

**Conciliar Decision-Making in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (6th to mid-9th centuries)**

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Christianity's emergence into the public sphere in Late Antiquity gave rise to a multitude of genuinely new questions. Among those, none was second in importance to the problem of how to create consensus amongst its adherents. How to implement reliable, effective decision-making processes was not only governed by practical considerations; from these processes' design and success highly consequential theological implications flowed naturally. Those implications in turn affected the very set of problems that had given rise to new, innovative modes of decision-making in the first place.

Christians had met to build consensus about matters of discipline and faith from earliest times. But with the tolerance and later espousal of Christianity by emperors, those deliberative bodies gained new relevance and were transformed themselves. The so-called „ecumenical councils“ were among the most prominent institutional innovations in Late Antiquity, but many more synods were held with the common goal of some form of consensus – with wildly varying outcomes. This disparate and far from uniform character stemmed not only from discord between participating bishops, but also from more indirect influence exerted by monks and

magistrates. Interference by the imperial authorities tasked with legally implementing the found consensus and, of course, by the emperor himself was also highly consequential.

Unique insights should therefore be gained from comparing various forms of conciliar decision-making and the different contexts within which those developments took place, both in time and space, as well as their contemporary and retrospective perception. Bridging the gaps between East and West, the 6th and the 9th centuries promised to reveal common traits as well as relevant differences, thus helping delineate more sharply the individual character of the historical events under investigation. With this goal, the Max-Planck-Institute for European Legal History and the Leibniz Project „Polyphony of Late Antique Christianity“ at Frankfurt's Goethe University jointly organized the conference. The interdisciplinary approach enabled the conference's organizers to profit from excellent contributions across fields of study and areas of specialization, setting the stage for a highly productive exchange of ideas in Frankfurt. At the same time, the new edition of the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II), produced by Erich Lamberg, was celebrated.

VOLKER-LORENZ MENZE (Budapest) opened the conference with a reappraisal of the political dimension of the Council of Chalcedon. Rejecting the traditional characterization of the Alexandrine Church as particularly hierarchical, he demonstrated similarly rigid hierarchies for rivaling centers across the East, highlighting the case of Constantinople. He further illustrated the conflicts created by Alexandria's pre-451 claim to preeminence. Connecting these conflicts with the evidence available for the proceedings at Chalcedon, he advocated for a broad contextualization of Chalcedon's results, connecting it to Constantine's creation of a new political center in the East. According to Menze, ecclesiastical structures followed suit more than a century later, revealing councils as pivotal battles not only in terms of theological arguments but also in terms of ecclesiastical politics.

HARTMUT LEPPIN (Frankfurt) compared different perspectives on councils in 6th-century ecclesiastical historiography. Empire-

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and worldwide councils had initially been a major innovation in inner-Christian consensus building which, however, had always been portrayed as under threat by dissenters and other disruptive forces. Against this backdrop, he emphasized the Council of Chalcedon's watershed role: Having failed to effectively build consensus, it would take almost a century for councils to be seriously considered in this capacity again. Despite obvious differences concerning past councils across linguistic and Christological divides, i.e. in Evagrius Scholasticos and John of Ephesus, a shared emphasis on the disruptive potential of councils was shown, making the later reemergence of councils as crucial modes of decision-making even more remarkable.

MARIA CONSTANTINO (Bamberg) contributed with observations on the Acts of the Synod of Constantinople in 536, pointing out a decisive shift in attitude towards the Council of Chalcedon beginning with Justin's accession. Subsequently, Justinian's early ecclesiastical policy had aimed at a restoration of unity between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians. Those efforts were effectively halted after 536, the synod marking the end of Justinian's attempts at reconciliation.

PHILIP MICHAEL FORNESS (Frankfurt) explored the particular role of text collections, focusing on the example of the acclamations of the People and the Synod of Constantinople in 518. He highlighted the heavy emphasis on the laity's role in the movement for the reinstatement of Chalcedon after the death of Anastasios, its attacks on Miaphysite champions such as Severos and the very short time span between the articulation of popular demands in the Hagia Sophia and the convention of the synod. Forness also illustrated the later overshadowing of the contributions of the laity by the synod's results, showing the lasting influence exerted by individual texts that had been transmitted as a collection.

JOHN HALDON (Princeton), shifting perspective to the Council of 787, characterized acts of councils in general as invaluable sources for Medieval East Roman life. Concerning the particular issue of iconoclasm, they, according to him, reveal the prevalent notion of uniform monastic opposition to iconoclasm as unsupported by evidence. In-

stead, many monks had supported Constantine V, with anti-monastic policies mostly limited to monasteries closest to the capital. Further drawing both on the multitude of conciliatory and aggressive positions embraced by monks and iconoclasm's character as an imperial phenomenon, he cautioned against a lopsided analysis of the parties' motivating factors; if political considerations were deemed relevant for iconoclasm's supporters, the same should hold true for opponents. Repudiating the conscience-focused, apparently disinterested narrative internal to the iconophile tradition, he rather suggested a self-conscious assertion of monastic independence from imperial authority to have caused the later abundance of iconophile literature from monastic sources.

Returning to the Latin West, ANDREAS WECKWERTH (Eichstätt-Ingolstadt) contextualized Western synods in the emergence and development of Canon Law. He argued that general, stylized formulations only served to mask the factual context of the respective synod under investigation. Therefore, a working model for the creation of these final texts was necessary, encompassing the necessary steps of deliberation, fixation in writing, ratification and publication. He also highlighted the role of professional *notarii* in the above-mentioned process of shaping the final document for distribution. In spite of these efforts at redaction and standardization, Weckwerth emphasized the continuing character of these synodal decisions as case law to which efforts at systemization would have been utterly alien.

FLORIAN HARTMANN (Aachen) presented both continuity and innovations in his analysis of episcopal dominance between the Council of Frankfurt in 794 and the Council of Paris in 829. Charlemagne, in taking the initiative and convening councils, had evoked the image of Late Antique Roman Emperors, if not Constantine himself. Him assuming a dual role as *rex et sacerdos* was a case in point, as were the proximity of, for example, the Council of Frankfurt to analogous conventions of nobility in both space and time. By 822 and the reign of Louis the Pious times had apparently changed: The imperial acts of public penance were clearly incompatible

with the earlier position of the emperor at the apex of both worldly and ecclesiastical hierarchies. The Council of Paris further shifted the balance of authority in favor of the clergy, without, however, directly attacking imperial authority. Thus, Charlemagne's dominance over the clergy had transformed into a notion of mutual dependence under his successors.

TIM GEELHAAR (Frankfurt) drew attention to the role accorded to the *populus Christianus* in Latin Councils' texts and the conceptualizations underlying these documents. He showed how meager, if any, references to concepts of a „Christian people“ in Patristic literature had not deterred liberal use of the term, i.e. during the Concilium Germanicum in 742. Geelhaar connected the regular use of the plural form with the authors' recognition of the inherent difficulties in applying notions of ethnical homogeneity to 8th- and 9th-century Western Europe. The unique difficulty in translating the political implications of the New Covenant in the Latin West, aggravated by the peculiar separation of *ecclesia* and *regnum*, were further demonstrated through comparison with the East where no such difficulties had existed, foreshadowing and illustrating the very different developmental trajectories that political power and sacred authority were to take.

Taking the conference to 8th-century Armenia, IGOR DORFMANN-LAZAREV (Frankfurt) shone light on the effects of the Muslim Conquests on conciliar decision-making, choosing the example of the Council of Mantzikert in 726. Armenia's reduction to vassalage by Muslim armies 699-705 had obliterated the country's traditional, nobility-based power structure and left ecclesiastical authorities in sole control of and directly responsible for the country to the new empire. The events unfolding and leading up to the Council of Mantzikert bore strong resemblance to the fate of churches in Syria half a century earlier, the reduction of Byzantine influence coinciding with new sources of episcopal legitimacy from within the Caliphate's political structure. In conclusion, these shared experiences had brought Armenians and Syrians closer together, being united both in defining and striving for orthodoxy and preventing conversion and imperial encroachment on

their political authority.

Having been unable to attend, PHILIP BOOTH (Oxford) nevertheless contributed by making his presentation available to the participants. Analyzing the pivotal role of the First Severan Councils, he devoted particular attention to the role played by al-Mundhir, the Ghassanid king, in attempting to reconcile Jacobites, Paulites, Egyptians and other Miaphyite groups, with his arbitration resulting in a pact of union. He suggested an interpretation of the arbitration as an imperial initiative, devised and executed at the request of the emperor Tiberius, utilizing the Arab ruler as a front to avoid any fallout in case of failure.

HEINZ OHME (Berlin) supplemented earlier insights into Western synodal working practices with an outlook to the East and a detailed analysis of the Concilium Quinisextum in 691 / 692. Responding to widespread apocalyptic expectations and deep divisions between East and West, it had been convened primarily to confirm the six ecumenical synods and to address the new importance of enforcing Canon Law beyond the empire's shrunken borders. Ohme illustrated how a commission had prepared the synod, clearing the way for the proposed text to be read in front of the emperor, confirmed by both him and the bishops and subsequently distributed. He furthermore pointed out structural similarities between the subscription lists and those of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, indicating a particular devotion to securing its decisions.

Further analyzing the Sixth Ecumenical Council, MAREK JANKOWIAK (Birmingham) highlighted the interrelatedness of political events and conciliar decision-making. Devastating military defeats had provided the opponents of Monotheletism with compelling evidence against a hated Christological position, stripping its champions of all legitimacy gained by previous success in battle. Jankowiak suggested resolving additional inconsistencies by reading and decoding the Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council through the *Liber pontificalis*. Considerations of style and content aside, he also adduced the council as evidence for the survival of a competent bureaucracy that might have been crucial for

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the survival of the empire.

KIRILL MAKSIMOVIĆ (Frankfurt) explored the possibility of synodal texts exerting powerful influence beyond their immediate purpose and eventually ignoring conventional limits of their genre. Investigating the difficult textual tradition of the Synodikon of 843, first publicly read in 844, he suggested a hybrid development, including both a stable textual core and a supplementing tradition of addition. He connected this last feature, rather atypical for legal texts, with the Synodikon's early liturgical use, while drawing on its importance in condemning heresy through public reading to explain the increase in heresiological content over time.

PANAGIOTIS AGAPITOS (Nicosia / Frankfurt) contributed a philological appraisal of the new edition of the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787) by Erich Lamberz. Expressing his appreciation for the monumental effort behind the new edition, he outlined the decade-long work spent on it. He also argued for philological analysis that refrained from enforcing an alien sense of textual unity and instead dealt with the texts as a collection. Agapitos also called for a new effort to read the acts not only as documents, but also as literary works, commending Lamberz for careful, moderate efforts at reconstruction, innovative use of an early Latin translation in that effort and his brilliant use of intra- and intertextual evidence to date individual components.

WOLFRAM BRANDES (Frankfurt) added a survey of the new opportunities provided by Lamberz to scholars of Byzantine History to this philological perspective. New insights could now be gained about iconoclasm itself, as the acts had essentially preserved the *horos* of the Council of Hieria in 754. Beyond this, possible Jewish and Muslim influences on iconoclast thought now had to be reevaluated. But the acts' value as a source would not be confined to the East – the history of Byzantine-Papal relationships in the 8th and 9th centuries depended on them, too.

Both of these historical and philological aspects were echoed in the reflections of ERICH LAMBERZ (Munich) himself. He expressed his conviction that any edition must not limit

itself to the restitution of an assumed original version but rather present a broad textual history, including the history of the text's reception. Methodologically, he defended his maintenance of an assumed original version while conceding the impossibility of any reconstruction beyond 806. He also justified his conservative editorial stance, instead arguing for readers to engage with the text and take conflicting versions into account rather than working with an imposed final judgment.

In conclusion, the conference's goals were achieved: Comparative approaches and fruitful discussions by specialists across epochs and regions provided new insights into motives behind and mechanics of conciliar decision-making; in addition, interactions with rulers, both Christian and non-Christian, were explored, shining light not only on ecclesiastical developments but also on historical events in general. Finally, a monumental contribution was presented to critical acclaim, concluding this conference but doubtlessly opening and inspiring new avenues of research for future generations of scholars.

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Late Antique Councils (5th-6th century)*

Volker-Lorenz Menze (Budapest): Verdammt oder nicht verdammt? Das Konzil von Chalkedon und seine Rezeption im 6. Jh.

Hartmut Leppin (Frankfurt): Konzilien in der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung des ausgehenden 6. Jahrhunderts

Maria Constantinou (Bamberg): Observations on the Acts of the Synod of Constantinople 536

Philip Michael Forness (Frankfurt): The Acclamations of the People and the Synod of Constantinople (518)

##### *Public Lecture*

John Haldon (Princeton): Monastic Politics and Vested Interests around the Council of 787: Myths and Realities

##### *Latin West*

Andreas Weckwerth (Eichstätt-Ingolstadt): Der Entstehungsprozess synodaler Kanones im Kontext westlicher Synoden

Florian Hartmann (Aachen): Auf dem Weg zur bischöflichen Dominanz? Die Konzilien von Frankfurt 794 bis Paris 829

Tim Geelhaar (Frankfurt): Das christliche Volk in den lateinischen Konzilstexten. Konzeptionalisierungen und Reichweite einer Figur des großen Ganzen

*Oriens Christianus*

Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev (Frankfurt): Armenisch-Syrisches Konzil von Mantzikert (726)

Philip Booth (Oxford): The First Severan Councils

*Byzantium*

Heinz Ohme (Berlin): Konziliare Entscheidungen und das Problem der Rezeption: Das Concilium Quinisextum (691/2)

Marek Jankowiak (Birmingham): Losing control: The Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-1) according to its Acts and the Liber Pontificalis

Kirill Maksimovič (Frankfurt): Die Synode von 843 als Wendepunkt in der Häresienbekämpfung in Byzanz: Der Fall des Synodikon der Orthodoxie

*Seventh Ecumenical Council*

Panagiotis Agapitos (Nicosia / Frankfurt): Vom Dokument zum literarischen Werk: Eine philologische Würdigung der neuen Ausgabe der Akten des Nicaenum II von Erich Lamberz

Wolfram Brandes (Frankfurt): Relevanz der neuen Ausgabe für die historische Forschung

Erich Lamberz (Munich): Reflexionen des Editors

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