

The Murals on Entrance Porch of the Faras Cathedral

STEFAN JAKOBIELSKI

Abstract: The aim of the article is to discuss a dating of two murals painted in a *tempera* technique on the walls of the southern entrance porch of Faras cathedral, namely the representations of an archangel and St Mercurius on horseback. Both were originally dated to the late tenth or the early eleventh century, but some scholars suggested that these works of arts could have been painted as late as in the late twelfth century or even later. That is at the time when area of the porch together with adjoining staircase had certainly been covered with a roof. Such a dating however, seems largely inadequate in view of the stylistic evidence and the artist's workshop characteristics, so an effort to restore the original dating has been undertaken in the present article, in the belief that the porch must have been covered earlier in a something way. There follows a suggestion concerning construction of the original roofing. The latter part of the article concerns a possible identification of the archangel's figure as Gabriel (and not Michael).

Keywords: Nubia, Cathedral of Faras, mural paintings, Christian iconography, archangels, St Mercurius

Stefan Jakobielski, Instytut Kultur Śródziemnomorskich i Orientalnych PAN, Warszawa;
sjakobielski@iksio.pan.pl

It would seem that after nearly fifty years of studies on wall paintings from Faras at least its chronology would have been firmly established, but still, as appears, the dates prompt further debate, this time on the paintings from the southern porch (**Fig. 1**).

The Faras collection is of major significance, not only in terms of its artistic value, but also because the paintings were executed on successive layers of plaster coating the cathedral's walls thus enabling a general chronology to be proposed for this mural art.¹

¹ A preliminary chronology and stylistics of murals from the Faras cathedral has already been published by Kazimierz Michałowski in a series of works: Michałowski 1964; 1967; 1970a; 1972; 1974. A document of fundamental significance for the chronology is the *List of Bishops of Pachoras*; see: Jakobielski 1966; 1972: esp. 190–195; 1982a: 127–133; 2013: 23–24, 28–29 (revised edition).



1. Painting representing an archangel in the moment of discovery. Stanisław Jasiewicz and Marek Marciniak cleaning the mural under the eye of Professor Michałowski (Phot. T. Biniewski © IKŚiO PAN).

It has even led, in the course of further detailed studies (observation of stylistic features and decorative patterns including) to the distinguishing of diversified groups of works painted by individual artists or teams of artists working at Faras.²

Amongst the assemblage of the early Faras murals alone there are examples of two groups. The first one (comprising about 30 paintings) consists of a planned – uniform decorative scheme for the cathedral made after its rebuilding by Bishop Paulos and dated generally to an undefined period within the eighth century.³ The second group forms later supplementation of the décor, as wall-space allowed, with works by a variety of ninth-century painters. Their efforts to perfect their skills gave rise to the characteristic features of Nubian painting. In the early tenth century the cathedral interiors were re-plastered and adorned with some new murals. However, the new decorative scheme was not completed until the latter half of the tenth century, when, during the episcopate of Petros (974–997), it was decided to comprehensively remodel the cathedral's *naos*. Its granite columns were replaced by massive mud-brick piers which supported domed vaulting. At the turn of the tenth century 60 murals were painted in the new interior by artists from a single atelier,

² See esp.: Martens 1972; 1973; Martens-Czarnecka 1982a; 1982b; 1989; Jakobielski 1982b; 2002; 2007; 2014; Godlewski 1992a; 1992b.

³ See recently: Jakobielski 2014: 257–259.

clearly inspired by Byzantine art,⁴ in a style in which figures are depicted with a great attention to the details added to their lavishly decorated robes and attributes. The school of painting represented during this period was widespread in Nubia and numerous examples of it have been encountered throughout the territories of the Nubian Kingdom.

The later development of a distinctive local style of painting, dated to the late eleventh till mid-twelfth century, took place in keeping with the same artistic principles, similar canons of composition and even decorative motifs being retained,⁵ both in the Nubian capital, Dongola and across the whole of the northern province – Nobadia.

The final phases of the cathedral's artwork, starting from the late twelfth century, making use again of available empty wall-spaces, brought an entire series of representations of the court and Nubian Church dignitaries depicted under the protection of holy figures. From the mid-thirteenth century onwards we witness a gradual decline in the art of painting, though there is still an active interest in embellishing the cathedral with murals. At that time the last rebuilding episode takes place. It was intended primarily to ensure that the edifice remained accessible in the face of the serious threat by the sand dunes building up around it; the ground level outside had already reached the level of windows, and external corridors with staircases leading down to entrances were installed alongside north and south façades of the cathedral. In the place of the entrance porch which is of a particular interest herein, a staircase had been created, and its area roofed.

The aim of this article is to discuss a somewhat controversial dating of two murals painted on walls of the southern entrance porch of Faras cathedral (**Fig. 2**).

One of these is the representation of an archangel (**Fig. 3**) located on the north wall.⁶ The archangel is depicted as a full-length standing figure, 1.75m in height, in frontal pose with his shod feet set apart and with outstretched yellow wings, edged with red and black lines, and with their ends turned outwards. The inner edge of wings forms a wavy line imitating plumage. With both hands the archangel removes a red sword of yellow hilt and red blade from its purple-brown scabbard decorated with precious stones and provided with red sword-belts. Archangel's head is encircled by a yellow halo with black circumference, contoured with a thick red line. His white face with facial features done in black, red and green lines is framed by his red hair, rendered in the form of fish-scale motifs, which is swept up into a topknot. He wore a yellow crown (not preserved). The archangel is clad in a white *chiton* with long, narrow sleeves decorated at the hem with a band of red double diamond lattice dotted red in each diamond, and with two green

⁴ See esp.: Martens-Czarnecka 1982b: 82–84; 1989: 10–12; 2010; Mierzejewska 1999: esp. 290–294; otherwise cf. Scholz 2001: 184–185, 193.

⁵ Martens-Czarnecka 2011: 261–262.

⁶ The painting is at present in the National Museum, Warsaw, inv. no. 149671; Field inv. no. 102. See: Wesel (Ed.) 1963: cat. no. 473, Pl. XII; *Exhib. Zürich 1963/64*: cat. no. 390; *Exhib. Paris 1964*: cat. no. 300, Pl. X; Michałowski 1965: 88–93, Fig. 63; 1967: 129–130, Pls 49–50; Michałowski (Ed.) 1969: cat. no. 13; 1970b: cat. no. 13; Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 41; Martens-Czarnecka 1982b: 60–62; Górecki 1990: 535–540; [Mierzejewska, Łaptaś] 2002: 95–97 (cat. no. 27); Mierzejewska 2014: 90, Fig. on p. 91; Jakobiński *et al.* forthcoming: cat. no. 121.



2. Entrance porch of the Cathedral seen from the south-west (Phot. M. Niepokólczycki © IKŚiO PAN).

galloons on the sleeve as also decorative cuffs with a pattern similar to that on the hem. Over it he wears a dalmatic with wide, three-quarter-length sleeves adorned with pairs of yellow bands comprising four red lines, each pair separated from its neighbour by double green stripes. The robe is tied at the hips with a brown belt emblazoned with green and red precious stones. The archangel is represented as an armed warrior in *chlamys* patterned by a red single-line lattice featuring alternate rows of red and green dots within the diamonds and edged by a band of plain yellow trim and has a semi-circular green collar. The *chlamys* is fastened on the right shoulder by a large cruciform brooch encrusted with red and green jewels.

The other painting to deal with is located on the east wall of the entrance porch and represents a scene of killing the Emperor Julian the Apostate by St Mercurius (**Fig. 4**).⁷ The saint is represented in an attitude of a warrior on horseback galloping to the right. In his left hand seen from behind the horse's neck he holds reins and a round white shield.

⁷ See: Wessel (Ed.) 1963: cat. no. 472, Pl. XIII; *Exhib. Zürich 1963/64*: cat. no. 389; *Exhib. Paris 1964*: cat. no. 299, Pl. XI; Michałowski 1965: 94–95, Fig. 94; 1967: 128, Pl. 48; Michałowski (Ed.) 1969: cat. no. 16; 1970b: cat. no. 16; Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 42; Lucchesi-Palli 1982: 162–169; Martens-Czarnecka 1982b: 63, 73, 77; Górecki 1990: 535–540; Scholz 2006: 164–209; [Mierzejewska, Łaptaś] 2002: 93–95 (cat. no. 26); Mierzejewska 2014: 88–89, Fig. on p. 89; Jakobielski *et al.* forthcoming: cat. no. 122.



3. Mural representing an archangel from the entrance porch of the Faras cathedral. National Museum, Warsaw, inv. no. 149671 (Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 41).



4. St Mercurius on horseback, a mural from the entrance porch of the Faras cathedral. National Museum, Warsaw, inv. no. 149672 (Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 42).

In the right (not preserved) hand possibly raised high he clutches a brown shaft of a spear with long black spearhead with which he pierces through a small bearded figure of man lying beneath the horse's hooves. The figure of the warrior is shown in profile but his white (partly preserved) face of furrowed forehead is turned to front. Facial features, similarly to those of the Archangel are painted with red, black and green lines. The Saint wears a spherical bonnet with a fish-scale motif (a half is green, the other half is red) and a golden diadem adorned by three *pinnae* and green and red precious stones. Long ends of a red-and-green ribbon with tassels at their ends escaping from beneath the diadem are visible on either side of the figure's head. The warrior is clad in a yellow mantle patterned with a red lattice design embellished with green and red dots arranged in alternating rows. A part of it is billowing behind the horseman. Most probably (as the upper part of figure is

not extant) the Saint wore a yellow cuirass reaching to the hips, on the hemline of which a row of straps with green jewels are affixed. Beneath the cuirass he has a knee-length purple-brown robe with wide green band in the middle, all patterned with fine fish-scale motif possibly imitating chain mail and under it a white *chiton* decorated with pairs of vertical yellow bands comprising four red lines, partly covering his feet shod in grey shoes. The chestnut steed of a black tail and hooves is depicted in right profile, its head turned backwards, to the left, the front legs raised above the recumbent figure represented (except legs) in three-quarter profile. His hands and face are pale brown; his pointed beard and thin moustache are black. Traces of yellow crown adorned with green jewels and a doomed cap on the head as also blood stains on his white tunic (or dalmatic) are recognisable. He also wore a *chlamys* fastened at the right shoulder, covered with a pattern of black lines and is shod in black shoes. The horse has a yellow saddlecloth on its back patterned by rows of green dots with framing band of green and red circles, a breastplate in the form of three wide reddish-brown bands decorated with white eight-petal rosettes amidst green dots with a row of round yellow bells attached to them and two narrower bands of the same colour, secured in the middle of the chest by a large yellow cup-shaped bell. The upper band is embellished with green dots nestling between two white leaves. The lowermost has the decoration similar to that on the saddlecloth border, and is fringed by jewel encrusted straps with a square yellow plate at the end of each. The identical straps are attached also to a crupper, except that plates are alternately red and green.

Location of murals painted in *al secco* (more precisely, in a *tempera* technique) on the outer walls of buildings is unusual in Nubia, where rains sometimes occur, and therefore it would be unlikely to create the discussed paintings in an unroofed area. Włodzimierz Godlewski believes that the walls of the porch were not plastered, and in the normal course of events the murals would not have been made until the late twelfth century⁸ when, according to his opinion, a layer of plaster was applied in the same time as a roof was raised over the staircase which included the whole porch area (**Fig. 5**).⁹ Godlewski's dating of both paintings to the late twelfth century (known earlier than published), was accepted in some works,¹⁰ although it seems largely inadequate. The left part of the mural, as related by the excavator¹¹ shows *effacements caused by its being partly covered with later construction* (precisely, by the staircase wall enclosing from the west the entrance platform). Thus, the painting must have been at any rate older than the staircase and its walls and the roof.

⁸ Godlewski 2006: 117.

⁹ In point of fact, according to the excavator, these murals were painted on the third layer of plaster. All subsequent layers of coating in this spot are described in detail by Kazimierz Michałowski (1965: 88; 1974: 197, cat. no. 41).

¹⁰ E.g. Mierzejewska 2005: 30; [Mierzejewska, Laptaś] 2002: 93–96 (in both, the date of twelfth–thirteenth century is given). Bożena Mierzejewska, however, in her recent publication (*de facto* later than this article has been written) dates both these murals into the eleventh century (cf. Mierzejewska 2014: 89, 91).

¹¹ Michałowski 1965: 88; 1974: cat. no. 41.



5. Staircase of the late twelfth-century date covering the area of the entrance porch seen from the south-west (Phot. T. Biniewski © IKŚiO PAN).

Enough evidence for classifying these murals as a work of artists acting in the late tenth to early eleventh century can be found in the rendering of details of both figures represented on them as also in decorative motifs identical to those used in other artworks of this large group, embellishing the cathedral after its renovation by Bishop Petros (**Figs 6–7**). Affiliation of the above-mentioned murals to this particular atelier is, in fact, nothing new as it was initially proposed by the excavator and his followers.¹² But the problem exists and is worth analysing, because both paintings were installed on the walls of the entrance

¹² In a matter of fact the dates published so far were very approximate and variable, thus, e.g. of the painting of the Archangel: Michałowski 1965: 93 (beginning of the tenth century); 1967: 129 (second half of the tenth century); Michałowski (Ed.) 1969 and 1970b: cat. no. 13 (second half of the tenth century); Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 41 (later part of the tenth century). Similarly, on the painting of St Mercurius: Michałowski 1965, 95 (most probably from the same time as the Archangel, i.e. beginning of the tenth century); 1967: 128 (late tenth century); Michałowski (Ed.) 1969 and 1970b: cat. no. 16 (late eleventh century); Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 42 (end of the tenth century). The best definition of the date for both murals has been given then by Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka who wrote (Martens 1973: 201–202) that *the both murals came into being during the period of the consecutive episcopates of Petros, Yoannes and Marianos, i.e. in theory, from 974 till 1036 but in reality from an unknown time when the effigy of Bishop Petros's was painted until Marianos's portrait is depicted in the Cathedral, most probably at the beginning of his episcopate (i.e. AD 1005).*



6. Similitude of style: a. detail of Mural representing an archangel from the entrance porch; b. Archangel Michael from the Baptistry Room, early eleventh century; c. Archangel Michael from the Commemorative Chapel of Ioannes, c. AD 1005; d. Archangel Michael, fragment of the composition: Youths in the Fiery Furnace, from the Narthex of the cathedral, end of the tenth century (a. National Museum, Warsaw; b-d. Sudan National Museum, Khartoum; repertory of documentation IKŚiO PAN).



7. Similitude of style: a. detail of painting of St Mercurius on horseback from the entrance porch; b. Standing Warrior Saint (Mercurius?), painting from the south aisle of the cathedral, end of tenth century; c. the Magi on horseback, a detail of the Nativity scene from the north aisle of the cathedral, c. AD 1000 (a. Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 42, National Museum, Warsaw; b-c. Phot. T. Jakobielski, Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, repertory of documentation IKŚiO PAN).

platform, hitherto thought to have been unroofed during the period in question. Therefore, some further arguments are needed in order to strengthen the original hypothesis. Some of multifarious examples of similar rendering of details on these and other murals are here illustrated based mostly on observations and studies of Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka.¹³ The artistic manner of the painters belonging to the late tenth- and early eleventh-century atelier was, as a rule, to slightly modify the represented patterns in order to individualise the painted figures. It was achieved by adding to (or removing) small elements of the ornament: either dots, or circles, or border lines, etc. Quite often painters merely transposed colours conversely. However, despite their efforts many elements appear to be strictly identical in the whole ensemble (**Figs 6–7**). This includes, e.g. the way of representing types of the garments and most of their decoration, haloes, shape of wings, thrones, crowns, jewels, brooches, etc.

Very characteristic is the rendering of facial features, the shape of mouth and nose, ears, as well as hairstyles (in a limited variety). Identical traits in the final touches applied to faces are in this style striking, particularly the shading on chin or creases on the neck and also shadows under the eyes (**Fig. 8**). If examined with a sharp eye two paintings in question would reveal most of characteristic features mentioned above, including also the popular patterns. The figure of the archangel on the porch is different only in a few respects: an untypical manner of rendering wrinkles on the forehead and the shape of the mouth. This may be due to the painter's not fully successful attempt to depict a menacing face of an armed guardian of the main entrance to the cathedral. A certain novelty in representing wings is that their top sections are separated from the rest by thick horizontal lines and covered with small scales each containing a single dot (**Fig. 6a**).¹⁴

Another argument for dating is provided by a legend to this painting (visible at the moment of discovery) in form of a fragment of Greek text in black paint, written above the figure's head and containing only one word: + ἄρχάγγελος (**Fig. 9a**). One can notice in it a peculiar form of letters popular in the late tenth and early eleventh century, including an elsewhere unknown shape of the *rho* and the *sigma*, that leaves no doubt as to which artistic atelier the scribe belonged (**Fig. 9b-c**).

If, however, paintings on the porch were originating from the late tenth and early eleventh century, one has to admit that the porch must have been covered by then in a something way. Włodzimierz Godlewski, who further in his book on Faras refers again to the question,¹⁵ rejects the evidence of possible occurrence of any roof before the late twelfth-century one, though some elements most likely belonging to such a structure were already recorded and even mentioned by him. Thus, a capital embedded into the late twelfth-century wall of the staircase built then, a column base used in its flight of steps, and also a considerable fragment of a column shaft (top part missing), lying against the east wall on the platform

¹³ Martens 1973: 164–212; Martens-Czarnecka 1982b: 50–88; 1989.

¹⁴ Analogous rendering of wings, cf. cat. nos 61 and 62 from room 24 of the Monastery on Kom H at Old Dongola (Martens-Czarnecka 2011: 186; 2005: 163–164).

¹⁵ Godlewski 2006: 129.



8. Similitude in the rendering of facial features: a. head of the archangel from the porch. Further there is a selection of faces painted in the period of late tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century: b. Apostle Peter; c. St Onophrius; d. Archangel Michael (in the composition of the Three Youth in the Fiery Furnace); e. Bishop Marianos; f. Queen Martha; g. the Virgin Mary and Child (the same composition as f.); h. the Virgin Mary and Child (the same composition as e.); i. Misael (the same composition as d.) (a-b, e, h. National Museum, Warsaw; c-d, f-g, i. Sudan National Museum, Khartoum; repertory of documentation IKSiO PAN).



9. Similitude of the graphic style of script: a. legend to archangel's figure on the porch; b. part of the legend to the representation of St Onuphrios, end of the tenth century; c. legend to the representation of the *Maiestas Crucis* (a. Phot. T. Biniewski; b. Phot. M. Niepokólczycki, Sudan National Museum, Khartoum © IKŚiO PAN; c. National Museum, Warsaw; Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 54).

were being noted (Figs 2, 11b). These may have originally supported a roof structure of some kind, which must have been dismantled (and its granite elements discarded, but still left at the entrance) when the porch was replaced by a staircase. The height of the support reaching c. 4m (base – 0.32m; presumable height of a column shaft – c. 3.40m; plus small capital – 0.36m) appears quite sufficient to locate roofing beams just over windows situated



10. A putative reconstruction of the entrance porch of Faras Cathedral (Drawing: M. Momot).

in the north and the east walls (**Fig. 10**). Unfortunately none of these walls is preserved high enough to restore precisely the type of construction of the roof itself. It is however, obvious that for technical reasons the roofed area would have sheltered the platform only, excluding the stairway. Additional argument for its extent provides the location of mural representing St Mercurius, painted on northernmost (i.e. roofed) part of the east wall and not at its centre.

Examining the paving of the entrance platform, composed – as many other parts of Paulos’s cathedral – of re-used sandstone blocks, one can see some remains of a furnishing being once installed in the porch. Hollowed out rectangular openings and a deep post hole that could be seen at south-west corner, close to the platform edge, feasibly mark the place of a wooden railing (**Fig. 11a**). A granite stand or capital with characteristic carved channels for fixing wooden or stone flat railing component was found reused in construction of the stairs together with aforementioned base (**Fig. 11b**). Whether it has belonged to a furnishing of the porch remains, of course, unknown, but possible.

If judged by then ground level outside the cathedral, during the eleventh century an extra entrance platform (of dimensions: 2.95m x 1.30m) was build adjoining the porch from the west (**Fig. 11c**). Its purpose was apparently to facilitate the passage to the cathedral entrance for those coming from the north by a path along its western façade. Perhaps for



11. Area of the porch, architectural details: a. paving of the entrance platform; b. interior of the late twelfth-century staircase built on the porch seen from the north; in its construction a base and a granite block with carved channels on sides are visible; c. paved rectangular structure adjoined to the entrance platform from the western side, seen from the north; d. the entrance platform edge and the paving of the rectangular structure, seen from the north-west; note the wear and tear step on the edge and a capital embedded in the staircase wall (a-b. Phot. M. Niepokólczycki; c-d. Phot. T. Biniewski © IKŚiO PAN).

some reason it was somewhat difficult for people to reach the main stairway leading to the porch. This could be, for instance, a partial landslip on the western slope of the *kom* causing that the slope become too steep. Hence, the new platform roughly corresponded in length to that of the porch and was situated only one step lower than the level of the porch's paving but in order to enter it only the north part of the western platform edge was used as is witnessed by distinct traces of the wear and tear on the stone used as a step (**Fig. 11d**). This may also mean that the remaining southern part of the western border of the porch was fenced at that time.

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Apart from dating there is another question which, as it seems, needs a comment. It concerns the mural on the north wall of the porch (**Figs 1, 3, 6a**). Although referred to in all previous publications as a representation of the Archangel Michael, there is no convincing evidence to suggest this identity. On the contrary, the iconographic detail that sets Michael apart from all other archangels – namely peacock feathers and eyes adorning the wings – are missing from this painting. This particular detail was scrupulously employed in representations of Michael by artists working at the cathedral from the late tenth century onwards.¹⁶ Another element that may be used to identify this archangel, as was already suggested,¹⁷ is the sword he holds. Although in Nubian iconography the sword does not appear to have been an attribute associated with Michael like in Coptic tradition,¹⁸ it does, however, feature on representations of the Archangel Gabriel. His figure, holding a sword was depicted, along with Michael's on an earlier Faras painting (**Fig. 12a**)¹⁹ which – according the most popular hypothesis – represented two standing guards of the west entrance to the cathedral.²⁰ Further examples of Gabriel with sword were found in the Monastery on Kom H in Old

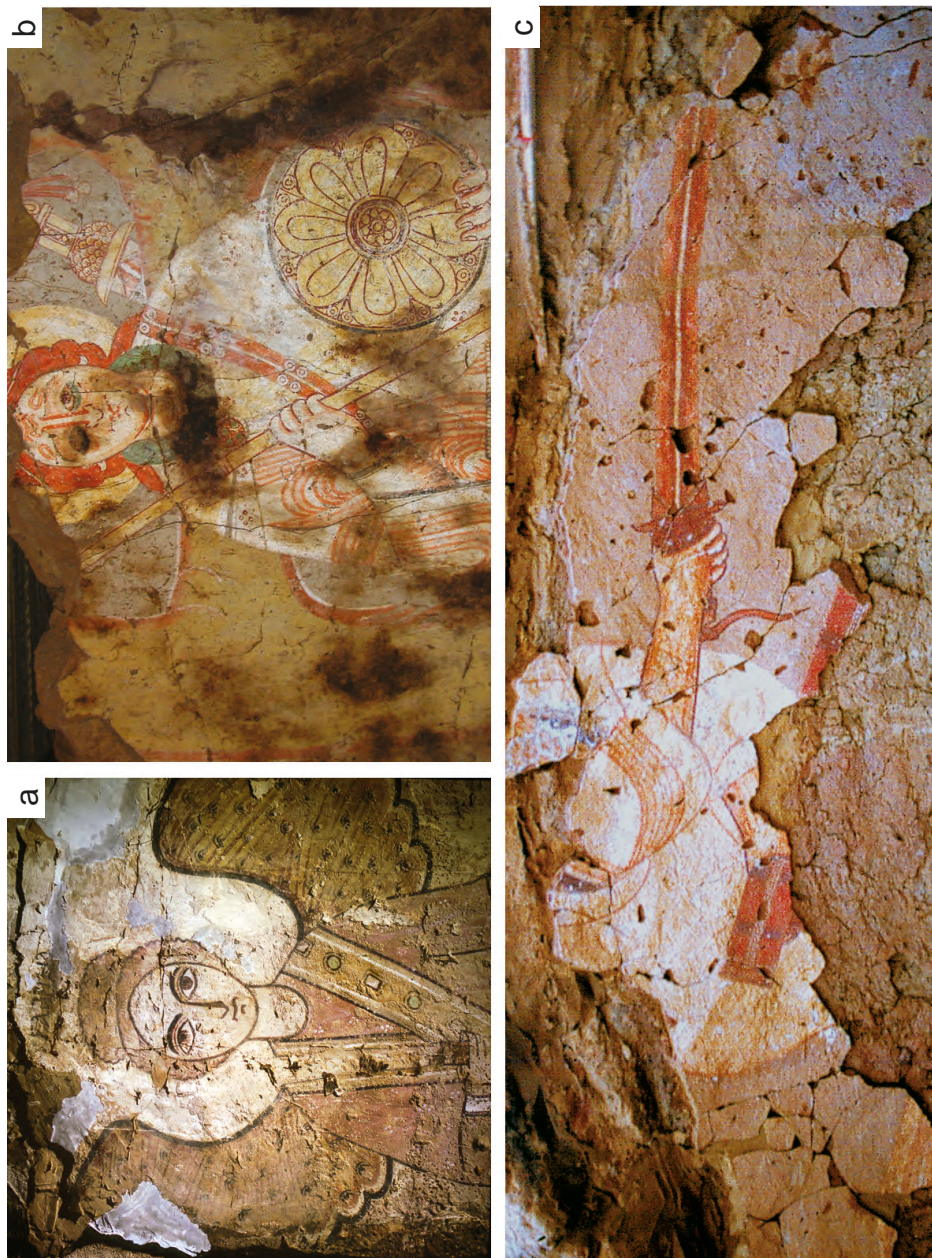
¹⁶ The similar rule is observed also amongst the assemblage of murals from Old Dongola Monastery comprising paintings dated to a period ranging from mid-eleventh until the thirteenth century, cf. Martens-Czarnecka 2011: 186, Figs 89, 91; see also: 2005: 163–164.

¹⁷ Martens-Czarnecka 2011: 195.

¹⁸ See: Müller 1959: 37, 143.

¹⁹ Michałowski 1967: 105–106, Pls 23, 25; 1974: cat. no. 7; Michałowski (Ed.) 1969: cat. no. 1; 1970b: cat. no. 1; Mierzejewska 2001; [Mierzejewska, Łaptaś] 2002: 75–76 (cat. no. 9); Mierzejewska 2014: 120, Fig. on p. 121; Jakobielski *et al.* forthcoming: cat. no. 32.

²⁰ The state of preservation of figures as they were found appeared somewhat strange because a part of left wing of Archangel Michael and paralleled the right one of the accompanying Archangel Gabriel were as if cut short on the edge of doorway jambs, just below the lintel. How it could happen that the painter – having at his disposal the whole blank surface of the wall – could have plan the execution of the figures so bad that there not enough space to fit the entire wings remained. These wings were an important argument for Bożena Mierzejewska (2006: 155) in her reasoning, while she suggested that at the time when their figures were painted the main entrance was already walled up and a niche arranged instead. On both sides of the conchoidal top of the niche would have been sufficient space for the archangels' wing endings – as if they were embracing the niche – where a figure of the Holy Virgin (cf. Michałowski 1974: cat. no. 24; Jakobielski *et al.* forthcoming: cat. no. 60) was painted at the same time, thus forming together with archangels one composition. This led to conclusion that archangels were represented here not as entrance guards, but they simply adored figure of the Virgin. See also: Mierzejewska 2014: 120, where the composition is dated to the ninth century (sic!).



12. Nubian representations of the Archangel Gabriel: a. Faras cathedral, eighth century; b. Old Dongola Monastery, SW Annexe room 6, late eleventh century; c. Old Dongola Monastery, SW Annexe room 1, late eleventh century (a. Phot. M. Niepokólczycki, National Museum, Warsaw; b. Phot. H. Pietras; c. Phot. W. Chmiel © IKSIO PAN).

Dongola (**Fig. 12b–c**).²¹ One of these, painted over the entrance to Southwestern Annexe, shows Gabriel with a flaming sword. Note, that on painting from the porch the sword-blade is represented in red(!). On the other hand the fiery sword is associated with Archangel Uriel, however, mostly in the western tradition. Tomasz Górecki²² possibly rightfully sees a probable thematic link between this representation and the neighbouring one of St Mercurius on horseback, based on Coptic text of *Encomium of Acacius, Bishop of Cesarea on Mercurius, the Martyr* (Brit. Mus. MS Or. no. 6802, fol. 26a–b), and other hagiographic texts of this collection relating a story of receiving a sword by Mercurius from an angel.²³ The angel's name, however, is nowhere mentioned. The association of the angel with the Archangel Michael was most probably due to the angel's utterance: *I am the Commander-in-Chief of the hosts of the Lord*, what is certainly Michael's competence, but no one can know with any degree of certainty whether a Faras painter knew this version of the Mercurius's legend. Painters would likely have been familiar with attributes, and the characteristic features of figures which they were going to depict. So, a supposed his connotation: when somebody with a sword is concerned it would be rather Gabriel than Michael. It is hard to imagine that an artist of this particular atelier, who created several murals of Archangel Michael would have forgotten about such a common Michael's feature as peacock feathers on wings. Therefore, the present author is rather inclined to suggest Archangel Gabriel as a possible identification of the angel's figure on the porch.

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²¹ See: Martens-Czarnecka 2011: cat. nos 80, 116.

²² Górecki 1990: 538–540.

²³ Budge (Ed.) 1915: 233, 287, 811, 859.

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