

## Abstract

### **Kyriakós oikos? Diachronic conceptualisation of the space and function of Medieval Nubian churches**

The Greek term *kyriakós oikos* means “the House of the Lord”, or, in other words, a church. The project seeks to answer questions about the form, function and concept of the church in Nubia (modern Sudan) between the 6th and the 14th centuries CE. It also aims to verify existing theories and concepts concerning changes in medieval sacral architecture in this region.

Past researches on Nubian churches have focused on the evolution of architectural form and its internal divisions, but have marginalized or entirely omitted social factors impacting the location and internal organization of churches. In addition, researchers tended to work alone and focus on a single aspect of the material remains or category of sources. The project assumes a teamwork approach to the Nubian church as a sacral space, considering it from the viewpoints of archaeology, architecture, epigraphy, iconography, and social sciences. The form and functions, as well as the processes that the church underwent over the centuries, will be studied from multiple research perspectives, which, when combined, will produce the effect of synergy.

The focus of the analysis is a group of 23 sacral buildings from two capitals of medieval Christian kingdoms located in the Middle Nile Valley. Over twenty churches are preserved in Dongola, the capital of the kingdom of Makuria, and the remains of the churches of Faras, the capital of Nobadia, are housed in the National Museums in Warsaw and Khartoum. The group selected for analyses constitutes 25% of the total of ca. 220 identified churches, half of which are now beneath the waters of the Nubian Lake. The remaining published churches will be treated as sources of supplementary data.

The data collected on all the buildings, acquired through field research and excavations, as well as archival, library and museum studies, will be analysed and used to reconstruct the forms of the churches. As no church in Dongola or Faras has had its erection date established using absolute dating methods, samples for analyses will be collected, and the obtained results will be used to establish a chronology of changes of the sacral buildings.

State-of-the-art computing methods will be used to investigate the internal organization of space and define the relationship between it and its users. The spiritual message imbued in the architecture and decoration will be examined from the perspective of the worshipper thanks to the use of the eye-tracking method. A study of decorated stonework will permit a better understanding of the boundaries between zones with different levels of sanctity.

The results will be a multi-aspect functional model of the Nubian church and an understanding of the diverse changes it underwent over time. Published in articles in leading journals, as well as in the form of a monograph, the results will contribute to global research on medieval sacral space, highlighting the distinctiveness of the Nubian religious, social and artistic milieu. The project will bring a wealth of new data to the study of Christian sacral architecture of Dongola and Nubia as a whole. The comprehensive analysis of the Nubian church will allow description of the phenomenon of the Nubian church in a reliable and exhaustive manner, not only as a lifeless form, but also as an element of social life.