Stefan Rebenich (Hg.), *Monarchische Herrschaft im Altertum*, Berlin – Boston (De Gruyter) 2017 (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs 94) XIV, 678 S., ISBN 978-3-11-046145-9 (geb.), € 139,95

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We have here a book about ancient monarchy collecting the papers given at the “Monarchische Herrschaft im Altertum” conference, from 23–25 January 2014, at the “Historische Kolleg” in Munich. The editor, the estimable Stefan Rebenich, is the author of a long article on “Monarchie” in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (vol. 24, 2012, 1112–1196), and this present volume is a demonstration of the respect in which he and that article are held: there are twenty-five papers (other than his own, introductory, piece), over more than 650 pages,

extending from ancient Egypt to the early Middle Ages (both East and West), and reaching outward from the Greco-Roman world to Judaea, Persia, Scythia and the Celts, Islam, and Han China, with a coda on the reception of ancient thinking about rulership in the early modern period (Ronald G. Asch, *Antike Herrschaftsmodelle und die frühneuzeitliche europäische Monarchie*, 637–661). A sociologist of German academia quickly notes that only three of the twenty-five authors fail to claim the reassuring title ‘Prof. Dr.’: this is a volume of contributions by successful, middle-aged academics, many of whose names will be well known to potential readers. It is also a volume by busy people, well armed with ‘Hilfskraft’. Some of the articles are openly stated to be, and others are in practice, useful compendia of existing scholarship rather than attempts to push back the frontiers of knowledge (and the bibliographical richness of almost all the contributions is awe-inspiring, especially to an English-speaking reader). Breadth of coverage, rather than unison of approach, is the purpose of this volume, although thematic unity is provided by the soft, comfortable, undogmatic Weberianism shared by many of the contributors. And despite the admirable range of societies surveyed, the task of comparison is left to the reader: individual papers stick close to the expertise of their authors. All the papers are in German, but all have full and accurate abstracts in English.

In a famous lecture, the medievalist Susan Reynolds insisted that kings in the Middle Ages “ruled **as kings**”. This was not a tautology, but an attempt to beat down the hydra of what she regarded as superfluous exterior explanations of royal power (see especially S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300*, Oxford 1997², 250–331): the king as feudal lord, the king as patron, the king as religious leader, the king as wonder-worker. No, the power of the king inhered primarily in the king being king. She was groping for a way of describing medieval monarchy as what we might call monarchy in its strong sense. Where monarchy in the strong sense exists, no other arrangement can be envisioned, people who are temporarily deficient of a monarch seek one, and those who are for historical reasons permanently defective of a monarch rue the fact: even they may yearn for a king of their own. However bad a monarch in a monarchy in this strong sense may be, killing or deposing him is often unimaginable, and so rebels seek to replace his advisors and to encircle him with their friends: such a king can be held permanently in check, but never checkmated. Monarchs hemmed in by ceremonial or ritual; monarchs never allowed to leave the palace; monarchies whose whole power is wielded by another for decades or centuries, such as that of the emperor of Japan by his Shogun: these are symptoms of monarchy in this strong sense. Should a monarch in this sense die, he must be replaced with his lawful heir even if that person is patently unsuited to the position by disposition or age: regencies are also a symptom of monarchy in

the strong sense. The king of a monarchy in the strong sense does not rule over conquered peoples, but has a genetic connection to the territory of his kingdom and the community of his subjects – what medieval Spain called ‘*naturalesa*’. Whether this is a proto-national feeling is a question best left aside; enough to accept that it is a very strong feeling, and may last long after a monarchy has been dissolved into another: thus, in part, today’s troubles in Catalonia, part of the Crown of Aragon until the 1400s. For today’s Spain represents the victory of the rival house of Castile, which never established a sense of ‘*naturalesa*’ over the eastern reaches of the country.

Aragon too is helpful because it reminds us that a monarchy in our strong sense need not be, in practical terms, a strong monarchy. The Crown of Aragon was notoriously weak, even by the standards of the Middle Ages, and the king was often thwarted by his uncooperative subjects in his desires and even in his critical needs: the community between king and subjects might indeed contribute to the sense that noblemen, towns, and clerics could stand upon their rights and provide the monarch with exactly what, and no more than, charter and tradition required of them, even in cases where potential damage to the kingdom was obvious. ‘*Naturalesa*’, loudly proclaimed in words of mutual esteem, love, and loyalty, nevertheless limited both what the king could ask and what the subject was obliged to provide. Monarchies in the weak sense, initially illegitimate monarchies, such as that of England under the Normans, were often more efficient in extracting wealth and soldiers from their subjects: their rule might be less stable, but it could also be crueler and more effective.

Medieval kingship serves to remind us that almost all the monarchies in the ancient Greek and Roman world, and so included in the admirably comprehensive book under review, were monarchies in this weak, not this strong, sense. The Hellenistic kingdoms (Hans-Ulrich Wiemer, *Siegen oder Untergehen? Die hellenistische Monarchie in der neueren Forschung*, 305–339) are striking examples of monarchy in the weak sense: ruling over spear-won land, claiming authority by virtue of victory in battle and generosity to their subjects, they renounced a close connection to their people or their territory; they turned their backs on ‘*naturalesa*’ (except insofar as the Antigonids ruled ancestral Macedonia and their Egyptian subjects may have understood the Ptolemies to be Pharaohs). Imperial Rome was monarchy in the weak sense sometimes verging on becoming a monarchy in the strong; or, looked at another way, the rule of the Caesars was, in the first three centuries AD, a monarchy in the strong sense to the commons at Rome (whom they fed and entertained, with whom they stressed their identity, their ‘*naturalesa*’) and sometimes to the soldiers (thus Claudius being dragged out from behind his curtain, as a ‘legitimate’, if hardly obvious, heir to the purple) but not, for a long time, to the imperial aristocracy, to whom the emperor was

certainly a monarch, but one without the deeper legitimacy of a monarch in the strong sense. To the aristocracy always and to the army sometimes the possibility of replacing the imperial regime with a regime of another type, or replacing the current emperor with another, not necessarily of the same dynasty, remained open. When the rule of the emperors finally became a monarchy in the strong sense at the end of the fourth century AD – when finally another form of rule or an alternative dynasty became nearly unimaginable – the Roman monarchy predictably became weak in practical things.

Lack of space forbids a systematic account of the twenty-six papers of which the volume under review consists, but I would point to some objects of intellectual ‘virtù’ in the papers about the Greco-Roman world (the limits of my competence). Tassilo Schmidt, in “Wer steckt hinter Agamemnons Maske? Zur politischen Herrschaft in mykenischer Zeit” (83–103) reiterates his claim that the term *wanax* in the linear-B tablets refers to god, not man, and rejects the recent argument that all of Mycenaean Greece was ruled by a single High King. The ever-ingenious Uwe Walter, in “Monarchen im frühen Rom. Traditionen – Konzepte – Wirklichkeiten” (119–139) accepts the scholarly conception of the kings of old Rome as warlords, and then hints that we should extend the period of the rule of Rome by warlords down to at least 367 BC. In “Die griechische Tyrannis als monarchische Herrschaftsform” (167–187), Martin Dreyer makes the point, obvious in retrospect but only when pointed out by someone as clever as Martin Dreyer, that the only form of monarchical *polis* that existed was the tyranny. Although some *poleis* had residual kings (Sparta had no fewer than two), no *polis* was a *basileia*, a kingdom. The observant Wilfried Nippel approaches a similar topic in his “Zur Monarchie in der politischen Theorie des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.” (245–261): he points out Aristotle’s neglect of all forms of monarchy except tyranny, and Aristotle’s particular take on tyranny, as a form of rulership that dissolves all social bonds. Aloys Winterling, in “Das römische Kaisertum des 1. und 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.” (413–432) prefers 19th-century understandings of the imperial regime as an unstable mass of contradictions to 20th-century assumptions that it was a settled and relatively uninteresting monarchy. Adrian Stähli, in “Strategien der Etablierung und Darstellung monarchischer Herrschaft in der visuellen Kultur der römischen Kaiserzeit” (433–449) delivers another much-needed kick to the idea that imperial portraits were ‘propaganda’. And finally, the first paper in the volume, “Monarchische Herrschaft im Altertum” by Stefan Rebenich and Johannes Wienand (1–41), in addition to laying out a series of questions about monarchy with admirable clarity, has a most useful full and up-to-date bibliography by subject (20–41).