Arabia between the Byzantine and Persian Empires

HSTAFM 162 Class 1.2
January 7, 2016
Late Antiquity

- Part of a periodization of historians used to characterize the transition from Classical Antiquity to the rise of Islam and the Middle Ages.
- While its contours are subject to debate, the term generally refers to the period between the fourth and seventh centuries CE.
Byzantium

- Under the Roman Emperor Constantine (272–337 CE), official toleration of Christianity grew tremendously in the Roman Empire.

- During the latter part of Constantine’s rule, the imperial residence was shifted to the city of Byzantium (Byzantion), which was expanded considerably and renamed Constantinople (modern Istanbul).

- Constantine converts to Christianity late in life; in 380 CE, the Edict of Thessalonica makes Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire.
Constantine, from a Mosaic at the Hagia Sophia (10th c.)
The Languages of Late Antiquity

- Latin
- Greek
- Aramaic
- Syriac
- Armenian
- Middle Persian (Pahlavi)
Roman Law

• During the sixth century, the Roman Emperor Justinian I (482–565) began a massive compilation and revision of Roman law, the *Corpus Juris Civilis*.

• The *Digest* of Justinian consists of 50 books, claiming to compile and synthesize Roman law as it had developed for 14 centuries.
With the aid of God governing Our Empire which was delivered to Us by His Celestial Majesty, We carry on war successfully, We adorn peace and maintain the Constitution of the State, and have such confidence in the protection of Almighty God that We do not depend upon Our arms, or upon Our soldiers, or upon those who conduct Our Wars, or upon Our own genius, but We solely place Our reliance upon the providence of the Holy Trinity, from which are derived the elements of the entire world and their disposition throughout the globe.

(1) Therefore, since there is nothing to be found in all things so worthy of attention as the authority of the law, which properly regulates all affairs both divine and human, and expels all injustice; We have found the entire arrangement of the law which has come down to us from the foundation of the City of Rome and the times of Romulus, to be so confused that it is extended to an infinite length and is not within the grasp of human capacity; and hence We were first induced to begin by examining what had been enacted by former most venerated princes, to correct their constitutions, and make them more easily understood; to the end that being included in a single Code, and having had removed all that is superfluous in resemblance and all iniquitous discord, they may afford to all men the ready assistance of their true meaning.
(7) We desire you to be careful with regard to the following: if you find in the old books anything that is not suitably arranged, superfluous, or incomplete, you must remove all superfluities, supply what is lacking, and present the entire work in regular form, and with as excellent an appearance as possible. You must also observe the following, namely: if you find anything which the ancients have inserted in their old laws or constitutions that is incorrectly worded, you must correct this, and place it in its proper order, so that it may appear to be true, expressed in the best language, and written in this way in the first place; so that by comparing it with the original text, no one can venture to call in question as defective what you have selected and arranged. Since by an ancient law, which is styled the Lex Regia, all the rights and power of the Roman people were transferred to the Emperor, We do not derive Our authority from that of other different compilations, but wish that it shall all be entirely Ours, for how can antiquity abrogate our laws?

We wish that all these matters after they have been arranged in place shall be observed to such an extent that, although they may have been written by the ancients in a different way than appears in Our collection, no blame shall be imputed the text, but it shall be ascribed to our selection.

(8) Therefore, in no part of the aforesaid treatise, shall there be any place for antinomia, but there must be such conformity and consistency therein that there will be no opportunity for contradiction.
(14) Let it be your earnest desire, therefore, to do all these things, God willing, by the aid of your own wisdom and that of those other most eloquent men, and bring the work to as excellent and rapid a conclusion as possible; so that it having been completed and digested into fifty books may remain a monument to the great and eternal memory of the undertaking, a proof of the wisdom of Almighty God, to the glory of Our Empire and of your service.

Given on the eighteenth day of the Kalends of January, during the Consulship of those most illustrious men Lampadius and Orestes, 530.
Christianity in Late Antiquity

• Debates on the nature (physis) of Christ:

  • Nestorianism emphasizes the disunion of the human and divine natures of Jesus, advocated by Nestorius (386–450 CE)

  • Miaphysitism, a reaction, emphasizes that in the person of Christ, Divinity and Humanity are united (Gk. mia- ‘single’)

  • Hypostatic Union, a doctrine that Christ represents the union of both Divine and Human natures.
Athanasian Creed

1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;
2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.
5. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.
9. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.
10. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternals but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.
13. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty.
14. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.
15. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;
16. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord;
18. And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.
The Sasanian/Sasanid Empire

- Founded in 224 by Ardashīr I, who defeated the then-reigning Parthian ruler Ardawān (Artabanus IV).

*Caption*: This is the image of the Mazda-worshipping Lord Ardashir, King of Kings of Ērān, whose seed is from the gods, son of Pābag the king.
Sources on the Sasanian Empire

- Sasanian royal inscriptions, the most extensive being the inscriptions of the kings Shâhbuhr and Narseh, as well as those of the high priest (mowbedân mowbed) Kerdîr.

- Sasanian coins, seals, and papyri, as well as those from neighboring/vassal kingdoms.

- Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts, including texts like the Mâdayân î Hazâr Dâdestân (a Sasanian law-code).

- Contemporary Classical, Syriac, Jewish and Armenian sources; later accounts in Arab and Persian historians.
Sasanian Conquests
The Sasanian Empire

Kerdīr - Hērbed and Mōbedān Mōbed in the 3rd c. CE under Shāpur I - Bahrām I
From the beginning, I, Kerdîr, have labored hard for the sake of the gods, rulers, and my own soul. And I have made many fires and priests prosperous in the realm. And also in the neighboring lands, wherever the horses and men of the king of kings went to pillage, burn, and lay waste the land, by the order of the king of kings, I organized the fires and priests who were there in that land. I did not allow any of them to come to harm or be taken away as captives, and whoever had already been made captive, those I sent back to their own lands. And I furthered the Mazdayasnian dên and the good priests in the land and honored them. But the heretics and unbelievers among the clergy who did not live correctly by the Mazdayasnian dên and the services to the gods, those I punished. And I “reprimanded” them until I had made them better. And I issued official documents for many fires and priests, and with the help of the gods I managed to have many Victorious fires established in the realm. Many marriages between close relatives were celebrated, and many who did not have the faith received it. There were many who believed in the foreign gods, but I managed to have them give up the faith in the foreign gods and take the faith in the gods. And many sacrifices were celebrated, and the dên was recalled in various ways. And many other services to the gods have been increased and heightened as well, which are not mentioned here, because if it had been written down, it would have been too much.
And in the realm Jews, Buddhists (shaman), Hindus (braman), Nestorian Christians and other Christians, baptists (magdag), and Manicheans (zandîg) were struck down, idol temples were destroyed, and the dens of the foreign gods were ruined and turned into thrones and seats for the gods. And throughout the realm, services to the gods were greatly increased. Many Victorious fires were established, many priests were rendered prosperous, and many fires and priests received official letters of recognition.
Manichaeism

- During the reign of Shāpur I, a prophet named Mani (ca. 216-276 CE) arose in Mesopotamia whose religion would spread throughout and across the borders of the Sasanian Empire.
Manichaeism

• The religion that I have chosen is in ten things above and better than the other, previous religions.

• 1. The religions of those of old were only in one country and in one language, but my religion is of that kind that it will be manifest in every country and in all languages, and it will be taught in far-away countries.

• 2. The previous religions endured only as long as there were pure leaders in them. When the leaders had ascended, then their religions fell into disorder and became negligent in commandments and works. And in ... But my religion, because of the living [scriptures?], of the teachers, the bishops, the elect, and the hearers, and because of its wisdom and works will endure to the end.

• 3. The souls “whose deeds were not accomplished” in their own religion will come to my religion, which certainly will be the door of redemption for them.
Manichaeism

4. My revelation of the two principles and my living scriptures, my wisdom and knowledge are above and better than those of the previous religions.

Kephalaia:
Jesus came to the West, and after his death his disciples wrote down his words. Zarathustra came to the land of Persia to King Hystaspes (Persian Wishtasp), but he did not write books, though his disciples remembered and wrote down his words after his death. And finally, when the Buddha came, he preached much wisdom and established churches, but he did not write anything, and it was his disciples who remembered and wrote down his words after his death.

5. The writings and the wisdom and the apocalypses and the parables of earlier religions were gathered everywhere and came to Mani’s religion and were added to the wisdom which he revealed.

Kephalaia adds:
“As water will be added to water and becomes much water, so were the ancient (earlier) books added to my writings and became a great wisdom the like of which was not proclaimed (hitherto) in all ancient (earlier) generations.”
Khusraw I the Immortal-Souled

1) It is said that during the reign of Xusrō, of Immortal soul, for the sake of testing the wisdom and knowledge of the Iranians and to see his own benefit, Dēwīšarm, great sovereign of the Indians, sent one set of chess, 16 pieces made from emerald and 16 pieces made from red ruby.

2) Along with that (game of) chess he sent 1200 camel loads of gold and silver and jewels and pearls and garments and 90 elephants and things specially made for them, which were sent along, and Tāxrītōs who was notable among the Indians was sent along.

3) In a letter he had written thus: Since you are named king of kings, and over us you are king of kings, then your wise men also must be wiser than ours, either you explain the logic of this (game of) chess or send (us) tribute and tax.

4) The king of kings asked for 3 days, and there was not one among the wise-men in Ērānšahr who was able to explain the logic of that chess (game).

5) On the third day, Wuzurgmīhr, the son of Boxtag stood upon his feet.

6) He said thus: May you be immortal, I did not explain the logic of this game of chess till today for that reason so that you and anyone who is in Ērānšahr know that I am the wisest in Ērānšahr.

7) I will easily explain the logic of this (game of) chess and will take tribute and tax from Dēwīšarm, and I will create and send something to Dēwīšarm which he will not be able to explain, (and) for the second time I will again take tribute and therefore it will become certain that you are worthy of the kingship of kings and our wise men are wiser than those of Dēwīšarm.
Khusraw II the Victorious
Sasanian Conquests
Heraclius Receiving the Submission of Khusraw II, plaque from a cross in the Louvre, 12th c.