

Regionalisation and the Integration of the Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity

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Abstracts

Hanns Christof Brennecke: Synode als institutionalisiertes Bindeglied zwischen Kaiser und Kirche in der Spätantike (The Synod as Institutional Bridge between Emperor and Church in Late Antiquity)

100 years ago, Eduard Schwartz interpreted synods above all as instruments of subjecting the Church to the will of the emperor and made an urgent call for critical editions of the large number of fragments of their proceedings. A large number of such proceedings survive that illustrate the character of the “synod” as an institution between emperor and episcopacy.

Until the 2nd century, Christianity had institutional instance above the church of a *civitas*. The “synod” originated in the Montanist dispute as a meeting of the leaders (bishops) of the churches of several *civitates* to resolve jointly questions of belief, doctrine and discipline. Although in principle the rulings of every synod bound the entire Church, the reception of synodal resolutions was problematic. The Church could enforce the resolutions of several synods against Paul of Samosata only with the help of Emperor Aurelian.

During the Donatist schism in Africa, Constantine entrusted the investigation of the Donatists’ allegations to bishops. By calling bishops together, setting the subjects of the investigation and enforcing the resolutions, Constantine created the new institution of the imperial synod (“Reichs-Synode”). This new institution between emperor and Church reached maturity with the “Arian controversy.” The emperor was involved even in doctrinal disputes.

The largest number of synodal documents preserved from the 4th century derives from the reign of Constantius II. The presence of several emperors led to new conflicts. The return of Athanasius from exile by the command of Constantine II provoked impassioned protest, because Athanasius had not been rehabilitated by a synod. The emperor was obliged to execute the decisions of synods but, without such a decision, should not interfere in internal ecclesiastical affairs.

After Theodosius I had to correct the edict *cunctos populos* on account of the resolutions of the Synod of Constantinople in 381, the eastern emperors increasingly issued decrees on dogma without synodal decisions. In the West, the synod remained the institutional instance between the king and episcopacy even in the new Germanic kingdoms and continued as such into the Middle Ages.

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