

| Faras Cathedral: A Witness of Art Development in the Nubian Kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria

The cathedral in Faras functioned for more than 600 years as an episcopal church.¹ Its interiors were gradually decorated with painting and sculpture, which now form the largest and the most comprehensive corpus of art of the kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria from the period between the 7th and the 14th century. The consecutive stages of the construction of the church permit the reconstruction of a sacral object which differs from others from this region. Since the 7th century, there was a larger complex here having an elaborate plan, most likely reflecting additional functions performed by a cathedral.² In the painted decoration, the difference is both evident in the number and the iconography of the depictions painted on the successive layers of plaster.³ This well-preserved, unique group enabled the scholars to grasp and review the process of development of architecture, painting and architectural sculpture in Nobadia and in the united kingdom of Nobadia and Makuria. It brings an opportunity to study the evolution of tendencies dominant in various periods of art, being expression of cultural, social and political changes, as well as of the aspirations of the donors.

Art in the Kingdom of Nobadia

The remains of the cathedral of Faras are one of few examples of architecture of the kingdom of Nobadia.⁴ The origins of the church are linked with the person of bishop Aetios, who held

¹ The history of the bishopric of Pachoras was reconstructed by Stefan Jakobielski on the basis of the inscriptions from the cathedral, see Stefan Jakobielski, *A History of the Bishopric of Pachoras on the Basis of Coptic Inscriptions* (Warsaw, 1972), especially pp. 206–11.

² In the present study, the consecutive stages of construction are named after bishops who held their office when essential changes were being introduced in architecture and in painted decoration. The dating of the architectural stages and their names are based on the most recent and complex description of Faras cathedral's architecture – see Włodzimierz Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos, and Petros. The Architecture* (Warsaw, 2006).

³ Several scholars go as far as to suggest that the iconographic programme of Faras cathedral should be discussed separately as it cannot be considered typical for the decoration of Nubian churches; however, the differences actually only apply to the depictions belonging to the so-called official programme – see below. Karel Christian Innemée, "Observations on the System of Nubian Church-Decoration," *Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille*, n° 17 (1995), p. 279; Włodzimierz Godlewski, "Bishops and Kings. The Official Program of the Pachoras (Faras) Cathedrals," in *Between the Cataracts. Proceedings of the 11th Conference for Nubian Studies, Warsaw University, 27 August – 2 September 2006. Part One, Main Papers*, Włodzimierz Godlewski, Adam Łajtar, eds (Warsaw, 2008), p. 263. PAM Supplement Series, 2.1.

⁴ It was not the earliest building before Faras cathedral in this place. We know that it was built upon relics of even earlier buildings, yet the few remains do not give sufficient basis for the present study. Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., pp. 31–32.

the office in the first half of the 7th century.⁵ Primarily, the cathedral was a five-aisle basilica. It appears that its size and spatial solutions, such as the lack of a passage behind the apse between the pastophoria, as well as the lack of a tripartite western part (a solution introduced probably after the unification with the kingdom of Makuria, see below),⁶ are characteristic for the churches constructed at that time. The only preserved painting from that period is the decoration of the episcopal throne (situated at the top of the *synthronon*), depicting a vessel with Eucharistic bread, an allusion to the liturgy celebrated in the sanctuary.⁷ However, the greatest and earliest group of artefacts from the cathedral of Aetios are architectonic details, mainly capitals and doorposts (**fig. 1**). The quality of craftsmanship testifies not only to inspiration and influences from Late-Antique Egypt and Meroitic forms (also inspired, on their part, by their northern neighbour), yet also a proof of the continuity of artisanal tradition flourishing at that time in Faras workshops that did not cease to create objects of the highest artistic level.⁸

The church's rank, expressed in its scale and the quality of decoration, indicates that Faras – just like in the Meroitic period – was an important centre in the region, and most likely the capital of the kingdom of Nobadia at that time.⁹

Changes after the Unification of the Kingdoms

The exact date of the unification of the kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria is not known; however, it is estimated that the kingdoms had already been united under the rule of king Merkourios in the early 8th century.¹⁰ The capital of the new state was Dongola, becoming a centre which created and imposed iconographic and stylistic concepts. In AD 707, the construction of a new cathedral was launched.

The cathedral's plan is characteristic for its tendency to underline the transverse axis of the building – a five-aisle basilica emerges complete with a transept extending as far as the side rooms, due to which the plan assumed a rectangular form.¹¹ Compared with the cathedral of Aetios, the so-called cathedral of Paulos is a much more elaborate complex, inspired by the cathedral in Dongola (the so-called Third Cathedral, RC.I)¹² (**figs 2-3**). The architectural detail preserved in the form of granite columns and capitals was shaped by tradition different than local. The new material greatly limited technical possibilities, and so the low relief applied in

⁵ Jakobielski, *A History of the Bishopric...*, op. cit., p. 206.

⁶ Artur Obłuski, "Nobadian and Makurian Church Architecture. Qasr El-Wizz, A Case Study," in *Aegyptus et Nubia Christiana. The Włodzimierz Godlewski Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, Adam Łajtar, Artur Obłuski, Iwona Zych, eds (Warsaw, 2016), p. 502 and passim.

⁷ Bożena Mierzejewska, *The Professor Kazimierz Michałowski Faras Gallery. Guidebook*, Karolina Koriat, tr. (Warsaw, 2014), p. 184.

⁸ Ida Ryl-Preibisz, "Chrześcijańskie kapitele z Faras ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Ann. 14 (1970), p. 374.

⁹ Artur Obłuski, *The Rise of Nobadia: Social Changes in Northern Nubia in Late Antiquity* (Warsaw, 2014), p. 98. *Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplements*, 20.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 199–200; id., "Early Period in Nubian-Muslim Relations," in *Islamic Frontiers*, Alexander Asa Eger, ed. (currently edited).

¹¹ Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., pp. 56–60, 65–66.

¹² Id., *Dongola – Ancient Tungul. Archaeological Guide*, Iwona Zych, Mahmoud El-Tayeb, trs, Iwona Zych, Dobrochna Zielińska, eds (Warsaw, 2016), pp. 53–55; id., *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., pp. 72–76.

the decoration is devoid of detailed finishing. Similarly as the architectural concept, sculpture is also representative of the artistic tradition of the capital of Makuria (figs 4–5).

The painted decoration of the cathedral forms the best-preserved group of paintings of that period. They present a mature, fully defined and coherent style. The iconographic schemes would later find their permanent place in the system of decoration of Makurian churches. One could assume that – just like in case of architecture – the concept of painted decoration followed the Dongola model. Excavation works in the capital of Makuria have so far provided only individual examples of paintings of that period. In this context, Faras cathedral is the main source for the research on mural painting of the 8th century.

In the apse's conch, *Maiestas Domini* could have been painted, and below – a depiction of the Virgin Mary with Christ the Child surrounded by the apostles (fig. 6). Two-zoned compositions such as this used to be the basic decoration of this part of the church.¹³ Beneath the main figural scene, a frieze would be located consisting of birds placed under arcades – a painted imitation of a relief frieze – which may have alluded to the decoration of the apse of the former cathedral.¹⁴ In the stage of the cathedral of Paulos, only the southern pastophorium contains decoration linked with the function of baptistery which it performed.¹⁵ These are images of birds drinking from a vessel, a (later repainted¹⁶) depiction of Saint John the Baptist and a depiction of a bishop, most likely added later, identified as Kolluthos (see below). Two birds drinking from a vessel which adorn the top of the niche in the southern wall form a motif known from Early Christian mosaic decorations, called the “Fountain of Life.”¹⁷ Its symbolics refer to the meaning of the sacrament of baptism and may be interpreted as an allegory of receiving the grace of faith by the neophytes.¹⁸ The representation of Saint John the Baptist, placed in a very shallow niche in the western wall of the room, directly alluding to the function of the baptistery, was probably the main element of its decoration. The saint holds an open scroll with the text of the Gospel of St John (J 1:29–30).¹⁹

The iconographic programme of the naos was dominated by frontal representations of standing single or grouped figures.²⁰ The narrative scenes are only represented by the *Nativity*

¹³ The Byzantine variants of two-zone apse compositions (*zweizonige Apsisprogramme*) are discussed by Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei von vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 95–102.

¹⁴ Włodzimierz Godlewski, “La frise de l’abside de la première cathédrale de Pachoras (Faras),” in *Orbis Aethiopicus: studia in honorem Stanislaus Chojnacki natali septuagesimo quinto dicata, septuagesimo oblata*, Piotr O. Scholz, ed. (Abstadt, 1992), vol. 2, pp. 327–56; Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 37, fig. 19; Kazimierz Michałowski, *Faras. Die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand* (Zurich–Köln, 1967), pp. 57, 59.

¹⁵ Its then function was clear since a baptismal basin was embedded in the floor. Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., pp. 66–68.

¹⁶ Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka, “Observations on the Repainted Murals from Faras,” in *Nubische Studien. Tagungsakten der 5. Internationalen Konferenz der International Society for Nubian Studies, Heidelberg, 22–25. September 1982*, Martin Krause, ed. (Mainz am Rhein, 1986), pp. 332–33.

¹⁷ James Wiseman, Djordje Mano-Zissi, “Excavations at Stobi,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 76, no. 4 (1971), p. 423, figs 41, 47.

¹⁸ Włodzimierz Godlewski, *Les baptistères nubiens* (Varsovie, 1979), p. 47. More on the symbolics and variants of the motif of the “Fountain of Life” see Paul A. Underwood, *The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels* (Cambridge, MS, 1950), pp. 41–138. Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 5.

¹⁹ Godlewski, *Les baptistères...*, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁰ Id., *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 70; Innemée, *Observations...*, op. cit., pp. 279–88.

and the *Three Young Men in the Fiery Furnace*, located, following the tradition, on the frontal wall of the northern pastophorium and in the south-western part of the naos, respectively.²¹ These scenes were a permanent element of the decoration of Makurian churches; other preserved narrative depictions are isolated examples.

The depictions in the narthex and staircase of Faras cathedral are so far the only known examples of painted decoration in this part of the church and as such are unique in Nubian art. Both in the cathedral of Paulos and the later stages of the church's reconstruction, paintings which adorned these rooms were – as it seems – integrated into the space of the naos.²²

The Development of Makurian Art in the 9th Century

Objects discovered in the course of excavation works conducted in Old Dongola, dated to the 9th century, indicate more and more evidently that this period of Makurian art was marked by great changes. Churches of a new type were erected, based on the plan of a cross inside of a rectangle (cross-over-rectangle),²³ and new, bold architectural ideas were put into effect, like the Throne Room²⁴ or the Cruciform Church.²⁵ What is interesting is that the choice of means of visual expression was limited to spatial forms (architecture) and image (mural painting), while architectural decoration almost completely disappeared, reduced to scarce terracotta or lime mortar window grilles²⁶ and terracotta borders of niches.²⁷ This stage of development of Makurian art is characterized by a fully conscious selection of forms and techniques, reflecting preferences and aspirations of local patrons.

A new, creative approach is also palpable in the concept of the painted decoration of the cathedral. Since the first half of the 9th century, depictions qualified as the so-called official programme²⁸ – of bishops, kings and royal mothers²⁹ – started to be painted on the walls of the naos and southern pastophorium and in the apse. These depictions – originally representing single figures, later involving saints expressing protection over Nubian officials – testified

²¹ Innemée, *Observations...*, op. cit., pp. 281–82; Stefan Jakobielski, “Remarques sur la chronologie des peintures murales de Faras aux VIII^e et IX^e siècles,” in *Nubia Christiana*, vol. 1, Stefan Jakobielski, ed. (Warsaw, 1982), pp. 153–54.

²² Dobrochna Zielińska, *Program ikonograficzny kościołów nubijskich. Studium lokalizacji malowideł we wnętrzu sakralnym* [Iconographical Programme in Nubian Churches. A Study of Wall Paintings Location in Sacral Interior], doctoral dissertation, Warsaw University (Warsaw, 2009).

²³ Włodzimierz Godlewski, “The Churches of Dongola, their origin and importance in the general line of development of church architecture in Makuria,” in *Acta Nubica, Proceedings of the X International Conference of Nubian Studies, Rome 9–14 September 2002*, Isabella Caneva and Alessandaro Roccati, eds (Roma, 2006), pp. 279–81.

²⁴ Godlewski, *Dongola – Ancient Tungul...*, op. cit., pp. 43–47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 127–28; Bogdan Żurawski, “St Raphael of Banganarti. Ritual and architectural adaptation,” in *Kings and Pilgrims. St Raphael Church II at Banganarti, Mid-eleventh to Mid-fifteenth Century*, Bogdan Żurawski, ed. (Warsaw, 2014), pp. 115–18. Nubia V/Banganarti, 2.

²⁷ Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., fig. 92.

²⁸ This term was introduced by Włodzimierz Godlewski who employed it with the depictions of Nubian kings, royal mothers and bishops. Godlewski, *Bishops and Kings...*, op. cit., p. 263.

²⁹ Godlewski, *Bishops and Kings...*, op. cit., pp. 263–82; Innemée, *Observations...*, op. cit., pp. 282–83; S. Jakobielski, *Remarques...*, op. cit., pp. 155–64, 166; Stefan Jakobielski, “Tentative d'identification de certaines peintures de Faras,” in *Études et Travaux*, vol. 19 (2001), pp. 59–81.

both to the rank of the office as endowed by God and of particular divine protection over the office and the persons themselves. The portraits were placed in the naos; these were depictions of bishops and kings in the southern and western part and of women in the northern part. It is generally believed that such a disposition of depictions reflected the division of the congregation into men's and women's part.³⁰ The appearance among portrayed persons of the so-called royal mothers, that is, women whose position had no parallels at the Byzantine court and belonging to the native Nubian tradition stemming from as early as the Napatan times, shows one more aspect of the development of Makurian culture of that period³¹ – the introduction of new, original types of representations for the sake of visualisation of their own local concepts. Introducing a representation of a ruler to the existing apse composition in Faras cathedral was a special instance of this tendency. The depiction, situated on the central axis of the composition, a little below the image of the Virgin Mary, covered the bottom part of Her figure, so that the repainted hands of Mary rested on the shoulders of the portrayed king.³² The insertion fundamentally changed the meaning of the composition – a scene conveying a liturgical and dogmatic message essential for the church's decoration was transformed into an official image of the ruler. Similar paintings are known from the church of Archangel Raphael in Baganarti which show the importance of this type of representations in the visualization of the idea of power.³³ These depictions find no exact analogy in the Byzantine world.³⁴ As depictions of successive rulers were regularly added within the compositions in Faras cathedral, it seems that the change of contents of the paintings in the apse became, in the course of time, a Faras tradition (fig. 7).

Changes under Bishop Petros

Around mid-10th century, Faras cathedral underwent a thorough reconstruction. The works were likely initiated under bishop Aaron (952–972) and completed under bishop Petros (972–999).³⁵ Again, under the influence of the modernization of the cathedral in Dongola carried out earlier, the interior was reconstructed to give it a central plan.³⁶ Introducing massive pillars enabled not only the construction of barrel vaults and sail vaults and a central dome, but also increased the surface of walls, which were then decorated with paintings.

The new painted decoration of the cathedral alluded to a certain extent to the previous version. It is particularly noticeable in the decoration of the apse as well as in the practice of repeating compositions painted earlier in the same place. In the course of the following

³⁰ Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 71; Tadeusz Gołgowski, *Nubijska architektura sakralna w świetle źródeł liturgicznych* [Nubian sacral architecture in the light of the liturgical sources], doctoral dissertation, Warsaw University (Warsaw, 1983).

³¹ On the ideas related to the portrayals of royal matriarchs, see Dobrochna Zielińska, "The Iconography of Power – The Power of Iconography: The Nubian Royal Ideology and Its Expression in Wall-Painting," in *The Fourth Cataract and Beyond. Proceedings of the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies*, Julie R. Anderson, Derek Welsby, eds (London, 2014), pp. 946–48. British Museum Publications on Egypt and Sudan, 1.

³² Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka, "Observations on the Repainted Murals....," op. cit., pp. 330–31.

³³ Żurawski, *Kings and Pilgrims...*, op. cit.

³⁴ Zielińska, *The Iconography of Power...*, op. cit., pp. 943–46.

³⁵ Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., fig. 92.

³⁶ Id., *Dongola – Ancient Tungul...*, op. cit., p. 55.

centuries, the apse depictions were enriched with images of successive rulers. The depictions of kings and bishops also appeared on the pillars belonging to the space of the chancel, which also encompassed the eastern part of the central nave.

In the northern pastophorium (identified as the *prothesis*), the new decoration was painted after a new layer of plaster was applied.³⁷ Its most important element was the depiction of Christ consecrating wine, which was related to the additional liturgical function of this room (**fig. 8**). The depiction was complemented by the text of four prayers (the so-called *prothesis* prayer, the prayer over the chalice, the second prayer over the chalice and the thanksgiving) from the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, which in Makuria was most probably celebrated in the northern pastophorium. Apparently, selecting this theme for paintings, confirmed on the walls of the *prothesis* since the 9th century,³⁸ was an original Makurian phenomenon related to the celebration of this liturgy. The painted decoration was complemented with ornate upper borders of niches and a band adorned with crosses painted along the eastern, northern and western wall.³⁹

The southern pastophorium also received a new, elaborate iconographic programme at that time.⁴⁰ The eastern wall gave place to a composition consisting of depictions of Christ adored by Archangels Michael and Raphael,⁴¹ and on the southern and western wall, earlier depictions of Saint Stephen and Saint John the Baptist were most probably repainted. The depictions of bishops, including the first portrait of bishop Kolluthos saved from the previous decoration, were joined by two other ones: of bishop Petros I and the scene of the investiture of king Georgios (III?).⁴² Depictions of Christ and the saints in the pastophorium together form an iconographic programme themed around the sacrament of baptism,⁴³ while at the same time the portraits of bishops together with the image of Saint Stephen the Proto-Deacon hint at the other function of this room – the *diaconicon*. The painted decoration therefore suggests a double function of the pastophorium – the *diaconikon* and baptistery.

The elaborate decoration of the naos of Faras cathedral, crafted between the 10th and the 12th century, including numerous depictions of rulers and bishops and the unique images of

³⁷ Id., *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., pp. 104–106, figs 89–93.

³⁸ An earlier example of this type of iconographic programme was found on the walls of the 9th-century church of Archangel Raphael on the Citadel in Dongola. On the decoration and function of *prothesis* see Adam Łajtar, Dobrochna Zielińska, “The Northern Pastophorium of Nubian Churches: Ideology and Function (on the Basis of Inscriptions and Paintings),” in *Aegyptus et Nubia Christiana...*, op. cit., pp. 435–57.

³⁹ Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 113.

⁴⁰ By reason of the lack of a baptismal basin (see n. 14; Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 106), in the stage of the cathedral of Petros the function of the southern pastophorium can be indirectly defined on the basis of the themes of painted decoration.

⁴¹ Magdalena Łaptaś, “Representation of the Angelic Hierarchy in a Nativity Scene from Faras Cathedral,” in *Gdańsk Archeological Museum African Reports*, vol. 2 (2003), p. 139.

⁴² Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 113. On the identification of the king's depiction as the scene of investiture see Bożena Mierzejewska, “Murals in the Bishops Chapel, Faras. The Visual Expression of the Ruler's Ideology in Nubia,” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster 20.–26. Juli 1996*, Stephen Emmel, ed., vol. 1: *Materielle Kultur, Kunst und religiöses Leben* (Wiesbaden, 1999), pp. 285–96. *Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients*, 6/1.

⁴³ Saint John the Baptist symbolizes the water baptism and Saint Stephen, as the first martyr – the baptism of blood and Holy Spirit, and Christ as the witness to the ceremony – the grace that the neophytes receive through baptism. Godlewski, *Les baptistères...*, op. cit., p. 49.

royal mothers, can be interpreted in various ways.⁴⁴ Several levels of interpretation of this interior decoration could be proposed: in the light of the interpretation of particular parts of the church or in the light of the division into two groups of depictions: heavenly creatures and saints forming the liturgical programme of the cathedral or of rulers, royal mothers and bishops, forming the aforementioned so-called official programme.

The dogmatic contents of the iconographic programme of the eastern walls of both aisles including the earlier-discussed apse consisting of the scenes of the *Nativity*, *Christ Enthroned* and the narrative compositions from the series of *Passion and Resurrection*⁴⁵ is essential in the cathedral's interior. The thematical differentiation of religious paintings in the northern and southern part of the naos is remarkable. While the southern aisle featured images of sainted priests, anchorites and warriors, in the northern aisle depictions of the Virgin Mary prevailed, including the particularly frequent type of *Galaktotrophousa* and depictions of angels and archangels. This division, related to the aforementioned segregation of the male and female part of the congregation during the liturgy in the church, is also mirrored in the distribution of portraits of rulers and bishops (located in the southern and western part of the naos) and royal mothers (located in the northern part).⁴⁶ Particular depictions of saints or biblical events were linked to the liturgical programme of the cathedral and honoured on specific days of the liturgical year. The comparison of iconographic programme and location of particular paintings in the interiors of other churches in Makuria⁴⁷ seem to suggest that there could have existed a "liturgical-chronological" system in Makurian painting. According to Otto Demus, it is one of the three plausible interpretations of iconographic programmes of the cross-over-square churches.⁴⁸

It should be emphasized that apart from a few exceptions, paintings added in the course of centuries followed the so-called official programme (depictions of rulers), which can indicate the permanence of the iconographic concept associated with the local liturgy.

The Artistic Decline

The 13th and 14th century brought other reconstruction works of the cathedral which involved changes in functions of particular parts of its naos. The northern aisle was separated, as well as the eastern part of the southern aisle and the "southern vestibule." These alterations, apart from functional character, were prompted by the necessity of reinforcing the building's construction.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ The present study proposes three methods of analysis of the iconographic programme, as contained in Zielińska, *Program ikonograficzny kościołów...*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 112; Peter O. Scholz, "Noch einmal zum Bildprogramm der nubischen Kirchenmalerei," in *Études Nubiennes. Conférence de Genève. Actes du VII^e Congrès international d'études nubiennes 3-8 septembre 1990*, vol. 2: *Communications*, Charles Bonnet, ed. (Genève, 1994), p. 240.

⁴⁶ On the relation of depictions of Mary and the portraits of royal mothers see Zielińska, *The Iconography of Power...*, op. cit., pp. 946-48.

⁴⁷ Dobrochna Zielińska, "The Iconographical Program in Nubian Churches. Progress Report Based on a New Reconstruction Project," in *Between the Cataracts. Proceedings of the 11th Conference for Nubian Studies*, Warsaw University, 27 August - 2 September 2006. *Part One, Main Papers*, Włodzimierz Godlewski, Adam Łajtar, eds (Warsaw, 2008), p. 643. PAM Supplement Series 2.1.

⁴⁸ The remaining ones listed by Demus are the system of cosmic and topographical hierarchy. See Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration* (London, 1948), p. 16.

⁴⁹ Godlewski, *Pachoras. The Cathedrals...*, op. cit., p. 119-20.

Attention should be given to the new painted decoration of the separated eastern part of the southern aisle, where, beneath the existing depiction of *Christ Enthroned*, an image of *Holy Trinity between Apostles* was painted (figs 9–10).⁵⁰ The care that the artist took to place the new image on the axis of the existing one may suggest the intention of creating a two-zoned apse composition, and at the same time, of endowing the room with the function of a chapel. A similar variant of apse decoration could have very likely decorated the chancel of the Southern Church II in Serra East.⁵¹ Compositions of this kind may indicate that despite declining tendencies in art of the fading kingdom, artists still revealed their potential of creating original and innovative iconographic solutions. Depictions of rulers continued to be placed on the walls within the sanctuary, and the depiction of a king with a bishop protected by an angel was painted on the southern wall of the nave.

Summary

The six centuries of history of the kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria as preserved in the relics of Faras cathedral, provide a separate and inexhaustible source of information on Nubian culture of that time. After a short period of development of Nobadian art, the reconstructions of the cathedral reflected the changes in art in Dongola, capital of Makuria: from the emergence of a coherent style within the framework of united kingdoms, through its growth, expression of “self-awareness” showing in the visualization of ideas essential to the Makurians, to concepts going beyond the ones known from Byzantium, like the depiction of a king as the central figure in the apse composition. The permanence of iconographic concepts created at that time would be clear until the last centuries of the existence of the kingdom of Makuria.

Translated by Karolina Koriat

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 125–26.

⁵¹ Dobrochna Zielińska, “The Wall Paintings in the Churches at Serra East,” in *Excavations At Serra East*, vol. 8: *Cerre Matto, The Christian Period Churches, Houses, Workshops, and Cemetery*, Bruce B. Williams, ed. The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, 12 (in print).