



## Христианизация Нубии

Кобищанов Ю. М.<sup>1</sup>

Из всех регионов и культур Христианского Востока Нубия остается наименее изученной, и наименьшее число исследователей берет на себя задачу изучения ее археологии, политической и церковной истории. Ниже приводится англоязычная версия главы книги известного российского историка Юрия Михайловича Кобищанова.

**Ключевые слова:** Нубия, Нобадия, Маккурай (Макурия), Альва (Алодия), Александрийская Церковь, Юлиан (миссионер), епископ Лонгин, монофиситство, мелькиты.

Кобищанов Юрий Михайлович — доктор исторических наук, главный научный сотрудник Института Африки РАН.

Автор, ответственный за переписку (Corresponding author):  
kobishchanov@mail.ru

Рукопись получена 15.08.2022

Принята к публикации 14.10.2022



**Для цитирования:** Кобищанов Ю. М. Христианизация Нубии. *Российский журнал истории Церкви*. 2022;3(3):32-43. doi:10.15829/2686-973X-2022-113. EDN TCFXSI

## The Christianization of Nubia

Yuri M. Kobishchanov

Out of all the regions and cultures of the Christian East, Nubia remains the one least studied, with the smallest number of researchers taking upon themselves the task of studying its political history, its Church and its archaeology. Below is the English version of the chapter of the book by the famous Russian historian Yuri M. Kobishchanov.

**Keywords:** Nubia, Nobadia, Makuria, Alwa, the Church of Alexandria, Julian (missionary), Bishop Longinus, Monophysitism, Melkites.

Yuri M. Kobishchanov — Doctor of Science (History), Chief Researcher of the Institute of African Studies of the Russian Academy of Science.

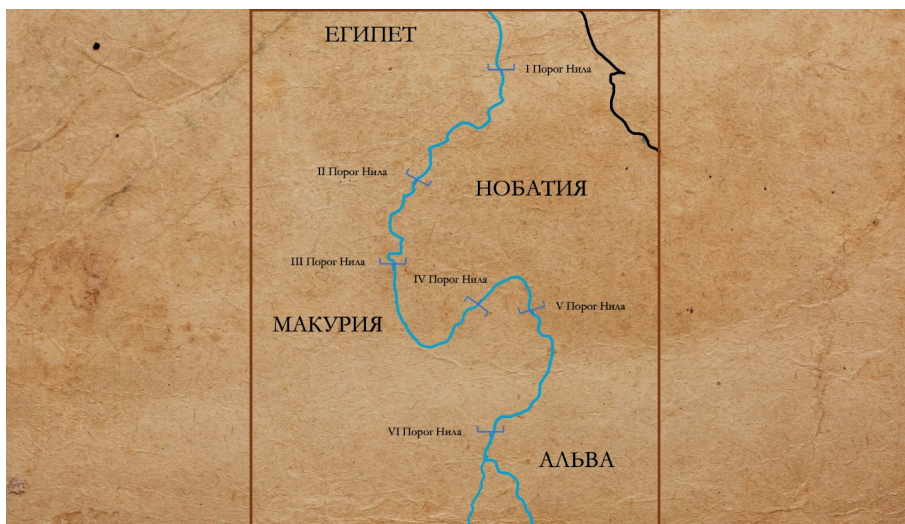
Corresponding author: kobishchanov@mail.ru

<sup>1</sup> Ниже приводится последняя опубликованная работа известного российского историка Юрия Михайловича Кобищанова, который скончался во время подготовки номера. Русская версия этой работы была опубликована в многотомном труде "Заметки по истории христианских цивилизаций" (т. I, Книга I). Мы надеемся, что эта публикация вызовет интерес ученых по всему миру, интересующихся политической и церковной историей Нубии.

Received: 15.08.2022

Accepted: 14.10.2022

**For citation:** Yuri M. Kobishchanov. The Christianization of Nubia. *Russian Journal of Church History*. 2022;3(3):32-43. (In Russ.) doi:10.15829/2686-973X-2022-113. EDN TCFXSI



### The Christianization of Lower Nubia

The hegemony of the Kingdom of Axum in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and in the northeast of Africa bore clear and decisive differentiations. On one hand, the Kingdom of Axum sought to dominate ancient civilized states as well as nomadic tribes (those who herded and drove the camel caravans) between the borders of their realm and the Roman (Byzantine) empire. In both regions, Axum acted in alliance with Constantinople, declaring — as its utmost goal — the protection Christianity from the aggression of the pagans. Yet in the Arabian Peninsula, unlike Africa, Axum and Byzantium faced the resistance of the Sassanid Empire, which sought to protect its own interests, and which enjoyed the support of the Jewish and Nestorian Christian communities. From a cultural standpoint, Northeastern Africa was far more complex and heterogeneous than Western Asia, with its Semitic peoples who were — in terms of language and culture — closer to the Axumites. G. Hatke notes that "despite evidence of Axumite military activity in Nubia" in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Axum was always far more interested in the conquest of Arabia, rather than the African realms; it sought to control Yemen, but "never tried to properly occupy Nubia"<sup>2</sup>.

Christianity came to Nobados (Lower Nubia), to the realm in the Nile Valley between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Cataracts — earlier, than it reached Axum, but the vast majority of the Nubians continued to adhere to the polytheistic religion. In

<sup>2</sup> Hatke G. (2013). *Aksum and Nubia. Warfare, commerce and political fictions in Ancient Northeast Africa*, New York, 12.

the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in the burial sites of the local population ("group X"), in the necropolises of the cities of Lower Nubia — Qustul, Ballana, Qasr-Ibrim, etc. — there are finds of Early Christian religious objects, manufactured in Alexandria and Fayum, as well as Syria<sup>3</sup>. In the second quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Silko, the *basiliskos* ("little king") of Nobados became a Christian. He defeated the Blemmyes, who occupied the right bank of the Nile, above the islands of Philae and Elephantine (Bige). Around the year 30 BC, Emperor Octavian Augustus erected the Temple of Mandulis (or the Temple of Kalabsha) on the western bank of the Nile River, not far from Philae. The main god of the Blemmyes was the Sun God Mandulis, to whom they made human sacrifices. The Blemmyes and Nobatians also worshipped the Egyptian-Meroitic gods, such as Isis, Osiris, "as well as Priapus"<sup>4</sup>. The Nubians of Lower Nubia were, at the time, known as Nobatians. Along with the Blemmyes, the Meroites and the remaining pagans of Egypt, the Nobatians made pilgrimages to the temples on Philae, where services were held by hereditary Meroitic priests. There, in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Temple of Isis became the base of one priestly dynasty, whose members regularly came over to Philae from Meroe. King Silko's reign in Nobados was followed by a pagan counter-offensive (quite natural in such cases, akin to the reigns of Julian the Apostate in Rome and Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich in Kiev). Yet, a few Christians managed to retain their positions in Faras, as well as in Primis (Qasr-Ibrim); for example, a church, converted from an Ancient Meroitic Temple built by King Taharqa<sup>5</sup>, survived in Qasr-Ibrim.

In the period between 518 and 524, the Byzantines clearly thought that the 30-day journey from Axum to Elephantine<sup>6</sup> could be safely used for the transfer of their troops<sup>7</sup>. In 537 Emperor Justinian I decided to destroy the pagan temples at Philae. Narses "a Persian Armenian by birth... who went over to the Romans and commanded their forces in that land (Egypt), destroyed the shrines at the orders of the emperor, arrested the priests, and sent the statues of the gods off to Byzantium (Constantinople)"<sup>8</sup>.

In 530, Narses, a member of the powerful Armenian dynasty, along with his brother Aratius and his mother, switched his allegiance from the Sassanids to the Byzantines. Here he was met by his namesake and fellow countryman, the eunuch and Imperial Treasurer Narses (who also hailed from Eastern Armenia).

<sup>3</sup> Kirwan, L.P. (1963). The X-Group Enigma. A little-known people of the Nubian Nile, *Vanished civilizations of the Ancient World*. London, 74. Fig. 1; Wenig, St. (1978). *The arts of Ancient Nubia and Sudan. Catalog*. London, № 278; Берзина, С.Я. (1992). *Мероэ и окружающий мир I-VIII вв. н.э.*, М., 80.

<sup>4</sup> Прокопий Кесарийский (1990). История войн Юстиниана (о войне персидской). пер. Е. Н. Мещерской. *История Африки в древних и средневековых источниках. Хрестоматия*. 2-е изд. М., 242; [Дестунис С.] (1876) *Прокопия Кесарийского История войн римлян с персами*. Т. I, СПб., 266-269.

<sup>5</sup> Plumley, J.M. (1982). New evidence on Christian Nubia in the light of recent excavations. *Nubia Christiana*. T.I. Warszawa, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Прокопий Кесарийский. История войн Юстиниана, 242; [Дестунис С.] Прокопия Кесарийского История войн римлян с персами, 266.

<sup>7</sup> The Martyrdom of Arethas elaborates on these events, quoting a letter, allegedly sent by Emperor Justinian I to the Aksumite King Ella Asbeha. See: *Martyrium sancti Arethae et sociorum in civitate Negran. Acta sanctorum* (1861). Octobris. T.X. Bruxellis, 843.

<sup>8</sup> Прокопий Кесарийский. История войн Юстиниана, 242; [Дестунис С.] Прокопия Кесарийского История войн римлян с персами, Т. I, 200, Т. II, 168.

Later on, the first Narses served in Italy, and in 543 he was mortally wounded fighting the Persians, in the Battle of Anglon<sup>9</sup>.

The principal Byzantine author of Justinian's reign — Procopius of Caesarea doesn't say a word about the spread of Christianity among the peoples of Nubia. One shouldn't think that this omission comes from the lack of evidence. It is more likely, that the Byzantine author chose to omit the mention of the Christian presence in Nubia; if a significant part of the Nubian population already embraced Christianity, the support for the pagan priesthood at Philae (the priests of Isis, Osiris, Mandulis) was already waning, and thus the acts of Narses (who executed imperial orders) do not seem as courageous as they could have. Meanwhile, Cosmas Indicopleustes, writing in the mid. 6<sup>th</sup> century, states that "the Nobatians and Garamants" have churches and bishops<sup>10</sup>. The baptism of the Nubians and Blemmyes was one of the main goals of Byzantine policy on Egypt's southern frontier.

Syrian sources record the history of the final stage of the Christianization of Nubia; the foremost amongst these sources is *The Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus. Nubia became a region which witnessed the efforts of Syrian Monophysite missionaries. The baptism of Nobados (Nobadia) took place in the lifetime of the Empress Theodora (prior to the year 548), yet after Pope Theodosius of Alexandria was exiled from Egypt (December 536). In other words, these events took place between 537 and 548. The official consensus in historiography is that the baptism of Nobados took place in the year 543.

John Ephesus tells the story of how Empress Theodora and the Emperor Justinian I competed with one another, hoping to convert the Nubians into their own faith. According to the story, the empress managed to cleverly fool the emperor. Theodora sent the Priest Julian from Constantinople to Thebaid (Upper Egypt). Julian was one of the members of Pope Theodosius' Synod. He was ordained by Patriarch Timotheus III of Alexandria (518-535) and expressed his clear desire to conduct missionary activities in Nubia. Before sending the missionary off to Eastern Africa, Theodora notified her husband regarding her choice and envoy. The emperor disliked his wife's plan, which bore a clear threat of spreading the Monophysite creed on the Egyptian frontier. Acting with all possible haste, Justinian I "sent his ambassadors first, with gold and baptismal vestments, and gifts to the king of that people, and a note to the *doukas* of Thebaid, making sure that the latter takes care of his embassy and leads it to those people". The empress, in turn, sent her own messenger to the *doukas* of Thebaid, demanding that he — allegedly at the emperor's orders — to hold back the original embassy, and, in turn, to aid Julian in reaching Nubia before Justinian's emissary. The *doukas* acted according to the empresses' wishes; upon Julian's arrival, he gave him "beasts of burden and people, who knew the desert", aiding him in the journey to Faras<sup>11</sup>. Julian's mission proved to be a success. The Nobatians sent a host to meet the Byzantine mission. Julian and

<sup>9</sup> [Дестунис С.] Прокопия Кесарийского История войн римлян с персами, Т. I, 266-269.

<sup>10</sup> *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes* (1909). Ed. Winstedt E. O. Cambridge, 119.

<sup>11</sup> Иоанн Эфесский (1990). Церковная история, пер. Е. Н. Мещерской. *История Африки в древних и средневековых источниках. Хрестоматия*. 2-е изд. М., 251-252.

his retinue were met with honors, as the empresses' ambassadors; they gave the Nobatians Theodora's gifts and read her letters. The Nubian king and his court "put their faith into the Christian Gods... And when Julian catechized and taught them, he was the first to tell them about the certain differences between the Christians regarding the faith". He told them about which party has the Empress' support and called upon the Nubians to embrace the theological position of Pope Theodosius. Finally, Julian revealed his mission would be followed by the emperor's mission, "and he advised them on how to meet them". As a result, the Nobatians — along with their King — embraced Monophysite Christianity<sup>12</sup>.

One must keep in mind the high status of the *queen-kandake* (the sister-queen and, incidentally — the queen mother or dowager in Kush and Nobadia) in the Meroitic civilization. Her title was translated into Greek as *basilissa*, which was the title of the Byzantine Empress.

When Emperor Justinian's ambassador and his retinue reached Nobadia, "handed the King his letters and gifts" and demanded from the Nobatians to embrace Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, "the King of the Nobatians replied: 'We accept the honors from the Emperor of the Romans [Byzantines], and we will send him our honors as well. But we shall not accept his faith, for if we decide to become Christian, we shall follow the Pope Theodosius'. Thus, they wrote to the emperor. "The Blessed Julian remained with them for two years, suffering from the heat, when — as the other peoples of that land — he would wait from the third hour to the tenth, naked and wrapped in a linen fabric, in the caves filled with water. And the only part of him kept outside the water was his nostrils. He took up his courage, and taught them, and baptized the king and his courtiers, and many of his people. And he was accompanied by a certain bishop from Thebaid, an elder by the name of Theodore, and when he [Julian] taught them and established the Rite, he entrusted them to that bishop, and left them, and came to Constantinople, and in our presence was met with great honors by the empress. At that time, he conveyed much about that people"<sup>13</sup>.

Despite the legendary fleur and the clear bias of John's account, he does convey what he personally heard from Julian at the Empress Theodora's reception. He also does give the exact date of the events in question: Julian came back to Constantinople in 546. Meanwhile, Procopius of Caesarea, writing the first book of *The Persian Wars*, had yet no information regarding the baptism of the Nobatians<sup>14</sup>.

Once again, there were Christians in Nubia even before Julian's mission, and the King of the Blemmyes was subject to the King of the Nobatians. That is why Narses' closure of the temples of Isis, Osiris and Mandulis did not meet any resistance from the two Kings, and the two Nubian peoples. Nevertheless, the King of Nobadia thought it prudent to send an armed escort to meet Julian's mission and ensure its security<sup>15</sup>. This measure had its reasons. From John of Ephesus' further narrative, we know that the King of the Blemmyes — following

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>14</sup> Julian came to Nubia in the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Justinian's reign (around 542/543) and spent two years in the region.

Thus, Julian's mission to Faras can be dated c. 543, and his return to Constantinople took place in 546.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 252.

the orders of the King of Nobadia — provided an escort to the camel caravan of Bishop Longinus, ensuring the latter reaches the Kingdom of Alwa, making it passed enemy outposts<sup>16</sup>. Yet the Blemmye tribes remained unruly, and when they sensed the weakening of authority in Nobados or Thebaid, they would conduct raids on the towns and villages of the Nile Valley. In 552 the Blemmyes threatened Ombos and its vicinities; a petition to the Byzantine *doukas* of Thebaid attests to that<sup>17</sup>. Approximately at the same time, a poet named Dioskoros, the son of Apollo, hailing from the village called 'The Land of Aphrodite', dedicated an ode to Athanasius, the *doukas* of Thebaid. The poet calls Doukas Athanasius 'the savior of the city' and states that Thebes are now safe from "the tribes of the Blemmyes and the Saracens"<sup>18</sup>. It does seem that the Northern Beja tribes (the Blemmyes) acted in alliance with the Arabs, who made their incursions into Egypt's Eastern Desert from the Sinai Peninsula, which is why this region — both then and now — is known as the Arabian Desert<sup>19</sup>. Another poem, dedicated to the *Doukas* John of Thebaid, Athanasius' successor, conveys the horrors, inflicted by the Blemmyes to the population of 'The Land of Aphrodite'. The population was, in fact, willing to pay annual tribute to avoid pillage<sup>20</sup>.

There is another surviving record of a Blemmye attack on Egypt, dating back to the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. On November 15<sup>th</sup> 570, Flavius Phlebammon, a doctor from the Upper Egyptian town of Antinopolis, made a will, in which he left a substantial amount of money to be used for ransom of people, taken prisoner by the Blemmyes<sup>21</sup>. It also seems that the Blemmye attacks on Philae forced the Bishop Theodore of Philae to restore the city walls in 577<sup>22</sup>.

As can be seen, from John of Ephesus' further account, Theodore became Bishop of Philae in the 540's. He was "quite old" and during the course of 18 years he visited his Nubian flock, instructing them in the faith and then coming back "to his city of Philae"<sup>23</sup>. His Monophysitism was so moderate, that Revelieu even considered Theodore to be a Chalcedonian Orthodox bishop, even though there was no documentary evidence for this. Bishop Theodore was the companion and successor to Julian, and Longinus considered him to be his brother in the faith. Yet it is unlikely that Bishop Theodore was willing and eager to bring his Nubian flock into the nuanced theological debates between the Monophysite and Diophysite creeds, and the Byzantines must have been content with his compromising policy. After the passing of Empress Theodora in 548, the Monophysite Patriarch of Alexandria did not dare to appoint a new Bishop of

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 257, 259.

<sup>17</sup> The document is kept in the Cairo Museum. See: Monneret de Villard, U. (1938). *Storia della Nubia cristiana*. Roma, 58-59.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>19</sup> Ugo Monneret de Villard, citing Nonnos, states that the Blemmye oasis-city of Phinikion was at the time occupied by the Saracens. Ibid., 59, nota 2. Yet N.V. Pigulevskaya shows that in this case, the oasis in question was in fact located in northwestern Arabia. See: Пигулевская, Н.В. (1964). *Арабы у границ Византии и Ирана в IV-VI веках*. Москва-Ленинград, 118, 160, 176.

<sup>20</sup> Monneret de Villard, U. *Storia della Nubia Cristiana*, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>22</sup> A construction inscription from 577.

<sup>23</sup> Иоанн Эфесский. *Церковная история*, 255.



Faras, especially since the King of Nobados' loyalty to Emperor Justinian I and his *doukas* of Thebaid was questionable.

The King of Nobados at the time was Arpanome, whose name is known from an inscription, dated the 27<sup>th</sup> of Tabi of the 7 Indictus (January 23<sup>rd</sup>) 559, made during the consecration of the church in Dendour. The inscription also names the aforementioned Bishop Theodore of Philae, the priest John (a Coptic presbyter, who elevated the cross over the Dendour church), the governor of Talmiyya — Joseph, Nubian courtiers bearing Christian names (Paphnutius, Epiphanius, Mark) and Byzantine titles (eparch, hypotiranos, philarchus), as officials at the court of the Egyptian *doukas*. Only King Arpanome, in fact, bore an authentic Nubian title of *uru* (from the Ancient Egyptian 'wr', meaning 'courtier') and a pagan name, even though he was clearly a Christian; it was at his orders that the ancient pagan temple was converted into a church<sup>24</sup>.

John of Ephesus' next account tells of the events between 570 and 581. "On the day of his passing... Pope Theodosius remembered those people [the Nubians], especially since the Blessed Julian, the one who was their teacher, also had passed away at the time. And the Empress Theodora herself also passed from this world". Theodosius sent Longinus as the Bishop to Nobados. He was "a man of zeal, who could convert them and strengthen them in Christianity". But Emperor Justinian blocked Longinus from going to Nubia, clearly doubting his loyalty. It was only three years later that Longinus managed to escape from Constantinople and make it to Nobados. Securing his position in Nobados, Bishop Longinus convinced the local king to send an embassy to the emperor "with gifts and honors. And he [the ambassador] was received and honored, before our very eyes, and he spoke of Longinus, saying: 'Even though we were Christians in name, we still had no proper knowledge of Christianity' (...) And the emperor was angry at him [Bishop Longinus], despite the fact that he kept his silence on the matter"<sup>25</sup>. Justinian I was clearly displeased with the fact that, under Bishop Longinus, Monophysitism triumphed in Nobados<sup>26</sup>, which was, in fact, partially in opposition to him.

During the six years that Bishop Longinus preached in Nobados, the Monophysite Church was torn apart by new doctrinal conflicts — between the so-called 'Jacobites', followers of Bishop Jacob Baradeus, and the 'Paulians', adherents of Patriarch Paul of Antioch, who previously was an abbot in one of Alexandria's monasteries. Bishop Longinus, just like John of Ephesus, was among the 'Paulians'. In the year 575 or 576 Bishop Longinus received letters from the Alexandrian Archpresbyter Theodosius and his nephew — the Archdeacon Theodore, calling him back north — to Egypt — for the election of the new Monophysite Patriarch. Longinus arrived in Mareotis, where the Monophysite bishops were gathering. At the Council at Mareotis saw the triumph of the 'Jacobites', who elected Archdeacon Theodore as the new Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria; Bishop Longinus was among those who voted for Theodore. The Paulians, in turn, subject to persecution. Longinus, due to his previous allegiance, could in fact expect trouble as well. After the Council at Mareotis he came back to

<sup>24</sup> Розов, А. (1890). *Христианская Нубия*. Киев, 597-599, 600.

<sup>25</sup> Иоанн Эфесский. *Церковная история*, 253-254.

<sup>26</sup> Розов А. *Христианская Нубия*, 573-575.

Nobados, yet did not remain there for long. The Alexandrian Jacobites sent letters to Nobados, condemning Longinus as a heretic and calling upon the local king not to accept him as a heretic<sup>27</sup>. Not long after, Longinus left for the central part of modern-day Sudan, farther from Egypt. It is possible that he hoped that his new missionary endeavor would rehabilitate him in the eyes of the Alexandrians. This, in fact, did transpire.

It is undoubtable that the six years Longinus spent in Nobados played a crucial role in the Christianization of the country. But the role of Longinus' predecessors — Julian, Theodore, Abraham, the clergy, named and unnamed in the sources, who served in Lower Nubia since the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century (and even earlier, since the time of King Silko). Christian services were now held in the traditional places of worship, in Ancient Egyptian temples remade into churches (the Copts converted their temples into churches in Egypt as well). Not counting the churches, built by King Silko in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and destroyed by his pagan successor<sup>28</sup>, the oldest church in Lower Nubia was the church in Primis, built in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century on the site of an early Roman temple constructed by King Taharqa (when converted into a church, an apse was added to the structure)<sup>29</sup>. The third oldest among the surviving shrines, according to our count was the Dendour Church, consecrated in AD 559. Another shrine of importance was the Church of St. Stephen the Protomartyr on the Isle of Philae, located on the southern Egyptian frontier Roman/Byzantine Empire, and since the 640's — as part of the Arab-Muslim domain. Just as its pagan predecessor, the new Christian church — established at the main pilgrimage destination of the Nubians and the Beja — was meant to be the binding point between the peoples of Egypt and Sudan.

In the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, the rulers of Nobados proved to be faithful allies of Byzantium. They even sent an expeditionary force to help the Byzantine quell the Coptic rebellion in Ahmim and Alexandria<sup>30</sup>. It is possible that the Byzantine prefect of Alexandria sent a plea to the King of Nobados, with gifts, reminders of the ally commitments, subsidies (both — money and gifts), as well as promises of aid in the struggle against Makuria.

### **The Christian of Middle and Upper Nubia**

When Bishop Longinus came to Nobados, in order to strengthen its Monophysite convictions, Nobados' rival — Mukurra ('Makuria' in Greek), accepted the imperial Byzantine mission and the Chalcedonian (Diophysite) Orthodox-Catholic faith. This happened in AD 569. Makuria occupied a chain of river oases of the Nile Valley, between the Third Cataract and the Mouth of the Atbarah River. The local Nubian population knew well the paths into Egypt. The Chronicle of John of Nikiû describes the war, waged by Aristomachus, the

<sup>27</sup> Иоанн Эфесский. *Церковная история*, 255-256.

<sup>28</sup> The foundations of this church are uncovered in Faras. The new polytheistic king built his palace on the cite. See: Kirwan, L. (1966). *Prelude to Nubian Christianity*. M.-L. Bernhard (ed.). *Mélanges offerts à Kazimierz Michałowski*. Warsaw, 121-128.

<sup>29</sup> Plumley, J. M. *New evidence on Christian Nubia in the light of recent excavations*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Zotenberg, H. (1877). *Mémoire sur la chronique byzantine de Jean, évêque de Nikiou*. *Journal asiatique*, Paris. T. II, 312, 315.



prefect of Egypt, son of the prefect Theodosius, against peoples of Makuria, "the barbarians of the land of Noba", when "Aristomachus defeated the barbarians of the lands of Noba and Africa, called *Murtanys*, and other barbarians, called *Marakos*. He defeated them, pillaged their land, took away their properties and brought all of the prisoners back to Egypt, up the Nile, for the war was waged on the banks of that river"<sup>31</sup>.

John of Nikiû's Chronicle does not say anything about the causes and details of this war between the Byzantine Empire and the Kingdom of Makuria. Therefore, let us at least attempt a reconstruction of the events in question. It seems that the Makurian Nubians invaded Nobados (Lower Nubia). The King of Nobados must have asked Byzantium for aid. The rest we know — Aristomachus led a campaign in Nubia, with the war being waged in the Nile Valley and Makuria suffering a crushing defeat. We do not know, how far south the Byzantines marched along the Nile. In one way or another, this war had a marked effect, strengthening Byzantine influence in Monophysite Nobados and in Chalcedonian Orthodox Makuria. The empire would retain this influence, until the loss of Egypt to the Muslim Arabs. It is possible that in 618, when Egypt was briefly conquered by the Zoroastrian Persians, who outlawed the Orthodox-Catholic Church and murdered, raped and enslaved Orthodox Christians, at least some of the Byzantine Greeks from the towns of Upper Egypt fled to the Orthodox Kingdom of Makuria. Orthodox Christianity reigned in Makuria before the kingdom's unification with Nobados in the 7<sup>th</sup> century; when the Muslims conquered Egypt, the Orthodox (Monothelite) Patriarch of Alexandria fled to Constantinople, and, as a result, Makuria could not receive Byzantine Orthodox bishops and clergy, who were supposed to be personally ordained by the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria.

The vast region along the Nile, from the Mouth of Atbara to the lands where the great river split into two (the Blue and the White Nile) was occupied by the southernmost and largest of Sudan's Christian kingdoms — the Kingdom of Alwa, which was basically the surviving core of ancient Meroe. The northern province of the kingdom — at the confluence of Atbara and the Nile — was, according to Arab sources, known as al-Abwab ('The Gates')<sup>32</sup>. The kingdom's capital was the city of Soba, now part of the Greater Khartoum. Alwa's southern frontier, according to archaeological finds, coincided with the historic borders of the Meroitic Kingdom and occupied the region of the Sennar.

Christians, both from Byzantium and from Aksum, frequented the Kingdom of Alwa. Some of them would spend extensive amounts of time and even settle in the kingdom. The Kings of Alwa and their courtiers were undoubtedly acquainted with Christianity; some of the latter embraced Christianity even before the country's official conversion. The name of the King of Alwa's ambassador, who met with Bishop Longinus, seems to have been Eutychios<sup>33</sup>. It is likely that this Eutychios was Christian. The question of the King of Alwa's conversion and the kingdom's allegiance with either the Monophysite faith of the Kings of Aksum

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 293-294.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Abwab is mentioned by Al-Yaqoubi and Al-Uswani.

<sup>33</sup> Иоанн Эфесский. Церковная история, 257.

and Faras, or the Chalcedonian faith of the Byzantine Emperor — was a key political issue in the 570's.

The King of Alwa, unlike his northern neighbor and rival — the King of Makuria, was inclined to the Monophysite fold and thus — to an alliance with the Kings of Nobados and Aksum. "When the people of Alodia [the people of Alwa] had learned about the conversion of the tribes of Nobados, the King [of Alodia] sent to the King of Nobados, so that the latter sends him a bishop, who would teach and baptize them". But at the time Bishop Longinus was summoned to the Council at Mareotis. After Longinus' return to Nubia, "the King of the peoples of Alodia [once again] sent ambassadors to the King of Nobados, for Longinus the Bishop to be sent to them, to baptize him and his people... And the Lord inspired Longinus to go out and come to them. And, lamenting his departure, the King [of Nobados], and his courtiers, and the rulers of the land sent him off with people, who knew the desert. Yet he [Bishop Longinus], as he personally reported in a letter, fell ill, along with his companions, while 17 camels from among the pack animals (...) perished in the desert from the intense heat... The people and kingdom of Makuria lay between the two kingdoms. And when their king learned that Longinus went on a journey, then Satan beckoned him... to place scouts on every path of his kingdom, and on all the roads, and on all the mountains, and in every vale, down to the sea... in order to take Longinus captive and preventing him from bringing salvation to the great people of Alodia"<sup>34</sup>. In his letter to Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria, the King of Nobados conveys several interesting details. He sent Longinus on a path through the desert "land of the Blemmyes", bypassing Makuria and instructing "the King of the Blemmyes to see him off on his journey"<sup>35</sup>. But Longinus and his companions managed to cross the desert, avoiding the King of Makuria's scouts and reaching Alwa's northern march. The King of Alwa "sent a courtier named Antekya to meet Longinus. And after several days of catechism, the King, and his courtiers, and in time — many of his people were baptized (...) And the King wrote a letter of gratitude to the King of Nobados"<sup>36</sup>. John of Ephesus names the King of Nobados 'Urepeyoula' (sometimes spelled as Avarphioulo or Orphiolo), which might be a distorted Greek name 'Eurypylos'.

The Bishop Longinus also sent letters, describing his mission in Alwa. One of these letters was sent, through the King of Nobados, to Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria. This letter is quoted by John Ephesus. The letter bears no trace of any polemics with the 'Jacobite' party of Alexandria; on the contrary, Longinus explains his sufferings in the desert as God's punishment for his sins and transgressions. He wisely transfers the discussion of the Christological issues to the heresy of the Monophysite Bishop Julian of Halicarnassus, whose adherents broke away from the Monophysite Church and were condemned by both — the 'Jacobites' and the 'Paulicians'. It is interesting that Julian of Halicarnassus' teachings were shared by "some Axumites" in Alwa. As Longinus wrote: "We let them know wherein lies the true faith and demanded of them to denounce — in

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 256-257.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 257.

writing — the heresy, receiving such letters"<sup>37</sup>. These Axumites must have been educated enough, being capable of conducting a debate on Christology and providing the condemnation of the 'Julian heresy' in writing. It does seem that the parties conversed and exchanged letters in Greek. Greek became the liturgical language for Alwa, remaining such for 900 years — before the country's forced conversion to Islam in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The relationship of the four kingdoms of Eastern Sudan — Nobados, Beja, Makuria and Alwa — with Axum in the 6<sup>th</sup> century are quite vague. The Kings Kaleb and Wazena of Axum added 'King of Kush, and Bega, and Noba' to their titles. This was not in fact just a mere repetition of the titles, used by the Axumite Kings of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the ones who actually invaded the Kingdom of Meroe. Yet there is not the slightest shred of evidence that would testify to the fact that the Axumite Christian Kings would campaign in Nubia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is also likely that at this period, Axum did not wield any form of political domination over Alwa and Makuria (let alone — Nobados). *The Martyrdom of Arethas* states that Emperor Justin I was about to send his forces into Southern Arabia, against Yusuf Dhū Nuwās, "through Coptos, Berenice and [the lands] of the Blemmyes and Nobatians"<sup>38</sup>; the Byzantines clearly considered these peoples to be within the political orbit of their Empire. Yet the Axumites saw the Blemmyes-Beja and the Noba-Nubians as peoples, subject to their *najashi* (king).

Thus, the states of Sudan, located between Egypt and Nobados in the north, and the Axumite Kingdom in the south, embraced Christianity. Alwa became a Monophysite realm, and Longinus assumed the role of its bishop. This choice seems to have strengthened Alwa's alliance with Nobados (Nobadia) and Axum. Nobadia's location between the Byzantium and Makuria (with Alodia lying to the south of the latter) proved to be quite complicated. As the King of Alwa wrote to the King of Nobadia: "I care about giving you respite from your enemies, and of their banishment from your lands. For he [the King of Makuria] is not only your enemy, but mine as well, and your land — is my land, and your people are my people. So do not despair, take up your courage and strength, for I cannot disregard you and your land, especially since now I have become Christian"<sup>39</sup>. It is well established, that in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Makuria would conquer Nobadia, yet would be in turn abandon its Melkite faith and convert to the Monophysite fold, primarily for internal political reasons and lack of a Chalcedonian Patriarch and bishops in Egypt. This transition, in the end, would unite all three Christian kingdoms, lying beyond the First Cataract of Nile — Makuria, Alwa and Axum — in the 'Faith of St. Cyril', under the omophorion of the Monophysite (Coptic) Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>38</sup> *Martyrium sancti Arethae...*, 747.

<sup>39</sup> Иоанн Эфесский. *Церковная история*, 258.

## Литература/References

1. Berzina, S. Ya. (1992). *Meroe and the surrounding world I-VIII centuries AD.* (In Russ.) Берзина, С.Я. (1992). *Мероэ и окружающий мир I-VIII вв. н.э.* М.
2. John of Ephesus (1990). Church History, E. N. Meshcherskaya Lane. *The history of Africa in ancient and medieval sources. A textbook.* 2nd ed. M. (In Russ.) Иоанн Эфесский (1990). Церковная история, пер. Е. Н. Мещерской. *История Африки в древних и средневековых источниках.* Хрестоматия. 2-е изд. М.
3. Pigulevskaya, N.V. (1964). *Arabs at the borders of Byzantium and Iran in the IV-VI centuries.* Moscow-Leningrad. (In Russ.) Пигулевская, Н.В. (1964). *Арабы у границ Византии и Ирана в IV-VI веках.* Москва-Ленинград.
4. Procopius of Caesarea (1990). The History of Justinian's Wars (about the Persian War). per. E. N. Meshcherskaya. *The history of Africa in ancient and medieval sources. A textbook.* 2nd ed. M. (In Russ.) Прокопий Кесарийский (1990). История войн Юстиниана (о войне персидской). пер. Е. Н. Мещерской. *История Африки в древних и средневековых источниках.* Хрестоматия. 2-е изд. М.
5. [Destunis S.] (1876) *Procopius of Caesarea History of the Wars of the Romans with the Persians.* Vol. I, St. Petersburg. (In Russ.) [Дестунис С.] (1876) *Прокопия Кесарийского История войн римлян с персами.* Т. I, СПб.
6. Rozov, A. (1890). *Christian Nubia.* Kyiv. (In Russ.) Розов, А. (1890). *Христианская Нубия.* Киев.
7. Hatke G. (2013). *Aksum and Nubia. Warfare, commerce and political fictions in Ancient Northeast Africa,* New York.
8. Kirwan, L. (1966). *Prelude to Nubian Christianity.* M.-L. Bernhard (ed.). *Mélanges offerts à Kazimierz Michałowski.* Warsaw.
9. Kirwan, L.P. (1963). The X-Group Enigma. A little-known people of the Nubian Nile, *Vanished civilizations of the Ancient World.* London.
10. *Martyrium sancti Arethae et sociorum in civitate Negrin.* Acta sanctorum (1861). Octobris. T.X. Bruxellis.
11. Monneret de Villard, U. (1938). *Storia della Nubia cristiana.* Roma.
12. Plumley, J.M. (1982). New evidence on Christian Nubia in the light of recent excavations. *Nubia Christiana.* T.I. Warszawa.
13. Wenig, St. (1978). *The arts of Ancient Nubia and Sudan. Catalog.* London.
14. *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes* (1909). Ed. Winstedt E. O. Cambridge.
15. Zotenberg, H. (1877). Mémoire sur la chronique byzantine de Jean, évêque de Nikiou. *Journal asiatique*, Paris. T. II.