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A Pagan's Reaction to Constantine's Conversion

Religious References in the Trier Panegyric of A.D. 313

In August of A.D. 313 Constantine the Great returned to Trier, a lovely city on the banks of the Moselle river in northern Gaul, which served as his imperial capital for the northwestern quarter of the Roman Empire.[1] He had been gone for most of the last year and a half. He had waged war in Italy to overthrow the usurper Maxentius during the spring, summer and autumn of 312. Then, he had resided in Rome to establish his rule and policies over the Italian and African provinces won in the war, and had met with his eastern co-Augustus Licinius in Milan to strengthen their imperial alliance and establish a common religious policy during the next winter. And finally, he had returned to Gaul and fought a successful campaign against the barbarians along the Rhine frontier in the spring and summer of 313 (Pl. I, a).[2] An imperial *adventus* was always an important occasion, but this one especially so since Constantine had accomplished so much during his absence. The signal victory over Maxentius had brought Italy and Africa back under the control of the legitimate imperial college after a six-year exclusion, and the Roman Senate in gratitude had voted Constantine numerous honors, including the rank of senior emperor.[3] The meeting in Milan had resulted in an empire-wide policy of religious toleration.[4] And both the defeat of the Franks and the emperor's presence in Gaul again made his northern subjects feel much more secure.[5] Thus, in the days following Constantine's arrival, a number of festivities were held to celebrate his accomplishments and to vent his subjects' joy at the imperial *adventus*.[6] Among these were parades and triumphal processions, circus and arena games — including beast fights with the barbarians recently captured along the Rhine,[7] and an official panegyrical oration intended "to bring the festival to a rousing climax by uniting everyone in strong emotional approval of the emperor"[8] (Pl. I, b & c).

1. On Trier and northern Gaul in late Roman times, see: Edith Mary Wightman, *Roman Trier and the Treveri* (New York, 1971), esp. pp. 58-123, and *Gallia Belgica* (Berkeley, 1985), esp. pp. 202-242.
2. The contemporary ancient literary sources for these events are: *Panegyricus* IX & *Panegyricus* X, Latin texts and French translations by E. Galletier, *Panégyriques Latins,* Tome II (Paris, 1952); Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum,* Latin text edited by Samuel Brandt in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum,* Vol. XXVII, Fac. II (Vienna, 1897), and English translation by W. Fletcher in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers,* Vol. VII (Grand Rapids, 1970 — reprint of 19th c. original); Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica,* IX & X, Greek text and English translation by J. Oulton and H. Lawlor in "The Loeb Classical Library," Vol. II (Cambridge, 1973); and Eusebius, *Vita Constantini,* I, Greek text edited by F. Winkelmann in *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller,* Eusebius Werke, Bd. 1 (Berlin, 1975), and English translation by E.C. Richardson in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* 2nd Series, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, 1986 — reprint of 19th c. original).

   The most detailed chronology of Constantine's reign based on the above writings, and other literary, numismatic, epigraphic and legal sources, is in Timothy D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 68-80. For some modern historical treatments of Constantine's reign, see: A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (New York, 1962); Andrew Alföldi, *The conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (Oxford, 1969); Ramsay MacMullen, *Constantine* (New York, 1971); Hermann Dörries, *Constantine the Great* (New York, 1972); and Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, 1981).
3. *Paneg* IX. 25; & Lact., *De Mort Pers* 44.
4. Lact., *De Mort Pers* 48; & Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5.1-14.
5. *Paneg* IX.2.6; & 21.5-23.
6. For a brief description of a Constantinian *adventus,* see: MacMullen, *Constantine,* pp. 11-16; & *Paneg* IX.18.3-20. For a detailed study of the *adventus* ceremony through late antiquity, see: Sabine G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 17-89.
7. *Paneg.* IX.23.
8. J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979) p. 237.

The Latin panegyric delivered before Constantine's court on this occasion is still extant.[9] Modern scholars, such as René Pichon, John Liebeschuetz, and Sabine MacCormack, who have carefully analyzed the surviving imperial panegyrics of the late third and early fourth centuries, indicate that these orations were supposed to "represent the point of view from which the ruler wanted his actions to be seen."[10] Along with other imperially sponsored forms of art and ceremony in late antiquity, the panegyric was "an instrument of propaganda"[11] which was meant to faithfully reflect the imperial policies of the sovereign whom it eulogized.[12]

An old and distinguished pagan rhetorician who had praised Constantine on previous occasions was chosen to compose and present the panegyric of 313.[13] He had probably been educated in one of the famous Gallic rhetorical schools at Autun or Trier[14] and would attempt to employ Ciceronian style, quote Vergilian poetry, and make favorable comparisons with renowned generals and statesmen from classical history in celebrating the *virtutes* and *res gestae* of his subject. The orator was undoubtedly advised by members of the court about the imperial deeds he was to praise and the themes he might emphasize. The panegyrist's training, the rhetorical handbooks with advice on the content, order and delivery of imperial addresses before the throne,[15] and his own past experiences thereat,[16] all helped the old pagan prepare his panegyric.

However, the pagan rhetorician was faced with a major problem that neither he nor previous panegyrical orators had ever encountered — the emperor had radically changed his religious orientation during the war in Italy the previous year by converting to Christianity. Constantine had come to believe that the Deity of the Christians was "the highest Divinity" and "all-powerful God" residing in the heavens,[17] and had adopted this *summa Divinitas* as his divine patron. He had turned his back on the pagan gods and their traditional rituals, and now sought divine *potestas* for military victories, and divine *consilium* for civil policies through worship of and inspiration from the Christian Deity.[18]

Though the first written Christian accounts of the conversion — by Lactantius in Latin and Eusebius in Greek — would not appear for a couple of years,[19] stories about the

9. Latin text and French translation by E. Galletier, *Panégyriques Latins,* pp. 103-144.

10. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* pp. 237-238.

11. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity,* p. 5.

12. René Pichon, *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes* (Paris, 1906), p. 86: 'il est bien certain, en effet, que les orateurs qui parlaient devant les Empereurs avaient soin de ne rien dire qui ne fût conforme aux pensées, aux désirs des souverains. Par là, leurs discours peuvent nous renseigner utilement sur les intentions et les ambitions des princes auxquels ils sont consecrés;. . . fidèles reflets de la politique impériale." Cf. Dörries, *Constantine the Great,* p. 31.

13. Galletier, *Panĝyriques Latins,* pp. 105-106.

14. *Ibid.*; & also Pichon, "Le monde des écoles dans la Gaule romaine," in *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes,* pp. 36-85.

15. MacCormack, "The World of the Panegyrists," in *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity,* pp. 1-14.

16. *Paneg* IX.1.

17. Constantine used such phrases as *summa Divinitas, Deus summus,* and *Deus omnipotens* in the "Edict of Milan" found in Lact., *De Mort Pers* 48; and in his Donatist correspondence, appended to Optatus, *Libri VII De Schismate Donatistarum,* Latin texts in *CSEL,* Vol. XXVI (Vienna, 1893), esp. *Appendix* III. *Epistula Constantini Ad Aelafium,* and *Appendix* V. *Epistula Constantini Ad Episcopos Catholicos*; with English translations in P.R. Colman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church,* Vol. I (London, 1966).

18. For a review of mdern scholarship and an analysis of the ancient sources on Constantine's conversion, see: Charles Odahl, "Constantine's Conversion to Christianity," in *Problems in European History* (Durham, 1979), pp. 1-18.

19. For dating the composition of Lactantius' pamphlet to the years 313-315 in Trier, see: Jean-Remy Palanque, "Sur la data du 'De Mortibus Persecutorum,' " *Melanges offerts à J. Carcopino* (Paris, 1966), pp. 711-716. On dating Bks. IX and X of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* to 313 and 315, see: Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories,* 2nd ed. (Macon, 1986) pp. 111-140, and esp. p. 125; and Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius,* pp. 126-194, and esp. p. 278. The fuller version of the conversion which rested on the emperor's own testimony, Eusebius' *Vita Constantini,* was not written until the late 330s — Chesnut, *Ibid.,* p. 125; Barnes, *Ibid.,* pp. 278-279; and most recently, H.A. Drake, "What Eusebius Knew: The Genesis of the *Vita Constantini,*" *Classical Philology,* Vol. 83, 1 (1988) pp. 20-38.

emperor's religious re-orientation would certainly have been circulating at the court in Trier. The panegyrist would have heard about the divine revelation the emperor supposedly had received from the Christian God that induced him to use Christian symbols on his military implements as talismanic devices to overpower the Maxentian forces at the climactic Battle of the Mulvian Bridge outside Rome (Pl. II, a & b).[20] Soon circulating in the east, and thus probably well known already in the west, was the account of the colossal statue of Constantine that had been erected in the center of Rome holding a Christian cross, and marked with an inscription giving credit for his victory "to this salutary sign"[21] (Pl. III, a & b). He would have known of the emperor's edicts, letters and laws restoring property lost in recent persecutions to the Christian Church, and offering money, buildings and public service exemptions to the Christian clergy (Pl. IV, a & b).[22] And, of course, he would have recognized the new Christian presence at court, with Church leaders like Bishop Ossius of Cordova now prominent companions and advisors of Constantine.[23]

Such factors as these made the orator aware of the difficult and delicate task he had to perform. He would have little trouble describing the military campaigns and praising the imperial virtues displayed therein that were to make up the bulk of his panegyric. Yet, when it came to describing the source of divine inspiration and power that had aided Constantine in planning and executing his victorious wars, great discretion would have to be employed. On the one hand, the rhetor would have to reflect the emperor's new religious orientation and please the Christians at court; but, on the other hand, he would not want to betray all his own long-held religious beliefs and displease the pagans in the audience.[24] An examination of the religious references in the panegyric of 313, and a comparison of these with some of the religious terms and images used by Constantine himself in contemporary edicts and epistles, will help us ascertain just how well the pagan panegyrist performed his difficult task.

We do not know precisely where in Trier the oration was delivered, but the location may well have been the recently completed *aula palatina,* the audience hall of the imperial palace complex.[25] In this massive edifice, Constantine together with dignitaries of the

20. Lact., *De Mort Pers* 44; Eusebius, *Hist Eccl* IX.9, and *Vita Const* I.26-38. See Charles Odahl, "The Celestial Sign on Constantine's Shields at the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association,* Vol. II (1981), pp. 15-28, and "Christian Symbols in Military Motifs on Constantine's Coinage," *SAN: Journal of the Society for Ancient Numismatics,* Vol XIII, 4 (1983), pp. 64-72.

21. Euseb., *Hist Eccl* IX.9.10-11, and *Vita Const* I.40.

22. Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5-7, and *Vita Const* I.41-44; *Codex Theodosianus* XVI.2.1-2 — Latin text edited by Theodor Mommsen, *Theodosiani Libri XVI cum Constitutiones Sirmondionis* (Berlin, 1905), and English translation by Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code*... (New York, 1952); *Le Liber Pontificalis,* XXXIV. *Silvester,* edited by L. Duchesne (Paris, 1955). For the laws, see: J. Gaudemet, "La legislation religious de Constantin," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France,* XXXIII (1947), pp. 25-61; C. Dupont, "Les privileges des clercs sous Constantin," *Revue de l'Histoire Ecclesiastique,* 62 (1967), pp. 729-752; and J.-R. Palanque, *The Church in the Christian Roman Empire,* Vol. I (New York, 1953), pp. 5-12. For the church building program, see: Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 18-31, and *Three Christian Capitals* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 7-40.

23. Euseb., *Vita Const* I.32 and 42 mentions clergy in general, and *Hist Eccl* X.6 names Ossius specifically. On Ossius as Constantine's religious advisor, see: V.C. de Clercq, *Ossius of Cordova* (Washington, D.C., 1954), esp. pp. 148ff. St. Jerome said that Lactantius "extrema senectute magister Caesaris Crispi filii Constantini in Gallia fuit," *De Viris Illustribus* 80 — Latin text in J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina,* XXIII (Paris, 1844ff.). J.-R. Palanque, "Sur la date du 'De Mortibus Persecutorum,' " p. 716, saw the old Christian rhetorician arriving "à la cour de Trèves à l'automne de 313," to take up his duties as tutor to Constantine's son, and there completing the *De Mortibus Persecutorum* pamphlet over the next two years. Cf. J. Stevenson, "The Life and Literary Activity of Lactantius," *Studia Patristica,* Vol. I, 1 (1957), pp. 661-677; and T.D. Barnes, "Lactantius and Constantine," *Journal of Roman Studies,* LXIII (1973), pp. 29-46. MacMullen, *Constantine,* pp. 125-131, discusses the influences of Ossius and Lactantius on Constantine's growing knowledge of and policies for Christianity after 312.

24. Pichon, *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes,* p. 99: "cette cour complait à la fois des chrétiens et des paiens"; and Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius,* p. 46: "the orator... was a pagan, as were many in his audience."

25. W. Reusch, "Die Aula Palatina in Trier...," *Germania,* 33 (1955), pp. 180-199, and *Die Basilica in Trier* (Trier, 1956); Richard Krautheimer, "The Constantinian Basilica," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* ***continued***

court and officers of the army, and large numbers of the city populace could have assembled in an impressive and ceremonial setting to hear the official panegyric celebrating the emperor's recent triumphs (Pl. V, a & b). The oration was divided into five parts: an *exordium* with introductory remarks to the emperor at the beginning (Ch. 1); several chapters on the preliminaries to the Italian campaign (Chs. 2-5.3); the central core of the speech describing Constantine's victories in Italy and stay in Rome (Chs. 5.4-21.4); a few chapters on the return to Gaul and defeat of the barbarians on the Rhine (Chs. 21.5-23); and a *peroratio* with closing remarks on the significance of Constantine's victories and an interesting prayer to the "highest Deity" (Chs. 24-26).

In the *exordium,* the orator expressed his fears that he might not have the ability to praise the emperor's great deeds with proper eloquence, but that it would be a great impiety to pass them over in silence.[26]

The second section began with a play on Constantine's name, in which the panegyrist declared his intention to speak about the emperor's *constantia,* his perseverence on the Italian expedition in the face of overwhelming odds.[27] He reminded the emperor that he had set out with less than 40,000 troops against his enemy's 100,000; that he had acted against the advice of his generals, and had disregarded the warnings of omens; that only in the calculation of virtues had he surpassed any of the resources of his evil rival Maxentius. Through this section the orator adroitly raised the religious issue:

> What god then (*Quisnam deus*), what presiding majesty (*quae praesens maiestas*) so encouraged you, that [against the odds]. . . you yourself determined that the time had come for Rome to be liberated through your efforts?[28]

He answered his own question by stating:

> Truly, Constantine, you have some secret communion with the divine mind itself (*illa mens divina*), which having delegated our care to lesser gods, deigns to reveal himself to you alone (*quae. . . uni se tibi dignatur ostendere*).[29]

Or again, he asks:

> Emperor, since you recognized, knew, and saw all these things, and neither your paternal gravity nor your nature allowed you to be thoughtless, tell us, I beg, what have you had for counsel unless the divine will itself (*quid in consilio nisi divinum numen*)?[30]

Amid the listing of the adversaries' virtues and vices, the panegyrist assured the court that Constantine followed "divine precepts" (*divina praecepta*), while Maxentius was a devotee of "wicked superstitions" (*superstitiosa maleficia*);[31] and since the good emperor went to war by reason of "divine counsel" (*divino consilio*),[32] he had been able to seek a "divinely promised victory" (*promissam divinitus victoriam*).[33] Fortified by his own valour and the great God's counsel, Constantine had thus dared to embark with lesser forces upon a greater war than the fabled Alexander the Great.[34]

25 *(continued)* 21 (Washington, D.C., 1967), pp. 117ff; and Wightman, *Roman Trier and the Treveri,* pp. 102-109. Eusebius describes occasions when he gave orations in the emperor's presence at eastern palaces later in the reign in *Vita const* IV.33, and IV.46.

26. *Paneg* IX.1.1-3. **27.** *Paneg* IX.2.1-5.3. **28.** *Paneg* IX.2.4.
29. *Paneg* IX.2.5. **30.** *Paneg* IX.4.1. **31.** *Paneg* IX.4.4.
32. *Paneg* IX.4.5. **33.** *Paneg* IX.3.3. **34.** *Paneg* IX.5.1-2.

The orator had made a good start, and was probably pleasing his audience. He could then advance to the long central core of his oration,[35] detailing Constantine's conquest of the fortified towns of northern Italy, the march to Rome and defeat of Maxentius at the Mulvian Bridge, and the triumphal *adventus* at Rome and consequent celebrations in the liberated capital. While he described these stirring events with colorful words, artisans were busy in Rome depicting some of them in relief sculptures on a triumphal arch to be dedicated upon Constantine's return to Rome in 315.[36] The movement of troops, the beseiging of cities, the slaughter of the enemy at the Tiber river, the triumphal march to Rome, and Constantine's *adlocutio* before the Senate and *largitio* to the people were described in detail and frozen in pictures by the orator and sculptors alike (Pl. VI, a & b).

The delicate religious issue could largely be ignored here, as the orator waxed eloquent about Constantine's martial exploits. His tactical brilliance in both field combats near Turin[37] and above the Tiber,[38] and in seige operations at Susa[39] and Verona,[40] was described admiringly. His *providentia*[41] before battles, his *ardor*[42] and *divina virtus*[43] during combat, and his *clementia*[44] to the vanquished were praised in traditional panegyrical fashion; and the orator drew upon his school training to praise Constantine's abilities to move and control armies, defeat formidable enemies, and humanely treat survivors in comparison with historical figures, such as Scipio, Sulla, and Caesar.[45]

Though the pagan panegyrist did not feel obliged to make any explicit reference to the emperor's conversion experience and use of the name and cross of Christ on the battlefield, ignoring the supernatural element of the campaign entirely just would not do. Thus, even in this martial section of the oration he had to make some religious references. When describing how Constantine overcame the problem of a lack of chains for the masses of prisoners taken in northern Italy by ordering the enemy swords to be hammered into double-bolted manacles, he indicated that this brilliant strategem had come to the emperor through "the admonition of divine revelation" (*divino monitus instinctu*).[46] Like a good classically trained rhetorician, he added some allusions to Vergil, Cicero, and Seneca in explaining how this humane and clement act of Constantine saved the errant soldiers from their own swords.[47] Yet it is the reference to divine intervention which stands out. It does again in the section on the conflict at the Mulvian Bridge. Maxentius might have stayed in Rome behind the Aurelian wall and withstood a seige as he had done against Severus and Galerius several years earlier.[48] But the panegyrist related that "the divine mind. . . snatched away counsel from the abominable man" (*divina mens. . . nefario homini eripuere consilium*), so that. . . "he suddenly broke forth and. . . sealed. . . his ultimate destruction."[49]

The language of the panegyrist found an echo on the triumphal arch inscription the pagan Senate dedicated to Constantine two years later. It was "by inspiration of the Divinity" (*instinctu Divinitatis*), the inscription says, that Constantine defeated the tyrant

35. *Paneg* IX.5.4-21.4.
36. H.P. L'Orange and A. von Gerkan, *Der Spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogen* (Berlin, 1939); H.P. L'Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 89-105; Diana Bowder, *The Age of Constantine and Julian* (London, 1978), p. 27; and MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity,* pp. 35-37.
37. *Paneg* IX.6.2-5. **38.** *Paneg* IX..17-18. **39.** *Paneg* IX.5.4-5.
40. *Paneg* IX.8-10. **41.** *Paneg* IX.6.4; & 8.3. **42.** *Paneg* IX.9.4; & 22.1-2.
43. *Paneg* IX.10.3. **44.** *Paneg* IX.5.6; 12.1; & 20.2-21.4.
45. *Paneg* IX.6.1-2; 15.3-6; & 20.3-4. Cf. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity,* pp. 4-6.
46. *Pange* IX.11.4.
47. *Paneg* IX.12-13: Vergil, *Georgics* I.508; Cicero, *De Divinatione* II.39; and Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones* II.12 — Latin texts in "The Loeb Classical Library" editions of these authors (Cambridge). The panegyrist came perilously close to identifying Constantine with the pagan god Jupiter in 13.2 with the analogy: "Just as that god, creator and lord of the world, sends by his same thunderbolt (*deus ille mundi creator et dominus eodem fulmine suo. . . mittit*) now sad, now happy messages, thus under the guidance of your divine spirit the same weapons discern your enemies or your suppliants by destruction or by preservation." But he backed off by not mentioning the god's name explicitly.
48. Lact., *De Mort Pers* 26 & 27. **49.** *Paneg* IX. 16.2.

"with just arms."[50] As the "great God" and "divine mind" gave *divinum consilium* and *divinus instinctus* to Constantine, he snatched them away from Maxentius.

The orator concluded the central core of his presentation with a brief description of Constantine's stay in Rome — the triumphal parade and joy of the people, his appearance before the Senate, and clemency to the surviving soldiers of his enemy.[51]

Then in the fourth section of the panegyric, the orator swiftly recounted the emperor's return to Gaul, and successful campaign along and across the Rhine frontier against barbarians who had tried to take advantage of his absence.[52]

The *peroratio* or conclusion of the oration ended on a high note as was expected.[53] The rhetorician related how Constantine's victories over disciplined Romans and fierce Franks outshone Alexander's triumphs over timid Greeks and delicate orientals,[54] and how he was extending the glorious achievements of his late father, the emperor Constantius, in the west.[55] Constantine's *virtus* and *pietas* had deservedly earned the honorary statues, shields and crowns the Roman Senate and Italian people had dedicated to him.[56]

The final chapter of the peroration concluded with a prayer to the "highest god," and brought the orator back to the difficult religious issue. He addressed the Deity directly as "the greatest creator of the universe" (*summe rerum sator*), who has. . . "as many names as there are languages of mankind," and then characterized him as either:

> A certain force and divine mind which is infused into the whole world and mixed with all the elements (*quaedam vis mensque divina. . . quae toto infusa mundo*),
>
> or
>
> some power above all the heavens who looks down upon this work of his from the higher citadel of nature (*aliqua supra caelum potestas. . . quae. . . ex altiore naturae arce despicias*).[57]

The panegyrist affirmed that it was to this God that he and the audience prayed and offered a worthy petition regarding Constantine. This greatest of all emperors was the best benevolence the Divinity had ever bestowed on the human race, and his great virtue and great piety should be allowed to last longer than merely one life. As the Deity had "the highest goodness and power in himself" (*summa bonitas et potestas*), and both wished for and had the power to make just things happen, he should therefore "allow Constantine to live on earth for all ages."[58]

The emperor probably smiled at the petition and appreciated the panegyric. Modern scholars have appreciated this oration as well and mined it for the historical and cultural

50. J.E. Sandys, *Latin Epigraphy* (Chicago, 1974) p. 127:

IMP CAES FL CONSTANTINO MAXIMO P F AUGUSTO
S P Q R QUOD INSTINCTU DIVINITATIS MENTIS
MAGNITUDINE CUM EXERCITU SUO TAM DE TYRANNO
QUAM DE OMNI EIUS FACTIONE UNO TEMPORE IUSTIS
REMPUBLICAM ULTUS EST ARMIS ARCUM TRIUMPHIS
INSIGNEM DICAVIT.

51. *Paneg* IX.19.1-21.4. **52.** *Paneg* IX.21.5-23.
53. *Paneg* IX.24-26. **54.** *Paneg* IX.24.1-3.
55. *Paneg* IX.24.4-25.3. **56.** *Paneg* IX.25.4.
57. *Paneg* IX.26.1. There are allusions here to Vergilian poetry: *Aeneid* I.254; X.725; & VI.724-727 — Latin texts in "The Loeb Classical Library" edition of Vergil (Cambridge). The panegyrist's all-encompassing definition of the Deity also includes ideas from Stoic pantheism, Solar syncretism, and Christian monotheism.
58. *Paneg* IX.26.2-5.

data it provides about the empire in the early fourth century.[59] Coming as it did less than a year after Constantine's well-documented conversion, its religious references have always been a focal point of interest — both the religious material excluded from the panegyric and the religious references included in it. The panegyric of 313 made no mention of the traditional pagan gods by name, nor gave any account of Constantine dedicating the spoils of victory at pagan temples.[60] These omissions are particularly evident in comparison with the three extant panegyrics for the emperor prior to his conversion (307, 310 and 311), wherein many *di immortales,* like Jupiter, Hercules, Sol or Apollo, were associated with the emperor, and he was recorded as entering or building *templa pulcherrima.*[61] The pagan panegyrist has thus recognized and reflected that the "emperor. . . had personally dissociated himself from the traditional gods."[62] However, as noted above, the orator made no mention of either Christ by name, nor gave any account of a Christian conversion or use of Christian symbols on war implements and victory statues as the Christian writers were soon to do.

Instead of relying on traditional paganism or turning to true Christianity, the panegyrist seemed to be "striving for a religiously neutral description of the divine foundations of Constantine's imperial position."[63] He associated Constantine with the supreme God, but defined that Deity with general and studiously vague terminology.[64] Devotees of pagan poetry, philosophic pantheism, solar syncretism, and Christian monotheism could all find points of contact with a *Deus* who was the "highest creator of the universe," a "divine mind infused through the world," or a "presiding power and majesty in the heavens above," and the source of "highest goodness and power."[65] The *instinctu Divinitatis* inscription used on the triumphal arch built for Constantine in Rome by the pagan Senate had a similarly neutral, monotheistic sound to it. As both the panegyrical oration and the triumphal arch were official expressions of *la politique impériale,* several modern scholars have seen pressure from Constantine behind the new phraseology.[66]

Fortunately, we have several contemporary documents of Constantine which express his religious policies and thinking in the period when the Trier panegyric was delivered. These sources aid us in assessing how accurately the rhetorician was reflecting the emperor's new religious orientation. Though Constantine had converted to Christianity and gave his personal devotion to the Christian God,[67] he was still emperor of all Roman

59. Pichon in *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes* for its material on literary culture; MacMullen in *Constantine,* and Barnes in *Constantine and Eusebius* for its military details; MacCormack in *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* for data on court ceremonial and propaganda; Dörries in *Constantine the Great,* and Liebeschuetz in *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* as well as the above-listed authors, for the religious issue.

60. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe,* pp. 82-83; Dörries, *Constantine the Great,* pp. 29-31; Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* p. 288; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius,* pp. 44-46; and Johannes Straub, "Konstantins Verzicht Auf Den Gang Zum Kapital," *Historia,* IV (1955) pp. 297-313.

61. The panegyrics of 307 (VI), 310 (VII), and 311 (VIII): *Paneg* VI.2; & 13-14; *Paneg* VII.7; 9; & 21-22; & *Paneg* VIII.7 & 8 — all in Galletier, *Panégyriques Latins,* Tome II (Paris, 1952).

62. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* p. 288; Cf. Dörries, *Constantine the Great,* pp. 29-31.

63. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* p. 285. Cf. Pichon, *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes,* p. 105: "c'est une sorte de polythéisme hiérarchisé, avec des aspirations monothéistes, plus philosophique que religieux, plus éclectique que précis, qui place l'auteur de ce Panégyrique à égale distance entre les vrais paiens et les chrétiens."

64. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe,* p. 82, called the peroration "a masterpiece of ambiguity." Cf. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* p. 286; and Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius,* p. 46.

65. Pichon, *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes,* pp. 104-105; André Piganiol, *L'Empereur Constantin* (Paris, 1932), p. 69; MacMullen, *Constantine,* pp. 110-112; and esp. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* pp. 252-291, for the use of such religious ideas and terms in both pagan and Christian writers of the late third and early fourth centuries.

66. Pichon, *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes,* p. 86; Dörries, *Constantine the Great,* p. 31; Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* p. 288; and Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius,* pp. 46-47.

67. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* pp. 288 & 291.

citizens and had the public duty of protecting all religious cults.[68] His public policy fulfilled this duty, and was set forth in the "Edict of Milan," which had resulted from the meeting with his eastern co-emperor Licinius in northern Italy during the early months of 313.[69] The religious terms and images used therein would have been current at the court in Trier later in the year, and thus may have been the immediate source for some of the religious references the orator used in the panegyric.[70] Through the Edict, for instance, Constantine and Licinius had ended the era of persecutions, and given...

> to Christians and to all peoples the free power of following the religion which each wished, so that whatever Divinity there is in the heavenly seat (*quicquid est Divinitatis in sede caelesti*) may be benign and propitious to us, and to everyone under our government.[71]

They went on to order restoration of property that the Christians had lost in the recent persecutions, and indicated repetitively that they hoped the *summa Divinitas* whom they worshipped would continue to bestow his *divininus favor* and *benevolentia* upon them and their subjects.[72] The majority of the clauses in the Edict concern the Christians, and the imperial solicitude for reverence to the *Divinitas* seems to apply more directly to them than others; yet, still, it is the vague and general term *summa Divinitas* which is employed throughout, and the Deity may be worshipped freely by all through any cult.

The contemporary epistles which Constantine wrote between 312 and 315 to provincial governors or Christian bishops in his program of patronizing the western Church with grants of money, buildings and clerical exemptions, or in his attempts to settle the Donatist schism in the north African church contain even more personal samples of the emperor's religious thinking and terminology with which court officials would have been cognizant.[73] In these the emperor often used phrases like "the Divinity of the great God" (*he theiotes tou megalou theou*),[74] the "all-powerful God" (*Deus omnipotens* or *ho theos ho pantokrator*),[75] and the familiar "highest God" or "highest Divinity" (*Deus summus* or *summa Divinitas*).[76]

Constantine could be very specific in identifying the *summa Divinitas* he worshipped with the Christian God — but usually when writing specifically to his co-religionists. For instance, in a letter to Aelafius, the Vicar of the secular Diocese of Africa, in the spring of 314, Constantine confided that he knew his official was also a fellow *cultor* of the *Deus summus.* The emperor then expressed his fear that the "highest and all-powerful God" would be upset with him if he did not bring to an end the schism "in the observance of the

68. Walter Ullmann, "The Constitutional Significance of Constantine the Great's Settlement," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 27, 1 (1976) p. 2.

69. Lact., *De Mort Pers* 48 (Latin); and Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5.1-14 (Greek). See Milton V. Anastos, "The Edict of Milan (313)," *Revue des Études Byzantines,* 25 (1967) pp. 13-41 for a defense of the Edict's traditional name, authorship, and publication in the west.

70. Anastos, "The Edict of Milan (313)," pp. 38-41; Cf. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome,* pp. 69-71; and Pichon, *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes,* pp. 105-106.

71. Lact., *De Mort Pers* 48.2 = Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5.4.

72. Lact., *De Mort Pers* 48.3-12 = Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5.5-13.

73. The *Appendix* to Optatus, *De Schismate Donatistarum* (*CSEL,* XXVI) has several in Latin; and Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5-7 has several in Greek translations; P.R. Colman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church,* Vol. I, contains English translations. For Constantine's role in the Donatist schism, see: W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford, 1985), esp. Ch. XI; H. Kraft, *Kaiser Konstantins religiöse Entwicklung* (Tübingen, 1955), esp. Chs. II-III; and for a chronology of the documents, see: Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine,* pp. 238-247.

74. Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5.20 — *Epistle to Miltiades, Bishop of Rome*; X.6.5 — *Epistle to Caecilianus, Bishop of Carthage.*

75. Optatus, *Appendix* III — *Epistula Constantini Ad Aelafium; Appendix* V — *Epistula Constantini Ad Episcopos Catholicos*; and Euseb., *Hist Eccl* X.5.24 — *Epistle to Chrestus, Bishop of Syracuse.*

76. Optatus, *Appendix* III — *Ad Aelafium.*

most holy law of the Catholics;" . . . and that he would not feel fully secure and always hope for the best things from "the benevolence of the most powerful God" (*potentissimus Deus*) until "all men were venerating the most holy God (*sanctissimus Deus*) by means of the proper cult of the Catholic religion."[77]

In his letter to the Christian bishops whom he had assembled at the Council of Arles in August of 314 to adjudicate the Donatist schism, Constantine addressed the ecclesiastical leaders as his "dearest brothers," and "most holy bishops of Christ the savior." He characterized the Deity as the "all-powerful God who resides in the watchtower of heaven" (*Deus omnipotens in caeli specula residens*), and spoke of him as "our God" (*Deus noster*). He also indicated that he himself was awaiting the "judgment of Christ" (*iudicium Christi*).[78]

Constantine had no doubt become a Christian: the phrases quoted above, his Christian legislation, his church building program, and the Christian accounts of his conversion which appeared in 315, all testified to his new religious orientaion. However, he remained *Pontifex Maximus* and head of the traditional pagan cults. Though no longer worshipping personally in the temples, he would protect the rights of his pagan subjects to do so. Though he quickly removed most of the pagan gods from official coin and art motifs relating to himself, he allowed Sol, the sun god, to remain therein for a few years as a syncretistic bridge between his pagan and Christian subjects (Pl. VII, a).[79] The former could see Sol as the highest deity of their pantheon, while the latter saw him as merely an artistic symbol for Christ, the "sun of righteousness," and "light of the world."[80] For example, on Constantine's arch above the relief showing his *adventus* in Rome after the defeat of Maxentius, the pagan Senate placed a sculptural tondo depicting Sol in his rising quadriga — symbolic of light returning to Rome with Constantine after the dark tyranny of Maxentius (Pl. VII, b).[81] Across town in a mosaic decoration in the tomb of the Julii at the Vatican cemetery, a Christian artist, however, placed a radiate Christ in Sol's chariot (Pl. VIII, a & b).[82] And on some of the coins still carrying Sol reverses in this period, Christian mint workers were allowed to place a cross beside the figure of the god, indicating who the real "sun of righteousness" was (Pl. VII, a).[83]

Eventually, Christ would win out over Sol, who would disappear from imperial art and coins (Pl. IX, a & b). However, in the years immediately after his conversion, Constantine allowed the edges of paganism to blend with the edges of his new faith. In his own public edicts and epistles he employed neutral and ambiguous monotheistic terminology that would offend neither his pagan nor his Christian subjects. In public ceremonies which included both religious groups, he probably expected and encouraged panegyrists to use such language as well.[84]

77. *Ibid.*

78. Optatus, *Appendix* V — *Ad Episcopos Catholicos.*

79. Alföldi, *The conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome,* pp. 54-59; MacMullen, *Constantine,* p. 112; Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* pp. 281-287; and Patrick M. Bruun, *Roman Imperial Coinage,* Vol. VII (London, 1966), pp. 48-49.

80. *Holy Bible — Malachi* 3:20; and *John* 1:4; 8:20 and *passim.*

81. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity,* pp. 35-37, and Pl. 13; and Bowder, *The Age of Constantine and Julian,* pp. 24-27, and Pl. 1.

82. Michael Gough, *The Origins of Christian Art* (New York, 1974) pp. 18-19, and ill. 10; and MacMullen, *Constantine,* p. 112, and Pl. III, A.

83. Charles Odahl, "Constantinian Coin Motifs in Ancient Literary Sources," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association,* Vol. VII (1986) p. 9, and Fig. 7; and Patrick Bruun, "The Christian Signs on the Coins of Constantine," *Arctos,* Series 2, Vol. 3 (1962) pp. 5-7, and Fig. 1d.

84. Pichon, *Les Derniers Écrivains Profanes,* pp. 105-106; Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion,* p. 291. Nazarius, who delivered the next extant Latin panegyric — #X in Galletier, *Panégyriques Latins,* Tome II (Paris, 1952) — employed similar language when he offered his oration before the Roman Senate in A.D. 321. For the theory that Constantine wanted such language to be used in public addresses even after his triumph over the last pagan emperor Licinius in the "holy war" of 324, see: H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine* (Berkeley, 1975) pp. 28-29, & 46-79.

The old pagan at Trier did not follow Constantine slavishly in his use of religious terms. Whenever he could, he took words and images from pagan poetry and philosophy,[85] but they were ambiguous or general enough to permit a Christian interpretation. Thus, he was within the guidelines the emperor seemed to be setting in his own imperial pronouncements. Though the orator probably leaned toward Stoic pantheism in his own beliefs (the *mens divina* infused through the world),[86] he was careful to include a more concrete and martial image of the "highest God" in his final prayer, which was undoubtedly closer to the thinking of the Christian soldier emperor to whom the panegyric was dedicated. Constantine seemed to like the idea of a *summa Divinitas* or *Deus summus* who presided over the universe in a heavenly fortress. Such imagery is implied in the "Edict of Milan" (*Divinitas in sede caelesti*),[87] and is explicit in the "Epistle to the Catholic Bishops" at Arles (*Deus omnipotens in caeli specula residens*).[88] Thus, by the use of the specific phrase *aliqua supra omne caelum potestas. . . ex arce despiciens* in his final prayer,[89] and by his careful discretion on the religious issue throughout his whole oration, one cannot help but feel that the emperor would have been pleased with the religious references and the public performance of his panegyrist.[90]

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85. See note 57 above.
86. *Paneg* IX.2.5; 16.2; & 26.1.
87. Lact., *De Mort Pers* 48.2
88. Optatus, *Appendix* V — *Ad Episcopos Catholicos.* Ramsay MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1967) p. 39, saw this kind of martial description for God as characteristic of the military mind of the period.
89. *Paneg* IX.26.1.
90. This article was first offered as a paper and slide presentation before the annual conference of the Classical Association of the Pacific Northwest in April 1989 at the Empress Hotel in Victoria, British Columbia. The prints in the following plates contain a sample of the illustrations used in the original presentation, and are from the author's collection of slides and prints of Constantinian sites, monuments and artifacts.

c)

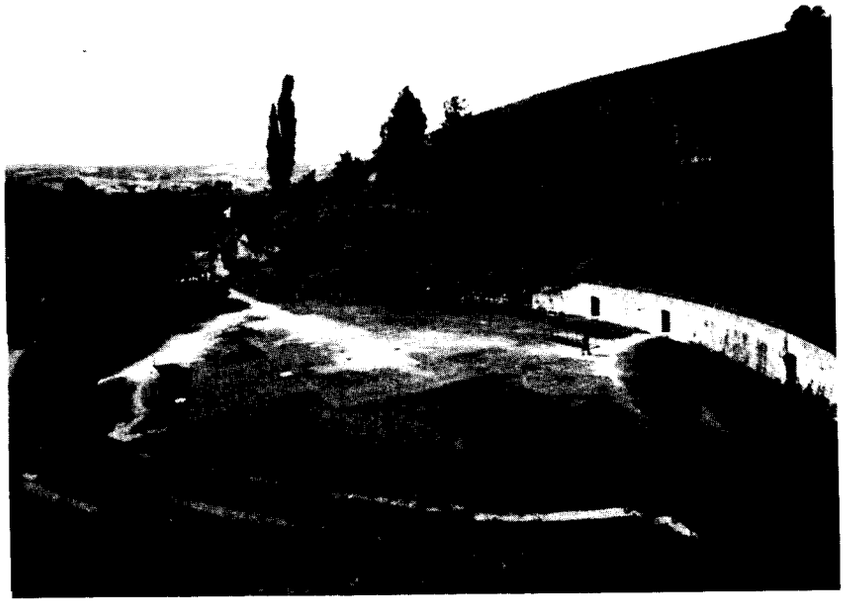


Plate I

a) *Victory Coin of Constantine* (Rome, Bronze, 312-313)
Coin issued after Constantine's Italian victories with obverse bust right and imperial titles "Emperor Constantine, Pious and Happy Augustus"; and with reverse motif of legionary eagle between two vexilla and inscription "The Roman Senate and People for the Best Princeps" (Odahl Collection, Boise).

b) *Adventus Medallion of Constantine* (Ticinum, Gold, 313)
Reverse of medallion issued for Constantine's arrival at Milan in early 313 with motif showing the emperor on horseback in a parade setting and the inscription "The Happy Arrival of Our Augusti" (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

c) *Amphitheater at Trier*
Carved out of a natural hill above the east end of Trier, this amphitheater arena was used for beast fights during the *adventus* celebrations for Constantine in August of 313.

a)

b)

Plate II

a) *Chi-Rho Medallion of Constantine* (Ticinum, Silver, 315)

Obverse of medallion celebrating the emperor's recent victory over Maxentius and the tenth year of his reign, depicting a facing bust of Constantine in a high crested helmet with a Christogram badge (☧) at the top front of the helm, and a globular cross-scepter over his shield (Staatliche Münzsammlung, Munich).

b) *Mulvian Bridge Over the Tiber River*

The climactic battle between Constantine and Maxentius took place beyond the north-western side of the bridge on 28 October 312 (See Pl. VI, b below).

a)

b)

Plate III

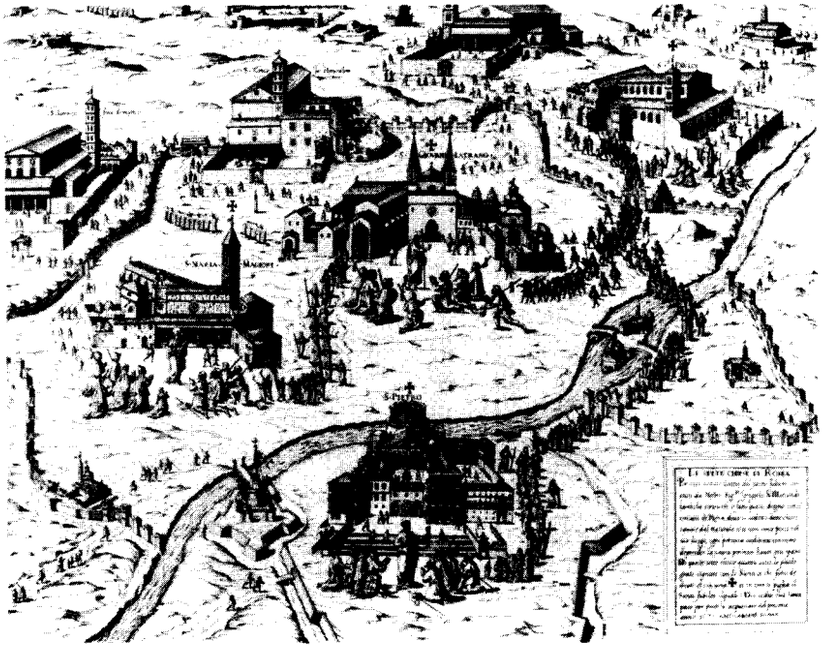
a) *Aerial of Rome*

View west over the Colosseum and Constantine's Arch, the Forum and Constantine's *Basilica Nova,* and the Capitoline Hill to the Dome of St. Peter's Vatican Basilica in the distance.

b) *Colossal Statue of Constantine*

Remains of the Emperor's colossal statue from the Roman Forum's *Basilica Nova* — now in the courtyard of the Palazzo Dei Conservatori on the Capitoline Hill.

a)



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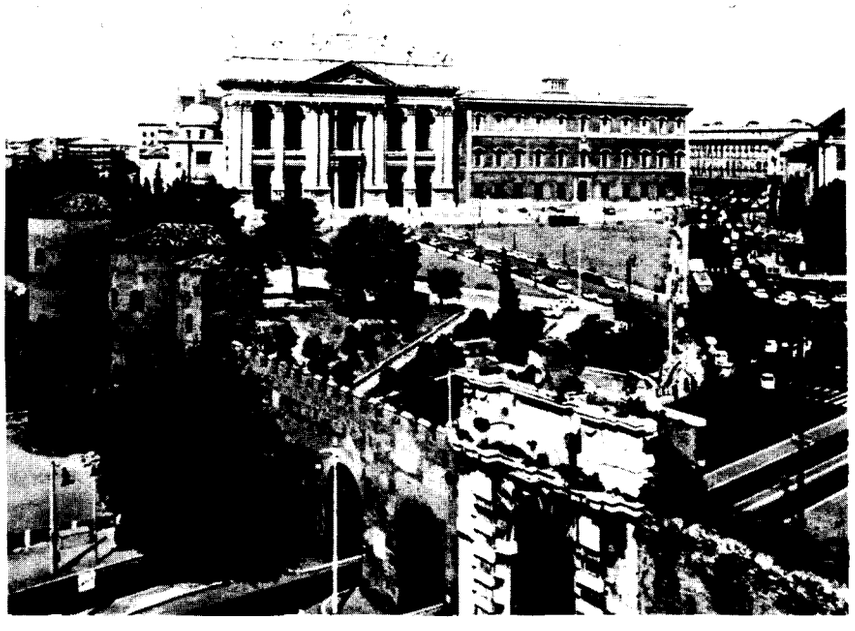


Plate IV

a) *Seven Churches of Rome Engraving*

A. Lafrery's 1575 engraving of the seven pilgrimage churches of Rome, six of which date back to the eight Constantinian basilicas of the fourth century — among the most important being the Lateran Basilica in the center, and the Vatican Basilica in the foreground.

b) *Aerial of the Lateran Basilica*

The first of Rome's eight Constantinian basilicas, the *Basilica Constantiniana* — now S. Giovanni in Laterano — was built just inside the east wall of the city, ca. 312-318, and is now faced with an 18th c. neoclassical facade.

a)

b)

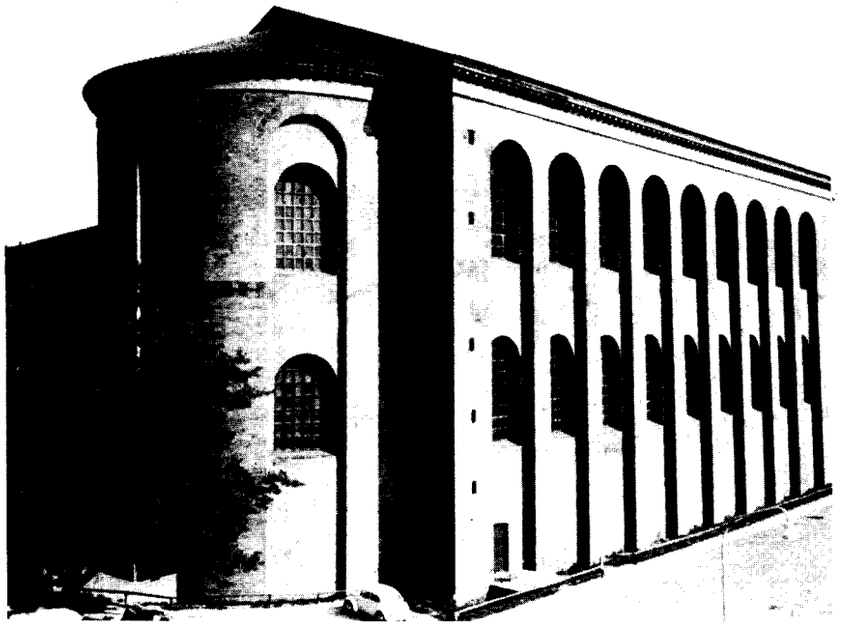


Plate V

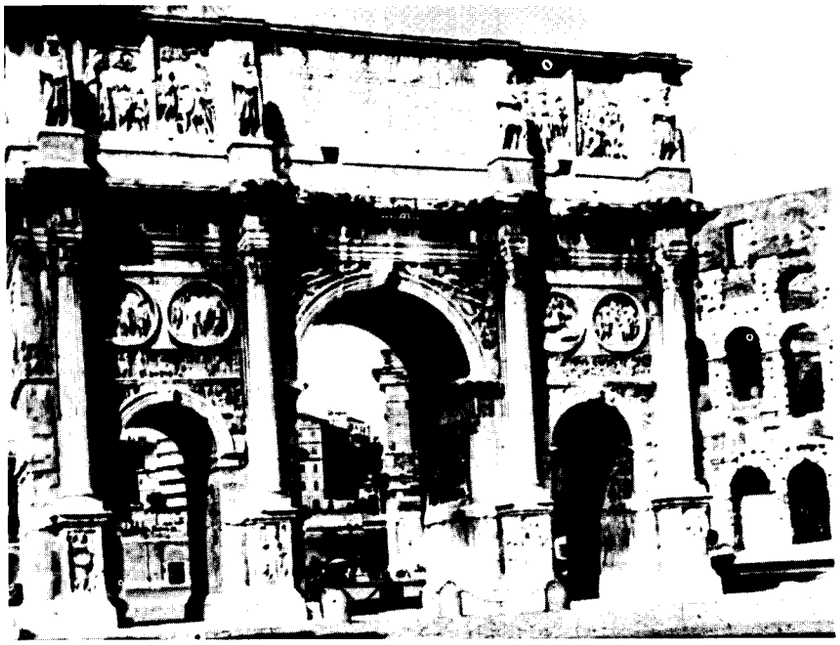
a) *Aerial of Trier*

View north from the hill above the left bank of the Moselle river, with the remains of the Roman city on the right bank of the river.

b) *Aula Palatina in Trier*

Exterior view of the northwestern portions of the audience hall of Constantine's palace complex in Trier, completed ca. 310, and measuring about 67 meters in length, 27 meters in width and 30 meters in height.

a)



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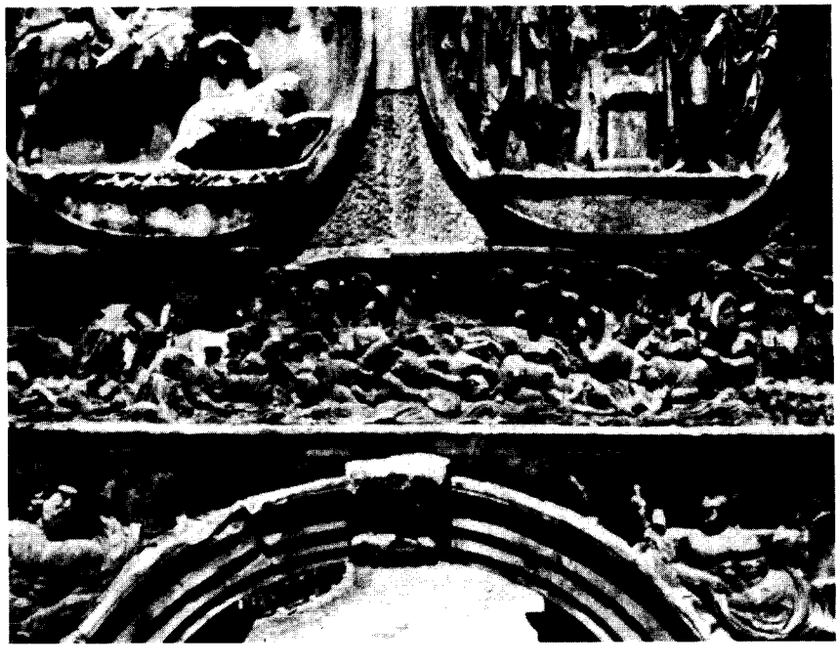
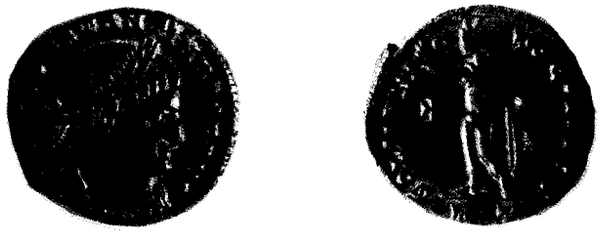


Plate VI

a) *Arch of Constantine in Rome*
South face of the victory arch built for Constantine by the Senate between the Colosseum and Roman Forum, A.D. 315.

b) *Battle Relief on the Arch of Constantine*
Relief sculpture of the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge with Constantinian troops pushing Maxentian forces into the Tiber river — right side panel on the south face of the arch.

a)



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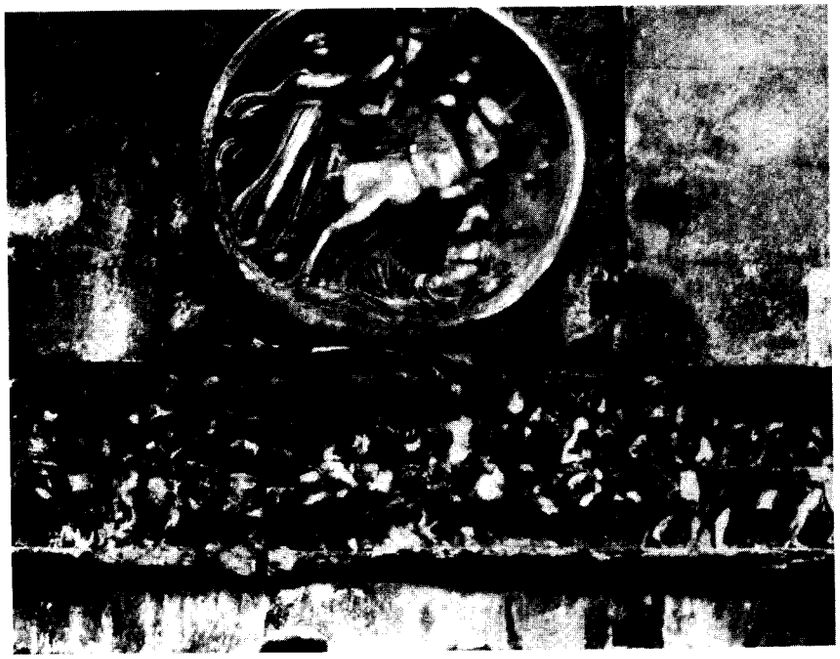


Plate VII

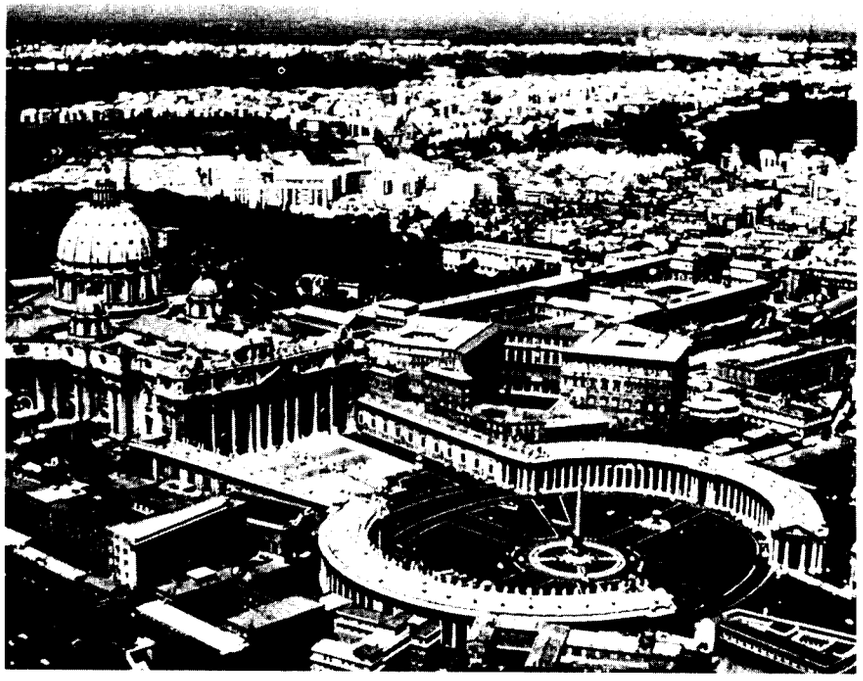
a) *Sol Coin of Constantine* (Ticinum, Bronze, 316)

Coin type issued for a few years after Constantine's conversion, with an obverse bust right and imperial titles "Emperor Constantine, Pious and Happy Augustus"; and reverse motif of the sun god standing left holding globe, with a Christian Greek cross in the left field, and inscription "To the Unconquered Sun, Our Companion" (Odahl Collection, Boise).

b) *Sol Tondo on the Arch of Constantine*

Sculptural tondo of the sun god in a rising chariot above the relief of Constantine's *adventus* at Rome on the east end of the arch.

a)



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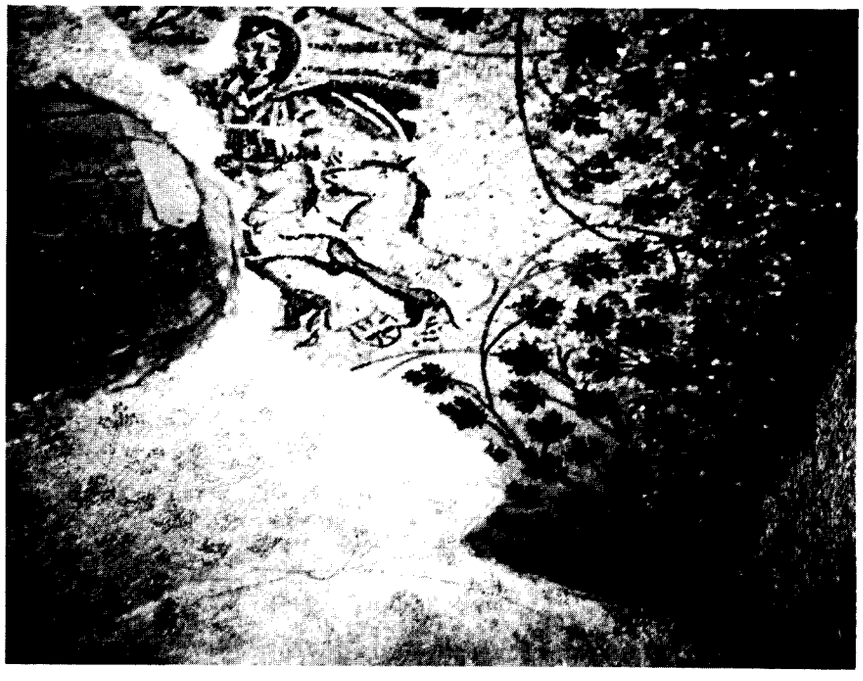


Plate VIII

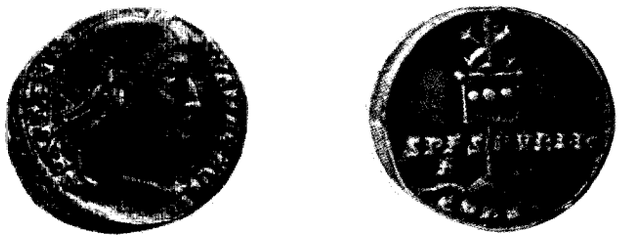
a) *Aerial of the Vatican Basilica*

View northwest over the modern San Pietro in Vaticano, built over the foundations of Constantine's fourth c. *Basilica Beato Petro Apostolo,* which was focused on St. Peter's tomb at the west end of the Vatican necropolis.

b) *Solar-Christ Mosaic*

Syncretistic mosaic of Christ in the sun god's chariot, which decorates the tomb of the Julii at the Vatican necropolis under St. Peter's Basilica (sometimes called the Helios-Christ, using the Greek name for Sol).

a)



b)

Plate IX

a) *Labarum Coin of Constantine* (Constantinople, Bronze, 326)

Coin issued after Constantine's "holy war" against Licinius to stop a renewed persecution in and get control of the eastern parts of the empire, with obverse bust right and imperial titles "Constantine, the Greatest Augustus"; and reverse motif of Constantine's Christian war standard — the *labarum* topped with the chi-rho monogram of Christ — piercing the wriggling serpent of the Bible, and inscription "The Hope of the Commonwealth" (British Museum, London).

b) *Christ the Lord Mosaic*

A fifth c. mosaic of Christ atop the globe endowing St. Peter with the keys to the Kingdom in a decoration of the Mausoleum of Constantina, the tomb of Constantine's daughter, which was attached to the mid-fourth c. Constantinian Basilica of St. Agnese to the northeast of Rome.