



PHARAONIC, BIBLICAL, AND BYZANTINE SUDAN

[Frederick Lauritzen](#)

13th September 2024



Cross (fresco), 11th century. Faras, Sudan, National Museum Warsaw.

Sudan has more Pyramids than Egypt. They are later than the Egyptian ones and are a tribute of the cultural influence from the North. Egypt occupied Sudan between 1550 and 1050, the New Kingdom. Amenhotep III, Akhenaten, Tutankhamun were Pharaohs who ruled what is now Sudan. Nefertiti was also their queen. It was called Kush (🏰📜). While Moses was still in Egypt, he led an Egyptian army to attack the capital of the rebel kingdom, Meroe. To end the siege, Moses was given a Kushite bride. In the Bible there seems to be a reference to this event:

And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. (Numbers 12:1 KJ)

She is called Tharbis in Flavius Josephus and was related to the royal family of the kingdom of Kush in the Jewish tradition.

After a long period of independence (during which the Sudanese pyramids were built), Sudan was split into three countries in the fourth century: Alodia, Makuria, Nobatia. These became Christian mainly in the sixth century. Their art and Christianity indicate influence not only from



Egypt (from the North) or even Ethiopia (from the south), but direct contacts with Constantinople (modern day Istanbul). When the Arabs were in touch with this area there was one kingdom, Makuria, which followed the Christianity of the Byzantine empire and its capital Constantinople. They were Orthodox Christians. In their capital, Old Dongola (Greek *Τιμικλεος* [Timikleos] Old Nubian *ἲνጥጥጎጎጎጎጎጎጎ*), and the Bishopric of Faras (Greek *Παχώρας* old nubian *ἲጠጠጎጎጎጎጎጎጎ*) there are numerous inscriptions written in Greek until the early 13th century.

The Kingdom of Makuria is crucial today for the interreligious dialogue. In the year 652, the Muslim Arab forces in Egypt signed an agreement with the Kingdom of Makuria which has absorbed Alodia and Nobadia). It is called the Baqt (بقت) and is a mutual non-aggression pact. The condition was that Makuria would receive large quantities of wheat and lentils in exchange for 360 slaves. It lasted over 700 years. It came to an end during the Mameluke rule of Egypt. The Mamluks were manumitted slaves who served the caliph in Baghdad. They were Turkish and fled Iraq to Egypt when the Mongols destroyed Baghdad in 1258.

The Baqt was a treatise agreed between the first Muslim rulers (the second generation) and a non-Muslim, a Christian, state. The terms are known exclusively from Arabic sources, but the concept is a byzantine legal one. The Byzantine empire would pay tribute to neighbouring countries with an agreement called '*pakton chrysiou*' (*πάκτον χρυσίου*). The Byzantine procedure was that the emperor would issue a golden bull (chrysobull, a document with a golden imperial seal) and would agree to pay gold in exchange for peace. It could also be called a peace treatise (*πάκτον ειρήνης* '*pakton eirenes*').

The reason for an agreement of this type (which derives from contractual agreement between individuals in roman law) is that civil law does not apply to the relations between foreign countries. It is part of *ius gentium* (law of the nations) and the realm of diplomacy. In the Byzantine empire foreign relations concerned only the emperor, since he was above civil law.

The European Union has accepted the legal value today of this sort of byzantine law and document. The monastic community/republic of Mount Athos in Greece was and is ruled by a chrysobull of Constantine IX written in 1045. When Greece acceded to the EU, the terms of the chrysobull were accepted as law by Brussels thus incorporating a byzantine legal framework and precedent within the European Union.

Sudan and its baqt (*πάκτον χρυσίου* '*pakton chrysiou*') of 652 AD reveals that Byzantine Law is an important keystone today for interreligious dialogue and international law.