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Introduction: Expanding the Discourse on Good Christian Rulership

Bad rulers make spectacular figures. Infamous Roman emperors – Caligula (r. 37–41), Nero (r. 54–68), and Commodus (r. 177–192) – have always attracted the attention of both scholars and a broader audience. Good rulers, on the other hand, are likable yet also boring and not mediagenic. On first glance, it may seem to be a dull, repetitive task to investigate good Christian rulers. Yet whether a ruler was considered good or bad depends on the individual perspective and the sources: many Romans thought highly of Nero, and many arguably hated Trajan (r. 98–117). This volume, therefore, does not address individual rulers but rather concepts of good rulership.

The individual studies that follow expose many similarities in the ideas of good Christian rulership across a wide range of cultures. But significant differences also emerge in relation to the intended audience of the sources, the time and location in which they were produced, and the individual backgrounds and intellectual traditions of their authors. By attending to the historical contexts of these views, this volume reveals that the first millennium was a time in which ideas of good Christian rulership took root and flourished across the cultures of Europe and the wider Mediterranean world.

This introduction seeks to provide a foundation for the contributions that follow and highlight how these studies point towards productive areas for future research. Section 1 serves as an introduction to the roots of Christian thought on good rulers with an emphasis on the challenge of Constantine I’s (r. 306–337) turn to Christianity and the development of thoughts on good Christian rulership within the Roman Empire until Heraclius (r. 610–641). Section 2 summarises the contributions in this volume which reach well beyond the Roman Empire and expose the wealth of ideas of good Christian rulership that developed in a variety of cultures and linguistic communities. Section 3 takes stock of the overall contribution of this volume by examining similarities and differences related to source material, royal titulature, models of good rulership, and virtues.

The essays included in this volume cover a wide range of scholarly disciplines that have different standards for both citations and the spelling of proper nouns. We have sought consistency within each individual essay on these matters rather than privileging the standards of one field of study. While this allows for some minor divergences, it respects the established norms of each discipline represented in the volume. Abbreviations for modern editions, journals, series, and reference works follow the conventions of Millennium Studies, while abbreviations for premodern works come from Brill’s New Pauly, G. W. H. Lampe’s A Patristic Greek Lexicon, and the Theologische Realenzyklopädie.
1 Traditions of the Good Christian Ruler in the Roman Empire

Roman emperors have played an outsized role in the conceptualisation of good Christian rulership. The legacy of Constantine I as the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire proved important in a wide range of cultures. Understanding the development of the ideas of Christian rulership within the Roman Empire provides one important foundation for approaching the studies that follow. Therefore, this section first investigates views on Roman emperors in Christian sources before Constantine as well as the foundations of Christian thought on good rulership. It then examines some of the new questions posed by Constantine’s conversion and the measures taken to address them up to the reign of Heraclius. Finally, it briefly summarises non-Roman traditions that also proved influential.

1.1 Christian Views on the Roman Emperor before Constantine

Most Christians took the existing monarchical order in the Roman Empire for granted. Many criticised individual rulers, but their Kaiserkritik did not necessarily reflect disapproval of the monarchical order as such. Paul, for example, exhorted his audience to be subject to the higher powers (Rom 13:1), which were monarchical at that time. If Paul had to instruct a Christian community in Rome to be obedient, there must have been Christians who were less convinced. But this still does not mean that they questioned the political order as such. The book of Revelation, which is highly critical of Roman rule, does not establish an alternative model to the political order as such. It rather announces that the end of the wicked world is near. Even Christian martyrs, who stated openly before Roman authorities that they obeyed a higher ruler in all matters they defined as religiously relevant, were nevertheless eager to underline that they otherwise felt loyal to Roman rule, behaved orderly, and paid taxes. Christians who confronted political authorities did not demand a new political system. They rather rejected certain practices connected with the imperial order, such as swearing an oath in the name of the emperor or performing a sacrifice.¹

Very few reflections on good rulership have survived from pre-Constantinian Christians; the emperors were far from the Lebenswelt of most.² Yet we do know

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² Foundational studies on this topic include Stefan Rebenich, Monarchie, RAC 24, 2012, 1112–1196; id. (ed.), Monarchische Herrschaft im Altertum (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs. Kolloquien 94), Munich 2017. But see also the earlier and still important study: Francis Dvornik, Early Christian...
that both Christians and non-Christians hated some of the most notorious Roman emperors such as Nero and Domitian (r. 81–96). But not all odious pre-Constantinian Roman emperors earned the ire of Christians. Commodus, for example, had a reputation as someone who favoured Christians. Hippolytus (fl. c. 200) attributes this tendency to the influence of Commodus's concubine Marcia (d. 193). Before Constantine, Christians likely remained close to the political mainstream and mainly criticised emperors when they engaged in persecutions.

In this time, Christians also knew how to praise an emperor fittingly. Apologies addressed to emperors, for example, use the typical encomiastic formulae. In his *Plea for the Christians*, the second-century apologist Athenagoras praises Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180) and Commodus as ideal rulers:

And accordingly, with admiration of your mildness and gentleness, and your peaceful and benevolent disposition towards everyone, individuals live in the possession of equal rights; and the cities, according to their rank, share in equal honour; and the whole empire, under your intelligent sway, enjoys profound peace.

Thus, there was certainly common ground between Christian and non-Christian interpretations of good rulership in the first centuries. Although the Roman emperors were not Christians, their reigns could still be presented as God-given.

Early Christians would not have expected a Roman emperor to become a Christian. Tertullian (c. 160/70–after 220) rejects this idea explicitly:

But even the emperors would have believed in Christ, if either emperors had not been necessary to the world or if it had been possible for Christians too to be emperors.

Tertullian had good reasons to do so. As *pontifex maximus* and as a man who was revered as a god, the Roman emperor was a central figure in the Roman religious system that Christians defined as pagan. Could anyone have anticipated that an emperor would abandon these pillars of his rule? There was, therefore, no specifically Christian concept of rulership at the time that Constantine turned to the Christian God

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3 Hipp., ref. 9.12.10–12; Euseb., hist. eccl. 5.21.

4 Hipp., ref. 9.12.10–12.

5 Διόσπερ τὸ πρᾶσον ὑμῶν καὶ ἡμερον καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἀπαντά εἰρηνικῶν καὶ φιλάνθρωπων θαυμάζοντες οἱ μὲν καθ’ ἕνα ἰσόνομα ὑποτάσσονται, αἱ δὲ πόλεις πρὸς ἀξίαν τῆς ἴσης μετέχουσιν τιμῆς, καὶ ὡς κύριας οἰκουμένης τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ συνήθει βαθείας εἰρήνης ἀπολαύοντος (Athenag., 1.2; translation slightly modified from that of B.P. Pratten).

6 *Sed et Caesares credidissent super Christo, si aut Caesares non essent necessarii saeculo, aut si et Christiani potuissent esse Caesares* (Tert., apol. 21.24; translation by Alexander Souter).
whom he perceived as a god of victory. At this moment, who could have had the slightest idea what it meant to be a Christian emperor?  

1.2 Sources for Christian Thought on Good Rulership

To conceptualise rule by a Christian emperor, non-Christians might have referred to other emperors’ preference for gods such as Sol Invictus, as promoted by Aurelian (r. 270 – 275) and by Constantine I himself to a certain degree. For Christians, however, Constantine’s unforeseen turn presented a real challenge and led to a range of new questions. What should they hope for from a Christian ruler? Would he support churches financially? Would priests and bishops play an important role in a Christian empire? What kind of authority could the ruler enjoy in religious matters? Would he feel entitled to negotiate dogmatic differences among Christians? How would he manage non-Christian cults? What influence might Christian ethics have on his personal life? Such questions shaped the debates about good Christian rulership for centuries.

The writings of early Christians, whether they later became canonical or not, provided no clear answers to these questions. There was no Fürstenspiegel (mirror of princes) embedded in the New Testament. The language of imperial rulership was by no means unknown to early Christians, as the synoptic Gospels hail the kingdom of God from an eschatological perspective. Yet Christian authors used this language primarily to describe the role of Christ. Likewise, ethical discourse among early Christians was highly individualised and rarely delved into how ethical behaviour was embedded within a particular social context. Christians from the fourth century and later could hardly rely on writings by early Christians for addressing the challenges that attended a Christian emperor.

On the other hand, both pagan Romans and Christians could draw on a common cache of ideas of good rulership that had developed since Isocrates, if not since Homer. Already in the second century, apologists highlighted that Christians lived

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7 Armenia forms a special case. There are now good reasons to date the conversion of Trdat III to 315; see Werner Seibt, Der historische Hintergrund und die Chronologie der Christianisierung Armeniens bzw. der Taufe König Trdats (ca. 315), in: id. (ed.), Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus, Vienna 2002, 125 – 133; Michel van Esbroeck, Die Stellung der Märtyrerin Rhipsime in der Geschichte der Bekehrung des Kaukasus, in: Werner Seibt (ed.), Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus, Vienna 2002, 171–179. For Armenian views on Christian rulership, see the contributions by Azuat Bozoyan, Tim Greenwood, and Aleksan Hakobyan in this volume.

8 On the wide range of meanings of the term Fürstenspiegel, see Geert Roskam and Stefan Schorn (eds.), Concepts of Ideal Rulership from Antiquity to the Renaissance (Lectio 7), Turnhout 2018. See also fn. 35.

9 The bibliography on this topic is extensive. A very recent study that discusses concepts and traits of good rulers in the Roman Empire to the end of the third century is Anne Gangloff, Pouvoir impérial et
up to Roman values much better than others did. Such commonalities proved extremely helpful in navigating an empire composed of both non-Christians and Christians. A shared political language emerged in the fourth century against this background. Words that traditionally denoted imperial virtues such as *eusebeia*, piety, or *philanthropía*, philanthropy, found a place in both Christian and non-Christian discourses. In that sense they were neutral concepts; by employing them, an emperor did not associate himself with any particular god.¹⁰

But unlike pagan Romans, Christians also relied on another tradition which they inherited from the Jews. The books of the Old Testament not only contain accounts of foreign kings and passages that reject royal rule on principle but also offer examples of rulers who were counted among the faithful. Unlike the New Testament, they include content similar to *Fürstenspiegel*, among them the so-called “Royal Psalms,” which were built on Egyptian and Assyrian traditions and seemingly praise a Jewish king.¹¹ Kings were expected to conduct war successfully, to establish justice in the world, and to ensure that appropriate cultic practices could be carried out.

More importantly, the historical books of the Old Testament devoted much space to bad kings in Israel and Judah. These narratives became important sources for ideas about rulership. King Ahab of Israel, for example, does not listen to the prophets and behaves in an unjust manner. But there are also more complicated cases of sovereigns who are seen as examples of good kings but nevertheless commit grave sins. King David has an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and causes her husband’s death. King Solomon builds temples for foreign gods. Even Josiah, who exhibits many features of an exemplary ruler, dies a sinner.¹² The examples of good and bad monarchs found in the Old Testament formed a productive source for reflection on good Christian rulership alongside other traditions from the Roman Empire.

1.3 The Challenge of Constantine I

When Constantine turned to the Christian God, it became necessary for Christians to reflect on monarchic rule. Few pre-Constantinian Christian writings discussed this

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¹⁰ See the contribution by Hartmut Leppin in this volume.
¹¹ The term “Royal Psalms” is modern, and the definition of the group is debated; see Markus Saur, *Die Königspsalmen. Studien zur Entstehung und Theologie* (BZAW 340), Berlin etc. 2004, 24 (Pss 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144); Reettakaisa Sofia Salo, *Die judäische Königsideologie im Kontext der Nachbarkulturen. Untersuchungen zu den Königspsalmen 2, 18, 20, 21, 45 und 72* (Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 25), Tübingen 2017.
subject explicitly, but the Old Testament and the Graeco-Roman tradition offered a stock of complex and multifaceted views. The challenge of ruling in practice led Christians to draw on these earlier traditions in developing their own views. Christian concepts of good rulership took shape primarily alongside the exertion of Christian rule.

Constantine had no time (and probably no interest) in musing over the complex questions that attended fulfilling his duties as a Roman emperor while maintaining devotion to the Christian God. It is difficult to say how far Christian expectations influenced his rule. Every single one of his activities is disputed among scholars, so we cannot go into details here. It is, however, widely acknowledged that he did not force a total change on his subjects and that he avoided provocations to any side. In the tradition of Roman pietas, he had to care for the Christian God. He duly built churches and was praised for that. Yet, he also learnt from experience that a ruler who paid tribute to the Christian God had to give heed not only to orthopraxy but also to orthodoxy. He instituted a new procedure for addressing conflicts, the imperial church council, which was to gain enormous importance over the centuries although it was not successful at first. Nevertheless, his contemporary Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260 – 339/40) already eulogised him as a Christian emperor. Pagans often recalled that Constantine had killed his son and his wife, even as he became the embodiment of an ideal Christian ruler for most Christians.¹³

Eusebius’s works already show a high degree of reflection on good Christian rulership. Constantine appears as an exemplary Christian ruler in Eusebius’s Vita Constantini which he published after the emperor’s death. In the Laudes Constantini from 336, Eusebius had depicted the emperor as a mediator between God and humankind, as a priest and prophet. His interpretation would later greatly shape ideas about Byzantine political thinking but was of limited influence in its own time.¹⁴

Constantine’s successors had to face the structural problems that attended Christian rule. Early Christians developed specific ideas of ethical behaviour. But how was it possible to transfer Christian ethics based on individual choices to rulers who had to consider the political consequences of their decisions and had to take diverse groups into account? Christian emperors needed to show mercy as Christians, but they also had to maintain the public order demanded by their subjects at large.

Christian authorities who were not integrated into the imperial hierarchy posed another challenge. How could the relationship between the power of the ruler and

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¹³ See, for example, the polemic in Soz. 1.5. See also Andreas Goltz and Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen (eds.), Konstantin der Große. Das Bild des Kaisers im Wandel der Zeiten, Cologne etc. 2008; Noel Lenski (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine, 2nd ed., Cambridge 2012.

¹⁴ See Hartmut Leppin, Kaisertum und Christentum in der Spätantike. Überlegungen zu einer unwahrscheinlichen Synthese, in: Andreas Fahrmeir and Annette Imhausen (eds.), Die Vielfalt normativer Ordnungen. Konflikte und Dynamik in historischer und ethnologischer Perspektive (Normative Orders 8), Frankfurt am Main 2013, 197–223, as well as the contribution by Hartmut Leppin in this volume.
that of Christian authorities such as clerics and monks be defined? Christian leaders were difficult to control since their position did not formally depend on the emperor. Many expected bishops to use *parrhēsía*, that is, to criticise the emperor candidly. Indeed, they enjoyed wide latitude in their interactions with emperors. An emperor could hardly use violence against them, as their death could become dangerous should they be regarded as martyrs. Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397) was a virtuoso in putting pressure on emperors on this basis. Moreover, holy men of all kinds, among them many ascetics, made use of *parrhēsía* whenever they deemed it right. Emperors struggled to control their relationships with individuals who claimed an authority outside of the imperially defined hierarchy.

The contentious debates surrounding orthodoxy posed another major problem for Christian rulers. It became difficult for the emperor to avoid committing to the true Christian faith, and this came to mean to one particular Christian confession. Whichever confession the emperor might choose, he would encounter resistance from other Christians. Emperors must have had an interest in promoting Christian practices that had no confessional inkling and would appeal to all Christians, such as the veneration of saints who could not be claimed as advocates of a particular confession. But late antique Christian emperors also opted for different confessions and explained their actions on this basis. For example, Constantius II (r. 337–361) and Valens (r. 364–378) opposed the Nicene Creed, while Theodosius I (r. 379–395) remained committed to the authority of the Council of Nicaea. Alongside many other questions, the emperor’s relationship to the various Christian communities proved to be one of the major questions regarding good Christian rulership sparked by Constantine’s turn to Christianity.

1.4 Christian Rulership in Practice from Constantius II to Heraclius

Late Roman Emperors engaged in a variety of activities to meet the expectations of Christians concerning their sovereigns. They not only had to address conflicts between Christian groups but also needed to demonstrate their own faithfulness. In this section, we will glance at the exercise of Christian governance as the concepts of good Christian rulership developed against the background of rule in practice.

Constantius II set out to reconcile his Christian subjects on the basis of a creed that avoided any non-biblical word. He assembled several councils and exiled his most prominent adversaries. The year 360 may have seemed to mark his final success: a council in Constantinople issued a Homoean creed; Eudoxius (r. 360–379), a supporter of the creed, finally sat on the episcopal throne in Constantinople;
and the Great Church, the Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, was dedicated. The task of rulership seemed to be fulfilled with this splendid ceremony of unity.\textsuperscript{15}

As is well known, the results did not last for a long time. Many stood against Constantius’s decisions, including Lucifer of Cagliari (d. 370) who aptly employed polemics from the Old Testament against bad kings to disparage Constantius.\textsuperscript{16} More importantly, Constantius’s life was cut short by a natural cause. Julian (r. 361–363), who had started as a usurper, took over the whole empire without bloodshed in 361 and made an abortive attempt to introduce a kind of pagan rulership. It is possible that this decision hardened the fronts between Christians and pagans. Subsequent emperors – probably Valens and certainly Valentinian I (r. 364–375) – attempted to avoid the problem of quarrelsome Christians by a policy of non-commitment. This seems to anticipate modern practices of tolerance, but it did not have a long tradition in late antiquity.\textsuperscript{17} Theodosius I clearly opted for the Nicene Creed, perhaps for tactical reasons, as he was thereby able to find loyal supporters for his cause in Constantinople where he was virtually unknown when he came to the throne.\textsuperscript{18}

The fourth century saw the emergence of new paths for publicly displaying Christian rulership. Gallus (r. 351–354), the Caesar of Constantius II, seems to have been the first ruler to perform piety publicly in the translation of the relics of Saint Babylas to Daphne, a suburb of Antioch.\textsuperscript{19} Theodosius I became a virtuoso in public performances of his piety. Most famously he demonstrated humilitas in 390 or 391 at the urging of Ambrose of Milan who had confronted him with his responsibility for a massacre in Thessalonica. Ambrose’s interpretation of the encounter between two Christian authorities exerted heavy influence on the idea of a good Christian ruler.


The Christian emperor was expected to perform penitence. Such an act would have been humiliating from a traditional Roman standpoint, but for Christian onlookers it recalled King David and was thus praiseworthy.²⁰ Thereafter, *humilitas* became a very useful imperial virtue. Theodosius paraded his humility on various occasions, such as at the translation of the head of John the Baptist in 391. He then staged himself as a Christian ruler who achieved victory due to his prayer at the decisive civil war battle at the Frigidus against Eugenius in 394. Theodosius’s regular public performances suggest that he clearly understood how to use such displays of piety to his advantage.

Theodosius I’s successors found other means of self-representation as Christian rulers. Theodosius II (r. 408 – 450) demonstrated his piety within the palace, and his prayers were regarded as powerful.²¹ He was even seen as a kind of priest by some.²² Marcian (r. 450 – 457) and his successors desperately tried to unite Christians within the empire and outside – evidently a crucial task for every good Christian ruler. The Council of Chalcedon that he convened in 451 was staged as a glorious celebration; Marcian appeared as a new Constantine. The council failed to unite the competing Christian communities, but Marcian’s staging of his effort to reconcile doctrinal differences remained an important feature of imperial representation.²³

All emperors paid attention to certain religious authorities. They listened, for example, to bishops such as Leo of Rome (r. 440 – 461) and Acacius of Constantinople (r. 471 – 489) as well as to stylites like Daniel (409 – 493), but they did so by their own choice.²⁴ There was no institutionalised religious authority able to confront the emperor continuously, and the power of the emperors to depose bishops was generally accepted if the rulers respected certain canonical norms. Nevertheless, Christians formed an important, albeit diverse constituency that could be mobilised by religious authorities such as bishops and holy men. Therefore, the emperor always had to strive to show that he was a good Christian ruler.

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²⁰ For a foundational study on these events, see Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan. Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 22), Berkeley 1994, 323 – 330. See also the contribution by Mikhail Boytsov in this volume.
The long reign of Justinian I (r. 527–565) witnessed several innovations in imperial representation as a good Christian ruler. Beginning in the 530s, he endeavoured to assume the role of a holy man including demonstrations of piety and humility. To support this new representation of the emperor, even an account of a miracle connected to the emperor was disseminated.²⁵ Justinian also claimed to have theological competence, which he exhibited through debates and in his writings. He attempted throughout his reign to bring together rivaling confessions but proved unable to unite them. When he assembled a council at Constantinople in 553, which was defined as ecumenical and which he dominated, the split became even deeper, as the structures of the miaphysite movement got stronger.²⁶ The innovations in Justinian’s reign exhibit some of the multifaceted ways in which ideas of good rulership continued to develop throughout the sixth century.

The reign of Heraclius forms a convenient end to this brief survey of concepts of Christian rulership in late antiquity. Much as in the reign of Theodosius I, the theatre of war became an important place for staging Heraclius’s faith. After celebrating Easter in Constantinople in 622, Heraclius sailed to Bithynia in preparation for war in Anatolia. He brought an icon of the Virgin Mary, the achêiropoîētos, to mark his military campaign as one undertaken with God’s aid. He was portrayed as a glorious victor against the Persians.²⁷ Heraclius’s panegyrists called him a new David and even compared him to Christ. The attention to the representation of Heraclius as a good Christian ruler demonstrates the continued importance and challenge of navigating imperial rule in practice and the emperor’s identity as a Christian.

1.5 Looking beyond the Roman Empire

The development of the image of the good Christian ruler was highly complex and regularly changing even within the Roman Empire. This is even more the case when we look beyond the empire’s borders. Although many key concepts regarding Christian rulers were formed in the Roman Empire, the contributions to this volume consider how these concepts of Christian rulership compare to those in other regions. Such investigations expose the entanglement of various cultures and languages in the Mediterranean world and beyond.

This volume explores ideas of Christian rulership that emerged in a variety of political settings. Some Christians ruled over large areas, others over very small kingdoms. Still others were set up as the administrators of vassal states that owed

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their allegiance to non-Christian rulers. Kingdoms in the Caucasus incorporated both Roman and Persian ideas of rulership, while post-Roman kingdoms in the West developed distinct ideas of good rulership. Bulgaria and Nubia drew on Byzantine traditions but also developed their own language and traditions regarding good Christian rulership.

Christians who lived under non-Christian rule form a special topic of interest. Christians in Persia were, on the whole, accustomed to living under Zoroastrian rule. There must have been some tensions between Christian communities and their Sasanian rulers. Martyr acts, modelled on their counterparts in the Roman Empire, became an important genre for Persian Christians. To achieve a variety of purposes, these texts draw on and exaggerate the persecutions that Christian communities supposedly underwent in the Sasanian Empire from the fourth century onwards. However, recent studies have shown how the Church of the East (formerly called the Nestorian church) enjoyed the support of several Persian monarchs and some members were well-integrated into the social fabric of Sasanian society.²⁸

The Arab conquests marked an important development in the conception of political power. The Umayyads and ‘Abbasids invested Christian religious authorities with secular prerogatives, whereas the patriarchs of the subdued nations were recognised as the legal chiefs responsible to the Islamic authority. Religious structures were thus the only form of autonomy left for Christians living under Islamic rulers, even if they were deprived of the capacity to give their religion a political dimension. Yet the accumulation of civil responsibilities in the hands of such prelates transformed them into political figures of a type unparalleled in the West. By turning our gaze to communities beyond the Roman Empire, we will catch a glimpse of the great diversity in the concepts of good Christian rulership that developed in the first millennium.

This volume is not intended to be a complete handbook for images of good rulers in the first millennium from a Christian perspective. The appearance of two edited collections on good rulership in late antiquity just in 2018 emphasises the wide range of unexplored avenues for investigating this topic.²⁹ Although we have sought a representative view from a wide range of cultures, we have not been able to consider all regions from this time. This is especially noticeable for the kingdom of the Franks whose concepts of rulership have been discussed in two relatively recent monographs.³⁰ Other lacunae include the late antique western and eastern Roman

²⁹ Diederik W. P Burgersdijk and Alan J. Ross (eds.), Imagining Emperors in the Later Roman Empire (Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean 1), Leiden 2018; Sylvain Destephen, Bruno Dumézil, and Hervé Inglebert (eds.), Le Prince chrétien de Constantin aux royautés barbares (IVᵉ–VIIIᵉ siècle) (Travaux et mémoires 22/2), Paris 2018.
³⁰ Almut Höfert, Kaisertum und Kalifat. Der imperiale Monotheismus im Früh- und Hochmittelalter (Globalgeschichte 21), Frankfurt am Main and New York, 2015; Wolfram Drews, Die Karolinger und
tradition itself after the end of the fourth century, and the Kingdom of Aksum in Ethiopia. Moreover, this volume does not include a contribution related to late antique Jewish views that seem to adopt a completely different approach centred on the Davidic tradition destined to assert itself at the end of times. For reasons of space, the articles in this volume focus on literary texts, which are extremely rich at this time, and include other sources only occasionally. Deeper engagement with numismatic, epigraphic, and archaeological research would of course enrich the picture significantly. Although this volume is not comprehensive, we hope that it gives an impression of the diversity of concepts that developed in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, up to the tenth century when new stable structures of imperial rulership shaped Europe and the Mediterranean.

2 Similarity and Diversity: Views on Good Rulership Examined in this Volume

The eighteen individual studies in this volume examine ideas of good rulership that extend well beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. Together they offer a multifaceted and transcultural perspective on how Christians (and some non-Christians) conceived of good rulers in the first millennium. We have divided the contributions into four sections organised around particular regions or contexts. The first two sections offer glimpses into discussions of good rulership within two specific geographical areas: (1) the late antique Roman Empire and (2) the Caucasus between Persia and Rome. The third and fourth sections focus on the reception and transformation of

31 For recent contributions with broad bibliography, see Paul Stephenson, The Imperial Theology of Victory, in: Yannis Stouritis (ed.), A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204 (Brill’s Companions to the Byzantine World 1), Leiden 2018, 23–58; Burgersdijk and Ross (cf. fn. 29).
32 King Æthelberht of Kent (r. c. 560/85–616) does surface briefly in Florian Hartmann’s contribution. Bede (c. 673–735) forms one focal point in research on Christian rulership in Britain. For a recent study on Bede’s views on kingship and a review of the extensive literature, see Conor O’Brien, Kings and Kingship in the Writings of Bede, EHR 132, no. 559, 2017, 1473–1498.
33 For a recent contribution with further bibliographic references, see Marie-Laure Derat, Trônes et sanctuaires. Victoires militaires, donations royales et christianisme dans le royaume d’Aksoum (IVe–VIIIe siècle), in: Destephen, Dumézil and Inglebert (cf. fn. 29) 545–559.
34 The concept of a limited monarchy found in Talmudic literature stands in stark contrast to contemporaneous ideas, as explored by Ya’ir Lorberbaum, Disempowered King. Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature, London etc. 2011. Two other recent studies demonstrate that Jewish authors were acutely aware of the developments of Roman imperial representation; see Alexei M. Sivertsev, Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity, New York 2012, and Ra’anan Boustan, Israelite Kingship, Christian Rome, and Jewish Imperial Imagination. Midrashic Precursors to the Medieval “Throne of Solomon”, in: Natalie B. Dohrmann and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), Jews, Christians and the Roman Empire, Philadelphia 2013, 167–182, 319–324.
earlier traditions in specific circumstances: (3) in post-Roman dominions and (4) under Islamic rule. While most of the sources explored in this volume stem from Christians, concepts of good Christian rulership do not represent an isolated phenomenon. They rather emerged through exchange with non-Christian thinkers and communities. We have thus included several studies on traditions from pagan Rome (Leppin), Zoroastrian Persia (Wiesehöfer), and Islamic Andalusia (Toral-Niehoff).

2.1 The Good Christian Ruler in the Roman Empire

The first set of contributions examines representative views on good Christian rulership within the late antique Roman Empire from several cultures and linguistic traditions. The first three studies rethink and reframe classical Latin and Greek sources on good rulership: late antique panegyrics (Leppin), Ambrose’s letter to Theodosius I (Boytsov), and the De civitate Dei of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) (Preuß). The final two studies turn to sources that have rarely been analysed in this regard: Greek and Coptic historiographies and hagiographies from Alexandria (Camplani) as well as hymns and letters written in Syriac (Forness).

Hartmut Leppin (Finding a Common Cause: Fourth-Century Greek Discourses on Rulership) explores how fourth-century Graeco-Roman panegyrists dealt with the unanticipated development of a Roman emperor becoming Christian. He distinguishes three types of imperial praise that emerged in this context and were inspired both by the Old Testament and the Graeco-Roman tradition of Fürstenspiegel: (1) the hierocratic discourse, (2) the neutralising discourse, and (3) the penitentiary discourse. Leppin focuses on the former two concepts, since Mikhail Boytsov and Kai Preuß address the penitentiary discourse in the following two studies. Eusebius of Caesarea’s works exemplify the first type of discourse which depicts the emperor’s virtues in a Christian and sacralising way. There does not seem to have been a standard sacralising discourse at this time. Even Eusebius’s three works that praise Constantine show a great deal of variation in their emphases. Eusebius presents the rulership of the emperor on earth as an image of God’s reign in heaven. Yet he also portrays Constantine I as a priest, an embodiment of Christian virtues, and a mediator between heaven and earth. The panegyrics of the pagan philosopher Themistius (c. 317–c. 389) exhibit another approach to presenting an emperor before a wider, not exclusively Christian audience. In neutralising discourses, authors like Themistius chose to either avoid religious commitments or employ terms acceptable to both Christians and pagans alike, including virtues like mildness and philanthropy. This study identifies two approaches taken by orators to address the challenge of praising emperors who were Christians in a traditional Roman form.

As Leppin points out, the penitentiary discourse proved more influential. Under the paradoxical title The Good Sinful Ruler: Ambrose of Milan and Theodosius I, Mikhail A. Boytsov’s contribution highlights the importance of humilitas as an imperial
virtue and discusses its origins in the times of Theodosius I. He focuses on a letter written by Ambrose of Milan to the emperor in which he encourages Theodosius to repent for the massacre in Thessalonica committed by imperial troops. Boytsov offers a careful interpretation of the biblical allusions in this text, which to this point have been largely neglected in scholarship. In his funeral oration on the emperor, Ambrose almost goes so far as to depict Theodosius in a sanctified state, not despite but because of his penance and the humility displayed through it. King David – famous for his own acts of repentance – becomes the model for the Christian ruler in this work. The image of a good Christian ruler now includes self-deprecation following a sinful act. In this way, sinfulness when coupled with repentance becomes part of the Christian idea of good rulership.

While the Roman Empire still existed in the East and the West, Augustine analysed the role of the emperor against the backdrop of the fall of Rome in 410. A chapter of De civitate Dei (5.24) that is devoted to the concept of Christian rulership has nearly become canonical in western thought on good rulership. Kai Preuß (The Emperor’s Two Cities: Augustine’s Image of the Good Christian Ruler in De civitate Dei 5.24) offers a close reading of this passage focusing on its intellectual context. He emphasises both Augustine’s individualised ethic based on a pastoral perspective and the distinction between citivitas terrena and civitas Dei. In this passage, Augustine addresses Christians who happen to be rulers, not rulers as such. All rulers are bound to the limits of humankind, and it is thus extremely difficult for them to reconcile Christian and political virtues. The existence of a good ruler does not mean that his rule will be successful by secular criteria. In this sense, Augustine reinterprets the meaning of felicitas. Although many of Augustine’s arguments appealed to later generations, Preuß makes clear that his ideas are deeply embedded in ancient perspectives. As a whole, the first three contributions demonstrate that returning to classical sources with fresh eyes can offer many new insights into the understanding of good Christian rulership in the Roman Empire.

The next chapter marks a turn to sources that have received less attention for their views on good rulership. Alberto Camplani (Pious and Impious Christian Rulers According to Egyptian Historiography and Hagiography: A First Survey of the Evidence) discusses historiographical and hagiographical sources in Greek and Coptic from the fourth to the ninth century that provide evidence for the changing perspective of the Alexandrian Patriarchate on Roman rulers. Despite Constantine I’s occasional outbursts of anger, the authors of these works consistently praise him as a good ruler who supported the activities of the church and combatted both the error of paganism and the danger of heresy. They also emphasise that support for the building activities of the church is a mark of good Christian rulers. The adherents of Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria (r. 328 – 373), ascribe the grave mistake – on their view – of the rehabilitation of Arius of Alexandria (d. 336) to Constantius II. But Jovian (r. 363 – 364), who favoured the patriarch, appears in these sources as a good ruler. Alexandrian sources portray the era of Theodosius I and Theodosius II during the patriarchates of Theophilus (r. 385 – 412), Cyril (r. 412 – 444), and Dioscorus (r. 444 – 451; d. 454)
as a golden age, when relations between church and state were prosperous. Both parties cooperated with each other, and emperors accepted the guidance of the church in ecclesiastical matters. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 heralded by Emperor Mar- cian (r. 450 – 457) was a breaking point for most Egyptian Christians. Starting with the elevation of Timothy II Aelurus (r. 457 – 477) to the patriarchal throne, the Coptic Church took an ever more pronounced anti-Chalcedonian stance. As a consequence, these sources depict Marcian and several of his successors as bad rulers. They even portray Marcian’s wife Pulcheria (398/9 – 453) as a whore. Such memories remained intact into the period of Islamic rule. Although some suggested that the Roman Empire with its support of the Council of Chalcedon rested on shaky foundations, the empire remained an important point of reference for Alexandrian authors.

The next study turns our attention to Syriac sources written from the eastern border of the Roman Empire. Philip Michael Forness (Faithful Rulers and Theological Deviance: Ephrem the Syrian and Jacob of Serugh on the Roman Emperor) examines two Syriac authors who praised emperors with whom they disagreed theologically: Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306 – 373) with Constantius II and Jacob of Serugh (d. 520/1) with Justin I. Ephrem wrote a series of hymns on the Emperor Julian shortly after the emperor died and Ephrem was forced to leave Nisibis as part of the treaty between Rome and Persia. As an avowed supporter of Nicaea, Ephrem surprisingly describes Constantius as a good emperor in contrast with Julian, despite Constantius’s support for Homoeans. Jacob of Serugh, an advocate for anti-Chalcedonian, miaphysite Christology, praises the pro-Chalcedonian Justin for allowing Paul, the bishop of Edessa (r. 510 – 522), to return to his episcopal throne. Justin had previously forced Paul to flee Edessa when he would not sign the pro-Chalcedonian Formula of Faith. As Forness points out, the ability of an emperor to provide protection seems to be more important than an emperor’s theological orthodoxy in these sources. The texts should therefore not be read as authentic pieces of political propaganda but must be seen in the context of the authors’ rhetorical strategies. In addition, the loyalist attitude of Christians also has its limits: Ephrem does not hesitate to call Julian, the pagan emperor, a tyrant, that is, an illegitimate Roman emperor. Although most Christians did not claim that Julian’s rule was illegitimate, Ephrem’s response shows that a non-Christian emperor now seems completely unacceptable for Christians. The latter two contributions in this section represent the range of sources and perspectives on good Christian rulership from within the Roman Empire that have yet to receive serious scholarly attention.

2.2 The Good Christian Ruler between Persia and Rome

The next set of articles address concepts of rulership farther east, both in Persia and in the Caucasus. The opening article presents an emic understanding of Persian rulership based mostly on Zoroastrian sources and thus forms a necessary counterpart to the focus on Roman perspectives in the first section of the introduction (Wiesehöfer).
The remaining five papers in this section examine views of rulership that emerged between Rome and Persia in the Caucasus. Despite the attendant geo-political terminological problems, we have divided them into studies on Armenia (Greenwood, Bozoyan), Georgia (Jeck), and Caucasian Albania (Hakobyan, Dorfmann-Lazarev). The first of these studies approaches the topic of good rulership from a foundational level by focusing on Armenian terminology used for rulers (Greenwood). The following three studies examine how particular rulers or dynasties came to assume an important element in the representation of good Christian rulership in each of the three major kingdoms in the Caucasus (Bozoyan, Jeck, Hakobyan). The concluding paper offers insight into a rather underexplored area of research on the former region of Caucasian Albania in the eighth through tenth centuries. Innovative new approaches to good rulership continued to develop in this area throughout the first millennium in response to new demands and circumstances (Dorfmann-Lazarev). Comparative studies often fail to include the Caucasus despite its strong, relatively well-documented tradition of Christian rulership deeply embedded both in local practices and in Greek, Syriac, and Persian traditions. The case studies in this volume on Persia and the Caucasus seek to draw these regions into broader conversations on good rulership.

Joseph Wiesehöfer (Images of the Good Ruler in Sasanian Iran: An Emic View) focuses on Zoroastrian sources to uncover an emic perspective on the good ruler in Sasanian Persia from the third to the seventh century. Persian sources clearly articulate the characteristics of good rulers: Persian kings had to be of Sasanian origin, ascend the throne in the right manner, demonstrate certain virtues such as justice, be free from physical infirmity, have a close affiliation to the gods, and promote the right religion. Among aristocratic circles in Sasanian Persia, there must have been room for criticism both of the monarchy itself and individual rulers. Non-Persian sources often portray Persian rulers as arrogant, extravagant, and cowardly. But Persian ideas of rulership had a lasting influence in regions such as Armenia and a positive reception in the Islamic tradition. This essay exposes the complexity of political thinking in Persia, which influenced the ideas of several Christian communities and especially in the Caucasus.

The five contributions that focus on the concepts of good rulership in the Caucasus begin with Armenia. Tim Greenwood (Representations of Rulership in Late Antique Armenia) focuses on four works of Armenian historiography: the Buzandaran Patarmentiwnk’ (from the last quarter of the fifth century), the History of Lazar P’arpec’i (c. 500), the History of Elišē (from the last third of the sixth century) and the History attributed to Sebēos (655, with scholia inserted in 661). These sources do not clearly demarcate different terms used for rulers, even if certain patterns such as the use of particular titles for Roman emperors do emerge. The terminological choices also betray influence from both Greek and Persian sources. Armenia had no king of its own after the fall of the kingdom in 428. The three earlier texts thus focus on the Persian ruler and reveal an expectation that he be accessible and permit them to cultivate their own religion. Certain differences between the historiographers emerge. Elišē
is much less disposed to acknowledge Persian superiority than Lazar. In Sebėos’s *History*, the Roman emperor assumes a more prominent role since Roman engagement in the Caucasus intensified from 590 onwards. Sebėos does not sympathise with all Roman emperors; theological and liturgical differences shape his judgement. By the seventh century, the Roman emperor could serve as a model for good Christian rulership as such, as demonstrated by P’ilon Tirakac’i’s revision of the Armenian translation of the Greek *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates (c. 380–after 439) in 695 or 696. Armenian historiographical sources contain a wide range of views on good rulership that reflect Armenia’s geographical location between the Roman and Persian empires.

The next chapter also considers Armenia and marks a transition to three studies on the reception of dynasties or individual rulers in the representation of good Christian rulership in the Caucasus. Azaat Bozoyan (*The Depiction of the Arsacid Dynasty in Medieval Armenian Historiography*) focuses on the importance placed on the Arsacids in the concept of rulership in the Armenian tradition. The Arsacids ruled Armenia both before and after Christianisation. Their lineage was said to stretch back to figures of the Old Testament, and their heirs included members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This dynasty served as a point of connection between Armenia and Persia and, in later times, between Armenia and the Byzantine Empire. The rule of the dynasty in Armenia came to an end in 428, when the Sasanian rulers appointed marz-bans to administer the region. The *History of the Armenians* by Movsēs Xorenac’i, whose dating remains a matter of debate, portrays the Arsacids as ideal Christian rulers. Xorenac’i underlines that they had embraced Christianity early on, at least from the time of Trdat III (r. 287 or 298/9–330) who adopted Christianity around 315 and was regarded as Armenia’s Constantine. The importance attached to this dynasty extends to such an extent that Xorenac’i even ascribes Christian virtues to non-Christian Arsacid rulers. Well after the fall of the Arsacids in Armenia, their dynasty continued to play an important role in apocalyptic and historiographic works that envision or discuss the restoration of Armenian rulership. This dynasty became part and parcel of the image of good Christian rulership in Armenia.

The next contribution maintains a focus on the figures who became seen as ideal rulers but turns our attention to a ruler of Georgia, ancient Iberia. Udo Reinhold Jeck (*Vakhtang Gorgasali (r. 447–522) as a Christian Monarch in Georgia: His Depiction in the Life of Kartli*) investigates an extremely difficult and historically problematic source known as the *Life of Kartli*. This diverse collection of texts written by various authors at different times found its current form around the eleventh century and includes a work entitled the *Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali*, which itself dates to the late eighth or early ninth century. Vakhtang appears in this work as an ideal king who has to navigate between Christianity, Zoroastrianism, as well as other traditions. A speech attributed to Vakhtang in this work shows a certain degree of engagement with the philosopher Plato’s allegory of the cave. It thereby portrays the philosopher-king, embodied in Vakhtang, as the ideal Christian ruler. The narrative surrounding Vakhtang found in the *Life of Kartli* offers little in the way of historical in-
formation about late antiquity. But this source still offers valuable insight into a representation of the good Christian ruler that circulated in medieval Georgia.

The final two chapters in this section turn to Caucasian Albania, a kingdom that was located in the territory of modern-day Azerbaijan and the southern part of the Republic of Dagestan. Although the kingdom ceased to exist in the fifth century, it held an importance in the imagination of good rulership within the Caucasus for a long time thereafter. Aleksan Hakobyan (*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)*) examines another figure who became seen as an ideal king. He focuses on the *Tale of Vač’agan*, a late-fifth- or early-sixth-century hagiographical account used by the tenth-century Armenian author Movsēs Dasxuranc’i (or Kalankatuac’i) in his *History of Albania*. This work does not provide a narrative of the reign of Vač’agan II but rather presents his Christian virtues and deeds. The virtues attributed to him include his piety, courage, intelligence, and prowess in fighting zealously against heresies. Vač’agan emerges in this work as an exemplary Christian king able to cope with Sasanian predominance, and he is seen as comparable to Constantine I and the Armenian King Trdat III. Although Vač’agan was a ruler of Caucasian Albania, he enjoyed a long legacy as an ideal Christian ruler within medieval Armenia. The *Tale of Vač’agan* marks the beginning of his transformation into a legend.

The final essay in this section goes further into the history of territory of the former kingdom of Caucasian Albania in an even less well-documented time. Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev (*Concerning Four Kings from the Land of ‘Deep Ravines, Dense Forests and Dark Thickets’*) discusses the rise and conception of the rule of the so-called lords of Albania, who were of Armenian and Georgian origin and reigned in the former territory of Caucasian Albania between the end of the eighth and the end of the tenth century. Four sons of Prince Išxananun Sewaday (born c. 910) can be discerned from the *History of the Albanians* by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i (or Kalankatuac’i) and the correspondence with the ecclesiastical writer Tiranun (tenth/eleventh centuries). These kings ruled over a fragmented and often changing territory. Dorfmann-Lazarev focuses on the Armenian-Albanian marchlands stretching along the right bank of the middle Kur River and discusses the implication of the geographical position of the kings’ territory and their interactions with Muslim rulers. The biblical tradition played an important role in the understanding of rulership: Adam, as the first human being, served as an image of and model for a new Christian king. Throughout his study, Dorfmann-Lazarev demonstrates how the sources on these little-known rulers touch on concepts of good rulership found throughout the essays in this volume, including legal aspects of kingship, the justification for rule and territory based on patterns of inheritance, and the adoption and adaptation of royal titulature.
2.3 The Good Christian Ruler in Post-Roman Traditions

While the previous set of papers revealed the diversity of views on good rulership within a specific region, the third section offers glimpses into the concepts of good rulership that developed in diverse geographic regions in post-Roman times. This set, therefore, begins with two chapters on developments in the West after the Western Roman Empire had fallen. The first article discusses papal perspectives on rulership. It begins in the fourth century and ends in the eighth, building a bridge between the time under direct Roman rule and the aftermath (Hartmann). The second focuses on the Visigoths in the seventh century (Drews). The next two papers examine concepts of good Christian rulership in kingdoms after the Byzantine Empire had lost much of its territory. One discusses concepts of good rulership in the Balkans around and directly after Christianisation (Ziemann), while the other analyses representations of rulers in Nubia until the thirteenth century (Łajtar/Ochala). For practical purposes it was not possible to cover each of these topics and regions as extensively as the Caucasus. We offer these studies as representative examples of the types of investigations possible for a wider range of regions than is possible within the confines of this volume.

Florian Hartmann (The Good Ruler from a Papal Perspective: Continuities and Discontinuities in Papal Letters from the Fourth to Eighth Centuries) discusses the image of the good ruler in the former centre of the Roman Empire from a papal standpoint. The canonical collections examined here mostly consist of letters, and the texts under question do not therefore devise a systematic theory of good rulership but react to concrete challenges. Nevertheless, there is a high degree of coherence in regard to the virtues demanded of a good ruler. Popes expected that rulers would defend the true faith as an outgrowth of their responsibility to care for the salvation of their subjects and that they would listen to the advice of good counsellors. Other qualities of rulers appear less often, including justice and charity. There seem to have been some developments over time in the concept of good rulers. For example, the responsibility of the good Christian ruler to carry out missionary work does not appear in letters to emperors from the fourth to the sixth century, even as this became a prominent theme in later correspondence. Likewise, the expectation that rulers would protect the popes militarily depended on particular circumstances and seems to have been most prevalent in papal engagement with Frankish kings. On the whole, the papal letters identify a select set of virtues on a regular basis against the background of a wide spectrum of virtues that could be called upon according to the particular circumstances.

The next contribution in this section focuses on a particular post-Roman successor state in the West. Wolfram Drews (The Image of the Christian Ruler in Catholic Visigothic Spain: Julian of Toledo’s Historia Wambae) analyses how Julian of Toledo (c. 640–680s) depicts King Wamba (r. 672–680) as an ideal Christian ruler in stark contrast to his Septimanian opponent Paul. In Julian’s work, Wamba appears to follow the tradition of the Old Testament kings and Roman rulers; he is certainly
not depicted as a barbarian ruler. His qualities are visible in his victories as well as in
his control of his own troops, whereas his religious credentials are based on his in-
auguration, including his anointment as king, the restoration of church property, and
his anti-Jewish measures. Significantly, neither his role as legislator nor his relations
with the bishops receive much attention. Instead, in some passages of the *Historia
Wambae*, King Wamba seems to be similar to a priest. Thus, Wamba proves to be
a king in a transhistorical sense, the leader of God’s chosen people without any
need to refer to the Roman Empire. This represents one way that post-Roman king-
doms reconceived reference points for good rulership in the wake of the fall of the
Western Roman Empire.

With the third essay in this section, the conversation turns to a region that need-
ed to develop an understanding of good rulership after its own Christianisation. Dan-
iel Ziemann (*Goodness and Cruelty: The Image of the Ruler of the First Bulgarian Em-
pire in the Period of Christianisation (Ninth Century)* ) discusses the changes that
Christianity brought to the concept of rulership in the First Bulgarian Empire.
Pagan Bulgarian rulers such as Krum (c. 803–814) or Omurtag (c. 815–c. 831) are de-
picted as counter-models to Christian emperors by Greek sources, the latter even as a
persecutor of Christians. Omurtag is also known from Bulgarian sources close to his
time in which his generosity and justice are objects for praise. The representation of
the first Christian ruler Boris (r. 852–889; d. 907), called Michael after his christen-
ing, however, can only be grasped on the basis of Western and Byzantine sources.
Although the Western church wielded influence on the image of a Christian ruler
in Bulgaria for a time, the Bulgarian concept of Christian rulership was ultimately
shaped by Byzantium. Some expectations of good Christian rulers remained un-
changed from the time of pagan rulers: they were expected to be victorious in
war, and cruelty remained connected to the imperial office. But the Christian ruler
was also expected to build churches and to suppress heretics in order to demonstrate
his Christian disposition. The example of Bulgaria shows a kingdom drawing on
Roman traditions – whether from the East or the West – in its own attempt to develop
a concept of good Christian rulership, but also asserting and maintaining local tra-
ditions.

The final study in this section turns to a region that has until this point received
very little attention in regard to its understanding of good rulership. Adam Łajtar and
Grzegorz Ochala (*A Christian King in Africa: The Image of Christian Nubian Rulers in
Internal and External Sources*) bring the study of the good Christian rulership across
the Mediterranean and up the Nile. They discuss sources regarding the image of the
good Christian ruler in Nubia, which was Christianised in the sixth century. In con-
trast to other Christian cultures, Nubia appears to lack historiography. Although most
relevant sources are late – from the eleventh to the fifteenth century – they seem to
preserve earlier material. Christianisation brought Graeco-Roman traditions with it.
Constantine was regarded as a model ruler and Graeco-Roman titles were added to
the Coptic and Nubian designation of rulers, even though Nubian kings did not
adopt the names of Roman emperors. The virtues of the kings comprised piety,
care for the subjects, especially the marginal ones, and the status of being a fear-inspiring warrior. Kings were regarded as being chosen by God, and external sources sometimes depict them as all-powerful. Yet, nobles as well as the king’s mother wielded considerable influence, and there are also examples of bishops legitimately criticising the king. In a situation when non-Christian rulers came to dominate North Africa and the Middle East, the Nubian kings gained superregional importance not only in North Africa but also in the apocalyptic literature of Syriac and Coptic Christians. From this viewpoint, the Nubian king was portrayed as the successor to the Byzantine emperor. The image of good Christian rulers in Nubia serves as a reminder of what binds the four studies in this section together. They all discuss authors and kingdoms that were heirs to Roman traditions and shaped this inheritance in distinct ways.

2.4 The Good Ruler under Islamic Rule

The last set of articles discusses how images of the good ruler developed under Islamic rulers. The concepts of rulership that emerged in the early caliphates shaped the Mediterranean world at a foundational level. The first essay in this section sets the stage for the others by examining the development of ideas of good rulership within an Islamic context. It focuses on an Islamic Fürstenspiegel composed in Islamic Andalusia (Toral-Niehoff). The second and third essays then consider how Christians living within Islamic regimes approached the question of good rulership. The second contribution thus addresses interaction between Christian and Islamic concepts of good rulership in Egypt in the Umayyad Caliphate (Booth). The third and final article looks at how Christian communities under Islamic rule formed ideals of rulership by considering a chronicle written by a Syriac author from the Melkite (Rūm Orthodox) Church (Conterno).

The first contribution forms one of the important few studies in this volume that focus on non-Christian views on good rulership (see also Leppin and Wiesehöfer). Isabel Toral-Niehoff (Justice and Good Administration in Medieval Islam: The Book of the Pearl of the Ruler by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (860–940)) considers a text from the periphery of the early Islamic world in Andalusia. The Book of the Pearl of the Ruler is representative of one strand of Islamic thought on rulership that spanned the Islamic world, namely, early Islamic mirror literature. This work emphasises that all true Muslim rulers – whose titles are carefully differentiated – have been invested with their power by God. They are expected to protect their subjects and care for their welfare; their subjects, for their part, should behave orderly. Good Islamic rulers should show decisiveness, choose advisors well, and display humility. They must also rule justly and be willing to accept advice from ministers and helpers. The Book of the Pearl of the Ruler is based on Sasanian, Hellenistic, Christian, and even Indian traditions and thus shows a transcultural character. It evidences how
these traditions continued to come together and develop into new concepts of good rulership through the end of the first millennium.

The following two essays present case studies on how good rulership in the Christian and Muslim world were in dialogue with one another. Phil Booth (Images of Emperors and Emirs in Early Islamic Egypt) shows how Christian notions of good rulership were being transposed from the emperor at Constantinople to the emir at Fustat. He argues that the persecution under the Emperor Heraclius as described by Severan (anti-Chalcedonian) sources never happened in a meaningful sense. Rather, the image of Heraclius as the persecuting emperor, which provided a marked contrast with the subsequent toleration of an Arab governor, was developed in pursuit of three goals: to obfuscate the actual ambiguities created during the Persian occupation and Roman restoration; to enable the later reintegration of fractured confessional communities; and to sanction a simultaneous transposition of the image of the good ruler from Christian to Muslim.

The Melkites (Rūm Orthodox) were among the Christians who lived under non-Christian rulers. They were adherents of Chalcedon and therefore close to the Byzantine emperor even if they increasingly used the Arabic language. Maria Conterno (Shaping the Good Christian King under Muslim Rule: Constantine and the Torah in the Melkite Arabic Chronicle of Agapius of Mabbug (Tenth Century)) discusses the chronicle of the tenth-century Melkite author Agapius of Mabbug, named the Kitāb al-ʿumwān. Agapius saw an expansion of Byzantine power in Syria, his home region, but lived under non-Christian rule. His chronicle nevertheless addresses Christian rulers, and his discussion of emperors of the past has strong implications for contemporary issues. An episode in the chronicle concerning Constantine I – who had risen to new importance in Byzantium during the Macedonian dynasty (867–1056) – is based on a hagiographical tradition but has direct connections to the religious debates of Agapius’s time. Agapius reacts to criticisms of Constantine by Muslim authors and includes the story of the finding of the Septuagint to refute what Agapius refers to as Jewish lies. An anti-Jewish attitude seems to be an important trait of the Christian ruler in this work, even though King Josiah serves as a model for Constantine. The work also attests to some doubts regarding the necessity of a Christian ruler. Agapius’s chronicle forms a fascinating testimony to discourse regarding good Christian rulership among a community who lived under Islamic rule.

As a whole, the papers assembled in this volume offer insight into the diverse images and conception of good rulership from the fourth to the tenth century. They include new interpretations of classical sources, but also push beyond to consider texts rarely incorporated into discussions of good rulership. The five essays on the Caucasus show how diverse concepts of good rulership could coexist within one geographical region, while the essays on the post-Roman West, Bulgaria, and Nubia serve as a reminder that other regions deserve further investigation. The final section on views of good rulership under Islamic rule as well as the two essays that incorporate pagan Roman and Zoroastrian Persian views serve as a reminder that Christian views on
good rulership did not emerge in a vacuum but were deeply influenced by other traditions and also influenced later traditions. The following section in the introduction seeks to take stock of the contribution of the volume as a whole and look forward to new avenues for research.

3 Initial Results and Outlook for Future Research

How did communities in the first millennium conceive of a good Christian ruler? Views on good rulership that developed within the Roman Empire exerted great influence throughout this era. Yet other traditions proved equally significant. The kingdoms that emerged in the Caucasus in late antiquity, for example, drew on both local and Persian ideas in identifying their expectations of kings. Writings from post-Roman societies of the West and kingdoms in Bulgaria and Nubia show a similar dynamic. After the rise of Islam, both Muslims and Christians developed ideas of rulership related to but departing from the late antique heritage. There was no single image of a good Christian ruler within and beyond the Roman Empire. The different concepts of good Christian rulership that emerged over the course of the first millennium reflect a shared inheritance but also demonstrate the importance of local traditions as well as regular exchange with other Christian and non-Christian communities. Given the complexity and diversity of representations explored in this volume, the final section of the introduction will examine four themes that enable a comparison of the articles collected here: (1) source material; (2) titles used for sovereigns; (3) models for good rulership; and (4) virtues expected of rulers.

3.1 Sources

Some of the articles in this volume examine a wide range of types of sources in order to gain insight into views on good Christian rulership in individual regions. But, for most contributions, literary sources seemed to offer the most complete and nuanced view on Christian rulership. This subsection will highlight the literary genres that proved particular productive in this regard before turning to other types of sources that yielded insights when literary sources were fewer in number.

Very few examples of Christian advice literature appeared in the first millennium that anticipated the genre of Fürstenspiegel which became popular across a number of cultures in the Middle Ages. This is all the more remarkable given the presence of

35 See recently Regula Forster and Neguin Yavari (eds.), *Global Medieval. Mirrors for Princes Reconsidered* (Ilex Series 15), Cambridge, MA 2015; Mariano Delgado and Volker Leppin (eds.), *Die gute Regierung. Fürstenspiegel von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Studien zur christlichen Religions- und Kulturgeschichte 24), Fribourg and Stuttgart 2017; Roskam / Schorn (cf. fn. 8) and especially Matthias Haake, *Across All Boundaries of Genre? On the Uses and Disadvantages of the Term Mirror for Princes*
texts with similar content in the Hebrew Bible,³⁶ in Persian andarz literature,³⁷ and in the early Islamic tradition.³⁸ Yet four essays in this volume do discuss writings often designated as Fürstenspiegel. Three different works by Eusebius of Caesarea and the orations of Themistius show how orators developed different strategies to praise Christian emperors, incorporating but also transforming the classical panegyrical tradition (Leppin). A chapter in Augustine of Hippo’s De civitate Dei (5.24) was received as a Fürstenspiegel in later times, but this section of the De civitate Dei is wanting in terms of the practicalities of ruling. Glimpses into the expectations of rulers can be gleaned from it, yet Augustine himself does not seem to have been interested in quotidian matters of rulership. It is far richer in terms of political theory (Preuß).

Daniel Ziemann’s contribution contrasts the two types of advice literature that the first Christian ruler of Bulgaria Boris/Michael received. Pope Nicholas I (r. 858–867) offered a series of answers to specific questions, while Patriarch Photius I of Constantinople (r. 858–867, 877–886) sent Boris/Michael a response that can rightly be called a Fürstenspiegel. Likewise, the Book of the Pearl of the Ruler in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s Unique Necklace displays the characteristics of a Fürstenspiegel. It offers clear concepts of both the authority and purpose of rulership and instructs its readers how to understand their place in society (Toral-Niehoff). Despite the similarities of these works, there are no clear lines of development between the fourth-century panegyrics, Augustine’s De civitate Dei, Photius’s letter, and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s Book of the Pearl of the Ruler.

Most of the essays cull information about the expectations of Christian rulers from different types of literary sources. Historiographical writings form the most common source consulted for investigating perspectives on good Christian rulers in this era (Booth, Bozoyan, Camplani, Conterno, Drews, Greenwood, Jeck, Leppin). Letters also play an important role in several contributions. Ambrose rebukes Theodosius I for the massacre at Thessalonica in a letter that marks a major innovation in the representation of rulers by incorporating the virtue of humilitas (Boytsov). The papal perspective on good rulership can be examined almost exclusively from their letters to Roman emperors (Hartmann). A letter of a miaphysite bishop in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire offers insight into the concepts of good rulership during a time of doctrinal conflict (Forness). Several letters from an ecclesiastical writer named Tiranun help reconstruct the faint traces of a distinct form of king-

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³⁶ See fn. 11 above.
ship that developed in the former territory of Caucasian Albania in the eighth through tenth centuries (Dorfmann-Lazarev). Historiographies and letters represent promising sources for future investigations.

Sacred writings and hagiographies prove valuable in investigating several disparate cultures. In addition to historiographical sources, Tim Greenwood’s essay on late antique Armenia mines the Armenian Bible to examine terminology used for rulers. Translations of the Bible form early literary relics of several languages used by Christian communities in the first millennium (Anglo-Saxon, Armenian, Caucasian Albanian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, Gothic, Sogdian, Syriac, etc.). They thereby offer insight into the earliest traceable concepts of rulership in these linguistic communities. Sacred Zoroastrian texts which were orally transmitted in Sasanian Persia and only recorded later offer insight into an emic view on good rulership from pre-Islamic times (Wiesehöfer). Hagiographical accounts of rulers from the Caucasus contribute to an understanding of the ideals of rulership that developed in kingdoms such as Armenia and Georgia (Hakobyan, Jeck). Coptic hagiographies on Roman emperors from the fourth century represent important sources for tracing representations of political power at the time of their composition (Camplani). Accounts of the reign of Khan Omurtag, seen as a persecutor of Christians, reveal important aspects of how writers in the First Bulgarian Empire framed the reigns of khans who ruled before the Christianisation (Ziemann). The sacred texts examined in this volume offer insight into early views on rulership; hagiographies help identify transitions in perspective.

Although pragmatic reasons made it impossible to consider fully other types of sources, their importance is made clear in essays on cultures where art and inscriptions serve as some of the main sources for examining ideas of good rulership. The contributions on Persia and Nubia show how both inscriptions and iconography help expose perspectives on good rulership. An inscription of the Persian Shah Narseh (r. 293–302) proves important for uncovering a pre-Islamic Persian perspective of rulership, as it contains an imagined dialogue between a pretender to the throne and imperial magnates (Wiesehöfer). Inscriptions in Nubia provide insight into the adoption of Coptic, Greek, and Latin titles and epithets for local rulers (Łajtar/Ochala). Art in Persia likewise offers vital information. Scenes of investiture in Sasanian relief art reveal that the perspective that the king’s rule has divine approval. These reliefs as well as hunting bowls display the virtues expected of rulers (Wiesehöfer). In Nubia, wall paintings in churches and other cult places depict Jesus, Mary, or an archangel standing behind the king as a sign of his protection and blessedness (Łajtar/Ochala). There are not direct lines of influence between Persia and Nubia here. The similarity emerges rather from the approaches that scholars of these regions have needed to take to gain insight into the perspectives on good rulership when other, more traditional literary sources remain unavailable. The essays in this volume may serve, in this way, as a model for future investigations even in traditions that are less well-documented.
3.2 Titulature

A second common theme exposes the diversity of the concepts of rulership that developed in the first millennium. The titles assigned to rulers not only reflect a common heritage from late antiquity but also honour local traditions. Royal titulature appears in almost all of the entries in this volume, and it forms a focal point in several (Greenwood, Łajtar/Ochala, Toral-Niehoff). The following examination of titulature draws on these contributions and fills in some gaps, although only a sketch of these intricate developments is possible here.

The main languages of the later Roman Empire’s administration – Latin and Greek – developed distinct words to refer to the emperor. The Latin title *augustus* (Greek *aúgoustos* or *sebastós*) was adopted by the first Roman emperor, while *imperator* (Greek *autokrátôr*) appears already in the first century CE. *Caesar* (Greek *kaí̱sar*) was used as an epithet of the principal emperor but also came to designate subordinates coregents under the Diocletianic tetrarchy and became a court title under Heraclitus. The more generic terms *basileús* and *rex* also found usage in administrative texts, and the former became attached to the principal emperor under Heraclius. The Latin title *princeps*, hearkening back to the beginning of the Roman Empire, continued to find unofficial use in Latin texts through the eighth century (Hartmann, Drews). The Latin title *dominus noster* “our lord” (Greek *despótēs hēmōn*), which recalled the absolute sovereignty of the emperor, became mandatory in the fourth century. At the same time, the somewhat weaker Greek title *kúrios* was abandoned only to become part of official imperial titulature again under Justinian I.³⁹

Other linguistic communities within the Roman Empire found different ways to refer to rulers. In Coptic writings, the Egyptian word *pêro* is used to refer to kings (Camplani). Syriac writers regularly used a word of Semitic origin for king: *malkā/ malko*.⁴⁰ Communities of the Syriac heritage that accepted the Christology of the Council of Chalcedon were termed *malkāyē/malkoyē* “Melkites” (Greek *melchítai*) by their opponents because of their association with the imperial Byzantine church (Conterno). The loan word *t(610,883),(781,908)ronā “tyrant” from Greek *tūrannos*, usually meaning

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⁴⁰ This term was applied very widely to the sovereigns of kingdoms and regions, including the rulers of Babylon and Persia, caliphs, emirs of Baghdad, dukes of France, Sultan Bogril Beg, among others. For these and other applications of this term, see Robert Payne Smith (ed.), *Thesaurus syriacus*, Oxford, 1879, 2:2142 – 2143.
“usurper,” was also available to Syriac writers. But as in the Greek language it seems to have carried the valence of “illegitimate rule” as already evidenced in a Syriac Bible translation and in the works of the fourth-century poet Ephrem the Syrian (For- ness). Gothic texts attest the loan word kaisar for the Roman Emperor and the Germanic word þiudans “king” applied to Jesus and Herod. The latter is derived from þiuda “people” and related to the terms þiudinassus “kingdom, reign” and þiudangardi “kingdom.” The title þiudans was carefully distinguished in the Gothic Bible translation from reiks “ruler,” which is applied regularly to Satan but also used more generally to refer to religious and other authorities. But the valence of rulership in reiks appears clearly in the names of Gothic rulers such as Alaric (“ruler of all”) and Theodoric (“ruler of the people”). Thus, even within the borders of the Roman Empire, imperial titles both saw development in Latin and Greek and reflected different cultural-linguistic communities.

Quite different royal titulature emerged in the Persian Empire. Sasanian sovereigns changed their titles several times. The first Sasanian ruler Ardashir I (d. 242) adopted the epithet şāhān šāh “king of kings,” taking on the title established by the preceding dynasties, the Arsacids and Achaemenids. This title reflects an intercultural milieu, as it was not spelled phonetically but rather with an ideogram based on the Aramaic word for king malkā (MLKA is the transliteration of the title šāhān šāh in Pahlavi). Later Sasanian emperors used the title kay to entwine their history with the mythological Kayanid dynasty that predated even the

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43 Miller (cf. fn. 41) 477. For references to Satan as reiks, see John 12:31, 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; for other authorities, see Matthew 9:18, 23; Luke 18:18; John 7:26, 48; 12:42; Romans 13:3.

44 Ibid. 3.


Achaemenids. In the late Sasanian Empire, rulers were called *abzōn* “increase” and later *xwarrah abzūd* “whose royal glory is increased,” connecting these rulers to the concept of *xwarrah* “royal glory” that represented the divine legitimation of their rule.

Christian kingdoms in the Caucasus drew on both Persian and Roman traditions in their titulature. Very little has survived of the Caucasian Albanian language, but the fragmentary Bible and lectionary use the title *üwx* as a generic term for kings as well as for specific rulers. This title also appears in the liturgical designation for a biblical passage “from the feast of the kings” which likely relates to a feast in honour of Constantine I or Theodosius I. There are distinct patterns in the use of the titles of rulers in Armenia (Greenwood). On the one hand, Armenian historians use specific terms only for foreign rulers: the loan word *kaysr* for Roman emperors; *tēr Areqa* “lord of the Aryans” and *ark’ayic* *ark’ay* “king of kings” for Persian emperors. Yet the two regular words for “king” in Armenian – *ark’ay* related to Greek *árchōn* and *t’agawor* from both Armenian and Middle Persian roots – are applied to both Armenian and non-Armenian rulers. This equivocation seems to indicate the equality of these sovereigns. Armenian writings on the princes who claimed to rule the former territory of Caucasian Albania in the tenth century were termed *išxan*, meaning dynastic ruler, or *tēr*, designating the head of a noble patriarchal family. Yet the roots *ark’ay* and *t’agawor* also surface in works about these rulers of Albania (Dorfmann-Lazarev). In the region of modern-day Georgia, a title with etymological roots in the Georgian language *mep’ē* or *meup’ē*, meaning “monarch” without gen-

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50 On this term, see Jost Gippert et al. (eds.), *The Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests of Mt. Sinai* (Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi. Series Ibero-Caucasica 2), vol. 1, Turnhout 2008, IV-40. This term is used as a generic term for kings in Matthew 10:18 (ibid., 1:III-23) and 1 Timothy 2:1–2 (ibid., 1:III-44); for Herod in Acts 12:1 (ibid., 1:III-30); for pharaoh in Hebrews 11:23 (ibid., 1:III-42); and for Jesus as the king of the Jews in John 18:33, 37; 19:21 (ibid., 1:III-17–18).

51 For this rubric, see ibid., 1:III-29. As the editors note, the biblical passage is Luke 1:1–10 which in some calendars is assigned for the commemoration of Theodosius on January 19th and Constantine on May 22nd. Some Georgian calendars simply have a feast for all kings, which seems to be reflected in the Caucasian Albanian lectionary. On the liturgical commemoration, see ibid., 2:VI-1. This rubric is the only non-biblical evidence for the use of this term in Caucasian Albanian. The known Caucasian Albanian inscriptions do not contain such titles: Jost Gippert, *The Albanian Inscriptions Revisited*, in: Religions in the Caucasus. A Collection of Essays and Articles, Baku 2016, 75–87 (see the corrected version with images at http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/personal/jg/pdf/jg2014t.pdf).
der, was used for rulers.\textsuperscript{52} After the reestablishment of the kingship in Georgia, Gur- 
gen I (r. 994 – 1008) took the title \textit{mep et mep e} “king of kings” upon his accession to 
the throne.\textsuperscript{53} Titular innovation continued in Georgia into the early second 
millennium.\textsuperscript{54} The titles of rulers in these kingdoms reflect a confidence regarding local 
traditions and an engagement with the two empires that bordered the region.

Christian sovereigns in places as diverse as Bulgaria, Nubia, and Ethiopia assumed both local titles and drew on other traditions. Both pagan and Christian Bulgarian rulers had the local title \textit{khan or kana}. But Khan Terval (r. c. 701 – 721) received the Greek title of \textit{kaiser} from Emperor Justinian II (r. 685 – 695, 705 – 711). Later, Khan Omurtag used the Byzantine title “ruler by the grace of God” (\textit{ho ek theou arhôn}). In inscriptions during his reign and those of his successors, this title usually appears alongside the somewhat enigmatic Slavic phrase \textit{kana sübigi}, meaning “the khan appointed by heaven” or “ruler from (by) God/Heaven” (Ziemann). In the reign of the first Christian ruler of Bulgaria, Boris/Michael, the title \textit{khan} seems to have been abandoned in favour of the Slavic title \textit{kniaz} “prince.”\textsuperscript{55} The title \textit{tsar} “emperor” – a loan word from Latin \textit{caesar}\textsuperscript{56} – was likely used in Bulgaria first by Simeon I (r. 893 – 927).\textsuperscript{57} In Nubia, terminology divides along the lines of the language of the 
texts in question. Greek and Coptic texts both use the Greek word \textit{basileús}, but Coptic texts also use the Egyptian word \textit{përro}. Old Nubian sources make use of the native word for ruler: \textit{ourou}. Loan words such as \textit{augoustos}, \textit{kaiser}, \textit{anax}, and \textit{rex} also appear in certain contexts. There was also a high-ranking office in Nubia held either by the king’s mother or sister who received the Old Nubian title \textit{ñommen} (Łajtar/Ochala). In Ethiopia, the standard term for rulers, \textit{näguś}, is first attested in the reign of the Axumite ruler Ṣ’Ezana (r. c. 330 – 365/70).\textsuperscript{58} Imperial coinage from Ṣ’Ezana’s reign, who became famous for his conversion to Christianity, also uses the Greek term \textit{ba-


\textsuperscript{54} Rapp (cf. fn. 52) 576.

\textsuperscript{55} Georgi Bakalov, \textit{Quelques particularités de la titulature des souverains balkaniques au Moyen Âge}, (Études balkaniques 13, no. 2), 1977, 72; Mikhail Raev, \textit{The Emergence of the Title Veliki Kniaz’ in Rus’ and the “Povest’ Vremennykh Let}, Зборник Радова Византолошког Института 51, 2014, 48.


\textsuperscript{57} Bakalov (cf. fn. 55) 73–74; Maksimović (cf. fn. 56) 475; Peter Schreiner, \textit{Zur Entstehung des Namens “car” im Balkanraum aus historischer Sicht}, Byzantina 21, 2000, 364.

sileús,

and the title nəgušā nāgāšt “king of kings” occurs in his inscriptions. These three kingdoms display the dynamic between the reception of the earlier traditions as well as the perseverance of local traditions.

The early Islamic tradition developed distinct ideas of rulership as reflected in the proliferation of terminology. For example, the Unique Necklace of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih uses four different terms for rulers (Toral-Niehoff). Sulṭān referred both to political authority as well as to the person who embodies this power. Khālīfa was used to emphasise the ruler as the Prophet’s vicar on earth; imām shares this meaning but had even stronger religious connotations and highlighted a ruler’s moral responsibilities. The term malik “king” was reserved for sovereigns before the rise of Islam as well as for contemporary non-Muslim rulers. Some of the implications of these Arabic titles match those known from Christian communities. Yet the development of specifically Islamic titles for early Muslim rulers emphasises the general trend of a dynamic between a reference to the past with attention to the present needs of communities and local traditions.

3.3 Models

A third topic that enables a comparison of the diverse articles in this volume comprises the individuals that came to serve as models for good Christian rulership. The idea of pious rulers that followed God’s will went back to the time of the Hebrew Bible. Stories about David, Solomon, and Josiah provided complicated examples of good kings who followed the same God as Christians yet nevertheless had shortcomings. Figures such as Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus showed the risks and advantages of rule by kings who believed in other gods. The use of individual biblical figures was multifarious. The figure of Adam as the first human being served as a type both for the kings who restored the Armenian kingship and for the princes who claimed to rule the former territory of Caucasian Albania (Dorfmann-Lazarev). In his Vita Constantini, Eusebius shows how Constantine’s life paralleled that of Moses (Leppin). David became a model for repentance in Ambrose’s rebuke of Theodosius I (Boytsov), while he seems to have served as a model for the anointing of the Visigothic King Wamba (Drews). Even a less common figure such as the king of the Ninevites from the book of Jonah appears in a couple studies. The Syriac poet Ephrem the Syrian referenced his famous decree to put on sackcloth from Jonah 3:7–9 in his praise for the emperor Constantius II (Forness). The Bulgarian ruler Boris/Michael, perhaps in imitation of this Ninevite king, is said to have declared a three-day fast for repentance.

60 Fiaccadori (cf. fn. 58) 1163.
ance to call on God for help (Ziemann). Finally, Eusebius of Caesarea drew parallels between Constantine and Christ in his *Church History*, especially through the acclamation σῶτερ, and between Constantine and the Logos-Christ in the *Laudes Constantini* by linking earthly rule and the cosmic order (Leppin). These figures provided a common reference point across communities.

Celebrated sovereigns also became models for later rulers. Eusebius portrayed Cyrus the Persian and Alexander the Macedonian as deficient models for Constantine I in the *Vita Constantini* (Leppin), and Constantine served as a model for Christian rulers in places as diverse as Armenia (Bozoyan), Caucasian Albania (Hakobyan), Egypt (Camplani), Georgia (Jeck), Nubia (Lajtar/Ochala), and Persia. As Maria Conterno explores in her article, a debate over the legacy of Constantine was waged in the early Islamic period in which Constantine was received as a model ruler but also criticised. His legacy was debated by the Macedonian dynasty in Byzantium, Melkite Christian communities, and Muslim authors. But other figures also were seen as exemplary sovereigns within more localised settings. Abgar of Edessa was honoured in both the Syriac and the Armenian traditions (Bozoyan, Forness), while Vakhtang I was portrayed as a model ruler in the Georgian tradition (Jeck). In Armenia, the Caucasian Albanian ruler Vač’agan II the Pious became a celebrated figure (Hakobyan), and the dynasty of the Parthian Arsacids served as a common point of reference in Armenia as well as in Byzantium (Bozoyan). During attempts to restore the kingship in the territory of Caucasian Albania in the ninth and tenth centuries, an early Caucasian Albanian ruler, Vač’agan I the Brave (fourth century) as well as more recent figures, such as the restorer of the Armenian kingship, Ašot I Bagratuni (r. 884–890), were seen as exemplary (Dorfmann-Lazarev). The models of good rulership thus reflected both a transcultural and a local nature.

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61 In the Hebrew Bible, Jonah proclaims that the city of Nineveh will be destroyed in forty days (Jon 3:4). The Greek Septuagint, used by the Byzantine church, changed this to “three days,” hence the association of a three-day fast with the Ninevites found in some eastern Christian traditions.

62 On the image of Constantine in Persia, which is not covered in this volume, see Kyle Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia. Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 57), Berkeley 2015.


3.4 Virtues

The essays in this volume also expose a fourth common thread that shows a significant degree of similarity among the various concepts of Christian rulership that developed in the first millennium: the virtues expected of Christian rulers. Most Christian thinkers expected Christian sovereigns to display the same virtues as non-Christian rulers, such as courage, justice, mildness, and piety, even if they understood these virtues in a specifically Christian way. The inherited catalogue of virtues remains relatively stable throughout the studies on Christian rulers in this volume and extends also to the contributions on Sasanian and early Islamic views on good rulership (Toral-Niehoff, Wiesehöfer). These standard virtues undergo a distinct transformation in Augustine of Hippo’s *De civitate Dei*. Augustine calls emperors *felices* not due to their success in battle, orderly succession, or virtues, but rather because they adhere to God. Augustine’s portrayal of the Christian ruler emphasises a general trend that Christians had to be good rulers not only in terms of politics, but also in respect to ethics. In Augustine, regal virtues are related to the expectations placed on all Christians (Preuß). Yet even here the catalogue of virtues expected of sovereigns remains largely intact.

These virtues changed, however, under specific circumstances. For example, rulers were expected to be just and to defend their subjects against the enemy. But justice from a Christian viewpoint could mean giving preference to Christians, such as when Ambrose forced Theodosius I to condone the actions of the Christians who destroyed a synagogue. Furthermore, the expectation for Christian sovereigns to be pious and support the orthodox faith played a large role already in the time of Constantine I. However, certain aspects of their promotion of the Christian faith, such as building churches, might be sidestepped in neutralising discourses seeking to find concepts acceptable to both pagans and Christians (Leppin). The demand for the ruler to support the true faith mirrors traditions concerning Zoroastrian rulers of the Sasanian Empire (Wiesehöfer) and the notion that rulers were divinely elected in the Islamic tradition (Toral-Niehoff). In this regard, Roman emperors such as Constantine I, Constantius II, and Justinian I set out to exert their influence on creeds. Yet many Christians also had to live under rulers whom they considered heretics, especially in view of the high number of doctrinal divisions. This resulted in heavy criticism of individual rulers. Nevertheless, most Christians remained loyal to the Roman state and still praised emperors whose views they held as heterodox when they acted mildly (Booth, Forness, Leppin). Such contexts changed how Christian communities evaluated their rulers.

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Christians who lived under non-Christian rulers developed different means of evaluating the virtues of their sovereigns. For example, the Persian Empire included many Christian subjects, and a separate church hierarchy began forming by 424. The resolution of the Council of Ephesus in 431 to condemn the thought of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350 – 428) isolated the Church of the East even more, as it honoured Theodore as an authority. On the whole, the Church of the East easily accommodated to circumstances under a non-Christian empire. Yet these communities also produced hagiographical literature that propagated a narrative of persecution under their Zoroastrian rulers. Nevertheless, some clerics became close to the imperial court, and they developed their own ideals for good rulership. After Armenia came under the control of the Persian Empire in 428, Armenian Christians accepted Persian rulers who allowed them to be observant and listened to their petitions. Similarly, non-Melkite Christians fared particularly well under Islamic rule and perhaps even better than they had under emperors who did not share their theological views. Some even imagined the time of Roman rule as a time of persecution in contrast to the times in which they lived. These communities adapted to life in non-Christian regimes by altering their expectations of rulers.

Three specific virtues feature in a wide range of the essays below. First, the wisdom of rulers remained a common trait even if it took a variety of forms. Knowledge was important in the Persian (Wiesehöfer) and Islamic traditions (Toral-Niehoff). It seems to have played a less prominent role for Christian rulers, with exceptions such as Vač’agan II in Albania (Hakobyan) and Justinian I. The absence of this virtue may relate to the role of Christian bishops who both wielded religious authority

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67 For recent studies of this literature, see Joel Thomas Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh. Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 40), Berkeley 2006; Payne (cf. fn. 28); Smith (cf. fn. 62). Annotated translations of a number of these texts have recently appeared, most substantially in the series *Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac. Text and Translation* by Gorgias Press.

68 Payne (cf. fn. 28) shows that Christians were not merely marginal figures in the administration of the empire.


and were theologically adept. Related to the virtue of wisdom, many contributions identify the expectation that rulers listen to advisers whether they were religious authorities or not. Eusebius and Themistius along with other orators followed the classical panegyric tradition of praising emperors but also implicitly criticising them (Leppin). Popes recommended themselves as advisors to post-Roman western kings and to the Byzantine emperor (Hartmann) as well as to the newly established Christian kingdom of Bulgaria (Ziemann). As the case of Ambrose of Milan shows, male advisors were often inclined to stage themselves as the successors of the prophets which allowed them to reprimand the rulers strongly (Boytsov). As recent work on Roman empresses has demonstrated, women related to male rulers formed an important group of counsellors. The texts explored in Alberto Camplani’s article contain polemical attacks on women close to the emperor. Yet the authors of these works nevertheless recognised Theodosius II’s wife Eudocia and his sister Pulcheria as advisors. Women close to rulers appear in an even more prominent role in the Nubian materials where the ruler’s mother consistently served as an advisor (Lajtar/Ochala). Good Christian rulers were expected either to be wise in their own right or to listen to their advisors.

A second virtue that connects these studies is the ability to defend an empire or kingdom, which was normally in the interest of Christians and non-Christians alike. Since the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, some Christians had portrayed the Christian God as an ally of the Roman Empire in time of war. Yet this became more pronounced during the reign of Theodosius I, as marked by the battle of Frigidus in 394. This battle was later interpreted as a religious victory, as the emperor’s piety towards God seemed to have guaranteed the victory. The emperor’s righteous actions towards God could now lead to victory in battle. The war against the Persians in 421 and 422 was similarly celebrated as a religious act. Religious conflict took on a new character when sacred buildings were deliberately destroyed during campaigns, cul-

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71 On bishops in late antiquity, see especially Andrea Sterk, Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church. The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity, Cambridge, MA 2004; Claudia Rapp, Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 37), Berkeley 2005.
minating in the war between Heraclius and Khosrow II (r. 590–628).\textsuperscript{75} Related developments occurred in the Mediterranean and surrounding regions. Papal letters reveal an expectation for Christian rulers to engage in mission, and after the sixth century this mission appears to be also of a military nature (Hartmann). The \textit{Historia Wambae} portrays the Visigothic King Wamba as a general who leads his troops into battle like the kings of the Old Testament (Drews). In Bulgaria, both pagan and Christian rulers used military victories to legitimise their rule. Indeed, the Bulgarian ruler’s conversion to Christianity seems to have changed very little in this regard (Ziemann). These studies reveal how Christian thinkers navigated the expectation of sovereigns to defend their realms with their Christian identity.

Third, the portrayal of the Christian ruler as the eschatological king appears in five contributions across a wide geographical area. In the \textit{Laudes Constantini}, Eusebius of Caesarea equates the beginning of the fourth decade of Constantine’s reign with the fourth beast or kingdom from Daniel 7:1–8 (Leppin). In late Roman North Africa, Augustine of Hippo relativised the effectiveness of rulers in this world against the backdrop of an eschatological future in which Christians would individually have to account for their pursuit of salvation (Preuß). In Armenia, the Arsacid dynasty became an important model for kingship and found its way into apocalyptic materials that emphasised their role in the restoration of the Armenian kingship (Bozoyan). In Nubia, King Kyriakos (eighth century) came to be seen as the fourth and last world king whose reign would usher in the end of the world (Łajtar/Ochała). And, finally, in Bulgaria, several sources depict a certain Michael as this eschatological king, perhaps alluding to the first Christian ruler of Bulgaria Boris/Michael (Ziemann). The hope associated with such eschatological thought became projected onto good Christian rulers in these realms.\textsuperscript{76}

\section{Conclusion}

Views on good Christian rulership shared much in the first millennium even as they reflected the different circumstances under which specific sovereigns ruled. The diverse views on rulership explored in this volume are bound together by their efforts to navigate between local traditions and a multifaceted common heritage. Traditions from the Roman and Persian Empires, authoritative and sacred texts, and later Islamic traditions all proved influential. Each community had to acquire what it inherited from its forebears in order to retain it. Variation between perspectives on good ruler-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{75} James Howard-Johnston, \textit{Witnesses to a World Crisis. Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century}, Oxford 2011.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} See also the individual studies on this topic in Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (eds.), \textit{Endzeiten. Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen} (Millennium-Studien 16), Berlin 2008; Wolfram Brandes, Felicitas Schmieder, and Rebekka Voß (eds.), \textit{Peoples of the Apocalypse. Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios} (Millennium-Studien 63), Berlin 2016.
\end{itemize}
ship can be found on almost every point: the source materials, the titles used for rulers, the models for good rulership, and the expected virtues. The idea of good Christian rulership proved to be very flexible as it was under constant pressure to adapt to new circumstances.

The articles assembled here stem from scholars who specialise in a great variety of cultures and languages both within and outside the Roman Empire. We hope that they lay groundwork for and contribute to a transephocal and transcultural approach to political orders in Europe and the wider Mediterranean world.