

Review: Constantinus Christianus

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CONSTANTINUS CHRISTIANUS

By AVERIL CAMERON

T. D. BARNES, CONSTANTINE AND EUSEBIUS. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981. Pp. viii + 458. THE NEW EMPIRE OF DIOCLETIAN AND CONSTANTINE. Cambridge, Mass. and

London: Harvard University Press, 1982. Pp. xix + 305.

These two books constitute the major study of Constantine for which the time was more than ripe. In English scholarship on the period the Raleigh Lecture of Norman Baynes, Constantine the Great and the Christian Church (1930), still holds the field, as its recent reissue (1972) indicates; and if continental scholarship has moved, with Grégoire, to a more sceptical position, both sides have made the interpretation of Constantine's religion their primary issue. Yet the growing study of the administrative history of the period (based, for instance, on prosopography; note PLRE I, of which Barnes much disapproves) should now make possible a less 'religious' approach to Constantine. This one expressly seeks to' transcend the terms in which "the Constantinian question" has traditionally been posed ' (Constantine and Eusebius, hereafter CE, 274) by essaying a less subjective approach, one that is firmly based on knowable historical data and which does not begin from one or another ideological position, but rather from the evidence itself. The rigour of B.'s critique of the available source material is undoubtedly his greatest strength, and is particularly on display in *The New Empire* (NE), where he shows a magisterial confidence in the handling of the raw material of chronology and prosopography which will put the whole period on a new footing-its 'post-Barnes' phase. Whether Constantine can wholly be grasped by these means is however a question which this review will raise.

It will be useful to give some idea of the two books, both because they are very different from each other and because B.'s approach to and presentation of his subject is highly personal and carefully articulated. CE is a work substantially, but far from wholly, of narrative history. It is 'neither a biography of Constantine nor a comprehensive study of Eusebius as a writer and thinker. Nor, strictly speaking, is it a history of the age of Constantine' (preface, v). Again, in the author's own words, 'I have not tried to present a comprehensive picture of the age of Constantine . . . but rather to establish the main features of the period by emphasizing the career, character, and policies of the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire and the viewpoint and assumptions of the most important writer of Constantine's time' (ibid.). The book falls into three parts, each of five chapters : Constantine's career up to the defeat of Licinius in A.D. 324 and his consequent establishment as sole ruler; Eusebius, the genesis of his intellectual development as a biblical scholar and historian of the Church and the effect on him of the experience of persecution and its paradoxical ending with a Christian emperor on the throne; finally, in a section subtitled 'The Christian Empire', the years from the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) to the death of Constantine (A.D. 337), when the bishop and the emperor came together as monarch and interpreter. The final chapter, 'Eusebius and Constantine', reverses the title of the book as a whole. Thus an artful construction, with its own tight logic, and one in its arrangement and interweaving of writer and subject highly reminiscent of Sir Ronald Syme's *Tacitus*, perhaps indeed deliberately so. By contrast, *NE* is described by the author as a 'companion volume' to the other. It has no connected narrative : on the contrary, it consists of independent chapters, again fifteen and again divided into three sections ('Emperors'; 'Holders of Offices '; ' The Administration of the Empire '). Each sets out in severe and scholarly form the evidence for a particular problem. Wider conclusions are obviously at every point suggested by B.'s interpretations and presentation of the evidence, but on the whole their explicit statement is avoided, and the general interpretations left for CE. Yet NE (the second book), while in a sense preparatory to CE, is also bigger in its scope. Its treatment of the imperial college, titulature and journeys, and of office holders in particular spheres, covers the whole period from the accession of Diocletian in A.D. 284 to the death of Constantine in A.D. 337, and it concerns itself, with important results, with the provincial system of Diocletian as well as with problems closer to the subject matter of CE. Thus it implicitly raises the question of whether we should not regard the reign of Constantine as a continuation, in many spheres, of what had gone on since 284, rather than seeking to understand Constantine in isolation from that. This is not, however, how CE approaches the subject. Nor, indeed, are all the 'dates and facts' on which CE is based to be found in NE, which is thus both more than and in some senses less than a companion to CE. We need also to go to the twenty-odd articles cited in the bibliography to CE, many of them establishing chronological positions and interpretations assumed in CE without further argument. Finally, there is little in NE to justify or support the chapters of CE which are devoted to the intellectual development and works of Eusebius; some of the positions there adopted have also been argued elsewhere in article form, though perhaps less often than is the case with the chapters on Constantine (one might single out the important paper in GRBS

1980 dating the conception of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and the early stages of its writing to the 290's, when persecution was still in the future; if B. is right on this, it makes a great difference to the interpretation of the work). *NE*, then, in the words of the unconventional fifth-century historian Olympiodorus, is a $\Im \chi_{\eta}$ ioropias, not a history in itself. It partly serves to justify the argument of *CE*, but it also has a wider importance of its own as a major work of reference for the period. Perhaps like Topsy it 'just growed', for which we must be thankful.

Nevertheless, the two books should be considered together in assessing B.'s view of Constantine. As the author admits, this view is somewhat one-sided, since it deliberately omits any detailed treatment of such large issues as Constantine's contribution to the development of the fourth-century army, his economic and financial policies or (except for the prosopographical lists of consuls and governors in NE) the character of his administration. The central question of his handling of the (mostly pagan; see now E. Champlin, Phoenix 36 (1982), 71 ff.) upper class and his dispensation of patronage, regarded in several recent works as instrumental in forging a 'new governing class', is covered by implication and to a limited extent in NE but deliberately eschewed in CE. B. has chosen to leave these issues completely aside in favour of a concentration on the ' career and policies' of the Christian Constantine. In fact they can hardly be separated off in this way; moreover, the effect and aim of CE are strangely reminiscent of those of one of its main sources, the Vita Constantini, of which more below. There are other holes left by this focus on the person of the emperor: a view of the empire as a whole, and any sense of the fabric of urban life in the provinces. Constantine appears here much as he does in the Vita, at first preoccupied with military needs, then with ecclesiastical politics (the title of one of the later chapters). Yet despite the doubts expressed by the author about the scope of his evidence (CE, 275, see below), NE does provide at least some of the necessary material for a wider and some would think a more realistic survey of the emperor's concerns.

But its format is severe, much of it consisting of prosopographical or chronological lists. The limitation on argument is as rigorous or more so than in CE, and citation of the secondary material is sometimes so curtailed as even to be unhelpful. Polemic, however, is not absent (see the remarks on PLRE I in chaps. IX, 'Administrators of Dioceses and Governors of Provinces' and X, 'Names in Acta Martyrum', the latter with a list of 67 'dubious' names which according to B. should never have been included in PLRE). Some of the chapters are on matters related to, but not directly the ' basis' for CE: thus the valuable discussion of the Verona list and the provincial organization under Diocletian, to which B. brings very recent papyrological and epigraphic evidence (for the latter see Roueché, βRS 71 (1981), 103 ff., and add ZPE 49 (1982), 159 ff.), as well as that of the five-yearly censuses from 284 to 337, with arguments for regular censuses at an earlier period. B. also provides a clear and comprehensive exposition of the sources for the chronology of the Donatist controversy during Constantine's reign, in the light of the new chronology of the battle of Cibalae (316, not 314; see P. Bruun, The Constantinian Coinage of Arelate (1953); C. Habicht, Hermes 86 (1958), 360 ff.), now generally, if unfortunately not universally, accepted in the scholarly literature, and a cornerstone of B.'s own interpretation of the crucial years after 313, and especially of his high esteem of Lactantius as a reliable source (see JRS 63 (1973), 29 ff.) and thus of his whole ' Christian' view of Constantine (see below). NE offers, therefore, a mixture of important new datings and identifications, and highly useful expositions in chronological, alphabetical and other tabular form of central and problematic evidence. Though it does not cover all of the necessary areas for a 'full history' (e.g. there are no military chapters), it puts most of what it does treat on an entirely new and firmer footing. NE will be the foundation for many years to come of all detailed discussions of the period, as of institutional developments in a wider sense.

But NE also lies at the very heart of B.'s approach to history. It is characteristic of him to tackle a subject, even such a subject as is presented by Constantine, the first Christian emperor, by first subjecting the basics of chronology and prosopography to the most searching examination. The rest then follows for him with the inexorability of logic, as the pieces of the jigsaw are fitted together. The key to the problem is the proper evaluation of evidence, often reached by just this sort of precise chronological study. Such a view of how history can be written underlies CE and accounts for its omissions, which B. justifies in a characteristic passage: there is not enough evidence for a 'reliable and detailed political narrative' of much of the reign, or for a proper general discussion of Constantine's administration (CE, 275). So CE is deliberately restricted; it is not the final word, nor even perhaps a 'fully rounded portrait' (B.'s own words). The latter is on his view at present impossible. But such high-minded refusal to discuss whole important aspects of Constantine's activities will strike readers as a pity. Rigorous inspection of the very biased literary sources will at best only yield a partial view (in both senses of the word). It is also far from clear that in this subject of all subjects the sources really will tell all. A wider view would certainly have to base itself in the whole context of the less well documented areas of the reign; but without the attempt, the wider questions cannot even be asked.

We must return to these issues later (see below). In the meantime some comments on the

argument of CE. B. has decided on a totally Christian Constantine, to the extent that arguments put forward by others for syncretistic or less than wholly committed attitudes on the emperor's part are simply not discussed. Even sources which seem to go counter to B.'s view are dismissed out of hand. The argument proceeds by direct statement. Thus the foundation of Constantinople, which has called forth reams of discussion elsewhere, is here given no more than a paragraph (p. 222). Any sign of pagan ceremony is relegated to the category of 'later legend', without argument, while 'early and reliable evidence' (in fact the Vita Const. III. 48, an obviously panegyrical passage) is to be accepted without reservation. (Oddly, B. is prepared to admit that the great statue of himself set up by Constantine in his new Forum in Constantinople was a reused image of Apollo-Helios (p. 222), though the early sources do not say so.) This passage in CE, which is not untypical, consists of a series of categorical statements derived from strictly selected sources, among which the Vita takes pride of place. Any real discussion is relegated to the footnotes, and is there strictly limited, e.g. to the simple statement that the claim of John Lydus about the participation in the inauguration of Sopater and Praetextatus is 'ludicrous' (p. 383, n. 144); the fact that B. may well be right does not affect these comments on his technique. Again, the later inhabitants of Constantinople found the many statues of pagan gods with which Constantine adorned the city a source of considerable embarrassment. We might suppose that they were brought there in the natural wish to give the city the best of both worlds; certainly the deliberate placing of these statues in the major public places, such as the Senate House, the Hippodrome and even the palace, suggests that they were to be admired. Alternatively, as with Constantine's coins, it may be that the emperor himself had less to do with the details than moderns suppose (Mango, DOP 17 (1963), 57). But for B. the apologetic explanation of the Vita is enough: obviously Constantine intended to show that these statues and others like them, now on view in the secular public places of the city, were no longer to have any cultic significance (p. 247; cf. Vita Const. III. 54 ' the emperor held up these very playthings to be the ridicule and the sport of all beholders').

Above all, B.'s firm belief in Constantine's Christianity has led him to a highly unfamiliar presentation, within the context of previous Constantinian scholarship, of the crucial vision ' of 312. Since Burckhardt at least, this has been seen as a central issue : even A. H. M. Jones, who opted (as does B. himself, p. 306, n. 148) for the 'meteorological' explanation, felt that it must be explained. The several and widely differing accounts of the battle's antecedents indeed call for particular analysis. But here these events simply take their place in the narrative of the year 312, with little emphasis and less discussion. There is none of the usual source criticism, no attempt to weigh Lactantius against the Eusebius of the Ecclesiastical History and the Vita. How is it that B. can so reduce the significance of what generations of scholars have regarded as the most important event of Constantine's life ('vision' is not even in the index)? Two reasons immediately suggest themselves: first the expressed aim of avoiding the 'subjective', which was clearly influential in reducing the amount of emphasis which B. was prepared to allow to such matters, and second, his key belief (on the basis of Lactantius, DMP 24, see JRS 63 (1973), 29 ff.) that Constantine was pro-Christian not from 312 but from 306; on such a view (not shared by most other scholars) the Battle of the Milvian Bridge bears much less weight of explanation. All the same, it is disconcerting that there is so little discussion of the range of problems involved, and that the treatment has been so clearly shaped by convictions held by the author for other reasons. Again the Vita Constantini is given a primary place. 'Constantine himself, years later, gave a fuller account, whose truth he asseverated emphatically and upon oath' (p. 43, summarizing *Vita Const. I.* 28 f.). B. is even prepared to suggest when it was that this information was given to the author of the Vita (p. 219—at the celebration of Constantine's Vicennalia following the Council of Nicaea). Thus he seems to accept at face value a clearly tendentious account in a self-confessed panegyric, and, moreover, one whose language (the claim to personal and secret information from the subject of the panegyric) ' betrays the fiction' even more clearly than that of the panegyrist of A.D. 310 when he claims that Constantine saw a vision of Apollo (see CE, 36). We are given no hint of the real and substantial differences between the early version of the 312 vision represented by Lactantius, DMP 44 and the much fuller and more highly wrought account in the Vita, written only after Constantine's death. If we turn to the treatment of the 310 'vision' of Apollo, we shall be surprised at the difference: B. is bound to reject this story, in the light of his own view of Constantine based on DMP 24, but here, unlike the case of the 312 vision, there is both dis-cussion and justification of his position. Thus while B. is prepared to admit that Constantine had to go along the path suggested by political advantage, he can assert that 'it is not necessary to believe that Constantine ever saw such a vision ' (p. 36), on the grounds that it is clear that the panegyrist is making it up to suit Constantine's political needs. But if we do not have to believe in this one, why extend greater credence to the similar, obviously panegyrical, Vita? Why go to the lengths of supposing that there really must have been a 'solar halo'? Above all, why not give the sources in each case parity of treatment?

These questions raise another basic issue, that of the validity or status of narrative history, a

topic recently much under discussion. It is doing much less than justice to CE to describe even the more narrative parts of it as 'narrative history'. And yet B. himself regards a detailed narrative as the most reliable historical form (CE, 275), one based on 'facts' (NE, vii). The treatment of the vision of 312 illustrates some of the difficulties of such a view, for the arrangement and presentation of the material as well as the selection of relevant 'facts' are at every point determined by the subjective choice of the author. In particular, B.'s deliberate refusal to indulge in open polemic (CE, vi) has resulted in a smooth narrative full of traps for the unwary, who may not realize the controversial nature of much of what they are being told. Some parts of CE are like a smooth icy surface below which (and invisible) there is a maelstrom of dark water. Like Thucydides (who also has his high-minded omissions). B. often covers his tracks. If only for those who lack the necessary experienced eye, it would have have been good if the problematic and uncertain had been allowed to surface more often.

Though fully Christian, this Constantine is no saint. B. feels no obligation to defend him, nor is he tempted to suppose that his Christianity would make him a better man. Having arrived at his assessment of Constantine through a rigorous analysis of Lactantius, DMP and the Donatist dossier, rather than from any religious conviction, he sticks to it, not allowing Constantine either 'syncretism' (see pp. 211, 245 f.) or more than a minimum concession to pagan feeling. But he does not feel obliged to pronounce on the quality of Constantine's religion, unlike a recent book which argues that though Christian, Constantine's influence was in every important sense the opposite of that of Christ (Alistair Kee, Constantine versus Christ (1982)). It is striking again, then, that a scholar so clearsighted as B. should rely so heavily on the Vita Constantini, whose claims he often follows without discussion and on whose evidence he relies throughout. Most Constantinian scholars would have wanted to justify their position with regard to the Vita (which naturally all must use and which is indeed fundamental) at an earlier point in their work and more fully than B. feels it necessary to do (see CE, 265 ff.). Quite rightly, he regards the Eusebian authorship as settled; logically, up to a point, he places the main discussion of the Vita at the very end of the book, in the discussion of the remaining short period of Eusebius' life after the death of Constantine, and so in its chronological place in the narrative. But although the short discussion here is an excellent, brief analysis of the very real problems of the text (of which B. is naturally entirely aware), it can in this place in the book (pp. 267–71) be no more than that; the footnotes in fact add little by way of justification for the assertions about the Vita made in the main text. It will continue to be worrying that B. offers no methodology for his use of the Vita in CE generally; he constantly uses it (for instance on the Council of Nicaea) without discussing or even signalling the peculiarities of its account. Perhaps here the narrative form is at its most strained. B. will paraphrase the Vita in the course of his own narrative (p. 219, for instance); yet we badly feel the need of a critical discussion of the value of the Vita's account of Nicaea, for which it constitutes indeed the only continuous contemporary account. For an indication of the undoubted bias of these chapters of the Vita we have to wait until p. 269 f., where in two paragraphs on the subject Eusebius' own embarrassment, writing about Nicaea and his own role in the Council when a very different situation prevailed, is rightly recognized as the primary influence in shaping the account. It would have been far kinder to the reader to point to this crucial fact at the appropriate place in the narrative of the Council. In the course of his brief discussion of the Vita, again, B. gives it as his opinion that the Arian question at Nicaea was not only trivial but also actually less important than the dispute over the date of Easter (p. 269)—not a view that is going to find much favour, but one which should surely have been debated in the main narrative, where indeed (p. 213) it is argued that Constantine did not in fact regard the Arian issue as being as trivial as he represents it in his letter to Alexandria. Finally, the placing of the sketch of the Vita and its problems at the end of the book denies to B. the possibility of integrating the discussion of this work with the major analysis of Eusebius' works in the central chapters, which would have been a valuable and interesting exercise, as well as one which the history of the controversy about the authorship of the Vita seems to demand of any writer seeking to re-evaluate Eusebius' work as a whole.

Most readers of this journal, it is reasonable to suppose, will read CE for its presentation of Constantine. Yet five long chapters are devoted to the bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, his writings, his background in Caesarea, where Origen had taught and left the kernel of the great library founded by Eusebius' mentor, Pamphilus, as well as to the conception of the *Chronicle* and the *Ecclesiastical History* and their relation to Eusebius own experiences during the persecution (the chapter called 'Persecution' offers a particularly vivid and memorable evocation of what the years beginning in A.D. 303 must have been like for the Christians of the eastern provinces). B.'s important early dating of the *History* has already been mentioned. But that work received its final touches soon after A.D. 324, and here this section ends. In 325 Eusebius came face to face with Constantine at Nicaea; thus the chronological framework of the book can be kept. The *Tricennalian Oration*, therefore, like the *Vita* (see above), must be deferred for consideration at a later point (p. 253 f.), and the essence of Eusebius' relation to Constantine left to emerge there too (p. 266 f., in the context of discussion)

of the Vita). B. will have nothing to do with the common and ill-based notion that in the later years Eusebius was Constantine's close confidant and adviser: 'he probably met and conversed with the emperor on no more than four occasions' (p. 266). Thus the question suggests itself whether the conception of CE as a whole, to present the period through an emphasis on the persons of Constantine and Eusebius (CE, v) can really yield the results that B. would like. Some difficulty certainly arises from the lack of contact between the two, the latter living for most of the time as a bishop at Caesarea (Constantine actually opposed the possibility of his moving to the see at Antioch): how reliable a guide can Eusebius really be for us? But more stems from the very nature of his works, and this is where a fuller and more integrated treatment of the Vita would have been welcome, if Eusebius and Constantine were to be presented as individuals and separate personalities. With Tacitus, after all, it was easier to use the literary works to illumine the history and attitudes of the time; with Eusebius, however, much of the literary output was much more specialized, and this poses certain problems, especially for one who like B. is out of sympathy with theology, either as such or as suggesting serious political and religious issues that might have influenced historical events. Constantine himself offers no easy material for the delineation of personality, when so much of our information about him comes from the Vita which is itself so problematic. B. makes good use of the Oratio ad Sanctos (p. 73 f.) and discounts another commonly held assumption (though cf. Anon. Vales. 2. 2), that the emperor was some kind of ignorant soldier unable to comprehend the subtler points of Christian doctrine. The letters preserved in Optatus' Appendix and in the Vita reveal a passionate and nervous man, but they too pose certain problems of interpretation (though see NE, 230 f.); the accidental discovery of a papyrus fragment of one of the documents from the Vita (see Jones and Skeat, JEH 1954, 196 ff.) certainly does not, as is too often assumed, guarantee that all are given correctly. At any rate, a much lengthier discussion of the character of Constantine as it emerges from this evidence would be welcome. In fact B. emphasizes Eusebius' lack of real knowledge of Constantine (p. 267). The Tricennalian Oration poses similar problems. So much has been deduced from it since the famous essay of Norman Baynes (see his Byzantine Studies, 1955), yet we have no way of knowing how it was received or the extent to which it did represent Constantine's own views or the manner in which he would like to be seen. The problem with using Eusebius, in addition to the distance between himself and Constantine, is that we cannot tell to what extent his evolved theory of the Christian monarchy was a more widely accepted one. As with the Latin Panegyrics, which seem to offer valuable indications of the development of Constantine's policies in the early years, there is actually a gulf between the panegyrist and his subject which we can only bridge by conjecture. Even by making that conjecture, namely by supposing that Eusebius' claims do in fact correspond with Constantine's own, we are still left with an incomplete picture, not one that is 'fully rounded' (p. 275). Seen through Eusebius, even if we give Eusebius the benefit of every doubt, as B. does, the available image of Constantine is inevitably an externalised one.

Nevertheless, the chapters on Eusebius are an important contribution to scholarship in their own right. They vindicate Eusebius (and thereby help B.'s main thesis) from the charges of being a mere apologist or an unoriginal follower of Origen. The *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Chronicle* were both begun, on B.'s view, in an uncontentious mood of scholarship, not written from the first for apologetic or polemical purposes. Above all, this Eusebius is primarily a scholar, not a propagandist. So the central chapters of the book can be taken to support the reliance placed on Eusebius in the rest of it, though the effect would have been even stronger had B. faced squarely at this point the interesting challenge of harmonizing the *Vita* with the rest of Eusebius' writings. The Eusebius chapters have a life of their own quite apart from the Constantine connection, and indeed the extent of the direct connection is limited, as B. is aware. Rather, while they are essential to the balance and organization of *CE*, they move into areas that are left untouched in the rest of the work.

Indeed, the importance of Christianity itself (as distinct from the role of ecclesiastics and the institutional church) is cut down in the rest of *CE* to a level that will come as a distinct surprise. B. makes it a major motivating force—indeed, *the* motivating force—for Constantine, but he seems to have no time for the wider and fundamental questions of how, or whether, Constantine set in motion a profound change of direction in society by his espousal of Christianity, a minority faith that was still the object of persecution at the beginning of his reign. How did his subjects react, and why was there (as it seems) so little pagan protest? Perhaps B. is implicitly denying that there were any such profound or important changes. If so, then that too raises the most basic issues of whether a history *can* avoid the subjective, however severe its scholarship. Omission is a positive choice too, particularly when an author has chosen Constantine as his subject.

More fundamentally, however, the very nature of the source material renders questionable the idea that it can be treated according to the rules of objective source criticism, accepting some statements and discarding others. For it reflects the ambiguity that was inherent in the situation itself. It is not that Constantine was 'really' doing one thing rather than another, when it comes to his religious policies; all the different explanations have their own truth. It was one of the strengths of

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what Constantine did that he could for a time be all things to all men. Pagans could find a way of describing his experience in 312 that was satisfactory to them, if not to us (we are no more disposed to believe in the heavenly armies of Constantius than in the vision of Apollo); the orator Nazarius might even allude in flattering terms to the legislation favouring celibacy (Pan. Lat. x (iv). 38). Whether Constantine intended to make deliberate use of it or not, there was much common ground for Christians and pagans in the sun-imagery that is evident in various forms during the reign, not least in the notion of Sunday, the 'day of the sun' (CTh. 2. 8. 1, A.D. 321); Tertullian had commented that pagans had identified the Christian God with Sol because Christians kept this observance (Ad Nat. I. 13). Although the Christian position became more clearly defined as time went on, much ambiguity remained, not merely the 'studied ambiguity' of the Latin panegyrics (Liebeschuetz, Continuity and Change in Roman Religion (1979), 286) but also a real ambiguity in Constantine's actions. He remained pontifex maximus, and after his death, despite Eusebius' attempts to give a totally Christian look to the ceremonial (VC IV. 69), his status in heaven remained ' openended' (Sabine MacCormack, Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity (1981), 120; CE, 401 n. 85, insists that ' the consecration was totally denuded of pagan symbolism '). B. will have nothing to do with notions of ambiguity. Indeed, he puts great weight on another claim only made by the Vita, that after the defeat of Licinius, paganism was seriously attacked and sacrifice expressly forbidden (VC II. 45, cf. CE, 210; the categorical statement of Libanius, Or. 30. 6, that pagan worship was allowed to continue is dismissed without argument as 'totally misleading', p. 377, n. 11). Yet we do not need to suppose, and reject, a deliberately syncretistic aim on Constantine's part or imagine that he had a clearer notion of what Christianity was than have most Christians at most periods of history. It is enough to realize that this genuine ambiguity, at various levels, was an aid to Constantine ; it made it easier for his innovations to find acceptance, and indeed it is striking how little pagan outcry there seems to have been (as evidence of pagan 'shock' at the alleged outlawing of sacrifice B. can cite only Iamblichus, De Myst. 5. 6). But if this is so, we should not try to iron out ambiguity by denying credence to any sources which appear to conflict with the Vita and its Christianizing interpretations, the more so as that work is recognized to be so problematic. With the rigorous critique that is the hallmark of B.'s method there is here a surprising willingness to accept one source, and that a suspect one, over the rest; neither the source material itself nor the subject matter of CE, however, will lend themselves as easily to the technique of selecting some sources and discarding others as the more tractable material used for the most part in NE.

In so complex and detailed a book as CE, whatever the general points that suggest themselves, there will naturally be many other passages that deserve comment besides those I have had the space to mention. A few examples must suffice, for instance the entry into Rome after the defeat of Maxentius, where the sensitive situation is vividly evoked (p. 44 f.), as are the first steps by which Constantine sought to intervene on behalf of Christianity (the 'Edict of Milan' is relegated to a footnote: p. 62, with n. 4). The deaths of Crispus and Fausta are brusquely treated (pp. 220-1), without sensationalism, but also without comment on the psychological effect which the whole affair surely did have on Constantine, even when we discount the excesses of interpretation in the pagan sources; indeed, the account here of the crucial years 326-30 is so densely compressed (pp. 219-23) that it can give no hint of how, or whether, Constantine's attitudes were changing during this period. In general there is insufficient account taken of pagan versions of Constantine's actions; the Christian ones took precedence and have survived, but there were other interpretations current, even if we can only reconstruct them from later writers. Of course B. dismisses a historical connection between Helena's visit to the Holy Land and the later ' finding ' of the True Cross (p. 221 with n. 130), and separates Helena's activities from Constantine's own patronage of the church of the Holy Sepulchre (pp. 221, 248; perhaps, however, the account of the Vita, III. 25 ff., on which this judgement is based, should be read as throwing the initiative on to Constantine in standard panegyrical manner rather than as genuinely distinguishing Helena's patronage from that of her son). But B. devotes no space to the enormous impact given by this church building to the development of Christianity in the eastern provinces or to pilgrimage to the Holy Land, nor is he interested in the way in which the later legends developed in this context (p. 382, n. 130 reads as though the legend of the Cross was a personal aberration of Gelasius rather than a major constituent of later eastern tradition about Constantine and Helena). Occasionally B.'s own attitudes show through, as on Christian asceticism (p. 220-Constantine's law of 1 April, 326, was 'morbid and unwholesome', disregarding 'the natural appetites of men and women '-an anachronistic view). Sometimes a telling juxtaposition will establish in programmatic fashion the lines of a wider argument: thus mention of the defeat of Maxentius in 312 is followed immediately not by the meeting with Licinius (for which see only chapter v) but by a discussion in wide terms of Constantine's measures over the next years to support Christianity through building and legislation (pp. 48 ff.) and an indication of the size of Christian communities at this time (p. 53). Tellingly, the Arch of Constantine, which might have seemed out of place here in the light of its paganizing motifs, gets only a few bland lines with no hint of any

awkward features (p. 47). Thus the unsuspecting reader is led to form a distinct view of Constantine as solidly in favour of Christianity, not realizing that the narrative form has been artfully set aside.

The strength of this presentation of Constantine, however, arises directly from its clear and uncompromising message, and that in turn depends on the coherence of B.'s interpretation of individual pieces of evidence : the pieces all fit to make the whole, just as the book itself is the totality of (though also of course much more than) the many preliminary articles. A careful collation of CE and NE will indeed reveal the stages and the key conclusions in the construction of the whole. There is not much room here for the perhaps or the possibly, nor even very often for the probably. What cannot be known must be ruthlessly excluded. And when one conclusion implies another, the author does not shirk the consequences. Once established as a Christian, Constantine is not allowed to deviate. Once the centrality of the *Vita* is recognized, it is used throughout and discussion deferred until much later, if the economy of the book suggests that. B.'s conclusions arise from the nuts and bolts of the evidence, and they are the more striking for that. Thus CE, as much as NE, is a book about events, not about ideas, and as such it will stand out from many of its rivals in Constantinian scholarship like a mountain in the fog.

There can be no question of B.'s mastery of his chosen materials, and readers of this Journal are unlikely to be mistaken on that score. He has given us a Constantine for Roman historians. Despite the chapters on Eusebius, the construction of B.'s view of Constantine is firmly traditional, built on source criticism and the close analysis of texts. In many ways such a view will appear astringent and refreshing. It calls to mind the Augustus of the Roman Revolution, who was also the author of a social transformation after a ruthless rise to power and a culminating, much-advertised victory. Like that of Augustus, the transformation under Constantine could be represented as a restoration, Constantine as the conservator of Rome. It must, then, seem something of a paradox that these two books, so severely aimed at objective scholarship, in fact refuse to analyse in detail the foundations of Constantine's power and his support, and concentrate instead exactly on the ' Christian career' of the emperor. For even here, the nature of Constantine's Christianity, the reasons why it prevailed, are left aside. The ' complex story ' of CE explains instead the external steps by which Constantine's rule was achieved, and in those terms this is a story which Roman historians will find reassuringly familiar. It is less certain whether those who are more used to the approach which B. condemns as subjective ' will realize, on failing to find it here, the real extent of B.'s achievement. The stated aim of CE is to delineate Constantine the man and the course of his actions. He emerges, in B.'s own words (p. 275), as ' neither a saint nor a tyrant ', nor yet ' wholly enigmatic ', a Roman emperor who differed from his predecessors in one thing only-his sincerely held conviction that ' God had given him a special mission to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity' (the last sentence of CE; see also p. 43). How much those words leave to be said.

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