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Adam Łajtar

CHRISTIAN SAÏ IN WRITTEN RECORDS
(INSCRIPTIONS AND MANUSCRIPTS) *

To the memory of Francis Geus,
the former Director of the French Unit
at the Sudan National Corporation of Antiquities
and Museums and the Director
of the French Mission on the Saï Island

It is a commonly accepted opinion that Saï was an important centre
within the Christian Kingdom of Makuria. Our knowledge of
Christian Saï, however, is very scarce. Remains of the town from the Christ-
ian period, situated in the northern part of the island of Saï, were never a
subject of archaeological excavations. Under these circumstances, the only
source of knowledge which we have to our disposal are few mentions of Saï
in written records.

Saï occurs twice in external sources. In his *Khitat*, al-Makrizi (1364–
1442), based on al-Aswani (10th century), describes it as an administrative
centre at the southern border of the province of Upper Maqs, as well as an
episcopal see. 1 In Vansleb’s *Histoire de l’église d’Alexandrie* (1677), Saï is men-

* The following abbreviation is used throughout: *IN = Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim* 11, ed. by G. M. Browne (= *Texts from Excavations* 10), London 1989; 111, ed. by G. M. Browne (= *Texts from Excavations* 12), London 1991.

tioned in a list of Nubian bishoprics quoted after a Coptic ecclesiastic document.² There are several attestations of Sāi in internal sources. At issue are inscriptions and manuscripts in Greek, Coptic and Old Nubian originating from Qasr Ibrim, Hambukol, Baganarti, and Sāi itself. They provide names of men who held various ecclesiastic and secular offices in Sāi. The aim of this paper is to collect all these instances and to analyse them, to the greatest possible extent, in a broader context of Christian Nubia.

**BISHOPS OF SĀI**

The Bishopric of Sāi is not well known.³ Its existence is attested expressis verbis by Makrizi and by the document quoted by Vansleb (cf. ft. 1 & 2). It has been suggested that the large church, the remains of which are visible on the surface in the northern part of town, served as the cathedral of Sāi. The episcopal fasti of Sāi are very fragmentary. Three epitaphs in Greek and/or Coptic found on the island of Sāi, as well as two Old Nubian documents found in Qasr Ibrim and Nauri preserve the names of five bishops.

The list is as follows:

1) Kerikos (Kyriakos). He is known from his epitaph inscribed on a circular marble slab found on the island of Sāi, now kept in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, Acc. No. E. 127.1903.⁴ The slab bears the epitaph of the bishop in Sahidic Coptic and a quotation from Ps. 19(20) in Greek.


The inscription may be dated to ca. AD 800 on palaeographic grounds. According to the epitaph, Kerikos was bishop of Saï for four years.

2) Iesou. He is the best known individual among the bishops of Saï. Information about him is provided by his epitaph written in Coptic on a rectangular slab of sandstone.5 The stone, acquired in 1905 from a native of Saï and once kept in the Sudan National Museum at Khartoum, is now lost. According to this epitaph, Iesou was a monk in the monastery of Neittde (alternative reading: Eittde). He was nominated Bishop when he was 50 and remained on the throne for 32 years. He died in AD 1054. This Iesou is probably identical with a Bishop Iesou mentioned in a graffito which commemorated an unusual Nile-flood on the rocks of the island of Saï.6 According to this inscription, he was a contemporary of the Makurian king Stephanos who is most probably identical with King Stephanos mentioned in a document of AD 1027 found in Gebel Adda.

3) Leon. His fragmentary Greek epitaph found by the French Mission on Saï Island is kept at the Institute of Papyrology and Egyptology of the University of Lille.7 Nothing is known about Bishop Leon except for his name. The epitaph should be dated to 11th–12th century on palaeographic grounds.

4) Isou (Iesou). He is the addressee of a letter, written in Old Nubian by Aron, Bishop of Faras, and found in Qasr Ibrim (IN III 57). It is rather improbable for this Aron to be identical with the Bishop of Faras of the same name who occupied the episcopal throne in AD 952–972.8 We are

5 For the complete publication of the inscription, see J. Van der Vliet, Catalogue of the Coptic Inscriptions in the Sudan National Museum at Khartoum (= Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 121), Leuven – Paris – Dudley, Ma. 2003, no. 27.
8 For him, see S. Jakobielski, A History of the Bishopric of Pachoras on the Basis of Coptic Inscriptions (= Faras 3), Warsaw 1972, pp. 119–125; for his epitaph, see Van der Vliet, Catalogue (cit. n. 5), no. 3.
undoubtedly dealing with his namesake who must have taken over the see of Faras at a much later date and was not included in the famous list of bishops of Faras which ends in AD 1169 with Bishop Iesou. As the Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim originate mostly from the second half of the 12th – the first half of the 13th century, we may suppose that Aron and Iesou were bishops of respectively Faras and Sai exactly in this period. It would be interesting to know why a letter from a Bishop of Faras to a Bishop of Sai was found in Qasr Ibrim. Perhaps one of the two men, the sender or the addressee, resided temporarily in Qasr Ibrim which, as a seat of the Eparch of Nobadia, played the role of the main administrative centre in the north of the Kingdom of Makuria in the 12th–13th century.

5) Simeon. He was Bishop of Sai in the time of King Basil (period unknown, perhaps end of the 13th century) as indicated by the protocol of a legal document (a agricultural contract) in Old Nubian, found in Nauri below the third cataract. The find spot of the document may indicate that the diocese of Sai extended to the south as far as the third cataract area.

TOT OF SAÏ AND THEGNA OF SAÏ

An office called Tot was known in the Kingdom of Makuria. This office is attested several times in Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim from the second half of the 12th century. It also is on record in the late (13th/14th cent.) inscriptions on the walls of the upper church at Banganarti, unearthed recently by the Polish Joint Expedition to the Middle Nile.

9 For the list of Bishops of Faras, see Jakobielski, Bishopric (cit. n. 8), pp. 190–195.
Thus, in Qasr Ibrim documents we have: аллои тот = ‘Tot of Addo’; атпэаи тот = ‘Tot of Atindan’; тамит тот = ‘Tot of Faras’; слмй тот = ‘Tot of Silmi’ (= Ibrim); тамтй тот = ‘Tot of Tamit’; топкей тот = ‘Tot of Toshka’. The Banganarti inscriptions add: апини тот = ‘Tot of the town (probably Dongola)’; тлавртй тот = ‘Tot of Tellarti’ (lit. ‘Island of God’); тиымя апини тот = ‘Tot of the town of Timmea’. It should be observed that тот is one of the words for ‘son, child’ in Old Nubian. In this meaning it is frequently attested in literary texts from Qasr Ibrim and elsewhere. It also occurs in documentary texts from Qasr Ibrim and in the inscriptions from Banganarti in presentation of various persons which normally assumes the form ‘so-and-so, son of so-and-so’. As the office of Tot also is indicated in the same way (‘so-and-so, Tot of so-and-so place’), it is often difficult to distinguish between the two meanings. In the above list, I included only unquestionable cases.

The inscriptions from Banganarti also yielded several attestations of another office called Thegna (σεγνα) or Thekna (σεκνα). The list includes:


14 IN III 44.16.
15 IN III 34 & 44 (note that the person mentioned here combined the office of the Tot of Silmi with that of the Tot of Kisdauoul); 37.37–38; 44.16.
16 IN III 37.32; 38.21; 54 11 2.
17 IN III 37.34: 43.7 (we are dealing with the same person in both cases).
18 The inscriptions are not published yet. I do not know how the toponyms occurring in them should be identified.
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[Δ]έν [π]άλλ(εος) μεγ(άλης) θε(κινα) and [Δ]έν [θε(κινα)] = 'Thegna of Ase, the great town' and 'Thegna of Ase' respectively; θυμ( ) πάλη μεγ(άλη) θε(κινα) = 'Thegna of Thym( ), the great town'; (Μιχαήλ) νέον θε(κινα) = 'Thegna of the Island of Michael'; νήσος (Μιχαήλ) πάλη καλ(ής) θε(κινα) = 'Thegna of the Island of Michael, a beautiful town'; Δαφνη θε(κινα) = 'Thegna of Daphni';

πάπας Άθανάσιος θε(κινα) = 'Thegna of Papas Athanasios'.

The office of Thegna also occurs in inscriptions from other Nubian sites, but the occurrences were misread or misinterpreted by previous editors. Thus a graffito in the church at Naga esh-Sheima was left by a certain Παχ(ώ)ρας ο(ι)ς θε(κινα) = 'Einitta, Thegna of Faras, son of Nonne'.

An ink inscription from the Faras cathedral mentions a certain Θομας who was Τρι<α)ς μεγ(άς) κλι(ρικος) κ(αι) Καδογή θε(κινα) = 'Cleric of the Great (Church of the) Holy Trinity and Thegna of Kadogi'.

An inscription in black ink in the church at Sonqi Tino has as the author a man (name not preserved) who presents himself as: γορτ(εο)λαι(ει) κ(αι) παλ(ι)ν θε(κινα), Τέσσαρα Ζώα πρε(σβύτερος) = 'Lord of Elders, and also Thegna of Aei, Priest of (the Church of) the Four Living Creatures'.

The word θε(κινα) also occurs as an element of Q

20 The name Jagje occurs in several further inscriptions from Banganarti. They indicate that Jagje is a toponym.

21 In the given context, 'Papas Athanasios' must be a toponym (compare the place names Saint Étienne, San Sebastian, São Paulo, &c. in the modern Western civilisation). It goes back to the famous Alexandrian Bishop of the 4th century, one of the church fathers, an relentless fighter for orthodoxy. We can imagine that this toponym was rooted in a local cult of the saint, perhaps connected with a church of his name boasting his relics.

22 For the publication of the graffito, see H. SATZINGER [in:] M. BIETAK, M. SCHWARZ & al., Nag el-Scheima. Eine befestigte christliche Siedlung und andere christliche Denkmäler in Sayala-Nubien (= Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 191), Wien 1987, p. 129-130, pl. 47. SATZINGER read Παχ(ω)ρας ο(ι)ς εινης = 'Einitta, Thegna of Faras, son of Nonne'.

23 S. JAKOBIELSKI, 'Inscriptions' [in:] K. MICHALOWSKI, Faras. Wall Paintings in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw 1974, pp. 304-305. The place under consideration was read by JAKOBIELSKI as follows: Τρι<α)ς μεγ(άς) θε(κινα) κ(αι) Καδογή θε(κινα). The reading Καδογή is also possible.

24 My reading from the photo kindly provided by Dobrochna ZIELIŃSKA. The inscription remains unpublished; it was mentioned briefly by S. DONADONI, 'Les graffiti de l’église de Sonqi Tino' [in:] K. MICHALOWSKI (ed.), Nubia. Récentes recherches. Actes du colloque nubio-
presentation of persons in Banganarti inscriptions, in the place where the
word ‘son’, either in Greek (υίος) or Old Nubian (тот) normally appears.
This suggests that Θεγία (Θεκία), like тот, meant literally ‘son, child’.
Even if the meaning of the word Θεγία (Θεκία) is more or less clear, its
etymology or even its linguistic appurtenance is problematic. I am
inclined to think that it is a Graeco-Nubian formation built upon the
Greek τέκνον – ‘child’ in which the dental stop /t/ at the beginning of the
word was changed for aspirated /th/;\footnote{For this change which occurs frequently in Post-Classical Greek, see F. Th. Gignac, A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods. I. Phonology (= Testi e documenti per lo studio dell’antichità 55), Milano 1976, p. 87 and 90–91. The change in question must have occurred already in Greek, before the Nubian derivative Θεγία (Θεκία) was coined, in other words Nubians took θίκνον and not τίκνον as a formation basis. Proof for this is the consequent use of ι in all Nubian attestations of the word in question and the fact that Old Nubian has no /th/ voice and uses the letter ι only in loan words of Greek origin. For the change of voiceless /k/ for voiced /g/, see Gignac, Grammar 1, pp. 77–80.} and the Greek flectional ending -on
was replaced by the Nubian nominal formant –а.\footnote{For this formant, perhaps originally predicative, see G. M. Browne, Old Nubian Grammar, Lincom Europa 2002, pp. 36–39, § 3.6.4.} It should be observed
that Θεγία (Θεκία) normally is written with a dot over the final а in the
Banganarti inscriptions. This dot probably marks the word accent thus
indicating that the word under consideration was an oxytonon.

The above discussion demonstrated that the words тот and Θέγία
(Θεκία) had a double meaning in the language of the inhabitants of
Makuria. Firstly, they designated a ‘male offspring, son’, secondly they were
used as a name of an office within the Kingdom of Makuria. As far as this
second meaning is concerned, they probably were but two terms for the
same office. The question arises what was the character of this office.
Unfortunately, the material to our disposal is too scant and too one-sided to
provide a definite answer in this matter. In the Qasr Ibrim texts, Тóт occur
mainly as witnesses to various contracts, while in case of inscriptions from
Banganarti and other Nubian sites we see Тóт and Thegnas as pious believers
making pilgrimage to a holy place. Nevertheless, some conclusions may be
drawn, though very cautiously, from the very name of the office.

\textit{logique international au Musée National de Varsovie, 19–22 Juin 1972, Varsovie 1975, p. 34}, who
read Θεγία (one word).
We have already seen that Tot and eerNa (eeKNa) meant ‘son, child’ and this meaning must be the primary one in respect to the name of the office. That the office is called ‘son, child’ seems to indicate its inferiority to or dependence on a higher office. Thus Tot (Thegna) must have been an official under the supreme control of a higher instance. It is easy to observe that the word Tot (eerNa) is always connected with a name of a place (a town or a village) in the lists of attestations collected above. From this we may suppose that the official called Tot/Thegna (Thekna) was the head of a given town (village) or, perhaps, the head of an administrative unit with the given town (village) as its centre. He must have been a representative of the royal administration, appointed by the King or the King’s deputy and answering to him. His exact duties are difficult to trace. In addition to administrative tasks, he might have been responsible for economic and fiscal policy and might have had judicial functions like the modern wali or sheikh al-balad.

Following persons designated as Tot/Thegna of Saï are known:

1) Ourtikashshi (oYpTiKavvi). He is mentioned in the document IN III 34 dated probably to the period prior to AD 1187. On the verso the document contains a sale of land and on the recto a contract of sale and cession of land. Ourtikashshi occurs in the second part (II 9) as the one who, together with a certain Sooja-Piki and his daughter Soundin-Nal, passes the payment for the land on to the seller, acting in the name of the purchaser.

2) Soundin-Nal (coYAAccai). He occurs in document IN III 37, line 27 (end of 1190s) as one of the witnesses to a sale of land. It is interesting to observe that he bears the same name as the woman who, together with the Tot of Saï named Ourtikashshi, acted as intermediary in the contract of sale of land as indicated by IN III 34. Perhaps the name Soundin-Nal was characteristic for the Saï island.
3) Ourse (OYPCH). He is the author of a graffito (see above) in the Upper Church at Banganarti. The graffito stands on the northern pillar at the entrance to Room 5, 149 cm above the floor. Dimensions: 53 x 9 cm; h. of letters: 2.3 cm (c in caeiN) – 6.5 cm (p in OYPCH). The inscription is unpublished.

† ἐμυ ουρχ οανην τοτι παγιεξαο.

I Ourse, Tot of the town of Sai, wrote this.

ἐμυ is a spelling variant for ἐμοῦ. ἐμοῦ stands for ἐγὼ here. The authors of the Banganarti inscriptions, just like the authors of visitors’ inscriptions on other Nubian sites, took (ἐ)μοῦ, (ἐ)μοί, (ἐ)μοῦ not for secondary formations of ἐγὼ, but for separate lexemes meaning ‘I’. This testifies to a complete collapse of the Greek declension system in Nubian Greek.

The personal name ουρχ has been attested only here thus far. Perhaps it is connected with Dongolawi urse, Nobiin oYpci = ‘root’. 27

The spelling caei seems to indicate that the toponym was a two-syllable one: /sa-ï/. It fits perfectly with the Meroitic Sye. 28 Note that Sai is qualified as a ‘town’ (ΑΠΠ) here and in other Banganarti inscriptions.

27 For attestations, see Armbruster, Lexicon (cit. n. 19), s.v. urse, and Khalil, Wörterbuch (cit. n. 19), s.v. oYpci.

28 Information kindly provided by Claude Rilly, Paris.
4) **Unknown person.** He is the author of a graffito in the Upper Church at Banganarti. The graffito is located on the northern pillar at the entrance to Room 4, 195 cm above the floor. Dimensions: 57.5 x 13 cm; h. of letters: 2.1 cm (ı) – 5.8 cm (γ). Unpublished.

ıt etειέ [ , ]... Ενεδά τον θανειλιον.

*I [ - - - ], Tot of the town of Sai, wrote (this).

5) **Dolse (Λαυτχ).** He is the author of a graffito on the western face of the southern engaged column in the northwestern support in the Upper Church at Banganarti, 199 cm above the floor. Dimensions: 29 x 11.2 cm; h. of letters: 1.9 cm (o in line 2) – 3.5 cm (λ), and note that ζ must have been much higher (ca. 5.5 cm). The inscription is unpublished.
The reading of the inscription is not certain. It is possible that the text mentioned two offices of the visitor and not one, with NH at the beginning of line 2 being the ending of the name of the first office. In this case, the translation would read: 'I Dolse, [---]ne of Sāi, being Thegna of the Beautiful Town'.

1. The personal name Δωάχ (sometimes written Δωάχι) occurs several times in inscriptions on the walls of the Upper Church at Baganarti. It has not been attested outside the Baganarti inscriptions thus far. It is undoubtedly of Old Nubian origin, but its etymology is unknown to me.

A dot over the final h in Sāiı probably marks the word accent thus indicating that the toponym was a two-syllable one: /za-iː/; cf. above, commentary to the inscription of Ourse.
The Greek epitaph of Merki found by the Canadian Mission in Hambukol\textsuperscript{29} testifies to the existence of the office of chartoularios of Saï. According to the epitaph, which may be dated to the 9th–10th century on palaeographic grounds, the man held the following offices (spelling normalised by me): νοτάριος, μειξότερος, χαρτουλάριος Σαη, ἐξαρχός ΤΙΜΙΚΛΕΩΣ ύφηλής γῆς, πρωτοδομήστικος = 'notary, steward, chartoularios of Saï, the very honourable military commander of the Lofty Land,\textsuperscript{30} protodomestikos'. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure in which sequence he entered these offices, as there are no strict rules of describing one's career in Nubian epitaphs. Additionally, the presentation of the deceased is rather carelessly edited in our epitaph. Only the sequence: χαρτουλάριος Σαη, ἐξαρχός ΤΙΜΙΚΛΕΩΣ ύφηλής γῆς is given in the main text of the inscription, woven into the syntax, while other offices are added freely on the right margin. This seems to suggest following cursus for our Merki: χαρτουλάριος Σαη, ἐξαρχός ΤΙΜΙΚΛΕΩΣ ύφηλής γῆς, νοτάριος, μειξότερος, πρωτοδομήστικος. Provided it were so, Merki would have started his career with offices in local administration (χαρτουλάριος Σαη, ἐξαρχός ΤΙΜΙΚΛΕΩΣ ύφηλής γῆς), then moved up to central offices at the royal court in Dongola (μειξότερος, πρωτοδομήστικος. As for νοτάριος, it might have been his initial occupation.

The office of χαρτουλάριος is very rarely attested with relation to Christian Nubia. In addition to the present inscription, it is on record only in the epitaph of Istephanou (Stephanos), discovered by the Polish

\textsuperscript{29} For the circumstances of the discovery, see Julie Anderson, ‘Monastic Lifestyles of the Nubian Desert: Seeking the Mysterious Monks of Makuria’, \textit{Sudan & Nubia} 3 (1999), pp. 71–83, at p. 75. The stone is in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto now. It will be published by me in the report from the excavations. I would like to thank Dr. Krzysztof Grzymski, Director of the Canadian Mission to Hambukol, for his invitation to publish the inscription and for providing me with the necessary information concerning the stone.

\textsuperscript{30} The translation is uncertain. It depends on the interpretation of the word TIMIKLAEOS which, judging by its syntactic position, may be either an epithet of a person or a toponym. An alternative translation: ‘military commander of Timikleos, a lofty land’. 
Mission in Dongola.\textsuperscript{31} In this epitaph, dated to AD 797, the dead man is designated as (spelling normalised by me): \textit{πρεσβύτερος, χαρτουλάριος, νοτάριος, ἀρχιμανδρίτης Μαρία Τιμαει, χοιακάβικ and ἐοκκαβίκ} = 'priest, chartoularios, notary, archimandrite of the Monastery of Mary in Timacie, Choiakisbibil, Joknaishshil'. It is interesting to observe that both Istephanou and Merki served in the offices of chartoularios and notary during their careers. Obviously, these two offices for which the knowledge of script was a prerequisite, were frequently filled by the same persons in Makuria, where the literacy rate must have been rather low. Apart from holding the offices of chartoularios and notary, the careers of Istephanou and Merki developed differently. As a member of the clerus, Istephanou followed an ecclesiastic \textit{cursus} becoming an archimandrite of a monastery, while Merki, a layman, had a civilian career which peaked in the high court office of protodomestikos.

It is not easy to determine the exact meaning of the office of chartoularios with relation to Christian Nubia. The term \textit{χαρτουλάριος} derives from \textit{χάρτης} = 'official document' which suggests that \textit{χαρτουλάριοι} had to do with tracing and keeping documents and records. \textit{χαρτουλάριοι} are attested from AD 326 until the end of the Byzantine Empire, the character of their office varied considerably in time.\textsuperscript{32} In Late Antiquity, they were subaltern officials in bureaus of various high officials, especially of military rank, like praetorian prefect, \textit{magister militum}, etc., later also in the imperial chancery. Starting with the Middle Byzantine period (9th–10th century), \textit{χαρτουλάριοι} rose in importance to become high functionaries with fiscal and archival duties in both central and provincial administration. They could have been nominated as heads of chanceries, military commanders and high-ranking courtiers. As the administrative system of Christian Nubia was apparently created in the 6th/7th century, during the official Christianization of the country and shortly afterwards, Nubian \textit{χαρτουλάριοι} should correspond to Late Antique \textit{χαρτουλάριοι}, i.e. they


should be officials of relatively low importance connected with drafting and keeping official documents. Such was surely the case of Istephanou who is simply qualified as χαρτουλάριος without any further designation. But the case of our Merki might have been different. The designation 'chartoularios of Saï' suggests that he was the head of an office located in Saï where official documents were drawn up and kept. This was either a town-office or an office connected with the administrative unit mentioned by al-Makrizi (cf. supra, ft. 1) of which Saï was the capital. Perhaps the chartoularios of Saï was one of the officials subordinate to the Tot/Thegna of Saï.

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