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# A Note towards Quantifying the Medieval Nubian Diaspora

Adam Simmons

Throughout the Christian medieval period of the kingdoms of Nubia (c. sixth–fifteenth centuries), ideas, goods, and peoples traversed vast distances. Judging from primarily external sources, the Nubian diaspora has seldom been thought of as vast, whether in number or geographical scope, both in terms of the relocated and a non-permanently domiciled diaspora. Prior to the Christianisation of the kingdoms of Nobadia, Makuria, and Alwa in the sixth century, likely Nubian delegations, consisting of “Ethiopes,” were received in both Rome and Constantinople alongside ones from neighbouring peoples, such as the Blemmyes and Aksumites. Yet, medieval Nubia is more often seen as inclusive rather than diasporic. This brief discussion will further show that Nubians were an interactive society within the wider Mediterranean, a topic most commonly seen in the debate on Nubian trade.<sup>1</sup> Above all, it argues that Nubians had a long relationship with Mediterranean societies that has primarily been overlooked in scholarship. Whilst the evidence presented here is not aimed to be definitive, it does highlight that Nubia’s Mediterranean connections may even have been more diverse than what Giovanni Ruffini argued for in his book *Medieval Nubia* whilst describing Nubia as a “Mediterranean society in Africa.”<sup>2</sup> May we even argue for a more developed thesis of interaction? What about the Nubian societies throughout the Mediterranean who interacted with other communities both spiritually and financially? It will be argued here that these questions should be revisited and have potential to further expand Ruffini’s Mediterranean thesis.

One limitation to such a study is that of focus. Here, only the Christian diaspora will be discussed. Without doubt, the Nubian presence within the Islamic realms was extensive, not least due to

1 For example OSMAN, *Economy and Trade*, pp. 113–127 compared to ADAMS, *Qasr Ibrim*, pp. 211–212, 249–250.

2 RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*.

the exchange of slaves as a result of the *baqt*. Quantifying the number of Nubians conscripted into the Muslim armies or the scale of other forms of slavery, notably of harems, would be impossible. However, the existence of Nubians as far east as Baghdad is widely accepted and is illustrative of the interconnectedness of the Islamic world, with more scepticism about the presence of Nubians in Europe.<sup>3</sup> In part, this is largely due to the fact that the number of Nubian slaves in Europe can never be known, given vague references simply to “negri,” rather than to a more specific ethnonym.<sup>4</sup> Although this Nubian slave diaspora is not the focus of this article, it is important to remember nonetheless. The Nubians in discussion here, due to the nature of the sources and their respective understanding of Nilotic peoples, should properly be seen specifically as the Nubians of Makuria (people from *Nubia*, *al-Nūba*, or an associated toponym/ethnonym). Whilst a quantifiable Nubian diaspora cannot be ascertained from the sources, it is the intention of this brief article to highlight the geographical scope of the diaspora and to suggest that Nubians were fully active members in numerous distant interactions.

Additionally, there is a geographical limitation to such a study due to the available source-base. As no internal sources discuss a Nubian diaspora, the chief sources for distant Nubians were written in the north, thus primarily creating a Mediterranean focus, centred on Egypt and the Holy Land. That said, the scale of western, eastern, and southern diasporas should not be forgotten either. For example, military expansion to the west is known, with Nubians seemingly regularly vying for control of trade routes along its western border with the Kingdom of Kanem and the Zaghawa.<sup>5</sup> Nubians who travelled westward would also have likely explored the trans-Saharan trade networks, just as North-West Africans travelled to Nubia.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, trade presumably inspired Nubians to travel further south and east down branches of the Nile, possibly even as far as the regions surrounding the northern Great Lakes, or eastwards towards Ethiopia and to follow the riches of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade.<sup>7</sup> Regrettably, the isolated remains of a monastery

3 The journey of Prince George in 836 being the most famous event: VANTINI, “Le roi Kirki de Nubie a Baghdad: Un ou deux voyages?”; SEIGNOBOS, “Le médecin et le singe du calife.” For thoughts on evidence of a more permanent Nubian presence in the city, see Seignobos, “Bāb al-Nūbi.”

4 CHRIST, “Differentiated Legality,” pp. 305–306. One example of an identifiable Nubian slave is a girl called Mubāraka who was bought from Alexandria in 1419: *Ibid.*, pp. 305, 310. For more on this slave, see BAUDEN, “Lachat d’esclaves,” pp. 271–304.

5 For example: OCHAŁA, “A King of Makuria in Kordofan.”

6 Such connections are stated by Ibn Sulaym in the tenth century: KHEIR, “Contribution,” p. 51.

7 Ibn Sulaym alludes to possible Nubian settlements further south than Alwa and toward Ethiopia, but without any indication of distances: *Ibid.*, p. 52. Further, it may be suggested that through future linguistic reconstruction of Northern East Sudanic languages, of which

at Jabal al-‘Ayn (c. 365 miles southwest of Soba) are the southernmost evidence for a permanent Christian Nubian presence known to date.<sup>8</sup> Although the nature of the sources limits our knowledge of these areas and interactions, an understanding of Nubian diasporas should not be limited only to the wider Mediterranean region.

### Egypt and the Holy Land

The main Nubian gateway to the Mediterranean was its connections with its northern neighbour, Egypt. Egypt has had a long, established history of a Christian Nubian presence, although Nubians are mostly noted in relatively late texts, primarily dating only to the fourteenth century, which is significant for attempts at quantification. The principle authors who witnessed Nubians throughout Egypt were Abū al-Makārim (c. 1200), Symon Semeonis (1323), Jacopo da Verona (1335), Niccolo da Poggibonsi (1345–1350), and Ludolph von Sudheim (1350). A Nubian presence was still substantial enough for Bernhard von Breydenbach (1496–1499) to be able to annotate his own depiction of the alphabet of the Nubians, though he actually depicted the Coptic alphabet.<sup>9</sup> Bernhard does not state how he learnt the alphabet, nor does he address where the information was gathered, be it in the Holy Land or Egypt. Regardless, a Christian Nubian presence existed in Egypt even throughout Nubia’s fifteenth-century decline, as also noted by Gabriele Capodilista in 1458, for example.<sup>10</sup>

One of the earliest pilgrimage centres to develop was situated on the Egyptian–Nubian border. Philae had been a shared pre-Christian pilgrimage centre, which kept its influential status following the Christian conversion of Egypt and then, later, Nubia.<sup>11</sup> Through the adoption of pre-Christian sites and the development of new ones, Nubians soon established numerous pilgrimage centres throughout Egypt. Such a centre, which became important to numerous Christian groups, was located at the Wadi al-Natrun (Scetis in antiquity).<sup>12</sup> Its lasting influence is reflective in King Giorgios IV’s choice to retire to the complex in 1158.<sup>13</sup>

Nubian is a member, an understanding of a southerly Nubian diaspora could be postulated, if not maintained. For example, we could follow an approach which somewhat inverts that of William Adams, or take a more expansive study similar to Robin Thelwall, although any linguistic approach can only suggest a presence of a permanent diaspora giving time for languages to interact and evolve, and cannot trace the mobile diaspora, such as traders, unless such trade was occurring for a prolonged period: ADAMS, “Coming of Nubian Speakers”; THELWALL, “Linguistic Aspects.”

8 EGER, “Ein mittelalterliches Kloster.”

9 ARNOLD VON HARFF, *Pilgerfahrt*, p. 152.

10 CERULLI, *Etiopi in Palestina*, p. I:255.

11 CRUZ-URIBE, “The Death of Demotic Philae”; DIJKSTRA, *Philae*.

12 AL-SURIANY, “Identification of the Monastery of the Nubians in Wadi al-Natrun.”

13 VAN GERVEN OEI, “The Old Nubian Memorial for King George.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the location of the complex at the Wadi al-Natrun, Nubians also established centres on either side of it at both Alexandria and Cairo. The survival of the Old Nubian Miracle of St Mina is suggestive of an importance that Alexandria came to have as a pilgrimage site, although no texts attest to a Nubian presence otherwise.<sup>14</sup> A Nubian presence should also be expected in relation to messengers to the Alexandrian Patriarchate before its relocation to Cairo during the reign of Pope St. Christodoulos (1046–77).<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether the move of the Patriarchate had any effect on the development of Nubian pilgrimage to either Alexandria or Cairo, or, indeed, had a detrimental effect. References to Nubians in Cairo all postdate this event, suggesting the relocation of the Patriarchate most likely had a positive effect on pilgrimage development. The new importance of Cairo was established almost immediately as King Solomon was invited by the vizier to Cairo following his abdication to the convent of St Onophrios in 1079.<sup>16</sup> According to Abū al-Makārim, writing c. 1200, Nubians (*Nūbah*) even shared a sacred space with other groups – Greeks (*Rūm*), Franks (*Faranj*), and Ethiopians (*Ḥabasha*) – whose envoys would be received at the court in Cairo where they would customarily worship alongside each other at the fountain at al-Maṭariyya.<sup>17</sup> The fact that no Latin European texts, which form the basis for current discussions on the Nubian presence in the Holy Land and Egypt, attest to this shared space further highlights how far the Nubian diaspora may be underestimated once Eastern texts are taken into consideration. Further questions regarding Nubian diasporic interactions with other groups are raised with the understanding that Niccolo da Poggibonsi also stated that he preached mass to Nubians, presumably in Latin or Italian alongside an interpreter, at the Church of St Martin near Cairo in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

Nubians were not restricted simply to commercial centres either. Elsewhere, they were seen at the Monastery of St Antony and St Macarius on the Red Sea, suggesting a rather widespread presence across Egypt.<sup>19</sup> Nubians do not usually appear in the area surrounding the Red Sea except at the above monastery. Currently, no

14 The Old Nubian Miracle of Saint Mina attests to the saint's influence on Nubian pilgrims whom would have travelled to Alexandria to venerate his shrine: TSAKOS, "On Place Names Used by Nubians for Places Outside Nubia," pp. 232–236. An early Byzantine coin, minted in Alexandria in the sixth century or later, has also been found at Old Dongola. Though the causal relationship between the coin and its context cannot be known, its appearance further suggests some Alexandrian interaction: LICHOCKA, "12 Nummia Coin."

15 It was said that the Patriarchate moved further south because of the number of messengers being received from Nubia and Ethiopia: SAWIRUS, *History of the Patriarchs*, pp. II.III: 3273–28.

16 MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Storia della Nubia*, pp. 128–129.

17 ABŪ AL-MAKĀRIM, *Tarikh al-kanā'is wa-l-adyura*, p. I:24.

18 NICCOLO DA POGGIBONSI, *Libro d'oltramare*, p. II:82.

19 LUDOLPHI RECTORIS, *De itinere terre sanctae*, p. 61.

evidence of Nubians at the monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai has been found, either in visitor accounts or through the presence of Old Nubian manuscripts.<sup>20</sup> At first glance, it would appear odd that Nubians did not visit or reside in the monastery at times given the multitude of other Christian groups known to have done so. Is it possible that Nubians had been present but they wrote in either Greek or Arabic instead of Old Nubian, appearing to be absent whilst their works have been subsequently catalogued as works of others? Or that their legacy is in the artwork of some manuscripts as opposed to the texts? Such study would not quantify a Nubian presence, but it would further enhance our understanding of the extent of the Nubian diaspora.

There was also a Nubian presence in the Holy Land adjacent to Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, identifying Nubians in the Holy Land during the first millennium is largely a problem of the identification of toponyms and ethnonyms, though it can be partially achieved. For instance, the otherwise unknown sixth-century Piacenza Pilgrim describes seeing men from “Ethiopia” (*homines a parte Aethiopiae*) in Jerusalem and Elusa who were said to have had their “nostrils split, ears cut, boots on their feet, and rings on their toes” by orders of Emperor Trajan, suggesting that these were actually men from northern Sudan as opposed to Aksumites.<sup>22</sup> Otherwise, the scant references that do enlighten the situation only use the vague ethnonym “Ethiopian,” such as the two “Ethiops” met by St Willibald on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the eighth century.<sup>23</sup> Problematically, Nubians only get referenced as such (i.e., as *Nubiani* or similar) from the twelfth century onwards, although, due to the perceived available sources, their presence has primarily only been viewed through Latin European sources written following the establishment of the Crusader States at the turn of the twelfth century.<sup>24</sup> Principally, according to such Latin European sources, Nubians were found in the

20 Dating from the building of the monastery to the present day, manuscripts have been found written in Arabic, Syriac, Georgian, Slavonic, Polish, Hebrew, Ethiopian, Armenian, Latin, and Persian.

21 Enrico Cerulli’s *Etiopi in Palestina* is still the seminal work on the topic but he often combines “Ethiopians,” “Nubians,” and “Jacobites” in his findings: CERULLI, *Etiopi in Palestina*. See also MEINARDUS, “The Christian Kingdoms of Nubia,” pp. 159–164; CECCARELLI MOROLLI, “Le fonti occidentali medievali”; CECCARELLI MOROLLI, “Ricerche.”

22 ANTONINI PLACENTINI, “Itinerarium,” p. 182.

23 HYGEBURG, “Vita Willibaldi Episcopi Eichstetensis,” pp. 100–101.

24 The German monk Theodorich was the first Latin pilgrim since the establishment of the Crusader States to explicitly note them in 1172: THEODORIC, “Libellus de Locis Sanctis,” p. 152. However, the Nubian presence may even have been much more extensive than the European sources suggest. For instance, Nubians (*Kūshaye*), along with Ethiopians (*Hindaye*), are implied to have been present throughout the Holy Land in the 1120s by Michael the Syrian, though the text is unclear whether they should be associated with the Holy Land or Egypt, decades prior to Theodorich’s “first” observational reference, challenging the notion of a lack of a Nubian presence during the first decades of Crusader rule as suggested by their absence in early Latin European accounts: MICHAEL THE SYRIAN, *Chronique*, p. IV:608.

Holy Sepulchre,<sup>25</sup> Nazareth,<sup>26</sup> and Bethlehem.<sup>27</sup> There is debate over whether the chapel on Mount Calvary had always been a place of worship for Nubians or whether it had been specifically gifted by the Sultan after 1333.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of this fact, the Sultan's gift would suggest that there was a prior presence in it for worship, even if it was not permanent. Although texts cannot be necessarily taken literally without certain rhetorical limitations, Burchard of Mount Sion, who visited the Holy Land between 1274–1284, stated that there was an infinite multitude (*infinita multitudo*) of Nubian monks amongst those of other denominations in the Holy Land.<sup>29</sup> Ludolph of Sudheim, in the mid-fourteenth century, calculates the combined number of this “infinite multitude” of Eastern Christians, including Nubians, at 400 monks and 40 converts (*conversi*).<sup>30</sup> One tantalising piece of evidence for a Nubian presence in the Holy Land comes in the form of a possible Nubian at the Crusader court called Guido of “Nubie” who is listed as an otherwise unknown witness to three separate letters in 1226, although it is impossible to know whether this man really was from the Sudan.<sup>31</sup> Christian Nubians are repeatedly referenced in the Holy Land even into the sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Whilst such late texts could simply have been continuing the tradition of noting Nubians in the Holy Land and at specific shrines, it does beg the question: how long did the Christian Nubian diaspora survive following the collapse of the Christian kingdoms? Additionally, was their survival explicitly linked to the degree of the success of their integration into wider networks?

This Nubian diaspora seemingly utilised the pilgrimage and trade networks of the Holy Land to great effect and were said to have been on Cyprus at least as late as the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere, Nubian messengers appear to have been present in

25 Some examples are: CERULLI, *Etiopi in Palestina*, p. I:220; BERNARD, *Guide-Book to Palestine*, p. 9; HORSTMANN, *The Three Kings of Cologne*, p. 263; JACOPO DA VERONA, *Liber Peregrinationis*, pp. 32, 39; LUDOLPHI RECTORIS, *De itinere terre sanctae*, p. 78; and LUDOLPHUS DE SUDHEIM, “De itinere Terre Sancte,” pp. II:352–353; NICCOLO DA POGGIBONSI, *Libro d’oltramare*, pp. I:94–95, 103–104.

26 NICCOLO DA POGGIBONSI, *Libro d’oltramare*, p. I:269.

27 JACOPO DA VERONA, *Liber Peregrinationis*, pp. 60–61.

28 DE SANDOLI, *The Peaceful Liberation of the Holy Places in the XIV Century*, pp. 54–55. It was Ludolph of Sudheim who initially wrote in c. 1350 that the Sultan had gifted the chapel to the Nubians in “his time”: LUDOLPHI RECTORIS, *De itinere terre sanctae*, p. 72.

29 BURCHARD OF MOUNT SION, “Descriptio Terrae Sanctae,” pp. 89–90.

30 LUDOLPHUS DE SUDHEIM, “De itinere Terre Sancte,” p. II:346.

31 MAYER and RICHARD, *Die Urkunden der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*, pp. III:1075, 1092, 1099. See also his appearance in a letter dated to 1243 where “Nubie” appears as “Nubre”: III:1200. It is possible that Guido was merely from a fief called Nubie in Tripoli, noted in a letter of 1163: RÖHRICHT, *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani*, no. 378, p. 99.

32 For instance, Ludwig Tschudi mentions Nubians in the Holy Land in 1519: LUDWIG TSCHUDI, *Bilgerfahrt*, pp. 147, 191–192, 199, 216, 306.

33 PHILIPPE DE MÉZIÈRES, *Life of Saint Peter Thomas*, pp. 99–100. This should also be viewed in light of a possible Nubian woman depicted as a donor in a small fresco in the fourteenth-century Carmelite church in Famagusta. The image is no longer visible, with

Syria. Our evidence is circumstantial but evidence for knowledge of Syriac in Nubia, despite no Syriac works currently being found, suggests that the language was for communication and, thus, facilitated a network of messengers.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, it can be suggested that Nubians may have had some occasional presence in Armenia, too. The only evidence for this is a statement by Hayton of Corycus who, whilst in France, wrote in his Crusade treatise that Armenians could be used as messengers between the Latin Papacy and the Nubians.<sup>35</sup> If this was the case, it may be presumed that some Nubians may have travelled to Armenia as messengers at various times in order for Hayton, who was also a prince of Armenia, to advertise seemingly strong communication networks between Nubia and Armenia. As this treatise was written before the more influential text of Marino Sanudo who further emphasised the possibility of allying with Nubians in the early fourteenth century, it would appear that any rhetoric in Hayton's text may be viewed less suspiciously and is indeed reflective of networks of communication. In turn, such networks appear to have been utilised throughout the Mediterranean.

With such an expansive presence throughout Egypt and the Holy Land, Nubians were able to interact with further networks and were not merely limited to neighbouring lands. Although these conjoining lands are most documented for a Nubian presence, this may largely be reflective of the geography and not necessarily of a large-scale Nubian absence further afield. Their larger presences in Egypt and the Holy Land did, however, enable Nubians to further interact with other Mediterranean societies and supported their role as non-peripheral active members within the wider Mediterranean world.

### The wider Mediterranean

Travelling great distances using such networks and routes should be considered no surprise. It would be safe to presume that an undocumented Nubian diaspora existed like that of other prominent groups, such as Italian merchants, who did leave behind evidence of their presence. That said, just how expansive was the Nubian diaspora and what can we learn by broadening our approach?

our understanding of the image restricted to its recorded depiction in the late nineteenth century, and is not accompanied by any text, though her depiction may suggest a Nubian origin. If true, this poses further questions for the degree of interaction by the either resident or visiting possible Nubian presence on the island: BOROWSKI, "In the Midst of Enemies?" pp. 103–106.

34 Ibn al-Nadīm notes the Nubian knowledge of Syriac in the tenth century: IBN AL-NADĪM, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, I:119; an otherwise unknown twelfth-century Syriac alphabet has also been found in Nubia: VAN GINKEL & VAN DER VLIET, "A Syriac Alphabet from Qasr Ibrim." The current corpus of texts found in Nubia has been discussed in OCHALA, "Multilingualism in Christian Nubia," pp. 26–27.

35 HAYTON OF CORYCUS, "La Flor des Estoires," p. 247.



The first region which needs to be further explored for the presence of Nubians is Byzantium.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, Greek sources offer little in the way of revealing the existence of Nubians within Byzantium, but, apart from any potential migration following service in the army (most specifically in the fifth and sixth centuries when Egypt was still under Byzantine control) and the exchange of messengers, Nubians are not known for appearing within the Empire. However, this would seem unlikely given that Nubians would surely have travelled to the Byzantine capital, especially during the sixth century, in order to learn more about Christianity and the Byzantine style of architecture, which became prominent in Nubia following its conversion by Byzantine missionaries. If not, the alternative would be to suggest that far more Byzantines were present in Nubia during this time than the mere few companions of the missionaries Julian and Longinus to act as both missionaries and artisans. A similar undocumented movement of Nubians may also have occurred in the Italian peninsula towards the end of the first millennium. The Anastasis scene at Banganarti in Nubia (c. 850-c. 1050) has been argued by Bogdan Żurawski to look notably “Italian,” specifically when compared with the Anastasis scenes at San Clemente and San Giovanni e Paulo for their dark contrasting backgrounds as opposed to traditional Byzantine or Coptic styles, including the one other Nubian example at Faras. If Żurawski’s comments are correct, this would suggest that either Italian artisans travelled to Nubia or Nubian artisans travelled within Italy in order to explain the Banganarti scene’s style.<sup>37</sup> Artistic and architectural influences can only remain tentative, but they do suggest a possible otherwise unknown Nubian diaspora.

One later source suggests a Byzantine use of Nubian soldiers. Agapius, Bishop of Manjib in Syria, describes in his tenth-century text Nubian (*Nūbah*) soldiers aiding Anastasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, against Emperor Leo III in the eighth century.<sup>38</sup> Consistently, these Nubians have been translated as Bulgars or Georgians, primarily based on the apparent unlikelihood of them being actual Nubians despite being described as “black” (*aswad*).<sup>39</sup> There is no reason to suggest here that the Nubians in question were not indeed African Nubians especially being described as “black” and with communication channels still being open, particularly between the

36 Byzantine-Nubian relations more generally have been explored, but this scholarship has not seriously challenged the perception of a two-way exchange and has focused primarily on the influence of Byzantium on Nubia: FRENK, “Nubia as an Outpost of Byzantine Cultural Influence”; DEMICHELI, “I regni cristiani di Nubia e i loro rapporti col mondo bizantino”; GODLEWSKI, “Nubia, Egypt and Byzantium”; ZACHAROPOULOU, *Νουβία και Βυζάντιο*.

37 ŻURAWSKI, “The Anastasis Scene.”

38 AGAPIUS, *Kitab al-'Unwan*, p. 503 [243].

39 *Ibid.*, p. 503n3; HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa*, p. 218n611.

patriarchs of Byzantium and Alexandria. Other intriguing cases appear in the work of the twelfth-century Archbishop of Thessaloniki, Eustathios, who describes “black abbots” (μαυροηγούμενον) and “black monks” (μαυροχαλόγηρων) in Thessaloniki,<sup>40</sup> and the “black men” (described as *aswad*) who were guards at the palace at Constantinople witnessed by Hārūn b. Yaḥyā whilst in captivity in c. 886.<sup>41</sup> Were these Nubians too? It should also be noted that due to the mistaken reading of the Russian “на Черном великом уболе” (great black embolon) in Sofia de Khitrow’s 1872 French translation of Anthony, Archbishop of Novgorod’s, c. 1200 pilgrimage text to “embolon des Noirs,” it is still wrongly maintained by some historians that Africans were in fact present in Constantinople.<sup>42</sup> Africans, and indeed Nubians, may well have been present in the city, but Anthony’s text does not bear witness to it.

Could, then, Byzantium host Nubians at its court? According to Eustathios, “Ethiopians” could be observed at the court of Emperor Manuel I in 1173/1174 amongst other foreign peoples.<sup>43</sup> Nubians may have been welcomed at the Byzantine court, although Eustathios himself may have been employing rhetoric, or unable to determine who the “Ethiopians” actually were. That said, the use of a court translator in arguably the most well-known appearance of a Nubian in Constantinople suggests that Nubians were indeed hosted by the Byzantine court. No single event arguably reveals more about the Nubian Mediterranean diaspora than the arrival of a Nubian king in Constantinople in 1203 who was welcomed by the Byzantine emperor.<sup>44</sup> The king, probably Moses George,<sup>45</sup> was reported by Robert of Clari to have been on a pilgrimage, already via Jerusalem, in which his entourage had decreased from sixty in number to two upon reaching Constantinople, but who still intended to travel to Rome and Santiago de Compostela before returning to Jerusalem for the king to die there if he lived long enough.<sup>46</sup> A Nubian presence in Je-

40 EUSTATHIOS, *Opuscula*, p. 342. That is the opinion posited by Kizobo O’Bweng-Okwess and Ray Kea: O’BWENG-OKWESS, “Byzance en guerre contre les Arabes et les Noirs d’Afrique du IXe au XIIe,” p. 102; KEA, “Mediterranean in Africa,” p. 437. Though in all likelihood, these were Benedictines, known as “black monks” for their clothing, not their ethnicity.

41 GOEJE, *Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum*, p. VII:120. See O’BWENG-OKWESS, “Le témoignage d’Haroun ibn-Yahya.”

42 САВВАЙТОВ, *Путешествие новгородского архиепископа Антония*, p. 43; DE KHRITROW, *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, p. 105. This mistake has long been known, as pointed out by Rodolphe Janin, but is still ignored: JANIN, “Études de topographie byzantine,” p. 141n5. For example, it appears in: O’BWENG-OKWESS, “Η παρουσία τῶν Νεγροαφρικανῶν,” pp. 93–94; KEA, “Mediterranean in Africa,” p. 437.

43 EUSTATHII THESSALONICENSIS, *Opera Minora*, pp. 263–264.

44 ROBERT DE CLARI, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, p. 130. For the debate on the event, see ROSTKOWSKA, “The Visit of a Nubian King to Constantinople in AD. 1203”; HENDRICKX, “Un roi Africain à Constantinople en 1203”; FIACCADORI, “Un re di Nubia a Constantinopoli nel 1203.”

45 RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*, p. 251.

46 ROBERT DE CLARI, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, p. 130.

rusalem is not problematic, neither is one particularly in Constantinople; the questions arise of any such presence in either Rome or Spain. There are no texts which note Nubians in Rome during the medieval period but they are listed at Santiago de Compostela. In a Latin codex, “Nubiani” appear amongst the many Christian groups said to worship at the site in the twelfth century, though its authenticity has been questioned.<sup>47</sup> However, in addition, a separate Arabic reference to Nubians (*Nūbah*) at the site can be found in a text dated to 1312 in relation to the year 997.<sup>48</sup> That said, the Nubian diaspora, as with the African diaspora more generally, should currently be seen to be underestimated. So much so that questions which arise from the Nubian king’s journey – such as how did he and his entourage supply themselves? – are currently without any answer in either Nubian or medieval European economic scholarship. Was a Nubian diaspora integrated enough into the wider Mediterranean, either spiritually or fiscally, to either access institutions such as banks and hostels with relative ease or to be able to seek fellow Christian charity to fund such extensive travel?

Additional questions of social integration are also posed by the Nubian diaspora, such as what languages were used for communication between groups? Arabic would appear to be the most likely answer, especially in the eastern Mediterranean and Spain, whilst the knowledge of Syriac in Nubia suggests alternative means of communication in Syria. Yet, what about in Cyprus and Europe? How suggestive could the use of *santa* (σάντα) in a late-twelfth-century Old Nubian document be for at least some Nubian knowledge of Italian for trade?<sup>49</sup> The use of Arabic and Greek appear to be discounted in the encounter with the Nubian king in Constantinople as a translator was needed to speak to the king in “his language”; both Arabic and Greek would have been recognised in the Greek court and amongst the Crusaders to inform Robert de Clari’s choice of words for his description.<sup>50</sup> Communication in Arabic, or even Greek, may have formed the basis of diplomatic exchanges, but some pidgin knowledge of other languages should be expected where interactions with Europeans were common. Coptic was known in the Holy Land by some Crusaders, possibly also facilitating communication with Nubians.<sup>51</sup> Equally, as difficult as it is to suggest Nubian means of communication, it should not be discounted that limited numbers of Europeans may have known certain languages to communicate

47 SEIGNOBOS, “L’autre Ethiopie,” pp. 52–53.

48 LIBER SANCTI JACOBI, *Codex Calixtinus*, pp. I:148–149; IBN ‘IDHĀRĪ AL-MARRĀKUSHĪ, *Kitāb al-bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa-al-Maghrib*, p. II:296.

49 The Qasr Ibrim Archive at the British Museum, P.QI inv. 74.1.29/7A. The reference was first noted by Giovanni Ruffini: RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*, pp. 262–263.

50 ROBERT DE CLARI, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, p. 130.

51 ASLANOV, “Languages in Contact.”

with Nubians too. Intimate daily interaction, especially in Jerusalem and Cairo, would have developed knowledge, specifically regarding language use. As a Nubian presence throughout the Mediterranean is documented, their means of communication and social and economic integration would have been vital, though unfortunately no evidence exists for such answers. Future studies, however, and still to be discovered sources may one day be able to shed light on these problems.

This brief discussion does not wish to inflate figures; instead its intention is to highlight that there is plenty of scope for enhancing our understanding of the scale and diversity of medieval Nubians living and travelling outside of the Sudan during the medieval period and the social and economic history of Nubians outside of Nobadia, Makuria, and Alwa. The Nubian diaspora, though limited in our evidence, was relatively prosperous and far-reaching. Even without taking into account further possible references and fixating only on those which use the ethnonym of "Nubian," the picture is clear – many Nubians travelled widely throughout the medieval period, whether for military reasons, pilgrimage, or trade, and were particularly active in the wider Mediterranean. Their presence in Egypt and the Holy Land is particularly well known, yet sporadic references to Nubians across Europe which have received less attention appear too. Although it is impossible to suggest a number for the size of the Nubian diaspora, whether as a whole or by focusing on certain locations, their wide-spread presence outside of traditionally viewed arenas, such as Egypt or the Holy Land, enables the exciting possibility of plenty of new avenues for future study to be undertaken. Moreover, the diaspora poses many more questions for its role in Mediterranean society, particularly questions of communication and interaction that go hand in hand when a presence is noted, which have so far been neglected. The present limited or lack of sources should not stop these questions being asked. Indeed, not only was Nubia an integrated society within the wider Mediterranean, one that arguably should even be viewed as more interactive than has previously been postulated, but was also likely to have been involved in wider African and Asian networks too. Medieval Nubians had international interactions.

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