

INTRODUCTION



THE STORY OF CONSTANTINE NEVER CEASES TO FASCINATE. There are at least three reasons for this. In the first place, like any good tale, it has something to please everyone – a quest for power, military campaigns on a wide geographical scale, victory over adversity, political intrigue, scandal, murder, religious disputes, and an absorbing cultural context. Second, it is an important story: Constantine took two crucial decisions that changed the course of European history – on the one hand he embraced the persecuted Christians and even converted to their faith, securing Christianity's position even today as a major monotheistic religion; on the other, he founded Constantinople as a rival to Rome, ensuring the survival of the empire in the East long after the loss of Rome and the western provinces in the fifth century. Last, but by no means least, there is room for debate and speculation: our sources tantalize us by revealing enough to whet our appetite for this man and his times, but not so much that we can ever know all the answers.¹

Despite the huge amount of interest shown in Constantine and his age by historians, theologians, archaeologists, and art-historians, the quantity of documentary and archaeological evidence relating to his reign is not as extensive as we might have hoped, and the discovery of new material is not frequent. Consequently, much of the available information has been sifted and discussed again and again by scholars, generating such a massive amount of literature that it would not be unreasonable to ask whether there is anything substantially new to be said.

Yet different scholars choose to explore the particular themes that take their interest, they bring their own perspective to bear on the interpretation of the available evidence, and they choose to emphasize and assess certain pieces of evidence as more significant whilst judging the importance of others to be less. As a result, various Constantines – some more plausible than others – have emerged in the scholarly literature over the years.²

My own thoughts on the emperor, as expressed here, are subject to the same personal decisions. I have, however, sought not merely to present a personal interpretation but also to explore the difficulties of analysing the available evidence, the differing inferences that might be drawn, and the ambiguities present. Ambiguity, it must be said from the start, will be a recurrent theme, for Constantine worked hard to accommodate both pagans and Christians, and had to adapt his behaviour and propaganda accordingly. I can only hope that my preferred perspectives, interpretations, and emphases give a truer, or – given that the nature of the evidence means that the whole truth will never be known – a fuller and more plausible picture of the real Constantine and the motivations behind his actions. At the very least they give another perspective.

My purpose in writing about Constantine has not been – or has not primarily been – to produce another historical account or biography (of which there are many),³ but to explore and hopefully achieve a better understanding of the emperor's philosophy and propaganda of rulership and its

relationship to his changing public and private faith. What were the messages that Constantine and his court wished to convey to the Roman people through art, architecture, and texts? What image of himself, his style of rulership, and his religious beliefs did Constantine hope to project? Were his personal beliefs reflected publicly? Did Constantine, like his Tetrarchic predecessors, consider himself in close proximity to the gods? If so, how did he reconcile his profession of Christian faith – a religion that recognized only one God – with pagan traditions of imperial divinity?

To tackle these issues, I have in two respects taken a different approach to the age of Constantine than most of my predecessors.

In the first place, I have judged it necessary not just to deal with the Constantinian age, but, where necessary, to set Constantine in the much broader context of the kings and emperors of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Whilst there is a danger in such an approach of drawing false and anachronistic parallels, I believe that the method, if applied with caution, can suggest new ways of interpreting the limited evidence we possess about Constantine himself, and can help in assessing his position in relation to the earlier traditions. I do not mean to suggest by this approach that Constantine and his court were aware of all this history, rather that similar concepts and ideas may have been transmitted to them through texts and images, although perhaps in an altered form. The test of such an approach is whether the interpretations it suggests have a meaningful application in the Constantinian age in respect of a significant number of pieces of evidence.

Second, I have sought to bring together both archaeological and historical evidence. The published works devoted to Constantine tend to be purely historical, and the best treatments of the relevant archaeological and art-historical evidence often appear separately in books dedicated to Roman art and architecture, in journal articles, or in exhibition catalogues. The two types of evidence are seldom discussed side by side with equal prominence or accuracy, which is an unfortunate situation given that the two are complementary sources of information, each of which ought to be used to enhance our understanding of the other.⁴ Although by attempt-

ing to tackle both subjects at the same time I run the risk of satisfying neither the archaeological nor the historical specialists, I believe such an approach has great benefits that outweigh the potential pitfalls. The significance of archaeological (particularly iconographical) evidence can never be fully appreciated without a careful consideration of the historical circumstances to which it relates, and I hope that the simultaneous exploration of both will not only give a broad perspective to the subject we are discussing but also introduce readers less familiar with the Constantinian period to the full spectrum of evidence available.

This book seeks not only to present the reader with much of the available archaeological and historical evidence bearing on Constantine's public image but also to argue for a new way of looking at Constantinian propaganda. A case can be made, as I explain in the pages that follow, that the evidence, when taken as a whole, suggests that Constantine was following more closely and more overtly than most earlier Roman emperors a solar philosophy of kingship whose beginnings can be traced back to the Hellenistic period and beyond. This interpretation was suggested to me by a short but seminal paper by Norman Baynes, in which he discussed Eusebius' portrayal of the nature of Constantine's rulership.⁵ The validity of Baynes' insightful suggestion that Eusebius was inspired by much earlier traditions of kingship philosophy was later clearly demonstrated when his argument was placed in its wider context by Francis Dvornik in his two volumes on *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*.⁶ Here I have sought to show that the representation of Constantine's rule in terms of kingship philosophy was not confined to Eusebius' rhetoric but was an integral part of the propaganda emanating from the palace, and that this is reflected in both texts and archaeology. I have also placed much more emphasis on the importance of the solar aspects of both kingship theory and Christianity.

I remain mindful of Baynes' warning that "we may imagine that we have discovered the key to a personality, and then we persuade ourselves that it will open every lock."⁷ Whilst I would not claim that the philosophical perspective presented here is "a single master-key" to Constantine's religious and

political beliefs and actions, nevertheless it would seem to explain a great deal. Others may prefer to interpret each piece of evidence in isolation and make no attempt to detect an underlying philosophy. Indeed, I am sure that there will be some who will want to take each element of my argument, probe it ruthlessly for weak points, and then deny the validity of the overall case. But it is, in my opinion, the impression left by the complete dossier of archaeological and historical evidence that must be taken into account, and I therefore believe that the case has something to recommend it and deserves to be set forth.

Although those looking for a traditional, strictly chronological narrative of Constantine's reign will not find it here, throughout the book I have endeavoured to give sufficient historical context for the reader to appreciate the changing political and religious circumstances, and I have provided a chronological chart. I have also striven to give adequate supporting annotation for readers who may want to explore the subject further in both primary and secondary literature. The primary literature becomes more accessible to those without ancient languages as the number of accurate scholarly translations and commentaries continues to grow. In this regard I must acknowledge my debt to the excellent translation of, and commentary on Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* by Averil Cameron and Stuart Hall, to which all who study Constantine cannot fail to refer with profit. Although not always based on the most accurate edition of a text, translations in series such as the Loeb Classical Library and the Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church are widely available, and for that reason I have cited them in the hope that the references may encourage students to consult the primary sources for themselves. I do not make any claim to having provided a complete secondary bibliography – a hopeless task in such a popular scholarly field. I have merely cited the large number of works that I have found most relevant and useful for the issues I have chosen to address, conscious of the fact that I could have read and listed many more were there no limits to my research time and the finances of both the publisher and the organizations that have contributed generously to the costs of publication.

The notes and bibliographies in those works will in turn guide the reader who wants to delve deeper into the ever-increasing wealth of academic literature.

EUSEBIUS AND OTHER SOURCES ON CONSTANTINE

The extent of our knowledge about the reign of Constantine and his Tetrarchic predecessors has suffered badly because of the loss of the first thirteen books of the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus.⁸ This history of Rome, which continued the work of Tacitus from A.D. 96 to the year 378, would have provided a unique insight into the period by an author who was politically aware and militarily experienced. Other texts whose losses are to be lamented are Praxagoras' *History of Constantine the Great*, which was written shortly after the emperor's death,⁹ and a ten-book history of the emperor by Bearchius, who wrote in the mid-fourth century.

In this situation, historians are forced to rely on less complete and less even-handed treatments of Constantine. Amongst these are the brief historical summaries by Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Orosius, and the anonymous but important *Origin of Constantine*, which was probably written soon after the emperor's death.¹⁰ In addition there is the *New History* of the pagan historian Zosimus, which was written in the late fifth century and covered the period 200–410, although it now regrettably lacks the reign of Diocletian.¹¹ This work must be used with caution because of the negative way in which Constantine is portrayed – a result of the author having drawn extensively on the lost *History* of Eunapius, which was probably written as a retort to the sympathetic treatments Constantine had received from Praxagoras and Bearchius.

Fortunately, to counter the negative pagan perspective of the likes of Zosimus, scholars can turn to the surviving Christian accounts of Constantine's reign. The Christian tradition generated a number of contemporary works about Constantine and his age, in particular those by Lactantius and Eusebius of Caesarea.¹² Both authors wrote several works, but of special interest and importance are Lactantius' *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* and Eusebius' *Church History*,

Life of Constantine, and *In Praise of Constantine*.¹³ The first of these was written between 313 and 315, and in it Lactantius describes the terrible judgements that God passed on the persecutors of the Christians from Nero to Diocletian. Eusebius' *Church History* traced the story of the Christian faithful from the time of Christ to his own day. It passed through several editions, the first published before 300 in seven books, the second at about the end of 313 with two new books (a summary of the persecution in Palestine as Book Eight plus what is today Book Nine), the third around 315 (in which the account of Palestinian martyrdoms was replaced by the present eighth book), and the fourth and final edition soon after the defeat of Licinius.¹⁴ Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, which tells the eponymous hero's story from around 301, when he travelled with Diocletian in Palestine, to 337, when he accepted baptism and died, is the most important single source we possess about Constantine. One analysis of the text has concluded that the book reached its final form at the hands of an unknown editor after Eusebius' death in 339. This editor, it is claimed, composed some passages of his own to link together two unfinished Eusebian works: a continuation of the *Church History* from the year 325 and a panegyric begun after Constantine's death. Whatever the stages in composition, the result may be called a "literary hybrid."¹⁵ To the main text of the *Life*, Eusebius appended three speeches, the second of which was Eusebius' own oration *In Praise of Constantine*, which was read before the emperor in 336 during the celebration of his thirtieth year of rule. In it, Eusebius presented a sophisticated philosophy of Constantinian kingship, explaining the intimate relationship of the emperor to Christ and God.

All four texts, despite their inestimable value, must be used with caution when trying to understand the emperor's personal motives and ideals because the accounts they present are heavily coloured by the authors' own political and Christian agendas and perspectives. Lactantius, for instance, makes no attempt to hide his violent hatred of Constantine's enemies whilst at the same time expressing the highest regard for Constantine himself. His tone naturally raises questions about his reliability.¹⁶ As for Eusebius, he portrays Constantine as the founder of a Christian

empire, admitting in the introduction to his *Life* that he intends to omit accounts of wars and laws, to concentrate instead on "the recording of actions dear to God" and "what relates to the life which is dear to God," adding that "the occasion demands that I offer unrestrained praises in varied words."¹⁷

Since scholars must rely heavily on the *Life of Constantine* when fashioning a view of the Constantinian era, I shall make a few observations on the importance of approaching Eusebius' account with healthy scepticism, and on the difficulties of assessing the accuracy of the information it provides.¹⁸ In the first place, we should remember that Eusebius was a provincial bishop who lived and wrote in Caesarea in Palestine. He visited the imperial court in Constantinople on just four occasions, all after the emperor's victory over Licinius in 324.¹⁹ His first meeting with the emperor was probably at the Council of Nicaea in 325, when Constantine would have become familiar with the bishop's thinking on the relationship of the Father to the Son. The two probably met again in December 327 at the Council of Nicomedia, but their paths did not cross again until November 335, when Eusebius travelled to Constantinople and recited to the emperor an oration concerning the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which had recently been dedicated. In the summer of the following year, Eusebius was again in the capital, this time to recite his *In Praise of Constantine* in celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine's accession, and he may have remained there until at least Easter in 337.

In addition to their rare meetings, we know from Eusebius of a few letters that passed between the bishop and the emperor – although Timothy Barnes claims "it is not unduly skeptical to suspect that Eusebius quotes all the important letters which he ever received from Constantine."²⁰ Yet, despite his distance from the centre of politics, it is clear from Eusebius' works that he endeavoured to compose reliable history. His inclusion in the *Life* not only of letters written to him by the emperor but also of other imperial letters and decrees illustrates his desire to preserve historically important materials.²¹ Before citing one decree, he comments that it should be quoted "both so that the actual text of this decree may survive through our history and be preserved for

those after us, and in order to confirm the truth of our narratives.”²² The extent to which he achieved his aim of writing a truthful history is, however, debatable, for it is clear that in certain instances Eusebius altered historical facts (generally to present Constantine or members of his family in the best light), omitted important information (often for the same purpose), and placed interpretations on events, actions, and imagery that reflect his own preferred perspective rather than reality.²³ Let me give some examples.

In the *Life*, Eusebius describes Constantius, Constantine’s deceased father, as “recognizing only the God over all,” clearly intending the reader to understand that he had been a Christian and that Constantine followed in his pious footsteps. Yet, Constantius is known to have destroyed Christian churches – even if, as one text claims, he acted unwillingly and only to avoid upsetting his colleagues. Although Constantius brought Christian persecution to an end in the West in 305, the majority of coins minted under him depicted the gods Hercules and Jupiter, and there was no attempt by him to dispense with these images of traditional pagan religion.²⁴

Eusebius’ omission of an important and terrible episode in 326 demonstrates perfectly his self-professed aim to “offer unrestrained praises.” So shocking and shameful that they get no mention in the *Life* whatsoever are the death sentence passed on Crispus, Constantine’s son by his first wife, and the mysterious but probably related death of his second wife, Fausta.

Deliberate misrepresentation occurs in Eusebius’ account of the arrangements that the ageing Constantine made for the succession to the throne. Eusebius falsely claims that the emperor expected his three surviving sons by Fausta – the Caesars Constantine, Constantius, and Constans – to succeed him. Apparently Eusebius felt it necessary to make this fallacious assertion to avoid the necessity of making any reference to Constantine’s nephew Dalmatius, who had also been raised to the rank of Caesar by the emperor. Mention of the murders of Dalmatius and his brothers immediately after Constantine’s death on the orders of Constantius would have tarnished the reputation of the Constantinian house, and so Eusebius preferred to omit this episode and present

the resulting rule-of-three as if it had always been Constantine’s intention.²⁵

As for Eusebius placing his preferred spin on events, there are many places in which we may reasonably be suspicious of the Christian motives he ascribes to the emperor’s actions. For instance, Eusebius categorically states that Constantine banned all sacrifice. If this were true, it would constitute a revolutionary move against traditional Roman religion. Yet, when examined in detail, there is reason to doubt that such a bold law was passed and rigorously enforced, although there can be no doubt that, after 324, Constantine was outspoken in his criticism of paganism.²⁶

These examples suffice to show that readers of the *Life* who are interested in exploiting its information for historical purposes must always bear in mind what Eusebius might have had to gain by altering or suppressing the truth, or by placing a particular interpretation on the facts – whether with regard to promoting Constantine as the ideal Christian ruler, or to putting down the emperor’s rivals, or to promoting his own religious viewpoint.

Bearing these possibilities in mind is one thing; *proving* deception, omission, or distorted interpretation is quite another. When suspicions arise, the best test is to compare Eusebius’ assertions with other historical evidence – if it exists. For example, Eusebius claims that the young Constantine fled from the plots of Diocletian and Galerius to the protection of his father in Gaul. On arrival in the West, he found Constantius on his death bed, and the emperor greeted his son with open arms, placed charge of the empire in his hands, and then expired. Next, having assumed the purple, Constantine campaigned successfully on the Rhine and in Britain. The sequence of events seems too dramatic to be true, and, indeed, when we compare the *Origin of Constantine* and the panegyric of 310, we discover that Constantine, whether or not he fled from a conspiracy in the eastern court, arrived in Boulogne to find his father very much alive. The campaign against the Picts in Britain was jointly conducted by father and son, and it was only later that Constantius died.²⁷

To take another example, in neither the *Church History* nor the *Life of Constantine* do we find full details of the events leading up to the breakdown of

the peace accord between Constantine and Licinius in 316. In the fourth edition of the former book, which appeared after Constantine's victory in 324, the favourable view of Licinius that had been expressed in earlier versions was adjusted.²⁸ In the *Life*, which was probably started in earnest shortly before Constantine's death, Licinius was consistently represented as a jealous, crafty, deceitful ingrate waging war against God.²⁹ In both cases, the omission of the events that led to the war is probably explained by the fact that Constantine was the aggressor. It is perhaps not surprising to find the pagan historian Zosimus claiming as much,³⁰ but the preservation of significant information in the *Origin of Constantine* provides a more reliable indication that Constantine may have engineered the breakdown. This he did by unreasonably proposing that his brother-in-law Bassianus be made a Caesar, the other Caesar presumably being his son, Crispus. Licinius could never have accepted such a proposal, since he had a newborn son of his own, whom he would have expected to be promoted to the rank of Caesar alongside Crispus. The situation became darker when Constantine's second wife, Fausta, unexpectedly became pregnant after eight years of barren marriage. By his proposal to elevate Bassianus, Constantine had unintentionally created a rival to his potential second son. The story goes that Licinius used Bassianus' brother Senecio to persuade Bassianus to assassinate Constantine. Bassianus, however, was killed when he was caught in the act, and Senecio fled to Licinius' protection. Whether there is any truth in the charge of attempted assassination we shall never know, but it is not unlikely that it was trumped up by Constantine to justify Bassianus' removal. When Licinius refused to hand Senecio over to justice, Constantine had a justification for going to war.³¹

Unfortunately, when such contradictions are found in our historical sources, it is not always easy to determine whether we should believe Eusebius or reject his assertions in favour of the contrary accounts. That is because other writers, too, had their agendas. Some, like Zosimus for example, being firmly anti-Christian and anti-Constantine, were equally prone to distorting the truth for their own purposes. The situation is somewhat easier when Eusebius' version in the *Life* can be compared

with his own accounts in his earlier *Church History*. Such comparison can reveal how Eusebius adjusted his original story in the light of subsequent events. For instance, the *Church History* contains no reference to Constantine's famous dream and vision. Admittedly, Eusebius may not have heard the story until a meeting with Constantine in 325 or 336, but the decision to add it to the historical account of the *Life*, which was written after Constantine had emerged as the sole ruler of the empire, illustrates Eusebius' desire to portray Constantine's rise to power as a direct consequence of his having been selected by the Christian God to be His champion – as Constantine himself no doubt wished it to be portrayed.³²

The better quality historical evidence for testing Eusebius' accuracy comes from official documents, such as laws and letters sent out by the emperor himself. Eusebius refers to many laws passed by Constantine, but he does not quote them. Whether he had the texts at hand we do not know, but clearly his brief summaries do not correspond closely to the reality of those laws that do survive. It is evident that not only has he often misrepresented the detail of the laws but he has also given them a Christian interpretation not always evident from the laws themselves.³³

When Eusebius claims that Constantinople was full of churches, it is only right to be suspicious, since we know that he was keen to paint his emperor as a fervent believer and defender of the faith.³⁴ Indeed, if we search in other sources for information that might help clarify the number of Constantinian churches in the city, we find that only three are named (in addition to the emperor's own burial place, which was also used for worship). However, we also possess a letter from Constantine to Eusebius, in which the emperor requested fifty bound copies of the gospels to be prepared and sent to him because "it is particularly fitting that more churches should be established."³⁵ Even with such evidence in support of Eusebius' claim, however, the general scepticism that surrounds Eusebius' reliability – particularly with regard to the extent to which Constantinople was a Christian city, and to which Constantine was a Christian emperor – can still lead to doubt. Thus, in their commentary on the *Life*, Cameron and Hall prefer to reject the possibility that there were more than a handful of churches in the city.³⁶

In short, it is necessary to consider Eusebius' assertions alongside those of other authors and together with the archaeological evidence. When there are inconsistencies we must begin to explore the motives that each author may have had for omitting, altering, or misrepresenting the facts. More often than not, it will not be possible to determine whether one particular account should be trusted above the others. Sometimes, the most plausible reconstruction of reality will come from assuming that different aspects of the truth are reflected to different degrees in different accounts. But at other times we will only be able to advance several possible scenarios without certainty about which is correct.

We must be equally cautious when exploiting the valuable information that can be gained from the surviving panegyric orations written by rhetoricians of the schools of Gaul.³⁷ These works praised Constantine and other later Roman emperors on occasions such as the fifth or tenth anniversary of their accession, their birthday, their marriage, or their entrance into or departure from a city. Some also attempted to win from the emperor specific concessions for a particular town, such as a reduction in taxes. In each case, flattery was necessary.³⁸ Such speeches are likely to have been delivered all over the empire on days of celebration, in which case those that survive by Gallic authors represent a small proportion of the thousands that must have been delivered.³⁹ We must also be aware that the surviving speeches give a local, Gallic perspective, and that therefore any view the panegyrics might provide of the empire as a whole is distorted by their "parochial lens."⁴⁰

The structure of such a speech was constrained by strict rhetorical rules, such as those laid down in the handbooks of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Menander Rhetor, and the imagery and phraseology was not original but drawn from authors of the past, especially Cicero. Nevertheless, the orators were skilled in working within these constraints to create a speech relevant to current political circumstances, the place of delivery, the expectations of the imperial court, and the needs of whoever had commissioned the oration. The orator had to say what he thought the emperor wanted to hear – but whether he always correctly assessed this is open to scholarly debate. Although they give us (amongst other

things) an insight into ideologies of rulership in Late Antiquity, the orations are works of flattery constructed according to what has been called "a trained method of perception," and we must therefore take care in assessing the extent to which they reflect the image the orator had of his ruler, the image that the emperor himself wished to propagate, and the reality about the emperor.⁴¹

As a result of these difficulties, the best sources of information we have for assessing Constantine's beliefs and the reasoning behind his actions are – as Norman Baynes emphasized in a fundamental lecture read to the British Academy in 1930 – the emperor's own writings.⁴² We possess not only a number of Constantine's laws, which are preserved in the *Theodosian Code*,⁴³ but also a selection of letters and edicts sent out to governors, bishops, and kings, many of which are preserved (in Latin) in an appendix to Optatus' treatise *Against the Donatists* and (in Greek translation) in the works of Eusebius, particularly the *Life of Constantine*.⁴⁴ The authenticity of those in Optatus was questioned by Otto Seeck but defended by others, including Norman Baynes.⁴⁵ The accuracy of those in Eusebius can hardly be doubted, since a letter of Constantine preserved by Eusebius in the *Life* and said by him to have been written after the victory of 324 for circulation to the eastern provinces has also been found on a papyrus from Egypt. The papyrus is written in a handwriting style that dates perhaps as early as 330, and which is nonliterary, suggesting that it is an official document. The text agrees verbatim with that given by Eusebius, thus demonstrating the accuracy of the information Eusebius records.⁴⁶ In addition to Constantine's laws and letters, we also possess an oration by the emperor himself, the *Oration to the Assembly of the Saints*, which is the first of three speeches Eusebius decided to append to his *Life of Constantine*.⁴⁷ Norman Baynes preferred not to consider this speech in his essay on Constantine's faith because, at the time, its authenticity was contested. Those doubts have been allayed, and it is now the issues of the oration's date and place of delivery that have come to the fore.⁴⁸

Despite the inestimable value of our texts, we cannot afford to ignore Constantine's archaeological legacy. I mean not only monuments, which were often built on a special site at a significant moment

in commemoration of an important event, but also coins and medallions, whose legends and designs (called “types” by numismatists) give an insight into imperial propaganda. Despite their importance, however, these artefacts can be just as troublesome to interpret as our texts. It would therefore not be difficult for the modern beholder to infer from a monument or coin a meaning that was never intended.

Coins, for example, may carry design elements that had not been given imperial sanction but were created on the initiative of mint officials. Alternatively, they may have been commemorative issues intended for circulation to a restricted circle of senior army officers,⁴⁹ and if so, any message they conveyed could not be considered widespread propaganda. One might think it would be straightforward to understand the meaning of a prominent public monument such as the triumphal arch erected beside the Colosseum to commemorate Constantine’s victory of 312 and his tenth year of rule. But any attempt at interpretation raises many issues, such as the extent of the pagan Senators’ involvement in the choice of decoration, the degree to which Constantine himself influenced the design, Constantine’s faith at the time, and the extent to which the availability of old sculpture dictated the choice of imagery. Coins, monuments, and their interpretation in their historical context will be central to this study of Constantine.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The organization of this book may seem unorthodox to those expecting a run-of-the-mill chronological narrative of the reign of Constantine, and I will explain its logic briefly here.

Chapter 1 concentrates on two important and suggestive aspects of Constantinian portraiture: the adoption of a new, youthful, clean-shaven portrait style in 306, and the decision that the portrait would include the diadem from 324. I argue that introduction of the latter is a strong indicator that Constantine was casting his image more in the style of an eastern monarch than a Roman emperor.

Chapter 2 explores another attribute adopted by Constantine – rays emanating from the head (either at angles or vertically in the form of a tangible-

looking crown). The use of the rays is most strikingly illustrated by the bronze, radiate statue of Constantine erected in 330 upon a porphyry column in Constantinople. The possible significance of this feature is explored with reference to Roman and Hellenistic uses of radiate headgear, and it is suggested that in Constantine’s case, and particularly with respect to his statue in Constantinople, the rays should be understood in the light of philosophical theories that the ruler reflected on earth the light of a supreme solar Deity.

The light emitted by the ruler in these philosophies of kingship was the light of salvation, and Chapter 3 therefore explores – from Hellenistic times to Late Antiquity – the idea that, by reflecting the light of the Supreme Deity, the worldly ruler became the saviour of his people. Such salvific imagery was applied to Constantine and also exploited by him. Since the salvation of the state was the responsibility of the ruler, and since the ruler was sustained by the Supreme Deity, it was necessary for the people to secure the benevolence of the Deity by engaging in proper worship if the emperor was not to fail in his protective capacity. Therefore, Constantine, together with Licinius, set out to ensure the good will of the Divinity by agreeing a policy intended to harness all the available power of prayer and sacrifice by allowing freedom of worship.

The matter of Constantine casting himself in the role of an eastern monarch and the issue of his relationship to the Supreme Deity are explored further in Chapter 4 – this time using the evidence for the procession held on the day of the dedication of Constantinople in 330. The ceremony, which was repeated each year on the city’s birthday, involved a statue of Constantine being paraded around the hippodrome on a carriage as if it were the statue of a god. The ritual recalled those held in honour of eastern kings.

In Chapter 5, I argue that the famous story of Constantine’s heavenly vision is best examined not as if it were an unusual, natural phenomenon that must be identified, but rather as a powerful tale that was forged according to long-standing traditions of rulership, traditions that served to connect the ruler with a supreme solar Deity who promised victory and long life by bestowing upon him a potent sign.

Chapter 6 examines the remains of Constantine's colossal, marble statue in Rome and the image of rulership it projected. Constantine was portrayed not only as victorious ruler but also in a pose and costume associated with the Supreme Deity, raising once again the issue of his relationship with his God.

It is not until Chapter 7 that I turn from Constantine's image and his relationship with the supreme solar Deity to the material and textual evidence concerning his nascent Christianity. It is clear that Constantine was generous to the Christians, bringing persecution to an end and funding the construction of churches, but his personal faith is much more difficult to understand from the available data. Even though he believed himself to be a Christian as early as 314, he continued to promote the Unconquered Sun, and Chapter 8 explores how Constantine may have reconciled this with his claims to be Christian: the sun could serve as a symbol for the Christian God.

Finally, Chapter 9 tackles the problem of imperial divinity. The emperors of Late Antiquity had become even closer to the gods than their predecessors, who had been worshipped during their lifetime even though they had not been proclaimed state gods until after death. Constantine apparently did not attempt, and probably did not wish, to put an end to emperor worship (for even in 337 Constans was willing to allow the construction of a temple of the imperial cult) and he probably encouraged it with monuments like his colossal statue in Rome, and events like the annual procession of his statue in Constantinople's hippodrome. This raises the question of how Constantine reconciled the tradition of imperial divinity with his monotheistic faith, which required him to believe that there was only one God in heaven. The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that Christians had adopted and adapted established traditions of kingship and applied them to Christ. On the one hand, this threatened the authority of pagan emperors, but on the other hand it opened up a new possibility for the first Christian ruler: if Constantine was the earthly representative of the supreme solar Deity, and if that Deity could be assimilated to the Christian God, then it followed that Constantine was analogous to Christ and was therefore (at

least according to Nicene orthodoxy) one with the Divinity.

NOTES

- 1 The gaps in our evidence are stressed by Barnes 2007, 191; 2009, 376–77; 2011, 1–2.
- 2 For overviews of the different assessments of Constantine, see Baynes 1972, 33–40 n. 16; Eadie 1971, 4–8; Barnes 1981, 273–75; Odahl 2005, 280–84; Lenski 2006, 7–10; Barnes 2011, 6–8, 10–11.
- 3 For historical studies, see, for example, Burckhardt 1949; MacMullen 1969; Dörries 1972; Keresztes 1981; Barnes 1981, esp. 3–77, 208–60; Grant 1993; Odahl 2005; Herrmann-Otto 2007; Brandt 2007; Stephenson 2009; Barnes 2011. Still useful, though lacking annotation, is Jones 1948 (reprinted 1962). For brief summaries of the period, see, for instance, Bleckmann 2003, Pohlsander 2004, and Lenski 2006, 59–90.
- 4 An exception is Lenski 2006, but although many facets of the reign have been usefully brought together in a single volume, they are nevertheless largely treated as discrete subjects in separate chapters.
- 5 Baynes 1933–1934.
- 6 Dvornik 1966.
- 7 Baynes 1972, 5.
- 8 For a useful survey of the ancient historical writings on Constantine, see Lieu and Montserrat 1996, 1–38.
- 9 Barnes 2011, 195–97. Photius' summary of Praxagoras is translated in Lieu and Montserrat 1996, 7–8.
- 10 Aurelius Victor: ed. Dufraigne 1975, trans. Bird 1994; Eutropius: ed. Verheyk 1821, trans. Bird 1993; Orosius: ed. Zangemeister 1882, trans. Deferrari 1964; *Origin of Constantine*: ed. Mommsen 1892, I, 1–11, trans. Stevenson in Lieu and Montserrat 1996, 39–62.
- 11 Zosimus, *New History*: ed. Paschoud 1986 and 2000, trans. Ridley 1982.
- 12 Briefly, see Barnes 2011, 8–9, 176–78 (Lactantius' career); 9–13 (Eusebius' career).
- 13 Lactantius, *Persecutors*: ed. and trans. Creed 1985; Eusebius, *Church History*: ed. Schwartz, Mommsen, and Winkelmann 1999, trans. Williamson and Louth 1989; Eusebius, *Life*: ed. Winkelmann 1991, trans. Cameron and Hall 1999; Eusebius, *In Praise of Constantine*: ed. Winkelmann 1991, trans. Drake 1976.
- 14 Barnes 1980, further developed by Burgess 1997.
- 15 Barnes 1994c, 2002b. Quote from Cameron and Hall 1999, 27, who object to Barnes' interpretation.
- 16 For an excellent example of Lactantius obscuring the truth (with regard to the rank and familial connections of Maximinus Daza and Constantine), see Mackay 1999.

- 17 Eusebius, *Life* 1.10.4; 1.11.1–2, ed. p. 20, trans. p. 72. See also Barnes 2002, 102–103.
- 18 See also the comments of Barnes 2002, 114–16.
- 19 See Barnes 1981, 266 (summer 325; December 327; November 335; summer 336). Note the continued stay proposed by Drake between the summer of 336 and Constantine's death: Drake 1988.
- 20 Barnes 1981, 267. Eusebius, *Life* 3.24, ed. p. 94, trans. p. 131, suggests that he had access to many more documents than he chose to quote. Whether any of these documents was addressed to Eusebius personally is, however, uncertain.
- 21 For a list of these documents and their dates, see Barnes 2002, 110–14.
- 22 Eusebius, *Life* 2.23.2, ed. p. 58, trans. p. 104.
- 23 See Barnes 1981, 267–71.
- 24 See pp. 89–92.
- 25 Cameron and Hall 1999, 12; Burgess 2008, 11–12; Barnes 2011, 163–68.
- 26 See pp. 284–89.
- 27 Eusebius, *Life* 1.20–25, ed. pp. 26–28, trans. pp. 77–79; *Origin of Constantine* 2, ed. Mommsen 1892, I, 7, trans. Stevenson in Lieu and Montserrat 1996, 43; *Pan. Lat.* VI.7.5, ed. and trans. pp. 228, 575–76.
- 28 Barnes 1981, 150.
- 29 Cameron and Hall 1999, 224–30, on Eusebius, *Life* 1.49–59 (esp. 1.50.2).
- 30 Lieu and Montserrat 1996, 15–16.
- 31 *Origin of Constantine* 14–15, ed. Mommsen 1892, I, 8, trans. Stevenson in Lieu and Montserrat 1996, 45; Barnes 1981, 66–67; 2011, 100–103.
- 32 For this and other examples, see Cameron and Hall 1999, 4–9.
- 33 See pp. 277–80, 289–90.
- 34 Eusebius, *Life* 3.48.1, ed. p. 104, trans. p. 140.
- 35 Eusebius, *Life* 4.36, ed. pp. 133–34, trans. pp. 166–67.
- 36 Cameron and Hall 1999, 327.
- 37 On the dates of the orations, see Barnes 2011, 181–84.
- 38 Rees 2002, 24–25.
- 39 Rees 2002, 18–19.
- 40 Rees 2002, 190–92 (quote from p. 191).
- 41 On the problems of exploiting the evidence provided by panegyrics, see MacCormack 1981, 1–14 (the quote comes from p. 26); Kolb 2001, 55.
- 42 Baynes 1972. Drake 2000, 287, rightly adds, “attention must also be paid to whether he [Constantine] did what he said.”
- 43 *Theodosian Code*: ed. Mommsen, Meyer, and Krüger 1905, trans. Pharr 1952.
- 44 Optatus, *Against the Donatists*: ed. Ziwsa 1893, trans. Edwards 1997. For the letters preserved in Eusebius' *Church History* and *Life of Constantine*, see: Carriker 2003, 279–98; Cameron and Hall 1999, 16–21.
- 45 Seeck 1889; Baynes 1925.
- 46 Jones and Skeat 1954 on *P. Lond.* 878; Eusebius, *Life* 2.26–29. For a photograph of the papyrus, see Cameron 2006b, 97. See also the catalogue entry by Michelle Brown in the same volume, Hartley and others 2006, 120.
- 47 *Oration to the Assembly of the Saints*: ed. Heikel 1902, trans. Edwards 1999.
- 48 See pp. 299–302.
- 49 On imperial coin types as propaganda, see Sutherland 1959, esp. 48–55, and, briefly, MacCormack 1981, 11–12. On the presentation of medallions to senior officers to make up the shortfall in pay, see Abdy 2006, 54–55.