

"I must have been inspired" Joseph Conrad

Medieval paintings found by University of Warsaw researchers named one of the TOP 10 most important archaeological discoveries of 2023

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STUART DOWELL DECEMBER 12, 2023



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The discovery of unique Christian paintings by archaeologists from the University of Warsaw have been named as one of the 10 most important discoveries of 2023.

The paintings dating to the fifth or sixth century were found hidden deep within ruins at the Old Dongola archaeological site which was once the capital of the Christian kingdom of Nubia in the early Middle Ages.

Under the floor of one of the ruins, the researchers from the university's Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology discovered an opening leading to a small room whose walls were decorated with the never-before-seen early Christian images.

ARCHAEOLOGY magazine reveals the year's most exciting finds

January/February 2024

TOP 10 DISCOVERIES OF 2023

- Sacred Spring** Sani Casciano dei Bagni, Italy
- Earliest Carpenters** Kalambo River, Zambia
- Cave of Swords** Ein Gedi, Israel
- A Painted Prayer** Old Dongola, Sudan
- Magical Mesoamerican Relics** Mexico City, Mexico

- Hunter-Gatherer Fortresses** Krasnyy-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Russia
- Inca Workers' Homelands** Machu Picchu, Peru
- World's Oldest Book** El Hibeh, Egypt
- Imperial Menagerie** Xi'an, China
- The Fiddler's Theater** Rome, Italy

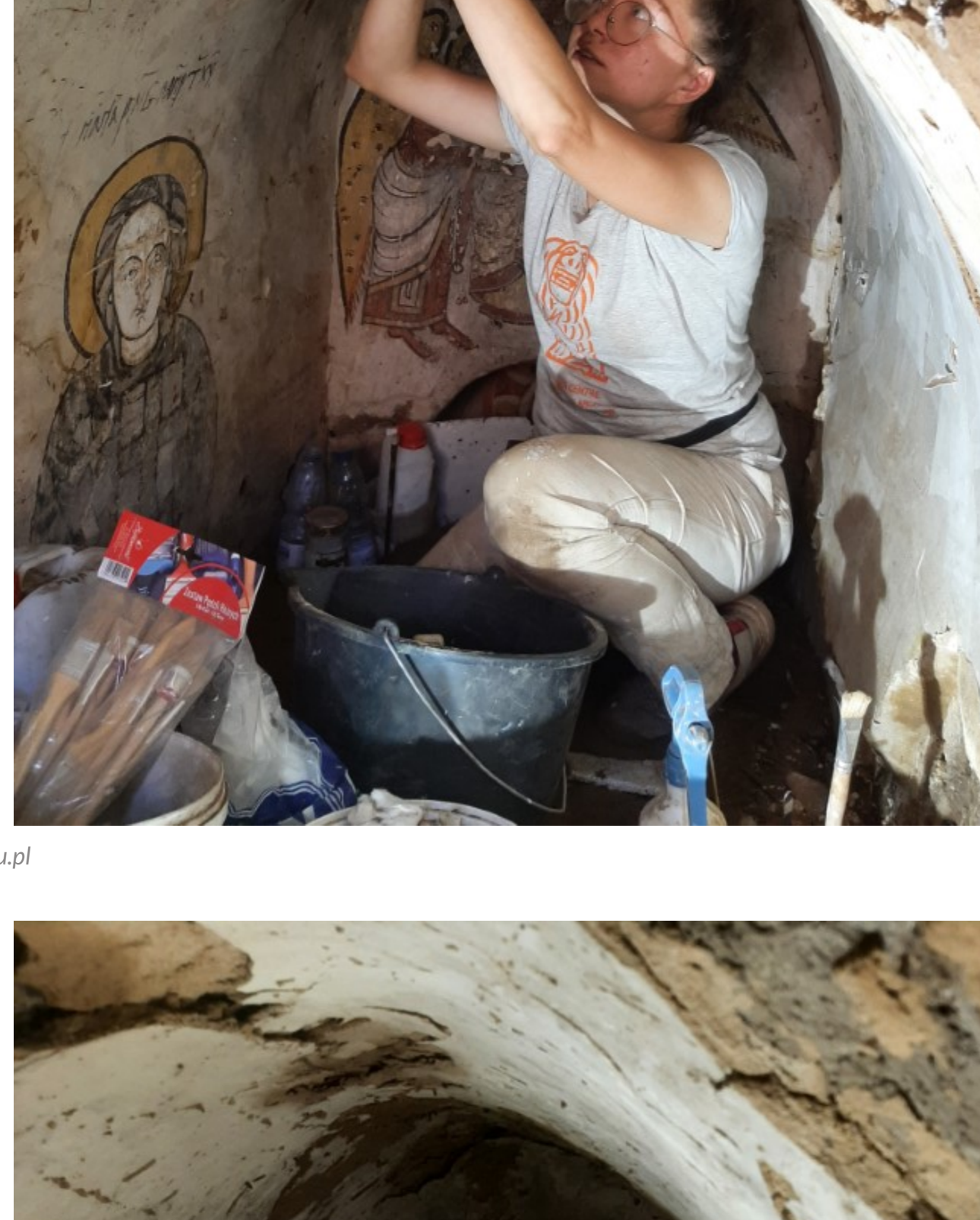
Posting the discovery as fourth on its list, the prestigious 'Archaeology' magazine's annual ranking highlights what it believes are the most significant finds for science and the most interesting for a wider audience.

archaeology.org

The paintings show the Virgin Mary, Christ, the archangel Michael, and a scene depicting a Nubian king. They are accompanied by inscriptions in Greek.

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Following the discovery, lead archaeologist Dr. Artur Obluski posted on social media: "Seems that the gods of excavations have favoured us."



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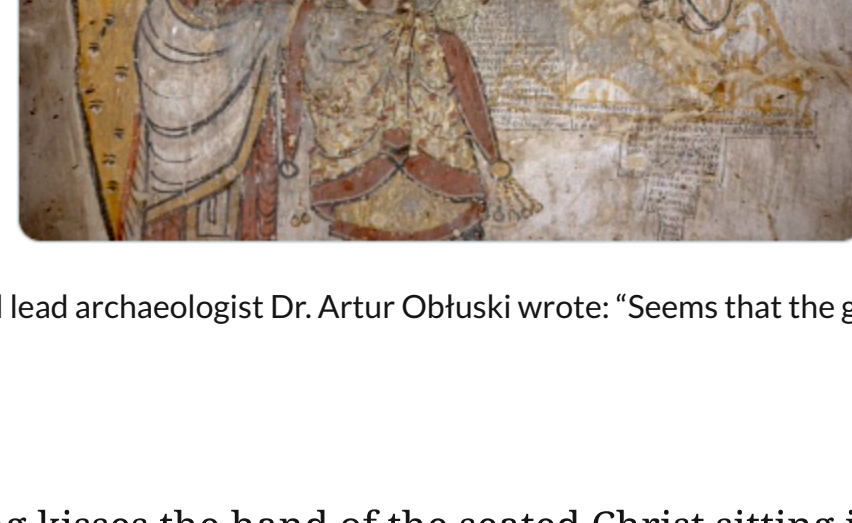
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"We found not only the stone blocks from walls and floor of a #Napatan temple of #Amun of #GemAton #Kawa but also enigmatic complex of chambers covered with wall paintings.

"One of the paintings presents king David of Makuria in intimate and dynamic scene with #archangel Michael and #Christ kissing the hand of the latter and probably begging for protection of the city of #Tungul (Old Dongola).

"[T]his is not a typical representation of the patronage of a Nubian ruler by saints and archangels."



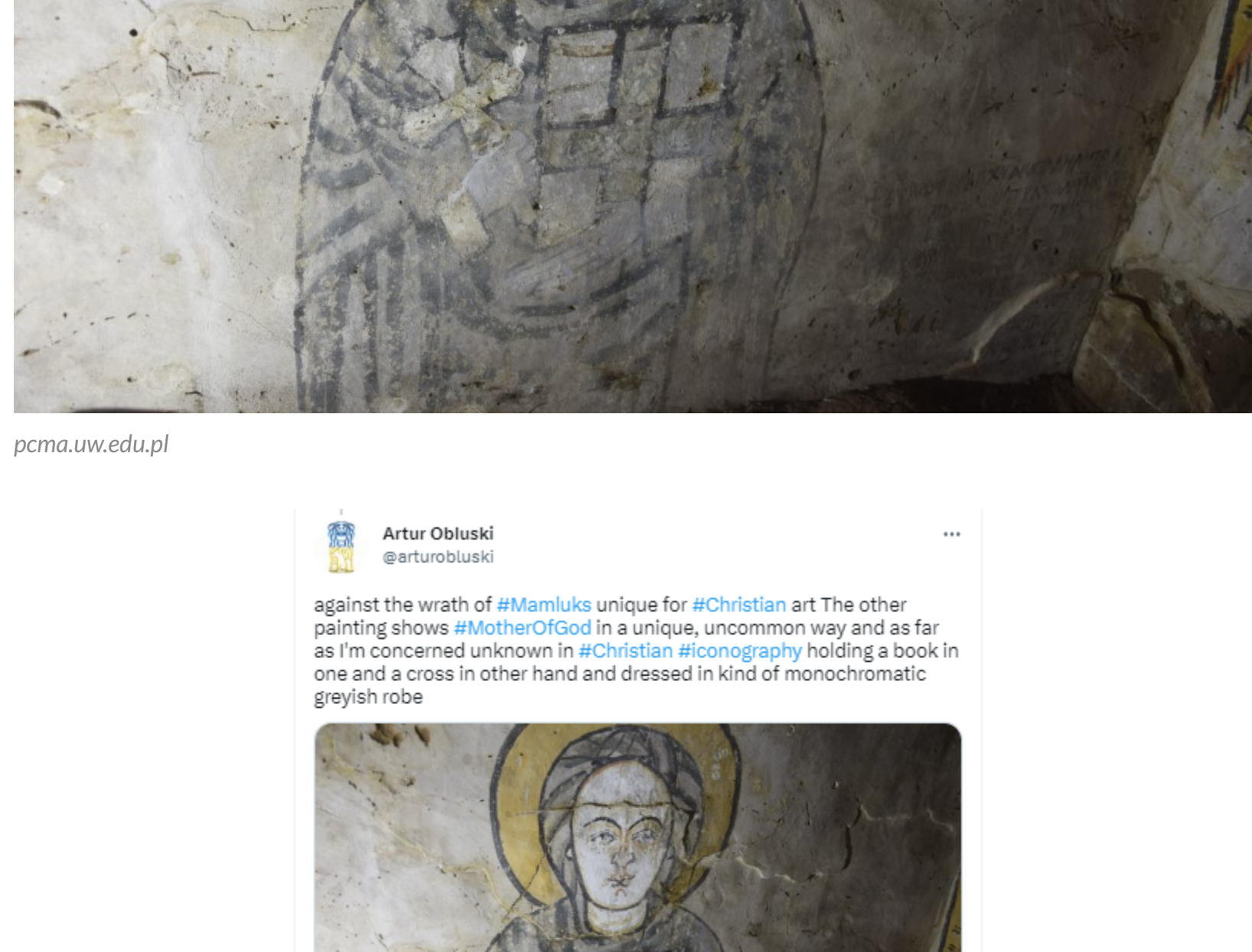
Posting on Twitter, stunned lead archaeologist Dr. Artur Obluski wrote: "Seems that the gods of excavations have favoured us."

Artur Obluski/X

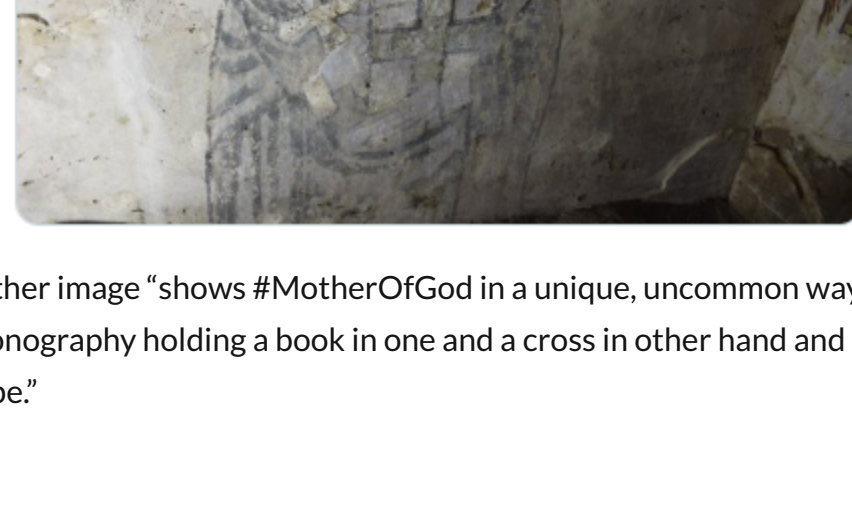
In the scene, the king kisses the hand of the seated Christ sitting in clouds. The ruler is supported by the archangel Michael, whose spread wings surround both the king and Christ in a protective embrace.

"Such a scene has no parallel in Nubian painting," the researchers said.

The biggest mystery for archaeologists, however, is the set of rooms containing the paintings and the spaces, covered with vaults and domes and made of dried brick, are quite small.



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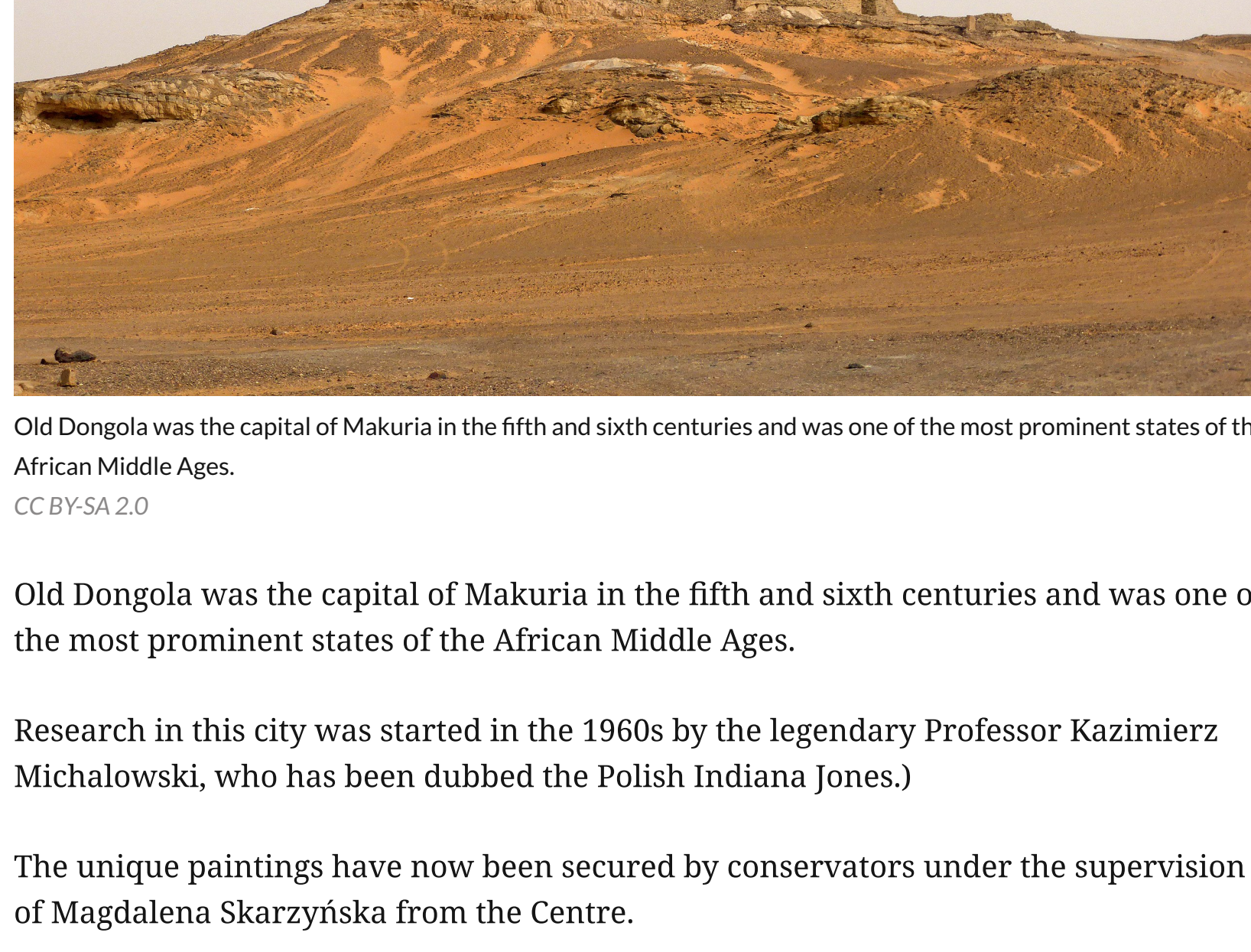
Dr Obluski added that another image "shows #MotherOfGod in a unique, uncommon way and as far as I'm concerned unknown in #Christian #iconography holding a book in one and a cross in other hand and dressed in kind of monochromatic greyish robe."

Artur Obluski/X

The Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology said: "The room housing the painting with the image of King David resembles a crypt, but is 7 meters above medieval ground level.

"Working in such a small space, under time pressure and in temperatures that were already high in March was extremely demanding.

"The paintings were detached from the wall in some places, but the paint layer itself was remarkably well preserved."



Old Dongola was the capital of Makuria in the fifth and sixth centuries and was one of the most prominent states of the African Middle Ages.

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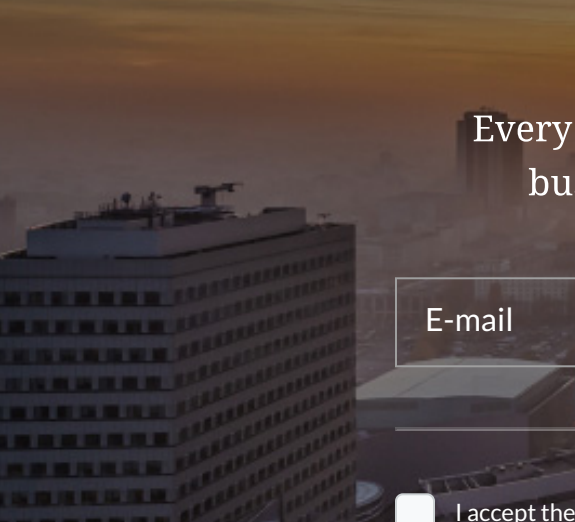
Research in this city was started in the 1960s by the legendary Professor Kazimierz Michalowski, who has been dubbed the Polish Indiana Jones.)

The unique paintings have now been secured by conservators under the supervision of Magdalena Skarzyńska from the Centre.

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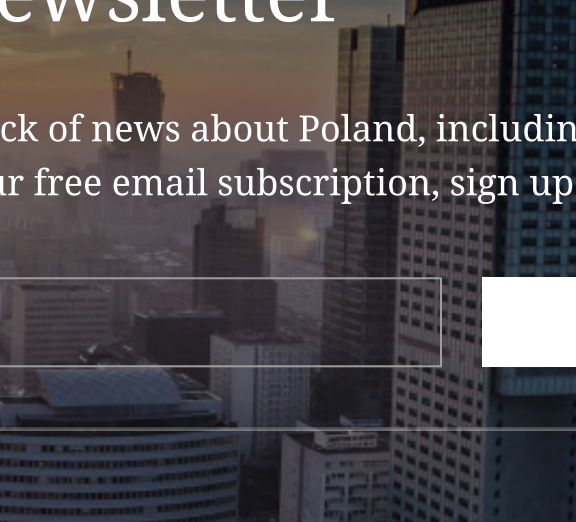
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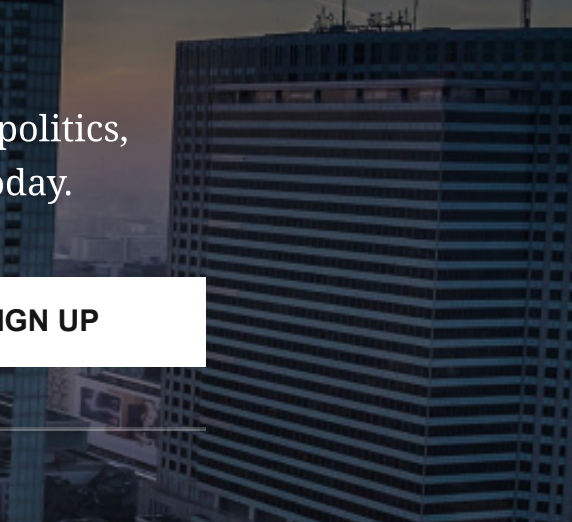
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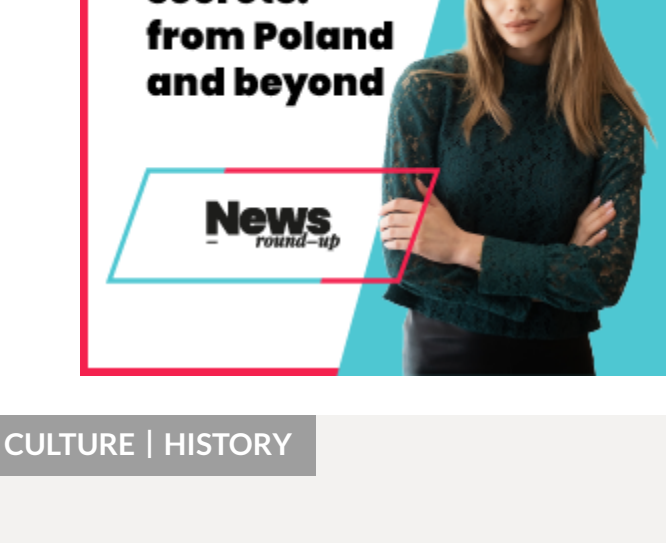
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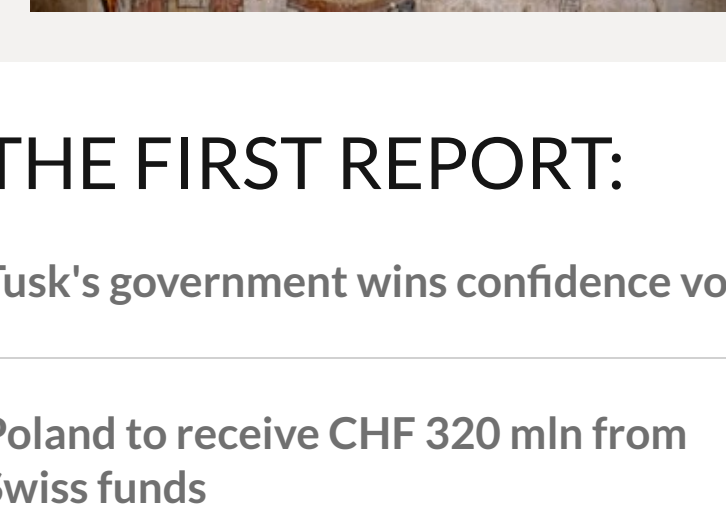
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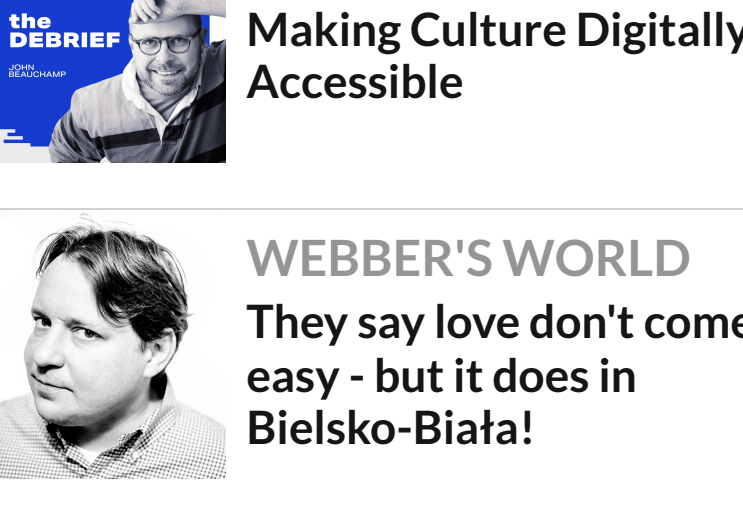
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