ABSTRACT

In this paper, I hope to show some ways in which scholars working on the period of Late Antiquity, who largely depend on literary sources, might gain some insights from the ethnographic and archaeological studies done on competitive sharing in the century since F. W. Hasluck pioneered the study of shared/contested shrines in the same region, 1500 years later.

When the territories of most of the Late Antique provinces of interest for this workshop—Thrace, Dacia, Macedonia, Moesia, Achea, Asia, & Pontus—were under Ottoman rule, from the 14th/15th centuries through the 19th/early 20th, they were called Rumelia, the land of the Rum, the Romans; and the Christian inhabitants of it were the Rum millet. I argue that viewing the Eastern Empire from the perspective of Rumelia offers several analytical advantages. In so far as Late Antiquity is taken to refer to the displacement of Roman paganism by (forms of) Christianity, the arrival of (forms of) Islam beginning in the 7th century seems relevant, since the patterns of interaction between early Muslims and the Christians and Jews in the places where Islam had just arrived presents a dynamic of competitive interaction in the development of religious spaces that seems very similar to that seen between Christians, Jews and pagans slightly before and contemporaneous with them. Thus, while the CfP refers to a less than clear-cut tripartition between pagans, Jews and Christians, the development of Islam from the same roots as Judaism and Christianity lets us consider a quadripartite set of interactions, with the fourth religious referent no more clearly delineated than the others. The view through the conceptual lenses of Antagonistic Tolerance reveals a range of similar trajectories of intertemporal interactions, in which political/military leaders have tried to impose divinities from wider geopolitical/georeligious spaces into localities in a region with many local gods and saints of varying divinity. As time progressed the wider religious traditions sequentially gained dominance in major, central sites, though with their own intra-denominational competitive displays (e.g., between various forms of Christianity; among Muslims, Sunni, Shi’a, Alevi-Bektaşi), while trying to gain control over practices at local sites, many of which remained—and remain even today—strikingly non-conforming to any larger doctrinal practices. While the practices are different in detail, seem quite familiar in many processes and patterns of social interaction.