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# THE TRUE FACE OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

DAVID H. WRIGHT

The head of Constantine in the Boar Hunt medallion (Figs. 1 and 2) is the best preserved of the portraits of Constantine on his Roman Arch. Although recut from a head of Hadrian, it shows no trace of the earlier face, and agrees in every surviving detail of physiognomy with the other portraits of Constantine on his Arch, two of them recut from heads of Hadrian, two from heads of Trajan, and one in one of the original historical reliefs, the Siege of Verona.<sup>1</sup> Since the head in the Boar Hunt is also of remarkably high artistic quality, it has an obvious claim to authenticity. We may take it to represent accurately the image of himself that Constantine wanted to present to the Roman People at the time of his decennalia, on 25 July 315, the occasion indicated by the votive inscription on the Arch.

We see a youthful face, with a broad forehead and prominent cheekbones that give the upper part of his face a rectangular character. This is complemented by strongly modeled facial muscles flanking the nose, mouth, and chin, and by a jawbone that expands outward slightly at the back of the jaw, giving clear-cut articulation between jaw and neck. Intrinsically, this is a face both strong and muscular, handsome and youthful. We sense intuitively that it is appropriate for the heroic hunter and, by obvious implication, the heroic victor, the man who calls himself *Liberator urbis* in one of the inscriptions inside the Arch.

The beholder of 315 saw a more specific meaning in this head. Constantine was clean-shaven as well as handsome and youthful, the first emperor to show himself clean-shaven after a long succession of emperors who adopted the military iconography of close-cropped hair and stubble beard,

and who generally affected an intense expression, often a look of ferocious power, in the tradition of Caracalla, instead of the ideal calm we perceive in Constantine. More specifically, both in combing his rather short hair casually over his brow, and in the shape and bony character of his youthful face, Constantine reminded the Roman beholder of Augustus. The other inscription inside the Arch with which Constantine characterized his accomplishments, *Fundator quietis*, reinforced the allusion without actually quoting the founder of Augustan Peace.

This head, together with the others on the Arch, is the key witness for any attempt to identify and put in order the marble portraits of Constantine. On this basis a considerable group of heads of similar expressive character but generally lower quality can be recognized. One other head has a claim to authenticity almost equaling those on the Arch, the colossal marble head found in the main apse of the Basilica Nova (Fig. 3). Its date is not documented, but circumstances suggest the same era as the Arch.<sup>2</sup> This head is quite different in style and expressive character because it is a cult image about eight times lifesize instead of a narrative image somewhat less than lifesize. In a style that emphasizes the abstract organization of forms, rather than the organic rendering of anatomy, the eyes are made much larger and more arbitrarily shaped, and the muscular articulation of the cheeks is relatively suppressed. But the basic features of the face are the same as those on the Arch, and because the colossal head preserves the complete nose it is particularly helpful in establishing the profile of Constantine. It seems he had a long nose, sharply indented at the top between the eyes, with a prominently projecting ridge in the middle

<sup>1</sup>See Hans Peter L'Orange, *Das spätantike Herrscherbild von Diokletian bis zu den Konstantin-söhnen, 284–361 n. Chr.* (Berlin, 1984), pls. 32–34, 36–37a; and for fuller descriptions and illustration, L'Orange and Armin von Gerkan, *Der spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens* (Berlin, 1939).

<sup>2</sup>Heinz Kähler, "Konstantin 313," *JDAI* 67 (1952), 1–30; Klaus Fittschen and Paul Zanker, *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen*, I (Mainz, 1985), 147–52.

and a pointed tip at the end. It seems he also had a strongly projecting chin and a squarely articulated jaw.

To pursue questions of physiognomy further, and secure a broader basis for interpreting Constantinian portraiture, it is necessary to turn to numismatic evidence, where the range of material is vast, and where most examples are reliably dated and localized. We can therefore select series of coins that can be assumed to have been struck under Constantine's immediate supervision, and if we select specific examples on the basis of artistic quality as well as condition, if we seek out the prime die rather than a derivative copy, we can gain a much better understanding of Constantine's intentions in publishing his official image than can be reached on the basis of the marble portraits alone.<sup>3</sup>

For Constantine's early years we must turn to the mint at Trier, which had been established in 293/4 as the principal mint of Constantius, the newly selected Caesar for the West. It struck gold coins and medallions of remarkably high artistic quality, and by 305, when Constantius became Augustus for the West, it had developed a style much more naturalistic than that of any of the other western mints, a style very different from the harsh and schematic style of the eastern mints.<sup>4</sup> A gold coin of Constantius from 305/6 (Fig. 4)<sup>5</sup> shows the expected close-cropped hair and beard of Tetrarchic iconography, but it also shows subtly modeled musculature in the brow and cheek, and a convincing three-dimensional eye socket with the eyeball in profile, qualities very different from our normal expectations of Tetrarchic style. These qualities

imply physiognomic accuracy, and we recognize the family trait of the long hooked nose.

A gold coin of Maximinus Daia as Caesar, struck at Trier at about the same time (Fig. 5),<sup>6</sup> must on the other hand be viewed as a standard type for a youthful Caesar, not as a physiognomically accurate portrait. Maximinus was the nephew and adoptive son of Galerius, selected by him as his Caesar in the East when he became Augustus in 305. We know almost nothing about the previous career of Maximinus, but apparently he was quite young and inexperienced. Just as the first coins struck for Constantine in eastern mints are demonstrably inaccurate in physiognomy, we should not expect a true portrait of Maximinus in Trier in 305/6. What we have is a very youthful beardless face, softly modeled in what appears to be a naturalistic style, but a face without distinctive physiognomy or character. Other coins of Maximinus as Caesar struck at Trier in the years 305–308 have a squarer shape and harsher features more like normal Tetrarchic iconography, but they do not agree among themselves in physiognomy. A few have sideburns and moustache, but none has the stubble beard that we expect on Tetrarchic coins.

Such iconography emphasizing the youth of the Caesar and successor is rare at this time but not unique. Similar coin portraits of Maximinus as Caesar were struck at Rome, Aquileia, and Carthage, and a similar iconography had been used for some of the coins of Numerianus, the younger son of Carus, when he was named Caesar in 282. The specific meaning of this iconography becomes clearer when we realize that Carinus, the older son of Carus, was always shown bearded, even as Caesar, and that Numerianus was always shown bearded when he was raised to the rank of Augustus in 283. Clearly, it was not just youth but the idea of expected succession that was the main burden of this beardless iconography for a Caesar.

With this background in mind we may turn to the first coin portraits of Constantine, those struck in 306/7 with the title Caesar. Unfortunately the gold of this period is extremely rare, and two of the three recorded issues, each known to me in only one specimen, are no help. A unique aureus in the British Museum, with reverse SPES PUBLICA, shows a beautifully modeled version of the Tetrarchic Caesar type, generally similar to the Maximinus of Figure 5, clean-shaven except for

<sup>3</sup>A brief version of part of the following analysis was presented in my article "Style in the Visual Arts as Material for Social Research," *Social Research* 45 (1978), 130–52; a summary of the present argument was presented at the 17th International Byzantine Congress, Washington, D.C., 1986, and published in the *Abstracts of Short Papers*, 389–90.

<sup>4</sup>See further my paper "Constantius, Constantine, and the Mint at Trier," Byzantine Studies Conference, *Abstracts of Papers* 12 (1986), 8–9.

<sup>5</sup>All coins illustrated in this article are reproduced at six times actual size. All will be identified by their classification in *Roman Imperial Coinage* (originally edited by Harold Mattingly and Edward A. Sydenham), citing volume, mint, and serial number within the mint. The volumes involved are: IV, Part 3, Gordian III to Uranian Antoninus by Mattingly and Carol H. V. Sutherland (1949); V, Part 1, Valerian to Florian by Percy H. Webb (1927); VI, From Diocletian's Reform (A.D. 294) to the Death of Maximinus (A.D. 313) by Sutherland (1967); VII, Constantine and Licinius by Patrick M. Bruun (1966); VIII, The Family of Constantine I by John P. C. Kent (1981). This coin is RIC VI Trier 620a (this specimen is in London).

<sup>6</sup>RIC VI Trier 630b (London).

slight sideburns, but with a simple straight nose.<sup>7</sup> A medallion of two solidi in Berlin has a very square-shaped head, clean-shaven but otherwise essentially Tetrarchic in character and with only a slight hint of Constantine's distinctive nose.<sup>8</sup> Both coins must be set aside as coming from dies cut before the die-cutters had an authentic model. It is easy to imagine such circumstances in the first weeks after 25 July 306, when Constantius died at York and young Constantine, essentially an unknown only lately arrived on the scene, was hailed by soldiers loyal to that very popular general.

Of the only other Trier issue of gold coins recorded for Constantine as Caesar I have found only two specimens, from different dies (Figs. 6 and 7).<sup>9</sup> Both follow the youthful iconography used for Maximinus, but both have the distinctive Constantinian nose; both show the short hair combed forward over the brow (clearer in the Oxford example, Fig. 7), tending to cover the sharp angle at the back of the top of the forehead that is normal in Tetrarchic portraits, including the coins of Constantius and Maximinus; and both emphasize youthfulness by making the neck more slender than normal in coin portraits at this time. In its softer modeling and less schematic rendering of details such as eyebrow and lower eyelid, the London specimen (Fig. 6) gives the impression of greater physiognomic accuracy, while the Oxford specimen seems based more on a formula for details around the eye and for the prominent cheekbone. Two other details of the Oxford specimen are disturbingly different from the next series of authentic portraits and seem to reflect some confusion with Tetrarchic conventions. There are slight sideburns and a ridge on the upper lip that may have been intended as a moustache and, strangest of all, there are small scattered marks suggesting a stubble beard on the lower part of the jaw, marks that obviously were cut in a separate campaign, using a different tool, probably by a craftsman less skilled than the one who originally cut the die. It is interesting to notice that the die for the London coin was first cut to show a slight beard on the lower part of the jaw (just visible in Fig. 6) but that this area was smoothed out before the surviving coin was struck. Again we find signs of confusion in the workshop, apparently an in-

complete understanding of the new Caesar's intentions.

If we take the London example (Fig. 6) as physiognomically more accurate, we get the impression of a very young face, rather long in proportions, with fairly prominent cheekbones, but with a rather small jaw. In particular there is no sign of the added breadth at the back of the jaw that gives such a clear articulation between jaw and neck in the heads on the Arch, though such articulation is present in the youthful type used for Maximinus. Constantine's year of birth is not clearly established. According to one line of argument, which I favor,<sup>10</sup> he was about twenty-three in 306, which would seem a reasonable age for such a face, and would confirm our general impression of physiognomic accuracy in this coin. The opposite line of argument has sought to confirm the statement of Eusebius that Constantine succeeded his father at the age when Alexander died, thirty-three; but those who favor this argument also emphasize the many indications that Constantine wished to present himself as very youthful,<sup>11</sup> and that interpretation would explain from a different point of view the character of this first portrait.

After this small initial issue of Constantine as Caesar there was scarcely any gold struck at Trier until the quinquennialia of 310;<sup>12</sup> therefore we must turn to the almost equally rare silver. There was a small issue of argentei showing Constantine as Caesar, and Galerius as Augustus, with at least one reverse die used for both emperors. The first of the dies for Constantine (known to me from specimens in London and Rome) resembles the London gold coin of Figure 6 in physiognomy and style of modeling, and has a nascent beard like the one originally cut in the die of the London gold coin but smoothed out before the surviving gold coin was struck, while the other six dies I have identified all show Constantine clean-shaven. What seems to be the third in this sequence of dies, known to me from specimens in Oxford and Paris (Fig. 8),<sup>13</sup> is of particularly high artistic quality, and suggests a significantly different direction of stylis-

<sup>10</sup>See, among others, Arnold H. M. Jones, "Notes on the Genuineness of the Constantinian Documents in Eusebius's Life of Constantine," *JEH* 5 (1954), 196–200.

<sup>11</sup>See Timothy D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 39–42.

<sup>12</sup>See the revised chronology implicit in Pierre Bastien and Catherine Metzger, *Le Trésor de Beaurains (dit d'Arras)*, *Numismatique romaine* 10 (Wetteren, 1977), 151.

<sup>13</sup>*RIC VI* Trier 636 (Paris).

<sup>7</sup>*RIC VI* Trier 633.

<sup>8</sup>*RIC VI* Trier 615; see Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, *Numismatic Studies* 5 (New York, 1944), pl. 19.4.

<sup>9</sup>*RIC VI* Trier 627.

tic development. The profile is essentially the same, but the bony structure of the face is rendered more emphatically, particularly the cheekbone and the articulation of the back part of the jaw; the head is more square in shape, and the neck is thicker. Indeed, this face of Constantine is coming to look remarkably like the one in the Boar Hunt medallion on the Arch; it is a face with stronger and more heroic character, less a sallow youth, than in the two gold coins.

The five other dies I have identified in this series show similar features somewhat less well rendered, and a unique gold coin of Constantine as Augustus, probably to be dated 307, which passed through the London market some years ago and is known to me only from an electrotype in the British Museum made before the coin was cleaned of incrustation,<sup>14</sup> also shows this character. These observations make it clear that even in the first months of his reign Constantine decided to base his image on that of Augustus. One confirming detail is the fact that the hair combed forward over the brow is slightly longer in the silver coin than in the gold, and thus resembles more closely the Augustan hairdo. There may have been some hesitation in his mind at first, as well as some confusion among the die-cutters, and the beardless caesar iconography may have been all that first occurred to Constantine as his model, but the heroic character of the best silver die surely depends on the Augustan model. As an example of the recent tradition of that image I illustrate a rare gold coin of Gallienus, which has the deified Augustus on the reverse (Fig. 9).<sup>15</sup> Battered though this specimen is, we recognize the Augustan hairdo, the square shape of the head with its strong brow, prominent cheekbones, and clearly articulated jaw, and more generally the idealized youthful character of Augustan iconography. We could find the same features somewhat more clumsily rendered on the more common silver coins of the deified Augustus issued some dozen years earlier by Decius, around 251. There can be no doubt that the Roman public of Constantine's time recognized the Augustan iconography and character when they saw it on a coin.

<sup>14</sup>*RIC* VI Trier 755; Robert Carson very kindly shared his study of this material with me. See his article "A Treasure of Aurei and Gold Multiples from the Mediterranean," *Mélanges de numismatique d'archéologie et d'histoire offerts à Jean Lafaurie* (Paris, 1980), 59–73, where this coin is number 119 but is not illustrated.

<sup>15</sup>*RIC* V.1 Rome 28 (p. 133); Michel Amandry kindly drew my attention to this recent acquisition in Paris.

Knowing the heads on the Arch, and other examples of this standard portrait for Constantine, we might suppose that the type was established during the first months of his reign, as seen in this silver coinage, and then continued in normal use with only slight modifications for nearly three decades. But apparently late in 307, at the time of his marriage with Fausta and his assumption of the title Augustus, he adopted a very different portrait. This can be discerned on the small silver coins struck on that occasion,<sup>16</sup> and it is reflected with varying degrees of accuracy on the base metal coins of the next few years, but to find a reliably dated and artistically significant example we must wait for the votive issue of the quinquennalia of 25 July 310 (Fig. 10).<sup>17</sup> Although the distinctive nose is recognizable—usually with a more pronounced protrusion in the middle than in this example—Constantine's face is now shown with puffy cheeks, a receding chin, and jowls that tend to obscure the articulation of the back of the jaw.

The shape and character of the face is so different that, if it were not for the nose and the hairdo (now more luxuriant even than that of Augustus), we would not be likely to recognize this as Constantine. But if I may anticipate the results of our studying the last numismatic portraits of Constantine, it will emerge that these features are essentially accurate. With that knowledge in mind, we can look back to the London example of the first gold coins of Constantine (Fig. 6) and realize that it does suggest a slightly receding chin, moderately fleshy cheeks, and a jaw that does not stand out sharply from the neck at the back of the jaw. In each of these aspects this face is significantly different from the ideal youthful formula used for Maximinus (Fig. 5), and each seems more accurate in the London example than in the Oxford example (Fig. 7). In retrospect it seems we should suppose that the die-cutter of the London coin was working from the formula we see in this Maximinus, introducing selected modifications for physiognomic accuracy but staying close to the ideal youthful character of the formula. Then the die-cutter of the silver coin (Fig. 8) turned to the specifically Augustan formula, modifying it only for the profile of the nose.

While the fleshy portrait of Figure 10 wasn't formula as used in the Trier mint, the formula was not used elsewhere, and it has no obvious prece-

<sup>16</sup>*RIC* VI Trier 758, etc.; cf. Bastien, p. 150.

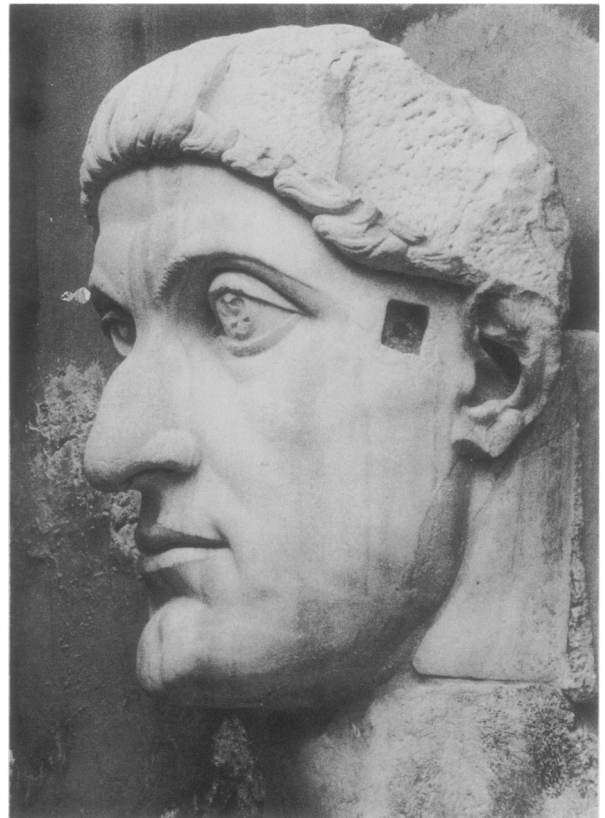
<sup>17</sup>*RIC* VI Trier 821 (London); Bastien, p. 151.



1. Constantine in the Boar Hunt, Arch of Constantine, Rome, ca. 315



2. Constantine in the Boar Hunt, Arch of Constantine, Rome, ca. 315



3. Colossal Constantine from the Basilica Nova, Rome, ca. 315



4. Constantius Augustus, aureus, Trier, 305/6



5. Maximinus Caesar, aureus, Trier, 305/6





6. Constantine Caesar, aureus, Trier, 306 (London)



7. Constantine Caesar, aureus, Trier, 306 (Oxford)





8. Constantine Caesar, argenteus, Trier, 306



9. Deified Augustus on an aureus of Gallienus, Rome, 260–268



10. Constantine Augustus, solidus, Trier, 310



11. Deified Trajan, antoninianus for Decius, Milan, ca. 251



12. Constantine Augustus, solidus, Rome, 312/3



13. Constantine Augustus, solidus, Trier, 315



14. Constantine Augustus, solidus, Nicomedia, 324/5



15. Deified Constantine, solidus, Constantinople, 337





16. Constantine Augustus, gold medallion, Constantinople, 336/7

dent. It must have been developed in the Trier mint on essentially naturalistic criteria and then codified for repetition. Certainly the last portraits of Constantius (as in Fig. 4) show that the best Trier die-cutters were capable of very naturalistic portrayal within the conventions of Tetrarchic iconography. The many Trier coins I have examined with the fleshy portrait type shown in Figure 10 vary slightly because of clumsy execution, not because of any distinctions of physiognomy among the coins, and none equals in artistic quality the best coins of Constantius. For the art historian the emergence and limited occurrence of this fleshy type is a curious episode that stands apart from the normal reliance in this period upon preexistent types.

When Constantine defeated and killed Maxentius on 28 October 312 he inherited the mints at Rome and Ostia. Presumably almost at once, and following their lead also the mint at Ticinum (modern Pavia), they began to issue coins for Constantine. Typical of the Constantinian portraits on these first coins is the one in Figure 12, struck at Rome.<sup>18</sup> Here is the familiar Constantinian nose and hairdo, the minimal traits to make it a portrait as that notion seems to have been understood at the time, but here also are prominent cheekbones, projecting chin, and clearly articulated jaw. To some extent these features, and the simplified planar modeling and generally blocky character of the face, can be seen as having been inherited from the Tetrarchic type used for Maxentius. But the type is quickly modified to introduce more subtle modeling that gives the impression of being naturalistic, and this becomes the standard Augustan portrait of Constantine, as we saw it on the Arch. Figure 13 shows an example typical of the best numismatic versions of this portrait type, a solidus struck at Trier in the first half of 315 while Constantine was in residence there.<sup>19</sup> The subtleties in the modeling of cheek and brow give the impression of naturalistic observation, and correspond to the contemporary heads on the Roman Arch.

The intrinsically heroic qualities of this idealized youthful head speak for themselves. It is easy to imagine Constantine deciding that the accurate but unflattering fleshy type would not adequately serve his propaganda, and it is easy to imagine his deciding to return to the specifically Augustan iconography that he had briefly used in 306/7 (Fig. 8). For his Arch he deliberately selected reliefs from three great predecessors, Marcus Aurelius, Hadrian, and Trajan, and for his portrait he returned to the founder of the empire, Augustus.

It is worth stressing that Augustan source because Maria Alföldi has claimed that this portrait type was based on Trajan rather than Augustus.<sup>20</sup> It is true, as she points out, that Constantine's hairdo could have been derived from Trajan, but particularly at the beginning of his portraiture it more closely resembles the hairdo of Augustus. It is also true, as she points out, that Constantine copied a specifically Trajanic reverse type with the legend SPQR OPTIMO PRINCIPI and three legionary standards, but this type was used at Ostia in 312/3 with a portrait like that in Figure 12, and in Trier in 313 with a portrait like that in Figure 10.<sup>21</sup> The reverse must have been quoted after the conquest of Rome without reference to questions of portrait iconography. More to the point, if we compare the numismatic image of Trajan as then likely to have been known, one of the deified emperors in the silver coins struck by Decius in Milan around 251 (Fig. 11),<sup>22</sup> both the physiognomy and the style of modeling in the muscles of cheek and chin are strikingly different from any of the portraits of Constantine. One could say that the relatively naturalistic purpose in the portrait of Trajan was comparable to that of the fleshy portrait of Constantine in Figure 10, but to impose such an aesthetic self-awareness, a way of thinking intrinsic to modern art criticism, upon a Constantinian die-cutter is unrealistic.

We must conclude that the Augustan model was first chosen for the silver coins of 306 (which Maria Alföldi seems not to have known) probably as a variation and improvement upon the youthful caesar type. At Trier this type was then set aside for the more naturalistic but unflattering fleshy type, for reasons we cannot identify, though following the generally naturalistic tradition developed at Trier for the portrait of Constantius. But after the conquest of Rome it was natural for the man who styled himself *Liberator urbis* and *Fundator quietis* to return to the Augustan model.

When Constantine defeated Licinius on 18 September 324 he had effectively conquered the East

<sup>18</sup>RIC VI Rome after 284, note on p. 688 (London).

<sup>19</sup>RIC VII Trier 21 (London).

<sup>20</sup>Maria R. Alföldi, *Die Constantinische Goldprägung* (Mainz, 1963), 57–62, etc.

<sup>21</sup>RIC VI Ostia 69 and VI Trier 815; cf. Bastien, pp. 155–56.

<sup>22</sup>RIC IV.3 Milan 86a (p. 131); this example in London is of higher artistic quality than any of the others I have examined.

and was the sole ruler of all the civilized world. Accordingly it is understandable that he would adopt the diadem of Alexander the Great and also his heaven-gazing pose for special issues of coins such as that in Figure 14,<sup>23</sup> struck later that year in Nicomedia, which was Constantine's principal residence at the time. The iconography of this portrait is specific and readily understandable, but the physiognomy is essentially still the same as in the heroic Augustan type that had been standardized a dozen years earlier. Similar coins were struck in 324/5 at Thessalonica, Sirmium, and Ticinum; at Ticinum and about two years later at Trier this special type was rendered with more naturalistic modeling, in keeping with the general distinction in style between eastern and western mints at this time, but it remained an iconography used for special purposes. The iconography associated with Alexander supplied the pose and the diadem, the attributes of divinely guided kingship, but it did not require any change in the idealized youthful physiognomy that had been developed on the basis of the Augustan model.

That physiognomy began to change, however, around 333. Gradually, as particularly evident in coins of the highest artistic quality, the jaw became heavier and the jowls came to obscure the transition from the back of the jaw to the neck. The end of this evolution of Constantine's old-age portrait can be seen in a fine medallion of two solidi struck in Constantinople in 336/7 (Fig. 16)<sup>24</sup> or in the posthumous coin of Divus Constantinus struck in Constantinople shortly after his death on 22 May 337 (Fig. 15).<sup>25</sup> In physiognomy this is easily recognized as the fleshy-faced portrait of Figure 10 grown old. The modeling is subtle and in some ways more naturalistic than in the early fleshy portrait, especially in the neck. Our search for the actual physiognomy of Constantine is now accomplished. We can define the fleshy-cheeked and heavy-jowled aspect of Constantine's face as confidently as we can the distinctive shape of his nose, and we might wonder if the receding chin of Figures 6 and 10 is not more accurate than the projecting chin of Figures 15 and 16.

But the question of a true portrait is more complex, and each of these main types has some claim on that designation. The first British Museum coin (Fig. 6), showing Constantine in the formula of the

young caesar and eventual successor, was certainly true in expressing his situation in the months just after his father's death. The modification of this type later that year, under the influence of Augustan iconography, suggests a political resourcefulness and determination we can deduce from his later career. The return to the Augustan type in 312 and the introduction of the Alexander type in 324 are obvious cases of modifying an established portrait to take advantage of the associative aspects of a generally recognized iconography. This is art conditioned by external considerations, and that is clearly true to the course of Constantine's political career.

The two more naturalistic and less flattering portrait types, the fleshy portrait and the old-age portrait, are more difficult to explain. Searching for a comparable incident in Roman history, we could cite the strikingly naturalistic portrait of Galba that appeared on his coins in 68, advertizing to the Roman People his opposition to Nero, and implying a promise to return to the good old days by using a style of portraiture easily recognized as a Republican tradition. Correspondingly, when Otho issued his coins early in 69 he effectively told the Roman People that he had been Nero's friend, and he sought legitimacy through association of portrait styles. But in the years following 307 there was no current tradition to which the youthful, clean-shaven, fleshy-faced portrait could refer. For nearly two centuries emperors of mature years had always been shown bearded, except for Valerian (253–260), who was normally clean-shaven; although he also had a very fleshy face, there was no reason for Constantine to want to be associated with him, and their coin portraits are not significantly similar in style.

The current Tetrarchic tradition emphasized *similitudo* among the portraits to express *concordia* among the augusti and caesars, as is obvious in the porphyry monuments and also in coins struck in eastern mints. At Trier Constantius had moved away from this tradition by making his own portrait considerably more individualized than those of his colleagues, and some similar developments can be seen in other western mints; but this was no more than a partial precedent for Constantine's fleshy portrait, which is more schematic in style than the last of his father's portraits (Fig. 4). The fleshy portrait cannot be seen, therefore, as having been conditioned by external factors, as having been selected to make a public statement. It must have been chosen, apparently late in 307, as a mat-

<sup>23</sup> *RIC* VII Nicomedia 70 (London).

<sup>24</sup> *RIC* VII Constantinople 101 (Paris).

<sup>25</sup> *RIC* VIII Constantinople 1 (Paris).



ter of personal taste, a taste partially predicted by that of Constantius.

The old-age portrait evolved over a period of two or three years at a time when Constantine was secure on the throne, when he had not had a significant rival for a decade. It had no direct precedent—after all, Augustus did not allow his image to grow old—and therefore it, too, must be seen as the result of personal choice, effectively the same taste that had led to the early fleshy portrait, now freed of the restrictions of political iconography. But if Constantine was now presenting to the Roman People the true physical appearance of his face, without self-flattery or pretentious political allusion, he was also presenting the true result of his spiritual evolution. The enormous eye, now depicted almost in frontal aspect, jumps out of organic context, dominating the expressive quality of the face, and it is lifted up to heaven even more emphatically than in the early versions of the Alexander type. That is the true image of spiritual authority in the man who had himself portrayed as Helios in a colossal statue on a column in the Forum of his new capital, and who provided that he was to be buried in his new Church of the Apostles in a manner indicating that he was slightly more equal than any of the Twelve.<sup>26</sup>

Considered as part of Constantinian art in general this series of portraits is significant for its naturalistic qualities and particularly for the predominance of the Augustan type, a clear symptom of Constantine's classical revival in art, which we know from works such as the ceiling paintings

from his palace in Trier and the decorative sculpture from his Baths and the Baths of Helena in Rome.

Considered in the full tradition of Roman portraiture this series constitutes an extraordinary case study. No other emperor changed his public image as drastically or as often, and none was more resourceful in manipulating his portrait for propagandistic effect. More specifically, from the point of view of the Roman idea of the physiognomically accurate and incisively expressive portrait, here we are near the end of a tradition. The sons of Constantine accepted formulaic portraits that are essentially interchangeable, and so did most of their successors. Julian, Procopius, and Eugenius are bearded, but it is really only Magnentius and his brother Decentius who developed physiognomically distinctive and expressive portraits in the century after Constantine. Isolated survivals of the old portrait tradition were still possible, as in some private marble portraits from Aphrodisias, but the very notion of portraiture was changing. As Ernst Kitzinger has pointed out, it would reemerge as a special mode in sixth-century wall painting and seventh-century coinage.<sup>27</sup> Constantine's repeated manipulation of his public image during his long career stands both as a remarkable achievement in itself and as an important aspect of the artistic revival he brought about. But it was not to be repeated.

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<sup>26</sup>See Richard Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals, Topography and Politics* (Berkeley, 1983), 56–66, etc.

<sup>27</sup>Ernst Kitzinger, "Some Reflections on Portraiture in Byzantine Art," *Mélanges G. Ostrogorsky*, I (Belgrade, 1963), 185–93; rpr. in his *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Bloomington, 1976), 256–69.