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Notes
Notes on the Transmission of Imperial Images in Late Antiquity

by Patrick Brunn

The emperor Julian once ironically described his uncle Constantine as an ingrained materialist, a money dealer (πραπτὸς) a cooel (δύοσποντις) and a hairdresser’s maid (κομματιὰ). An important point in his harsh criticism is obviously that, in the nephew’s opinion, the uncle made too much of a fuss of his hair, which in real life seems to have been far from abundant. A certain amount of male vanity would normally be a sufficient explanation for the attention an emperor pays to his hairstyle. In our particular case, however, Julian’s words suggest something more than a frivolous joke at a ruler’s worries over his increasing baldness. They reveal, as the context shows, a serious attack on the image of Constantine. As depicted by his apostate nephew the first Christian emperor appears to be greedy, wasteful and vain, and very alien to the philosophical ideal of a ruler. According to Silvanus in Julian’s Saturnalian diatribe Constantine’s hairstyle and his looks reflect his true character. Julian’s severe criticism of Constantine’s “tossing” over his hairstyle cannot be a chance illustration of his predecessor’s concern with his outward appearance. Readers and listeners of Julian’s text must have been familiar with the Constantinian portraits which were in evidence all over the empire, in statues, images and coins. Julian most certainly wrote with a purpose, which may reflect a reaction to Constantine’s systematic and no doubt also successful attempts to undermine the values of the old world of Greek and Roman traditions, and to create a new image of the Roman emperor, different from that of the tetrarchic ruler. With careful attention to detail, a new court ceremonial was developed, and old symbols were employed in a new setting both in regard to the imperial dress and to other external manifestations of power. The hairstyle was just one part of the new picture and Julian’s words remind us of the fact that it was an important part.

The clew-shaven portraits and busts of Constantine which have been preserved bear witness first of all to a radical break with the tradition of the close-cropped hair and bearded face of the tetrarchs, and secondly to an infinite variety in the arrangement of locks and waves of hair. Certain aspects of the early appearance of this Constantinian portrait are the main object of this paper.

Portraits on Roman imperial coins have traditionally been of great importance to the art historian in the identification of Roman imperial sculptures. The comparison of busts in stone and on coins as a rule creates few difficulties as long as coinage was restricted to one or two mints. This was the case during most of the third century A.D. Things changed, however, when the administrative reforms of the tetrarchies created centres coining regularly in all the four parts of the Empire, in this new situation the evaluation of coin portraits constitutes a methodological problem of its own.

An intimate knowledge of the process of coin production is a prerequisite when forming an opinion of the physical appearance of an emperor with the aid of coins. The closer to the model, to the emperor himself, the sculptor worked, the greater the chance that the coin portrait corresponds to the model. This, in a way trivial, methodological criterion of proximity of our source (the coin) to the object it describes (the physiognomy of the ruler) is valid in different ways; it extends into time, into space and into society. This implies also that the coins and the coinage constitute valid evidence particularly when coins are allowed to testify collectively, when the coinage process is regarded as an organic entity, and when only this organic whole is taken into consideration. Single parts of the process, individual coins, should be employed only when it can be shown that they are representative of the group to which they belong. But not even when the scholar seems to have a clear idea of the complicated administrative reality behind the widely varying imperial portraits, has the method of research been related to the character of the sources.

When dealing with the history of the Later Roman Empire students of portraiture and iconography have to a large extent favoured the Constantinian or the post-Constantinian period. Consequently, the influence of the epoch-making administrative reforms of the tetrarchies on coin portraits has been very much ignored. Von Sydow is probably the first scholar to pay serious attention to regional differences without, however, attempting any systematic analysis or presentation of development in the provinces. What follows aims at clarifying certain general principles according to which coin portraits were circulated in the empire. Awareness of these and similar principles suggests what kind of images should be selected for the purpose of illustrating the artistic and iconographic development of a certain period.

I propose to make the Constantinian portrait the point of departure, and to demonstrate how the portrait created in conjunction with the imperial image was introduced in the parts of the Empire not governed by Constantine. The portrait is markedly different from the portraits of Constantine’s fellow-rulers, and therefore not easily confused with the features of other emperors—regardless of local distortions. The period chosen covers the time from early A.D. 312 to the death of the ruler of the East, Maximinus Daia in August 313. This conveniently limits our field of investigation, which nevertheless includes a study of the relations between the three tetrarchic rulers Maximinus, Constantine and Licinius.

The official internal relations of the members of any one imperial college are invariably reflected by the coinage, though they may be expressed in many different ways. A constitutionally elected emperor could on account of his imperium issue coins. Because the processes should be employed only when it can be shown that they are representative of the group to which they belong. But not even when the scholar seems to have a clear idea of the complicated administrative reality behind the widely varying imperial portraits, has the method of research been related to the character of the sources.

The right to issue coins meant the power to have coins designed in order to present the ruler and his aims as much to his advantage as possible. The privileges of having his portraits and his titles circulated on the coins must have been an asset of fundamental importance to imperial propaganda.

The era of coinage rule established with the tetrarchic system presupposed close cooperation; all rulers did in fact belong to the same domus divina, as members of the gens Valeria. Sextus compares the relationship of the senior members of the college to the junior ones with the relation of an army commander to his second-in-command or with family fathers to their sons, who worked in the same profession. In this case of course Diocletian was at first very much the senior ruler as compared even with the other augustus, to Maximian.

The cohesion of the imperial college is apparent in all official documents, laws, edicts, papyri and inscriptions, and similarly in the
The transmission of imperial images in late antiquity

Coinage. In normal conditions an issue of coins would present all the rulers of the empire, and depict their portraits. As far as we know, one of the main problems of this paper can the coin portraits really be regarded as true portraits of the ruler in question?

We have some literary evidence of the procedure adopted for the purpose of communicating imperial portraits all over the empire. This comes from the period after the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, when the diēmos divina was less united than under the firm rule of the founder of the tetrarchic system. Lactantius tells us that Constantine, having been hailed his father's successor on July 25, 306 in Eboracum, after a few days sent his laureate portrait to the senior augustus Galerius, who hesitated for a while over whether to accept it or not. He did so finally, with reluctance, and sent to Constantine an imperial mantle as a token of his 'magnanimity' in taking the initiative to promote Constantine to imperial rank.

About five years later, after several moments of uncertainty in the political stage, the old Maximian, having resumed the purple, and been forced to retire as princeps to Gaul, nevertheless clashed with his son-in-law Constantine, who was then ruling the West. The conflict grew in intensity and finally resulted in Maximian's premature death in Massilia. Lactantius reports that Constantine ordered Maximian's statues to be overthrown and his portraits to be pulled down wherever they happened to be.

Not very much later when Constantine had started his Italian campaign (spring of A. D. 312), Lactantius notes that the two champions of Christianity, Constantine and Licinius, seemed to constitute a threat to Maxentius and Maximinus Daia, their counterparts among the remaining persecutors of the Christian faith. This forced the persecutors into an alliance; their friendship was a fact, and consequently the portraits of both rulers were set up in places of honor.

A final instance again demonstrates that according to fourth century views, a political alliance was confirmed by erecting statues and by displaying portraits of the rulers concerned. Constantine, Lactantius writes, learned about Deria's victory with Maxentius against himself when, after the victory of the Milvian bridge, discovered the busts and the portraits of Maximinus in Rome.

A description of the actual ceremony of the presentation of the image to an emperor has been preserved in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' De caerimoniarum. The general situation described by Constantine Porphyrogenitus is as the heading of the chapter shows that an emperor acclaimed in partibus occidentalibus has not as yet been accepted as a legitimate ruler by the Byzantine emperor. The newly appointed sends an envoy and his images to Constantine in one. Constantine first explains in general terms how the delegation is received, how they have to wait to be admitted and how they are finally granted an audience with his Majesty. As soon as they have delivered their message, the emperor of the east empire confirms the imperial status of the petitioner, Constantine then illustrates the ceremony by recounting what happened (in A. D. 467) when Anthemius, the emperor of Rome, turned to Leo the Great in Constantinople. Anthemius' envoy Helercrates carried with him his masters' image laurae (to λαυρεια) and letters to Leo. The imperial delegation was received in the imperial consistory, where Helercrates introduced Anthemius' image to the emperor. After the introduction the silentiarii received the portrait and Diokletian, the prefect of the city, pronounced a panegyric praising both emperors, after which his predecessor Diocletian performed a similar feat. The emperor then resolved that the image be distributed all over the empire and that the images of both emperors should be set up jointly. He did so, making the following discourse: 'It has caused us great joy that the most gentle prince Anthemius' portrait, which we have been awaiting a long time, has finally now been presented to us. For this reason and also, by our divine will, we command that this portrait of his, joined with ours shall share the same honours as our portrait to the delight of all our people, so that the city shall realize that the rulers of both parts of the empire act in concert and that we have been united into one with His Indulgence.'

The emperor Leo thought of the receptions in all the cities of the empire when the imperial portraits arrived and were officially set up. There is a piece of corroborating evidence for such celebrations in a papyrus showing how Thebais in A. D. 566 celebrated the arrival and the reception of the imagines of Justinus II. These fragmentary records of the process of the transmission of images laurate should be regarded as complementary to one another. There is, of course, a considerable chronological difference between the reigns of Constantine the Great and Justinus II. Nevertheless, the rigid conservatism of the Byzantine court, which faithfully observed the rules and practices laid down by the first Christian emperor, should enable us to draw some general conclusions from the texts referred to above.

(1) Constantine Porphyrogenitus' text, and particularly the records he has preserved of the visit of the Roman delegation in A. D. 467 above all convey a feeling of the solemnity of the occasion. Lactantius' words laurate imagine are used in the declaration as a superlatum, superlatim, in a sense emperor . . . suspect image imaginem evokes nothing which corresponds to this but then, court ceremony was very far from being the main object of the treatise De moribus persecutorum. All the same, both instances show that the transmission of images in practice is equivalent to a request for recognition of imperial status. The Byzantine text shows that the confirmation of the legitimacy of the title to rule of the supplanting emperor (τὰν ἐπιβαίνουσα τὴν βασιλείαν) is the prerequisite for the exchange of courtesies and the transfer of the actual portraits. Once the emperor has decided to accept someone as a (necessarily junior) fellow-ruler, there are no difficulties. Deliberations concerning the crucial question of recognition were, no doubt, normally carried out in the wings. In the days of Leo when the time factor may have been less pressing than during the agitations of the tetrarchies, delegations waiting to be admitted to the presence of the Divine ruler can be expected to have negotiated the positive terms of the amicitia, which was to be sealed by the court ceremony. Lactantius records that Galerius hesitated whether or not he should accept Constantine in societatem. I believe that it is justified to assume that these deliberations did not take place openly, in the presence of the court, but during discussions with Constantine's emissaries behind the scenes. The political amicitia Lactantius speaks of does not sprout spontaneously out of the barren ground of tetrarchic troubles, nor was the transmission of imagines simply a courier dashes along through the empire on a foaming horse with his master's portrait or a master die of the portrait - in his saddle bag.

(2) There are several corollaries to the above interpretation of the ceremony of the presentation of the imperial portrait. The suppliant is always a junior ruler who awaits the presence to be legitimatized. It is not a question of an exchange of portraits - the images of the senior emperor had long ago been communicated all over the empire. Galerius' portraits must have been known in the West as well as in the East from the time he was nominated Caesar. When Galerius accepted the portraits of Constantine, he had them distributed all over the empire. As Maximus Augustus he had made a decision which was binding for Maximinus and Licinius also. We need not assume that delegations with Constantine's portraits had been sent separately to the junior rulers of the empire; in fact, negotiations between junior emperors in the ceremonial setting outlined by Constantine Porphyrogenitus would amount to conspiracy. However, when Galerius died, a new situation arose. I propose to deal with it presently.

(3) Behind the elaborate ceremonial connected with the presentation of the imagines lies of course, the sacred character of the imperial portrait, the sacra vestis which were a guarantee of the authenticity of the coins, where they were depicted. Similarly the ima-
gines set up all over the empire in public places, or produced on solemn occasions, "super-
vised" the administration in its dealing with the
population. Likewise the medallion por-
traits fixed to the military signa represented
the imperial presence which brought luck to
the Roman arms and therefore were objects
of worship also. Consequently, the imagnes, 
which by the senior ruler were distributed
\. must have had a very
large circulation indeed. I believe that the
originals presented at the court were genuine
ceremonial portraits, which subsequently were
copied in different ways according to the future
use of the portrait.29
The following remarks concerning the dis-
tribution of imperial portraits in the years
A.D. 311-313 may serve as a case study ill-
ustrating the application in practice of the
theory just outlined.30
I return now to my original field of inquiry,
the vexed years which brought about the death
of the two last persecutors of the Christian
faith, Galerius and Maximinus.
In order to clarify the background of the
two years between Galerius' death in May 311
and Daza's in the Summer of 313, we should
consider Constantine's position after the death
of Maximian, senior augustus and Constantine's
father-in-law.
Maximian had been a link with the legiti-
mate ruling dynasty, the gens Valeria, after
the ablutions in A.D. 305 headed by Gale-
rius. Originally Constantine was a usurper, 
though the imperial office had been forced
upon him by the army acclaiming him em-
peror in accordance with the requirements of
the constitution, on July 25, 306. Galerius
had acknowledged him, though not as an au-
gustus,31 but Constantine refused to be de-
graded to the rank of caesar. The old Her-
citus now provided the young man with a
means of compensation by marrying his daugh-
ter Fausta to him, thereby connecting him with

Key to page 127
(1) Coins ordered to be struck by Constantine.
2. Constantine as caesar. A.D. 306-307. Trier, argenteus, 
RIC vi, No 619. The reverse is VIRTVS MILITVM. 
This coin is from the sale catalogue Münzen und 
Medaillen, Basel 479. 474.
3. Constantine as caesar. A.D. 311-314. Trier, solidus, 
RIC vi, No 814. The reverse is GAVDIVM REIPV-
RILICAE. This coin from the sale catalogue Hess, 
4. Constantine as augustus. A.D. 314. Antioch, solidus, 
RIC vii, No 6. The reverse is VIRTVS AVGVSTI. 
This coin from the Hess/Louvre sale catalogue 36 (1969), 
373.
(5) Gold coins issued by Galerius at Thessalonica.
6. Licinius as augustus. A.D. 317-323, 307 in RIC vii, 
but belongs to the gold issue on pp. 316 sq. The reverse 
is IOVI CONSERVATORI AVGV. This coin from 
the sale catalogue Glendenning, Nov. 1955, 1928.
7. Constantine as caesar. A.D. 312, RIC vi, No 147b. 
The reverse is CONSVL P P PROCONSVL. This 
coin from the sale catalogue Münzen und Medaillen, 
The reverse is CONSVL P P PROCONSVL. This 
coin from the sale catalogue Hess/Louvre 49, 473.
9. The plate illustrates how Constantine, having grown up 
with the military hair-cut of his father (No 3), at Gaul 
adopted a hair dress of elaborately arranged locks and
curls (No 2-3). Galerius; coin in A.D. 305-309 (No 
4) and Licinius issuing coins in A.D. 317-312 (No 5) did 
not know - or employ - this new portrait, whereas 
Maximian in Antioch contemporaneously uses it in his
gold issues (No 7). The portrait of Licinius (No 6) and 
of Maximian (No 8) serve the comparison of the 
portrait of Constantine with the one of the (actually 
occurring) regional ruler.
the original tetrarchic dynasty. Moreover, Maximian as a member of this dynasty was, though officially retired, still capable of interceding in the affairs of the empire in the same way as Diocletian had done on several occasions. So, in conjunction with Fausta's marriage to Constantine, Maximian obviously invested his son-in-law with the divine power to rule, confirming upon him the rank of Augustus. This day, December 25, 307, became Constantine's *natalis imperii*. This implied that he had broken his relations with Galerius — he had rejected Galerius' acceptance of him as a ruler of inferior rank. Consequently, Constantine had to reject the dies imperii of July 25, 305 acknowledged by Galerius.

From Constantine's *natalis imperii* as Augustus at least to the death of Maximian, Maximian as a link to the divine genus Valeria was the ideological source and the legitimization of Constantine's imperial power. When Maximian died a rebel of the order established in Gaul, Constantine had to find a new justification and authorization of his position as emperor; at any rate it became imperative to be acknowledged by the rulers in the East. Therefore, Constantine took two as it would seem consecutive steps in order to confirm and motivate his status and his rank.

First he turned to Maximinus in Antioch, Galerius may by then have been dead or dying; his had been a long illness, the outcome of which would have been foreseen for a considerable time. Constantine's approach ended in the formation of a kind of alliance between the three rulers now left to share Galerius' heritage. There was amicitia et imaginis simul locutus — at least on the coins. The usurper Maxentius in Italy, though brother-in-law of Constantine, of course remained outside the negotiations.

Secondly Constantine constructed a theory — or created the fiction — that his father Constantius was a descendant of Claudius Gothicus, a son of Sol Invictus. The claim, which was accompanied by the abolition of the old reverse imagery on the coins in favour of Sol, superseded the previous fiction of his belonging to the divine tetrarchic dynasty and constituted a clear rupture with tetrarchic ideas.

It may be vain to ponder the formal aspects of the reconciliation of Constantine to the eastern rulers as long as it appears impossible to establish in detail the strength, the influence and the contents of the opposing parties, although certain features of the pictures were recognized, Daza the position as senior or maximus Augustus and successor to Galerius, Licii tus, at any rate, was in no bargaining position at all, discredited by his failure to reconquer Italy.

The coinage suggests that the overtures in the bargaining process were taken by Maximinus but there may have been several twists and turns in the talks between East and West before an acceptable compromise was found. There is, however, documentary evidence of one facet of the reconciliation. The new Constantine portrait (figs. 2–3, cf. fig. 1) in Constantine, charged with an abundance of hair and by meticulously arranged locks at the forehead and the temples, was circulated all over the East at this time. How this came about is easily explained with reference to court ceremony — although such an explanation does not constitute any clear-cut answer to the many questions concerning the causal relationship of the sequence of events. After Galerius' death Maximinus, despite Licinius' indisputable seniority as Augustus, stood a good chance of acquiring the position of maximus Augustus with some external support. After the overtures of Daza referred to above, it must have been very natural to Constantine to transmit to Daza his laureate images, therefore, asking for recognition and for admission to the tetrarchic community. The coin is indisputably clear that the request was granted (fig. 7, cf. fig. 8), the imagines circulated and the portraits published on the coin obverses.

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within the margin established by the Cons. Const. 35. Licinius was scarcely implicated at an early stage. The final result of the negotiations was an alliance between all three rulers, as is eloquently demonstrated by the bronze coinage issued in all parts of the empire. Licinius was obviously forced to accept a settlement with his two colleagues acting in concert. Otherwise it is hard to understand why he yielded his position as oldest to Maximus and conversed himself with the third place in the imperial college.

36. Of all the men outside Constantine’s realm, Daza’s were the only one to demonstrate a positive attitude to collegial co-operation prior to the death of Galerius in May 317. At Antioch two new reverse types were created, HERCII VICTORI (RIC vi, Ant. 552) and IOVI CONSERVATORI AVG (RIC vi, Ant. 1533-2) which, decisively differing from the preceding monograms of Galerius, constitute a reversal to tetarchic dynastic imagery. At Alexandria we find within the framework of a single issue (RIC vi, Ant. 124-130 313-422) obverses of Licinius, Maximinus, Constantine and Galerius, the latter within the same mint mark appearing also on a series of consular coinages (RIC vi, Ant. 1393).

In this mark there appeared in addition a reverse created to commemorate the deceased ruler, BONO GENIO III IMPERATORIS (RIC vi, Ant. 1340-582).