Suggestions of Date in Constantine's Oration to the Saints

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SUGGESTIONS OF DATE IN CONSTANTINE'S *ORATION TO THE SAINTS**

The oration *To the Assembly of the Saints* attributed to Constantine the Great comes down to us appended to manuscripts of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Life* of that emperor.[1] It purports to be a Greek translation of a speech composed by the emperor in Latin. In twenty-six chapters of what is best described as a fourth century version of "pop philosophy," Constantine offers a defense of Christianity and an exhortation to the pious life, implicitly and sometimes explicitly celebrating as well his own pious career. Its genuineness has been questioned, but scholars of the present generation have shown themselves willing to presume authenticity, no doubt in reaction against the hyper-criticism of earlier generations.[2]

Instead, the question of date has taken preeminence in the past dozen years, which have seen the appearance of several studies, varying widely in assumptions, methods, and conclusions.[3] The reason for this

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[1]I. A. Heikel, ed., *Eusebius' Werke*, I, GCS 7 (Leipzig 1902) 154-92. References in subsequent notes that are preceded by "H." refer to page and line of this edition.

[2]Suspicion first was cast on the *Oratio* by J.-P. Rossignol, *Virgile et Constantin le Grand* (Paris 1845). It suffered particularly at the hands of Heikel, *Kritische Beiträge zu den Constantin-Schriften des Eusebius* (Leipzig 1911) ch. 1, then became a victim of a general attack on the authenticity of the *Life* and its documents launched in the 1930s by Henri Grégoire. In a lengthy and judicious 1931 review, Norman Baynes denied its use as evidence for Constantine's personal convictions: *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London 1972) n. 19. The tide began to turn in the 1950s with publication of a contemporary copy of one of the documents in the *Life* by A. H. M. Jones and T. C. Skeat, "Notes on the Genuineness of the Constantinian Documents in Eusebius' 'Life of Constantine,'" *JEH* 5 (1954) 194-200. Significant problems remain, and the very nature of the work makes it likely that some always will. But a more flexible attitude was signaled by H. Dörries, *Das Selbstzeugnis Kaiser Konstantins* (Göttingen 1954) 147-61, putting the burden of proof on those who would deny authenticity.

[3]See, e.g., R. P. C. Hanson, "The ORATIO AD SANCTOS Attributed to the Emperor Constantine and the Oracle at Daphne," *JTS*[2] 24 (1973) 505-11; S. Mazzarino, "La data dell' *Oratio ad sanctorum coetum*...," in *Antico, tardantico ed èra costantiniana* I (Rome 1974) ch. 5, pp. 99-150; T. D. Barnes, "The Emperor Constantine's Good Friday Sermon," *JTS*[2] 27 (1976) 414-23; D. DeDecker, "Le discours à l'assemblée des Saints attribué à Constantin et l'oeuvre de Lactance," in J. Fontaine and M. Perrin, eds., *Lactance et son temps* (Paris 1978) 75-87.

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labor is self-evident. Not only would a precise date help resolve the question of authenticity, but also it would enhance the *Oration*'s value as a piece of Constantine's "self-witness" by placing it in the context of his political and religious growth. Yet it will be a final purpose of this present review to propose that precisely for this reason concern to find an exact date may itself be profoundly misleading.

Unfortunately, no date attaches to the *Oration*, nor is there any direct indication of one in Eusebius' description of it in the *Life*.[4] Perforce, scholars have had to rely on information provided in an address whose nature it is to be allusive and imprecise about historical matters: it was written, alas, to celebrate the Providence of God, not to lighten the load of future investigators. Potentially fruitful allusions are strewn throughout the work, but these present the obvious temptation of reading more into an innocent or irrelevant remark than the author could ever have intended. Primary attention must be paid, therefore, to the emperor's few direct references to events of the day.

Of these there are only three. The first occurs at the very outset, where his words make clear that Constantine was speaking on a Good Friday—a fact by itself not terribly enlightening, but one which has proved crucial when combined with other variables.[5] The second comes at the start of chapter 22, as the *Oration* traditionally has been divided. At the end of the preceding chapter, Constantine began an address to Piety, invoking her as his helpmate and, with Clemency, the source of his inspiration. He now continues:

> To your favor [Piety], I assign my good fortune and all that is mine. The outcome of everything in accordance with [my] prayers bears witness to this: acts of bravery, victories, trophies over enemies. Even the great city knows this, and approves with praise, and the people of the dearest city concur, even though, having been misled by false hopes, they preferred a champion unworthy of her, who was swiftly conquered, in a manner both suitable to and worthy of the things he had dared.[6]

Constantine proceeds to discuss the "tyrants," whose war against Piety was thwarted by the steadfastness of the martyrs (22.2). He then ad-

[4]F. Winkelmann, ed., *De vita Constantini* (*VC*) 4.32 (Berlin 1975) 132.

[5]*Oratio* 1.1: ἡ τοῦ παθήματος ἡμέρα πάρεστιν (H. 154.5). For examples of the significance of the day, see Barnes (note 3 above) 416.

[6]*Oratio* 22.1: σύνοιδεν δὲ καὶ μετ' εὐφημίας ἐπαινεῖ καὶ ἡ μεγάλη πόλις, βούλεται δὲ καὶ ὁ δῆμος τῆς φιλτάτης πόλεως, εἰ καὶ πρὸς ταῖς σφαλεραῖς ἐλπίσιν ἐξαπατηθεὶς ἀνάξιον ἑαυτῆς προείλετο προστάτην, ὃς παραχρῆμα ἑάλω προσηκόντως τε καὶ ἀξίως τοῖς ἑαυτῷ τετολμημένοις . . . (H. 188.1-4).

dresses one of these tyrants directly, unfortunately invoking him only as the "most impious of men" (22.4). Your defense, he says to this one, doubtless would be that you were safeguarding the honor of the gods and defending the ancestral ways and public opinion.[7]

The final piece of information occurs at the end of chapter 25. After a stinging rebuke of Diocletian for authorizing the persecution, Constantine claims that, in retribution,

> the entire army of the aforementioned emperor, having fallen subject to the authority of a certain worthless individual who seized the Roman imperium by force, was destroyed in many and various battles when the Providence of God was liberating the great city.[8]

The concluding chapter of the work calls on all men to render thanks for the victory won by the Providence of God and Constantine's prayers.

These statements seem sufficiently detailed to provide at least a *terminus post quem* by which to date the *Oration*, if their subject can be identified. Unfortunately, such a task is not as easy as it might seem. Clearly they refer to an opponent of Constantine's, and scholars long took this, and the reference to the liberation of a great city, as indications of the famous battle Constantine fought with Maxentius in October 312 for control of the city of Rome. Intimately bound as it is with the conversion experience which traditionally first aligned Constantine with Christianity, the Battle of the Milvian Bridge qualifies in modern eyes as no other battle can for Constantine to celebrate in a speech to a Christian audience.[9]

[7] *Oratio* 22.4-5.

[8] *Oratio* 25.4: πᾶν γὰρ τὸ τοῦ προειρημένου βασιλέως στράτευμα, ὑποταχθὲν ἐξουσίᾳ τινὸς ἀχρήστου βίᾳ τε τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ἁρπάσαντος, προνοίας θεοῦ τὴν μεγάλην πόλιν ἐλευθερούσης, πολλοῖς καὶ παντοδαποῖς πολέμοις ἀνήλωται (H. 191.24-27).

[9] Valois translated the "great city" as "Roma" in his edition: Migne, *PG* 20, col. 1303, with n. 86, and Heikel, although attacking the authenticity of the work, took the passage as reference to Maxentius in his *Kritische Beiträge* (note 2 above) 40. A. Kurfess argued that the *Oration* was delivered in the aftermath of this battle ("Kaiser Konstantins Rede an die Versammlung der Heiligen, ein Karfreitagsrede von Jahre 313," *Pastor Bonus* [1930] 115-24). A. Piganiol, "Dates constantiniennes," *RHPhR* 12 (1932) 371, took Maxentius as the subject of this passage, although he thought the remainder of the *Oration* dealt with Licinius. Studies of the significance of this battle to Constantine abound. Particularly useful are N. H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London 1972) 9, n. 25 and 32; R. MacMullen, "Constantine and the Miraculous," *GRBS* 9 (1968) 81-96. Testimonia are collected in J. Aufhauser, *Konstantins Kreuzevision* (Bonn 1912).

But there are difficulties with this identification. For the passage from chapter 25 appears to say that Diocletian's army, now subject to this "worthless individual," also was destroyed, and no stretch of the scholarly imagination has been able to explain how Maxentius, whose rule was confined to Italy at the time of the battle, could have had control of Diocletian's army in the East. To complicate matters further, the heading to chapter 22 identifies the tyrant addressed therein not as Maxentius but Maximinus, presumably meaning thereby the persecutor Maximin Daia.[10]

Other candidates have accordingly been brought forward, as well as other dates and events. Two particularly engaging and fruitful studies have been presented by S. Mazzarino, who identifies the opponent as Licinius, the city as Byzantium, and the date as 325; and T. D. Barnes, who opts for Galerius, Serdica, and 317.[11] The means used by each scholar to reach his conclusion are as instructive as the conclusions themselves.

Assuming from the similarity of expression that Constantine's opponent in chapter 22 is identical to the one mentioned in chapter 25, Mazzarino concludes that no opponent other than Licinius can meet all of the conditions indicated in this work. As Constantine's co-ruler in the East for more than a dozen years, Licinius qualifies as an heir to Diocletian's army. Moreover, prior to the outbreak of war with Constantine in 324, he undertook restrictive, if not persecuting, measures against Christians, and during that war Byzantium served him as a major base; its fall led shortly after to his own disgrace, exile, and eventual execution.

Mazzarino also sees the use of direct address in chapter 22 as an indication that the "most impious of men" was alive when Constantine spoke. This strengthens his case for Licinius, for none of the other contenders could conceivably have been so, Galerius having died in 311 and both Maxentius and Maximin Daia perishing in, or shortly after, their respective defeats. But if the *Oration* is dated to the Good Friday subsequent to Constantine's victory over Licinius—16 April 325—then it is

[10]κβ΄. Εὐχαριστία Χριστῷ τὰς νίκας καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἀγαθὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπιγράφουσα, καὶ ἔλεγχος τοῦ κατ᾽ αὐτῶν τυράννου Μαξιμίνου τῷ μεγέθει τοῦ διωγμοῦ μείζονα δόξαν τῇ εὐσεβείᾳ περιποιήσαντος (H. 153.1-4).

[11]Mazzarino (note 3 above) 115; Barnes (note 3 above) 423.

just possible for Licinius still to have been alive, since he spent some months in exile before being put to death.[12]

Barnes takes a different approach. Arguing that the heading for chapter 22 conforms to Eusebius' practice and therefore probably was written either by him or his editor, Barnes concludes that it provides a contemporary identification of Galerius, Diocletian's lieutenant and successor as chief Augustus, as the author of the Great Persecution.[13] His reasoning is intricate, as indeed it must be, since the heading refers not to Galerius but "the tyrant Maximinus," apparently disqualifying Galerius both by name and title, since as an emperor legitimately invested with the purple he should not be called a "tyrant." Barnes shows, however, that in Christian usage this term also was applied to persecutors and, as such, fits Galerius. The name "Maximinus" poses less of a problem, since emending it by insertion of an easily omitted "a" produces "Maximianus," Galerius' official name.[14]

With one exception, Barnes finds that the contents of chapter 22 apply exclusively to Galerius: only he can be accused of declaring war on Christianity, torturing and executing Christians, and justifying his policy with oracles. Constantine's allusion to the death of this "unworthy champion" also, according to Barnes, "fits Galerius perfectly—and Galerius alone." The single exception, for Barnes, occurs at chapter 22.2, where, after listing the crimes against the martyrs, Constantine speaks of "those at Rome who rejoiced at such great public evils." These, Barnes concedes, cannot include Galerius, who never entered Rome during this period; the passage, therefore, must be an "allusion to Maxentius" which Constantine has intruded "into a context which is otherwise concerned with Galerius alone."[15]

With the subject of the passage thus identified, Barnes proceeds to identify the "great city" and the date of the *Oration*. The city, he stipulates, must be one in which Constantine is speaking, and one in which

[12]Mazzarino, loc. cit. No date is given in the sources for Licinius' execution. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981) 214, connects it with the *damnatio memoriae* of one of the consuls for 325 in May of that year, suggesting a pagan rebellion which made Licinius too dangerous to tolerate, even as a private citizen.

[13]Barnes (note 3 above) 420-21. For an argument against Eusebian authorship of the chapter headings in the *VC*, see R. T. Ridley, "Anonymity in the Vita Constantini," *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 241-58.

[14]Barnes (note 3 above) 416, 420.

[15]Ibid., p. 421.

the "unworthy champion" died "soon after taking up residence there." It must, therefore, be Serdica, the city in which Galerius died "not many years" after making it his capital, and one which Constantine used as a base between 317 and 324. From his known whereabouts on Good Friday, Constantine must have delivered the *Oration* in Serdica in 317.[16]

When two such meticulous scholars arrive at such contradictory conclusions, caution, if not despair, is advisable. Yet on reflection it seems clear that both scholars made stipulations that limited their range of options unnecessarily.

The attributes, for instance, that Barnes sees as peculiarly Galerian—hostility to Christians, use of oracles, a miserable end—apply equally well to other of Constantine's rivals.[17] To deny the apparent identification of Rome as the "great city," he compresses the eight years Galerius used Serdica as a capital into "soon after," and ignores completely the necessary implication of the text that the city chose its champion, not vice versa. Such contortions suggest that Barnes was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to defend his earlier choice of Galerius as the real author of the Great Persecution against the claim that Constantine fails to name him as such in this *Oration*.[18]

Mazzarino's argument is more subtle, but it also makes important stipulations. Like Barnes, he rejects the simplest identification of the opponent as Maxentius and the "great city" as Rome. The city cannot be Rome, he argues, because Maxentius was the only one of Constantine's opponents to hold sovereignty there; and Maxentius cannot be the tyrant addressed because he never persecuted Christians. Therefore, he concludes, the "great city" of the *Oration* must be Byzantium, and the honeyed language Constantine uses for both the city and its inhabitants

[16]Ibid., pp. 421, 423. Barnes subsequently has wavered on the date, opting more tentatively for a period between 321 and 324, but he still holds that "my central argument is sound." See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (note 12 above) 73, with n. 115.

[17]Maxentius, for instance, consulted oracles before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, and his death can hardly be called pleasant: Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 44.1, 8; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 9.3; *VC* 1.37 38. Eusebius specifically accuses Licinius of persecuting Christians and practicing divination prior to his war with Constantine (*VC* 2.1-5). Maximin Daia's hostility to Christianity, devotion to the "ancient ways," and miserable death are all well attested (Lactant. *De mort. pers.*, chs. 36,49; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 9.10-11).

[18]See the revealing comments in "Sermon" (note 3 above) 422, with n. 6.

shows that the emperor's thinking about his new capital already was set as early as 325.[19]

Such reasoning raises problems. It is true that modern scholars have determined that Constantine's opponent at the Milvian Bridge was no persecutor, but by 325 he surely had become one in Constantinian propaganda.[20] It is also true that Constantine remade Byzantium into a second capital, but there is no reason to believe that he also transferred to it — especially as early as 325 — an epithet more readily associated with Rome, or that he would have been understood had he done so: years later, this phrase still meant the traditional capital to Eusebius.[21] On this point, therefore, Mazzarino's argument does not support his choice of Licinius as the subject of the address.

Mazzarino's conclusion that Constantine's use of direct address in chapter 22.4 means that his rival must have been alive at the time he spoke also seems unnecessary. The invocation of the "most impious of men" is only one of a series of direct addresses which Constantine uses in these final chapters, beginning with Piety in chapter 21 and including the persecutors Decius, Valerian, and Aurelian — all of whom were surely dead — in chapter 24.[22] As in the other cases, so here its use is most likely to have been rhetorical. For the intent of the passage is to make the "most impious of men" see the error of his ways. If meant literally

[19]Mazzarino (note 3 above) 114. Mazzarino also argues (p. 115) that Maxentius is excluded by Constantine's use of the plural "tyrants" in ch. 22 (H. 188.9), which he uses to refer to Licinius and his son as co-rulers. The argument neglects the fact that Maxentius also had a son. But Constantine's more likely reference is to the persecutors as a group: his switch to the passive voice suggests that he is no longer speaking of the "unworthy champion" at this point (see below, p. 343).

[20]Piganiol (note 9 above) took the presumed identification of Maxentius as a persecutor as evidence that the *Oration* could not have been delivered as early as 313, but saw no conflict with a date of 323. On Maxentius' policies, see A. Pincherle, "La politica ecclesiastica di Massenzio," *Studi Italiana di Filologia Classica* 7 (1929) 131-43; H. von Schoenebeck, *Beiträge zur Religionspolitik des Maxentius und Constantin,* Klio Beiheft 43, n.s. 30 (1939; repr. 1962); D. DeDecker, "La politique religieuse de Maxence," *Byzantion* 38 (1968) 472-562.

[21]ἀλλ' ἔτι καὶ νῦν τίς ἀγνοεῖ κατὰ τὴν μεγάλην πόλιν τῇ τοῦ Λατ[ρ]ιαρίου Διὸς ἑορτῇ σφαγιαζόμενον ἄνθρωπον; [*LC*] XIII.7 (H. 239.5-6). The phrase is from an oration on the Holy Sepulchre delivered in 335, which has become mixed in the mss. with Eusebius' *laus Constantini* (*LC*) of 336. Valois saw the significance of this passage for understanding Constantine's usage (see note 9 above).

[22]*Oratio* 21.4 (Piety); 24.1 (Decius); 24.2 (Valerian); 24.3 (Aurelian).

for Licinius, it would require him to be not merely alive but also still capable of pursuing an independent policy: exhortations to a Licinius alive but beaten and stripped of the purple make little more sense than ones addressed to a dead Galerius or Maxentius or Maximin Daia. Yet Licinius cannot still have been regnant at the time the *Oration* was delivered—if indeed it is his persecution being attacked—for in this case the note it strikes of victory and an end to persecution would be distinctly out of place.

The strongest argument for Mazzarino's choice comes from a different assumption, which is that chapters 22 and 25 must speak of one and the same individual. But is the assumption necessary? Barnes tacitly assumed that chapters 22 and 25 deal with separate events, and even found a third opponent "intruded" into one of the chapters. Others have observed that Constantine follows the tone and argument of Lactantius in these pages.[23] If this is so, then chapters 22 and 25 should not be read in terms of a single person or event, but instead as a synopsis—albeit in highly condensed form—of a series of events.

On this reading, Constantine begins chapter 22 at the obvious place, by speaking of his own victory over Maxentius, Rome's "unworthy champion." Significantly, in light of Mazzarino's argument, Constantine does not call this "unworthy champion" a persecutor, stating only that he was punished for "the things he had dared." Only in the next passage does persecution come up, as Constantine speaks of the madness of the tyrants. But by this point he has clearly changed the subject, although his shorthand style makes the change an easy one to overlook.

Constantine began, it will be recalled, by modestly attributing all his successes to Piety. Rhetoric clearly is at work, and all but the most naïve reader will understand by this gambit that Constantine now intends to recount his great deeds. It is as witnesses to his success that the "great city" and its people are invoked, with Constantine adding that they did so even though initially they had "preferred a champion unworthy of her, who was swiftly captured, in a manner suitable to and worthy of the things he had dared." For all the attention scholars have lavished on him, the "unworthy champion" arises in what is little more than an aside, a grudging admission on Constantine's part that the Divine Hand was at one point not as apparent as it should have been.

[23]So Piganiol (note 9 above) 372. Barnes decided ch. 25 refers to Licinius in "Sermon" (note 3 above, 423).

What were the "things he had dared"? Constantine demurs. They are "things which ought not to be recalled, especially by me as I hold converse with you [Piety] and make every effort to address you with gentle and auspicious language." Not surprisingly, given the rhetorical tone of this chapter, Constantine proceeds immediately to discuss such deeds.

> But I will say something which may not be improper or unfitting. An implacable war once was waged against you, Piety, and all your most holy churches, by the tyrants who excelled in madness and cruelty, and there was not lacking certain of those in Rome who rejoiced at such great public evils; the field was prepared for war.[24]

Scholars have rightly assumed that by the war against Piety Constantine means the persecution of Christians. But is he still speaking of the "unworthy champion"? The voice has changed to the passive, and with it the subject as well: "tyrants," as yet unspecified, are responsible for this war. Assuming, for the moment, that the "unworthy champion" is Maxentius, his only part in this sentence is among those in Rome who "rejoiced" at this turn of events. Maxentius is indeed insinuated into this passage, but in a way which suggests Constantine has used the compressed form of his narrative to finesse a point: he cannot call Maxentius a persecutor directly, so he will accuse him of guilt by association.

At this point, after brief praise for the steadfastness of the martyrs, Constantine invokes the "most impious of men."

> What did you benefit, then, daring these things, most impious of men? Why did you take such leave of your senses? You will say that it was because of the honor due to the gods. What sort are these? Or what sort of concept do you hold in any way worthy of the divine nature? . . . You will say, perhaps, that it was because of ancestral customs and public opinion. I agree. Because those customs, like the events, are the products of one and the same folly.[25]

[24] *Oratio* 22.2: ἐρῶ δέ τι ἴσως οὐκ ἄσχημον οὐδὲ ἀπρεπές. ὑπερβάλλων μέντοι μανίᾳ καὶ ὠμότητι προκεκήρυκτό σοί ποτε, ὦ θεοσέβεια, καὶ πάσαις ταῖς ἁγιωτάταις σου ἐκκλησίαις ὑπὸ τυράννων πόλεμος ἄσπονδος, καὶ οὐκ ἐπέλειψάν τινες τῶν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ τηλικούτοις ἐπιχαίροντες δημοσίοις κακοῖς, παρεσκεύαστο δὲ καὶ πεδίον τῇ μάχῃ (H. 188.7–12).

[25] *Oratio* 22.4–5: τί οὖν ταῦτα τολμῶν ὤνησας, ὦ δυσσεβέστατε; τί δὲ τὸ αἴτιον τῆς ἐκστάσεως τῶν φρενῶν; ἐρεῖς ὅτι διὰ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς τιμήν· τίνας τούτους; ἢ ποίαν τινὰ ἀξίαν τῆς θείας φύσεως λαμβάνεις ἔννοιαν; ... ἐρεῖς ἴσως διὰ τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν προγόνων νομισθέντα καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑπόληψιν· συγχωρῶ. καὶ γάρ ἐστι παραπλήσια τοῖς δρωμένοις τὰ νομιζόμενα μιᾶς τε καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ἀφροσύνης·

It is hard to read this passage without thinking of Galerius, whose deathbed edict ending the persecution explained the policy as an effort to restore the ancestral gods.[26] But if Galerius' edict is on Constantine's mind, then his use of the future tense, as well as "perhaps" (ἴσως), is being unnecessarily coy. There is, however, another persecutor who used ancestral ways and, in particular, public opinion to justify his actions, and who is, incidentally, cited by name in the chapter heading as it comes down in the manuscripts: he is Maximin Daia, Augustus in the Orient and, until his death in the summer of 313, the most versatile and relentless of the persecutors.[27]

If Constantine is indeed following a sequence of events, then the logic which led him to turn to Daia at this point becomes clear. For in the papers of the defeated Maxentius, Constantine discovered an alliance made with Daia, in defense against the one Constantine himself had made with Licinius.[28] This pact, linking the tolerant Maxentius with the Church's most bitter enemy, was a propaganda bonanza for Constantine. It justified his invasion of Italy and provided the first stroke on a canvas which, fleshed out by time, depicted Maxentius as a tyrant and persecutor.

The argument of the chapter thus runs: Maxentius was rightly conquered because, despite the cruelty of the persecution which the tyrants had sponsored, he put his personal interest above the public interest in allying with the "most impious of men." It is thus Daia, not Maxentius, who is the primary object of Constantine's attention in this chapter and, by extension, in the remaining chapters of the *Oration*. For as Augustus in the Orient he was the direct heir to the army of Diocletian, precisely as Constantine describes him in chapter 25. Here, too, however, a compressed narrative, as well as what might be an ulterior motive on Constantine's part, has kept Daia's identity from being as obvious as it might.

[26]Lactant. *De mort. pers.*, ch. 34; Eusebius prints a Greek translation in *Hist. Eccl.* 8.17.

[27]For Maximin's use of both religious custom and public opinion, see Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 9.2-7 and 9.9a for Maximin's letter in defense of his policies. For modern studies see H. Castritus, *Studien zu Maximinus Daia*, Frankfurter Althistorische Studien, Heft 2 (Kallmünz 1969); G. S. R. Thomas, "Maximin Daia's Policy and the Edicts of Toleration," *Antiquité Classique* 37 (1968) 172-85; R. M. Grant, "The Religion of Maximin Daia," in *Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults* (Leiden 1975) IV, 143-66.

[28]Lactant. *De mort. pers.*, chs. 43-44.

In this passage, Constantine speaks again of the liberation of the "great city," providing the grounds for Mazzarino and others to assume that he was speaking of the same event, and thus the same individual, as in chapter 22. But that victory is not here the subject of the passage; it is mentioned in a participial phrase to provide a relative date for the event under discussion, the destruction of Diocletian's army:

> For the entire army of the aforementioned emperor, having fallen subject to the authority of a certain worthless individual who seized the Roman imperium by force, when the foresight of God was liberating the great city, was destroyed in many and various battles.

The actual subject is the destruction of Diocletian's army, which occurred in not one but "many and various" battles, and which was brought on by an attempt to "seize the Roman imperium by force." In much abbreviated form, this sentence refers precisely to the events of 313, when Daia invaded Licinius' territories, catching the allies by surprise as they conferred in Milan. Licinius destroyed Daia's main force near Adrianople, but Daia himself escaped to raise a new army in Asia Minor. Only after several months of pursuit and skirmish did the persecutor concede defeat and commit suicide.[29]

The victory in chapter 25 thus is not Constantine's own but Licinius', and Constantine once again follows Lactantius in carrying his story down to the destruction of the last of the Tetrarchic persecutors. With not a little skill, he has managed to tell the story in such a way as to keep attention focused on his own deeds, thereby ensuring maximum credit to himself and the very minimum to Licinius, who is not even identified by name.

Chapters 22–25 thus deal with the events of A.D. 312–313. Since Daia's defeat did not occur until Easter of 313 had passed, the earliest date at which the *Oration* might have been delivered is the subsequent Good Friday, 16 April 314.[30] Yet Constantine's choice of these events does not, by itself, mean he was in fact speaking so early. Taking Rome was decisive to his fortunes, and it became the great foundation legend

[29]Lactant. *De mort. pers.*, chs. 45–49.

[30]Easter in 313 fell on 29 March, whereas Daia's defeat can be dated precisely to 30 April by Lactantius' comment that he chose the day before his imperial anniversary, 1 May, for the battle. O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste* (Stuttgart 1919; repr Frankfurt 1964) 160; Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 46.8–9. Daia's suicide, described by Lactantius in ch. 49, probably did not occur until July: T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass. 1982) 67.

of his reign. Constantine still enjoyed talking about it many years later when Eusebius heard the story, and Eusebius himself preferred it to more recent events when giving an official address at the very end of Constantine's long reign.[31]

The apparent lack of reference to either of Constantine's wars with Licinius—in 316 or 324—is, therefore, no certain proof that the *Oration* was delivered before either had occurred. Too much can be made as well of the backhanded way in which Constantine refers to Licinius' victory over Daia. It could reflect a period of hostility between the two, as Barnes suggests, but like all Romans, Constantine was a vainglorious man. According to Peter the Patrician, he shared fame with such worthies as Augustus and Trajan only grudgingly; there is no reason to believe he ever would have been more generous to the likes of Licinius.[32]

The *Oration*'s theme of victory and its celebration of the end of persecution are a more certain indication of date. For such topics would have been out of place had Licinius begun to take active measures against Christians, as he appears to have done by 319 or 320 at the latest,[33] and they would have remained so anytime between then and his defeat in the fall of 324. The *Oration* can, on these grounds, be limited to two periods: the first, from the defeat of Daia to the beginning of Licinius' anti-Christian measures, say A.D. 314–319; the second, from the first Easter following the defeat of Licinius to any time before Constantine's death, A.D. 325–337.

Can the date be made any more precise? Barnes hoped to do so by finding a correlation between a "great city" and Constantine's known whereabouts on Good Friday of different years.[34] This approach depended, however, on the assumption that Constantine must have been speaking in the city to which he refers—an assumption prompted by the special tone of his references. But this assumption, in turn, rested upon another—that the city in question could not be Rome. Once Rome is identified as the city in question, the possibility of making such a corre-

[31] *LC* 9.8 (H. 219.2–16). The reference to Constantine's war against Maxentius is confirmed by Eusebius' use of the phrase βασιλευούσῃ πόλει (H. 219.13) for the site of the victory.

[32] Const. Porph. *Excerpta Historica*, IV: *Excerpta de sententiis*, ed. U. Boissevain, p. 271.191; cf. Mueller, *FGH* IV, p. 199.15.2. Barnes detected hostility in "Sermon" (note 3 above, 423).

[33] F. Görries, *Kritische Untersuchungen über die licinianische Christenverfolgung* (Jena 1875) 19; Barnes (note 12 above) 71–72.

[34] Barnes (note 3 above) 416, 423.

lation disappears. For the special status of Rome would have been conceded anywhere in the Empire, making Constantine's language appropriate—indeed, perhaps obligatory—wherever he spoke.

Without a city on which to triangulate, Constantine's whereabouts no longer promise a key to the mystery of date. But less mechanical approaches are still possible. Chapter 22.1, which has been so central to the discussion thus far, may also be exploited for a date. In looking at this passage, scholars have been concerned only to identify the "great city" and its "unworthy champion." An obvious question, therefore, has not been asked: why, in a speech devoted to a confession and celebration of Constantine's faith, and to the divine favor it has brought, did the emperor find it necessary to admit that the "people of the dearest city" preferred his opponent to himself, even if only initially? And who are the people so precious that their failure to support Constantine must even now be explained? They are not simply the *plebs Romana*: the scorn that Constantine professes throughout this *Oration* for the ignorant opposition of the masses[35] makes it unlikely that concern for their opinion would have prompted such an embarrassing admission. These are people who had been "misled by false hopes" into selecting their champion. Exegesis of the succeeding narrative has revealed that these "false hopes" were the belief that Maxentius did not support the Tetrarchy's policy of persecution. They were dashed only after the event, by discovery of Maxentius' pact with Maximin Daia, which allowed Constantine to place him among "those in Rome who rejoiced at such great public evils."

It must be that these people are the Christians of Rome. Remarks in the *Oration* make it clear that Constantine was speaking to a Christian audience,[36] and this would explain why he had no choice but to answer for the failure of this particular constituency immediately to rec-

[35]E.g., *Oratio* 4.1: δόξα δὲ τῶν ἀλογίστων δήμων (H. 157.20); IX.5: παρὰ τοῖς ἀλογίστοις τῶν ἀνθρώπων (H. 164.1); XXI.4: ὁ δὲ ἄπειρος ὄχλος (H. 187.23). See also, in this very chapter, Constantine's ridicule of the "most impious of men" for using public opinion as a defense (22.5, H. 188.27 ff.) and note 25 above.

[36]In the first sentence of the *Oration*, Constantine refers to his hearers as προσφιλέστατοι καθηγηταί (*Oratio* 1.1, H. 154.5), a term identified by Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, as a title of address for Christian bishops. In ch. 2, Constantine addresses the president of the meeting, praising his age and celibacy, and the personified Church (H. 155.21-22), and calls on his hearers to be indulgent of the doctrinal exposition that follows. The title of the *Oration*, of course, as well as the subject matter, also suggest a Christian audience.

ognize his own superior claim to their allegiance. It is a stunning admission, with implications for interpreting the *Oration*—indeed, for interpreting Constantine's whole career—that have yet to be assessed.

This interpretation of chapter 22.1 requires an early date for delivery of the *Oration*, for within a matter of years the problem was solved by rewriting the early career of Maxentius. The pages of Eusebius are instructive. In his treatment of Maxentius in the *Church History*, probably written around 315, Eusebius portrays Constantine's enemy as a ruler whose friendliness to the Church proved to be false when he allied himself with the arch-persecutor. In the *Life of Constantine*, written more than twenty years later, Maxentius appears in the more familiar guise of the tyrant whose villainies against the Church provoked Constantine to action and precipitated his conversion experience.[37]

The relatively passive and subsidiary role assigned to Maxentius in the *Oration* thus would also speak for an early date. For here he is still a secondary figure, whose crime amounts primarily to casting his lot with Maximin Daia. Instead, it is Daia who is the focus of Constantine's judgment, receiving a measure of attention and scorn out of all proportion to the role scholars now assign him in relation to Galerius and Licinius. This would be more readily understood if the *Oration* was delivered in the flush of his defeat.

Too much of this conclusion rests on interpretation for it to be put forward with any claim to scientific finality. The minimal role of Maxentius and focus on Daia could be as readily explained by locating the *Oration* in the East, where Daia's impact was felt most strongly. Such a locale would also make it easier to explain why Eusebius ignored the implications of Constantine's remarks for his relations with the Christians of Rome, and how he managed to have a copy of the *Oration* to append to his *Life* in the first place. But it would also require a date in the last period of Constantine's reign, when he both controlled and resided in the East.[38]

[37]Cf. *Hist. Eccl.* 8.14 (esp. 1-7) and 9.9 with *VC* 1.26-40.

[38]DeDecker found signs of a "milieu antiochéen" in the *Oration:* see "Évocation de la Bible dans le 'Discours à l'Assemblée des Saints' prêté à l'empereur Constantin," *Studia Biblica* 1978 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 11) I, 136, and note 3 above. Barnes (note 3 above, 417) has argued that the absence of "Victor" (Νικητὴς) from Constantine's nomenclature in the *Oration*'s title demands a date earlier than 324. But use of the epithet appears not to have been so consistent. See C. Ehrhardt, "'Maximus,' 'Invictus,' und 'Victor' als Datierungskriterien auf Inschriften Konstantins des Grossen," *ZPE* 38 (1980) 177-81.

The *Oration* thus defies a precise date. But does it need one? Eusebius appended it to the *Life* not as evidence for Constantine's conversion or of any of the particular acts of his reign, but as an example of the emperor's developed thought. It was, he says, a type of speech that Constantine was always giving, and indeed its contents bear remarkable similarity to one which Eusebius later says the emperor gave shortly before his death in 337.[39] It seems clear, then, that Eusebius took the *Oration to the Saints* as a valid guide to Constantine's thinking at the very last stages of his reign, and scholars who would try to limit its use merely to one period or another run the risk of assuming precisely what we would most like this *Oration* to prove: that the momentous decisions of his reign had an impact of any sort on the religious conceptions of the first Christian emperor.

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[39]Eusebius' specific reference to the *Oration*, at *VC* 4.32, occurs in the context of an extended discussion of the emperor's pious habits. He speaks more generally of Constantine's writings and speeches at *VC* 3.24 and 4.29. For the account of an oration delivered shortly before his death, see *VC* 4.55.