

PHILIPP M. FORNESS – ALEXANDRA HASSE-UNGEHEUER – HARTMUT LEPPIN (eds), *The Good Christian Ruler in the First Millennium: Views from the Wider Mediterranean World in Conversation* (Millennium-Studien 92). Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter 2021. IX, 464 pp. – ISBN 978-3-11-072469-1 (€ 139.95)

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The volume under review emerged from a conference hosted in Frankfurt am Main in November 2016. It concentrates on concepts of good rulership from a Christian perspective across the cultures of Europe and the wider Mediterranean during the first millennium (i. e. from the fourth to the tenth century CE). Eighteen studies are grouped into four thematic sections: beginning with the Roman Empire (A.), the collection moves on to the Caucasus and Persia (B.), the post-Roman traditions (C.), and closes with the good ruler under Islamic rule (D.). The sections and chapters are listed at the end of this review.

The introduction (pp. 1–36) is divided into three sections. Section 1 examines the origins of Christian thought on good rulers by following the traditional chronological division into “before and after Constantine I”: before Constantine, relevance is given to the sources for Christian thought on good rulership. Constantine’s challenge and the Christian turn are discussed. After Constantine, emphasis is placed on how Christian rulership developed in practice from Constantius II to Heraclius and how it took shape in different political settings beyond the Roman Empire. Section 2 compares and summarises the views on good Christian rulership explored in the contributions. This section unnecessarily anticipates research results and introduces further geographical, chronological and thematical categories. Section 3 proposes four helpful themes that enable cross-study comparison: (1) source material; (2) titles for sovereigns; (3) models for good rulership; (4) virtues expected of rulers.

In “Finding a Common Cause: Fourth-Century Greek Discourses on Rulership” (pp. 39–63), LEPPIN identifies three types of imperial praise in Greek panegyrics that drew on both the Old Testament and the tradition of the Graeco-Roman *Fürstenspiegel*: (1) the hierocratic discourse, which “eulogised the sacral position of the ruler in a Christian sense”; (2) the neutralising discourse, which “avoided religious commitments and often employed

ambiguous language”; (3) the penitentiary discourse, which “accepted and sublimated the sinfulness of the emperor in a Christian sense” (p. 40). The author introduces the tripartite division as a heuristic device to serve the first three studies of Section A, devoted to the good Christian ruler transculturally in the context of the late antique Roman Empire. LEPPIN engages with the hierocratic and neutralising discourses. He shows how the Christian Eusebius of Caesarea and the pagan Themistius navigated the transition towards Christian rulership. LEPPIN finds that, while Eusebius did not develop any unitarian Christian notion of rulership (despite extolling the emperor in view of priestly concepts), Themistius refrained from making any religious commitments. In “The Good Sinful Ruler: Ambrose of Milan and Theodosius I” (pp. 65–86), BOYTSOV examines the role of *humilitas* as an imperial virtue within the penitentiary discourse, which emerged in the fourth century. The author provides a critical analysis of Ambrose of Milan’s letter to Theodosius I and his speech *De obitu Theodosii*. He considers aspects of the transmission and political symbolic of the repentance of Theodosius that have not yet been researched but are crucial in understanding the long-term success of this discourse. In “The Emperor’s Two Cities: Augustine’s Image of the Good Christian Ruler in *De civitate Dei* 5.24” (pp. 87–108), PREUß engages once more with the penitentiary discourse. The author draws attention to Augustine of Hippo’s focus on the emperor not in the role of head of government but as a Christian human being. PREUß argues: “if what we find in the *De civitate Dei* is to be called a mirror, it is a mirror for Christians who are rulers, rather than a guide for Christian rulership” (p. 89). While the introduction to the volume puts forward that PREUß attributes a political theory to *De civitate Dei* 5.24 (p. 24), PREUß repeatedly indicates that Augustine offers no political theory (p. 98, and with reference to DODARO¹, note 32, p. 94). PREUß rightly highlights that Augustine refuses to link *felicitas* to earthly achievements (p. 92). On the other hand, in the *De civitate Dei*, *beatitudo* is reserved for heavenly blessedness. A juxtaposition of *felicitas* and *beatitudo* and their occurrence in the *De civitate Dei* might shed more light on the extent to which *felicitas* assumes a transcendental meaning. The contributions “Pious and Impious Christian Rulers According to Egyptian Historiography

1. ROBERT DODARO, *Ecclesia and Res Publica: How Augustinian Are Neo-Augustinian Politics?* In: LIEVEN BOEVE – MATHIJS LAMBERIGTS – MAARTEN WISSE (eds), *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium 219). Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA 2009, pp. 237–71, here p. 238.

and Hagiography: A First Survey of the Evidence” (pp. 109–39) by CAMPLANI and “Faithful Rulers and Theological Deviance: Ephrem the Syrian and Jacob of Serugh on the Roman Emperor” (pp. 141–67) by FORNESS are devoted to the Middle East. While the first three studies of Section A. are re-evaluations of well-known Greek and Latin sources, these last two pieces discuss hitherto unexplored material with regard to views on good Christian rulership and point out avenues for further research.

Section B. opens with an enquiry into rulership from within Sasanian Persia in mainly Zoroastrian sources. WIESEHÖFER’s “Images of the Good Ruler in Sasanian Iran: An Emic View” (pp. 171–80) offers a complementary perspective to the Rome-centric view taken in the first section. The author exposes a dichotomy in the perception of Persian rulership between Persian and non-Persian sources and reveals the diversity of Persian representations of the monarchy and individual rulers between the third and the seventh century. The following five contributions concentrate on the Caucasus. GREENWOOD’s “Representations of Rulership in Late Antique Armenia” (pp. 181–203) examines terminology used for rulers in four Armenian historiographical texts: the *Buzandaran Patmut’iwnk’* (c. 475–499), the *History* of Łazar P’arpec’i (c. 500), the *History* of Elišē (c. 566–599) and the *History* assigned to Sebēos (655, scholia inserted in 661). While the texts reveal terminological choices influenced by Roman, Greek and Persian sources, an overall development towards a Roman-oriented model for good Christian rulership can be discerned. BOZOYAN’s “The Depiction of the Arsacid Dynasty in Medieval Armenian Historiography” (pp. 205–19) introduces into the study of the reception of dynasties and individual rulers. The Arsacids represented a connecting point, first between Armenia and Persia, later between Armenia and the Byzantine Empire. The author shows how the Arsacids feature prominently in the Armenian conception of rulership through representation in historiographical works such as Movsēs Xorenac’i’s *History of the Armenians*, where Christian virtues are even ascribed to non-Christian Arsacid kings. BOZOYAN highlights that, after the fall of the dynasty in 428, the Arsacids assumed a restorative role in Armenian apocalyptic literature. The need for further research on this genre is emphasised. JECK’s “Vakhtang I Gorgasali (r. 447–522) as a Christian Monarch in Georgia: His Depiction in the *Life of Kartli*” (pp. 221–37) focuses on the *Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali*, dated to the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century and embedded within the *Life of Kartli*, a historically complex collection and re-edition of earlier texts from different authors formed around 1050. The author illustrates how Georgia’s

Christianisation process is reflected in Vakhtang's manoeuvring between the different religions represented in the kingdom, i. e. the traditional gods, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. An alleged speech by Vakhtang recorded in the *Life* alludes to Plato's allegory of the cave. The author argues that in this episode Vakhtang emerges as an ideal king whose Christian principles are anchored in the platonic philosophical tradition. He assumes the role of a protector of Christianity against the Persians. HAKOBYAN's "The Creation of a "Pious" Image of King Vač'agan II (r. c. 485–523) of Caucasian Albania in the *Tale of Vač'agan* (Early Sixth Century)" (pp. 239–48) examines the content of a late-fifth- to early-sixth-century hagiographical account included in Movsēs Daxuranc'i's *History of Albania* (a compilation of writings from Caucasian Albania). Concentrating on his deeds and Christian virtues rather than his reign, the narrative, according to HAKOBYAN, portrays *Vač'agan* as a pious ruler worthy of veneration and in this way contributes towards his transformation into a legend. The final contribution, DORFMANN-LAZAREV's "Concerning Four Kings From the Land of 'Deep Ravines, Dense Forests and Dark Thickets'" (pp. 249–88), examines an instance of kingship not yet elucidated in scholarship of four brothers belonging to an Armenian house: the sons of Prince Išxananun Sewaday (born c. 910). In addition to the *History of the Albanians* by Movsēs Daxuranc'i (or Kałankatuac'i), the author uses recently edited letter exchanges between three of the sons and the ecclesiastical writer Tiranun. The aim of the source analysis is to understand the conception and practice of rule, as well as the kings' relations with Muslim neighbours. The four brothers reigned over a small, changing territory north-east of Lake Sewan and were recognised as "lords of Armenia". Their title dates to the Arsacid kingdom of Armenia (66 BCE–428 CE) and is shared between four princely houses of Armenian and Georgian origin that reigned within the territory of the ancient kingdom of Caucasian Albania between the end of the eighth and the end of the tenth century. The claim to the Albanian throne links the "lords of Albania" to the Christian prestige enjoyed by that kingdom. The author demonstrates the importance of the biblical tradition: Adam, the first human being, represents a renewal of Christian kingship in Albania.

Section C. explores the reception and transformation of earlier traditions in selected regions during post-Roman times. Rather than a comprehensive treatment of post-Roman conceptions of Christian rulership, the section provides "examples of the types of investigations" that are "possible for a wider range of regions" (p. 19). In "The Good Ruler from a Papal Per-

spective: Continuities and Discontinuities in Papal Letters from the Fourth to Eighth Centuries” (pp. 291–309), HARTMANN examines how popes of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages envisioned good Christian rulership and how they addressed the emperors and the rulers of successor states in Europe. The canonical collections investigated mainly consist of papal correspondence and do not reflect systematic thought on good rulership. Nevertheless, according to the author, a consistency can be discerned as far as the virtues expected of good rulers are concerned. These included defending the correct Christian doctrine with a view to ensuring the subjects’ salvation, as well as listening to trustworthy advisers. Missionary work and protection of the Church that were to go hand in hand with military expansion were responsibilities demanded by popes only after the sixth century (in particular, in relation to the militarily successful Frankish kings). In “The Image of the Christian Ruler in the Catholic Monarchy of Visigothic Spain: Julian of Toledo’s *Historia Wambae*” (pp. 311–25), DREWS concentrates on seventh-century Spain and analyses the representation of King Wamba (r. 672–680) in bishop Julian of Toledo’s *Historia Wambae*. Using the Septimanian usurper Paul who embodies bad rule as a counter-example, Julian of Toledo depicts Wamba as a virtuous *princeps religiosus*. DREWS finds that the author takes recourse to well-known models of good rulership from Roman literature (Sallust) and the Old Testament. However, the socio-historical context (i. e. the ecclesiastical milieu within late Visigothic Spain) requires a remodelling of the conventional image of Christian rulership into a more transcendent notion: King Wamba is endowed with priestly qualities, and his rule assumes a transhistorical meaning beyond the physical and temporal limits of the Roman Empire. In “Goodness and Cruelty: The Image of the Ruler of the First Bulgarian Empire in the Period of Christianisation (Ninth Century)” (pp. 327–60), ZIEMANN draws on Bulgarian, Byzantine and Western sources in order to show how models and counter-models shaped perceptions of Bulgarian rulership during the process of Christianisation in the ninth century. He finds that the image of Boris/Michael, the first Christian ruler of Bulgaria, as a “zealous fighter for Christianity and as a pious ruler”, and in later sources as a “builder of churches” (p. 360), combines elements from the Greek East, the Latin West, and local traditions. ŁAJTAR-OCHAŁA conclude the section with “A Christian King in Africa: The Image of Christian Nubian Rulers in Internal and External Sources” (pp. 361–79). The authors turn to a variety of sources depicting the Christian Nubian kingdoms, which developed already in the sixth century. However, due to a lack of historiography, most

of the relevant material, although based on earlier sources, is from a later period – from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. While the internal (i. e. Nubian) sources originate from Muslim and Christian milieus and include material remains, sacred buildings, objects of everyday use, and literary and documentary texts in Greek, Sahidic Coptic, Old Nubian and Arabic, the external (i. e. non-Nubian) sources are for the most part literary texts composed in Arabic, and to a lesser extent in Coptic, Greek, Syriac and Gəʿəz. It emerges that perceptions of Christian Nubian rulership were influenced by the Graeco-Roman tradition, in particular the model of Constantine I. In addition, nobles and the mother of the Nubian king were given important roles, and there is evidence of episcopal criticism of kingly behaviour.

TORAL-NIEHOFF's contribution "Justice and Good Administration in Medieval Islam: The Book of the Pearl of the Ruler by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (860–940)" (pp. 383–96) opens Section D. and introduces into the study of the good ruler within an Islamic context. The author concentrates on an Andalusian early Islamic mirror (*Fürstenspiegel*). The source is ideal for summarising qualities generally ascribed to the good ruler in medieval Islam and for outlining how his relationship with the entourage (ministers, counsellors, and family) and his subjects was conceived. TORAL-NIEHOFF provides an overview of the various literary manifestations of advice on good rulership, the Arabic concept of *ʿadāla* ("justice"), as well as the terminology used for rulers and other political powerholders in medieval Arabic literature. Different cultural elements can be discerned in early Islamic political advice, which developed into a new tradition of rulership through works such as the *Book of the Pearl of the Ruler*. In "Images of Emperors and Emirs in Early Islamic Egypt" (pp. 397–420) BOOTH discusses an intriguing case in which portrayals of good and bad rulership developed in tandem: the image of Heraclius (r. 610–641) as persecutor and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (685–705) as the good ruler circulated as arguments in Severan (anti-Chalcedonian) sources to justify allegiance to the Arab-Muslim authorities in Egypt during the time of transition after the Arab conquest (640–642). CONTERNO's "Shaping the Good Christian King under Muslim Rule: Constantine and the Torah in the Melkite Arabic Chronicle of Agapius of Mabbug (Tenth Century)" (pp. 421–41) examines representations of past rulers in the tenth-century Melkite *Kitāb al-ʿunwān* of Agapius of Mabbug. A narrative concerning Constantine I relates both to a hagiographical tradition and to contemporary religious debates. CONTERNO finds that it responds to Muslim authors' criticisms of Constantine and that

an anti-Jewish stance was considered to be an essential trait of a Christian ruler in Agapius's milieu.

The conceptual framework of this volume appears slightly obscured in the introduction due to a division into a vast number of analytical categories. Inconsistencies between introduction and contribution (PREUß) can be avoided by refraining from anticipating research results in greater detail. Eliminating existing gaps in research was not the sole rationale for this collection: "This volume is not intended to be a complete handbook for images of good rulers in the first millennium from a Christian perspective" (p. 11). Overall, the volume is an important collection that incorporates the study of Christian political thought into a wider perspective, both transculturally and transepoachally, which is overdue and has been anticipated by scholars as well as historically interested laymen.

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rulership; Christianity; first millennium; Mediterranean; cultural exchange