



## Identification of John and Matthew in Some Nubian Paintings of Twelve Apostles<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to show how, in certain Nubian paintings depicting apostolic colleges, the evangelists John and Matthew can be identified by the attributes they hold, namely books. Theoretically, a book is an attribute that can define many figures involved in writing or preaching, such as saints (especially bishops in Nubian paintings), apostles, evangelists and Christ. However, in these particular paintings I am describing, only two of the apostles are holding books and these are the evangelists John and Matthew. The other apostles hold *rotuli*, while Peter is singled out through the key. My argument is based not only on the attributes, but also on an analysis of other elements such as the position of the apostles in the whole college, their physiognomic types, and finally the surviving inscriptions. However, we should remember that not all Nubian paintings are preserved intact. In many cases, large fragments of figures, including their faces, are missing. Therefore, several elements must be taken into consideration during the interpretation of the content of the paintings. The research I have carried out can be helpful in identifying the individual figures that make up the apostolic college. It also shows how Nubian iconographers consciously used the language of symbols by differentiating between the earthly and heavenly hierarchies.

**Keywords:** Apostles; Evangelists; Nubia; Kings; Wall paintings

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The apostolic college was a constant element of apsidal painting in Christian Nubia<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, the state of preservation of these compositions is not always complete. In most cases, the *tituli* specifying the names of the apostles have not been preserved. The identification of Christ's individual disciples can therefore be made on the basis of the collation of several elements.

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Firstly, the position of the apostles in relation to the main axis of the apse, whose centre featured the Virgin Mary, a Nubian king, or an archangel. Secondly, the attributes, which, however, are not always individualised. Next, by distinguishing the physiognomic types of the individual apostles, i.e. their age, hair length, beard shape, etc. However, the features of the apostles are not always personalised. What remains, therefore, are the inscriptions which, although incomplete, nevertheless provide a basis for comparative analysis between the various scenes depicting the apostolic colleges<sup>4</sup>.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how, in some Nubian compositions, the two evangelists John and Matthew can be identified in the apostolic college on the basis of the attributes they hold and their position within the apostolic college. Still, to address this aspect, one needs to consider all the above factors, first and foremost which of the apostles were included in the apostolic college in Nubia.

### 1. The apostles included in the group of the “Twelve” in Nubia

The three, canonical Gospels list the twelve disciples of Christ as chosen by Him (Mt 10:24; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16). The arrangement of these lists and the position of the apostles are similar. A fixed position is held by Peter (first), Philip (fifth) and Judas (twelfth). Two of the evangelists John and Matthew are mentioned among the apostles. After Judas' suicide, the rest eleven Disciples are mentioned in the Acts (1:13).

Peter encouraged them to select one more apostle to complete the group of twelfth Disciples. There were two candidates: Matthias and Barsabbas. The apostles threw the dice and chose Matthias (Acts 1:23-26).

Theoretically, Matthias should be included as the twelfth apostle. However, his place was taken by Paul, according to Roman tradition. Therefore, Paul not only replaced Matthias in the apostolic college, but also found himself on the second position (not the twelve one). It resulted from his cult developing in Rome, the city where along with the Church tradition he was martyred<sup>5</sup>. The written testimony linking Peter and Paul's activities in

<sup>4</sup> More about this method of identification in: M. Łaptaś, *Attributes, Vestments, Context and Inscription in the Identification of Nubian Paintings: Proposing the 'Multi-Layer' Image Recognition Method*, “Études et Travaux” 32 (2019) p. 161-179.

<sup>5</sup> B. Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska, *Najstarsze świadectwa kultu męczenników w Rzymie*, in: *Sympozja Kazimierskie poświęcone kulturze świata późnego antyku i wczesnego*

Rome, and their martyrdoms appeared as early as in the end of the first century in the *First Letter to the Corinthians* attributed to Clement I the bishop of Rome. In this text, Apostles were described as “the most upright pillars who were persecuted because of jealousy and envy”<sup>6</sup>.

Eusebius of Caesarea referred to the opinion of Presbyter Gaius, who mentioned that the trophies of Peter and Paul were located (by the end of the second century) on Vatican and by the Via Ostiensis (HE II 25, 7). The further tradition linked the cult of Paul with that of Peter, the leader of the apostles. Therefore Paul was mentioned on the second position and this tradition also reached Byzantium. In the *Synaxarion* of the Constantinopolitan Church, which was compiled most probably in the tenth century<sup>7</sup>, the apostles were listed under the date of the 30th of June. That day the common feast of the apostles was celebrated named “Synaxis of the apostles”. The apostles listed under this date were: “Peter and Paul, Andrew, James son of Zebedee, John, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon and Jude (Thaddeus)”<sup>8</sup>. As one can see, Paul was mentioned here on the second place after Peter, whereas Matthias was not added to the group of the apostles.

On the other hand, in a homily attributed to Pseudo-Chrysostom there was an additional modification of the apostolic group. Two apostles are missing Evangelists, Luke and Mark were added to the group of the “Twelve”<sup>9</sup>. This way not only Matthias but also James, son of Alphaeus and Jude (Thaddeus) were removed out of the apostolic college<sup>10</sup>. The names of the apostles written on the elements protruding from the dome of the Mausoleum of Theodoric (ar. 520-526) were as follows: (1.) Peter, (2.) Paul, (3.) Andrew, (4.) Jacob, (5.) John, (6.) Philip, (7.) Matthew, (8.) Matthias (?), (9.) Mark, (10.) Luke, (11.) Thomas and (12.) Simon<sup>11</sup>. As

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*chrześcijaństwa* [= *Sympozja Kazimierskie*], v. 4: *Męczennicy w świecie późnego antyku*, ed. B. Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska – D. Próchniak, Lublin 2004, p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> Clemens Romanus, *Epistula prima ad Corinthians* 5,1-7.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. SJ R.F. Taft – N.P. Ševčenco, *Synaxarion*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, v. 3, ed. A.P. Kazhdan *et al.*, Oxford 1991, p. 1991.

<sup>8</sup> *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano*, ed. H. Delehay, Propylaeum ad Acta sanctorum Novembris, Bruxellis 1902, Iun. 30, c. 779-782.

<sup>9</sup> Pseudo-Chrysostomus, *In duodecim Apostolos sermo*, PG 59, 495-498.

<sup>10</sup> R. Knapieński, *Kolegium Apostolskie w sztuce pierwszego tysiąclecia*, in: *Symbol Apostolski w nauczaniu i sztuce Kościoła do Soboru Trydenckiego*, ed. R. Knapieński, Lublin 1997, p. 116.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. de Jerphanion, *Quels sont les douze apôtres dans l'iconographie chrétienne?*, in: *La Voix des monuments: Notes et études d'archéologie chrétienne*,

one can see two evangelists and Paul were added to the list of the apostles, however, this time Matthias was included into the group of the “Twelve” as well. To add him to the apostolic college, Bartholomew was removed this time. The set of the “Twelve” with four evangelists spread throughout Byzantium what was confirmed by the sixth century mosaics of the Church of the Panagia Kanakaria at Lythrankomi in Cyprus. Busts of the apostles were placed on the border surrounding the apse, in which the Virgin Mary seated on the throne with Christ encircled by a mandorla, flanked by two archangels, was depicted. Apostles located on the northern side were: Paul, Andrew, Matthew, Jude, Mark and Thomas; whereas on the southern one: Peter, John, Philip, Luke, James, Bartholomew<sup>12</sup>.

However, the studies conducted on the Nubian texts and images e.g. by Thomas Hägg<sup>13</sup>, myself<sup>14</sup>, and Adam Łajtar<sup>15</sup> have demonstrated that the lists of the apostles known from Nubia came closest to the one from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Thus Paul was not mentioned there, while second place after Peter was held by his brother Andrew. It looks like Nubia created a uniform apostolic tradition, whereas the lists of the apostles recurring in written sources, were also reflected in wall painting<sup>16</sup>.

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Paris 1930, p. 194; A.M. Shneider, *Die Symbolik des Theodorichgrabes*, “Byzantinische Zeitschrift” 41/2 (1941) p. 405.

<sup>12</sup> On the mosaics of the apostles in this church: M. Sacopoulo, *La Théotokos à la mandorle de Lythrankomi*, Paris 1975, p. 41-52; A.H.S. Megaw – E.J.W. Hawkins, *The Church of the Panagia Kanakaria at Lythrankomi in Cyprus: Its Mosaics and Frescoes*, Harvard 1977, p. 106-113.

<sup>13</sup> T. Hägg, *Magic Bowls Inscribed with an Apostles-and-Disciples Catalogue from the Christian Settlement of Hambukol (Upper Nubia)*, “Orientalia” 62/4 (1993) p. 376-399.

<sup>14</sup> M. Łaptaś, *St Andrew the Apostle in the Murals of the Upper Church in Banganarti*, “Études et Travaux” 22 (2008) p. 101-114; M. Łaptaś, *The Apostolic College in Egyptian Art Compared with Nubian Wall Painting*, “Kush” 20/2 (*Proceedings of the 14th International Conference of Nubian Studies, Musée du Louvre – Sorbonne Université*, Paris 2018), ed. M. Millet – V. Rondot – F. Payraudeau – P. Tallet, Cairo 2023, p. 615-635.

<sup>15</sup> A. Łajtar – J. van der Vliet, *Empowering the Dead in Christian Nubia. The Texts from a Medieval Funerary Complex in Dongola*, JJP Supplement 32, Warsaw 2017, p. 220-227; A. Łajtar, *Nubica. Bricks from Faras Inscribed with the Names of Saints*, in: A. Łajtar, *Studies in the History and Epigraphy of the Middle Nile Region in Christian Times*, Leuven – Paris – Bristol (in print).

<sup>16</sup> It is also worth to mention pseudepigraphal texts by Pseudo-Dorotheus and Pseudo-Epiphanius which were popular in Byzantium as a source of the catalogues,

While in written sources the apostles were listed one by one, in paintings, the order of the apostles did not start from right to left (or vice versa), but from the centre of the apse. As already mentioned, the apostles were not depicted as an independent group, but rather flank the central figure in the apse. They were therefore placed alternately according to their importance, relative to this central figure. A division into three tetrads could also be seen, with the first, most important one placed right in the centre.

A good example is the composition from Chapel no. III of the Upper Church in Banganarti, dated back by Bogdan Żurawski to the 12th century<sup>17</sup>, for in this scene both the facial types are individualised and some attributes specified (fig. 1). In the middle of the composition, a king is shown as protected by an archangel. Four apostles stand at his sides in the apse. Closest to the archangel and the king there are two brothers, Peter and Andrew (fig. 2). In keeping with the principle of ideological hierarchy, Peter is shown to the right of the monarch, while Andrew is shown on his left. Both apostles support the king at his elbows.

Peter is mentioned as first in all the lists in the Gospels, and in the Acts. His special position is a result of his being chosen as the head of the Church by Christ himself. By comparison, in a painting from the Faras Cathedral, showing the Apostles Peter and John, the former is defined as the *coryphaeus* of the apostles, a leader (fig. 3)<sup>18</sup>. In turn, in Banganarti, Andrew is depicted on the other side of the king. The Gospel according to John describes Andrew as the first to meet Christ and to bring to Him his brother, Simon Peter: “One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him we have found the Messiah (which is translated anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus” (Jn 1:40-42).

Andrew was the first vocated, therefore named *protokletos*. While Peter, on account of his martyr’s death in Rome, became the patron of that

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not only of the apostles, but also of 70 (or 72) Disciples of Christ. Cf. T. Schermann, *Prophetarum vitae fabulosae. Indices apostolorum discipulorumque Domini, Dorotheo, Epiphanio, Hippolyto allisque vindicata*, Leipzig 1907.

<sup>17</sup> B. Żurawski, *Kings and Pilgrims: St Raphael Church II at Banganarti, Mid-Eleventh to Mid-Eighteenth Century*, Nubia 5, Banganarti 2, Warsaw 2014, p. 146.

<sup>18</sup> The Greek inscription says: “+ ὁ ἅγιος Πέτρος | κορυφαῖο {υ}ς τῶν ἀποσ|τόλων | κ(αὶ) κλ(ε)ιδοῦ ἄ(ο)ς [τ]ῆς βα[(σιλεία)ς] τ(ῶν) οὐ(ρα)νῶν” (+ *Saint Peter, coryphaeus of the apostles and holder of the keys of the Heavenly Kingdom*), quoted after S. Jakobielski – M. Martens-Czarnecka – M. Łaptaś – B. Mierzejewska – B. Rostkowska, *Pachoras (Faras). The Wall Paintings from Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros*, PAM Monograph Series 4, Warsaw 2017, Cat. no. 15, p. 140.

city, Andrew, whose relics were brought to Constantinople in the fourth century, became, according to the later tradition, the patron of the capital city and, more generally, of the whole East<sup>19</sup>.

In Chapel no. III of the Upper Church in Baganarti, both apostles support the king at his elbows. Indeed, the iconographers who created the design for this composition knew how to highlight the king's stature and emphasise his position. Shown in the centre of the apse, the king is supported on the right by the *coryphaeus* of the apostles, and on the left by St. Andrew, the first vocated. He is therefore anointed by the *coryphaeuses* of the East and West, whose relics were carried by two sisters, i.e. Roma and Constantinopolis.

This idea corresponds to what Eusebius of Caesarea wrote about Constantine the Great (306-337). The emperor had a great veneration for the Twelve Apostles, which was to be demonstrated by the construction of a church dedicated to them in Constantinople. According to the above historian, Constantine wished to be equal to the apostles, Greek *Ἰσαπόστολος*, "foreseeing with extraordinary fervour of faith that his body, after death, would share the title with the apostles themselves, so that even as a dead man he would receive a share in the prayers offered in this place in his honour. He therefore erected in this church twelve tombs, like holy pillars, for the praise and remembrance of the company of the apostles, and placed his sarcophagus in the middle, having six of them on either side"<sup>20</sup>.

In the same apse of the Upper Church of Baganarti, John stands next to Peter, to the right of the archangel and the king. His identification is possible thanks to his position, attribute, and iconographic type, as well as a comparison with a painting from Faras Cathedral, which shows Peter and only John, to his right (fig. 3). Since in the Faras painting both apostles were described with inscriptions, fortunately preserved, this is good comparative material. The inscription around Peter's head and arms defines him as the *coryphaeus* of the Apostles. Around the head of John, depicted in the same painting from Faras, runs an inscription describing him as a Theologian. This designation refers to John as the author of the gospel, which is emphasised by his attribute, a codex he holds in his hand.

Like his brother James, the son of Zebedee of Capernaum, John was called after Andrew and Peter (Mt 4:21; Lk 5:10). In the scene of

<sup>19</sup> F. Dvornik, *The Idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the Apostle Andrew*, Cambridge 1958.

<sup>20</sup> Eusebius Caesariensis, *Vita Constantini* IV 60.

the vocation, his elder brother James is mentioned first. Therefore he takes a higher position, prior to John, in the canonical lists of Christ's disciples.

In Nubia, to the contrary, John is listed prior to Jacob. This change from the canonical lists has already been noted by Thomas Hägg, who compiled the lists of Christ's disciples on the magic bowls of Hambukol<sup>21</sup>. It was undoubtedly deliberate and intended to emphasise John's position as the author of the gospel.

In Byzantine art, John was depicted in two ways, either as a young man with dark hair, i.e. as a young disciple of Christ, or as a mature man with grey hair and a beard, the author of the gospel<sup>22</sup>. This is how John was portrayed in both Faras and Banganarti, so undoubtedly the intention was to highlight his wisdom, bestowed upon him by God<sup>23</sup>. In the Gospel according to Mark, the apostle is listed second, while in the other New Testament inventories he comes third (Mt 10:2-4; Lk 6:13; Acts 1:13). John's brother James was named "the Elder" (as opposed to James "the Younger", son of Alphaeus (Mk 15:40). He accompanied Christ in major events, such as the Transfiguration, during which the Saviour revealed his divine nature to only three disciples (Peter, James, and John, Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:2-10; Lk 9:28-36). Because of their impulsiveness, the brothers James and John earned the nickname Sons of Thunder – "Boanerges", as evidenced by the Gospel according to Mark (Mk 3:17)<sup>24</sup>. Despite this slight imperfection, they were distinguished by Christ. When the Saviour asked them what was their will, they answered – to sit on his right and left, "in His glory" (Mk 10:36-37). Christ, however, replied that it is not his to give the seats on His left and right (Mk 10:40)<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Hägg, *Magic Bowls*, p. 381: "The present list follows most closely that of Matthew, but lets the brothers John and James change place".

<sup>22</sup> J. Irmsher – A.P. Kazhdan – A. Weyl Carr, *John*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, v. 3, ed. A.P. Kazhdan *et al.*, Oxford 1991, p. 1045.

<sup>23</sup> Augustine in his homily compares John to the mountain: "This John, you see, my dearest brothers and sisters, was one of those mountains of which it is written: 'May the mountains receive peace for your people and the hills justice' (Ps 71:3). Mountains are lofty souls; hills are ordinary souls" (Augustinus, *Ioannis evangelium tractatus* I 2).

<sup>24</sup> These two apostles were often impatient, as evidenced by their reaction to the refusal of a Samaritan town to receive Christ. John and James asked Jesus: "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them". However, the Saviour stopped them (Lk 9:54).

<sup>25</sup> According to the Gospel of Matthew, it is James' and John's mother who asks Christ to allow her sons to sit next to Him in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 20:20-24).

This is, however, how these two are depicted in the Nubian chapels, and take the central position in the apses, along with Peter and John.

Chapel no. IV of the Upper Church in Banganarti features an inscription, carved on the capital of the north column: υ(ιῶ)ν βροντ(ῆς) – Sons of Thunder<sup>26</sup>, which, however, was not in the immediate vicinity of the images of John and James, but by the entry of the chapel. According to Adam Łajtar, it referred to the entire apostolic college in this chapel<sup>27</sup>. To my mind, the position of the inscription at the entrance might also have had an apotropaic meaning. Christ granted the Apostles “power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” (Mt 10:1). The Acts of the Apostles often refer to these actions on the part of the Twelve<sup>28</sup>.

To sum up this part, the identification of the first four “Disciples” in the apostolic college in Nubia is rather clear and confirmed by the inscriptions extant at some of the images as well as by the physiognomic types. The identification of the other eight figures is slightly more problematic. Here we may rely on the attributes they hold in some images from Nubia.

## 2. Identification of the apostles in Nubia by the attributes they hold

Not all apostles in Nubia hold attributes distinctive enough to be identified by them. An exception here is Peter, invariably depicted with a key. This attribute was assigned to him by Christ, who said: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19). The representation of these scene is a composition *traditio clavium* – Christ’s handing over the keys to Peter, known in art since late fourth century<sup>29</sup>. The sixth century, famous icon of Peter, housed at St. Catherine’s Monastery at Sinai shows him holding in his right hand keys and in the left one a sceptre topped with

<sup>26</sup> A. Łajtar, *Late Christian Pilgrimage Centre in Nubia: The Evidence of Wall Inscriptions in the Upper Church at Banganarti*, JJP Supplement 39, Leuven – Paris – Bristol 2020, p. 296, Cat. no. 374.

<sup>27</sup> Łajtar, *Late Christian Pilgrimage Centre in Nubia*, p. 374.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 5:6; 8:7; 16:16; 19:12; 19:16.

<sup>29</sup> B. Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska, *Najstarsze przedstawienia Piotra Apostoła a problem prymatu papieskiego*, VoxP 46-47 (2004) p. 397, n. 48-49.



the cross<sup>30</sup>. On his own, Peter is depicted with keys as early as the sixth century, for example in a famous icon now kept at St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai.

A spectacular, free-standing representation of Saint Peter was painted in the Temple Wadi es-Sebua (Egypt). The Temple of Amun in Wadi es-Sebua (Egypt), built by Amenhotep III (18th Dynasty) and rebuilt by Ramesses II (19th Dynasty) was converted into a church after introduction of Christianity in Nubia in the sixth century. Christians adopted the hypostyle hall and the temple's sanctuary for their church<sup>31</sup>. They plastered over the pharaonic reliefs of the temple and painted their own saints there. The apse was built up into the hypostyle hall and adorned with a painting of the Virgin with Christ Emmanuel flanked by the "Twelve". An image of Peter was painted opposite this scene, in the rear niche of the sanctuary. This place was important and primarily the Egyptian gods were carved there to whom two figures of Ramesses II offered lotus flower from both sides. Christians therefore chose a central location for the depiction of Saint Peter, right in front of the apse. In the painting in the sanctuary of the temple at Wadi es-Sebua Peter stands on his feet apart, frontally (fig. 4). In his right hand he holds a key with its shaft pointing upwards. This key is so large that the end of the shank and the wards rest against the saint's right shoulder. The apostle is portrayed with his characteristic physiognomic type, developed in Christian art in the fourth century. He is an elderly, yet robust man with white hair, forming curves over his forehead, while his beard is semi-circular and trimmed. The saint's eyes are large and almond-shaped, his nose is straight, and mouth – narrow. His serious face expresses concentration. A halo surrounds the apostle's head. Peter wears plain white chiton and himation, with no decorations. His yellow (goldish) key is emblazoned in rich decorative patterns. The titulus is inscribed at the top, on the sides of the saint's silhouette. To the right of the apostle ΠΙΕΤΡΟΥ is written, and on his left, in two horizontal rows at the top: ΑΠΙΟC, and below ΤΟΛΟΥ. The apostle's figure is linear, which is characteristic of early Nubian painting. The work may have originated

<sup>30</sup> *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. R.S. Nelson – K.M. Collins, Los Angeles 2006, p. 121-123, Cat. no. 1.

<sup>31</sup> H. Gauthier, *L'église nubienne d'es-Seboua*, in: *Rapports relatifs à la consolidation des temples*, v. 2, ed. G. Maspero, Le Caire 1911, p. 111-121, pls. CXXVII-CXXXI; U. Monneret de Villard, *La Nubia medioevale*, v. 1, 4, Cairo 1935-1957, p. 84-89, pls. CXXXIX-CXLI; M. Medić, *Vadi es Sebua*, "Zbornik Zaštite Spomenika Kulture" 16 (1965) p. 41-50.

even in the seventh 7th-8th century, as Włodzimierz Godlewski suggested or earlier<sup>32</sup>.

Both the location of Peter in the centre of the sanctuary niche and the size of the key were deliberately enhanced to emphasise his role for the propagation of Christianity. Peter was painted in the place previously occupied by Egyptian pagan gods. He took their place as a pillar of faith, the cornerstone of the Catholic Church. The apostle lifts the key as a symbol of victory over death, of the Resurrection and, of the triumph of Christianity. Undoubtedly, the authors of the painting enlarged the key to emphasise Peter's mission, which is additionally highlighted by his severe face<sup>33</sup>.

In Chapel no. III of the Upper Church in Banganarti, Peter is depicted in a similar manner, as an elderly man with a semi-circular beard, white hair, and a high forehead (Figs 1-2). His head, within a halo, is topped with an open Byzantine crown (*stemma*) with three pinnacles. In his right hand, St. Peter holds the keys, suspended from a wide hoop, as, with his left, he supports the king below the elbow. The apostle leans slightly towards the king, showing his support towards the ruler. He wears white robes: a chiton and a himation. Standing to his right, John blesses with his right hand, while in his left hand he holds up a closed codex, the cover of which is studded with precious stones (Figs 1-2). His face is more drawn than Peter's one, elongated by a grey pointed beard. White hair surround the sides of his face. As with Peter and the other apostles in this chapel, a halo surrounds his head, on which he wears a crown. The apostle blesses in such a way that his index and little fingers are straight, while the others – bent.

Andrew, standing on the left side of the king in the apse of Chapel no. III of the Upper Church in Banganarti holds a scroll in the left hand and supports the king with his right hand. He is shown as a man with medium-length, dishevelled grey hair and a frayed beard, which is typical of the iconography of this saint since the sixth century. Standing next to him, James has a short brown goatee, a high forehead and short hair ending above his ears. He stands on his feet apart, with the left hand lowered down, while the right one is hidden behind Andrew. The other

<sup>32</sup> W. Godlewski, *Wczesne malowidła ścienne z terenów Nobadii*, "Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie" 36 (1992) p. 31, fig. 8; G.J.M. van Loon – D. Zielińska, *Le temple du Ouadi es-Seboua: Les implantations chrétiennes*, in: *Études Coptes XVII. Dix-neuvième journée d'études Ottawa, 19-22 juin 2019*, ed. A. Boud'hors – J.H.F. Dijkstra – E. Garel, Cahiers de la bibliothèque copte 24, Paris 2022, p. 113.

<sup>33</sup> The other image of St. Peter was painted in the same building by the entrance to the "sanctuary". Cf. Monneret de Villard, *La Nubia medioevale*, 1, s. 88, Pl. XLI.

eight apostles, painted antithetically on the northern and southern walls of this chapel, either hold *rotuli* or have empty hands. Only one of them, shown on the southern wall of the chapel, holds a book. He is placed fifth to the left of the king, i.e. tenth, counting according to the lists in the Gospels. Given that the attribute of John the Evangelist is a book and that there are only two evangelists among twelve apostles in Nubia, he can be identified as Matthew. While in the Gospels and in the Acts, Matthew is placed on the seventh or the eighth place, this is still a position which is close to that he takes in this chapel in Banganarti.

Similarly, in Chapel V of the Upper Church in Banganarti, the apostle with the book is shown on the southern wall, but this time he occupies the seventh rather than the tenth position (fig. 5)<sup>34</sup>. On the opposite (northern wall), Peter and John stand next to the king as before. Their faces have been worn away and only their beards have remained (Peter's semi-circular and John's pointed ones)<sup>35</sup>. Still, the apostles can be identified thanks to their attributes. Peter holds the keys while John a codex (fig. 6). Matthew's seventh position is in line with the lists in the Gospels according to Mark (3:16-19) and Luke (6:14-16)<sup>36</sup>.

An analogy to this position of Matthew can be found in a painting from the "J1 Church" on Kulubnarti Island in Sudan<sup>37</sup>. The composition was located on the northern, eastern, and southern walls of the sanctuary<sup>38</sup>. It belonged to the second layer of paintings and is dated back to the thirteenth century or later<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Żurawski, *Kings and Pilgrims*, p. 160-161, fig. V 6.

<sup>35</sup> Żurawski, *Kings and Pilgrims*, p. 160-161, fig. V 7-8.

<sup>36</sup> Also in the Chapel III of the Upper Church in Banganarti there is a partly destroyed silhouette of the apostle in the northern intercolumnium holding a book. Possibly Matthew, Cf. Żurawski, *Kings and Pilgrims*, Fig. 9, p.154.

<sup>37</sup> Work in the Church was carried out by a mission of Kentucky University led by William Adams in 1969. Cf. W.Y. Adams, *The University of Kentucky Excavations at Kulubnarti*, in: *Kunst und Geschichte Nubiens in christlicher Zeit: Ergebnisse und Probleme auf Grund der Jungsten Ausgrabungen*, ed. E. Dinkler, Recklinghausen 1970, p. 141-154.

<sup>38</sup> After removing the paintings off the walls, by Silvestro Castellani in 1970, they were transported to Urbino for restoration. In October 1971, the restored murals were moved to the National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum. Cf. W.Y. Adams – N. Adams, *Kulubnarti*, v. 1: *The Artifactual Remains*, Sudan Archaeological Research Society Publication 2, London 2011, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> W. Godlewski, *The Late Period in Nubian Art from the Middle of the 13th to the end of the 14th Century*, in: *Sudan Past and Present/Der Sudan in Vergangenheit und*

The composition is divided into two parts now. One of them represents a central figure a king (?) under the protection of an archangel and the group of the apostles standing on their right side, as well as Andrew on the left side. This part is severely damaged (fig. 7). All the upper parts of the figures and two apostles are missing. The left hand of Peter is visible, holding a bunch of keys. The silhouette of the king is damaged at the top and bottom. The figures of the apostles on the left side are preserved in better condition, however, the lower part of their silhouettes is missing (fig. 8).

The figure of the king is damaged at the top and bottom (fig. 7). We see his right hand, lowered in front of him. The hand is white, the index finger and the thumb are spread apart and a maniple flows down between them. The king wears a long light-coloured robe, over which he has a blue, shorter kaftan decorated with rosettes. This type of robe helps to identify him as a king, by analogy with other Nubian compositions, e.g. from the Upper Church in Banganarti. In contrast, the two purple, somewhat unshaped elements running down the side of the figure are covered with eyes. Probably they are the wings of the archangel standing behind the king. The whole scene, therefore, depicts a scene of the protection over a Nubian king, similar to the Banganarti compositions.

Andrew begins the procession of apostles on the left side of the king. The upper section of his head, above the eyes, is damaged. Extant are the lower part of his face and the grey, medium-length beard, which is frayed at the bottom, as is typical of images of this apostle. Andrew holds a scroll in his left hand. Just beside him stands James, who in turn holds the scroll in his right hand. James' hair is short, hidden under a golden crown, while his beard is rhomboidal in shape. The apostle wears a long blue-sleeved tunic and an ochre (golden) chiton. A titulus bearing the apostle's name is displayed above his head. The following apostle holds a book in his right hand (figs. 8, 9). Due to the extensive damage to this painting, especially the pest marks (*arda*), the titulus has not survived, but this is the only apostle who holds the book on the southern wall of the sanctuary, pressing it to his chest. This apostle has curly hair and a pointed white beard. Looking upwards, he is clad in red and white robes. The face of the apostle standing to his left is entirely damaged, but the crown and halo can be made out. It can also be seen that

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*Gegenwart*, ed. R. Gundlach – M. Kropp – A. Leibundgut, Nordostafrikanisch-Westasiatische Studien 1, Frankfurt a/Main 1996, p. 50-60.

he is holding a scroll in his left hand. The fifth apostle is Thomas, signed with a titulus, visible above his head (figs. 8, 9). He is shown as a mature apostle with smooth grey hair and a pointed beard, holding a scroll in his left hand. This group is closed by the sixth apostle signed as Matthias. His face is drawn, and his pointed beard is slightly longer than that of Thomas. This apostle appears smaller than the other disciples. This is probably a deliberate effort to show that he was not Christ's chosen disciple and was added to the group of "Twelve" only after the death of Judas.

Based on the few surviving inscriptions of the types of physiognomy and the order and attributes of the apostles on this wall, they can be identified as following: James, Matthew, Simon, Thomas, and Matthias.

The figures are painted freely, at times even carelessly. They are quite stocky, although the fingers of the hands are elongated in a mannerist way, highlighted by the angular forms of the figures. The eyes of the apostles are raised and gaze upwards into space. All these features confirm this painting should be dated to the late period of Nubian art (thirteenth century or later). The iconographic model, on the other hand, is similar to that of the chapels at Banganarti dated back to the twelfth centuries.

To summarise the above observations, it should be noted that in both Chapels no. III and no. V of the Upper Church in Banganarti as well as in the Church at Kulubnarti, only two apostles hold books. This provides a clue, that the two may be evangelists. However, a book was not an attribute reserved exclusively for evangelists, in the context of the entire apostolic college it could fulfil such a function. Let us therefore briefly look at the identification of characters holding books in art during the period preceding the creation of Nubian paintings.

### **3. The scrolls and the codices as attributes in the pre-Christian, early-Christian, and Byzantine art**

Images of people reading texts from scrolls were known in the Ancient Greece during the classical period. This was demonstrated, for example, by the scenes on Greek vases of that period, showing figures holding unrolled scrolls in their hands and reading the text from top to bottom<sup>40</sup>. In the Hellenistic period and in ancient Rome, scrolls

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<sup>40</sup> H.R. Immerwahr, *More Book Rolls on Attic Vases*, "Antike Kunst" 16 (1973) p. 143-147.

became an attribute of philosophers, playwrights, and poets<sup>41</sup>, i.e. all those who pursued some intellectual activities or preached the word<sup>42</sup>. In late Antiquity, figures engrossed in reading appeared on sarcophagi. A scroll could also be metaphorical of an entire human life<sup>43</sup>. Christians adopted the scroll or codex motif that appeared on their sarcophagi, but it was given a new meaning, referring to the Resurrection. A case in point is the painting from the catacombs of Domitilla, dated to the mid-late fourth century, showing the deceased Veneranda led to Paradise by Saint Petronilla<sup>44</sup>. The saint points to the *capsa* full of scrolls standing on her left, above which an open book hovers. Regarding sepulchral art a scroll, or a codex, might have an eschatological meaning. In case of Christ holding them it may symbolise teaching. On the late fourth century so-called sarcophagus of Stilicho in the church of Sant' Ambrogio at Milan, Christ is represented twice among the apostles. On the front, he is shown as a bearded man holding a scroll, whereas on the back as a youthful one with an open codex<sup>45</sup>.

Regarding the evangelists, a scroll or a codex, combined with writing implements, might symbolise the creation of Gospels. In the sixth century, in the presbytery of San Vitale Church in Ravenna, the four evangelists were depicted on the southern and northern walls (“flanking the windows that open into the gallery”)<sup>46</sup>. They were captured in a seated position, against a rocky landscape. Each seated on a rock and holding an open codex which would read: “according to” and the name of the evangelist, e.g. SECUNDUM MATTHAEUM – “according to Matthew”. Additionally, the evangelists are defined through the four apocalyptic creatures standing above them (fig. 10). In the case of Matthew, represented on the southern wall, an angel emerging from heavens extends his right hand towards the evangelist, as if conveying to him what he is to write. The evangelist, holding a stylus in his right hand, writes the text in the codex. A table with an inkwell and writing implements is shown in front of the apostle. In the lower right-hand corner of the composition stands

<sup>41</sup> B. Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska, *Głoszenie słowa. Kilka uwag na temat motywu książki w ikonografii wczesnochrześcijańskiej*, VoxP 44-45 (2003) p. 131.

<sup>42</sup> P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, Berkeley 1995, p. 158-194.

<sup>43</sup> Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska, *Głoszenie słowa*, p. 132.

<sup>44</sup> G. Wilpert, *Le pitture delle catacombe romane*, Roma 1903, pl. 213.

<sup>45</sup> Iwaszkiewicz-Wronikowska, *Głoszenie słowa*, p. 139.

<sup>46</sup> D.M. Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2010, p. 246.

a *capsa* with scrolls. Matthew is shown as an old man with long grey hair and slightly curly beard.

John located on the northern wall, holds a codex that is turned towards him. The evangelist does not look at the eagle depicted above him, but forward. An open inkwell and a stylus are shown on the table in front of him. John is shown as an elderly man with a pointed beard and long grey shoulder-length hair.

From the sixth century, evangelists could be distinguished in the apostolic college through codices, like in the The Church of the Panagia Kanakariá at Lythrankomi in Cyprus<sup>47</sup>. However, in the scene of Ascension of the Syriac Rabbula Gospels only Paul holds a codex in his hand (fol. 13v)<sup>48</sup>.

While in the case of the evangelists, the book or the *rotulus* symbolises their work, in the case of the apostles it can signify their preaching the word: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).

In keeping with the above words, a *rotulus* or a codex may be an attribute not only of the evangelists, but also of every apostle or a holy bishop<sup>49</sup>. This way of showing all the apostles with codices was applied in the two-zone composition from the praying niche of Bawit (Room VI) in Egypt, dated back also to the sixth-seventh centuries<sup>50</sup>. In this composition, each apostle holds the same attribute – a codex. The name of each of the apostles was written above his head, but had these inscriptions not survived, it would have been difficult to identify the individual disciples unambiguously as their attributes were the same. On the contrary, the newly discovered painting of the Ascension located on the eastern panel of the dome over the sanctuary in Deir al-Surian (tenth century) shows most probably four evangelists holding codices (yet the silhouette of the fourth

<sup>47</sup> Megaw – Hawkins, *The Church of the Panagia Kanakariá*, 106.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. K. Weitzmann, *Late antique and early Christian book illumination*, London 1977, p. 101, Pl. 36. The manuscript from the Monastery of St. John of Zagba, written by monk Rabula (completed in 586 A.D.) is housed in Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana at Florence (cod. Plut. I, 56).

<sup>49</sup> M. Martens, *Księga jako motyw ikonograficzny w malarstwie ściennym w katedrze w Faras*, “Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie” 18 (1974) p. 309.

<sup>50</sup> C. Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1960, p. 200, pl. 25, 1.

one is partly destroyed)<sup>51</sup>. In turn, the icon of Ascension, housed in the Sinai Monastery (ninth/tenth century) shows three apostles holding codices<sup>52</sup>. Perhaps one of them is Paul, standing on the left side of the Virgin (like in the Rabbula Gospels) and two others – the evangelists (John and Matthew?).

In comparison, Nubian examples, described in this paper, stand out as they show a certain deliberate system of distinguishing the evangelists from the apostolic college. John in the painting from Faras Cathedral is described as a Theologian, which is an additional epithet emphasising his rank as the evangelist. The system used by the Nubians indicates a conscious emphasis on the role of evangelists in the apostolic college and definitely helps scholars identify them in those cases when their *tituli* or parts of their figures (sometimes including the faces) have not survived.

#### 4. Conclusions

The paintings from Banganarti Upper Church and from the Church in Kulubnarti, described above, show that the iconographers who created them deliberately introduced pluralism in the depiction of the attributes of the apostles. Apart from Peter, who is always shown with a key in his hand, the other apostles hold *rotuli*, i.e. symbols of their teaching. Still, the evangelists are singled out by the codices they hold. Since, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, a fixed set of twelve apostles was repeated in Nubia, which according to Scripture contained only two evangelists – John and Matthew, further identification (in conjunction with their attributes) can be made on the basis of their position relative to the centre of the apse.

The selected examples allow us to estimate that the Nubian iconographers wanted to show a certain gradation in the apostolic college by distinguishing two evangelists from the other “Disciples”. This system

<sup>51</sup> K.C. Inemée, *The newly discovered paintings in the dome over the sanctuary in Deir al-Surian*, “Byzantinische Zeitschrift” 116/1 (2023) p. 60.

<sup>52</sup> This icon is attributed to the Palestinian school, Sinai (?). Cf. *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. R.S. Nelson – K.M. Collins, Los Angeles 2006, Cat. No. 5, p. 131. Paul is also depicted by the left side of the Virgin in the conch of the prayer niche in Cell 42 of the Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bāwīt. Cf. Łaptaś, *The Apostolic College in Egyptian Art*, fig. 8.



indicates a certain consistency in presenting the apostolic colleges, while there was no such steadiness in the art of mediaeval Egypt<sup>53</sup>. In case of Nubia it might be the result of its own tradition and the order caused by the kings' patronage. The examples discussed in this paper show the apostles surrounding royal figures, therefore, the hierarchy applied might be reflection of court's ceremonial assuming gradation of the figures surrounding the kings.

### Figures

1. A Nubian king under protection of the archangel and twelve apostles. Chapel no III. The Upper Church in Banganarti. Drawing by W. Chmiel (Courtesy of PCMA).
2. Part of the fig. 1. A Nubian king under protection of four apostles. Apse of Chapel no III. The Upper Church in Banganarti. Drawing by W. Chmiel (Courtesy of PCMA).
3. SS. Peter and John the apostles. Faras Cathedral (Courtesy of the National Museum in Warsaw, Cyfrowe MNW).
4. St. Peter. Church in Wadi es-Sebua. Niche of the sanctuary. After: Medić M., *Vadi es Sebua*, 1965, fig. 15.
5. The apostles, on the southern wall of Chapel V in the Upper Church in Banganarti. Photo by B. Żurawski.
6. The colour drawing of Chapel V in the Upper Church in Banganarti. Drawing by M. Łaptaś.
7. Scene of protection and the apostles from the sanctuary of the Church at Kulubnarti. Photo by M. Łaptaś (Courtesy of the National Museum in Khartoum).
8. The apostles the second part of the composition from the Church at Kulubnarti. Photo by M. Łaptaś (Courtesy of the National Museum in Khartoum).
9. Drawing of the apostles: Matthew, Simon, Thomas, Matthias, from the Church at Kulubnarti (cf. fig 8) by Marta Momot.
10. SS. Matthew the evangelist, church of S. Vitale in Ravenna. Part of photo [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail\\_of\\_mosaics\\_%28526-47%29\\_in\\_the\\_Basilica\\_of\\_San\\_Vitale,\\_Ravenna\\_%281%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Detail_of_mosaics_%28526-47%29_in_the_Basilica_of_San_Vitale,_Ravenna_%281%29.jpg), wikimedia, public domain.

<sup>53</sup> Łaptaś, *The Apostolic College in Egyptian Art*, p. 635.

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## Anexes



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

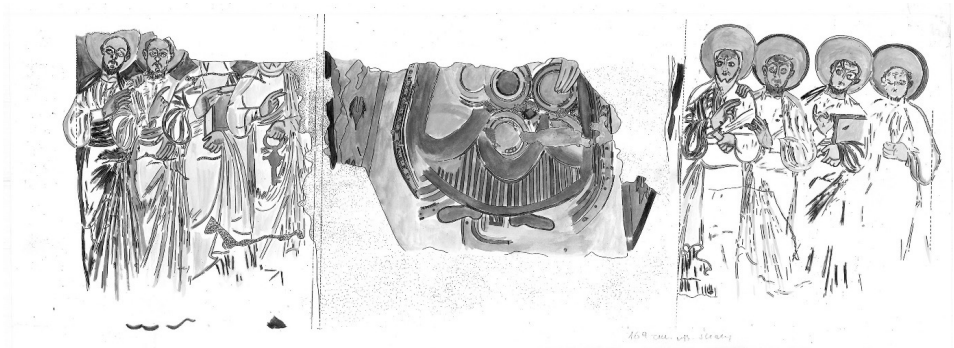


Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.