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The Cloak of Power

Dressing and Undressing the King

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To prussian king frederick the great, a crown was merely a hat that let the rain in. Alas, it is not that simple! Pomp and circumstance are essential to monarchic rule, and a crown is far more than a hat, even still more than just a symbol of political power: a crown is a medium in the communicative processes between the ruler and the ruled—a medium (among others) through which sovereignty itself is carved out in the first place.

The idea that a king might just as well do without his regalia (or take off his crown as if it were just a curiously shaped hat) rests on the implicit assumption that the constitutional substructures of political power provide legitimacy in and of themselves. This, however, is a fiction of early modern political theory. A king is not just a private person who occasionally wears a crown to indicate his constitutional right to govern a given polity. Rather, a king is the sum of the social roles he assumes to negotiate ways of exercising his rule when encountering his subjects. To put it differently, there is no such thing as the king's two bodies: analytically speaking, it makes no sense to differentiate a ruler into his human reality, on the one hand (the body natural), and his social functions, on the other (the body politic)—notwithstanding all the folk tales that reflect precisely the desire to strip the ruler of his insignia, if not of his clothes altogether.

A naked king, though, is not a king at all! A king cannot be undressed; he can only be undone. Body natural and body politic are inseparably intertwined. The Libyan Tuareg author Ibrahim al Koni has put this insight at the core of his brilliant Arabic novel *Al Waram* (literally *The Tumor*): a desert leader named Asanay gradually becomes one with the cloak of power—a magnificent leather garment, braided with gold thread, which slowly fuses with the flesh of its bearer. The cancerous cloak of power is a fitting allegory for earthly rule: the individual is inseparable from his public appearances as a ruler, most prominently, his roles as a law-giver and judge, as a victor, and as a religious leader: "The jacket is nothing but a garment made of leather. . . . Whatever power it has comes solely from wearing it. And what matters is how you wear it" (al Koni, *Al Waram*, transl. E. Colla).

A crown, then, is not an item that symbolizes the king's body politic; it is a set of communicative acts superimposed on a particular material object, embedded in a dense texture of performances and discourses from which monarchy itself emerges as a highly complex social system. While in al Koni's novel what matters is how the desert leader wears the cloak of power, what matters in history is how the king utilizes his public roles as instruments of sovereignty; representations of virtue, honor, glory and the like—values a crown can stand for—serve as communicative reference points for fostering subjects' identification with the political order. A crown, then, can provide nodes of legitimacy, just as other acts and symbols may contribute to the general acceptance of the king's claim to sovereignty.

Thus, the most obvious element of earthly command, the availability of coercive force, or *power* ("Macht" in Weberian terms), is tranformed into *rule* ("Herrschaft") not by constitutional sleight of hand, but by *legitimacy*—in the sociological, not the legal, understanding of this concept. In his book *On China*, Henry Kissinger expresses this idea of the interdependency of rule and legitimacy with admirable clarity: "Almost all empires were created by force, but none can be sustained by it. Universal rule, to last, needs to translate force into obligation. Otherwise, the energies of the rulers will be exhausted in maintaining their dominance at the expense of their ability to shape the future, which is the ultimate task of statesmanship. Empires persist if repression gives way to consensus" (p. 13).

Kissinger's notion of societal consensus rests on the basic idea that the continuing success of rule depends on the ruler's ongoing ability to win the loyalty, commitment, and allegiance of his subjects. This can be seen not only in the history of China, but also particularly clearly in the political systems of pre-modern societies of the Mediterranean world: in the Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian monarchies, in the Hellenistic dynasties, in the Roman and Byzantine empires, and in the medieval kingdoms. In countless episodes full of drama and tragedy (occasionally entailing twists of comedy), the historical record exhibits the same pattern again and again: the way in which a pre-modern sovereign encountered his subjects directly affected his options of winning acceptance, which in turn had a direct effect on the success or failure of his rule. A ruler could quickly lose the support of important and influential interest groups, with fatal consequences for himself and his supporters. Latent potential for political disintegration existed even when administrative institutions were sufficiently robust to survive largely unscathed the downfall of a single ruler, and even when, on the contrary, the political system was embodied almost completely in a charismatic leader, as was the case in the early Roman Principate, a system that has duly been characterized as a series

of monarchs lacking a proper monarchy: the notion of *l'État, c'est moi!* in its purest form.

However, the "consensus" of which Kissinger speaks is not easily achieved in a domain as vast as the Roman empire of the fourth century—stretching from the moors of Britain to the deserts of Egypt, and from the Strait of Gibraltar to the streams of Mesopotamia. The political system spanning these vast lands and encompassing a population characterized by huge social, economic, cultural, and religious differences had to be held together by a comparably small administrative elite under pre-modern conditions of mobility and communication. The emperor had to meet the greatly diverging and changing demands of social groups as different and idiosyncratic as the court society and the central administration of the empire, the various strata of the military machine, the wealthy landowning aristocracy, powerful regional interest groups, the Church, and other social and political subgroups of the Roman population.

The most demanding historical challenge is to understand how this peculiar mixture of more or less cohesive social subunits converged in an era of substantial cultural change to build a sufficiently functional social and political hierarchy centered around a leading figure who sometimes sooner, sometimes later, would be replaced by a successor. This question can be answered properly only if the phenomenon of rule is studied from below: by looking at how the ruled (despite all the centrifugal forces at work) could develop what Kissinger has called "obligation." To talk about the emperor is thus to talk about the empire, which again means talking about its inhabitants and their multifarious relations with the ruler, his chief representatives, and subordinate actors within the imperial administration.

To understand sovereignty and legitimacy in pre-modern monarchies in general, therefore, a timely form of political history is needed, one that integrates on a very basic level the central arenas of reciprocal social interaction between the sovereign and his subjects. In the case of the fourth century AD, these are three distinct but mutually interrelated fields: civil and military administration, ceremony (or monarchic representation), and religion. Each of the three parts of this book is dedicated to one of these fields. All three sections refer back to the problem of legitimacy, and although they differ significantly in the ways they consider this phenomenon, they all seek to provide a proper understanding of how these three fields coalesce into a functionally differentiated, complex political system clustering around the central figure of the monarch. To explain how the three parts of this book approach the contested monarchy of the fourth century AD and how they relate to one another, this introduction will give brief outlines of their aims and methods and introduce the corresponding chapters.

Administering the Empire

The sociopolitical developments of the fourth century created a need to redefine the complex relationship between the emperor, on the one hand, and powerful interest groups such as local aristocracies, imperial elites, and the military, on the other. The first two contributions in this section start from an investigation of the changes in the self-understanding and internal stratification of the Roman aristocracy, analyzing the corresponding implications for the relationship between the emperor and the urban elites of Rome.

In his chapter, "Domesticating the Senatorial Elite: Universal Monarchy and Transregional Aristocracy in the Fourth Century AD," John Weisweiler explores the ways in which the formation of the late Roman monarchy redefined cultural and social conceptions of the elite and consequently transformed the relationship between emperors and senators as well. In public speeches and official monuments, senators presented themselves no longer as a Republican elite, whose identity was defined by the traditional magistracies of the Roman city-state, but as a global and monarchical class, whose authority derived from their selection by a sacred ruler. Weisweiler shows that the emergence of a new language of power had far-reaching social consequences. It gave the emperor new opportunities to involve senators in competition against each other and made it more difficult for them to articulate resistance against the monarchy. Like the fiscal and administrative reforms introduced by the emperors of the late third and early fourth centuries, the development of new forms of imperial ideology made a crucial contribution to the domestication of the power of the largest landowners in the Roman empire.

In consequence, the growth of the imperial administration in the provinces and the level of central control over their resources also led to a redefinition of the relationship between the imperial center, on the one hand, and members of the imperial and provincial administration, on the other, as John Noël Dillon shows in Chapter 3, "The Inflation of Rank and Privilege: Regulating Precedence in the Fourth Century AD." His analysis of imperial laws concerning elite ranks issued in the fourth century exposes the intriguing dynamics of imperial conferment of privileges and honors on individuals and elite groups. The emperor was central to all decision-making processes; he was able to control elite competition and to define the closeness of elite members to the imperial court, a power he wielded efficiently and to great effect. As Dillon shows, the fourth century saw a peak in the conferment of rank and privileges, by which status and influence of elite members were regulated. At the same time, the emperor deliberately avoided creating formal criteria for rank advancement. This lack of systematization in the conferment of ranks

and honors allowed the emperor to retain a crucial means of controlling the processes of hierarchy formation within the aristocracy on a case-to-case basis. As a detrimental side effect, however, the proliferation of rank and privilege weakened the authority of the imperial and provincial administration vis-à-vis the provincial population.

In Chapter 4, "Ostentatious Legislation: Law and Dynastic Change, AD 364–365," Sebastian Schmidt-Hofner analyzes imperial legislation as a medium for promoting monarchic rule in moments of political crisis. Schmidt-Hofner focuses on the crisis of the years 364–365, out of which (after the death of Julian and the brief reign of Jovian) the Valentinian dynasty would emerge as the new *domus divina*. A remarkably extensive body of legal texts survives from this period, the communicative function of which was to encourage loyalty and allegiance among the subjects toward the new regime. Starting from a close analysis of this corpus of texts, Schmidt-Hofner offers general observations on the communicative function of late Roman legislation and arrives at the conclusion that a majority of what we typically consider everyday late-antique legislation served primarily to convey and represent the authority of the emperors and their concern for the population of the vast empire.

The remaining contributions to the first section examine the relationship between the emperor, on the one hand, and the army and local elites, on the other. In Chapter 5, "Emperors and Generals in the Fourth Century," Doug Lee explores the relationship between the center of monarchic rule and the military. The civil wars and regional fissures of the mid-third century revealed just how fatally vulnerable emperors could be to rival claims on the allegiances of the military. Fourth-century emperors took particular care to try to win and retain the loyalty of the rank and file with symbolic rituals and gestures as well as with material incentives. However, the most serious danger was ambitious generals seeking to divert the affections of the troops under their command. To counteract and neutralize this potential threat, emperors developed a variety of strategies, an investigation of which is the primary concern of Lee's chapter. These strategies ranged from ensuring that generals received appropriate recognition and material rewards to marginalizing and even eliminating them. Beyond this, Lee examines how emperors took steps to promote an image of military experience and competence.

In some provinces the presence of the emperor himself had a strong impact on the social, cultural, and political development of the region, which again affected power relations within the empire, especially in times of shared rule. In the fourth century, the most important region of the western part of the Roman empire was Gaul (i.e., the *dioeceses Galliarum* and *Viennensis*), which Joachim Szidat explores in Chapter 6, "Gaul and the Roman Emperors of the Fourth Century." A rich variety of sources gives closer insight into the civil and

military administration, the sphere of the imperial court, the cities, and various local interest groups. Szidat concludes on the basis of a close analysis of this material that the strategic situation of the region transformed fourth-century Gaul into one of the most significant imperial residences and prefectural territories. The need to defend the frontier led to the stationing of a substantial part of the field army in Gaul. Usurpations were facilitated by proximity to free barbarian tribes, which presented an extremely useful recruiting ground for the army. Gaul thus was one of the most important and the most dangerous centers of power at the time. The region was so important for the stability of the monarchic order, that virtually every emperor who could not personally be present in the region installed members of the imperial house there as co-rulers with limited powers to administer the region so as to reduce the threat of usurpations. The withdrawal of the imperial court from the northern frontier by the end of the century dramatically changed the geopolitical importance of Gaul and led to a considerable decline of the region.

In "Regional Dynasties and Imperial Court," Michael Kulikowski analyzes the gradual integration of late Roman regional elites into the imperial administration, tracing strong continuities that span the traditional division between Principate and Late Antiquity. Kulikowski argues that it was mainly the creation of multiple imperial residences and the necessary reliance of the court on regional aristocracies that prompted the inclusion of provincial elites into the imperial administration on an unprecedented scale. Kulikowski argues that regions along the *limes* but physically beyond its notional line should be considered as analogous to those within the *limes*, hence allowing us to interpret the Gallic, Syrian, or Anatolian elites of the fourth century according to the same criteria, and as part of the same historical patterns, as Moorish, Frankish, or Alamannic elites.

Performing the Monarchy

The chapters of the first section are concerned with the structure, the functions, and the gradual transformation of the institutional foundations and administrative resources of the Roman monarchy in the fourth century; the contributions to the second section focus specifically on the role of symbolic forms of communication and ritualized forms of interaction between the sovereign and his subjects. The first set of contributions to this section deals with the impact of usurpation and civil war on the Roman monarchy, one of the most important driving factors in the history of the fourth century AD.

With his chapter "Emperors, Usurpers, and the City of Rome: Performing Power from Diocletian to Theodosius," Mark Humphries analyzes the role

of civil war in shaping the relationship between the emperor and the political elite of Rome. Humphries starts from an analysis of imperial visits to the city of Rome, which regularly occurred in the aftermath of civil wars in which members of the Roman aristocracy had supported the defeated emperor, and retraces the characteristic patterns of these episodes. He suggests not only that usurpation constituted an important dynamic for the interaction of Rome with the imperial court, but also that civil war significantly influenced the way imperial power was articulated and received in the city.

In my chapter "'*O tandem felix civili, Roma, victoria!*' Civil-War Triumphs From Honorius to Constantine and Back," I offer a complementary investigation, starting from a close analysis of two well-documented late Roman triumphal processions: Constantine's triumph over Maxentius in 312 and Honorius' triumph over Priscus Attalus in 416. These victory performances mark the beginning and conclusion of a series of triumphs in the city of Rome that deliberately included dramatic representations of martial achievements in civil war. I argue that the need to celebrate a civil-war victory with performances, monuments, and narratives that were formerly restricted to external victories (e.g., a triumphal procession, a triumphal arch, a battle frieze) resulted, on the one hand, from significant structural changes of the Roman monarchy in the third and fourth centuries and, on the other, from the fierce rivalry between emperors in the period of late Tetrarchic collegial rule, a situation in which a massive display of the emperor's military achievements was an important prerequisite for the cultivation of loyalty and obedience within the *apparatus imperii*.

The next two chapters also center around the topic of civil war. Christianization had a significant impact on internal conflicts. In Chapter 10, "Coping with the Tyrant's Faction: Civil-War Amnesties and Christian Discourses in the Fourth Century AD," Hartmut Leppin explores the impact of Christianization on the way emperors treated victories in civil wars. Christianization deeply affected how the emperor portrayed his role as a commander and victor in civil war. Triumphal processions were reformulated without reference to pagan deities; triumphal imagery merged with Christian concepts; Christian prayers became an integral part of the ruler cult in the army, and warfare and military conflicts were increasingly viewed in terms of Christian conceptions of heavenly and earthly rule. One significant aspect of this development not analyzed closely thus far is the treatment of enemy soldiers after their defeat in civil wars. Leppin's detailed examination of this phenomenon sheds light on the impact of religious change on the military representation of the emperor. Leppin focuses on three test cases: first on Magnentius' soldiers and their treatment by Constantius II in 352/353, then on the supporters of Procopius and

their treatment by Valens in 366, and finally on the adherents of Maximus and their treatment by Theodosius I in 388. These cases highlight how the Christianization of the Roman monarchy led to a Christian reformulation of acts of mercy as an innovative means of expressing clemency, humanity, and Christian piety.

While Christianity played an increasing role in the relations between emperors and soldiers, panegyric served as one of the most effective media for creating and sustaining consensus between the aristocracy and the emperor: its political significance was especially pointed after political ruptures, such as those that repeatedly resulted in civil wars during the third and fourth centuries. Starting with the Gallic orator Drepanius Pacatus, who delivered a panegyric to Theodosius in Rome in 389—shortly after the defeat of Magnus Maximus in civil war—Christopher Kelly devotes Chapter 11, "Pliny and Pacatus: Past and Present in Imperial Panegyric," to the figure of the panegyrist, one of the most important intermediaries in encounters between members of local aristocracies and the emperor in the ceremonial setting of the imperial court. Kelly illustrates in detail how, under the restrictive conditions of the ceremonial setting and with the topical use of earlier exempla of the genre (especially Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus*), the orator plausibly demonstrates his change of loyalties among the aristocracy.

The increasing relevance of ruler colleges made necessary the development of new strategies for establishing and maintaining coherence and stability within the imperial *domus*. In Chapter 12, "Born to Be Emperor: The Principle of Succession and the Roman Monarchy," Henning Börm explores the impact of imperial dynasties on the stability of the Roman monarchy in the fourth century. The dynastic principle was an important means of organizing imperial succession from the earliest phase of the Roman monarchy onward. However, the principle of dynastic succession competed with the meritocratic principle throughout the Principate. Börm argues that the rule of Constantine marked an important change in this respect. Constantine's focus on the dynastic principle resulted from the need to outweigh the normative force of Tetrarchic ideology. Therefore, the idea of a hereditary monarchy was spelled out explicitly and in great detail in the panegyrics, in Eusebius, and also later in the writings of the emperor Julian. From Constantine onward, imperial colleges composed of biological relatives were the standard option of monarchical rule. This, however, reinforced disputes and conflicts over rank, authority, and competence, since all members of a dynastically legitimized ruler college could claim an equal share in power. The resulting conflicts, in turn, could only be resolved by a gradually increasing territorial demarcation of the individual dominions.

Representations of imperial power are not merely ephemeral phenomena of monarchical rule: symbols, rituals, and narratives in fact structure the processes of political negotiation between the sovereign and his subjects and define the conditions of their success or failure. In "Performing Justice: The Penal Code of Constantine the Great," Christian Reitzenstein-Ronning examines this political dimension of symbolic communication through an analysis of ostentatious acts of inclusion or exclusion primarily in the sphere of criminal proceedings. In these performances the late Roman monarchy delineated and reinforced with a fine-grained scale of distinction the social stratification of its subjects. Reitzenstein-Ronning observes both an intensification of public performances of punishment and an expansion of criminal law to cover a continuously growing range of offenses. This amounted to an increase in the "dramatic" quality of such monarchic performances. Reitzenstein-Ronning raises the question of how these acts contributed to integrating the political and social system of the late Roman empire. He argues that the strength of this legal system lay in the very fact that criminal proceedings provided the Roman emperor with an arena for self-portrayal and self-description as the ultimate reference point of punishment and mercy—that is, of justice.

Balancing Religious Change

The contributions to the first two sections occasionally broached the topic of religion. The third section systematically examines the emperor's role in religious change and religious conflict. In Chapter 14, "Speaking of Power: Christian Redefinition of the Imperial Role in the Fourth Century," Harold Drake sets the stage for analysis of this theme, opening up a broad panorama of the changes that slowly but surely transformed the fraught relationship between the Christian religion and the Roman state and fundamentally redefined the status of the emperor himself. Drake's study starts from a close examination of Eusebius' Tricennial Oration, the earliest surviving imperial panegyric presented before the emperor by a Christian bishop. As Drake observes, Eusebius' consensual portrait of the emperor as a quasi-divine figure suffered an unfortunate fate in subsequent Christian discourse. Later Christian thinkers such as Athanasius of Alexandria, Hilary of Poitiers, John Chrysostom, or Ambrose of Milan contested the emperor's claim to have a special relationship with the divine and to possess a corresponding pre-eminence in questions pertaining to church affairs. John Chrysostom even observed that kings were inferior to Christian monks. This discourse centered on the question of privileged imperial access to the divine and resulted in a gradual deconstruction of the emperor as the final arbiter in the world: in a Christian empire, final judgment

rested with the Christian God. The idea of a Roman emperor as part of the divine sphere, inherited from the imperial ideology of the Tetrarchic era, was gradually reformulated to correspond to Christian cosmology. Drake examines how the development and intensification of these Christian discourses ultimately also affected the emperor's self-portrayal.

The next two chapters in this section focus on the role Rome and Constantinople played in imperial representation and religious policy in the Constantinian transformation of the Roman monarchy. In Chapter 15, "Constantine, Rome, and the Christians," Bruno Bleckmann calls for a reappraisal of the traditional view that Constantine's conversion was the driving force behind his way of dealing with the city of Rome. Bleckmann proposes to reverse the burden of proof and to regard the Constantinian ideology of Rome as the primary parameter underlying the changes in imperial representation after the victory at the Milvian Bridge. Bleckmann's detailed analysis of the material remains and the literary sources is the backdrop for his interpretation of Constantine's "Romprogrammatik," which locates the Constantinian building program, the imperial imagery on coins and other monuments, and the relationship with the divine sphere within an ideological context that merged aspects from both the Tetrarchic tradition and Constantine's rivalry with Licinius.

With Chapter 16, "Constantine and the Tyche of Constantinople," Noel Lenski shifts attention from Rome to Constantine's new residential capital and examines the religious and political function of Constantine's rededication of the cult of the city goddess Constantinopolis. In a detailed analysis of a Constantinian coin series depicting Constantinopolis and of literary sources on the imperial festivals and monuments of Constantinople, Lenski argues that Constantine cautiously remodeled the centuries-old pagan tradition of the Tyche of Byzantium, showing how wrong Eusebius was to have believed that Constantine founded Constantinople as a tabula rasa in terms of imperial and religious semantics. The Tyche can thus be understood as yet another example of the religious experimentation so characteristic of Constantine that helped him to bridge the gap between the empire's pagan past and its Christian future.

In Chapter 17, "A Vain Quest for Unity: Creeds and Political (Dis)Integration in the Reign of Constantius II," Steffen Diefenbach analyzes the political impact of the religious policy of Constantius II. First, Diefenbach argues that Constantius' active enforcement of an empire-wide, uniform creed must be understood as an imperial endeavor that was not driven primarily by pragmatic considerations. Based on this observation, Diefenbach investigates the disintegrative and integrative potentials of this policy from the viewpoint of the local and regional levels. He argues that conflicts within the church during

that time were not essentially triggered by Constantius' "Bekenntnispolitik." Rather, the stasis-like conditions that can be observed in some cities resulted from the enhancement of the status of members of the clergy, which increased and intensified the formation of factions at both the local and regional levels.

A particularly contentious aspect of Christianization is religious violence, which also had a strong impact on the interaction between the emperor and his subjects, as discussed by Johannes Hahn in Chapter 18, "The Challenge of Religious Violence: Imperial Ideology and Policy in the Fourth Century." Hahn analyzes the role played by the emperor in religious conflicts between Christians and non-Christians as well as in conflicts between Christians of different denominations. The Constantinian revolution, with its strong support of a religious minority, implied a desacralization and delegitimization of the emperor in the religious field: the imperial cult, instrumental for relations with local elites and subjects in the provinces, vanished, as did sacred elements in imperial propaganda. While imperial religious legislation soon paid tribute to tireless Christian lobbying, imperial pragmatism mostly favored traditional local structures and eschewed interventionism. However, the growth of the church and its powerful organization, as well as occasional militant Christian action, could lead to polarization and bitter conflicts in cities and the countryside. While often simply veiling battles for political and economic power, endemic internal Christian struggles and anti-pagan or anti-Jewish violence were (though often unabashedly illegal) regularly justified in religious terms and difficult to counter by imperial fiat. Thus, widespread religious conflict and violence not only seriously endangered public order but also presented a major challenge to imperial peace, ideology, and policy.

Rita Lizzi Testa's contribution, "The Famous 'Altar of Victory Controversy' in Rome: The Impact of Christianity at the End of the Fourth Century," reassesses the theory of a pagan reaction against the Christianizing tendencies of the Roman emperors. Her reconstruction of the "altar of Victory controversy" reveals that a complete rejection of the thesis, as is common in recent scholarship, fails to account for the fact that even politically influential citizens were able to retain a pagan identity up to the fifth century. Lizzi Testa uses the particularly well-documented episode of the altar of Victory controversy to show that such a reaction declared itself in a much less overt manner than claimed by contemporary Christian authors. Nevertheless, the polarity between Christianity and pagan traditions influenced the organization of senatorial pressure groups in political decision-making processes; it also shaped the processes of negotiation between groups from differing religious affiliations, and consequently also between the Roman aristocracy and the emperor.

The epilogue to this volume casts a concluding glance at the medallion depicted on the book cover (and again as Figure 20.1). Seen in context, this exceptional coin gives instructive insight into the contested monarchy of the fourth century AD and brings into focus one last time the diverse themes discussed in this volume.

In sum, the social, political, and religious changes of the fourth century profoundly affected the role of the Roman monarch within the highly complex political system of the empire. The transformation of the Roman world from the Principate to Late Antiquity went hand in hand with a substantial reformulation and adaptation of imperial strategies for retaining the loyalty and allegiance of the *apparatus imperii*, the military sector, powerful regional interest groups, the church, and other social and political subgroups of the Roman population. These processes can be traced in the changing interaction between the emperor, on the one hand, and the military and civil elites as well as civic populations, on the other, in innovations in the field of monarchic self-representation, and in the emperor's intervention in religious affairs.