Bastian Max Brucklacher: Res publica continuata. Politischer Mythos und historische Semantik einer spätantiken Ordnungsmetapher. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh 2023 (Antike Imperien 4). XI, 642 p. € 147.66/$ 163.00. ISBN: 978-3-506-79021-7.

In "Res publica continuata", Bastian Max Brucklacher examines the evolving justifications of imperial authority in the Eastern Roman Empire between 450 and 550 CE, challenging traditional narratives of a transition from republican to theocratic legitimacy. By integrating historical semantics and conceptual history, he argues that republican ideals persisted far longer than assumed, particularly in the rhetoric surrounding the consular reform, imperial ceremonies, and interactions between emperors and civic institutions. The study engages with an ongoing scholarly debate: to what extent did late antique rulers continue to justify their power through republican principles, and when (if ever) did religious explanations fully replace them?

For much of the modern era, scholars viewed the decline of the Augustan *principatus* and the rise of the late antique *dominatus* as a moment when emperors abandoned republican legitimising frameworks (still employed during the early imperial period) in favour of divine sanction and autocratic governance. This view suggested that, by the sixth century, imperial rule had become quasi-theocratic, with little remaining influence from earlier political traditions. However, since the late 1970s, scholars such as Hans-Georg Beck, Anthony Kaldellis and Marion Kruse have increasingly challenged this perspective, arguing that even in Late Antiquity, emperors continued to invoke republican rhetoric and civic legitimacy alongside religious justifications. Brucklacher positions his work within this debate, offering a nuanced synthesis between the 'Theocratic' and 'Republican' schools of thought.

Focusing on the fifth- and sixth-century Eastern Roman Empire, the book analyses how emperors balanced traditional republican ideals – such as stewardship of the *res publica* and the role of the Senate – with the increasing dominance of Christian legitimisation. In particular, it explores whether the nature of this justification evolved in response to the dramatic political, religious and social shifts of the time. By tracing these shifts through imperial documents, panegyrics, ecclesiastical correspondence and historiographical texts, the study provides a valuable reassessment of late antique political culture.

The book is structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 ("Einleitung", pp. 1–35) establishes the dual foundation of imperial legitimacy, arguing that emperors had to be recognised both as stewards of the *res publica* and as divinely sanctioned rulers. It also introduces theoretical concepts from political theory, legitimacy and semantic dimensions of power, demonstrating how imperial legitimacy was framed as conditional upon meeting the expectations of the people and upholding the principles of *politeia*.

Chapter 2 ("Die Poetik der Wirklichkeit. Epistemologische und methodische Grundlagen", pp. 37–68) outlines the study's methodological and epistemological foundations, focusing on historical semantics and metaphorology (the study of metaphors and their conceptual significance) as tools for analysing political legitimacy. By integrating methods from the Cambridge School and French discourse analysis, Brucklacher engages with Hans Blumenberg's work on political myths and Reinhart Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) to argue that republican ideals did not merely survive in legal and ceremonial discourse, but actively shaped governance.

Chapter 3 ("Die Erbschaft des Mythos. Republikanische Semantiken im 5. Jahrhundert", pp. 69–137) explores the interplay between republican and religious ideologies, highlighting the continued influence of republican traditions in imperial rhetoric, particularly in the capital. Here Brucklacher analyses the accessions of Leo I, Anastasius, and Justin, as preserved in Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus' *Book of the Ceremonies,* to demonstrate that the Senate and the people were still invoked as sources of legitimacy, despite the growing dominance of Christian ideology. He also examines Priscus' writings to highlight how republican ideals were used as a counterpoint to the failures of imperial rule (a theme later revisited, albeit somehow discontinuously, in the next chapters). The final section ("Limitation des Mythos: Orthodoxie und Republik, Bischof und Kaiser" pp. 112–137) considers the role of Christian orthodoxy in shaping legitimacy, arguing that this period marked a critical shift where emperors increasingly had to justify their rule through both civic ideals and adherence to Christian doctrine.

Chapter 4 ("Der republikanische Mythos als Problem. Die Anfechtbarkeit der imperialen Monarchie", pp. 139–385) marks a turning point in the book, examining various challenges to imperial "republican" legitimacy up to Anastasius' death. Key among these were the Acacian Schism, which further strained imperial-papal relations; the rise of an ascetic *politeia*; and the emergence of a competing Italo-Ostrogothic model of *res publica* – a hybrid polity

where a Gothic monarch ruled, but did so by ostensibly reviving and safeguarding Rome's republican heritage to an unprecedented degree. The chapter explores how these rival paradigms of legitimacy not only accelerated the shift toward religious justifications for imperial rule but also placed the very concept of monarchy under unprecedented scrutiny. On one hand, the author argues, panegyrists like Procopius of Gaza and Priscian intertwined divine sanction with republican ideals; on the other, political and intellectual currents – including Zosimus, Malchus of Philadelphia, hagiography, and Ostrogothic writers – began questioning the nature of one-man rule and exploring alternatives to absolute monarchy.

Chapter 5 ("Konfrontation und Krisis. Republikanische Grenzerfahrungen", pp. 387–508) shifts the focus to the reigns of Justin and Justinian, exploring how imperial justification evolved in response to changing political fortunes. Brucklacher argues that Justinian initially maintained a mixed approach to legitimacy, amplifying republican rhetoric in the 520s and early 530s through legal and ceremonial reforms – most notably the revival of the ordinary consulship. He frames Justinian's decision to cease appointments in 541/542 as the collapse of a long-standing 'republican restoration project.' This transition is analysed through contemporary or near-contemporary literary reception, most notably Marcellinus Comes, John Malalas and the philosophical tradition, the last largely ignoring imperial claims for divine legitimacy in favour of epistemocratic ideals based on wisdom and virtue.

The final chapter ("Schlussbemerkungen", pp. 509–518) synthesises the arguments presented throughout the book, concluding that the period from 450 to the mid-500s saw dramatic ideological experiments and shifts, which ultimately clarified that imperial absolutism would endure, whereas projects tinged with 'republican' legitimacy receded into the background.

The book makes a stimulating contribution by drawing attention to an often-underappreciated facet of late antique political culture: the tension between imperial autocracy and the vestiges of Rome's republican past. The author's central idea – that the late fifth and early sixth centuries served as a laboratory of ideological experimentation – is both compelling and thought-provoking. Many of the primary sources examined, including papal letters, imperial edicts, chronicles, and panegyrics, are indeed rich in rhetorical ambiguities that merit closer analysis. While greater attention to non-literary sources, such as coins and artworks, would have provided a fuller picture of imperial ideology, the book succeeds in assembling a diverse range of literary

evidence from both East and West, across secular and ecclesiastical spheres. The result is a vivid portrayal of a world in which Roman political thought was forced to adapt to new realities: the fall of the Western Empire, the rise of powerful 'barbarian' states and intensifying religious conflicts. These are legitimate and important areas of inquiry, and the study presents a compelling case for their significance.

However, certain aspects of the book's analysis and execution limit the force of its conclusions. A key weakness is the absence of a clear pre-450 baseline, which undermines its assessment of ideological shifts. Without sufficiently engaging with developments before 450 CE, the book risks not only presenting post-450 changes as more novel or radical than they actually were but also asking the reader to accept its claims without fully demonstrating whether these shifts were genuinely new or part of a longer continuum. A more diachronic approach, extending back to the early fifth or even fourth centuries, would likely have revealed that many of the so-called 'innovations' of 450–550 were in fact foreshadowed by earlier practices.

A clear example of this problem is the book's discussion of Pope Simplicius' innovation in invoking *providentia* as the primary foundation of imperial legitimacy (pp. 112–137). The book persuasively argues that Simplicius elevated divine providence above other legitimating principles, making imperial rule explicitly contingent on adherence to Chalcedonian Christianity. However, while the argument for a shift in emphasis is compelling, the extent of this innovation could have been more critically examined. Although the author acknowledges the use of *providentia* rhetoric in earlier periods, this discussion is largely buried in footnotes (e.g., p. 124, n. 168) and is limited to its appearance only from the time of Marcian and Valentinian III. Yet earlier Christian and pagan traditions had already intertwined divine providence with imperial authority. Figures like Eusebius of Caesarea had long framed emperorship as part of God's cosmic order, and the *providentia Augusti* of the imperial cult provided an even earlier precedent.[1] Additionally, the book could have more fully explored how both emperors and popes had previously articulated the idea that imperial authority depended on religious fidelity. A striking example is Pope Celestine's letter to Theodosius II in response to the emperor's summons to Ephesus, where he states:

1 W. den Boer (ed.): Le culte des souverains dans l'Empire romain. Sept exposés suivis de discussions. Geneva/Vandœuvres 1973 (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique 19).

> May the concern showed by your clemency suffice for the defence of the catholic faith, which out of love for Christ our God, who directs your reign, you hasten to support in every way. By condemning the error of perverse doctrines you keep the faith pure and immaculate; *in this you place the protection of your reign*, *knowing that your rule, when protected by the observance of holy religion, will endure more firmly*.[2]

This is particularly relevant because it shows a pope addressing an emperor with a claim remarkably similar to that of Simplicius – that the endurance of imperial power depends on the emperor's commitment to Orthodoxy. Certainly, the idea of an emperor's legitimacy being connected to religious orthodoxy was far from new. Additionally, the book could do more to highlight the contextual nature of Simplicius' emphasis on divine delegation. When articulating legitimacy solely in terms of orthodoxy, he was often writing to fellow clerics or bishops, particularly within or near the immediate context of the Acacian Schism – a point acknowledged but again mostly buried in footnotes (pp. 124 and especially 126, note 173). In contrast, when addressing emperors, Simplicius did mention other legitimising secular principles, as seen in his letter to Basiliscus, where he referenced *utilitas publica* alongside *providentia* (p. 122). This suggests that the supposed 'innovation' of Simplicius' claims was highly circumstantial – he was adapting his rhetoric depending on the audience rather than asserting a universally novel political theology. A deeper engagement with both earlier precedents and the situational pragmatism of Simplicius' claims would have more effectively nu-

2 Translated by R. Price (ed.): The Council of Ephesus of 431. Documents and Proceedings. With an Introduction and Notes by T. Graumann. Liverpool 2020 (Translated Texts for Historians 72), p. 204. For the Latin text, see Celestinus, epist. 19, in E. Schwartz (ed.): Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum. Vol. 2.1.2: Concilium Universale Chalcedonense. Actio secunda. Epistularum collectio B. Actiones III–VII. Berlin/Leipzig 1933), pp. 25–26: *Sufficiat licet quod sollicitudo vestrae clementiae circa fidei catholicae defensionem, cui pro Christi Dei nostri amore qui vestri imperii rector est adesse modis omnibus festinatis, integram immaculatamque eam, pravorum dogmatum damnato errore, servatis; in hoc semper munimen vestri constituentes imperii, scientes regnum vestrum sanctae religionis observantia communitum firmius duraturum*. Christian emperors had already emphasised the close relationship between religion and the state. Theodosius II, for instance, acknowledged how the stability of the empire depended on the faith through which the emperor honoured God. See the imperial letter that convened the Council, and the instructions for the Council: Schwartz (note 2), pp. 114–116; 1.1.1, pp. 120–121 (transl. Price [note 2], pp. 197–199; 214–216). The same points were fundamentally made by Zeno in his *Henotikon*; cf. Evagrius, HE 3.14 with M. Whitby (ed.): The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus. Translated with an Introduction. Liverpool 2000 (Translated Texts for Historians 33), pp. 147–149 and notes.

anced the book's conclusions regarding his role in pioneering a new model of legitimacy.

Similarly, the author's discussion of the rise of ascetic authority from 450s onward is rich in detail but suffers from a lack of contextualisation ("'Steh fest und stehe Deinen Mann!' Die asketische *politeia* als Konkurrenzmodell", pp. 200–225). The book essentially asserts that the empire experienced a heightened crisis of legitimacy across the fifth and sixth centuries, when the moral authority of saints and ascetics, who were seen as guardians of orthodoxy and justice, began to assert itself as a structurally competing model of authority. The chapter concludes that a new political dynamic took shape, namely, that imperial legitimacy now had to reckon with the ascetic-religious sphere, implying that secular authority alone was no longer unquestioned.

While the events of Zeno's, Basiliscus' and Anastasius' reigns indeed show imperial policies contested by churchmen and monks, the idea that this was a new development triggered by a specific crisis of legitimacy, or that ascetic figures suddenly took on an unprecedented role in challenging imperial authority, risks overlooking the broader history of saintly opposition to emperors. Long before Zeno, earlier Christian tradition had already conceptualised religious figures as arbiters of imperial legitimacy. The ascetic *politeia* – the idea that the community of the faithful under spiritual leaders formed a sort of polity with moral jurisdiction – was not an invention of the late fifth century. St. Ambrose's confrontation with Emperor Theodosius I – barring him from church after the Thessaloniki massacre – is a famous example of ecclesiastical authority checking imperial power. Similarly, throughout the fourth and early fifth centuries, monks, hermits and bishops frequently mobilised public opinion against imperial religious policies, from the Arian controversies to the tumultuous episodes under Theodosius II, particularly Dalmatus' mobilisation of Constantinopolitan monks against Nestorius that forced the emperor to abandon his chosen patriarch. By not engaging with these earlier cases in greater depth, the author creates an impression of rupture where, in reality, the tension between imperial and ascetic authority was part of a continuum. A more nuanced chronological perspective would have strengthened the argument by showing that this tension was an ongoing dynamic, and perhaps one that intensified in the late fifth century, but certainly not a one-time anomaly triggered solely by recent imperial policies.

Further complicating the analysis is the book's definition of the republican elements within the ideology of legitimacy, which does not fully engage with

broader traditions of (East) Roman political thought, particularly the overlap between republican and Hellenistic monarchical traditions. One such element, the idea of the emperor as a 'steward of the empire', is indeed examined within a republican framework (pp. 69–137, especially "Exposition des Mythos: die Kaisererhebung Leons I. und die Integrität der *politeia*", pp. 70–89; 139–159 etc.), but the book does not fully clarify to what extent this concept was primarily republican rather than a blending of multiple ideological strands, both older and newer. The idea of imperial power being constrained by law and the common good, as the book rightly highlights (pp. 4–5), does align with the republican tradition – most notably Cicero's vision of governance as preserved in his *De re publica* and other works. However, late Roman conceptions of monarchy were not exclusively influenced by Roman republicanism but also by Christian moral frameworks, which imposed ethical obligations on rulers, as well as by the Hellenistic notion of *basileia*, particularly the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition of royal virtues. This tradition, which emphasised wisdom, clemency and the ruler's duty toward his subjects, was well established in the fourth-century Roman Empire and commonly employed in Greco-Roman and Christian eulogistic oratory, historiography and political theory.[3] It is also attested in the West, with figures such as the Gallic orator Pacatus applying it in his panegyric for Theodosius I in 389.[4] It is possible that late antique Romans recognised aspects of this tradition as compatible with republican ideals, but the book does not explore this dimension in sufficient depth, with the result that the study risks oversimplifying the relationship between republicanism and the evolving imperial ideology in Late Antiquity.

These shortcomings are also evident in the book's discussion of East Roman and Ostrogothic republican propaganda ("Theoderich und die Konstruktion eines zweiten republikanischen Mandatars", pp. 226–322). Specifically, the author underscores Theoderic's use of notions like *libertas* (liberty), *aequitas*

3 The idea of the 'good sovereign', with an emphasis on clemency, reverberates in Seneca (*De clementia* 1.11.4) and later in historiographical treatments of Marcus Aurelius (Cassius Dio 72.27–29; *Historia Augusta*, Marcus Aurelius 26.10–12). See also F. Dvornik: Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy. Origins and Background. Vol. 2. Washington, D. C. 1966 (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 9), pp. 626–630 for a more detailed discussion.

4 C. Kelly: Emperors, Government and Bureaucracy. In: Av. Cameron/P. Garnsey (eds.): The Cambridge Ancient History. Vol. 13: The Late Empire A.D. 337–425. Cambridge 1998, pp. 138–183, p. 148 and n. 61.

(legal fairness), and *res publica* – particularly as received through Ennodius' panegyric and Cassiodorus' *Variae* – as well as his preservation of the consulship and Senate (*cura senatus*), aiming to demonstrate that Theoderic's official rhetoric was less imperial and more republican (p. 229). Later, the author provides some reasons for this innovation, arguing that the introduction of a distinctly 'republican' brand of political rhetoric was not a deliberate policy of the Ostrogothic government but rather arose as a consequence of its need to gain legitimacy from an Italian audience. Since Theoderic's rule faced a legitimacy deficit, partly due to his heretical status among the pro-Nicaean and pro-Chalcedonian majority, the Gothic administration leaned heavily on republican ideals and language to legitimise his reign. This rhetorical strategy, the author contends, would have provided a form of legitimisation that could resonate with the Roman aristocracy and the Italian population. It would have also made Theoderic a challenger for imperial rule (pp. 320–322).

To be clear, I support the author's conclusions that Theoderic (and, by extension, the Ostrogothic-led Roman state in the West) was unquestionably perceived as a threat by Constantinople. However, I am less convinced by the rest of the argument. Did earlier Arian emperors ruling in the West use republican rather than imperial rhetoric? If not, why would the Ostrogoths have done so? There is evidence that Odovacar, and even Visigothic and Burgundian kings, maintained Roman administrative forms and respected the prestige of Roman institutions to stabilise their own regimes. If one considers these parallels, Theoderic's policies appear less like a unique 'Gothic republicanism' and more like a particularly successful instance of barbarian kingship assimilating Roman legitimising conventions. On this point, I was often left wondering how the regime's public rhetoric would have looked had it been explicitly imperial rather than republican. In fact, is this distinction even meaningful? Since the time of Augustus, Roman emperors (and usurpers) had routinely cloaked their authority in republican terminology – restoring the *res publica*, defending the liberty of Rome, and cooperating with the Senate – even while wielding monarchic power. This political language was a standard idiom of legitimacy in Roman imperial discourse. For Theoderic in Italy, adopting such rhetoric was a natural means to ingratiate himself with his Roman subjects and the senatorial aristocracy. Therefore, here too a comparative analysis of the political discourse before Theoderic, particularly under Valentinian III and his immediate successors, would have

helped contextualise whether such a rhetorical strategy was truly novel or simply a continuation of existing traditions of governance – tradition within which Theoderic was positioning himself. Moreover, while the author does discuss the likely aims and context of Cassiodorus' and Ennodius' works (pp. 230–322), he never seriously considers the possibility that Cassiodorus, in the *Variae*, may have sought to present himself as serving a genuinely Roman (i.e. legitimate), rather than republican, government. Likewise, while the book rightly highlights Theoderic's *cura senatus* – his careful relationship with the Senate – it does not sufficiently weigh how much of this perception is a consequence of *Variae*'s survival rather than an inherently unique feature of Theoderic's rule. Since we lack a comparable collection of letters from emperors in the East or West to their respective senates, it is unclear whether Theoderic's language was exceptional or simply in line with broader Roman political discourse.

This excessive emphasis on a 'republican rhetoric' is further evident in the book's treatment of Anastasius' address to the Roman Senate in 516, where the standard formula *Si vos liberique vestri valetis, bene est; ego exercitusque meus valemus* is cited as evidence of a republican revival (p. 372). Yet, this phrase was used by Roman emperors when addressing the Senate, long before Anastasius.[5] Its presence in 516, therefore, does not necessarily indicate a fundamental ideological shift. Later ("Ergebnis. Die erste republikanische Transformationsphase", pp. 382–385), the author argues that terms like *res publica*, *politeia*, *populus*, *demos*, *senatus*, *consul* – all associated with the republican tradition – were increasingly used in contemporary sources during Anastasius' reign, suggesting a revival or intensification of republican discourse. However, without comparing how and how often these terms were used in earlier texts, how can we assess whether this reflects a true ideological shift or merely the continuation of existing rhetorical conventions? The author acknowledges that more detailed quantitative and qualitative studies on these

5 See, e.g., Constantius II's letter to the Senate of Constantinople in 355 concerning Themistius' *adlectio*, in H. Schenkl/G. Downey/A. F. Norman (eds.): Themistii orationes quae supersunt. Vol. 3. Leipzig 1974 (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), p. 122, with P. Heather/D. Moncur (eds.): Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century. Select Orations of Themistius. Translated with an Introduction. Liverpool 2001 (Translated Texts for Historians 36), p. 108, n. 183.

terms are needed, yet the lack of this analytical layer does not prevent him from presenting his conclusions as definitive.

Interconnected with the republican argument is the book's theory that the initial revitalisation and eventual suppression of the ordinary consulship in the reign of Justinian were tied to a grand republican restoration project (pp. 426–508). The author interprets the persistence of consular appointments – particularly in the Eastern Empire – as part of an effort to rejuvenate republican elements within the imperial system, supposedly championed by figures like Justinian to bolster legitimacy. Accordingly, when Justinian finally terminated the consulship in 541, by declining to appoint any new consuls after that year, the book sees this as the failure or abandonment of republican propaganda by his regime.

Admittedly, some arguments in these sections are highly persuasive, particularly where the author contends that the consulship amplified imperial successes, that its revival in the 530s was tied to Justinian's restoration propaganda (pp. 426–456, following a view advanced by Lorenzo Sguaitamatti),[6] and that its lapse in the 540s reflected shifting imperial fortunes ("Die Kontingenz der negativen Umstände", pp. 490–504). However, the argument becomes less convincing, in my opinion, where it links both the reform and the abolition of the consulship entirely to this republican project. While the book acknowledges the existence of alternative explanations for Justinian's decision to reform and later terminate the institution, it does not seriously engage with longstanding theories that attribute the end of consular appointments to political and financial considerations rather than ideological inconsistencies. This omission is unfortunate, as incorporating this layer of analysis – particularly in the discussion of the reform and the legislation governing consular celebrations and public appearances – would have enriched an otherwise insightful and detailed examination. For instance, the analysis of *Novel* 105 is particularly valuable in demonstrating that the law probably aimed (among other things) to enhance the emperor's image through the heightened ceremonial grandeur of the imperial consulship (p. 453).

Moreover, if the author seeks to frame Justinian's reform as largely ideologically driven, the book should have addressed why this would stem primarily from a republican ideology rather than, for instance, the broader restoration

6 L. Sguaitamatti: Der spätantike Konsulat. Fribourg 2012 (Paradosis 53), pp. 112–113.

ideology Justinian actively pursued while presenting himself as reviving the Western Empire in the 530s. These two frameworks are not mutually exclusive, as the author himself acknowledges, but a discussion weighing their relationship – or at least explaining why the author's preference for the republican element is preferable – would have helped clarify the issue. After all, if Justinian actively exploited the consulship to reinforce his image as a steward of the *res publica*, as the book argues (p. 493), then revitalising the institution could also have aligned with his triumphalist ideology of imperial restoration. Moreover, emperors before Justinian had already used the consulship to magnify their achievements, without this being linked to any 'republican project.' For instance, Theodosius II assumed the office in 431 (with Valentinian) after defeating the usurper John, and again in 438 when announcing the Theodosian Code. Similarly, Anastasius designated himself consul in 506 to mark his peace settlement with Persia. Thus, if this practice was not unique to Justinian, what does that imply for its supposed connection to a republican restoration programme? Further questions the book fails to address include: why did the honorary title continue to be bestowed if abolishing the consulship signalled the abandonment of republican rhetoric? And why, after its suppression, was the ordinary consulship only assumed by emperors and never granted to *privati*? Like other earlier scholars, the author primarily searches for the causes of the consular reform (and its supposed failure) within the immediate context of Justinian's agenda rather than situating it within the broader historical framework – one of the main reasons why the book's thesis is not entirely persuasive.

Next, the book advances the provocative idea that the institution of imperial monarchy itself was being fundamentally questioned during this period ("Inversion des Mythos: Priskos im *barbaricum*", pp. 89–111; 142–200). This argument is intriguing and, to some extent, sensible when considering the political transformations in the West and their potential ramifications in the East. However, it remains problematic. While the period certainly witnessed turbulence and power shifts, nowhere is there concrete indication of any faction or movement attempting to abolish the imperial office or replace monarchy with an alternate system, at least in the East. The Eastern Roman state continued to function as a monarchy without interruption – no senate or council attempted to rule *in place* of an emperor. Even in the West, when the western imperial line ended in 476, the solution was not a true revival of

republican governance, but rather the (notional) acknowledgment of a single emperor in Constantinople and the (actual) rule of a *rex* in Italy.

The book leans heavily on subtle hints to argue that monarchy was concretely challenged. For example, it interprets Malchos' *Byzantiaka*, particularly fragment 15 (92.6–93.13) on Theoderic's demand that Zeno's decisions be ratified by the Senate, as evidence that the Senate in the East – like its counterpart in the West – assumed an increasingly sovereign role due to the emperor's perceived incapacity to govern effectively (pp. 197–198). It further concludes that Malchos' work suggests a future in which Rome might exist without an emperor (p. 199: "In der Gesamtschau eignete den *Byzantiaka* des Malchos daher der Charakter einer Ablösungs- und Transfergeschichte republikanischen Herrschaftswissens, die als Zeitgeschichte auf die nahe Möglichkeit einer römischen Geschichte ohne Kaiser verwies"). Yet, how much of Malchos' critique reflects a genuine alternative to monarchy rather than partisan hostility to Zeno? Writing under Anastasius, he may have sought to discredit Zeno rather than advocate systemic change.

A similar overreach appears in its reading of Zosimus. In *Historia Nova* 6.8.3, Zosimus writes:

> ἀνενεγκὼν δὲ ὥσπερ ἐκ κάρου βαθέος Ὀνώριος τοῖς μὲν ἐκ τῆς ἑῴας ἀφιγμένοις τὴν τῶν τειχῶν ἐπίστευε φυλακήν, ἐγνώκει δὲ τέως ἐπιμεῖναι τῇ Ῥαβέννῃ, μέχρις ἂν ἀκριβέστερον τὰ κατὰ τὴν Λιβύην αὐτῷ δηλωθείη, καὶ εἰ μὲν Ἡρακλειανὸς ὑπέρτερος γένοιτο, τῶν αὐτόθι πραγμάτων ὄντων ἐν ἀσφαλεῖ παντὶ τῷ στρατεύματι πολεμεῖν Ἀττάλῳ καὶ Ἀλλαρίχῳ, τῶν δὲ εἰς τὴν Λιβύην παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ πεμφθέντων ἐλαττωθέντων ταῖς οὔσαις αὐτῷ ναυσὶ πρὸς Θεοδόσιον εἰς τὴν ἑῴαν ἐκπλεῦσαι καὶ τῆς τῶν ἑσπερίων βασιλείας ἐκστῆναι.

Most scholars interpret this passage as implying that Honorius was considering abdication and flight to Theodosius II in the event of military failure in Africa. However, the book argues that Zosimus portrays Honorius not merely as planning his own retreat but as contemplating the possible end of the imperial monarchy in the West (p. 187: "im Falle seines militärischen Scheiterns den Entschluss fassen ließ, 'die kaiserliche Herrschaft über die westlichen [Gebiete]' aufzugeben und sich zu seinem Neffen nach Konstantinopel abzusetzen, schrieb er das mögliche Ende der monarchischen Herrschaft sogar einem kaiserlichen Denkhorizont ein.") In reality, these incidents reflect specific and limited circumstances – usurpation, military uprisings or political crises – rather than a principled rejection of an emperor. The book extrapolates too much from ambiguous sources, framing isolated

events as part of a larger ideological shift that the evidence does not fully substantiate.

By incorporating a vast bibliography (pp. 521–631) – almost 100 pages of secondary literature – the author demonstrates an impressive mastery of a wide range of topics across the period covered. This depth of engagement is also reflected in the detailed and often extensive footnotes that accompany the book. Therefore, the following points are only minor suggestions for areas where future research could further enrich the discussion, rather than critiques of the book's overall depth.

For instance, the sections examining the contemporary use and meaning of *politeia* (especially pp. 172–181) would have benefited from a deeper engagement with Kaldellis' reflections on the same topic.[7] Does Kaldellis' interpretation align with the author's conclusions on Zosimus' use of *politeia*? Would Zosimus' perspective reinforce or complicate this framework? More broadly, Kaldellis' research argues that late-antique and Byzantine Constantinople continued to understand itself as a *res publica* governed by consent and law, with true sovereignty resting with the people. Engaging more closely with this scholarship would have provided a richer interpretative framework, one which could either reinforce parts of the book's thesis (by showing republican ideas were indeed ingrained in the contemporary political sphere) or temper it (by explaining those ideas as a continuous background norm rather than an intensified post–450 phenomenon).

Additionally, the discussion in section 4.2.1.2 ("Die Erschließung eines republikanischen Deutungswissens", pp. 172–177) could have been enriched and strengthened by referencing the longstanding historiographical tradition that framed Rome's history through the metaphor of the human life cycle (birth, growth, maturity, decline and potential rejuvenation). Florus and Seneca, as cited by Lactantius, exemplify this tradition, and it would have been useful to consider how late Roman historians such as Zosimus positioned themselves within, or diverged from, this framework.[8]

7 A. Kaldellis: The Byzantine Republic. People and Power in New Rome. Cambridge, MA/London 2015, especially chapters 1 ("Introducing the Byzantine Republic", pp. 1–31) and 2 ("The Emperor in the Republic", pp. 32–61).

8 See especially L. Bessone: Senectus imperii. Biologismo e storia romana. Padua 2008 (Ithaca).

Similarly, in the chapter on the consulship, a few bibliographical clarifications would have helped. For example, Roger S. Bagnall's "Consuls of the Later Roman Empire",[9] and the article by Alan Cameron and Diane Schauer,[10] are essentially the same study reprinted in different formats, so it would have been clearer to cite just one version consistently. When mentioning the financial motivations behind the termination of the consulship (pp. 428–429), the book would have benefited from acknowledging John B. Bury's early contribution to this theory.[11] Furthermore, while the author commendably references key works such as Gerhard Rösch[12] and Denis Feissel[13] when discussing the lasting impact of *Novella* 105 on provincial dating practices, the omission of "Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt",[14] which provides crucial papyrological evidence from Egypt, is a missed opportunity to strengthen this argument. As noted, these are minor refinements rather than fundamental criticisms. The book's extensive engagement with scholarship is one of its strengths, and its analysis is often highly insightful. However, integrating these additional perspectives would have further enhanced the discussion, particularly by clarifying connections between late antique political thought, historiographical traditions and institutional change.

To sum up, while the book presents a compelling argument about ideological adaptation in Late Antiquity, certain aspects of its execution and methodology limit the force of its conclusions. By treating some ideological developments as unprecedented without fully accounting for earlier prece-

9 R. S. Bagnall/Al. Cameron/S. R. Schwartz/K. A. Worp: Consuls of the Later Roman Empire. Atlanta 1987 (Philological Monographs of the American Philological Association 36), pp. 7–12.

10 Al. Cameron/D. Schauer: The Last Consul: Basilius and His Diptych. In: JRS 72, 1982, pp. 126–145, pp. 137–142.

11 J. B. Bury: History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I. to the Death of Justinian (A.D. 395 to A.D. 565). Vol. 2. London 1923, pp. 346–348.

12 G. Rösch: Onoma basileias. Studien zum offiziellen Gebrauch der Kaisertitel in spätantiker und frühbyzantinischer Zeit. Vienna 1978 (Byzantina Vindobonensia 10).

13 D. Feissel: La réforme chronologique de 537 et son application dans l'épigraphie grecque: années de règne et dates consulaires de Justinien à Héraclius. In: Ktema 18, 1993, pp. 171–188.

14 R. S. Bagnall/K. A. Worp: Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt. 2nd ed. Leiden/Boston 2004.

dents, it at times overstates the novelty of these shifts. A broader comparative framework – particularly one incorporating pre-450 analysis – would have provided a stronger foundation for its claims. That said, "Res publica continuata" is an ambitious and stimulating study that makes a valuable contribution to ongoing debates about political legitimacy in Late Antiquity. Its strength lies in its willingness to challenge entrenched narratives about the decline of republican traditions, offering a fresh perspective on how emperors and intellectuals framed imperial authority in an evolving ideological landscape. As noted, some arguments might have benefited from greater contextualisation, and certain conclusions may be debated, but these are ultimately points for further discussion. The book raises important questions that will no doubt inspire future research, and its engagement with conceptual history, historical semantics and political rhetoric adds depth to the field.

It is a commendable effort to reassess the role of Rome's republican past – whether as a lingering vestige or a living force – in a period traditionally viewed as dominated by autocracy and divine kingship. In this regard, Brucklacher succeeds in demonstrating that Late Antiquity was not just an era of continuity or decline but one of active ideological negotiation where older frameworks of governance were not simply discarded but strategically reinterpreted.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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