



**Kunsthistorisches
Institut
in
Florenz**

Max-Planck-Institut



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

Medieval Nubia in a Transcultural Horizon: Art, Architecture, Epigraphy

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Abstracts

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

INTRODUCTION

Dobrochna Zielińska (Department of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

“Introduction to Late Antique and Medieval Nubian Art”

The culture of the Christian Nubian kingdoms flourished in the Middle Nile Valley between the sixth and the fifteenth centuries. Numerous archaeological artifacts from that context have recently been brought to light, including a rich collection of monuments and objects that, apart from their aesthetic properties, stand as an important source of information about medieval Nubian culture. This presentation will introduce the history and the current state of research on Nubia by focusing particularly on the nature of excavated objects; and it will provide a historical outline of the issues to be discussed during the workshop.

SESSION I: POWER AND KINGSHIP

Karel C. Innemée (Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam)

“The Visual Manifestation of Power and Authority in Christian Nubia”

Byzantium can be seen as a source of inspiration for the costumes that express the authority of the state and the church in Nubia. These mainly appear in wall paintings in churches. But how visible were these authorities in other respects? In Byzantium the image of the emperor was present on coins, on painted panels, and in the form of statues in public places. These manifestations of royal authority are absent in Nubia, showing that in this respect the Byzantine example was not followed. Were state and religion in Nubia in a relationship entirely different from that in Byzantium? Was the model of divine kingship instead characteristic of pharaonic Egypt and Kushite Nubia? This presentation will formulate questions on power and authority, and offer some sketches for answers.

Magdalena Łaptaś (Faculty of History, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University)

“Apostles, Kings, and Archangels. Building a Royal Tradition through Painted Images in Medieval Nubia”

The aim of my lecture will be to show how the apostolic tradition developed in medieval Nubia and how it influenced the idea of holy kingship. According to the preserved paintings and the apostolic lists, the Nubians built the image of the heavenly hierarchy very carefully. The apostolic college accompanied the images of the kings painted in the apses of the Faras,

Dongola and Banganarti Churches. The king was the central figure in the apses, and he was surrounded by the apostles, while the figure of the Virgin Mary or the archangel standing behind him supported his protection. Moreover, the order of the apostles in relation to the ruler was strictly observed. Although not many descriptions of paintings from Nubia have survived, an analysis of what remains allows us to consider Nubian creators as very conscious of what they wanted to convey in a thoughtful way.

SESSION II: TRANSCULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Andrea M. Achi (Assistant Curator, Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

“Wood and Ivory Boxes in Late Antique Nubia”

A fifth-century chest from Nubia shifts perceptions about Byzantine art production and sources. Assuming the form of a multi-storied, mahogany house, the chest's twenty-one ivory panels depict the gods Bes, Dionysus, Zeus-Ammon, Perseus and features the goddess Aphrodite with sirens and satyrs. Discovered at a royal cemetery in Nubia, this nearly complete chest's motifs relate to fertility and prosperity, leading to its widespread description in modern scholarship as a bridal chest. This contribution considers the context in which the Nubian chest was made, used and buried through a re-analysis of twentieth-century archaeological and conservation reports from Nubian sites. Ultimately, the project reevaluates late antique ivory and wood boxes and chests in light of recent research on the African ivories trade and early Byzantine identity.

Gertrud J.M. van Loon (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

“Inspiration and Influences: Nubian Church Decoration and Its Relationship with Egypt.”

It has long been acknowledged that the long-standing bond between the Egyptian and Nubian church has yielded mutual inspiration and exchange. The iconographic programmes of Nubian churches—especially the churches of Nobadia—include a number of features and subjects with an Egyptian provenance. This paper will explore some of these elements, markers of a long-term cultural and religious relationship between the two countries.

SESSION III: ARCHAEOLOGY AND EPIGRAPHY

Jacques van der Vliet (Universiteit Leiden / Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen / NINO Leiden)

“Text, Image and Performance in Medieval Nubia”

Inscriptions and images are usually considered two different media: different ways of addressing different audiences. This says more about modern ways of studying art and epigraphy in an academic context than about their actual relationship. Does medieval visual art really represent a *biblia pauperum* for those who were unable to read? In a time when mixed-media performances have become an art form in its own right, the entire distinction seems outdated. Can we consider the mural paintings of medieval Nubia as part of a multi-media performance and, if so, what was the role of the written text in the event?

Adam Łajtar (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

“The Literacy of Christian Nubia”

Christian Nubia had a rich literary culture. Testament to this are the more than 4000 entries preserved in the online Database of Medieval Nubian Texts (www.dbmmt.uw.edu.pl). In my paper, I will analyse the Christian Nubian textual record with respect to the language of the texts, the form of their carriers, and their contents, to investigate some common characteristics and to put forth patterns of written communication in the middle Nile valley in Christian times.