

Though a separation of religious from military/economic spheres in the 4th century west has manifested itself in recent scholarship (see, e.g., J. O'Donnell's comments in BMCR 2005.07.69), a shift in focus to the 6th century east makes such a division more problematic. This talk will use the military conflict between Christianizing Axum (Ethiopia) and Judaizing Himyar (Yemen, *ca.* 525-45) to open up a discussion of the profound integration of religion into the evolving economic and military strategies of the 6th century. Inspection of textual evidence reveals that various leaders began to use new exclusive religious identities in their imperial strategies. While the ground breaking work of Pigulevskaia, Vasiliev, Rubin, Shahid and Kobishchanov established the historical foundation and importance of this Red Sea conflict, none of these authors expanded into discussing how exclusive religions became essential to tribal and state identities and thus came to be exploited by their rulers. Recently Greatrex (in M. Maas, *Age of Justinian*, Cambridge, 2004) has echoed the strategic importance of the conflict, but also without expansion on the role of religion. This paper will begin with the novel attempts of the Himyarite ruler, Yusuf Dhu Nawas, and the Axumite emperor, Kaleb, to employ Christianity and Judaism respectively for unifying their states against each other and for positioning them in the broader relations amongst Christian Rome, Zoroastrian Iran and the various Arab client kingdoms. While reviewing the conventional teaching that Justinian used this conflict to attempt to undermine Ctesiphon's grip on the eastern trade in silk and spices, the paper will underline how Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism had become fully integrated into the strategic (military and economic) thinking of all states involved. A few brief sources must serve to illustrate the basic points. First, the Jewish orientation of Himyar can be demonstrated from John Malalas (433 along with epigraphical evidence) as Axum's effort to Christianize the Himyarites can be extrapolated from the *Leges Homeritarum* (PG 86a col. 576 also inscriptions). For Roman imperial insinuation into the conflict Procopius' statement from *Wars* 1.20.9, that Justinian called upon the common Christianity of Kaleb and Yusuf's Christian successor, Abreha, to join them in subverting Persian trade (silk and spices), will be consulted. Finally the Sasanid emperor Kavad's use of Mazdaism to firm up his Black Sea trade routes in Lazica (Georgia) must be considered (Procopius *Wars* 1.12.4). A counterexample from the 4th century west should be helpful. When the emperor Valens was confronted by Gothic immigration into Thrace in 376 (Amm. 31.3-4) he held several meetings, but at that time the Goths did not think to present themselves as Christian (*pace* Eunapius frg. 2, Blockley p. 74) nor apparently did Valens successfully appeal to such a religious identity (even in the anachronistic version of Theodoret *HE* p. 274 Parmentier/Scheidweiler). But by the time of Justinian not only have the peripheral kingdoms adopted exclusive religious identities, but the various leaders were consciously using them in their strategic decision making. In this way religion can be shown to be essential to any understanding of later late antiquity.

Brief Bibliography

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