Forts*. ↩

10. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*; Seignobos, *L'Égypte et la Nubie à l'époque médiévale*. ↩

11. Edwards, "Slavery and Slaving in the Medieval and Post-Medieval Kingdoms of the Middle Nile." ↩

12. All the Old Nubian words assembled in this study can be found in Browne, Old Nubian Dictionary (hence OND). ↩

13. Frend, "The Cult of Military Saints in Christian Nubia." ↩

14. For the correction of the date from 1156, see Ruffini, *Medieval Nubia: A Social and Economic History*, pp. 265-70. ↩

15. The same church may be the object of two more documents, i.e. P.QI 3 40 & P.QI 3 53. ↩

16. Here a corrigendum to P.Attiri 1.ii.1 from [ⲁⲙ] to [ⲁⲇ] should be noted, see Van Gerven Oei e.a., *The Old Nubian Texts from Attiri*, p. 39. ↩

17. Khalil, *Wörterbuch der nubischen Sprache*, p. 41. ↩

18. The word ⲁⲓⲥ̄ⲧ̄ for "wrestling" is totally reconstructed in OND and is not considered in the present discussion. ↩

19. Łajtar, *A Late Christian Pilgrimage Centre in Nubia. The Evidence of Wall Inscriptions in the Upper Church at Banganarti*, pp. 383-5 (inscription nr. 578). The citation is from p. 384. ↩

20. Idem, p. 562-3 and inscription 964. ↩

21. Tsakos, "Miscellanea Epigraphica Nubica III: Epimachos of Attiri: a Warrior Saint of Late Christian Nubia," pp. 215-7. ↩

22. Esbroeck, "Epimachus of Pelusium, Saint," pp. 965b-7a. ↩

23. Van der Vliet, *I. Khartoum Copt.*, pp. 83-4 (nr. 24). ↩

24. Browne, “An Old Nubian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Epimachus” and “An Old Nubian translation of the Martyrdom of Saint Epimachus.” ↩

25. See Tsakos, “Miscellanea Epigraphica Nubica III: Epimachos of Attiri: a Warrior Saint of Late Christian Nubia,” p. 213 with an image of the plaque and pp. 220-1 for the other representations with references ↩

26. Frend, “The Cult of Military Saints in Christian Nubia,” pp. 156-8. ↩

27. For the reference, see Idem, p. 157 and note 9. ↩

28. Piankoff, “Peintures au monastère de Saint Antoine,” p. 160 and ill. IV. ↩

29. Esbroeck, “Mercurius of Caesarea, Saint,” pp. 1593b-4a. ↩

30. See Frend, “The Cult of Military Saints in Christian Nubia,” p. 157 for references. ↩

31. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, p. 40; Seignobos, *L’Égypte et la Nubie à l’époque médiévale*, p. 96. ↩

32. Tsakos, “The Christianization of Nubia.” ↩

33. For the find from Qasr Ibrim, see Frend, “Fragments of a version of the Acta S. Georgii from Q'asr Ibrim.” For the find from Kulubnarti, see Browne, *The Old Nubian Martyrdom of Saint George*. ↩

34. Browne, ibid., p. 1-3. ↩

35. For the general characteristics of Greek in Late Christian Nubia, see Łajtar, *A Late Christian Pilgrimage Centre in Nubia. The Evidence of Wall Inscriptions in the Upper Church at Banganarti*, pp. 20-30. ↩

36. Frend, “Fragments of a version of the Acta S. Georgii from Q'asr Ibrim,” pp. 103-4. ↩

37. Idem., p. 94. ↩

38. See Derda and Łajtar, "Greek and Latin papyri from the Egypt Exploration Society excavations at Qasr Ibrim: A testimony to the Roman army in Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia in the first years of Augustus," p. 185; Derda and Łajtar, "The Roman Occupation of Qasr Ibrim as Reflected in the Greek Papyri from the Site," pp. 105-6 and notes 1 and 2 for references. ↩

39. Drzewiecki, "Roman Type Forts in the Middle Nile Valley. Late Antique Fortlets between Patterns of Roman Military Architecture and Local Tradition." ↩

40. Browne, *The Old Nubian Martyrdom of Saint George*, p. 11. ↩

41. For the phenomenon of "incorporation", see Van Gerven Oei, *A Reference Grammar of Old Nubian*, §15.1.3.4. ↩

42. This passage has been interpreted as a later interpolation by the copyist of the original work in Old Nubian, see Van Gerven Oei and Tsakos, "Apostolic Memoirs in Old Nubian." ↩

43. It should be noted that two more terms may be linked with ⲣⲟⲩⲉⲓ for "shield": the first is ⲣⲟⲩⲱ (or ⲣⲟⲩⲥ), perhaps from ⲣⲟⲩⲉⲓ for "shield" and ⲱⲗ for "spear", but Osman, "The Post-Medieval Kingdom of Kokka: A Means for a Better Understanding of the Administration of the Medieval Kingdom of Dongola," p. 191 proposes an alternative explanation of the word, albeit still interpreted as a military title; and the second is ⲣⲟⲩⲗⲁ, about which there is even less certainty. ↩

44. Foulon, "Hypaspistes, peltastes, chrysaspides, argyraspides, chalcaspides." ↩

45. Maspero, *Organisation militaire de l'Égypte byzantine*, pp. 66-8. ↩

46. For an up-to-date discussion of the issue, see Simmons, *Nubia, Ethiopia, and the Crusading World, 1095-1402*. ↩

47. Ostrogorsky, "Observations on the Aristocracy in Byzantium," pp. 13-4 ↩

48. Koukounas, *Georgios Phrantzes, Chronicon*. ↩

49. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 369-70. ↩

50. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, p. 329; Seignobos, *L'Égypte et la Nubie à l'époque médiévale*, pp. 93-112. ↩

51. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, p. 639; Seignobos, *L'Égypte et la Nubie à l'époque médiévale*, pp. 53-91. ↩

52. Łajtar, "On the Name of the Capital of the Nubian Kingdom of Makuria." ↩

53. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, pp. 858-61. ↩

54. Zielińska and Tsakos, "Representations of the Archangel Michael in Wall Paintings from Christian Nubia," pp. 85-6. ↩

55. See Hafsaas and Tsakos, "Michael and Other Archangels behind an Eight-Pointed Cross-Symbol from Medieval Nubia: A View from Sai Island in Northern Sudan"; Tsakos, "Sources about the Cult and Persona of the Archangel Michael in Nubia." ↩

56. For the use of the title archistratēgos for the archangel Raphael, see Łajtar, *A Late Christian Pilgrimage Centre in Nubia. The Evidence of Wall Inscriptions in the Upper Church at Banganarti*, p. 46. ↩

57. Tsakos, "The Liber Institutionis Michaelis in Medieval Nubia." ↩

58. About this coincidence, see Browne, "Old Nubian literature," p. 382; Tsakos, "Textual finds from Cerre Matto." ↩

59. Ruffini, *Medieval Nubia: A Social and Economic History*, pp. 34-5. ↩

60. Seignobos, *L'Égypte et la Nubie à l'époque médiévale*, p. 198 and note 158. ↩

61. For examples of the contrary, see Martens-Czarnecka, *The Wall Paintings from the Monastery on Kom H in Dongola*, pp. 207-13. ↩

62. Michalowski, *Faras - Wall Paintings in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw*, nr. 61, p. 263; Jakobielski e.a., *Pachoras/Faras: The Wall Paintings from the Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros*, nr. 138, pp. 419-22. ↩

63. For a discussion framed as background for an analysis of the title "Eparch of Nobadia," see Hendrickx, "The 'Lord of the Mountain'. A Study of the Nubian *eparchos of Nobadia*." ↩

64. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions: A Lexicon and Analysis*, pp. 138-40. ↩

65. Żurawski, "Strongholds on the Middle Nile: Nubian Fortifications of the Middle Ages," pp. 115-8. ↩

66. Tsakos, "Terms for Boats and Navigation in Old Nubia." ↩

67. Żurawski, "Strongholds on the Middle Nile: Nubian Fortifications of the Middle Ages," p. 116. ↩

68. Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush*, p. 40 ↩

69. Hägg, "Titles and Honorific Epithets in Nubian Greek texts," pp. 161-2. ↩

70. Griffith, "Christian Documents from Nubia," pp. 134-45; Łajtar, "The so-called Kudanbes Inscription in Deir Anba Hadra (St. Simeon Monastery) near Aswan: An Attempt at a New Reading and Interpretation." ↩