

THE CORONATION OATHS OF THE NUBIAN KINGS

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From the early days of Muslim rule over Egypt, when ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ led an Arab army to Dongola, until the reigns of the Mamluk sultans, Baybars and Qalāwūn in the late seventh/thirteenth century, no serious attempt was made to conquer al-Muqurra, the northern kingdom of Christian Nubia. The great Nubian fortress of Ibrīm had indeed been captured and briefly held by an Ayyubid force sent by Saladin in 568/1172-73, and (a more important development) the frontier-region of the kingdom lying south of Aswan was gradually eroded by Arab settlement and intermarriage, but the heartland of al-Muqurra with its remote capital at Old Dongola lay beyond the reach of raids from Upper Egypt. The situation changed when expeditionary forces sent by Baybars in 674/1276, and by Qalāwūn in 686-87/1288 and again in 688-89/1289-90 penetrated to Dongola, ousted the ruling king, and crowned a prince of the Nubian royal house as a vassal-ruler under the sultan. The oaths of allegiance to their suzerain sworn by two of these tributary kings, Shakanda in 674/1276, and one of Qalāwūn's clients have been preserved in Arabic literary sources, and are virtually identical. Shakanda's coronation oath is given by al-Nuwayrī, who died in 732/1332, and other eighth/fourteenth-century chroniclers; that of Qalāwūn's unnamed vassal appears in *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, the chancery encyclopedia completed by al-Qalqashandī in 814/1412. It is Shakanda's oath which is here discussed.¹

The coronation oath presents some points of interest in both form and content. Al-Qalqashandī's example comes in his long chapter on oaths (*Ṣubḥ*, XIII, 200-320; *maqāla* 8, at pp. 290-91) as a kind of appendix to the sub-section on oaths sworn by Christians. It is however modelled on a Muslim instrument given earlier (pp. 216-18),

1 The version used here is that given by al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, XXVIII, f. 259v., as printed in al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, I/3, ed. M. Mustafa Ziada, Cairo 1970, 973-74; App. 5. Another version with apparatus criticus is given in Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar*, VIII, ed. Ulrich Haarmann, Freiburg 1971, 185-86.

which is described as, “The general oath sworn by the servants of the government (*ahl al-dawla*), amirs, wazirs, governors (*nuwwāb*), and the like”. The adoption of this model in itself suggests that the king of Nubia was regarded by the Mamluk government as the governor of Dongola, which indeed becomes explicit in the text, where Shakanda describes himself as the sultan’s governor (*nāʾib*). The general oath, which is longer and more verbose than the coronation oath, consists of four main sections. There is first an invocation of God and the divine names. Secondly, there is a profession of sincere and complete obedience to the sultan. Thirdly come the penalties invoked in the event of a breach of the oath, culminating in the renunciation of Islam, “And he (*sic pro*, I) shall be quit (*barīʾan*) of God Most High, and of His Apostle, the blessing of God be upon him and peace, and of the Faith of Islam, if I (*sic.*) break this oath or any of its conditions.”² The instrument concludes with a confirmatory formula in which God is invoked as witness.

Turning now to the coronation oath, we find the same sections, although they vary in length from their counterparts in the general oath. The Muslim opening formula invoking God alone is replaced by a Christian invocation of the Trinity, the gospel, the Virgin and so forth. The reference to, “Judas, who pierced Christ with the spear”, is puzzling. It is not, of course, biblical, and does not appear to go back to an apocryphal gospel. Possibly it reflects confusion between Judas and the soldier with a spear who pierced Christ’s side (Jno. 1934). The profession of allegiance to the sultan, which comes next, introduces some very specific undertakings. These have naturally no parallels in the general oath, but are not without precedents elsewhere in al-Qalqashandī’s chapter on oaths, where he gives the additional undertakings included in the oaths of various officials (pp. 308-11), and these are specific to the functions of the oath-taker. Two of Shakanda’s undertakings are of particular importance. First, the two northern provinces of al-ʿAlī and al-Jabal are ceded to the sultan. This was the region known as al-Marīs, the ancient Nobatia, which was governed by a viceroy of the king of Nubia known to the Arabs as *ṣāhib al-jabal*. The current holder of this office became the sultan’s governor of the region. Secondly, the poll-tax of one dinar on each adult was a significant requirement, since the poll-tax (*jizya*) was the canonical

2 Al-Qalqashandī, who transcribed the oath from an earlier work, *al-Taʿrīf biʾl-muṣṭalaḥ al-sharīf* of Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 748/1348), notes the confusion of pronouns in his source (*Ṣubḥ*, XIII, 218-19).

tribute paid by *dhimmīs* under Muslim rule, and the implication was that the Nubians had become subjects of the Mamluk sultan.³ A formula of renunciation, which picks up the earlier reference to the abjuration of Christ, is interpolated, and breaks the sequence of Shakanda's undertakings. These resume, almost as a postscript, with a promise to expel nomad Arabs from Nubia. What this refers to is no longer clear. Conceivably it concerns the Arab irregulars who had accompanied the Mamluk expeditionary force. Their removal would be of obvious advantage to the king, who could hardly welcome Arab settlers, particularly since the northern buffer-territory was now lost. Equally Baybars would probably not wish to see these unruly tribal warriors establishing themselves outside the area of his direct and effective control. At the end, the formula "I am the friend of the sultan's friends, and the enemy of his enemies" has parallels in the truces with the Frankish states, and the oath, like the general oath, closes with an invocation of God as guarantor.

With all its adherence to the forms and formulae of the Mamluk chancery, the instrument was not so much an oath of allegiance as a *Diktat* imposed on the puppet ruler of a conquered people. But Mamluk suzerainty was to be both precarious and transitory. Over five hundred years were to pass before an army sent by a ruler of Egypt effectively conquered Nubia, and in the meantime the Islamization of the Nubians had been achieved by other means.

والله ! والله ! والله ! وحق الثالث المقدس ، والإنجيل الظاهر ،
 والسيدة الطاهرة العذراء أم النور والمعمودية ، والأنبياء المرسلين والحواريين والقديسين
 والشهداء الأبرار ، وإلا أجحد المسيح كما جحده يودس ، وأقول فيه ما يقول
 اليهود وأعتقد ما يعتقدونه ، وإلا أكون يودس الذي طعن المسيح بالحربة ، إنني
 أخذت نيتي وطوبى من وقتي هذا وساعتى هذه للسلطان الملك الظاهر ركن الدنيا
 والدين بيبرس ، وإنى أبذل جهد وطاقتى فى تحصيل مرضاته ، وإنى ما دمت نالبه
 لا أقطع ما قرر على فى كل سنة تمضى ، وهو ما يفضل من مشاطرة البلاد على
 ما كان يتحصل لمن تقدم من ملوك النوبة ، وأن يكون النصف من المتحصل
 لسلطان محتسباً من كل حق ، والنصف الآخر أرسده لعارة البلاد وحفظها من

3 In the negotiations with the Christian city of Antioch immediately before its fall in 666/1268, Baybars demanded a similar annual tribute; cf. Peter Thorau, *Sultan Baybars I. von Ägypten*, Wiesbaden 1987, 228.

عدو يطرفها ، وأن يكون على كل سنة من الأفيلة ثلاثة ، ومن الزرافات ثلاث (٣) ، ومن إناث التهود خمس ، ومن الصهب الجياد مائة ، ومن الأبقار الجياد المنتخبة أربعمائة . وإني أُفَرِّرُ على كل نفر من الرعية الذين تحت يدي في البلاد من العقلاء البالغين ديناراً عيناً ، وأن يقرد بلاد العلي والجليل خالصاً للسلطان . وأنه مهما كان لداود ملك النوبة ولأخيه سنكورا ولأمه وأقاربه ، ومن قتل من عسكره بسوف العساكر المنصورة ، أحمله إلى الباب العالي مع من يُرصد لذلك ؛ وإني لا أترك شيئاً منه قل ولا جل ولا أخضيه ، ولا أمكن أحداً من إخفائه . ومتى خرجتُ عن جميع ما قررته ، أو شيء من هذا المذكور أعلاه ، كنت بريئاً من الله تعالى ومن المسيح ومن السيدة الطاهرة ، وأنحصر دين النصرانية ، وأصلنى إلى غير الشرق ، وأكفر بالصليب وأعتقد ما تعتقد اليهود . وإني لا أترك أحداً من العربان ببلاد النوبة ، ومن وجدته منهم أرسلته إلى الباب السلطاني . ومهما سمعت من الأخبار السارة والنافعة طالعت به السلطان في وقته وسأعته ، ولا أنفرد بشيء من الأشياء إذا لم تكن مصلحة ، وإني ولي من والي السلطان وعدو من عداه ، والله على نقول وكيل (١) .

(٣) في الأصل "ثلاثة".

(١) أورد القنصليني (صبح الأعشى - ج ١٣ ، ص ٢٩٠ - ٢٩١) هذا النص باختصار قليل ،

تحت أخبار السلطان المنصور قلاوون .

Shakanda's coronation oath 674/1276

By God, by God, by God:

By the truth of the Holy Trinity, the pure Gospel, the pure lady, the Virgin,

the Mother of the Light,⁴ the Prophets, the Apostles, the Disciples, the Saints, and the pious Martyrs:

Let me not abjure Christ as Judas abjured Him, and speak of Him as the Jews spoke, and believe as they believe; let me not be [as] Judas, who pierced Christ with the spear:

I shall be loyal in will and conscience from this time and this hour to the sultan al-Malik al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dunyā Baybars,⁵ and I shall

4 *Umm al-nūr*. In Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Umm al-fard*, "the Mother of the Only-Begotten".

5 Ibn al-Dawādārī adds the benediction, "May God make his kingdom eternal".

make every endeavour to win his good pleasure:

While I remain his governor I shall not cut off the annual imposition upon me, which is the surplus from the sharing of the territory, according to what was levied for previous kings of the Nubians; half of the revenue shall go to the sultan⁶ free of all dues, the other half I shall set aside to promote the prosperity of the territory, and to protect it from any enemy that may attack it:

And there shall be due from me every year three elephants, three giraffes, five female cheetahs, a hundred chestnut steeds, and four hundred head of good choice cattle:

And I shall impose upon every individual of the subjects under my hand in the territory, being of sound mind and adult, a dinar in coin:

And the territory of al-^cAlī and al-Jabal shall be set aside entirely for the sultan:

And whatever belonged to Dāwūd, the king of the Nubians, to his brother Sankū, to his brother and kinsmen, and to those of his soldiery who were killed by the swords of the divinely assisted army, I shall convey under escort to the royal court; I shall not leave anything of it, whether small or great, nor shall I conceal it, nor enable anyone to conceal it:

Should I depart from all I have confirmed or from anything that I have mentioned, I shall renounce God Most High, the Lord Christ and the pure lady; I shall go astray from the Christian faith, pray otherwise than towards the east, be an unbeliever in the Cross, and believe as the Jews believe:

And I shall leave no nomad Arabs in the territory of the Nubians; any whom I find, I shall send to the royal court:

Whatever harmful or useful information I hear, I shall acquaint the sultan with it at once and immediately, and I shall not keep anything to myself whenever it is of advantage:⁷

I am the friend of the sultan's friends, and the enemy of his enemies:

God is the Trustee⁸ of what I say.

6 Ibn al-Dawādārī adds the benediction, "Great be his victory".

7 Ibn al-Dawādārī follows with, "I am the slave (*ʿabd*) of our lord the sultan (great be his victory), the seedling of his care, the freedman (*ʿatīq*) of his divinely aided sword." The terms "slave" and "freedman" may possibly suggest a notional status in Mamluk military society.

8 Ibn al-Dawādārī adds, "And Witness".