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THE THICK NECK OF THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE
SLIMY SNAILS AND "QUELLENFORSCHUNG"

1. A puzzling passage concerning Constantine the Great in the Epitome de Caesaribus was the subject of a study by Andreas Alföldi some twenty years ago. The Epitome states: (Constantinus) Irrisor potius quam blandus. Unde proverbio vulgari Trachala, decem anni praestantissimus, duodecim sequentis latro, decem novissimis pupillos ob profusiones immodicas nominatus (41.16).2 The interpretation of the appellation Trachala has caused considerable difficulties. Many scholars have regarded it as derived from the Greek ὁ τράχηλος / τράχηλος ("neck") and as meaning "thick neck".3 Alföldi, in an ingenious argument, suggested instead that Trachala refers to the upper part of a snail ("Schnecke"). Therefore the author of the Epitome, möglicherweise [my italics] will er nur besagen: er ist 'schleimig und schlipprig wie ein Schneckenhaupt".4

1 The final version of this paper was written in Cologne while enjoying a grant from the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung; my sincere thanks go to both the A.v.H.-Stiftung and to my host at the Universität zu Köln, Prof. Werner Eck. For their most useful advice and comments I wish to thank Prof. T. D. Barnes, Dr. Bruno Bleckmann (Göttingen), and Dr. John Curran (Belfast). I am also grateful to my father Patrick Bruun for the opportunity of discussing various matters with him, and for the use of his library. Thanks are due to Ms. Aara Suksi for correcting my English.

2 A. Alföldi, "Constantinus ... proverbio vulgari Trachala ... nominatus", BHAC 1970 (Bonn 1972) 1–4: "He was a mocker rather than a flatterer. Whence he was by a popular saying called Trachala, for ten years the foremost, for the next twelve years a villain, for the ten last years a puppet [scil. of the church] because of his excessive lavishness". The passage has now been extensively discussed by V. Neri, "Le fonti della Vita di Costantino nell'Epitome de Caesaribus", RSA 17–18 (1987–88) 249–280.


4 Alföldi, Constantinus (as in n. 2) 4. The hypothetical conclusion of Alföldi has now been considered a certitude by Neri, "Fonti" (as in n. 2) 255 and idem, Medius princeps. Storia e imagine di Costantino nella storografia latina pagana (Bologna 1992) 161: "convincientemente spiegato". It was also accepted by J. Schlumberger, Die Epitome de Caesari
bus, Vestigia 18 (München 1974) 200 n. 83: "hat erst A. Alföldi ... befriedigend erklärt".

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Alföldi's suggestion gives "Trachala" a clearly pejorative meaning, for which the following explanation is provided: "Die Heiden bezeichneten also Konstantin als Trachala, weil sie ihn für einen zynischen, unverantwortlichen Frevel hielten, der alles verlacht, was teuer war." Alföldi's hypothesis is therefore of interest when investigating, as the present writer is doing, to what extent mocking epithets for Roman emperors can be shown to have been in use during their lifetime. At first sight Alföldi's solution would seem to fit the context better than previous interpretations, since *irrisor* as used in the *Epitome* is clearly an epithet with a negative meaning. It is implied that people who approached the emperor were not treated very well, and, in the words of Fergus Millar: "When it was so firmly and so long established that one important function of the emperor was to give ear to his subjects, it was natural that he should be judged partly on how approachable he was and how graciously he heard people."  

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2. On the other hand, as we shall see, Alföldi's argument is open to criticism on many points and can hardly be correct. As a decisive statement, providing the *raison d'être* for his whole argument, Alföldi argued that "Konstantin hatte keinen dicken Hals, wie etwa Vitellius oder Vespasian; wir kennen seine Gesichtszüge gut genug, um das sicherstellen zu können" (p. 1). In the light of recent research on Constantinian iconography such a blunt statement no longer holds true.

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5 Alföldi, *Constantinus* (as in n. 2) 2.
6 This paper originated as part of a larger study on the nicknames of the Roman emperors, which I hope to publish soon.
7 For *irrisor*, see *ThL* s.v. and Alföldi, *Constantinus* (as in n. 2) 2.
8 This general statement is in F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World 31 B.C. – A.D. 337* (2nd ed. London 1992) 467 (while I can find no reference to the above passage from the *Epitome de Caes.* in that monumental work). See also *ibid.*, 469: "The existence of a conscious ideology by which it was part of the functions of a good emperor to respond favourably to requests is undeniable, and it is reflected in Eusebius' account of how Constantine would compensate with gifts those who lost cases before him." The verdict of the *Epitome* is preceded by a passage of apparently opposite content: *Commodissimus tamen rebus multis fuit ... audire legationes et querimonias provinciarum* (Epit. de Caes. 4.1.14), i.e. he willingly lent his ear to provincial embassies.
9 There might be even less certitude about what Constantine really looked like, than is apparent from the following paragraphs. Two of the most important portraits not to be found on coins, a *tondo*-head from the Arch of Constantine in Rome, and the colossal head in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitol, may be reworkings of second-century originals according to C. Evers, "Remarque sur l'iconographie de Constantin. À propos du remploi de portraits des 'bons empereurs'", *MEFRA* 103 (1991) 785–806.

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10 See P. Bruun, *Constantine* app.
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12 courtyard of the vicennalia of 32 especially thick sought to create
13 This fact brief portraits. First, especially for tol among the rule features. 15 We 1 features on coin
The coin portraits are of special importance. It has long been known that Constantine appeared on coins in at least four versions that appeared in chronological sequence.\textsuperscript{10} Some of Constantine’s coin portraits during the 310s definitely show a thick neck.\textsuperscript{11} So does the colossal head of Constantine now in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome.\textsuperscript{12} To be sure, after the vicennalia of 325/6 a new portrait was created, where the neck does not appear especially thick. But it must be kept in mind that at this point Constantine sought to create an image based on the new ruler-ideal.\textsuperscript{13}

This fact brings us to an important methodological point regarding imperial portraits. First, portraits might be unfaithful to some extent.\textsuperscript{14} This was so especially for the tetrarchic period, which stressed simulitudo and concordia among the rulers to the extent that their portraits contained many common features.\textsuperscript{15} We know that emperors frequently borrowed each other’s portrait features on coins before Constantine became sole ruler.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{11} See P. Bruun, \textit{RIC VII} (as in n. 10), passim, e.g. pl. 12.1–2, 12, and 29; P. Bruun, \textit{Studies in Constantinian Numismatics}, Acta Inst. Rom. Finl. XII (Roma 1991), e.g. pl. IV.12 (= \textit{RIC VII} Siscia no. 15); V.20 (Nicomedia); V.25 (= \textit{RIC VII} Antiochia no. 5).

\textsuperscript{12} L’Orange, \textit{Herrscherbild} (as in n. 10) 70–77 and esp. 77 dated the reworking of the statue to A.D. 324/337, but see now the careful discussion by Fittschen & Zanker, \textit{Katalog} (as in n. 10) 147–152: the head is of the “second type” and can be dated to shortly after A.D. 312. Cf. C. Walden, “The Tetrarchic Image”, \textit{OJA} 9 (1990) 221–235, esp. 232; and note the new suggestion by Evers, \textit{Remarque} (as in n. 9) 794–799.

\textsuperscript{13} Fittschen & Zanker, \textit{Katalog} (as in n. 10) 154f.

\textsuperscript{14} Similarly B. Baldwin, “Physical Descriptions of Byzantine Emperors”, \textit{Byzantion} 81 (1981) 8–21, esp. 8. The best known example is the study of Augustus’ representations by P. Zanker, \textit{Augustus und die Macht der Bilder} (München 1987) e.g. 50–52. 103–106; cf. “Das neue Bildnis war ein Erfolg …, obwohl es mit dessen wirklichem Aussehen wahrscheinlich nur noch wenig zu tun hatte” (p. 104). See also T. Pekäy, \textit{Das römische Kaiserbildnis in Staat, Kult und Gesellschaft dargestellt anhand der Schriftquellen} (Berlin 1985) 101–103 who uses literary sources to show that the Romans themselves were aware of how often statues and pictures of emperors had a poor likeness.

\textsuperscript{15} L’Orange, \textit{Herrscherbild} (as in n. 10) 3–10.

\textsuperscript{16} P. Bruun, \textit{Studies} (as in n. 11), e.g. 153f.; 176f. (coinage of Heraclea); 183–199 (coinage of Siscia). For Licinius appearing with the features of Galerius, see also P. Bruun, “Lattanzio e Massimino il tiranno”, \textit{Opuscula Inst. Rom. Finl.} 4 (Roma 1989) 123–130, esp. 127; L’Orange, \textit{Herrscherbild} (as in n. 10) 50f.
Secondly, even though some of the tetrarchs may have had a thicker neck than Constantine\(^\text{17}\) (for instance Galerius or Maxentius\(^\text{18}\)), the former could all the same, for some reason, have gained an epithet such as “Thick-neck” (if that is what “Trachala” refers to, and if the epithet is to be taken literally). One can surely not postulate as a rule that a fair assessment of every person’s features and capacities is made during his/her lifetime or by posterity.\(^\text{19}\)

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3. The argument of Alföldi rests mainly on a complicated deduction based on a passage of the second century antiquarian Pompeius Festus: *Trachali appellantur muricam ac purpurae superiores partes. Unde Ariminenses maritimis homines cognomen traxerunt Trachali* (Paul. Fest. p. 504 Lindsay).\(^\text{20}\)

Alföldi used one or two occurrences of the cognomen Trachalus at Ariminum as proof of the correctness of this passage, the senator Galerius Trachalus (cos. ord. 68) being the most important case.\(^\text{21}\) Secondly, Alföldi pointed to a coin from the Adriatic town Hadria (Hatris, present-day Atri) dating from the

\(^{17}\) Among the sources describing other emperors of the tetrarchic age very few pay attention to the neck of the persons in question, as can be seen from the collection by Marina Torelli in Calza, *Iconografia* (as in n. 10) 13–83. Regarding later emperors, for Constantius II there is Amm. Marc. 16.10.10 velut collo munito; for Julian (on whom see below section 8) there are mentions in Amm. Marc. 25.4.22; Greg. Naz. or. 5.23; and Paneg. lat. 3 (11).6.4 (ed. Mynors). One may compare the descriptions given by Calza, *Iconografia* (as in n. 10) of the various emperors based on their “iconografia monetale”. The following passages are relevant: on Carausius, “colo basso e taurino” (p. 87); on Allectus, “colo alto e dritto” (p. 88); on Diocletian, “colo saldo e solcato da rughe” (p. 91); on Maximian Herculis, “colo corto e tozzo” (p. 119); on Licinius, “colo grosso e corto” (p. 201).

\(^{18}\) For convenient references see Calza, *Iconografia* (as in n. 10) pl. XXXVII and LXIV.

\(^{19}\) For instance, as shown on photographs but rarely commented upon, Princess Stephanie of Monaco has a remarkably thick neck, but this is not how she is primarily thought of today, nor, presumably, how and why posterity may remember her.

\(^{20}\) As is shown by H. Stephanus, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* VII (Paris 1848–54) 2372f., there is ample Greek evidence that ὁ πρόδρομος could denote the neck of an animal, or even the upper part of shells, for which see Athen. 3.87d, 87e, 87f. (citing Poseidippus).

\(^{21}\) Alföldi, *Constantinus* (as in n. 2) 2f. In a passage of Valerius Maximus (7.7.4) a certain Septicius, *mater Trachalorum Ariminensium* of Augustan age is mentioned. Secondly, there is the *cos. ord.* of A.D. 68, P. Galerius Trachalus. He is the only known bearer of this cognomen belonging to the upper classes, and he is commonly assumed to be from Ariminum (thus Alföldi, *Constantinus* [as in n. 2] 3; R. Syme, *Roman Papers* IV (Oxford 1988) 381 n. 66 referring to Plin. *HN* 10.50, which is a notice from 78 B.C.: A. Donati is less certain in *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio* II (Roma 1982) 305). The danger of a vicious circle is clearly present here; “Galerius is called Trachalus, so he must be from Ariminum. Galerius is from Ariminum, therefore the statement of Festus is proven right”. No actual evidence links the senator P. Galerius Trachalus to Ariminum, even if a few Galerii are known from inscriptions there (no Publius, but four Gaii).
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early third century B.C., where a human head can be seen looking out of a
shell. According to Alföldi, this coin shows that the people on the Adriatic
coast were indeed, as Festus said, called "Schneckenmensch en" or "Schne-
kenköpfe": "Für diese maritimi homines war die Schnecke mit dem Men-
schenkopf, Trachalus, kein Witz, sondern ihr Urahne, der ihre marine Existenz
in ihrem Ursprungsmythos begründen sollte. Dieser Mythos muß in Ariminum
und Hadria gleich beheimatet gewesen sein" (p. 3).

Alföldi’s first mistake was to take the word cognomen in Festus’ passage as a
terminus technicus, i.e. as meaning "these people have as the third element of
their tria nomina the name Trachalus". In fact, outside a small number of legal
texts, cognominare and cognomen are not used with any consistency as termini
technici in Roman literature. These terms might indicate the third element of a
Roman’s name, but they might equally well denote a nickname, and thus be
synonymous to appellare. In Festus’ passage, the latter is clearly the case.

What Festus is claiming is that people around Ariminum were nicknamed
Trachali. Whether his statement is true is, to begin with, open to some doubt. It
is no secret that his etymologies, presented by the 8th-century monk Paulus
Diaconus, are often nothing but speculations or later aetiological inventions.

Secondly, Festus cannot be proven right by pointing to the name of the
senator Galerius Trachalus, a man presumably originating from Ariminum. The
tendency is for newcomers in the senate not to advertise their recent ascent by
carrying cognomina pointing to their country of origin. If anything, one may
suspect that Festus’ passage is the result of etymologizing on Galerius’ cogn-
omen.

Whatever the inventory of the occurrence of the cognomen Trachalus in the
Roman world shows, it cannot be used for proving Festus’ assertion that the
Ariminenses were nicknamed Trachali. As Alföldi candidly showed, the cog-
nomen appears, although it is relatively rare, in several other places in the
Roman Empire: once at Tusculum (*CIL* XIV 2616), twice at Cannes (*AE* 1945,
79), once at Lepcis Magna (*IRT* 677), and once at Carthage (*CIL* VIII
24830). To this list can be added a soldier originating from Utica (*AE* 1969/
70, 633 col. III).

This criticism of Alföldi’s method is vindicated by a parallel in Festus. The
antiquarian states about the inhabitants of Praeneste: *Nuclus Praenestinos*
4. The starting point of the second main objection is that Hadria is not merely "eine andere Küstensiedlung" laying "südlich von Rimini", as Alfeldi stated. The town lies over 200 km further south along the coast and belongs to a different region. Ariminum lies in Umbria, Hadria in Picenum. Nevertheless, certain cultural affinities between Hadria and Ariminum have been identified for the first period of minting in the two towns. Both towns, like some other mints but unlike Rome, used the decimal division of monetary units. This might be a cultural pattern derived from an indigenous substratum, as suggested by Michael Crawford. However, nothing is known about any common "Ursprungsmythos".

26 See I. Kajanto, The Latin Cognomina (Helsinki 1965) 89f. and 337. Of five known occurrences, two are from Pompeii, one from Rome, and one from Comum. The fifth is an unidentified Nucula who was septemvir agris dandis adsignandis in 44 B.C., see Münzer, Nucula (as in n. 25).
27 According to Varro, Ling. 6.5, children born at dawn in the neighbourhood of Reate (Rieti) were called Lucius: ... ut Lucii primu luce [nati] in reatino. This information would however be worthless, were we interested in the time of day when a "Lucius" from Rieti had been born. "Lucius" is one of the most common Latin praenomina and was borne by over 20% of the male population (30% in Etruria and 24% in Picenum) – hardly all of them born at dawn. For "Lucius" and the name statistics see O. Salomies, Die römischen Vornamen (Helsinki 1987) 34. 150–160 (who apparently does not comment on this passage of Varro). Also, there is the statement by Festus himself (p. 135 Lindsay): Lucius qui lice (natus est). Again, it would be false to use this in concluding that, since we now know that Lucius is used by some 20% of the Romans, very few Roman children were born in daylight.
28 On the location, see G. Azzena, Atri: forma e urbanistica, Città antiche in Italia 1 (Roma 1987) 15 with map in fig. 7. Cf. Plin. HN 3.110: ager Hadrianus et Hadria colonia a mari VI (milia) passuum and Strab. 5.4.2.
30 The only known myth that concerns Hadria is in Stepb. Byz. s.v. 'Atòč, who says that the town was founded by Diomedes (see Stephanus Byzantinus, Ethnika, ed. A. Meineke.

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The numismatic evidence is clearly crucial to Alfeldi, and is therefore worth citing in full. We know seven different coin types (aes grave) from Hadria from the period shortly after 289 B.C., when the Latin colonia was founded and Hadria began minting. Altogether eleven coin figures appear on the coins, each of them on one type of coin only (descriptions by Haeberlin, in translation): “Head of Silenos” with “Dog sleeping” on the reverse; “Female (?) head in shell” with “Pegasos” (i.e. the coin discussed by Alfeldi); “Head of male youth” with “Kantharos”; “Fish” with “Dolphin”; “Cock” with “Shoe”; and “Anchor”.

Ariminum, supposedly the real home of the “snail-men”, had its own coinage for a brief period after Hadria began minting and possibly even before the town became a Latin colonia in 268 B.C. The seven aes grave types all carry a “Head of a Gaul” on one side, and seven different pictures on the other: “Horse’s head”, “Shield”, “Sword and sheath”, “Trident”, “Dolphin”, “Rosstrum”, “Cockle-shell”. On a struck coin one finds “Head of Vulcan” combined with “Gaulish warrior”.

Thus, the coin evidence does not indicate the existence of a foundation myth of Hadria or of Ariminum involving “snail-men” or the like. The two towns only have the “Dolphin” in common. In fact, the pictures on the coins of Ariminum were clearly influenced from Rome (except for the “Gaulish warrior”). As stressed by Thomsen, six of the above motifs derive from Roman coins.

In passing it might be mentioned that Alfeldi’s attempt at identifying the image of a “founding father” of Hadria on its coinage was by no means the first one. During the 19th century a number of local historians were engaged in the same pursuit, but were concentrating their efforts on the aes-coin showing “Head of Silenos” with “Dog sleeping”. The suggested identifications ranged from [Berlin 1849, repr. Graz 1958] 143). If one would like to connect the name Trachalus to an ancient myth, the best alternative is surely the old name Trachas used of the Italic town of Anxur (modern Terracina) in Ovid. Met. 15.717. But Anxur lies on the opposite shore of the peninsula.

31 For the beginning of minting in Hadria, see R. Thomsen, Early Roman Coinage. A Study of the Chronology II (København 1961) 104f.; cf. Azzena, Atri (as in n. 28) 10–13, on both minting and the foundation of the urban nucleus.

32 See Haeberlin, Aes (as in n. 22) I, 205–210. Cf. Azzena, Atri (as in n. 28) 12f. fig. 6, who shows all the coin types.


34 For Ariminum, see Haeberlin, Aes (as in n. 22) I, 214–218 and Tafelband, pl. 77.

35 Thomsen, Coinage (as in n. 31) III, 245–247.
“Picus” to “Faunus”, but were all discarded by Giovanni Pansa, who thought instead that the bearded head “potesse rappresentare quella del dio tutelare della schiatta, fondatore della città, e propriamente quella di Hadranus o Hataranus, nume indigite dei Siculi, dio della guerra e del fuoco”.36 This suggestion was disposed of by Haeberlin in 1910.37 Whether Alföldi found inspiration in this tradition cannot however be determined, since he gives no references in this direction.

To return to the main argument: there is no need to postulate a foundation myth involving the “human head in shell” from Hadria, because there is a much more likely explanation. The shell shown on the coin is cone-shaped. It is not possible to determine whether it depicts any particular species. But if the representation can be assumed to be mildly accurate, the shell might belong to the Charonia-genus and is then presumably a charonia lampa, the only variety that can be found in the Mediterranean.38 Robin Skeates has recently pointed out the great symbolic importance of the charonia shells in Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean since Neolithic times. There are clear indications from coins and elsewhere that the charonia shell was connected to the seagoing Triton, who sometimes is represented blowing into a shell trumpet.39 There are other cone-shaped shells as well that attracted the attention of ancient Mediterranean cultures.40

Not “snail-men” then, but a connection to Triton or generally a result of the importance given to particular shells in Italy since oldest times, should be the explanation for the coin from Hadria. The same explanation seems to apply to the frequent use of the scallop-shell on coins in Rome, Ariminum and elsewhere.41

There is little substantiation for Festus’ assertion that the people on the Adriatic coast were known as trachali, meaning “Schneckenmenschen” or “Schneckenköpfe”.

In any case, the largest step remains to be taken, namely to advance from Alföldi’s analysis of Festus’ passage and the coin from Hadria to the nickname

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37 Haeberlin, Aes (as in n. 22) I, 203.
39 Skeates, “Triton’s Trumpet” (as in n. 38).
40 See the broad survey by D. S. Reese, “The Trade of Indo-Pacific Shells into the Mediterranean Basin and Europe”, OJA 10 (1991) 159–196. Reese mentions no Charonia shells, but some other varieties, especially the cone-shaped Cerithium vulgatum, found in West Africa and in the Mediterranean, resemble the shell on the coin from Hadria.
41 The scallop-shell is found on coins from Rome, Ariminum, Cales, Luceria, and Venusia; see Thomsen, Coinage (as in n. 31) III, 245.
"Trachala", supposedly given to Constantine. The emperor was not from Ariminum or Hadria, nor was he a homo maritimus, as far as we know. Alföldi ends on a sincerely doubtful note: „Man hat ihn [Constantinus] als irrisor, illusor, contemptor (und circumventor) verstanden, aber man sieht es kaum, wie der Bedeutungswechsel zustande kam“. Still, his final phrase is the one cited above: "perhaps it was just supposed to mean: 'he is slimy and slippery like the head of a snail'”, a suggestion that has met with considerable approval.42

It remains to be discussed what the real meaning of Constantine’s nickname might have been.

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5. In the world history by the Byzantine chronicler pseudo-Symeon, written in the 10th century,43 there is the following description of Constantine:44

> ὁ μέγας Κοσταντῖνος ... εὐρύτερος δὲ τοῦς ὁμοίους καὶ παχύὸς τὸν σώματα, δὲν δὲ καὶ Τραχελῶν σφυτον ἐπονόμαζον.

“The great Constantine ... (had) strong shoulders, and a strong neck, and therefore they called him Trachelas”

This passage was taken over almost verbatim by the better-known chronicler Georgios Kedrenos (late 10th/early 11th century).45 In this passage there is no doubt about the meaning of Constantine’s nickname: it was his thick neck that gave him the epithet “Trachelas”. This passage in fact caused Raissa Calza to write on Constantine’s coin portraits from the decade 310–320: “più che altrove, qui si può notare il collo massiccio e corto dell’imperatore, che gli valse presso i contemporanei il soprannome spregiativo di Trachellas (dal collo taurino)”.46 But the value of Calza’s opinion is diminished by the fact that she

42 Alföldi, Constantinus (as in n. 2) 4 and see n. 4 above.
43 For pseudo-Symeon, see H. Hunger, Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner I, Byzantinisches Handbuch im Rahmen des Handbuchs der Altertumswissenschaft V.1 (München 1978) 355.
45 "Ἡν δὲ τῇ ἴδιᾳ ὁ μέγας Κοσταντῖνος μεσηλιζ. εὐρύτερος τοὺς ὁμοίους καὶ παχύὸς τὸν σώματα, δὲν καὶ Τραχελῶν σφυτον ἐπονόμαζον; Georgios Kedrenos, Historiarum Compendium I, col. 516 (Patrologia Graeca 121). This passage is also presented by Marina Torelli in Calza, Iconografia (as in n. 10) 34f., while the passage in Epit. de Caes. 41.16 is missing from the collection of sources in the work of Calza and Torelli describing Constantine’s appearance. Alföldi, Constantinus (as in n. 2) 1 cited the passage of pseudo-Symeon (and Kedrenos) as indication that τραχαιλαζ can mean “qui est crasso collo”, but then went on to build his own argument.
46 Calza, Cronologia (as in n. 10) 212.
seems unaware of the passage in the *Epitome* where Constantine's nickname "Trachala" appears in a different context (while she could not have known Alfeldi's interpretation, which appeared simultaneously).

Pseudo-Symeon's opinion contradicts Alfeldi's interpretation, but it cannot be accepted at face value before discussing how the Byzantine scholar could have arrived at his judgement. His physical description of Constantine might have been based on an aetiological conclusion ("because Constantine was called Ῥόχιταλάς he must have had a thick neck"). There might be some cause for suspicion. The part of pseudo-Symeon's chronicle that concerns Rome is unpublished except for the passages about Constantine. We can instead read Kedrenos, who presents nicknames for three other emperors during the period from Nerva to Constantine. In two cases these nicknames are unhistoric and based on false etymologies and misunderstandings. Kedrenos claims that Didius Julianus got the name Didius because he bribed his way to the throne (*PG* 121, col. 481C), and that Constantius was called Chlorus because of his pale face (*PG* 121, col. 512C).

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6. We shall next consider the question of literary influences, in order to explain why the epithet "Trachala" appears in the *Epitome* and, with a different meaning, in pseudo-Symeon (copied by Kedrenos), but in no other source.

First a misunderstanding ought to be cleared up. The recent claim that "Trachala" is mentioned also in the Byzantine "Life of Constantine" published by Guidi in 1907 is unfounded. The phrase δὲ ἔστω τὰ τρικέλιν χύτων ἑπόνομαξον used by pseudo-Symeon does not appear in Guidi’s "Life", which is all the more intriguing, since otherwise pseudo-Symeon and Guidi’s anonymous author present practically identical passages giving a physical description of Constantine.

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47 However, the claim that the emperor Antoninus received the epithet "Pius" because of his benign rule (*PG* 121, col. 480A) is found in antiquity as well. The emperor Elagabal is called either "Avitus", "Pseudantoninus", or "Aurelius Antoninus Heliogabalus" (ibid. col. 492A), which undoubtedly is in accordance with the practice of ancient historians.

48 The claim was made by F. Fusco, "Costantino in Niceforo Gregora", in G. Bonamente & F. Fusco (eds.), *Costantino il Grande dall'antichità all'umanesimo* I (Macerata 1992) 433–444, esp. 438. For the "Life of Constantine", based on manuscripts of which none is earlier than the 11th century, see M. Guidi, "Un βλογi di Costantino", *RAL* 16 (1907) 304–340, 637–655.

49 For the physical descriptions, see Halkin, "Règne" (as in n. 44) 11, and Guidi, "Βλογi" (as in n. 48) 319. For a discussion of the implications of this feature, see B. Bleckmann, "Bemerkungen zu den Annales des Nicomachus Flavianus" (*Historia* 44 [1995] 83–99).
Can we assume that pseudo-Symeon or a source that he was using found the epithet Trachala in the Epitome? If so, the Epitome would be the only relevant witness, and pseudo-Symeon would be guilty of a later reinterpretation. Or is it possible that the Epitome and pseudo-Symeon were using texts that derive from a common source? If so, a mistake by either writer might be to blame for the differing interpretations of Trachala. Thirdly, we might of course be dealing with parallel and independent traditions.

Since the Epitome alone among fourth century historical Breviaries mentions the nickname Trachala, it presumably had in part a different source of information than Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Festus. If this source can be discovered, it might provide the key to the epithet Trachala. Trachala must be the Latin form of the Greek Τραχηλός, but it need not necessarily have been found in a Greek source; as is well-known, the Romans made ample use of Greek loanwords. Now, a Latin historical work that made considerable use of Greek writings was designated as the “principal unknown source” or “Hauptquelle” of the Epitome in Jörg Schlumberger’s thorough study. According to Schlumberger, we are dealing with the Annals of Nicomachus Flavianus (which are completely lost). Although this suggestion did not persuade everybody at first, recent research has stressed this possibility.

Other scholars have put forward different suggestions. In particular, T. D. Barnes has argued that the Epitome de Caesaribus used Eunapius for the history

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50 Cf. Quint. Inst. 1.5.70: *Sed res tota [the formation of word-compounds] magis Graecos decet, nobis minus succedit, nec id fieri natura puto, sed alienis favemus; ideoque cum curavit sequens mirati simus, incurvcervicum vis a risu defendimus. Incidentally, here is an epithet which refers to the neck.


53 Schlumberger’s thesis is accepted by, e.g., Neri, “Fonti” (as in n. 2) 279, and Fr. Paschoud, “Valentinien travesti, ou: De la malignité d’Ammien”, in J. den Boeft/D. den Hengst/H. C. Teitler (eds.), Cognitio Gestorum. The Historiographic Art of Ammianus Marcellinus (North Holland 1992) 67–84, esp. 81, who has supported this solution in a number of earlier writings.
of the fourth century. This hypothesis is based on an earlier dating, ca. A.D. 380, of the publication of Eunapius’ first edition of his “History”. The traditional date, ca. A.D. 395, would make it impossible for the Epitome to have used Eunapius’ work. Barnes’ thesis has made considerable impact, but the traditional date still has its supporters.

On the whole, this particular sector of “Quellenforschung” is complicated, but the possibility of an influence from Nicomachus Flavianus’ lost Annals and/or Eunapius ought to be kept in mind.

The sources of the Byzantine chroniclers present no lesser problems. The difficulties in determining how pseudo-Symeon and his predecessors acquired their material are manifold. Pseudo-Symeon is a compilation from many previous chroniclers, above all Theophanes and Georgios Monachos, who also dealt with the Roman emperors. Theophanes (ca. 760–818) wrote a chronicle starting in A.D. 285, while the chronicle of Georgios Monachos covered the period from Adam to A.D. 842. The passages in these two chronicles dealing with Constantine are, however, known, and the epithet Trachala does not appear.

As recently stressed by Bruno Bleckmann, many Byzantine chroniclers up to Zonaras in the 12th century made use of a good source containing historically valuable information about the Roman Empire. This source is identical with or very closely related to the Chronicle of Petros Patrikios. Through an intermediary source (the so-called “Epitome”, not to be confounded with the Epitome de Caesariibis) the so-called “Good Source” provided material for, among others, pseudo-Symeon and Kedrenos.

54 Barnes, CPh 71 (as in n. 52) 265–268; idem, The Sources of the Historia Augusta (Bruxelles 1978) 114–123, esp. 119f.
55 Blockley, Historians (as in n. 52) 4f. and 24. Matthews, Empire (as in n. 52) dates Ammianus Marcellinus, who according to him used Eunapius (op. cit., 161–175. 504 n. 67), earlier, to ca. 390 (op. cit., 476 n. 6). This earlier dating of Ammianus’ work is independently argued also by C. W. Fornara, “Studies in Ammianus Marcellinus I: The Letter of Libanius and Ammianus’ Connection with Antioch”, Historia 41 (1992) 328–344, esp. 338. Various opinions on whether Ammianus used Eunapius are also recorded by B. Bleckmann, Die Reichskrise des III. Jahrhunderts in der spätantiken und byzantinischen Geschichtsschreibung (Untersuchungen zu den nachdionischen Quellen der Chronik des Johannes Zonaras) (München 1992) 397 n. 10.
56 The question has been especially forcefully argued by François Paschoud in a number of writings, see most recently his Zosime III.2 (ed. & comm.) (Paris 1989) 90f.; cf. Paschoud, Valentinien (as in n. 53), 68.
57 Hunger, Literatur (as in n. 43) 355.
58 See Hunger, Literatur (as in n. 43) 334–339 and 347f., respectively.
59 On the relation between Petros Patrikios and the so-called “Anonymus post Dionem” (or “Continuator Dionis”) see Bleckmann, Reichskrise (as in n. 55) 51–53; for a different view D. S. Potter, Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire. A Historical Commentary on the ‘Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle’ (Oxford 1990) 395–397.
60 Bleckmann, Reichskrise (as in n. 55) 44.
Concerning Kedrenos' sources (in the case of "Trachala", identical to those used by pseudo-Symeon), Bleckmann supports the idea that our specific passage may have derived, through intermediaries, from the so-called "Leoquelle" (which gives a fuller version of the "Good Source" than the Byzantine "Epitome"). This again points to Petros Patrikios. 61

Thus, as a possible source for the passage mentioning "Trachala" in the Epitome de Caesaribus we have the "Annals of Nicomachus Flavianus" (rather than Eunapius), while the corresponding passages of pseudo-Symeon and Kedrenos might derive from the "Chronicle of Petros Patrikios". Is there any way in which these findings can be correlated?

The Epitome de Caesaribus and the work of Petros Patrikios ("Anon. post Dionem"), known only from fragments, share at least one passage, the claim that Constantine called Trajan herba parietaria (Epit. de Caes. 41.13 and FHG IV, ed. Müller, 199 no. 15.2 = U. Boissevain [ed.], Excerpta de sententiae [Berolini 1906] 271 Petr. Patrikios fragm. 191: θοράνη τοιχου). Fragment 191 of Petros contains mocking characterizations of other emperors besides Trajan, all said to have been used by Constantine. Such a context would have been suited for presenting also the popular dictum "Trachala" about Constantine himself.

There is also another passage in the Epitome that shows unmistakable affinities with the tradition to which Kedrenos belongs: the way of presenting the death of the emperor Florianus (Epit. de Caes. 36.2) is similar to the version concerning the emperor Quintillus' suicide that has influenced Zosimus, Zonaras, and Kedrenos. The passage is absent from other late fourth century historical works, which shows that the Epitome and the tradition used by Kedrenos at least occasionally based their narrative on a common source. 62

Petros Patrikios may have derived the passage in fragm. 191 directly or indirectly from Eunapius. 63 But more likely, there is another explanation. According to the recent conclusions by Bleckmann, the "Annals of Nicomachus Flavianus" were one source of Petros Patrikios, either directly, or more probably, through a Greek intermediary (of the fourth century). This Greek intermediary was used by Eunapius, which explains certain parallelisms. Petros Patrikios, in turn, provided valuable material for the Byzantine "Epitome" and the

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61 B. Bleckmann, "Die Chronik des Johannes Zonaras und eine pagane Quelle zur Geschichtethe Konstantins", Historia 40 (1991) 343–365, esp. 354 n. 49 for the possible origin of the above passage of Kedrenos in the "Leoquelle". On the "Leoquelle", the "Epitome", the "Anon. post Dionem" and Petros Patrikios see now Bleckmann, Reichskrise (as in n. 55) 43–53. For Petros Patrikios, see also Hunger, Literatur (as in n. 43) 301.

62 Thus Schlumberger, Epitome (as in n. 4) 167; doubted by Bleckmann, Reichskrise (as in n. 55) 296.

63 Barnes, CPh 71 (as in n. 52) 267. Hunger, Literatur (as in n. 43) 301 also conjectures that Petros Patrikios made use of Eunapius.
"Leoquelle" (whence pseudo-Symeon and Kedrenos). Thus, the "Annals of Nicomachus Flavianus" can be seen as a source common to the *Epitome de Caesaribus* and the Byzantine chroniclers pseudo-Symeon and Kedrenos. Perhaps these "Annals" are therefore the ultimate origin of Constantine's epithet "Trachala".

A broader investigation of Latin/Greek and Byzantine "Quellenforschung" and imperial epithets may produce a more conclusive result. One would for instance like to know why, besides the two imperial nicknames Trachala and herba parietaria that provide connections between the *Epitome de Caesaribus* and other texts, there are three other imperial nicknames that appear in no other ancient source. The *Epitome* refers to Maximinus "Thrax" (25,1), Licinius Valerianus "cognomento Colobius" (32,1), and "Equitus" Probus (36,2). From our particular point of view, it is noteworthy that they are all absent from Kedrenos' text.

As things stand now, we must return to the discussion of the epithet Trachala itself without having been able to trace its provenance with any certitude. However for the time being, the lost "Annals of Nicomachus Flavianus" seem to provide the best common denominator explaining the appearance of the nickname Trachala.

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7. Two alternatives to Alföldi's explanation for "Trachala" present themselves, both permitting the interpretation that Trachala may well be a compli-

64 See Bleckmann, *Reichskrise* (as in n. 55) 398f. for a categorical refutation of the influence of Eunapius, and pp. 396–415 for an analysis of the relations between the sources.

65 See also Schlumberger, *Epitome* (as in n. 4) 137.

66 Schlumberger, *Epitome* (as in n. 4) 145f.: "Ohne jegliche Parallele ist die Nachricht über einen Beinamen Colobius ... Die Forschung weiß nichts damit anzufangen", but see now Bleckmann, *Reichskrise* (as in n. 55) 110 "Colobius = der Verstümmelte", from Gr. κολοβός, referring to P. Michelotti, "A proposito di Epit. de Caesaribus 32,1, cognomento Colobius", *RIL* 114 (1980) 197–205 (non vidi). In his forthcoming study "Fiction in the Epitome?" in the *Papers from the Historia-Augusta-Colloquium in Barcelona 1993*, A.R. Birley suggests that the nickname is spurious and that it originated from a misunderstanding of the Greek original used by the writer of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*. I am most grateful to Prof. Birley for kindly showing me a copy of his forthcoming paper.

67 According to Schlumberger, *Epitome* (above n. 4) 166, the name is derived from "glaubwürdiger Überlieferung".

68 A different suggestion is put forward by Baldwin, "Descriptions" (as in n. 14) 12, who suggests that Kedrenos derived the epithet Trachala from Greek historians such as Bemannicius or Praxagoras, contemporaries of Constantine. But Baldwin was unaware of the fact that Trachala is first mentioned by the *Epitome de Caesaribus*.

69 There is also a third alternative interpretation, which will only be mentioned here. O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* I (3rd ed. Berlin 1910) 52 interpreted mentary epithet word blandus says: Blandus appellavere (E Pertinax is Augusta. Here appear separat benignus nec fabulas confer lantes, qui ben Jacques Schwi deux éléments un trait de car for the Histori sion is correct two separate j opens up the passage in the passage two passes t Epit. de Ca those presen: "Das noch a poetische N Anhang Bd. "commental 395) (2nd et 70 J. Schwartz esp. 221. Be gen zwische who however for the passw with Pertina Marius Max quelle".

71 Schlumberg specifically 110f., when from Marius: Epitome de 219, esp. 20

72 This is inde 4) 184, althp CPh 71 (as Constantine Historians t Eunapius.
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(as in n. 14) 12, who k historians such as idwin was unaware of bus. e mentioned here. O. 1910) 52 interpreted

mentary epithet. The other passage where the author of the Epitome uses the word blandus is important here. Concerning Helvius Pertinax, the Epitome says: Blandus magis quam beneficus, unde eum Graeco nomine χρηστολόγον appellaver e (Epit. de Caes. 18.4).

Pertinax is called Chrestologus (“he who talks nicely”) also in the Historia Augusta. Here the two above statements, which are found united in the Epitome, appear separately: SHA Pert. 12.1: eloquentia mediocri et magis blandus quam benignus nec unquam creditus simplex, and SHA Pert. 13.5: omnes, qui libere fabulas conferabant, male Pertinaceum loquebantur, Chrestologum eum appellantes, qui bene loqueretur et male faceret. In a study involving these passages, Jacques Schwartz stated that Epit. de Caes. 18.4 “a uni, par un unde mal justifié, deux éléments de la description de Pertinax dont le premier ne s’applique qu’à un trait de caractère”, concluding that the Epitome must have been the source for the Historia Augusta on this occasion.70 Regardless of whether this conclusion is correct (it seems more likely that the Epitome had been drawing together two separate passages in the Historia Augusta or in a common source71), it opens up the possibility that we may be dealing with another “unde mal justifié” in the passage dealing with Constantine. The Epitomator may have combined two passages that originally had no strictly logical connection.72

Epit. de Caes. 41.16 to mean that when Constantine tried to be pleasantly entertaining, those present experienced his words as jests and contempt. On “Trachala” Seeck wrote: “Das noch nicht genügend erklärte Wort trachala ist wohl nichts anderes als die onomatopoetische Nachbildung eines kurzen heiseren Auflachens (vgl. κριγγαλέον)” (op. cit., Anhang Bd. I [4th ed. Stuttgart 1922] 469). Halkin, “Règne” (as in n. 44) 11 calls this a “commentaire fantasiste”, but it is referred to by A. Piganot, L’Empire chrétien (325–395) (2nd ed. Paris 1972) 77 n. 7.

70 J. Schwartz, “Histoire Auguste et Epitome”, BHAC 1977/1978 (Bonn 1980) 219–224, esp. 221. Before him, a similar opinion was advocated by F. Kolb, Literarische Besiehungen zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta (Bonn 1972) 63 n. 332, who however did not exclude “Emann’s Lost Kaisergeschichte” (= EKG) as the source for the passage on Pertinax. The complex character of the passages of the Epitome dealing with Pertinax is also noted by Schlumberger, Epitome (as in n. 4) 110–112, who regards Marius Maximus as the ultimate source, in part reworked by the EKG and the “Hauptquelle”.

71 Schlumberger does not think that the Historia Augusta made use of the Epitome. This is specifically argued for the passages on Pertinax in Schlumberger, Epitome (as in n. 4), 110f., where it is argued that the information in Epit. de Caes. 18.4–6 ultimately derives from Marius Maximus, through an intermediary source. Cf. also J. Schlumberger, „Die Epitome de Caesaribus und die Historia Augusta“, BHAC 1972/1974 (Bonn 1976) 201–219, esp. 205.

72 This is indeed the view held by Neri, “Fonti” (as in n. 2) 255, and Neri, Princes (as in n. 4) 184, although with a different explanation than that offered here. As shown by Barnes, CPh 71 (as in n. 52) 267, chapter 41 in the Epitome, dealing with the life and times of Constantine, is to a high degree a mix of material of different provenience. Blockley, Historians (as in n. 52) 101 considers Epit. de Caes. 41.4 and 41.22f. as deriving from Eunapius.
Therefore we must consider the possibility that the passage Constantinus ... proverbo vulgari Trachala ... nominatus has been separated from its context. It may originally not have appeared in such an ambiguous or even negative context as it now does in the Epitome. If we take as a starting point the obvious meaning of Trachala, it should derive from the Greek word for neck, ὀ τράχαλος.

Firstly, the Greek verb τραχαλίζω, “to arch the neck proudly”, may therefore be of relevance here (although it was not mentioned by Alfordi). The word was used by late antique writers, and seems to provide a neat explanation for the epithet Trachala in the passage in Epit. de Caes. 41.16: Irrisor potius quam blandus. Unde proverbio vulgari Trachala ...

If the Greek verb τραχαλίζω gave rise to Constantine’s epithet Trachala, it might well mean that the epithet was intended in a non-complimentary way. Not “slimy snails”, but the emperor’s superstia would explain his nickname Trachala. This was also suggested by Bleckmann, who wrote that Kedrenos’ Byzantine sources „könnte hier die Notiz aus einem antiken Autor mißverstanden haben, in der nur im übergetragenen Sinne von einem ‘steifen Nacken’ des hochmüti gen Konstantin die Rede war”.

But the ancient evidence involving metaphorical references to the neck is not unambiguous. To be sure, in Latin texts, references to the neck (collum or cervix) were sometimes used in describing unrestrained and immoderate behaviour, as in per cervices enim superstia significata est eorum, qui in nullo se reprehendit volunt (Prosp. in psalm 128.4) or si manumissus ... cervices adversus eum [scil. patronum] erexerit (Cod. Iust. 6.7.2 pr.). On the other hand, carrying the head high on an upright neck is a sign of libertas, as testified by Gregory the Great: sic in malis cervix superstiam, sic in bonis libertatis ejectionem signat (Greg. M. mor. 13.18). By comparison, the prisoners in the triumphal procession described by Ovid (Tr. 4.2.21–24) bow their heads: vinculae captiva reges cervice gerentes / ante coronatos ire videbit equos. / et cernet vultus alius pro tempore versos ...

33 On the sequence in Epit. de Caes. 41.16 following the introduction of the epithet Trachala, Barnes, CPh 71 (as in n. 52) 267, writes “[i]t clearly reflects the judgement of an eastern pagan, for whom Constantine’s war against Licinius (316–17 and 324) marked significant points in his reigne”.


35 Bleckmann, “Chronik” (as in n. 61) 354 n. 49.

36 See ThLL III (1907) 1658. 1663 s.v. collum (Probst) and ThLL III (1907) 946. 950 s.v. cervix (Probst), whence the examples have been borrowed. Superbia appears occasionally also in descriptions of the neck by ancient physiognomists, see R. Foerster, Scriptores Physiognomonici Graeci et Latini (Lipsiae 1893) vol. II, e.g. 72, 74, 99f.

37 “Beholding the kings with chains upon their captive throats marching before the garlanded horses, seeing some countenances turned to earth as becomes captives.” (transl. A. L. Wheeler, Loeb Class. Libr.).

In this case Arian comm. century: Una sint ... Sicut eius, ipse est superbus

These all supported by actione sicut etiam ad signum naturam. Na. languor et pr. inst. 11.3.68f.

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78 For the text and its date vali ser. 3.

79 “The head delivery, s. well. To se a droop was inclined to rigidly it at Libr.”.

80 Blockley, Προδοτικος πλατυκέφαλος ουτω τις εις ελίως αξιος
In this context, it is also interesting to read a passage by the anonymous Arian commentator on the Gospel of S. Matthew, dating from about the 5th century: *Unde et homini, quia acceperant a Deo scientiam Dei, erecti creati sint* ... *Sicut ergo gibbus cameli, qui videtur esse erectio sublimitatis corporis eius, ipse est magis depressio ejus, et deformitatis: ideo nee collum eius sursum erigere potest gibbo depressus: sic idolatria gentium* ... 78

These observations on the importance of an upright neck and head are supported by some remarks by Quintilian on gesturing: *Praecipuum vero in actione sicut in corpore ipso caput est cum ad illum, de quo dixi, decorum, tam etiam ad significationem. Decoris illa sunt, ut sit primo rectum et secundum naturam. Nam et dejecto humilitas et supino arrogantia et in latum inclinato languor et praeduro ac rigente barbaria quaedam mentis ostenditur* ... (Quint. inst. 11.3.68f.). 79

But interpreting a gesture of the head is unfortunately not always that straightforward. A somewhat different interpretation of a head held low appears from the translation by R. C. Blockley of a passage from Olympiodorus concerning Constantius III, emperor for a short period in A.D. 421: “In public processions Constantius was downcast and sullen, a man with bulging eyes, a long neck and a broad head, who always slumped over the neck of the horse he was riding, darting glances here and there out of the corners of his eyes, so that all saw in him ‘a mien worthy of ‘a tyrant’", as the saying goes. But at banquets and parties he was so cheerful and affable ...” 80

Regardless of whether some words might be given a different interpretation—e.g., is Constantius III described as having “big” or “bulging” eyes (μεγάλα-όρθαλμος), a “long” or a “thick” neck (μεγαλαυχήν)?—in this case we have not a prisoner but a ruler lowering his head in a gesture which is given a negative interpretation.

But a ruler may bow his head also as a sign of benevolence. From passing mentions in the well-known work based on pictorial sources by Richard Bril-

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78 For the text, see PG 56, 810 (wrongly attributed to Johannes Chrysostomos); for the text and its date see M. Simonetti, “Note sull’opus imperfectum in Mathaeum”, Studi mediev. ser. 3, 10 (1969) 117–200, esp. 117–120.

79 “The head, being the chief member of the body, has a corresponding importance in delivery, serving not merely to produce graceful effect, but to illustrate our meaning as well. To secure grace it is essential that the head should be carried naturally and erect. For a droop suggests humility, while if it be thrown back it seems to express arrogance, if inclined to one side it gives an impression of languor, while if it is held too stiffly and rigidly it appears to indicate a rude and savage temper.” (transl. H. E. Butler, Loeb Class. Libr.).

80 Blockley, Historians (as in n. 52) 186f. fragment 23: Ἡν δὲ Κονσταντῖνος ἐν μὲν ταῖς προθοδοσίς κατηφησίς καὶ συκοφαντίς, μεγαλόφθαλμος τε καὶ μεγαλαυχήν καὶ πλευτερόφθαλμος, νεών διόλου ἐπὶ τὸν τρόχελον τοῦ φέροντος αὐτὸν ἵππου, καὶ οὕτω τῷ δὲ κάκεισαι λοξῶν ἐκπέμπων τὸ ὄμα ταύτα, ὡς (τοῦ τόU λόγου) πᾶσα φαίνεσθαι εἶδος ἀξίων τυραννίδος, ἐν δὲ δειπνοῖς καὶ συμποσίοις τετράνυς καὶ πολιτικὸς, ...
lignant one can, for instance, gather one further interpretation of a head held low: it can indicate benevolence on the part of the ruler. Thus, we have a diametrically opposite interpretation to that suggested by Olympiodorus.

Perhaps a wider investigation of gestures involving the head in classical antiquity might enable us to discern a clearer pattern in this question.

Returning to Constantine’s epithet Trachala, we can say that it might have been derived from a metaphorical reference to the neck indicating superbia. But there is also the possibility that an upright neck might have positive connotations, indicating e.g. libertas. This somewhat unsatisfactory outcome prompts us to look further.

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8. The second alternative is to consider that when discussing physical traits in antiquity, physiognomic theories are clearly relevant. We must ask what importance ancient physiognomists attributed to the neck, in order to understand better what intentions or concepts may lie behind ancient descriptions focussing on the neck. The answer is quite clear. Having a strong, thick, and not too short neck was considered a virtue. A thin and curved neck, or a short and thick one, was considered a negative quality. A passage from Juvenal (3.86–89) will illustrate this point:

Quid quod adulandi gens prudentissima laudat
sermonem indocti, faciem deformis amici,
et longum invalidi collum cervicibus aequat
Herculis Antaeum procul a tellure tenentis.

One part of the physiognomic “science” was based on comparisons with animals that were considered to have certain qualities. In the third century B.C. Physiognomonika of the so-called pseudo-Aristotle, the lion is considered the most noble of animals; it has a neck of good length and moderate thickness. In

81 R. Brilliant, Gesture and Rank in Roman Art. The Use of Gestures to denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage (New Haven Conn. 1963) passim (containing however no particular treatment of the gestures of the head).
82 On this topic, there are only some brief mentions in J.-C. Schmitz, Il gesto nel medioevo (Bari – Roma 1990; French orig. 1990) 21–42, “L’eredità antica”.
84 “What of this again, that these people are experts in flattery, and will commend the talk of an illiterate, or the beauty of a deformed friend, and compare the scraggy neck of some weakling to the brawny throat of Hercules when holding up Antaeus high above the earth.” (transl. G. G. Ramsay, Loeb Class. Libr.).
of a head held low; we have a diametrical
contrast, the panther, a much inferior animal, has a very long and thin neck. Incidentally, both pseudo-Symeon and the anonymous author of Guidi’s “Life” compare Constantine to a lion when describing his eyes and face: τὸ δὲ ὄμμα παραπλήσιον λέοντος, and εὐφθαλμὸς τὸ ὄμμα παραπλήσιον λέοντεον καὶ ἔξοδους ταῖς θριξὶ. The second-century physiognomist writer Polemo and the fourth-century Anonymus Latinus present many references to the neck. Polemo states in his description of the Greek race, considered superior to all others: Est autem purus Graecus ... nec parvi nec magni capitis, calvis in collo crassitudo et fortitudo. Common to both writers (the Anonymus admits to using Polemo) is that the neck is given considerable importance. The eyes are by far the most important features, followed by the rest of the face, and followed in turn by the neck. They devote considerable space to an analysis of various types of necks. The ideal neck is characterized by Polemo thus: ubi collum moderatae longitutinis et brevitatris et angustiae et crassitiae atque eius in stirpe locum moderatum esse vides cum simul robustum est, eius possessorem ob strenuitatem intellegentiam docilitatem omnesque lauda virtutes. Having a neck too short and thick, or too long and thin, or too rigid, or too unstable, are all indications of various defects in character.

It would require a separate study to deal in detail with every passage pertaining to features of the neck in the writings of the physiognomists, imperial biographers and historians. Here it must suffice to point to one late antique instance, the emperor Julian. We find his neck described in several sources: These passages bear out the notion that focussing on the powerful neck of a ruler may indeed be a compliment (while describing his neck as weak is derogatory).

In the imperial panegyric delivered in A.D. 362 on the occasion of his consulate, Claudius Mamertinus describes Julian’s arrival, and makes special

85 Foerster, Scriptores (as in n. 76) I, 50–53. Similarly the second century A.D. writer Polemo, see ibid. p. 172; p. 196 collo crasso cervice robusto (lion); p. 196 collo angusto (panther). Polemo’s text is preserved only in an Arabic version. References are throughout to the Latin translation by G. Hoffmann.

86 Halcin, “Règne” (as in n. 44) 11 and Guidi, “βιος” (as in n. 48) 319.

87 Foerster, Scriptores (as in n. 76) I, 242 = Polemo ch. 35.

88 Foerster, Scriptores (as in n. 76) I, 166–168; II, 62 (ch. 45).

89 Foerster, Scriptores (as in n. 76) I, 218–222, esp. 220. The corresponding passage of the Anonymus Latinus is in Foerster, Scriptores (as in n. 76) II, 72–77, esp. 72f. (ch. 53): Quae ergo moderat et prolixia et vasta cervix est ac minus rotunda, et virtutem animi approbat et habilit est corpore.

90 For passages in Polemo not mentioned above, see Foerster, Scriptores (as in n. 76) I, 128. 160. 194. 218–222. 258. 262. 270. 274. 276. For the Anonymus, see Foerster, Scriptores (as in n. 76) II, 72–77. 96. 99f. 112. 120f. 123. 129. 137. 139. 141–143. For conclusions similar to those advanced here, see also R. Asmus, “Vergessene Physiognomonika”, Philologus 65 N.F. 19 (1906) 410–424, esp. 410–412.
mention of the emperor’s strong neck: *sudorum rivos per forta colla manantes* (Paneg. lat. 3 [11].6.4 [ed. Mynors]). Whether Julian really had a strong neck is another matter. Gregory of Nazianzus gives a totally different description of Julian: ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τοῦ οὐδενὸς γὰρ ἐβαθυνεῖ μοι σμαίνον εἰναι χρυσότου σὰρχην ὁπωμένης . . . (Greg. Naz. or. 5.23 in PG 35, col. 692B), i.e. his neck was unsteady. The physiognomists repeatedly stressed *cervicis laxitas signum affectationis*, and the neck is clearly described in a way that is intended to show Julian in a negative light. Other passages show that Gregory was indeed familiar with physiognomical thought. This explains why Gregory on another occasion gives a very different description of Julian’s neck, which, however, once again must be given a negative interpretation, in terms of physiognomy: *cervix inflexibilis* (mentioned by Cassiod. hist. tripart., PL 69, col. 1065C).

Ammianus Marcellinus also was undoubtedly familiar with physiognomical theories. This is transparent from, among other things, his description of Julian’s appearance (Amm. Marc. 25.4.22), which is shown in a highly positive light and contains many features that are reminiscent of the lion. Among these features, one notices that his neck was thick and somewhat bent (*opima et incurva cervice*). According to E. C. Evans, “although this may be regarded as indicative of affectation, and is generally a very unfavourable sign, a thick neck is also a sign of a fierce temper, as in bulls”. Considering the overall aim of Ammianus’ description, the latter and more positive interpretation is likely to be correct.

This brief survey leads to the conclusion that we must not be uncritical when encountering descriptions, even eyewitness-descriptions, of late antique rulers. To a large degree, physiognomical theories and the writer’s bias may account for the features highlighted in the descriptions.

This fourth-century physiognomical interest may well account for the focus on Constantine’s neck, which presumably gave rise to the epithet Trachala.

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9. It is time to sum up. Giving Constantine’s epithet Trachala the sophisticated interpretation “snailman” or “slimy like the head of a snail”, as suggested by Alföldi, has little to recommend itself.

The epithet “Trachala” is presumably derived either from the Greek word τραχηλίδιο (to arch one’s neck proudly) or from ὁ τράχηλος / τράχαλος (neck). In the first case, it may stigmatize an unrestrained behaviour. The
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The Thick Neck of the Emperor Constantine

A textual context where the nickname Trachala appears seems to speak in favour of this. However, a detailed analysis shows that the passage in question may have been excerpted from a different context.

We are therefore left with the possibility that Trachala refers to a powerful neck, either in the literal sense (as has been shown above, there are portraits of Constantine that might well have caused such an epithet), or metaphorically. We have seen that attention was paid both to the form and the shape of the neck when describing good or bad rulers in antiquity. The appellation Trachala may have been intended not in a pejorative sense, but as a sign of respect. Nevertheless, the possibility that it denoted unrestrained behaviour, *superbia*, cannot be ruled out.

Finally we need to consider when, by whom, and why the epithet was introduced. These questions are important, not least when studying the nicknaming of Roman emperors in general.

The *Epitome de Caesaribus*, written towards the end of the fourth century, is our only ancient source for Constantine’s nickname. Our survey of “Quellen-
forschung” indicates that the *Epitome* may have found the epithet in the *Annals* of Nicomachus Flavianus. However, since these *Annals* must have been written only a short time before the *Epitome de Caesaribus* and some 50 years after the death of Constantine, they can hardly be the original source of the dictum.

The *Epitome* declares that a *proverbium vulgare* had introduced the nickname; the inference is that it occurred during Constantine’s lifetime. The claim that the common people had invented the nickname may be a piece of literary convention, or it may be true. There is evidence for contemporary popular nicknames and epithets of a pejorative kind directed at emperors during the fourth century.96 Concerning Constantine, some passages by Zosimos imply critical attitudes towards the emperor among the people of Rome (Zos. 2.29.5; 2.30.1), and Libanius is quite outspoken about such occurrences (Liban. or. 19.19; 20.24). The consul Ablabius, although a man trusted by the emperor, is claimed to have affixed secretly the following satirical verses to the door of the palace: *Saturni aurea saecula quis requirit? / sunt haec gemmae, sed Nerontiana* (Sid. Apoll. ep. 5.8.2).97

It would be no surprise if an emperor as controversial as Constantine had received pejorative epithets in some circles. It need not even have been rivals for the purple throne or disappointed pagans among the people or the senate that used pejorative epithets. Among the Christians, the African Donatists must have felt resentment that Constantine did not support their case. In fact, the

96 Matthews, *Empire* (as in n. 52) 162f. and 504 n. 72 on invectives against Jovian after the retreat from Nisibis. See also J. G. Kempf, *Romanorum sermonis castrensis reliquiae*, Jahrb. f. class. Philologie Suppl. Bd. 26 (Leipzig 1901) 354–362.
97 “Who would now want the golden age of Saturn? Ours is a diamond age – of Nero’s pattern” (transl. W. B. Anderson, Loeb Class. Libr.).
story of how the Donatists for over three years (312–315) tried to get access to Constantine in order to present their case against their Catholic opponents, only to have his verdict turn against them in the end, might even fit the first sentence in *Epit. de Caes. 41.16: irrisor potius quam blandus.*

Still, the use of a nickname among the common people in some part of the Roman world would not automatically mean that it was recorded for posterity. It needs someone to record it.

If the nickname is a pejorative one, someone hostile to the object is presumably needed in order for it to be recorded. In Constantine’s case, the pagan senator Nicomachus Flavianus would be just such a man. Another eminently hostile writer was, of course, Eunapius. But the existence of these hostile writers does not necessarily mean that the name Trachala was intended originally as a pejorative epithet. On the contrary, precisely because there is a possibility that Trachala was recorded by a writer with anti-Constantinian bias, the name may have been adapted for the writer’s own needs.

Since we have seen that Trachala can also be given various positive explanations, the possibility that this nickname, when and if used during Constantine’s lifetime, was intended in a complimentary way must be seriously considered. It might have been merely descriptive ("someone with a strong neck"), but it might also have been used metaphorically or from a physiognomic point of view ("strong, good, upright ruler").

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99 On the intellectual milieu in which Nicomachus Flavianus wrote, see recently Grünewald, „Kampf“ (as in n. 51).