

Regionalisation and the Integration of the Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity

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Abstracts

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Throughout his whole reign, during a time of disintegration, Emperor Justinian (527-565) pursued a consistent policy of integration – monks being an important part of it. Justinian acted on several fronts simultaneously to unify the church: he had to guarantee the newly re-established communion with the occident, namely the papacy, furthermore he tried to integrate eastern Chalcedonians and Miaphysites, who were themselves divided into several divergent groups. Hence Justinian occasionally had to make concessions by modifying but not abandoning his consistent principles. To establish a unity of the diverse Christendoms was always a tough balancing act.

In this enormous task monks played an important role as a factor for integration or disintegration. Through their ascetic authority they were of importance for society, the state, and the church. Monks not only embodied the regional Christendoms but also influenced and shaped them. Therefore Justinian had to deal with monks, on the one side using them e.g. as a theological source and as an instrument of integration, on the other side responding to their counterproductive and disintegrative pressure.

Justinian's policy of integration and the function of monks therein will be exemplified in this paper by his religious policy of the 20s and 30s: Soon after the end of the Acacian schism Justinian adopted the Theopaschite formula from Scythian monks who proclaimed it in Constantinople. Here Justinian used the theology of monks as an instrument for his policy to integrate Miaphysites. But Justinian had to be cautious not to put the new communion with the papacy at stake and to offend parts of the eastern Chalcedonians, e.g. represented by monks of the Akoimete monastery travelling to the pope and blaming Justinian for this attempt. In 532 Justinian convoked an assembly of Chalcedonian and Miaphysite bishops, where Justinian himself held discussions with the Syrian-orthodox bishops and tried to achieve a common theological basis for their integration. But in 536 Chalcedonian monks forced Justinian to convoke a synod, where prominent Miaphysites were anathematized. In this case monks acted in a disintegrative way and against Justinian's policy, not only sending petitions to pope Agapet and later to Justinian himself but also as authority for the synodical decisions. In 536 Justinian had to make concessions under monastic pressure, but in his consenting edict he nevertheless used the integrative Theopaschite formula and in later times still tried to push his integrative provisions forward.

At the end Justinian's policy of integration failed. The disintegration of the Western and the Eastern Empire, the papacy and the regional Christendoms in the East, especially the Syrian-orthodox, continued and caused the formation of separate churches. But this didn't prove that Justinian did not follow a consistent policy, only that he wasn't successful. Monks influenced Justinian's integrative religious policy enormously, either as an instrument of integration or as a violent factor of disintegration.

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