Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge

Constantine’s victory in 312 at the battle of the Milvian Bridge established his rule as the first Christian emperor. This book examines the creation and dissemination of the legends about that battle and its significance. Christian histories, panegyrics, and an honorific arch at Rome soon commemorated his victory, and the emperor himself contributed to the myth by describing his vision of a cross in the sky before the battle. Through meticulous research into the late Roman narratives and the medieval and Byzantine legends, this book moves beyond a strictly religious perspective by emphasizing the conflicts about the periphery of the Roman empire, the nature of emperorship, and the role of Rome as a capital city. Throughout late antiquity and the medieval period, memories of Constantine’s victory served as a powerful paradigm for understanding rulership in a Christian society.

Raymond Van Dam is Professor in the Department of History at the University of Michigan. His most recent books are Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History during Late Antiquity (2010) and The Roman Revolution of Constantine (Cambridge, 2007).
REMEMBERING CONSTANTINE AT THE MILVIAN BRIDGE

RAYMOND VAN DAM

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
For Anne
CONTENTS

PREFACE ix ABBREVIATIONS xi TIMELINE xii

1. FOREWORD: VISIONS OF CONSTANTINE 1
   The Vision
   Memories, Traditions, Narratives
   That Other Vision
   Imaginary History

2. THE AFTERLIFE OF CONSTANTINE 19
   Medieval Popes
   The Battle at Constantinople
   Relics

3. ECClesiASTICAL HistORIES 33
   Pagan Critics
   Christian Historians
   New Visions
   Memories of Constantine

4. CONSTANTINE’S MEMORIES 56
   Eusebius and Constantine
   Constantine’s Stories
   Eusebius’ Memories
   Theology Becomes History
   From Moses to Jesus

5. EUSEBIUS’ COMMENTARY 82
   Changing the Story . . . Repeatedly
   Changing the Backstory

vii
viii  CONTENTS

6. SHAPING MEMORIES IN THE WEST  © 101
   A Panegyric at Trier
   Lactantius at Trier
   The Arch in Rome
   A Panegyric at Rome
   Absence
   Twilight

7. ROME AFTER THE BATTLE  © 155
   Porfyrius the Poet
   A Dispute in North Africa
   The Arch at Malborghetto
   A Dedication, a Statue, and a Hand
   Churches and Ritual Topography
   Victory

8. BACKWARD AND FORWARD  © 219

9. REMEMBERING MAXENTIUS  © 224
   Empire
   Emperorship
   Forgetting Maxentius

10. BACK WORD: THE BRIDGE  © 253
    Remembering the Bridge

EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS  © 259  BIBLIOGRAPHY  © 267
INDEX  © 289
A book about memories of Constantine is also an album of memories for me. Earlier versions of parts of chapters were presented as the Moritz Lecture at Kalamazoo College, a plenary lecture at the annual conference of the North American Patristics Society, and a lecture at Calvin College. The most rewarding moments of those occasions were always the complementary conversations: with Anne Haeckl, John Wickstrom, and their students at Kalamazoo College; with Paul Blowers, Virginia Burrus, Elizabeth Digeser, David Hunter, Adam Schor, and Dennis Trout at NAPS; and with Young Kim, Mark Williams, and their students at Calvin College.

As an undergraduate and a graduate student I was blessed to enjoy the company and learning of wonderful professors. As a professor I continue to learn from the undergraduates in my survey courses and the graduate students in my seminars, who have become my most invigorating teachers. After his victory at the Milvian Bridge, the emperor Constantine relished arguing with bishops at their councils. He would likewise have enjoyed talking about late antiquity with Alex Angelov, Jon Arnold, and Rob Chenault, and with Ian Mladjov, who designed and drew the splendid maps.

Stimulating comments from Mark Humphries and the anonymous Press readers were helpful, encouraging, and much appreciated. Publishing with Cambridge University Press is a high honor; working with Beatrice Rehl, the best editor in academic publishing, is a delightful pleasure.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACW</td>
<td>Ancient Christian Writers (Westminster)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budé</td>
<td>Collection des Universités de France publiée sous le patronage de l’Association Guillaume Budé (Paris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CChr.</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum (Turnhout)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIL</td>
<td>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum (Berlin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSEL</td>
<td>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum (Vienna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCS</td>
<td>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte (Berlin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGH</td>
<td>Monumenta Germaniae historica (Berlin, Hannover, and Leipzig)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCT</td>
<td>Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Patrologia graeca (Paris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Patrologia latina (Paris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SChr.</td>
<td>Sources chrétiennes (Paris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teubner</td>
<td>Bibliotheca scriptorum graecorum et romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig and Stuttgart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTH</td>
<td>Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
early 21st century: this book
mid-19th century: Jacob Burckhardt’s Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen (Chap. 1)
late 18th century: Edward Gibbon’s The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Chap. 1)
mid-17th century: Bernini’s statue of Constantine in the Church of St. Peter (Chap. 2)
early 16th century: Raphael’s frescoes in papal apartment (Chap. 2)
millennial period: Donation of Constantine (Chap. 2)
late 9th century: Byzantine Life of Constantine (Chap. 2)
late 8th or early 9th century: forgery of Constitution of Constantine (Chap. 2)
late 6th century: historian Evagrius (Chap. 3)
527–565: emperor Justinian
early 6th century: historian Zosimus (Chap. 3) and historian John Malalas (Chap. 2)
430s–440s: historians Socrates and Sozomen at Constantinople, and bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus (Chap. 3)
425–455: emperor Valentinian III
early 5th century: historian Rufinus (Chap. 3, 7)
late 4th–early 5th century: Eunapius of Sardis (Chap. 3)
379–395: emperor Theodosius
361–363: emperor Julian
early 350s: revolts of Magnentius and Vetranio; letter of bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (Chap. 3)
after 337: Praxagoras’ “History of Constantine the Great” (Chap. 6)
337–361: emperor Constantius II

CONSTANTINE AND EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA (see next page)

303: visit of Diocletian and Maximian to Rome; Monument of Five Columns (Chap. 6–7, 9)
from 284, Tetrarchic emperors: Diocletian (284–305), Maximian (285–305, 306–310), Constantius I (293–306),
Galérius (293–311), Severus (305–307), Maximinus (305–313), Licinius (308–324)
late 3rd century: construction of Aurelian Wall at Rome
161–180: emperor Marcus Aurelius
117–138: emperor Hadrian
98–117: emperor Trajan
31 B.C.–A.D. 14: emperor Augustus
late 3rd century B.C.: construction of Flaminian Way (Chap. 7) and Milvian Bridge (Chap. 10)
late 6th century B.C.: establishment of Republic; defense of Sublician Bridge by Horatius Cocles (Chap. 10)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constantine</th>
<th>Both (or Neither)</th>
<th>Eusebius of Caesarea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>337 May 22: death</td>
<td>336 July 25: celebration at Constantinople of 30th anniversary of Constantine’s accession, including banquet for bishops and oration by Eusebius</td>
<td>339(?): May 30: death after May 337: <em>Life of Constantine</em> (Chap. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>330 May 11: dedication of Constantinople</td>
<td>325 June–July: council of Nicaea (Chap. 4)</td>
<td>325 March(?): council of Antioch (Chap. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>324–325 winter or 325 spring: visit to Antioch (Chap. 4)</td>
<td>324 September 18: final victory over Licinius</td>
<td>324–335: Silvester, bishop of Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>316 October–317 February: conflict with Licinius</td>
<td>before autumn 316: “second edition” of <em>Ecclesiastical History</em> 8–9 + 10 (Chap. 5)</td>
<td>late 313 or 314: “first edition” of <em>Ecclesiastical History</em> 8–9 (Chap. 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>315 July 21–September 27: visit to Rome; dedication of arch of Constantine (Chap. 6)</td>
<td>ca. 314/315: Lactantius’ <em>Deaths of the Persecutors</em>, at Trier (Chap. 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>314 summer: council of Arles (Chap. 7)</td>
<td>314–335: Silvester, bishop of Rome</td>
<td>after October 312: anonymous source about Maxentius and Constantine at Rome (Chap. 5, 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>313 late summer (?): panegyric at Trier (?) (Chap. 6, 7)</td>
<td>313 summer: death of Maximinus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porfyrius the poet (Chap. 7)</td>
<td>312 October 29–313 January: visit to Rome; Church of St. John Lateran (Chap. 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312 October 28: battle at the Milvian Bridge; death of Maxentius (Chap. 1, 9)</td>
<td>311–314: Miltiades, bishop of Rome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310 summer: death of Maximian; Constantine’s vision of Apollo (Chap. 1); panegyric at Trier (Chap. 7)</td>
<td>306 October 28: Maxentius proclaimed emperor at Rome (Chap. 9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>306 July 25: Constantine proclaimed emperor at York (Chap. 9)</td>
<td>306 October 28: Maxentius proclaimed emperor at Rome (Chap. 9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>